

Theme: The Spirit Helps Us Pray

- 1. He Intercedes for Us When We Don't Know What to Pray For**
- 2. He Intercedes for Us in Accordance with God's Will**

Text: Romans 8:26-27

26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Have you read something, saw something, or heard something this past week that caused you to “sigh”—you know, one of those sad, exasperated, I-don't-know-how-to-put-this-into-words types of “sighs”? Sometimes they come out more like a “groan,” or almost like the noise you'd make if you were in some pain. Was it a news report you read (plenty of them have been tragic and “sigh-worthy” lately)? Maybe it was your “to-do” list for the day? Was it something you saw your child do, or something they told you? Maybe it was something your spouse did or said? The fact is there are plenty of things in this life that can make us “sigh” or “groan” and leave us literally at a loss for words, not knowing what to say or do in response.

It can be frustrating. It can make us feel very helpless and make us truly feel our “weakness” when we notice just how fallen we are, and how fallen and broken the world around us is. The longer we live our lives the more we find Paul's words from just a few verses before our sermon text to be true: **“We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:22-23 NIV).**

Some days, more than others, we just can't wait for the day when our bodies are rescued and glorified to live forever with God in heaven's perfection. But until then we must wait—and the wait is often painful, full of sorrow, frustration, confusion, and disappointment—yes, full of “sighs” and “groans.”

But in that “weakness” our text reminds us that we have a great help from our great “Helper,” the Holy Spirit. In fact, our text tells us that the Holy Spirit also **“groans,”** or “sighs,” (which is another way the Greek word can be translated) when He hears us—but not out of frustration or exasperation, rather in *translation* and *intercession*. They are **“groans,”** or “sighs,” that show His *deep concern* for us. He is there for us when we don't know what to do or what to say—even when we don't know what to say to God! Paul reminds us in our text that **“the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses” (v. 26a)**. He reminds us that the Holy Spirit even **Helps Us Pray!**

Our text points especially to two important ways in which **The Holy Spirit Helps Us Pray**. The first is **1. He Intercedes for Us When We Don't Know What to Pray For**. Have you been there before? Coming to God, knowing you have many things you ought to pray for, but not really knowing what to pray for or what to say?

Sometimes this is because we are distracted, or because of our doubts. We know that God has saved us through His Son Jesus, we know He has promised to hear our prayers, to protect us and work all things for our good, and yet the many things that are on our minds at any given moment can distract us and make our prayers feel “scattered.” Often the magnitude of the troubles we are praying about can seem like a tidal wave about to overwhelm us and about all we feel able to choke out is a feeble cry of “Help!” But we doubt and inside we feel that our feeble cries to the Lord hardly seem

like they could do anything in the face of such overwhelming troubles (sickness, death of loved ones, debt, disappointments, tragedies, etc.). Because of our doubts we can find it difficult, or even impossible, to pray the way we should with full and complete confidence in the Lord.

Sometimes our problem is simply exactly how the Apostle Paul describes it in our text: It's not always a matter of doubt, or distraction, we simply **"do not know what we should pray for as we ought"** (v. 26b). Sometimes the reason for this is a lack of Christian maturity and a need for growth in the Spirit through the Word of God. Too often we are like little kids in a toy store running around pointing at everything and saying, "I want this! I need this, and this!" not realizing that many of those things that we ask for we simply do not *need*. Some of it would not be beneficial for us to have, while other things we simply just aren't prepared to receive or we aren't mature enough to handle at this point in our lives.

We so quickly pray for the things we do not need and neglect to pray for the things that we could use so much. We might pray hard for God to give us food and money, but fail to ask Him for a stronger faith to calm us in our days of uncertainty. We might pray for good health when what we really need to pray for is patience to endure. We might pray that stress in our lives would be taken away when what we need are open ears and a willing spirit to hear the comfort He has already given in His Word. We may pray for ourselves when we really ought to be praying for the welfare of someone else. We don't always know the things to ask and when we should ask them. We don't always have the wisdom to see what things would be helpful and what things would be harmful for us.

Aren't you glad to hear the promises from our text? **"The Spirit helps us in our weakness"** (v. 26) Paul reminds us. When we are weak, God is strong. We cry "Help!" and He *has* helped—even in the face of the "tidal wave" of our worst troubles: sin and death. He has washed us clean of our guilt in the blood of His Son, removing our sins from His sight forever by the death of Christ on the cross. He has made us His own dear children, giving us faith which allows us to come before His throne in prayer, and He promises to hear us! He promises this even when we don't know what to say, or even when we "do not know what we should pray for as we ought" (v. 26b)! Paul reminds us, **"The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express"** (v. 26c, NIV).

Think about what that says. It means that you are not the only one praying. The Holy Spirit is also **"interceding"** for you—that means He is going to God the Father on your behalf, expressing our requests to God properly even when we cannot find the words; "translating" them to God for us in ways that **"words cannot express"** (v. 26c NIV). Think of what a comfort that is! We often find great comfort when we know that other fellow believers are praying for us—whether privately or publically, as we do in the worship service. And we should! God encourages us to "intercede" for each other in His Word: **James 5:16 (NIV) – "...Pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."** How much greater comfort, though, to be assured that the *Holy Spirit* is also interceding for you!

Do you think the Spirit will make mistakes? Do you think He will make poor requests, or harmful requests on your behalf? Of course not! The God who loved you enough to send His Son to die for you and sent His Spirit into your heart to make you His very own child by faith will not—and simply cannot give you help that is less than perfect for our needs. Therefore we also take great comfort in the second way in which **The Holy Spirit Helps Us Pray: 2. He Intercedes for Us in Accordance with God's Will.**

You and I may make imperfect prayers, asking in ignorance for things that are not always in our best interests, but the Spirit will always make *perfect* requests. When the Holy Spirit **"intercedes"** for us, His requests are always the most helpful that can be made for us in our situation. The bottom line is this: He always knows what to ask for. His requests always match the will of God and will be granted.

But we can also pray with this confidence: That the Spirit is expressing His thoughts to the Heavenly Father and He can pray for things that we are not even aware we should be praying for! He makes requests for us that are always according to God's will, that are always in line with God's thinking. Paul reminds us of these truths in the second verse of our text **"Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (v. 27)**. God the Father, who knows everything, knows the mind of the Spirit. They are the one, eternal God. So there is never any danger of the "connection" not being made between the two of them. There is never any danger of the Spirit being unable to get His requests to the Father or of the Father misunderstanding the Spirit when He intercedes for us.

Yes, our prayers may be weak and frail, filled with doubt and apprehension. We may not always know what to say or how to say it. We may just "sigh," or not be able to voice anything more than "Help!" When we cannot find the proper words to pray, or do not know the proper things to pray for, or even if we have not been as conscious of our prayer life as we ought to have been—the Holy Spirit is there, praying for us in our weakness, expressing things that even our words cannot, and He knows exactly what to say! So you can always be confident that what your heavenly Father needs to hear, He will hear, and His answers will be for your good. Amen.