

Theme: When You Don't Know What to Say, Pray!

Text: Romans 8:26-27 (EHV)

²⁶ In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we should pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that are not expressed in words. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints, according to God's will.

Can you think of a time in your life when you just didn't know what to say? Maybe you heard some horribly sad or tragic news. Maybe you were put on the spot with a question you just didn't know how to answer. Whatever the reason, when we can't seem to formulate the right words to say in a given situation it's not usually a very good feeling. It can make us feel frustrated and helpless. Would you believe that there are plenty of times when I don't know what to say either? Yes, even though—news flash: I like to talk 😊—and a large part of my job involves talking with people and knowing what to say at the right time, there are times when finding the right words to say seems impossible. It happens to all of us at times.

How about when we are talking with God? Have you ever come before God in prayer and just don't know what to say? You have things you need to pray for—things you want to pray for—but you close your eyes and fold your hands and the words just don't seem to want to come out from your mouth, or your heart. We've all been there before too, haven't we? That too is a frustrating feeling and can make us feel helpless. After all, we know we're coming before the God who loves us and can help us...but we don't know what to say.

Our text for today encourages us with the blessed reminder that we have help—in fact, we have the “Helper,” the Holy Spirit. 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 helps us in our weakness” (v. 26a)**. He reminds us that the Holy Spirit helps us pray! So, **When you don't know what to say, pray!** Yes, just pray!

Think of how good it would be for us to remember this when we don't know what to say to other people. Some of the best advice I ever read was from a Christian counselor who repeatedly reminded his patients to “Stop, think, and pray.” Think of how much better our communication and relationships with others would be if we could follow this advice before we open our mouths to speak to others—especially when we don't know what to say. “Stop,” pause for a moment. “Think” about what you are about to say. And then “pray” a short prayer, “Lord, give me the words to speak and help me say it in the best possible way. Amen.” It doesn't have to be a long or “flowery” prayer—in fact, it probably can't be in these types of situations. Remember, the Holy Spirit is there and **“helps us in our weakness” (v. 26a)**. Turn to Him!

Our text points especially to two important ways in which the Holy Spirit helps us pray. The first is **1. The Spirit intercedes for us when we don't know what to pray for.**

Again, we all know that we have many things that we ought to pray for—that we need and want to pray for—but we often don't know what to say. This can happen for a number of reasons:

Sometimes this happens 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” (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” (v. 26b)!** Paul reminds us, **“the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that are not expressed in words” (v. 26c).**

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 **“are not expressed in words” (v. 26c)**. 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 “...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. The Spirit 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 “**And he who searches our hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints, according to God’s will**” (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, Lord!” But even that short prayer is still a prayer that our Heavenly Father wants to hear and answer! 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! **When you don’t know what to say, pray!** 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.