

**WORD-ROOTED PRAYER AND WORSHIP - Keeping Your Heart Close To The Flame - Part five - Sunday, June 26th, 2022, 5:30 p.m.
Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON**

Romans 8:26-27 - "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. [27] And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

This text makes explicit the theme of this entire series. Prayer is ***not*** just something ***we*** do. Paul teaches that the Holy Spirit is deeply connected with a strong prayer life. Christians generally appreciate the Spirit's work in ***regeneration***. There is great emphasis in the world-wide charismatic renewal on the ***baptizing*** and ***gifting*** work of the Holy Spirit among believers. The Spirit's work in ***sanctification*** is generally accepted and linked with the cultivation of the ***fruit of the Spirit*** in our hearts. Today we will be studying the role of the Holy Spirit in ***praying according to the will of God***.

1) **WHY DO WE NEED THE SPIRIT'S HELP IN PRAYER?**

“....the Spirit helps us in our weakness”(8:26). The key word describing our condition in prayer is "**weakness**" (26). Paul is not describing any **peculiar, unusual weakness** (like some circumstantial trial or difficulty) but the **general condition** of mankind as being weak in **prayer**. He says the common expression of that weakness is a form of general **ignorance** - "**For we do not know what to pray for as we ought....**"(26b). In other words, partly because of the **Fall**, and partly because of our **finiteness**, we all suffer from an earthbound, limited perspective.

Without the help of the Holy Spirit we are naturally **dull** at prayer. We can summon the **desire** to pray when our needs press us into a corner. But such prayers are bound to be small and full of self interest. Also, situations not only **discourage** us, bringing, as they do, pain and loss and discomfort, but they also **confuse** us.

Paul says bluntly we don't always **know** how to react properly in prayer. Even as Christians, we do not always know **how we are to take all of these things to God**. We know we **should** pray. The problem is, we usually feel **overwhelmed**. We know almost instinctively that we **should** pray yet our instinctive **creatureliness** limits us. We don't know specifically **what** we are to prayer for. And we wrestle with something as big as prayer.

2) **IS THIS WEAKNESS A SIN? DO I HAVE TO FEEL GUILTY ABOUT MY IGNORANCE IN PRAYER?**

We should take comfort in the many examples of great individuals of faith and prayer who wrestled with this problem in the Bible:

Deuteronomy 3:23-26 - "And I pleaded with the Lord at that time, saying, [24] 'O Lord GOD, you have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as yours? [25] Please let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and Lebanon.' [26] But the Lord was angry with me because of you and would not listen to me. And the Lord said to me, 'Enough from you; do not speak to me of this matter again.'"

These are the words of Moses as he rehearses the history of Israel with the people. He boldly recounts this "conversation" with God. He shares both his disappointment and his confusion with the way God was speaking to him. Moses shares with all the people he didn't even come close to getting his way with God in prayer. He tells the people God actually told him to ***be quiet***.

2 Corinthians 12:7-9 - "So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. [8] Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. [9] But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Here is the apostle Paul wrestling to obtain something from God. Though with the clear vision of hindsight he can see the wisdom of God's unwillingness, at the time of the request Paul has to deal with the flat refusal of God in the face of his poor and unwise request.

From these and many other passages it is clear we must never conclude or allow the devil to plant in our minds the idea that we are not God's children because we don't know how we should pray, or we pray incorrectly. *All* Christians share this common weakness. We see "***through a glass darkly***" even in our prayer lives.

3) **HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT HELP US WITH THIS PROBLEM?**

Paul makes several points in our Romans text, all of which are useful to our study:

a) ***The Holy Spirit "intercedes for us"*(26)**. We don't always remember that the Godhead is involved in intercession for us in at least **two** distinct ways:

i) ***First, Jesus intercedes for us before the throne of God - Romans 8:34 - "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."***

These verses are really too big for us. But we need to reach out to grasp their meaning as best we can.

Salvation works in **two ways** in our favour. **First**, Christ lives in our hearts by faith. The Holy Spirit brings Jesus close to each one of us. The union isn't primarily **intellectual** but **relational**. We can **know** His presence and power **in** our lives. This much we all know and speak of frequently in evangelical circles.

But there's a **second**, harder to conceptualize, benefit of salvation. Not only is Christ in **us**, but we are now, Paul repeatedly says, in **Christ**. Sometimes he puts it in terms so staggeringly big we can only handle them by reducing their meaning to religious poetry:

Colossians 3:1-3 - “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. [2] Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. [3] For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

Your life - ***right now*** - isn't just hidden ***with*** God, but ***in*** God. What can Paul be saying? I think it comes right down to the present ***ongoing*** work (not the ***finished*** work of the cross) of Christ as the Ascended Man. You and I, with all our fallenness and weakness, are ***taken up in Christ*** into the life of the triune God. Believe it or not, Paul says we are right now ***“in God”*** through the ongoing humanity of Christ Jesus.

This has to effect the prayer life of the Christian. We are praying from the inside in our place before God, not the outside. Jesus takes us with Him into the presence of the Father. It is because of this ***no one will ever be able to bring any charge against us before the throne of God:***

Romans 8:31-33 - “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? [32] He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? [33] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.”

- ii) ***Second, the Holy Spirit intercedes for each of us right now here on earth - Romans 8:26 - “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”***

This intercession is different in process from the intercessory humanity of Christ. This is an ***internal*** intercession - effecting change deep within our earthly condition. He prays from ***within*** our own hearts. He shapes our ***minds*** and ***desires*** as we pray. He helps us in our times of confusion and weakness.

One more interesting thing. It seems we may not always be **aware** of all the activity of the Holy Spirit as our Internal Intercessor. Notice the way Paul describes Him working with **“groanings too deep for words.”** I take that to mean He is at work even when all we feel is the **sigh**. He carries us along even when His work doesn't rise to a mentally conceptual level. Learn to keep trusting in this hidden grace. More on that now:

- b) ***He intercedes with "groans that words cannot express"***
 (26) Many times people take this to be a reference to **praying in tongues**. While that is a valid and important experience, this is probably not the best text to support it. The Greek words in this text mean **words that are unspoken**, rather than **words spoken that go beyond our understanding**. Tongues are words that are not understood by our own minds, but they are spoken. Paul is here referring to **words that are never uttered, in English or any other language**.

The Holy Spirit **wells up a weight, burden or desire** around some area of prayer concern that moves the intercessor in the way He feels and causes him to **linger** over a particular area of prayer. He creates a **burden** deep within the heart of the one praying, because that's where the Holy Spirit intercedes - **deep within our hearts**.

- c) ***God then searches the depths of our hearts and comprehends the work of the Holy Spirit as He prays within us - Romans 8:27 - “And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”***

The text nowhere states we will be fully conscious of this whole process. ***But God the Father and the Holy Spirit share the same mind and heart.*** This is ***trinitarian prayer.*** A meaning and import are shared that makes those prayer times more powerful than we could ever put into words.

4) **HOW CAN I INVOLVE MYSELF MORE FULLY IN THIS KIND OF PRAYER?**

Clearly, we do have a role to play. Notice the text. The Holy Spirit ***“helps us in our weakness”*** (26). Unlike the accomplished fact of being ***“in Christ”*** which we studied earlier, the Holy Spirit does not ***accomplish*** the entire process Himself. We have a role to play. Here are some steps:

- a) ***We must totally submit ourselves to all areas of God's will as we pray*** - Paul gives us a perfect example of this in 2 Corinthians 12:9 - ***“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”***

Paul had his own ideas of what he wanted God to do about his thorn in the flesh. ***But he came to accept what God wanted to do in total patience and trust.*** The Holy Spirit can ***reveal***. Only you can ***comply***. The test to see if you've really prayed with a fully submitted heart is a ***happy trust that will accept the way God answers*** - Philippians 4:6-7 - ***“....do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”***

- b) ***To recognize the mind and desires of the Holy Spirit, learn how He works from the Word of God*** - Not every situation is spelled out in the Bible, but the broad ***heart and will of the Spirit of God*** can be traced and learned. Prayers that won't line up with the inner refining work of the Spirit will be more quickly spotted and filtered out. God wants to use our prayer times ***to teach us His ways and to train us in holiness.***

Notice how this process in prayer was at work even in the life of Jesus while He was on earth - **Hebrews 5:7-10** - ***“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. [8] Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. [9] And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, [10] being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.”***

Being the Son of God, what could Jesus have possibly needed to ***learn*** from the Father while on earth? He came for the first time into the ***experience*** of suffering for the sins of others as a ***man***. There is great mystery here. But the text clearly links the prayer life of the man Christ Jesus to the learning and being ***“made perfect”*** as the source of eternal salvation.

- c) ***We must stay long enough at prayer to allow the Holy Spirit some time to form the Father's heart in us.*** We aren't instantly perceptive to His inward work. He is working within the limitations of our own flesh. Time is an absolute must. Be patient. The Holy Spirit wants to pray power and truth and life within your heart.