

"Prayer Help"

Romans 8:26-27

Baxter Exum (#983)
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Introduction:

This morning I would like for us to start looking at several sermon requests that have come in from various members of our congregation. As I started looking through the cards that were returned before we headed out of town for a few weeks, I found it very interesting that at least four of the cards had something in common. Two people listed **Romans 8:28** as one of their favorite passages of Scripture, and in a related twist, two others requested a lesson on the power of prayer. In fact, one of our members had this to say about the challenge of going to God in prayer. She said, **"My prayer life is not what I desire—my heart speaks but I cannot express my thoughts."** As I looked at that concern, I started to imagine that such a concern is probably something that all of us face from time to time, and the passage of Scripture that addresses this concern head-on is actually right next-door to **Romans 8:28**! This morning, then, I would like for us to begin a brief series of only two lessons based on three verses in **Romans 8**. And as we prepare for our study, I would encourage you to turn with me to **Romans 8:26-27**. In our pew Bibles, the passage is found on **page 1769—Romans 8:26-27**. **»PPT»** Lord willing, we will consider **verse 28** next week, but for today, we are looking together at **Romans 8:26-27**.

Certainly the Bible has much to say about the subject of prayer. Perhaps it all starts in the first few chapters of the book of Genesis as Adam and Eve appear to have conversations with God. It continues in **Genesis 4** as Cain begs for God's mercy after killing his brother Abel. We remember Abraham praying on behalf of Ishmael in **Genesis 17**, praying for Sodom in **Genesis 18**, and praying for King Abimelech in **Genesis 20**. Perhaps we can remember Isaac's prayer for children, Rebekah's prayer for understanding, and Jacob's prayer for deliverance from Esau in **Genesis 32**. We remember the Israelites crying out for deliverance from Egypt, and the prayers that Moses offered to God concerning Pharaoh. We remember Moses crying out to God for water in the wilderness. We remember Joshua asking God for help and mercy as he took on the burden of leadership in the opening chapters of the book of Joshua. We remember the prayers of Gideon as he asked for proof through the dry wool and the wet wool lying out there in the field. We remember the prayer of Samson for strength, the prayer of Hannah for a son. We remember the many prayers of King David—for help, for deliverance, and for blessing. We remember King Solomon's prayer for wisdom, the prophet Elijah's prayer for victory over the prophets of Baal. We remember the prayers of Daniel that got him thrown into the lion's den. And we remember the prayer of Ezra, confessing the sin of those who had

entered into marriages of which God did not approve. We remember the separations that took place after that prayer was offered. In the New Testament, we remember the many prayers offered by Jesus—the sample prayer in **Matthew 6**, the prayer on the night before He died in **John 17**. We remember the prayer for courage offered by the early church in **Acts 4**. We remember the prayers offered by the various apostles—the prayer of Peter at the raising of Tabitha from the dead, the many prayers of the apostle Paul on behalf of those new congregations he had established. Truly, the Bible is a book of prayer.

And yet we also know that prayer can sometimes be a great challenge. After all, if it were not so hard to pray, we would do it a lot more often than we do! If prayer were easy and natural, the Bible would not have so much to say about it! Prayer, therefore, takes great effort sometimes. Prayer is something we learn to do. Prayer is a challenge. And the special challenge we are addressing this morning is the concern that we are not always able to express our thoughts to God as clearly as we think we should. It seems that all of us go through some very difficult times—maybe we are stressed at work, maybe we are having some issues at home, maybe we are frustrated at having, once again, fallen into some kind of sin. And then when it comes to our prayer life with God, our concerns are so overwhelming it seems that all we can do is groan. We go to God, and we hardly know what to say. But thankfully, we discover in the Scriptures that God is on our side in the process! If you will, please look with me at **Romans 8:26-27**...

²⁶ In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; ²⁷ and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

As we look at these two verses, I would like for us to consider two very basic ideas...

I. First of all, we discover OUR WEAKNESS; that is (as Paul says in verse 26), WE DO NOT KNOW HOW TO PRAY AS WE SHOULD. »PPT«

As Christians, all of us know something about prayer. We know that we should be praying. When Paul wrote these verses, he assumed that the Christians in Rome would already be praying. We know that prayer is important. But that is not the issue here, because again, as Paul says in **verse 26**, the issue here is that **"...we do not know how to pray as we should."** We pray: we just do not know how to do it as we should.

In **verse 26**, the apostle Paul attributes this to **"weakness."** Literally, the word refers to being **"without strength."** You know, sometimes we may be tempted to think that God only listens to us when we are strong, when we've got it all together, when our prayers have some kind of structure, when our prayers make perfect sense. And yet sometimes we need to remind ourselves of what the Scripture says in **Hebrews 4:15-16**, **"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize**

with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

And so the Bible specifically says that Jesus, our great High Priest, is able to sympathize with our "***weaknesses.***" And even in our weakness, we are able to "***draw near with confidence to the throne of grace.***"

And so God takes our weakness into account as we pray. We do not always have the right words. We do not always see things from God's point of view. We do not know if we should be praying for a situation to go away or if we should be praying for strength to endure it. In our weakness, we struggle with the prayers that we offer. We remember the two prayers that were offered in **Luke 18**, as Silas read for us earlier—the Pharisee was eloquent. The Pharisee had it all together. The tax collector, though, was an emotional wreck! The tax collector did not have it all together, but the tax collector said, "***God, be merciful to me, the sinner!***" We are told that God heard the prayer of the tax collector but ignored the self-righteous Pharisee. God, therefore, takes our weakness into account. God is not impressed by eloquence, but in the words of **Psalm 34:18**, "***The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.***" God understands our weakness—He understands that we do not know how to pray as we should.

God knows that we sometimes get distracted with wandering thoughts. God knows that we sometimes fall asleep in our prayers—have you ever done that? Have you ever started praying, and then you wake up the next morning and realize that you never ended the prayer as you should have? God understands! God knows that we are sometimes confused—not knowing what to ask for. God knows that we sometimes wonder where to begin with our prayers. God knows that we sometimes just have a meltdown—we have no idea what to say. God knows that we struggle with decisions that will affect our children for many years to come. God knows that we cannot see even a minute into the future. And so with all of this, as all of us know from personal experience, prayer is a challenge. As Paul says, "***...we do not know how to pray as we should.***" First of all, then, God is aware of our weakness.

II. Thankfully, however, we go back to our text for this morning, and we discover that HELP HAS BEEN PROVIDED. »PPT»

We are told in **verse 26** that, "***In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness....***" The word translated here as "***help***" refers to taking hold of someone or something by the side. It is the idea of sharing a burden. If I need to move a giant mattress, and if you take one end while I take the other, you would be helping me in the literal sense of this word.

In **verse 26**, we discover how this help is provided as we find that, "***...the Spirit Himself intercedes for us, with groanings too deep for words.***" When we intercede for someone, we speak up on that person's behalf. We make an appeal, we plead their case. And so the Holy Spirit is interceding to God the Father on our

behalf, **"...with groanings too deep for words."** In **verse 27**, it appears that someone else also intercedes, and we discover who it is in **verse 34**, where Paul says that Jesus Christ died, He was raised, He is at the right hand of God, and He also **"...intercedes for us."** And so it appears that we have double coverage here! We remember the words of the apostle John in **1 John 2:1** as he said, **"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."** And so both Jesus and the Holy Spirit intercede on our behalf as we come to God the Father with our prayers.

And specifically, we are told here in **Romans 8:26** that the Spirit takes our **"groanings"** to God. The Spirit intercedes and takes our deepest concerns to the Father. As we discussed earlier, in our weakness, sometimes all we can do is sigh or let out a groan or even cry or even just break down in tears before the throne of God. We remember those words of King David that we sang this past Wednesday evening—put to music by one of our own members. In **Psalms 5:1-2**, King David said, **"Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my groaning. Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God, for to You I pray."** As we go to the Father, therefore, the Spirit intercedes. The Spirit takes our groanings, our tears, and our cries for help, and He lifts those concerns up to God in heaven. He intercedes. He takes our case to the Father. Even those thoughts that cannot be put into words, the Spirit takes those thoughts to God.

Over and over again in the Scriptures, we read about God's people taking their groanings and sighs to God. We remember the words of **Exodus 2:23-25**, concerning the suffering of the Israelites. The Bible says, **"Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them."** Later on, we remember the words of King David in **Psalms 38:8-9**, **"I am benumbed and badly crushed; I groan because of the agitation of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before You; and my sighing is not hidden from You."** God, therefore, hears the sighs and groaning of His people.

We are told that the Spirit **"intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."** And in **Romans 8:27**, we discover that this interceding is only done **"for the saints."** The one who searches the hearts, therefore, only intercedes for those who are Christians. As Christians, we have a special relationship with God that people in the world do not have. As Christians, we are told that the Spirit of God dwells within us. At the point of baptism (according to **Acts 2:38**), we have been given the **"gift of the Holy Spirit."** The Holy Spirit dwells within us. And because of this special relationship, the Bible teaches here in **Romans 8** that the Spirit is able to intercede and plead our case with God in heaven.

The Spirit never forces us to pray—that's our responsibility. The Spirit never tells us what to do—again, that's up to us—to read the word of God. But once we go to God

in prayer, the Spirit intercedes. The Spirit takes those inexpressible thoughts to God. I realize that we've been focusing on the bad—those times when we are so up set that we do not know what to say. But this also applies to the good—to the praise that we offer. Even the apostle Paul had trouble describing the grace of God. In **2 Corinthians 9:15**, he says, ***"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"*** Isn't it interesting that we can describe the gift of God as being indescribable? I guess we have just described it as indescribable! But as we try to express our thankfulness to God for His indescribable gift, the Spirit intercedes! Even the apostle Peter had trouble expressing his thoughts from time to time. Perhaps you can remember what Peter said in **1 Peter 1:8**, ***"...and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory."*** Peter said, therefore, that we rejoice with ***"joy inexpressible."*** As we try to express our inexpressible joy to God, the Spirit intercedes!

What does this mean? If we were to turn over to **Ephesians 6** and Paul's description of the Christian armor, we would find an interesting verse near the end of that little section, because in **Ephesians 6:18**, Paul says, ***"With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints."*** When we pray, we are to pray ***"in the Spirit."*** That is, we are to be diligent. We are to pray, knowing that the Spirit is involved in some way. According to **Ephesians 5:19**, we are to be ***"filled with the Spirit."*** When we pray, we are submitting to the will of God. We are not to allow anything to come between us and God. We are to live as spiritual people. As the Lord's half-brother said in **Jude 20-21**, ***"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life."***

Praying in the Holy Spirit does not mean that we are to speak in tongues or anything like that—we do not see that in **Romans 8**. But there are times when our thoughts can only be expressed through sighs and groaning. And because the Spirit intercedes, God will hear those prayers! And thankfully, as someone has very well said, the power of prayer is not in the one who prays, but the power is in the One who hears the prayer!

I don't know about all of you, but that is so comforting to me—to know that God understands even my thoughts and my feelings—even those concerns that I cannot even put into words!

Conclusion & Invitation:

This morning, as we close our thoughts on **Romans 8:26-27**, we need to go back to the concern that led to this morning's lesson—a request that came from one of our members but probably expresses what a lot of us are thinking, ***"My prayer life isn't what I desire—my heart speaks but I cannot express my thoughts."*** Again, that is a concern that probably all of us have had. And yet we learn from **Romans 8**

(first of all), that we all have that weakness—that we do not know how to pray as we should. And yet, thankfully, we also learn (secondly) that our weakness should not keep us from praying—God has taken that into account and has promised that His Spirit will intercede for us with groanings too deep for words.

As we go to God in prayer, therefore, it is okay to say, **“Lord we do not know what to ask for. We do not know exactly what to say. However, we are coming to You as Your children, and we want Your will to be done in our lives.”**

But as we have already studied, the interceding that is done by the Holy Spirit is only offered to the saints. Jesus only serves as an advocate for those who are Christians. We do not want to face the Judge without an attorney. As the saying goes, **“He who represents himself in court has a fool for a client.”** The same is true on the Judgment Day. If you understand how important it is to have an intercessor, then you need to know that we enter into that relationship through our obedience to the gospel.

The gospel is the good news about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. We respond to the good news by reenacting the gospel in our own lives. We die to sin, we allow ourselves to be briefly buried in water, and then we rise up out of the water ready to live the Christian life. If you have any questions about God’s plan, we would love to study with you as soon as possible. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org