

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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Romans 8:26,27

PRAYING!

- 1. Recognize your “weakness”**
- 2. The Spirit does what?!**
- 3. The Father’s answers**

Hymns: 221 – 411 – 468 – 329

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Romans 8:18-25 –

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.

“I’m praying for you”? Have you ever had someone tell you that? What a great comfort that can be! When you are going through trials, when you’re undergoing illness, and when life has you down, how comforting it is to know that another Christian is thinking about you and is making their requests for your situation and your wellbeing before God!

Who might say those words to you?

- A family member
- A church member
- A relative
- A close friend

Anyone else? Today we will see in the book of Romans that there is indeed someone else we would have to include on that list!

Each week we have focused on a key word from a sermon text in Romans. Today’s key word is “Praying.” Let’s look at Romans 8:26,27 and see who is doing the praying and why. We read, “*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our*

weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”

1. Recognize your “weakness”

Let’s answer the question that we started with right away. Who is praying for us? Who is the subject of our word for the day? It is none other than the Holy Spirit. I’m not sure if you would have included him on your list of intercessors, but the Apostle Paul tells us clearly that he is!

Why must he intercede for us? The first sentence tells us the stark truth. It is because of our weakness. We need to take an honest look at our weaknesses and why we need the intercession of the Holy Spirit so desperately.

It might be good to first identify what our weakness is not. Our weakness does not have to do with our salvation. Our weakness does not have to do with our forgiveness. Last week we mentioned the words that this chapter of Romans begins with. Verses 1-3 tell us, “*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.*”

It is important to recognize this, because we would never want to wonder if our salvation is secure. Since our salvation depends on the work of Christ, it most certainly is. Since he came to earth as our Savior and fulfilled God’s commandments perfectly for us, we are viewed as holy in God’s sight. Since he suffered the punishment that we deserved for our sins on the cross and said, “It is finished,” our forgiveness has been won. In all of our weaknesses in our days of life on this earth, we should never doubt that fact!

Yet we have weaknesses in other areas of life. Specifically, today, we see in Romans that we have a weakness in knowing what we ought to pray for. Why is this so? Our weakness is in

the area of temporal things, not spiritual things. When it comes to our temporal lives and the ups and downs that God allows to come into them, we cannot read the mind of the Lord. Isaiah 55 says, *"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."* We live in this world with a sinful nature attached to us and with a lack of knowledge of the daily plans of God for us. We cannot read God's mind in all matters. We are mortals.

Therefore, there are situations when we desperately need the Spirit's intercession. This can be a time of severe trial:

- A time when illness has struck
- A time of pain
- A time when a child has grown wayward
- A time of financial crisis
- A time when you're fired
- A time of grief at a death

At a time when disaster or opposition comes into our lives, what is the first inclination to pray for? At a time of illness, what is the first thing we want to pray for? At a time of financial hardship, what is the first thing we feel we should pray for? At a time of opposition, what is the first thing we feel we should pray for? Isn't it that the Lord would take away whatever it is? And can't our petition to God become demanding, as if this is his only will and that if he is not quick to do it he is holding back on us?

Paul's "thorn in the flesh" is good example of prayer in a time of trial. In 2 Corinthians 12 we read, *"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults,*

in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

It was certainly not wrong for Paul to pray that God would take his physical ailment away from him. However, he could not read the mind of the Lord, who had a purpose in laying it on him. It would keep Paul from becoming conceited.

Might God have a purpose in your time of trial that you do not recognize? Might your prayers need to be sanctified at that time? Perhaps the Lord doesn't have quick deliverance on his mind, but rather a lesson in patience and faith. Perhaps the Lord doesn't have an easy road planned out because he needs your godly example of faith to shine to your grown children or your neighbors. In such times we need help with our prayers.

Our weakness can also be a time when we just don't know what to pray for:

- A time when a decision must be made that has deep implications on our life
- A time of job uncertainty
- A time when a dating relationship is at a crossroads, or is simply nonexistent
- A time when we are at our wits end
- A time when we are stuck in a tumultuous relationship
- A time of confusion
- A time when the mind is racing

In such times of our weakness, we need help in formulating our prayers to our Father in heaven.

Lord, help us to pray!

2. The Spirit does what?!

Then we hear the welcome words of our text that such help is present. *"The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."*

Those words lead us to say, "The Holy Spirit does what?!" The concept is almost unbelievable. In your reading of Scripture and in the Bible study that you've done, you might have learned about some of the things that the Holy Spirit is spoken of as doing.

- He is clearly pointed out as the One who has verbally inspired the Word of God (*"Prophecy never had its origin in*

the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”).

- He is the One who converts heathens that are powerless in their sins into believers in Jesus (“*No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit*”)
- He is the One who continues to sanctify us to live holy lives that are pleasing to God (“*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit*”). This would include the “fruits of the Spirit.”

However, in these verses we learn another fact about the Holy Spirit that I’d imagine you don’t think about very often. He does two things for us:

1. **He “helps us in our weakness”** – This is an interesting concept. This compound verb has the words “take,” “with,” and “facing” in it. The Holy Spirit takes it up with us. It’s almost pictured like an object that he takes a side in and helps you to pick up and carry. The only other place this word is used in the NT is when Mary asks Jesus to tell Martha to “help” her. She wants her to pitch in and do her share!

Remember, this does not have to do with your conversion. It has to do with your prayer life. Why is this significant? You do not have the excuse to quit praying. As you experience difficult times, continue to pray. Struggle in your prayers and trust that you have “help” in them.

2. **We also hear in these verses that the Holy Spirit “intercedes for us.”** – The manner in which he does this is “with groans that words cannot express.” This is quite a mysterious thing. How can this be? And what does this mean? Does this mean that the Holy Spirit takes our feeble, shortsighted words and sanctifies them properly for God the Father? Does this mean he formulates his own prayers for us? What are these unspeakable groans? How passionately is he praying for us? What

an amazing statement this is in our weakness!

And it’s noteworthy that Paul writes that the Holy Spirit intercedes “for the saints.” “Saints” is not a term referring only to believers in heaven or to super-believers on this earth. It is the Scripture’s term simply for a “believer in Christ.” You are a saint! This is worth mentioning, because once again we see that the salvation of these people involved is never in question. They are forgiven. They are saints. They are bound for heaven.

This is most remarkable when we consider that this is the same Holy Spirit who has converted us. In a way, we could say that he “sees us through” all the way from our spiritual rebirth to our possession of the glories of heaven. The Holy Spirit does not merely bring us to faith; he preserves us by sanctifying our prayers and interceding for us all the way until we are in heaven! This is almost beyond comprehension!

3. The Father’s answers

As if all this wasn’t enough, Paul closes these verses with one last thought. It has to do with the One who is hearing these prayers: “*And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.*” This undoubtedly refers to God the Father, to whom these prayers are addressed. He is the one who “searches the heart.”

Perhaps you’ve had someone in your family or circle of friends with whom you shared some telepathy. The two of you seemed to be thinking the same things quite often. Or many times the same words seemed to be coming out of your mouths at the same time.

On a whole different level, we see that the Father “knows the mind of the Spirit.” The Trinity is certainly incomprehensible to us. The fact that there are three persons in the Godhead who are so inseparably joined that Scripture also calls them truly “one” is beyond our understanding. They are three. They are one. The Father knows the mind of the Holy Spirit as he intercedes for us. Do you see why this is so comforting? The One who is accepting

the prayer is inseparably united with the One who is praying it. There is no conflict of interest here!

In fact, Paul says, *“The Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”* We are often encouraged by Scripture to pray according to God’s will. As we mentioned before, though, we don’t always know what the will of God is when it comes to temporal matters. In spiritual prayers we do, but not in our temporal requests. Yet when our prayers are sanctified by the Holy Spirit and when he intercedes for us, these prayers are always according to God’s will! They are perfected according to what we are supposed to be asking. They are the perfect prayers. And therefore, they are certainly answered by our Father in heaven.

“I’m praying for you.” This certainly is comforting coming from a fellow Christian, but in our reading from Romans today this takes on a whole different meaning. God the Holy Spirit is praying for us!

Finally, what will our reaction be to this wondering news? This is not told to us so that we pray less and leave it all up to the One who intercedes for us. No, may our reaction be this:

- May we take great comfort that we have this wonderful assurance from God himself.
- May we pray all the more fervently, realizing that our prayers are welcomed by our heavenly Father and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.
- May we also strive to have prayers that are according to God’s will.
- And may our faith and trust in God be strengthened as we realize that our prayers are indeed sanctified and that he will answer them correctly.

Amen.