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Introduction

Well, I don't know about you, but in my life and my Christian walk, there is really no harder thing for me than prayer. And I'm sure you would say the same thing. Prayer is a constant struggle for most Christians. In the last, oh, six months to a year, though, I've come to see an absolutely amazing reality from God's Word about prayer. And I want to share that with you this morning from the book of Romans, chapter 8. So look with there at Romans chapter 8. Look with me, Romans chapter 8, and we're going to look at verses 26 and 27, Romans 8:26, and 27. Paul writes this:

*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. (Rom 8:26-27)*

So, because of Christ's resurrection, and His ascension, He has sent forth, He has poured forth His spirit into our hearts. And what I want you to see this morning from this text, is really this main theme, this main big idea this morning, and it's this -- you and I cannot pray without the Spirit. You cannot pray without the Spirit.

My goal in in, in this message is, is really what my goal is. It's to maximize, it's to magnify the work of the Spirit in our lives. It's to exalt Him in what He is doing in and through us. And when I do this, when He is glorified, I think in that moment, then we will be, we will be helped, we will be encouraged, we will be given tools and resources to strengthen us, particularly as it comes to praying. And so to this end, I

want us to focus on these verses, and I want us to unpack these two verses with three questions that will form sort of the outline of the message this morning, three questions about the spirit of prayer.

1. Number one, **what** does the Holy Spirit do in prayer? What does the Holy Spirit do in prayer that this text says.
2. Number two, **Why** does the Holy Spirit do what he does in prayer?
3. And then number three, **How** does? How does what the Spirit does? How does that help us? How does that benefit us?

So we're going to look first at The Spirit's "What"; The Spirit's "Why", and then The Spirit's "How". All really getting to this main idea of you cannot pray without the Spirit.

1. How does the Holy Spirit help us?

So first, how does? How does the Spirit, how does the Holy Spirit help us? Or how does He, I should say, what does He do in prayer? What does He do for us? Well, if you look at verse 26 again with me, let's read it again. It says, "in the same way, the Spirit also helps our weakness." So, what does it say there that He's doing? He's helping us, right? He's helping our weakness. So, the question I have is, what does it mean that He helps us? It says He helps us. What does that mean?

Well, the word "help" here does not mean that the Spirit, it does not mean that we pray. Or so we go to the Lord and prayer, we offer our prayers. And when we get stuck, when we don't know what to say, when we get distracted, that the Spirit then comes along and He assists us. It's not what this word "help" means.

It's not like the Spirit is a math tutor who comes along and sort of helps you with your math assignment. It's not like you try to pray, and when you can't do it on your own, then the Spirit comes along and gives you aid. In other words, it's not like sometimes we can pray without the Spirit, and sometimes we can pray with the Spirit with His help. No... what this text says is, we cannot truly pray without the Spirit. We cannot pray without Him. We need His help. The Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit alone, He helps us in prayer.

But let me make clear that the passage does not say that we do not pray -- that the Holy Spirit sort of does all the praying. No, we truly pray, but the Spirit helps us in our prayer. That's what He does. Now, perhaps you're wondering, what does this help entail? What is He actually doing? How does He help us? And I know the text says, "**He helps us in our weakness.**" How does He help us? Well, it actually goes on to say in verse 26, look at it again with me, "**in the same way, the Spirit also helps our weakness. For we do not know how to pray as we should.**" (Rom 8:26) and here's the answer how He helps us. "**But the Spirit Himself intercedes for us, with groanings too deep for words.**" (Rom 8:26)

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So, what does the Spirit do? According to that text, the text **What does He do**, He intercedes. He intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. An intercessor, someone who intercedes, is one who speaks on behalf of another. And we often talk about prayers of intercession. Right? What are prayers of intercession? Prayers of intercession are you praying for someone else. It's you carrying their needs to the Father on their behalf. That's a prayer of intercession. And this is the work of the Spirit in our lives. He offers prayers on behalf of us -- for our good -- for our benefit. He's an intercessor in prayer. This is how he helps us. So, this is what -- remember the first question -- what does the Spirit do in prayer? This is what He does. He helps us by interceding for us. That's what the Spirit does.

2. Why does the Holy Spirit Intercede for us?

But why? **Why does He do this**? Why do you and I need this work in our lives? Or I could ask it like this, putting it a little differently, "Why is prayer so difficult?" Why is it so difficult? Why is it hard? So, I'm asking this, why does the Spirit help us? Why do we need His help? And we get the answer in verse 26. The answer is because we are weak. Look at it again with me in verse 26. **"In the same way, the Spirit also helps our weakness." (Rom 8:26)** What this is saying is that we are weak when it comes to prayer. We are weak when it comes to prayer. Now when it says, "we are weak", it means what the next part of the verse says -- look at it again. **"In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness"** -- and here is defining how we are weak -- **"for we do not know how to pray as we should."** So that is how we are weak. We do not know -- it says-- how to pray as we should.

Now there's something I have to point out about this verse that unfortunately needs to be said. This verse is not saying that we do not know **"how"** to pray, but that we do not know **"what"** to pray. Now the translation which you're using here, you use the The New American Standard Version, I think, the 95 version. That translation here, I think is inaccurate. And if you look up this word in most other English translations, the word "how" is actually translated with the word "what", in verse 26, including the New American Standard Version, the 2020 version. So, if you are a Bible marker, I would encourage you to cross out the word "how" and replace it with the word "what", because that's the underlying Greek word. That almost may seem a little bit wrong to do that, but that's what Paul is saying. It's unfortunate in the translation, that it's "how" and not "what."

So, what is our weakness in prayer? Here it is, here's our weakness in prayer, we don't truly know "what" to pray for. That's our weakness. Our weakness is a problem of content. In other words, our weakness is our ignorance.

Let me give you an example of what I mean, right? Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, you don't have to turn there, but you remember this passage. He talks about this thorn in the flesh...you remember he was given this thorn in the flesh. And what does he do? He implores the Lord three times, that it might be taken away. But it wasn't. So the Lord says to Paul, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."** (2 Cor 12:9)

Now the question might be asked, was Paul supposed to pray that his thorn in the flesh be removed? Was he supposed to pray that? Well, in one sense, no, he wasn't. Why? Because it wasn't removed. It was not God's will that his thorn in the flesh be removed. Paul was ignorant at that point, he was weak, as Romans 8 says. He prayed for it, but God answered with a "no." Now of course, in another sense, Paul was supposed to pray that his thorn in the flesh be removed, because we know that we're to bring everything before the Lord in prayer. The point though, is that we are, we are weak, that is, we often times truly do not know what to pray for.

Let me give you some other examples that you can maybe relate to a little bit more easily.

- What do you pray for a person who loses a spouse even unexpectedly, and they are just grieving this loss? What do you pray for them in that moment? What is their true need? Right? Sometimes it's really, really hard to know, in a gut-wrenching experience like that.
- Or what do you pray for when a child that you raised in the Christian faith decides to leave the faith? I don't want Christianity anymore. I don't believe in Jesus anymore. What do you truly pray for them in that moment? Do you pray that that they return to Christ? But what if it's not God's will that they return to Christ? Truly what do you pray?
- Or what does a married couple pray who is infertile for years? A painful situation and they want to have children. They really do. What do you pray for them?
- What do you pray for when your joy is lost, when your circumstances are a mess, and when your hope is gone? We can multiply examples.
- Like, have you ever prayed for something that you truly wanted, that you truly thought was God's will, only to find out that it wasn't? Like, I know I've prayed in the past, Lord, I really want this job. I think it's the job for me. Help me to get this job, it's the perfect fit, Lord. And then I don't get the job. Or, or, Lord, I love this girl. I think she's the one for me, please make it happen. Make her say "Yes." And then God doesn't give you the girl or the boy, or whatever it is you're praying for. Why? Why doesn't He give it to you? Because it wasn't truly His will, it wasn't the best thing for you.

And so, in those moments, you truly did not know what to pray for. In those moments, your prayers are weak. There's an old Puritan preacher named Thomas Boston. And he once wrote this, describing our weakness in prayer, he says, "*We might pray against God's mercy, unknowingly even. We might pray for what could hurt us. We might pray for what feeds our sinful desires, we might not pray for what we truly need simply, we might not pray according to the will of God.*" That is the weakness that we face.

Now in all these examples, right, we can certainly can say our prayers. Right? We can offer prayers to the Lord, but we truly don't know what God's will is... many times. We truly, to put it in the language of this passage look what it says -- we truly don't know what to pray as we should. Or we could say, "As is fitting according to God's will?" I mean how many times have you gone to prayer, and you just don't know. You're like me and you don't know how to express your thoughts in words. You've been there you ever been there? You go to prayer and then you just groan, you just sigh, you just don't know what to pray in the moment.

I mean, if Jesus, if our Lord in His humanity did not always know what to pray for, if Jesus struggled to pray, like when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, why wouldn't we also struggle in prayer? Why

wouldn't we also be weak in prayer? Now there are certain things that we know from God's Word that are His will, that we know we can pray for. Like an example ... [1 Thessalonians 5:17](#), "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God for you." So, I know that I can pray that God would give me a thankful heart in every circumstance I find myself in, but outside of the clearly revealed will of God in the Bible, you don't know God's will, ultimately... until it happens. I didn't know that it was God's will that I marry my wife Beth until I said, "I do." I thought it was God's will, and we made preparations for it being God's will, and we went to the marriage day thinking it was God's will, but until I said "I do" before the witnesses and before God, I didn't know that it was God's will.

It's the same with us...for most of the things in our life we don't know what God's will is, until it happens -- until it's revealed to us -- until He shows it to us. The whole point of all of this is that we are weak, which means we don't truly know what to pray for in the moment, most of the time, a lot of times, sometimes.

Two Objections

Now, before we answer the final question of how this helps us, I want to address two objections that are running through your brains right now. At least I hope they are, you're thinking.

1. So, the first one is this: I know that I don't know always what to pray for, but that's why I end all my prayers with this -- "And I pray all this Lord, according to Your will, that Your will will be done, in Jesus name. Amen." That's my catch... I just pray it all and I say that caveat, "Your will be done." Now there's nothing wrong with praying that prayer. Right? It shows your heart, but that's proving my point. You don't know exactly what God's will is - and so you pray, "Lord, Lord, I don't know, but You do...may Your will be done." And what you're really praying is, "Lord, may I accept Your will.", "May I accept the outcome of whatever You have in this prayer that I'm offering."
2. The second thought you might be having right now is what about the places in the Scripture where it tells us "what" to pray for? It gives us the content of what our prayer should be like, what we should pray. For example, the Lord's Prayer. Does not the Lord's Prayer give us the content of what we are to pray for? Well, if you study the Lord's Prayer, and we're not going to do a sermon on that right now, but if you study the Lord's Prayer, you will see that, that the the content that Jesus gives us is, He tells us this is the manner in which you should pray --this is the way in which you should pray. In other words, it's not so much about the "content" of the Lord's prayer that matters... it's about the "manner", the "way", the "how" we pray. When we're praying for God's kingdom to come, we're praying that our hearts would first and foremost accept and be in tune with God's kingdom and what He is doing in this world, not primarily about our kingdoms, and our personal advancement. Nothing wrong to pray the words of the Lord's Prayer, as long as your heart is in those words.

That's Jesus's whole point in that passage in the Lord's Prayer. There are Pharisees, you remember, in there praying these all-mighty high words, but their hearts weren't in it. Saying

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Jesus says, no, no, no, don't pray in that way --pray rather in this way, "Our Father who art in heaven," and on and on and on, He goes.

The point is, is that we often don't know our true need, in the moment, what is our true need? Even maybe here at my home church, Grace Community Bible Church, we have a prayer list that we publish on Wednesdays and we have our corporate prayer meeting. And on that list, there are prayer requests. There's content on there, right, that we can look at and read and pray about, but even that, even that is limited. I mean, we have a man on our prayer list we've been praying for many, many years who struggles with chronic pain -- right now he's bed fast. And I prayed for him so many times. And so many times, I'm like, Lord, what does my brother really need? I don't really know. In a situation like that, I mean, there's many things he needs. And this is where this is where the Spirit enters into our prayers. He, as we said, He helps us by interceding for our weakness. That's what He does. He helps us by interceding -- by praying -- on our behalf. And this benefits us because we are weak. We are weak.

3. How does the Holy Spirit's intercession help us?

But how does how does really the Spirit's intercession help us?

He prays for us, and we know we need it because we're weak, but how does it help us? Well, we get clarity now from the second verse...verse 27. So, look at it with me...verse 27, "[and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He](#)" (the Spirit) "[intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.](#)" (Rom 8:27)

So that -- first (He is God, God, the Father who searches the hearts) knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. You see, because the Spirit, according to verse 27, says, He intercedes for us, according to the will of God (because He does that) the Spirit's prayers (because He's interceding according to the will of God) are always answered. They're always answered in the affirmative, because the Spirit knows what God's will is, the Spirit and the Father are one. They're not divided into two different wills. Right? They are one, with one will. The Spirit knows what the Father's plans are, right? The Spirit knows what His will is.

So, here's why the Spirit's work is so important. **Here is how this benefits us:** Because we are weak (a problem of content...we don't truly know what to pray for in any given situation we face because we're that way) the Spirit is the one who takes our inadequate, and ill-informed prayers, and prays Himself, according to the will of God.

One person has said this, and I really like it. "It's like we pray and then the Holy Spirit fixes our prayers on the way up." That's what the Spirit is doing. We pray, and He prays according to the will of God for us. That is amazing help. That is an amazing promise of help that the Spirit is doing in our lives.

And based on all of that, all of that -- because you cannot pray without the Spirit. You cannot truly pray without the Spirit. You can say words, you can say them, but without the Spirit you cannot truly pray. You need Him, not just to help you when you get stuck. No, you need Him to intercede for you according to the will of God. And because that is the case, because He helps us in our weakness. Because His intercession is always being answered, I want to give you I want to give you two realities, about our prayer life, about really our lives and then I want to leave you with three encouragements.

Two realities and three encouragements

1. The first reality is that if you are not a Christian, you cannot truly pray. It's not possible. Now, I don't mean you can't offer up words that resemble prayer, what I mean is you cannot truly pray. You cannot truly offer to God what pleases Him and what accomplishes His will. And the reason is because if you are not a Christian, you don't have the Spirit. You don't have Him residing in you. One Puritan pastor wrote very descriptively that "Praying without the Spirit is like the lowing of oxen and the grunting of hogs." Hmmmmmm...Aghhhh. You know, that's what we're like without the Spirit. But that's not the only reality.
2. The second reality is that if you are a Christian, you cannot pray without the Spirit. You are weak. Which means that you truly don't know what to pray for. But there's always the "but God" as believers, here's the "but God" moment. It doesn't stop there...If you are a Christian, you have the Spirit. You have Him and if you have the Spirit, then you can Pray! You can truly pray! And not only that, your prayers can be answered with yes! Because the Spirit intercedes for you according to the will of God. And this is where this passage not only gives us two realities...those two realities, it gives us three encouragements.
 - i. Number one, listen, Christian, believer, listen to these words: be encouraged that in your groaning and in your ignorance, as one pastor says, "You're not being watched, you're being understood." That's the reality. But, God is up there sort of watching you and 'look at that pathetic, person, child of mine...they have no clue what to pray for...they don't know what they're doing.' No, no, no. No, God is understanding you because you have the Spirit, and the Spirit is taking what you can't communicate right to the Father, and presenting it to the God of the universe. God, the Father (as the text says here in verse 27), He searches your heart. He knows your heart, He knows the deep longings and desires of your heart. Sometimes, desires and longings that just can't be expressed with words. He knows, He searches your hearts, and those longings, those desires are taken by the spirit to the Father. That's what the Spirit is doing.
 - ii. Secondly, the second encouragement is that God's will will be accomplished in your life, despite your weakness. Despite your weakness, and your inability to know what to pray for. That is so encouraging to me. Nothing, not even your weak prayers can frustrate the plans of God. Now, now we are to pray, and God does use our prayers. But God always hears the prayers of the Spirit, and they are always in tune with

God's will, God's will will be accomplished in your life, as a believer. That is so encouraging to me.

- iii. And number three, the third encouragement that I get from this passage is that your weakness in struggle, in prayer, your weakness and struggle in prayer will not necessarily get better in this life. The Spirit does not remove your weakness...the Spirit helps your weakness. That is so important to see. He does not remove it, and give you all of this understanding of God the Father and His perfect will for you. We could not handle that in this life, knowing God's will perfectly for us. We would be totally undone if that were revealed to us. Your weakness will not be removed. And sometimes, I think, at least in my walk with the Lord, sometimes I look to those. I think "man, they are prayer warriors," "man, they can pray so well," "man, they..." I've learned that in Sierra Leone with my brother Musa. I mean, he has a need, and he just his first thought is prayer – "Let's pray about this."

I want to encourage you. Listen to a man named John Bunyan. Have you ever heard of the man? He wrote *Pilgrims Progress*. He says this. Prayer didn't come easy for him. He says it's a little longer quote. But I think this will encourage you..."May I but speak of my own experience." He says, "and from this tell you of the difficulty of praying to God." He says "For as my heart when I go to prayer, I find it so reluctant to go to God. And when it is there with Him, I find my heart so reluctant to stay with Him. That many times I'm forced in my prayers, first to beg God that He would take my heart and set it upon Him in Christ. And then when it's there, that he would keep it there." Many times, I know not what to pray for. I am so blind, only he says, blessed be grace, the Spirit helps our weakness.

Summary

So, what we have seen this morning from Romans chapter 8. What we have seen is that prayer is a Holy Spirit thing. Prayer is spiritual. It's a Holy Spirit thing. Or as I've said, you cannot pray without the Spirit.

1. In prayer, **What** does the Spirit do? He helps you in your weakness.
2. **How** does he help you? Through intercession.
3. **Why** does he help you? Because you're weak, you don't know what to pray for. I don't know what to pray for.

And how does this help us? It helps us because the Spirit's prayers make our prayers effective. The Spirit's prayers help our prayers to be answered before the Father. His prayers that He's praying, that He is interceding on our behalf. Our prayers are answered according to the will of God.

So here's the takeaway. If you remember nothing else from this morning, the takeaway is this. Embrace your weakness in prayer. Embrace it, embrace it. Admit it, come to grips with it. Embrace the

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fact that you really cannot pray on your own. Stop trying to pray in your own power, in your own strength. It won't work. It's not possible.

You and I are so weak. And the irony is that only when you see yourself as weak at that moment, then can you truly pray. That's the irony. Prayer. After all, you know prayer is? Prayer is an admission of weakness. That's what it is. It's an admission of weakness. And it keeps us in a posture of need. We need God. We need the Lord. It's why Robert Murray McShane once said, "If you want to humble a Christian, just ask about his or her prayer life." So true. So true, but this is how the Christian life works. [He must increase and I must decrease. \(John 3:30\)](#) Only when you are weak, then He is strong. And when He is strong, we can, and we will, and we must, truly pray with the powerful Spirit's intercession.

So friends, we can pray. We can pray boldly, because we have the Spirit. Amen. Amen. Let me pray.

Father, thank You for the work of the Spirit. Lord even now as I'm praying and as we're praying corporately together. Lord, I thank You that the Spirit is interceding on our behalf. Lord, we thank You so much for this promise. And Lord, we have sought this morning to truly glorify You -- the great Triune God. Thinking about this amazing plan that You have for us, that You would send Your Son and Your Son would do the work that we cannot do. He would die, rise, and ascend, and in ascending He would pour forth His Spirit. And now we have Him. And we thank You that there are so much that He is doing in our lives right now. And specifically, we thank You that He is our great intercessor in prayer. And so Lord, I pray for Your people here. I pray that they would embrace their weakness so that at the same time they embrace the Spirit, the Spirit of prayer in their lives. Oh Father, would You make all of us to be men and women of prayer, coming to You daily, depending on You for need, recognizing that we have, we have the Spirit who is who is there helping our weakness which gives us it gives me Lord, it gives me boldness, it gives me confidence. It gives me assurance to come to You, knowing that You, through Your spirit, are praying on my behalf, praying powerful, adequate, right prayers that are in tune with Your will. So, Lord, make this reality to be to be true and to be resonating and to be blossoming and flourishing in our hearts we pray, in Jesus' name, Amen.