

Praying by the Spirit**Romans 8:26-27; Ephesians 6:18-20**

Over the course of ministry you learn interesting pieces of information about people. Probably in your conversations with or about Wayne you may have come to find out that he has enjoyed taking pictures of birds and has a couple of books one of which is the *Mystery at the Birdfeeder*.

What you may not know is that when Wayne was in college, he needed to take a course in science so chose a class in ornithology – the study of birds. He enjoyed the course immensely and learned a lot about these feathered friends. On the day of the final exam, all the students filed into the large auditorium and took their place for the test. It was a large class with a couple hundred students. The professor sat behind his desk on which was perched a bird covered with a cloth. The bird's legs were the only thing exposed.

The professor explained that each student would be given the opportunity to file by his desk and take a look at the legs of this bird. The exam was to write everything they knew about that bird based on their observation – its name, habitat, migration patterns and eating practices. Once everyone had seen the bird, they would be given an hour to write the exam. Wayne took his place and when time began, he started writing and writing and writing.

Time went by quickly and the professor announced that it was time to put their pens down and turn in their exams. Everyone went forward to put their test on the professor's desk except Wayne. For another 15 minutes he kept writing and writing and writing. The professor busied himself with grading papers but looked up and saw Wayne still writing. He called out and told Wayne to stop and turn in his paper, but Wayne kept writing and writing and writing. Another 10 minutes went by. This time the professor told Wayne that if he didn't stop and bring his paper down immediately, he would fail the course. Wayne gathered up his belongings and went down and stood before the professor. He then asked the professor if he knew who he was. The professor admitted that he couldn't possibly know the names

of all the students with such a large class size. Wayne said "good", picked up the stack of tests on the corner of the desk and shoved his in the middle and turned to leave. The professor called after him and said, "young man, just who do you think you are?" Wayne turned to face the professor, lifted his pant legs exposing his feet and said, "You tell me."

Fortunately for us God knows our name. And we know Him through the ministry of the Holy Spirit who confirms that we are part of God's forever family.

Romans 8:15-17 "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ."

In **John 14** Jesus promised the coming of another helper, a comforter. It's the word paraclete and means someone who comes along side another to help. This was a reference to the Holy Spirit who would indwell the believer. Jesus was preparing the disciples for His departure and promised that He would send the Holy Spirit who would be present in them. **Vs. 15-16** say it is for all believers who love Christ and keep His commands. It's as applicable to us today as it was for the disciples then, something that the passage says will be forever.

Jesus said He would send another Comforter or Helper. The Greek language uses two different words that are translated "**another**". Sometimes they are used interchangeably. At other times the authors used one word to mean another of a different kind and the other word to mean another of the same kind. This difference is seen in **Galatians 1:6-7** where both words are used to speak of a different gospel over the true gospel.

The Holy Spirit that Jesus promised is not a mystical power or force or spiritual essence in the life of the believer. He is real and is part of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Spirit, seen as early as **Genesis 1:2** where He hovered over the waters.

In **John 14:17**, Jesus promised that this Spirit would reside in us. **“He lives with you and will be in you”** and as I said a moment ago, it is permanent. The confirmation is in what Scripture teaches from **Matthew 28:20** where Jesus would be with us always even to the end of the world in reference to the coming Holy Spirit.

Paul also confirmed the residency of the Holy Spirit in the believer in writing **I Corinthians 3:16** **“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?”**

He also stated in **Romans 8:9** that if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ in him, he does not belong to Christ. But the Spirit is more than just an indwelling Comforter or Helper. The Bible outlines other responsibilities in the life of the believer.

Because He is the Spirit of truth, He provides spiritual understanding to the believer. He is our spiritual teacher helping us know the truth of God’s Word. Thus, He convicts us of sin, He changes our heart to conform us to be like Christ, He develops the character of God in us. When it comes to God’s Word, the Holy Spirit helps us in our search of the truth as we study and then apply what we learn to everyday life. He gives us the power to live a godly life.

Acts 1:8 **“You shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

But while we have the Holy Spirit living in us, Paul tells us in **Ephesians 5:18** to **“be filled with the Spirit”** which means we yield in submission to His leading and control in our lives.

Tuesday I have my surgery and I have already been informed that I will be going home with a pain pump. As I understand it, I will have the ability to control my pain by pressing a little button which dispenses the medication directly into my body. The power is there in the pump, but it won’t do me any good if I just let the medication sit in the device and don’t let it do its thing by pressing the button.

The Holy Spirit wants to do great things in me if I would but yield control to Him and let Him do His thing in me. As a matter of fact, **Ephesians 3:20** says that God **“is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to the His power that is at work within us.”** The power that is at work in us is the eternally indwelling Holy Spirit. So when it comes to our praying, the Holy Spirit has an active role as we will see in our two passages today. The first of which is found in **Romans 8:26-27** where we see our hope in prayer.

I. OUR HOPE IN PRAYER – Romans 8:26-27

Paul starts out by pointing to the previous verses when he begins **“In the same way.”** Beginning in **verse 22**, Paul speaks about the inward groaning of the believer who eagerly waits for the completion of the redemption of his body. Until that day, we groan because we are still bound in body to the curse that began when Adam and Eve fell through their disobedience casting all of humanity from then on into sin. We still feel the effects of that curse – having to work hard to eke out a living, aging, experiencing illness, injury and even death. John assures us from **Revelation 21** that there is coming a day when the curse of sin will no longer have power over us. There will be no more death, mourning, crying, pain or illness. The old order will pass away, but until then we groan. Yet, even though we groan, Paul says we hope. This hope is in longing for that day when we will receive new bodies unaffected by all the ravages of this present world. And he concludes **verse 25** by saying that we wait patiently for it. It’s coming.

In the same way as we wait for the redemption of our body, Paul says we have a helper. The first thing we notice is His identity is clear.

A. His Identity is Clear – v. 26a

We aren’t left to wonder who this helper is. We aren’t left to wonder if this helper will come to our aid. The very term itself implies His assistance. The identity of this helper is clearly revealed. **“In the same way, the Holy Spirit helps us.”**

Keep in mind as we mentioned earlier that the Holy Spirit is already in us.

If you have watched any old western movies, a notorious gang has ridden in and taken over and the town is in jeopardy. Someone escapes in the hopes they can arrive at the closest military post and bring word about the plight of the good people in Gulch Creek. They are left to wonder if the message of their plight got through or if the Cavalry will arrive in time. Sure enough, you see a cloud of dust rising above the hill. You hear the familiar trumpet call sounding the charge. The flag is the first thing to be seen as the advancing army crests the hill just in time to save the day.

The Holy Spirit does not act like the Cavalry arriving just in time. The Holy Spirit is already here and as we saw earlier, Jesus promised He would be with us and would be with us all the time. His identity is clear.

Next, we see that His intervention is clear.

B. His Intervention is Clear – v. 26b

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for.”

The word **“helps”** means to lend a hand together, to help another carry a heavy load. It is in the present tense meaning that He keeps on helping. It is ongoing. The words **“us in”** are not in the Greek text but implied. It literally reads **“the Holy Spirit helps our weakness.”**

Paul recognized this weakness in himself. He mentions in **II Corinthians 12** of having an experience where, either in the body or out of the body he wasn't sure, he was caught up into the third heaven or paradise. It was not the earth's atmosphere nor was it outer space. This was the place of God's presence. He then says that to keep him from boasting about this experience, God sent a thorn in the flesh, some **“messenger of Satan”** to torment him. We don't know what it was. Some think it was an eye ailment of some kind, but that is purely speculation. What we know is that this thorn was painful enough that he earnestly pleaded three

different times with God remove it. Despite his pleading, God allowed it to remain and gave Paul an answer that is good for each of us remember when we are going through difficult situations.

II Corinthians 12:9 “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.”

That means God will give you what you need to carry you through whatever is causing the pain. Paul responded to this new revelation from God. **“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.” (II Corinthians 12:10)**

Now the word **“helps”** implies that the Holy Spirit doesn't do it alone, but, as one author noted, He picks up the end and pulls along with us. The word is singular – we don't have a series of weaknesses, but one great weakness, which is our total inability to do anything in the Christian life on our own. It is in our weakness where the Lord likes to find us because it is in that weakness that He is able, through the Holy Spirit, to exhibit His strength so that **“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13)**

We are described by Paul in **Romans 8** as experiencing weakness.

In our weakness the Holy Spirit helps us speak the truth.

In our weakness the Holy Spirit helps us live a godly life.

In our weakness the Holy Spirit helps us witness.

In our weakness the Holy Spirit helps us do good.

Apart from Him, we can do nothing. Only when we recognize our weakness is He then able to help us.

A third way the Holy Spirit clearly helps us is in intercession.

C. His Intercession is Clear – v. 26c

“The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”

Have you ever had an experience where something

happened and you were at a loss for how to pray?

I know I have shared this before, but it is worth repeating. When David was 6 months old, Robyn came down sick, significant enough that we took her to emergency on a Saturday night. It was her gall bladder. David and I then drove home where I got him to bed and I set to studying my message.

Pastor Don was on vacation and I was filling in for him. Sunday morning I got David ready and came to church. After the service, whoever was in the nursery that morning, said that David had a bit of a fever. We arrived home and I took him upstairs to change him and out of nowhere, he erupted like a volcano spewing lava all over. It wasn't just dribbling out the side of his mouth down his cheek, it was gushing all over. And my instant plea was "Jesus, help me." In that moment I didn't know how or what to pray other than call out to Jesus for help.

Now the Holy Spirit took those words and went to work interceding for me in that moment. The phrase **"do not know what they ought to pray"** literally means **"what we should pray as it is necessary."**

When we don't know what to pray, when both the content and manner of prayer evade us, the Holy Spirit comes to the rescue and intercedes for us. You should know that this is in the present tense, meaning that He keeps on interceding, and He does so with groans or words that aren't stated. He takes our finite and imperfect words and forms them into a prayer that will be heard by God. In our weakness, we know to pray, but we do not know what to pray for and the Holy Spirit takes over and knows what exactly needs to be said.

When all things seem against me
To drive me to despair,
I know one gate is open,
One ear will hear my prayer.

John Phillips writes God's **"Spirit within us is actually praying for us in those agonizing longings which never find words."**

So when we don't know what we ought to pray or how to pray, how does the Holy Spirit pray for us?

His identity is clear.

His intervention is clear.

His intercession is clear.

His intention is clear.

D. His Intention is Clear – v. 27

"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."

The note in one study Bible states that **"the relationship between the Holy Spirit and God the Father is so close that the Holy Spirit's prayers need not be audible. God knows His every thought."**

There has always existed a perfect unity in the Godhead where they agree. The will of the one is the will of the others. Each works to accomplish that will in the life of the believer. So when we don't know how or what we should pray for, the Holy Spirit prays the will of God for that person because He knows what the will of God is for each believer. And God who searches the heart knows the mind of the Spirit, because while separate and distinct with unique tasks, they are one.

God knows our heart.

I Samuel 16:7 "But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'"

I Kings 8:39 "Hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with each man according to all he does, since You know his heart (for you alone know the hearts of all men)."

I Chronicles 28:9 "And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve Him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts."

Psalms 139:1-2, 23-24 "O Lord, You have searched me and You know me. You know when I sit and when I rise: You perceive my thoughts

from afar...Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

God knows your heart and He knows the mind of the Spirit and because the mind of the Spirit is in unity with the mind of God, He knows how to pray the will of God for you. And though they are unexpressed, these words are understood by the Father, and we can have this assurance – that when the Holy Spirit prays according to the will of God, it is answered.

The Holy Spirit is our hope in prayer.

How about our help in prayer?

II. OUR HELP IN PRAYER – Ephesians 6:18-20

Here again we touch on some of the very ideas we have dealt with already in our discussion on prayer. As Paul concludes his remarks regarding the armor of God the invitation is given for us to pray. Prayer is not a piece of the armor but is to be used as we wield the weapons in our battle with the enemy. It is not conventional, it is spiritual. It is a reminder that this battle can only be fought in God’s strength as we depend on Him and His Word in prayer.

Notice first the vastness of prayer.

A. The Vastness of Our Prayers – v. 18a “And pray in the Spirit”

Paul tells us when to pray – **“on all occasions.”**

Paul tells us how to pray – **“with all kinds of prayers and requests.”**

Paul tells us the means by which we pray – **“pray in the Spirit.”**

The word translated **“pray in”** can have several meanings. It can mean “by means of,” “with the help of,” and “in connection to.”

GotQuestions gives us a helpful understanding of what it means to pray in the Spirit: **“To pray in the Spirit does not refer to the words we are saying, but to how we are praying. It means to pray according**

to the Spirit’s leading, praying for the things the Spirit is leading us to pray for. It is praying in the power of the Spirit, by the leading of the Spirit, and according to His will.”

When we pray, yield to the Holy Spirit’s leading so that as we pray, our prayers are according to His will and not ours. And when the Holy Spirit prompts us to pray, don’t quench the Spirit by ignoring that prompting.

I read a story in my studies about a man working on his doctoral degree. He also held a fulltime job working at night. In the early morning hours on his way home from work, he was extremely tired and falling asleep at the wheel. He did everything he knew to stay awake. He turned the radio up and sing along, he even slapped himself to drive sleep away. The next thing he knew he woke up in his driveway not knowing how he had gotten there. Shaken, he went inside and was now eerily wide awoken. He went into the bedroom and noticed his wife was sitting up in bed waiting for him. In that early morning hour she was usually asleep. She asked how his drive home was. He confessed having a hard time staying awake. She proceeded to tell her husband that at 4:30 she woke up very suddenly and felt the intense prompting to pray figuring he must be struggling to stay awake since that’s the time he normally drives home.

When the Holy Spirit prompts you to pray, be obedient and pray right then.

What is the vastness of your prayer? Are you praying in the Spirit, who is in you?

We then notice the variety of our prayers.

B. The Variety of Our Prayers – v. 18b “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.”

The tone of Paul’s instructions to pray in the Spirit on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers and requests suggests the thoroughness by which we are to pray. Our prayers aren’t to be slipshod or haphazard but succinct and specific. As we just learned, on those occasions when we don’t know

how to pray as we ought, the Holy Spirit prays the will of God in those situations on our behalf for our spiritual well-being. Essentially then, Paul is saying that we need to be in constant communication with God using all kinds of prayers.

Warren Wiersbe gives us a picture of this need for constant prayer. “The Old Testament provides a picture of the constant prayers offered by worshippers. In the Tabernacle there was a small golden altar that stood before the veil leading into the Holy of holies. On this altar the priest burned incense. The incense was a picture of prayer. It had to be mixed according to God’s plan and could not be counterfeited by man. The fire on the altar is a picture of the Holy Spirit, for it is He who takes our prayers and ‘ignites’ them in the will of God. It is possible to pray fervently in the flesh and never get through to God. It is also possible to pray quietly in the Spirit and see God’s hand do great things.”

Wiersbe then suggests a Bible formula for prayer: “Pray to the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit. Only in the power of the Spirit can we pray for the will of God.”

Pray with all types of prayers: public and private, loud cries and whispers, spoken or silent, deliberate or spontaneous, sitting or standing, walking or kneeling or lying down, at home, work or church, hands folded or raised, eyes open or closed, head bowed or lifted up.

John MacArthur says “For the faithful, Spirit-filled believer, every place becomes a place of prayer.”

What is the variety of your prayers?

The next thing we notice is something we have seen in our previous studies on prayer, which Paul once again addresses here.

He speaks of the vigilance of our prayers.

C. The Vigilance of Our Prayers – v. 18c

“With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

The warfare we are engaged in includes all the saints, the body of Christ. How important it is to

pray for each other to stand strong in the battle, to be both alert and prayerful. Always be on the lookout. Our enemy never rests, never takes a break, never ceases his attack. He and his cohorts relentlessly pursue the believer to catch him unaware and pounces when least expected, as Peter tells us, like a lion pouncing on its prey. How urgent it is and how diligent it must be that we watch and pray. Jesus told His disciples to watch and pray so that they wouldn’t fall into temptation.

John Phillips notes that “watching sights the enemy; praying fights the enemy.”

Charlotte Elliot penned the words of this hymn as a reminder of our need to watch and pray.

Christian, seek not yet repose,
Cast thy dreams of ease away;
Thou art in the midst of foes;
Watch and pray.

Principalities and power,
Mustering their unseen array,
Wait for thy unguarded hour;
Watch and pray.

Watch as if on that alone
Hung the issue of the day,
Pray that help may be sent down;
Watch and pray.

Are you vigilant in prayer?

Finally, notice the vitality of our prayers.

D. The Vitality of Our Prayers – vs. 19-20

Paul says that while they were praying for others, include him in those prayers.

Last week I mentioned from our study in Colossians that Paul asked for prayer, similar to what he asks for here. He wants the message about Christ to be clear. He wants the message about Christ to be concise. He wants to be courageous and fearless as he shares the gospel wherever he goes.

As the shackles of his chains rubbed the skin on his wrists and ankles raw, it would be easy to wallow in self-pity. But instead, he asked that every time he

opened his mouth, he would boldly and unashamedly proclaim the gospel to all those who heard him and that they would understand the message of hope in Christ.

We would do well to pray that for ourselves and on behalf of all the saints.

Let's remember as Robert Law once said: "Prayer is not getting man's will done in heaven. Prayer is getting God's will done on earth."

Don't quit until you have an answer from God. As we pray for the saints, remember that your prayers can directly affect someone else halfway round the world. The best way we can help others is pray for them.

D. Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote "Our ultimate position as Christians is tested by the character of our prayer life."

Let's commit to prayer that will make others sit up and take notice because we pray in the Spirit for the will of God to be done.