

Romans 8:26-30 The Spirit Helps us Pray

Our passage begins, “in the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness.....”. So we need to take a look at the way we have already been told about that the Spirit helps us.

Review of the Spirit in Romans 8

- v.2 ...the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free
from the law of sin and death
- v.4 we walk (live) according to the Spirit
- v. 5 we set our minds on the things of the Spirit
- v.6 **the mind of the Spirit is life and peace**
- v.9 the Spirit of God dwells (lives) in us
- v.10 Christ is in you
- v.11 the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you
- v.13 by the Spirit we put to death the deeds of the flesh
- v.14 we are being led by the Spirit of God
- v.15 we have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out,
“Abba, Father”.
- v.16 the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God
- v.26 the Spirit helps us in our weakness
- v.26 the Spirit intercedes for us with groans unspeakable

groaning in Romans 8

- v. 22 creation groans, waiting on tip-toe for the sons and daughters of God
to be revealed
- v. 23 we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly, waiting
- v. v.26 the Spirit intercedes for us with groans unspeakable

In summary...

The Spirit lives **in us**, leads us,

We walk by the Spirit, are led by the Spirit, set our minds on the things of the Spirit, are empowered by the Spirit **in us**.

In the same way....” V.26

Living in us, working for us, leading us....

-the Spirit helps us in our weakness. Our specific weakness here in Romans 8 is that we don't know how we ought to pray.

If you are a fairly new Christian or if you did not grow up in a Christian home and family you might possibly feel that everyone else knows how to pray but you don't.

I have news for you.

As your pastor, I sometimes don't know how I ought to pray.

One of the things that came out of our conversation with the young adults a couple of weeks ago is that we 'old adults' often give the impression that we have no real struggles in our faith. That was pretty funny, because it is so far from the truth. I have to tell you again, that there are many times that I don't know how to pray as I should.

As your council, we sometimes don't know how we ought to pray.

The person writing the letter we are reading, **the most important leader in the church ever** after Jesus says he doesn't know how he should pray.

So maybe there is relief here, to know we are not the only ones who struggle with prayer.

Prayer can be hard because life is hard.

How do we pray if we are being bullied at school, or if we have been the bully?

How do we pray if office politics are heating up at work and we are caught up in the middle of them?

How do we pray if our children or our children's children are struggling?

We might be praying for our husband or wife to grow spiritually and it could be that **our** behaviour is the biggest obstacle to their growth.

How do we pray for others?

We don't want to preach in our prayers, though that is easy enough to do. "Dear Jesus, please help Bob to stop resisting your Spirit, to start to read his Bible and to do the dishes when we ask him".

That's not a prayer, that's a sermon.

How do we pray, when we are afraid of pushing our ideas on others?

How do we pray when we don't know what the real needs are?

Does our friend need to be comforted or confronted? Do we pray for patience or for the courage to put our foot down, to take the risk or to be cautious? How do we pray when the wrong seems oft so strong?

I think it is safe to say that we **all** struggle with prayer sometimes.

If we are honest, and I want to be, isn't it true that some of the problem we have with prayer is that we are too lazy to pray, or we don't trust enough, or we are not praying about the things that really matter to us, or we use prayer as a formal way to open our meals and our meetings?

Maybe some of us have remembered that the writer, Paul really did know how to pray. We can read his prayers in his letters. Here's one:

¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Now that is an awesome prayer

So when he says that we don't know how to pray as we should, he's got to mean, "in the situation we are talking about right here".

Remember from last week?

We are waiting eagerly for the redemption of our bodies.

All of creation is waiting to be renewed.

But what does that mean?

How can there be no more sorrow or dying? What will it mean to have a resurrected body like Jesus? What will it be like to live as people without brokenness or sin?

When I start to talk about things like that I feel almost as if I am using words like "florp" and "bwingydoodle". It's as if unborn twins were discussing what being born is like and what it will be like to be "held in their mom and dad's arms". "What's an arm?"

We cannot see what we are hoping for and that is why we don't know how to pray for it.

We have these tastes, the "first fruits" of the Spirit as Paul says. Forgiveness and peace and joy and purpose and worship, and the Lord's Supper.

Here and there we see creation refreshed.

But those tastes are like spices from another country. They are like colours we have seen only in our dreams. We don't know their names so we don't know how to ask for them.

A part of our weakness in prayer is not our problem. The future is too big, too beautiful for us to know how to ask for it.

Now here is the great word of freedom and comfort.

It is not just the creation that is groaning as in the pains of childbirth (v.22). It is not just we who are groaning and longing for the future day (v.23). The Spirit intercedes for us with groans unspeakable. (v.26) The Spirit of God groans most of all. The Spirit wants God's future for us even more than we do.

Underneath our prayers, our sometimes half-formed, mis-informed, ill-informed, deformed prayers, the Spirit is praying. But it is not that the Spirit takes our fumbling words and whips them into shape. It seems that not even the Spirit can put these deep longings into words. The Spirit groans with us, in us and most of all, for us.

And then, something beautiful happens. As we see it we learn a new name for God. A few weeks ago the Sunday School kids had posters on the back wall with all kinds of different names for Jesus. At the last strength weekend we read as long a list as we could find of names for God. But I don't remember the name we find here.

"The Searcher of our Hearts" v.27. It's a picture name. The picture is of someone going down into the space below the basement, down where there is

no light at all, to bring light to our most secret place. Right down there, in our innermost being, into the place where we are so often a mystery even to ourselves, the Spirit is groaning with groans too deep for words, and God, the Searcher of our Hearts comes. And the Searcher of our Hearts knows the mind of the Spirit he has given us, and knows what the Spirit is longing for and groaning for in us.

Remember, verse 6, “the mind of the Spirit is life and peace”.

Life here is life with a capital “L”. It is life that is full and rich and meaningful because it is life in Jesus Christ.

Peace here is that old word, “shalom” which means that everything is as it should be. “All is well”.

So the Spirit’s groan in us and for us is always for deeper life, fuller peace. For our church’s life to be deeper and more full of peace in Jesus Christ. For the life and peace of Jesus Christ to become visible in us and among us for us and our community.

There will always be times when prayer is a struggle. In the mystery of this relationship God acts and responds to our prayers and brings us into his future. But when we don’t know how we ought to pray we may know the Spirit groans, the Searcher of our Hearts reads the mind of the Spirit and does what is needed.

Or, as Paul says, “We know that God causes **all things** to work together for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”. God is always at work, in good times and bad, in disappointments and

sorrows and suffering, always working to conform us to the image of Jesus, always working that Jesus, the first to be resurrected, may have more brothers and sisters. (v.29)

There is freedom for us here:

We don't need to worry if we don't know how we ought to pray. We don't need to worry that we might be asking for the wrong things. We don't need to worry if we cannot see the future God is opening up for us.

The Spirit in us is groaning for us to grow in the life of Jesus and in his peace.

We are free to pray with the Spirit. Pray for life and peace. Pray for us all to become more like Jesus. Pray that Jesus may have more and more brothers and sisters. Tell God that he is free to do whatever it takes with you to make your prayer and the Spirit's groan come true.

The Lord is bringing us into his better future, his better world.

We are free to pray. And called to pray.

The Lord is gracious and faithful and he will do it. He has done it already in Jesus. We are called to follow.

The Lord be gracious to you.

And also to you. And all God's people said, **Amen**