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**The Spirit's Prayers**

**Romans 8.26-28**

**Series: The Pure Gospel**

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**The Village Church**

**November 17, 2024**

I. Introduction

- A. I once was acquainted with a man who was an author, a writer
  - 1. Can't remember who exactly
    - a. But certainly a notable author
  - 2. Well known for his books
    - a. Not sure, but I'm thinking he had been on the NY Times Bestseller list
  - 3. But someone once asked him how we went about doing his writing
  - 4. He said, "Oh, for me, writing is easy. All I do is sit down at my desk and wait until drops of blood begin to form on my forehead."
  - 5. His basic idea was that, even for an accomplished writer, writing is hard
    - a. Really hard!
- B. It's interesting to me that his response was an allusion to another enterprise known for its difficulty
  - 1. It refers to Jesus' experience in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane
  - 2. **Luke 22:44** (ESV) —
    - a. 44 And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.
  - 3. Now I wouldn't think that prayer was ordinarily a difficult enterprise for Jesus
    - a. After all, when He was praying He was communicating with His heavenly Father, and He Himself was the incarnate Son of God
    - b. The closeness in relationship is, of course, unsurpassed
  - 4. **John 10:30** (ESV) —
    - a. 30 I and the Father are one."
  - 5. **John 8:29** (ESV) —
    - a. 29 "And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."
  - 6. Unlike ourselves, there was no obstacle, no hindrance to the relationship between the Son and the Father
    - a. There would be no awkwardness in communication in which one member of the Godhead would be afraid to speak to the other about a particular subject

- b. There was no subject off limits, as in our conversations, like at Thanksgiving dinner with the extended family, whatever you do, don't talk about politics!
- C. But evidently, even for Jesus, there was a time in which prayer was difficult
  - 1. It had to do, of course, with the nature of the subject at that point in time
    - a. The most monumental of subjects
    - b. The Son laying down His own life and taking upon Himself the penalty for the sin of every member of the human race who would ever believe in Him
    - c. Taking the punishment of Almighty God, the Judge of all the earth, for sin that He Himself never committed
  - 2. It was the most excruciating task imaginable
    - a. A sacrifice beyond all other sacrifices
    - b. A time in which, in the humanity of Jesus, He would have liked nothing better than to find another way
    - c. But in the final analysis, there was no other way
    - d. And Jesus was a willing offering – giving Himself up for others
    - e. But His willingness made it no less difficult
    - f. Agonizing, according to Luke
    - g. In which His sweat... (I wonder, do we sweat when we pray?)
    - h. In which His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground
- D. John Calvin once wrote that the chief activity of the Christian is prayer
  - 1. He said that because Christianity is not a code of conduct or a system of doctrine
  - 2. Christianity is a relationship
    - a. A relationship between human beings, made in the image of God, and God Himself
    - b. Morally responsible human beings – responsible to God
    - c. Human beings with meaning and purpose in life which can only be realized through God
  - 3. A relationship in which the critical and essential element is communication
    - a. Communication between the Creator and His image-bearers
  - 4. And communication with God is prayer
- E. But prayer is hard
  - 1. Most believers find prayer difficult
  - 2. Why should the chief activity of the Christian be so hard?
  - 3. More importantly, how do we sail upon those waters in which the currents and the winds seem to be so contrary to our course and our destination?
- F. Our text this morning is a great encouragement to us
  - 1. It is a text about prayer
    - a. But more importantly, about God's help in our praying
- G. **Romans 8:26–28** (ESV) —
  - 1. 26 **Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness.**

2. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought,
3. but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.
4. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit,
5. because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.
6. 28 And we know that for those who love God
7. all things work together for good,
8. for those who are called according to his purpose.

## II. Blessed Assurance

- A. In our study of Romans we've been exploring, of course, the Gospel – the good news of Jesus Christ
  1. That in Christ Jesus, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting the sins of humans against them
  2. Paul has done that by describing in no uncertain terms the human condition
    - a. That human beings are by nature sinful creatures, cosmic rebels against the King of kings
    - b. That human sin is both universal and pervasive
    - c. Universal in that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
    - d. Pervasive in that every dimension of the human nature is corrupted by sin
  3. But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus has provided the righteousness that we so desperately need in order to have a restored relationship with God
    - a. And that by faith alone in Christ alone, God justifies us – declares us righteous
    - b. He takes the righteousness of Jesus Christ and places it into our account, as it were
    - c. Even as He takes our sin and places it in Christ's account on the cross
  4. This gospel is glorious good news for God's image-bearers!
    - a. For all who will humbly bow the knee to God and receive the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ!
- B. In this section of Romans – which really begins in Chapter 5 – Paul is describing the benefits of this salvation
  1. How by faith in Jesus we are justified, declared not guilty before God
    - a. That we have peace with God
    - b. That we have access to God, that our separation is over
    - c. That we belong to the family of God (we can actually go to this Thanksgiving dinner without fear!)
  2. This chapter – Romans 8 – is a wonderful chapter designed to give us assurance of our salvation as we trust in Jesus Christ
  3. **Romans 8:1–2** (ESV) —
    - a. 1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

- b. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.
    - 4. There are several ways in which Paul works to give us assurance of our salvation
  - C. **The Family of God**
    - 1. He first encourages us that we are members of the family of God
    - 2. **Romans 8:14–17** (ESV) —
      - a. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.
      - b. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”
      - c. 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,
      - d. 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.
  - D. **The Spirit’s Indwelling**
    - 1. Intimately connected with our belonging to the family of God is the indwelling of the Spirit of God
      - a. We are said to be led by the Spirit of God
      - b. And so led, that identifies us as sons of God
    - 2. Believers in Jesus have received the Spirit of God – who Paul calls the Spirit of Christ
      - a. And that Spirit is in this text “the Spirit of adoption as sons”
      - b. So we have been adopted into the family of God
      - c. And that adoptive transaction is not some legal declaration or paper decree
      - d. It is confirmed and assured by the presence within each believer of the Spirit of the Son, Christ living His life in and through us, by the Holy Spirit
    - 3. In fact, the indwelling Spirit communicates with our human spirits
      - a. And His testimony to our spirits is that we are God’s children
    - 4. And He gives us more than a place at the family table
      - a. He grants us an intimacy of fellowship and familial love
      - b. So that we cry “Abba! Father” – “Daddy!” – as we commune with our heavenly Father
  - E. **Our Blessed Hope**
    - 1. And then Paul assures us in this chapter by calling attention to our blessed hope
      - a. The promise of God that the last enemy of our humanity – death itself – will be abolished
      - b. And that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead will also raise us from the dead
      - c. And that will be when our adoption will be fully realized
    - 2. **Romans 8:23–24** (ESV) —

- a. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.
    - b. 24 For in this hope we were saved. ...
- F. So in this chapter Paul grants wonderful assurance that all who trust in Christ alone for salvation have a salvation that, as Peter puts it, is...
  - 1. **1 Peter 1:4-5** (ESV) —
    - a. 4 ... an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
  - 2. We are part of the family of God
    - a. We have the Spirit of Christ dwelling within us
    - b. We are promised resurrection power
  - 3. And God will never turn His back on His own!
    - a. What blessed assurance!

### III. **Our Struggles in Prayer**

- A. So why, with such assurance, such a familial relationship with the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – do we have such a difficult time with prayer?
- B. **Our Weakness**
  - 1. Well, Paul says it has to do with our “weakness”
  - 2. **Romans 8:26** (ESV) —
    - a. 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought...
  - 3. Let’s first of all acknowledge that Paul is not talking here about sin as “our weakness”
  - 4. We know sin is a barrier to communication with God
    - a. **Psalm 66:18** (ESV) — 18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.
    - b. **Isaiah 59:2** (ESV) — 2 but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.
  - 5. What Paul has in mind has to do with our finiteness, our limitation of knowledge, our ignorance of the will of God, or our lack of understanding of our circumstances
  - 6. “... we do not know what to pray for as we ought...”
  - 7. The content of our prayers reflect our human limitations, our ignorance, our finiteness
  - 8. The good news is that once you realize that, and as you read your Bibles, you will discover that you’re in good company
  - 9. **Paul** is personally aware of our limitations – for he had his own
  - 10. He had this “thorn in the flesh”
    - a. We really don’t know what that thorn in the flesh was
    - b. Some think it may have been an eye issue, something affecting his sight

- c. Others think it was some other physical malady
  - d. Still others think it was a person! (Maybe that's what you think is your thorn in the flesh!!!)
11. What we do know is that Paul prayed about it
- a. He asked for it to be removed
  - b. Three times!
12. **2 Corinthians 12:8–9** (ESV) —
- a. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.
  - b. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” ...
13. So Paul prayed, ignorant of the will of God – and his prayers were not answered!
- a. But there are other examples as well
14. Consider **Job**
15. **Job 1:8** (ESV) —
- a. 8 And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?”
  - b. So there was nothing in Job's character that would have been a barrier to his communion with God
16. **Job 7:20–21** (ESV) —
- a. 20 If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of mankind? Why have you made me your mark? Why have I become a burden to you?
  - b. 21 Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? For now I shall lie in the earth; you will seek me, but I shall not be.”
  - c. Job, confused, cried out to God for answers, and he received none
  - d. He really had no idea about the drama in the heavenly realm that led to his drama on earth
  - e. He perhaps never knew what was behind it
  - f. Though I trust he knows it now!
17. And then what about **Elijah**
- a. One of the great, powerful prophetic voices
  - b. Having orchestrated a great victory over the prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel
  - c. But that victory drained him physically and emotionally
  - d. He fled Jezebel, who had threatened to kill him, into the wilderness
  - e. So how did he respond?
  - f. **1 Kings 19:4** (ESV) — 4 ... And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.”
  - g. This was a transparent prayer, a soul-baring prayer – but a foolish prayer

- h. He really didn't know what he was asking
- i. Even Elijah was weak in prayer
- 18. And then think about **Mary Magdalene**
  - a. She loved Jesus – devoted to Jesus
  - b. But she completely misunderstood what God was up to in the death of Jesus
  - c. When she met Jesus in the garden following the resurrection she didn't recognize Him
  - d. Thought He was the gardner!
  - e. **John 20:15** (ESV) — 15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”
  - f. Here was a deeply devout woman, but completely confused; a weak believer
- 19. But then, consider even **Jesus!**
  - a. Now we have to be careful here
  - b. But remember, Jesus was subject to physical limitations in His incarnation
  - c. He could be hungry; he could be tired
  - d. And there were times in which He did not know everything – in His humanity
  - e. In the Garden of Gethsemane he prayed for something like three hours that the wrath of God might pass Him by
  - f. His prayer was, at that moment, in His humanity, was not according to the will of God
  - g. He came to grips with the will of God in that time of prayer, but for a time, there was weakness in prayer in His humanity
- 20. So if these folks struggled with prayer, is it any wonder we have our weaknesses?
  - a. We have our frailties; we have our limitations
  - b. And it affects our praying

C. **The Spirit's Work**

- 1. But Paul is quick to point out that help is on the way
  - a. The same Spirit who adopts us into the family of God
  - b. The same Spirit who communicates with our spirits that we are children of God
  - c. Is the same Spirit that helps us in our weakness
- 2. **His Help**
  - a. **Romans 8:26** (ESV) — 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.
  - b. The first thing we see is that the Spirit “helps” us
  - c. “Helps” is one of the great contrasts in New Testament translation

- d. The word in English is a simple four letter word – help; five letters in the present tense verb form – helps
- e. But the word in the Greek has 17 letters!
- f. **Sunantilambanomai (Gk)**
- g. Anytime you have a Greek word like that you can pretty much tell that it's a compound word – a word made up of several smaller word
- h. **Sun – with, along with, together with**
- i. **Anti – in the place of**
- j. Root word is **Lambano – take hold of, remove, or bear**
- k. Put it all together – one who comes along beside, picks up the burden of the weak one, and carries or bears the load in his place
- l. The English “helps” doesn't quite capture that!
- m. The person I immediately think of to illustrate this word is Simon of Cyrene – the man thrust into the role of picking up the cross of Jesus as Jesus was failing under its weight
- n. He came along beside, picked up the burden that was crushing Jesus, and carried the load to its destination
- o. But the same idea is applied to the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to the disciples according to the Gospel of John
- p. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit a Helper, our Counselor, our Advocate
- q. The word there is **parakletos**
- r. Another compound Greek word
- s. Kletos = to call
- t. Para = alongside
- u. The parakletos is one who is called along beside to help
- v. And that's what the Holy Spirit does for us as we pray
- w. He comes along beside us, to pick us up from our burdens, and carries prayer to the throne room of the Father in the heavenly sanctuary

### 3. **His Intercession**

- a. The second word that Paul uses to describe the Holy Spirit's assistance in prayer is “intercession”
- b. He uses the word twice
- c. **Romans 8:26–27** (ESV) — 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself **intercedes** for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit **intercedes** for the saints according to the will of God.
- d. The word in the Greek is **entynchano (Gk) = to run up to, approach**
- e. The first time the word is used it adds a prefix of **huper (Gk)**
- f. This intensifies the approach or the intercession
- g. Huper = hyper = super
- h. This is an intensified approach; an approach on steroids

- i. A pleading to the superior on behalf of the inferior, the one who would otherwise have no standing
  - j. You would be encouraged to know that even in your weakness in prayer you have two intercessors appealing to the Sovereign governor of the universe on your behalf
  - k. One is the Lord Jesus Himself
  - l. **Hebrews 7:25** (ESV) — 25 Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.
  - m. **Romans 8:34** (ESV) — 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.
  - n. You are secure, you are assured of salvation, not because of who you are or what you've done, but because the author of your salvation is pleading your case in the heavenly sanctuary
  - o. He, the Lord Jesus Christ, is telling His Father that He, Jesus, has already covered your sins with His own blood
  - p. But then, in addition to Jesus, the third person of the Trinity is also interceding – pleading on your behalf – from the sanctuary of your own heart
  - q. So you have two intercessors, pleading in two sanctuaries
  - r. But you know what? You have a third intercessor – your brothers and sisters
  - s. And they also plead with the Father on your behalf
  - t. And they do so from yet another sanctuary – the sanctuary of the Church
  - u. For the Church is the temple being built with living stones
  - v. So, dear friends – you are covered with intercession in all three sanctuaries
  - w. And the Spirit of God is pleading your case from within your own heart
4. **His Groanings**
- a. Well, how does the Spirit do this intercession?
  - b. He does it with groanings
  - c. **Romans 8:26** (ESV) — 26 ... the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.
  - d. We learned last week that there's a lot of groaning going on in this passage – that three distinct beings groan
  - e. The whole creation groans in the pains of childbirth (**Romans 8.22**)
  - f. And we groan as those who are believers, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit (**Romans 8.23**)
  - g. And now we learn that the Spirit groans
  - h. And the Spirit's groaning is "too deep for words"
  - i. What the Spirit says is unintelligible to us

- j. But His groaning also reflects the passion and intensity of His pleading
- k. Have you ever watched a professional tennis match?
- l. Have you noticed that almost all of the players grunt or groan every time they hit the ball
- m. That grunting or groaning really, I don't believe, adds anything to the kinesiological efficiency and biomechanical power of the stroke
- n. But it does reflect the effort of the player
- o. With the Holy Spirit, His groaning reflects His passion on your behalf
- p. But it goes well beyond that – because it does register an effect in heaven
- q. Because just because His groanings are for us “too deep for words”, heaven understands the content of the prayer just fine
- r. We are too weak to express what we really need in ways that are articulate
- s. And we find ourselves groaning
- t. But the Holy Spirit comes along beside us
- u. He picks up our burden and in His own heavenly, passionate language, carries our burden to the heavenly sanctuary
- v. And in concert with the Lord Jesus, brings two witnesses into the divine courtroom on our behalf
- w. And we don't understand those pleadings – but God does; He understands the Spirit's groanings perfectly

5. **His Purpose**

- a. Which brings us to the other dimension of the Spirit's assistance in our praying – His purpose
- b. **Romans 8:27** (ESV) — 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.
- c. This confirms that God the Father knows exactly what the Spirit is communicating through His groaning
- d. “He who searches hearts” – that's God – “knows what is the mind of the Spirit”
- e. But then it indicates that what the Spirit is groaning is according to the will of God
- f. “The Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God”
- g. We don't always know what the will of God is for our lives; that's one of our weaknesses in prayer
- h. But the Spirit of God does! He knows what the will of God is
- i. It's as if we say, “Oh God, do this for me!”
- j. And the Spirit says, “Oh Father, he wants this to be done, you and I know what he really needs. So give him the best; give him what he

really needs, because our purpose is to conform this dear saint into the image of the Lord Jesus.”

- k. Isn't it wonderful that we have an interpreter interceding for us
- l. I've heard of stories on the mission field when the missionary was preaching and an interpreter was interpreting in the native language which the missionary did not understand
- m. But occasionally the interpreter was a better preacher than the missionary
- n. And the interpreter didn't like what the missionary was preaching, so he preached his own message in the native language, correcting the errors of the missionary
- o. And the missionary had no idea!
- p. It's kind of like that – we pray!
- q. We're called to pray; commanded to pray; count it a privilege to we welcome into the throne room of the King of kings
- r. And yet we have the Spirit to interpret our prayers
- s. So that they do correspond to the will of God

#### IV. **Prayer's Triumph**

- A. And that's why I threw in v. 28 in this message
  - 1. Because it shows the results of the Spirit's assistance in our praying
- B. **Romans 8:28** (ESV) —
  - 1. 28 And we know that for those who love God
  - 2. all things work together for good,
  - 3. for those who are called according to his purpose.
- C. All things work together for good!
  - 1. That, of course, doesn't mean that all good things happen to believers who pray
  - 2. It does mean that God works all things – even hard things – together to accomplish good for us
  - 3. And that good is to be transformed into the image and likeness of the Lord Jesus
- D. That's the Spirit's triumph
  - 1. We pray – weakly to be sure
    - a. But that's no argument to not pray!
    - b. We must pray if we want the Spirit's help!
  - 2. But the Spirit prays with us, for us
    - a. He comes along beside us
    - b. He picks up our burdens
    - c. He storms the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf
    - d. Along with the Lord Jesus
  - 3. And it will result in good for us for all eternity