

TEACH ME TO PRAY

ROMANS 8:26-27

THE HELP OF THE SPIRIT



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

DAVID MURRAY
JANUARY 8, 2023 (AM)

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever felt helpless in prayer?

You don't know what to pray, when to pray, how to pray, who to pray for, and even why you should pray at all. You feel utterly helpless. You come before the Lord and nothing comes out. You're just numb, or feel so confused, or you're scared of praying for the wrong things in the wrong way, or you are just exhausted and can't even put two words together. Maybe you can't stand hearing your own prayers - they sound so boring, so repetitive, so formal, so casual, so small, so pointless - and wonder, "How can God want to hear my prayers if even I don't want to hear them?"

So we sit there, or kneel there, or fall there and nothing comes out but helpless moans and helpless groans.

Where can we get help when we feel helpless in prayer?

God gives us three helps to pray and we want to look at the first help today, the help of the Holy Spirit. Our text says, "**The Spirit helps us in our weakness**" (Rom. 8:26). Next time, we will discover the help of the Son, and then we will finish this series on prayer, with the help of other Christians in prayer gatherings.

BACKGROUND

We've been looking at prayer using different images to teach us to pray:

- **The cross:** Taught us how to pray in Jesus name
- **The throne:** Taught us to pray with confidence
- **The battlefield:** Taught us to pray as in a war.
- **The supper:** Taught us to view prayer as communion
- **The door:** Taught us to pray for all our needs
- **The window:** Teaches us how to pray for perspective
- **The schedule:** Teaches us when to pray

This week, we are looking at the help of the Holy Spirit in prayer from Romans 8:26-27, and the image I want us to think about is that of a stage. As Professor John Murray said, "The children of God have two divine intercessors. Christ is their intercessor in the court of heaven. The Holy Spirit is their intercessor in the theaters of their own hearts."

Before we look at these verses in detail, note how this chapter is all about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people. The Holy Spirit frees us (2), dwells in us (9), kills sin in us (13), leads us (14), bears witness to our adoption (16), and helps us in prayer when we are helpless (26).



How does the Holy Spirit help us in prayer?



THE SPIRIT HELPS BY GROANING IN US, WITH US, AND FOR US.

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness" (26). "Helps" means "heaves together with." It's the word used to describe someone who comes to our help when we're struggling to lift something. The helper picks up one end and heaves it together with us so that it is moved to the right place. How does the Spirit do this? How does he heave together with us? He helps by authoring groans in our hearts.

The Stage

Remember what Professor John Murray said, "The children of God have two divine intercessors. Christ is their intercessor in the court of heaven. The Holy Spirit is their intercessor in the theaters of their own hearts." The Holy Spirit works there in the deep, dark, and desperate places of our hearts. The believer's heart is the stage where he does his best helping work.

The Prompter

A prompter is a person who prompts or cues actors when they forget their lines or neglect to move on the stage to the right place. In the same way, the Holy Spirit works on the sidelines to initiate prayer words and prayer groans at the right time and in the right place. The Holy Spirit stirs up, initiates, inspires, dictates, and excites our words and our groans. The Spirit prays for us with words and with groanings by prompting us to pray with words and groanings.

Just as a Dad teaches his son archery by putting his hands on his son's hands to help him shoot the arrow, so the Spirit helps us to pray by putting his words and groans in our hearts to send heavenwards. We don't sit passively but heave these groans together with him. They are his groans but we groan them.

The "Actors"

This is a chapter about Christians. It's assuming those reading are those who have no condemnation because they are in Christ Jesus (1). They have the Holy Spirit (2), they are walking according to the Spirit (5), etc. The Apostle Paul underlines this when it says "**the Spirit intercedes for the saints**" (27). This co-groaning is not an experience that anyone can have, but only those who are saints.

The Lines

The Spirit joins us as we pray "**with groanings too deep for words**" (26). The creation groans (22), we groan (23), and the Spirit groans (26). These are sounds like sighs, gasps, moans, grunts, which cannot be put into words. Though full of meaning they cannot be articulated with letters.

The Audience

"**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**" (27). Although neither we nor others can put words on these sounds, the Lord understands them. He is the audience for our Spirit-prompted heart groans. He knows what the mind of the Spirit is who prompted the groans, and he knows our hearts as they utter them. Prompted by the Holy Spirit these groans are automatically in line with God's will. Indeed, these wordless prayers are often more in line with God's will than our most articulate prayers.



CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Encouragement for the tempted young man. Sometimes pornography temptation is so strong, so overwhelming, so irresistible, so devilish that all we can do is groan and gasp before God. That is Spirit-prompted prayer that God understands and hears.

Encouragement for the exhausted young mother. Young mothers especially find it so hard to get time for personal devotions. Feeding, clothing, organizing, providing, protecting, driving, washing up. You feel guilty that you are getting so little time for "proper prayer" in the morning and by bedtime, all you have left is a sigh heavenwards. That heavenward look and sigh is Spirit prompted prayer that God understands and hears.

Encouragement for the repentant backslider. Although guilt closes your mouth so that you can hardly utter a word of prayer, your repentant pantings and sighings are Spirit-prompted prayer that God understands and hears.

Encouragement for the aging senior. You are getting weaker and lonelier. You are forgetting more than you are remembering. Dementia is debilitating your mind. It's hard to speak to others or God. But your heavenwards grunts and groans are Spirit-prompted prayer that God understands and hears.

Encouragement for the young Christian. Maybe you hear others pray and think, "I can hardly pray a sentence. My prayers are worthless." Even if you can hardly put two words together, the very fact that you groan about that is a Spirit-prompted prayer that God understands and hears.

Encouragement for the mentally ill. Perhaps your depression has got you so down that you are barely able to lift your head, never mind your voice. Or your anxiety has got you so agitated that you cannot keep your mind on prayer for even five seconds. You moan and sigh over this, but know that these are Spirit-prompted prayers that God understands and hears.

Encouragement for the stressed and busy. You are so rushed off your feet all day that you barely have time to pray. But you do at various points in the day look heavenwards and groan for help. Such prayers are Spirit prompted prayers that God hears and understands.

Encouragement for estranged parents. You poured your lives into your children but they have turned their back on you, maybe even turned their back on God. You are so upset that you can barely think straight, never mind pray. You fall on your knees and can only groan about the pain and the pointlessness of life. This is a Spirit-prompted prayer that God understands and hears.

Encouragement for the convicted sinner. The Holy Spirit has shown you your sin in a way you've never seen before. You feel so hopeless you can't find words to express your situation. All you can do is look heavenwards and groan for mercy. That's a Spirit-prompted prayer that God understands and hears.

Encouragement for the dying saint. You are in your last days and hours and instead of seeing angels, all you can feel are pains and weakness. You thought you would depart to heaven with songs of praises and a bold witness, but all you have are groans. These are Spirit-prompted prayers that God understands and hears.

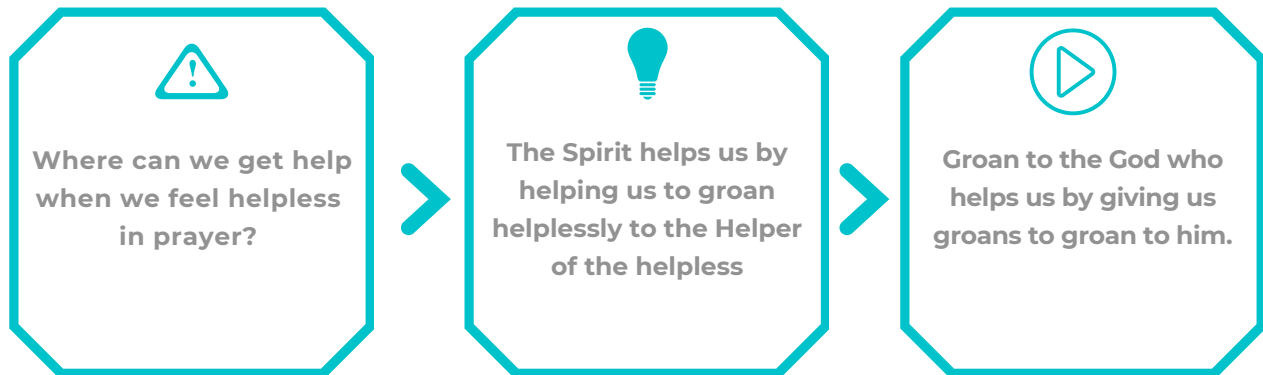
GOD LOVES GROAN PRAYERS
MORE THAN "GOOD" PRAYERS



Hear God's Story: Change your story > Tell the story > Change others' stories



SUMMARY



A NEW CHAPTER

Thank the Holy Spirit for your groans. Don't feel guilty about prayer groans but thank the Spirit for seeing our helplessness and coming into our hearts with groans too deep for words that God loves to hear and answer.

Know Jesus through your groans. If anyone ever groaned it was Jesus. He groaned over the death of Lazarus, he groaned over the unbelief of Jerusalem, he groaned in Gethsemane, he groaned over the loss of his Father's presence. The Spirit helped him in his weakness. We can enter into Christ's life and experience via our groans in our weakness.

Prayer. God of my groanings, thank you for giving me groans to pray to you with the help of the Spirit. Help me to groan with faith that you hear, understand, and will answer my groans.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When have you felt helpless in prayer and how did it affect your prayers?
2. What roles does the Holy Spirit have in your life? How does he help you daily?
3. What surprised you about this message from God's Word? What thrilled you?
4. How will this sermon help your prayer life?
5. What other human situations can you think of that need this truth?
6. In what other situations do you think Jesus groaned in prayer?

First Byron Christian Reformed Church
8541 Byron Center Ave SW, Byron Center, MI 49315
Phone: (616) 878-9768
www.firstbyroncrc.org

Pastor David Murray
www.thestorychanger.life