



## Romans 8:26 30

### Praying in the Spirit

Things looked bleak for the children of George Muller's orphanage at Ashley Downs in England. It was time for breakfast, and there was no food. A small girl whose father was a close friend of Muller was visiting in the home. Muller took her hand and said, "Come and see what our Father will do." In the dining room, long tables were set with empty plates and empty mugs. Not only was there no food in the kitchen, but there was no money in the children home's account.

Muller prayed, "Dear Father, we thank Thee for what Thou art going to give us to eat." Immediately, they heard a knock at the door. When they opened it, there stood the local baker. "Mr. Muller," he said, "I couldn't sleep last night. Somehow I felt you had no bread for breakfast, so I got up at 2 o'clock and baked fresh bread. Here it is." Muller thanked him and gave praise to God.

Soon, a second knock was heard. It was the milkman. His cart had broken down in front of the orphanage. He said he would like to give the children the milk so he could empty the cart and repair it.

God answers prayer. He wants us involved in His eternal purpose. As a loving, Father He wants us to come to Him and ask in faith. The Spirit filled Christian is a praying Christian who walks by faith trusting His heavenly Father to provide daily.

The life of the Christian is a daily Spirit controlled life. It is not a life designed just for the weekend, just for Sunday, or just for the church. It is a life designed for the home, the school, the place of employment, the office, the kitchen – wherever you are. It is there that God expects us to live a Spirit filled life. The Spirit filled life is not a religious cop out. It is designed to meet the need of every moment of your week, and to be your source of strength and power right through all the difficulties of each day.

### PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT (8:26 27)

The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:26 27 words of encouragement for trouble filled days. He said: "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; 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*."

#### *God wants us to ask.*

One of the great mysteries of life is prayer. God the Father takes joy in answering prayer. It is our responsibility to go to Him and enter into

answering prayer. It is our responsibility to go to Him and enter into fellowship with Him. Prayer is more than just asking God for things. It is an attitude, a way of life. It involves formal prayers as when we come before Him in corporeal worship. It is also when we come before Him silently in the classroom, a business adventure, or in a public setting. In Ephesians 6:18, the apostle Paul asked the church at Ephesus to pray for him in his ministry,

"With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints."

There are other times when life is just simply too big, and too complex, and *we do not know what to ask for*. In such times, we know neither what to pray for, nor how to present our petitions, as we ought. This is when the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf. He graciously shares with us the bearing of this burden.

He gives wisdom to all who come and ask Him. "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind" (James 1:5-6).

### *Jesus is our perfect example of praying in the Spirit.*

He was the perfect Spirit-filled man. Luke, the Greek Physician, gives a good summary of the Holy Spirit's ministry in Jesus.

Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well pleased . . . . Jesus full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness . . . . And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district. And He *began* teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all. And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,

Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.  
He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,  
And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set free those who are oppressed,  
To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." (Luke 3:21-22; 4:1, 14-18).

Why did Jesus pray? He prayed to maintain the intimate love relationship

Why did Jesus pray? He prayed to maintain the intimate love relationship with the Father. Jesus experienced unbroken sweet communion between He and His Father. Throughout the four Gospels, we find Jesus abiding in the presence of the Father. He sought to do the will of the Father.

Where did Jesus pray? He prayed everywhere: with His disciples, in small groups with Peter, James and John. He prayed alone in the mountains, He prayed on a picnic with His disciples by the lakeside, etc.

Jesus prayed without ceasing. It was His custom to pray. He prayed before making important decisions as when He called the twelve. He asked for the Father's guidance. He spent the entire night paying for the Father's will.

What did He pray for? He prayed for Himself. He prayed for the disciples to know spiritual truths, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this unto you, but My Father who is in heaven." He prayed for Peter when he said, "I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail." In warning Peter the very night of His denial Jesus said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31 – 32).

He encouraged them to pray and not to become weighed down by the worries of life. "But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36).

Not only did Jesus pray with a deep burden and sense of urgency for His disciples, but He also prayed for strength for Himself. Have you ever listened to the groanings of Jesus as He prayed?

And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and *began* to pray, saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, and said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation. (Luke 22: 39 – 46).

While Jesus is yet speaking, the mob came to arrest Him.

It is interesting as we consider Jesus as our best example of the Spirit-controlled man praying in the Spirit that there is no record of His ever praying in "tongues."

People ask is this groaning in the Spirit praying in tongues. There seems little reason to embrace such a view. All of creation is sighing and groaning. They are not speaking in charismatic tongues. It is the prayer of every Christian. The Holy Spirit makes intercession even through our groanings.

Speaking in tongues or praying emotionally ecstatic meaningless syllables is *not* what Paul is talking about in Romans 8:26. These are not ecstatic cries or tongues or any special language that is mentioned here. Paul specifically says that the praying of the Spirit is too deep for words, or even utterance. It is unuttered; it cannot be expressed. It is felt only in the heart, and it never comes to the surface of the lips. It never can be expressed. In other words, these are those deep yearnings of the soul that all of us feel at times for more of

expressed. In other words, these are those deep yearnings of the soul that all of us feel at times for more of God for ourselves, or for someone else. This is why we often call it "a burden." It is a burden "too deep for words."

This word is found here only in the New Testament. These groanings are inexpressible, "unspoken," or "unutterable." They are without words. Perhaps it is impossible to put them into words.

Jesus prayed with this same kind of intense burden for a lost world in the Garden of Gethsemane. "Not my will, Thy will be done." When we pray in the Spirit, we have that same intense desire of the soul. We love for the will of God to be done in our lives.

### *The Holy Spirit does the same thing for us.*

Where do you groan today? Where do you feel the sting of sin, or the hurt of a broken relationship? Where is the pain of an empty chair at your supper table, or the crushing defeat of loneliness? Is there the guilt of a conscience that refuses to be quieted, or the disappointment of unfaithfulness? What is the "groan" or "burden" or "weakness" you face today?

Can you identify with Paul in Second Corinthians 4:7-12? In part he says, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; *we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you."

Pounds paraphrase reads: We possess this priceless treasure of the fragrance of the Gospel in these old fragile clay pots in order that the exceeding greatness of the power of God may be manifest, as coming from God and not from ourselves. We are hard pressed on every side with troubles all around us, but we are not crushed, we still have breathing room. We are perplexed and bewildered, but not despairing. We are hunted down by persecutors, but not forsaken by the Lord. We are always getting knocked down, but never a knockout.

You say "Life isn't fair." "That's not what I want out of my life."

We want to be glazed and polished, painted, displayed and put on some safe shelf. But that's not God's way of producing fragrance.

God's way of producing His fragrance is to take the pot off the shelf, break it and pour out the fragrance.

A. W. Tozer said, "It is doubtful God can bless any man greatly until He has hurt him deeply." Or as Alan Redpath once said: "When God wants to do an impossible task he takes an impossible man and crushes him."

How is the pot? Where is your weakness today? Do you feel squeezed in? Sickness, disease, heartache, disappointment, disaster, some crushing experience, tears, death, shadow of death . . . (v. 11 is a commentary on v. 10).

For Paul it meant, "afflicted . . . perplexed . . . persecuted . . . struck down." That was the process God used to release the fragrance in Paul's life. But please keep in mind Paul was not alone in this process. God was at work in Him. How did He do it?

In Romans 8:26, the Apostle Paul writes, "the Spirit helps our weakness." He was there with Paul in the afflictions, perplexities, persecutions and weaknesses.

*Helps* means to lend a hand together, at the same time with one, to help, to come to the aid of someone. That is the word of the Encourager, the *Paraklete*. A. T. Robertson said, "Here beautifully Paul pictures the Holy Spirit taking hold at our side at the very time of our weakness . . . and before too late."

The beautiful thing is His power is perfected in our weaknesses. When we die, He lives. When we lose, He wins. When we are weak, He is strong. When we are dependent, He is powerful. This is what God was doing in Paul. He does the same in us as we yield to Him. It is walking and praying in the Spirit.

Paul reminds us we don't know how to pray. Like Jesus' disciples we come to the Lord asking Him to teach us to pray. Praying is hard work. It is difficult for most of us. It takes thought, concentration and commitment. Moreover, we are not always good judges of that for which we should be praying. We ask amiss. We ask for the wrong things. I am afraid we often come to the Father asking for things that displease Him. We pray for things unprofitable for us in our walk with Him. Paul prayed intensely on three occasions for the thorn to be removed (2 Cor. 12:7-9). God did not remove the thorn. He gave Paul grace to grow through the thorns in his life. In the process of suffering, Paul grew in the likeness of Christ.

We do not know what is best for us because we do not have God's overall perspective of what He is doing, not only in our lives, but also in the lives of those about us who in one way or another are impacted by our lives. There are always those who are silently watching us and observing how we live the Christian life. They are influenced by how we handle our weaknesses. Do they see us as instruments of God's grace? From our human perspective, we don't always see how God is using our situations to impact others for His good. Our perspective of our circumstances radically changes when we get eternity into the picture.

Isn't it wonderful to know that when we do not know how to pray or what to do the Holy Spirit comes to our aid? He doesn't take the entire load. That really wouldn't help us in the maturation process. We still have our personal responsibility. However, He helps us in working out the problems and overcoming the difficulties.

### ***Holy Spirit intercedes for us.***

The word for "intercedes" is found only here in the New Testament. It means, "meet, to turn to, approach, appeal, petition." The word "intercession" "is a picturesque word of rescue by one who "happens on" one who is in trouble and "in his behalf" pleads "with unuttered groanings" or with "sighs that baffle words." This is work of our Helper, the Holy Spirit Himself (Robertson).

The Spirit makes intercession for us from within us. Paul says, "the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words." Henry Alford wrote, "The Holy Spirit of God dwells in us, knowing our wants better than we, Himself pleads in our prayers, raising us to higher and holier desires than we can express in words, which can only find utterance in sighings and aspirations."

God receives these inarticulate groanings as acceptable prayers since they come from a soul full of, or under the control of the Spirit of God. God knows what is the mind of the Spirit. He understands the intent or bent of our unutterable prayers. He knows the mind of the Holy Spirit who is always praying for us according to God's plan for our lives.

Are these groanings those of the believer or the Holy Spirit? Phillips translates, "The Spirit within us is

Are these groanings those of the believer or the Holy Spirit? Phillips translates, "The Spirit within us is actually praying for us in those agonizing longings which never find words." NEB reads, "through our inarticulate groans."

The Spirit produces these groanings within the believer. He knows our hearts better than we do. Paul is not describing what happens to the non-believer. Paul is speaking of an activity of the Spirit, not the human spirit. The groans are uttered by the believer. The Spirit is not said to groan, but to intercede with or if "groans. When we cannot find words in which to express our prayer and we can do no better than make inarticulate sounds, the Spirit takes those sounds and makes them into effective intercession on our behalf. The unbeliever does not groan over his weakness in prayer. The child of God does, however. I think this inarticulate groaning is the work of the Spirit in the believer.

God the Spirit knows the mind of the Father and what the Holy Spirit is doing in our hearts. The Father listens to the intercession of the Spirit on our behalf and answers them according to His will. These "unutterable groanings" of the heart are the intercessions of the Spirit. Jesus promised the disciples, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you" (John 14:16-17).

The Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We have someone praying for us all the time. Christ searches (Rev. 1:23) and the Holy Spirit searches (1 Cor. 2:10). Christ prays for us in heaven (8:34; Hebrews 7:25-26; 9:24; 1 John 2:1), and the Holy Spirit intercedes for us here on the earth. What a caring God we serve!

Have you ever sensed a burden in your life for prayer for your own needs or someone else's needs? It is dissatisfaction with the present experience of your life, and a discontent with the shallowness of your present Christian experience, and a hungering after richer fellowship with God which are born of the Spirit within. It is the evidence that, deep within the heart, is a spirit that cries out for more of God.

I had the opportunity and privilege of serving with Missionary Radio Station HCJB, Quito, Ecuador three summers while I was a college student. One of the individuals I had the joy of knowing was a young medical doctor at Hospital Vozandes during the summer of 1965. A group of us got together several times each week and sang around the piano, went out to eat, pray, share our testimonies, etc. One of those was this doctor friend. At that time, he was not a believer, even though he was very sympathetic to evangelicals. I never saw a person come so deeply under conviction of sin and enjoy it as he did week after week.

A group of us went to the Santiago Garaballa evangelistic crusade in the sports plaza. We listened intensely to the simple message of salvation through Jesus Christ. My friend came deeply under conviction with weeping. I urged him to believe on Christ and receive eternal life. He shook his head and said, "No, he couldn't."

A few weeks later I returned to my studies at William Carey University. One afternoon that Fall I said to my close friend, Ann (who later became my wife), "Let's go to the prayer room. I have a deep burden to stop and pray for a friend in Ecuador." We knelt and prayed for some time with an intense burden for his salvation. When we finished praying the burden went away and I have never felt it in such a way since.

I returned the following June to work at the radio station. When I walked into the Hospital Vozandes, I was greeted by the receptionist. She said my friend was anxious to see me. He began to share how he responded last summer and related how difficult was for a professional in Latin America to make a public decision for Christ and identify themselves with evangelicals. (Things have changed in the last 40 years). Then he shared how one evening in the Fall that previous year a missionary presented the Good News in Jesus Christ and he

how one evening in the Fall that previous year a missionary presented the Good News in Jesus Christ and he believed on Christ as his personal Savior.

One the very evening Ann and I were praying she was sharing Christ with him!

There is also the cry of the Spirit within for something more, something deeper, something more precious, something more satisfying than our present experiences. This is always according to the will of God. In other words, the job of the Spirit of God in our life is to keep us pressing on, so that we don't settle down and become satisfied with our sanctification. The Father's goal as the following verses reminds us is to "conform us to the image of his Son."

What happens? Well, you see the results of such praying, in this next section in the Providence of God.

## **THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD (8:28-30)**

### *God answers the silent yearnings of the Spirit within you.*

It is God's way of meeting the cry of the Spirit within to lead us into a deeper and a more wonderful experience of God's grace, and God's glory, and God's person. It is not some things that happen to you, but *everything* that happens to you, whatever it may be!

This includes those wonderful delightful surprises that God brings our way from day to day. He answers so many of our prayers before we verbalize them.

However, it also includes those heartbreaking and painful experiences where life just seems to collapse around you and fall apart at the seams. Now, these experiences are sent; they don't just happen. This is the testimony of Scripture to the believer. These things are sent —everything, without exception —they don't just happen. They are working together for good to accomplish the deep yearning of the heart, awakened by the Spirit within, for more of the grace and glory and person of God. We'll say more about this in the next passage in Romans.

You may have asked God to heal you only to discover He had a grater purpose in your illness. God is teaching us to trust him with everything, from now to eternity.

He is working out the situation not to supply our wants but *our need of spiritual growth*. Those spiritual needs find expression in the deep unuttered longings of our hearts. They express those restless dissatisfactions that show we cannot be satisfied with what we are presently going through, but cry out for something more, something greater, something yet to satisfy the thirst of our soul for God.

We will examine the five steps God takes in His beautiful program for us in our next message. "Those whom he foreknew, he also predestined." Don't be afraid of this beautiful word "predestined." It means that God thought it out in advance, just like we plan our youth and recreation building before we build it. So God planned what He is going to do —He predestined.

The five steps God takes stretches from eternity to eternity. Yet, this is what brings us to faith. I want to make clear that in this passage the Apostle Paul is not touching the question of why some people believe and some do not. That is His choice in election, which Paul clearly addresses in Romans chapter nine. In our present passage Paul is not facing the mystery of election. He is simply describing how God has worked in the lives of those who believe, what has already happened when, as Christians, we look back to see how God

the lives of those who believe, what has already happened when, as Christians, we look back to see how God brought us to this place today. There are five steps: He foreknew, He predestined, He called, He justified and He glorified. God did not overlook anything!

***God's goal is that we be like Jesus (8:29).***

Though we all share the character of Jesus Christ, God is not stamping out little robots repeatedly. There is an infinite variety of expressions of the beauty of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. The plan began in eternity past and doesn't end until eternity in the future. As we grow in Christ there are some characteristics of Christ that will come clearly into focus. They are "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

Do I write to someone today who needs a word of encouragement and a simple reminder that He does answer our prayers, even in ways we do not comprehend or understand? Our heavenly Father has demonstrated His love for us once and for all at Calvary. We should never ever question it again. Now if He has already made the greatest sacrifice for us even when we were His enemies will He not do everything He needs to do to accomplish His eternal purpose in our lives now that we know Him personally? He listens to our groanings and helps us in our weakness. You are not alone in your hurt.

If you need help in becoming a Christian here is [A Free Gift for You](#).

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