

SPIRIT-ASSISTED PRAYING

How the Spirit Helps Us When Words Fail

Romans Series
PBC 2026

Text: Romans 8:26-27; Phil 1:19-26

Romans 8:26–27 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***.

Philippians 1:19–26 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. ***Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell***. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

Introduction

If you could ask any single person to pray for you, who would you want to be praying for you? Is there a saint of God in your life who seems to you to have an unusual ability to get God to hear and answer their prayers? When you are facing a great trial, grave danger, or a critical decision, who do you most want to be praying and interceding on your behalf?

One of the greatest passages in all of Romans is the two verses before us, because they reveal a stunning truth – ***God is praying to God for me!***

God is talking to God about us! ***Christ is interceding for our protection from sin*** when Satan's desires to overwhelm and destroy us (8:34), and ***the Holy Spirit is interceding for what is best for us in suffering*** according to God's perfect will for our lives and circumstances (8:26-27).

And if there is anyone I want praying for me, it is these two persons!

However, if we are truly going to understand and experience the powerful impact these two realities are intended to have on our souls, we must understand the biblical and theological context in which these truths are given to us, ***or we will minimize their impact on our lives and miss the triumphant endurance they are meant to produce in us.***

Neither of these two realities is meant to give us the impression that our struggle with sin is over or that we will never again be overcome by some great sin. Nor are they meant to make us think that we will never again suffer great pain, tribulation, or danger, or go through a soul-crushing, life-ending circumstance from which we are not delivered in this life. ***That is not their point – and if we make these expectations their point, we will end up with defeated souls and devastated spirits that lack joy, hope, and the endurance that pleases God!***

So what is the biblical framework we need to ensure we have in place before we look at these two verses?

1. Because of what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross, there is no condemnation before God for those who are in Christ Jesus, and there is no separation from God for those who are in Christ Jesus (8:1).
2. These wonderful mercies of God that have been extended to us should prompt us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, dedicating ourselves to a lifelong pursuit of discerning and doing His good, acceptable, and perfect will for our bodies without reservation or hesitation (Rom 12:1-2).
3. Those purposes are clearly stated in Scripture as follows: a) It is His will that we be conformed to the image of His Son (8:29), and He is using everything that happens to us in life to bring this about (8:28); b) It is His will that we allow Him to use our bodies in life and by our death to glorify Him and magnify His Son (Phil 1:20-21; 1 Cor 10:31); and c) It is His will to use us to bring many sons to glory so that His Son

might be the firstborn (preeminent) among many other glorified sons and daughters (Rom 8:29).

4. He intends to accomplish these purposes in and through our mortal bodies (Rom 12:1-2; Phil 1:20).
5. Our present bodies groan just like creation groans, and Paul tells us to reckon carefully about those groanings so that we endure in confident expectation and triumphant endurance rather than despairing so that we don't abandon our calling or turn away from His purposes.
6. And to help us, God has caused His Spirit to indwell us and has granted this Spirit a marvelous ministry within us. Thus far in Romans, He:
 - a. Pours out the Love of God in us so that we know and experience that love constantly (5:5);
 - b. He energizes our sanctification and our ongoing resistance to sin (Rom 8:1-13);
 - c. He witnesses with our spirit to affirm and confirm that we are the true sons and daughters of God by causing us to cry, Abba! (8:14-17)
 - d. He enables us to endure under the extreme pressure of suffering and affliction (8:26).
 - e. He intercedes on our behalf by going to God with our deepest groaning that we are unable even to articulate in words (8:27) ***and sustains in us a joyful, triumphant endurance under pressure.***

NOTE: Our groanings are different from those of creation. Creation groans in futility and frustration; we groan with longing and anticipation for the stunning glory that we know is about to arrive. Our longing is born of a confidence we have from God in the form of a down payment that Creation and lost humanity do not share – the Holy Spirit.

As an example of this kind of groaning – there are two places in our bible where it is uttered:

- 1 Cor 16:22 – “Come, O Lord!”
- Rev 22:20 – “Come, Lord Jesus!”

In both cases, these cries of longing arise after a stunningly glorious revelation has been given.

- At the end of 1 Cor 16, we are told about the glorious future God has for our earthly bodies and what they will be like when they are resurrected at the appearing of the Lord, and the immediate cry that comes from believers is – ***“Come, O Lord!”***
- Rev 22:20, gives us a breathtaking portrait of what the entire creation will look like when Jesus rules the earth from the New Jerusalem, and we instinctively cry, ***“Come, Lord (King) Jesus!”***

To help us cultivate and maintain the joyful, triumphant endurance God prizes in us as we wait for the glorious future we know is coming, Paul tells us we must carefully and accurately “consider” (logizomai) an important ministry the Holy Spirit performs on our behalf as we groan with longing expectation for the redemption of our bodies.

And that brings us to a series of questions that these two verses are intended to answer to help us understand God’s larger purposes for us so that we will rest in God’s sovereign plan for us when the path is hard and the way is dark.

I. What is the Holy Spirit doing? *Helping us in our weakness.*

“Likewise” points back to something important. In 8:16, we are told that the Spirit ministers assurance to us by bearing witness with our spirit that we are true children of God, having been given the promise and pledge of our future adoption. ***Here is a second way the Spirit ministers assurance to us – He helps us in our weakness.***

The word “help” (συναντιλαμβάνεται) evokes the image of someone coming alongside a person carrying a crushingly heavy load, bearing the load with them (cf. Psalm 89:21). It is the word Martha used when she was overwhelmed by the work before her. She went to Jesus and

said, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to **help** me!” (Luke 10:40). Paul says that **when our weakness threatens to overwhelm us and shake our assurance, the Holy Spirit comes alongside, holds us up, and sustains us!**

And the specific help He provides is stated this way: He is interceding (ὑπερεντυγχάνω) for us because of our **weakness**. Note that the term “weakness” is singular, suggesting that Paul has a very specific kind of weakness in mind here that the Holy Spirit helps us bear.

In other words, there is a very specific weakness that Paul has in mind, and the specific way in which God intends to help us with that weakness is by causing the Holy Spirit to come alongside and do for us what we cannot do for ourselves by praying for us (interceding).

And he is constantly providing this help on our behalf (*note the present-tense verbs for help and for intercede*).

So that is the first thing we are to reckon – that the help God gives us in our weakness comes in the form of the Holy Spirit praying for us.

II. Who is He doing it for? *The Saints*.

These are the same people who are no longer under any condemnation in 8:1 and who will never be separated from the love of God in 8:37-39.

These are the very people who have received a promise and a pledge of their adoption, along with a guarantee of their future glorification and liberation from the decay and corruption currently afflicting them (8:18-25).

And **BECAUSE** they have tasted the beauty and power of new life and are experiencing the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, who is progressively moving them from one glory of God to the next, they long

for full glorification and groan for it whenever they encounter the limits of their humanity or the frustrating futility of life under the curse.

Because they have someone within them who gives them a taste of what it will be like when these birth pangs are over – the Holy Spirit who dwells in them – they groan with longing for the freedom from pain, suffering, and debilitation that they know is coming!

He is the first fruits – and once you taste those first fruits in your inner man, you long for the whole harvest throughout your entire being – you yearn for the complete and total restoration of your inner man, as well as the full liberation and redemption of your body!

III. Why is He doing it? *We don't know "the what" we should pray for.*

A. *Why He does it:*

Our problem is not that we don't know how to pray or that we are not praying – but that in certain cases, we do not know "the what" that is "necessary" (καθὸ δέῃ) that we should be praying for, especially when we see the dangerous or painful circumstances that we are enduring or about to endure.

Illustration: the Apostles after being strictly commanded by the rulers and elders to stop preaching and they say, "*Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.*" (Acts 4:19).

We don't know what will happen to us or what you will do to us, but we do know this much – *we must speak of what we have seen and heard regarding Jesus of Nazareth because "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we **must** be saved" (4:12).*

B. When He does it: (under what circumstances)

When we are facing excruciating groaning associated with our bodies that makes us long to leave this life so that we can receive and enjoy the liberty and freedom of our new, glorified body.

Illustration: Paul caught between two conflicting desires in Philippians 1:21-23 – *“For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”*

Think about what it meant for Paul to remain in the flesh a while longer – Roman scourging, being stoned and left for dead, judicial, shameful public floggings, hardship, bodily deprivation, dangers, further imprisonment, and betrayal by those he labored to serve.

Does he choose this path? Or does he choose to go and be with the Lord in a completely restored and fully glorified body?

IV. How is He doing it? By interceding for us with our unutterable groanings.

A. By Intercession – talking to God on our behalf

- The word intercede – an unusual word (ὑπερεντυγχάνω) that means to meet with someone on behalf of another.
- There are three ways he does this:
 1. He intercedes for us by joining us in our groaning.
 2. He brings our longings to the Father on the basis of His intimate relationship with the Father, who searches all hearts and knows the mind of the Spirit intimately, fully, accurately, and thoroughly.

3. He brings our groanings into alignment with a good and beneficial standard – the will of God. That is what He uses to shape and measure our heart's longings when our bodies are weary, worn, bruised, and battered.

B. With our unspoken groanings

1. These are either the Spirit's own groanings that he expresses to God wordlessly;
 2. OR, these are our own hope-filled groanings, when we struggle to discern the will of God in a particular situation involving the suffering of our weak bodies, and the Holy Spirit brings them to God on our behalf.
- So the idea here is that when we face excruciating pain or unfathomable difficulty, or when we deeply long to be released from the pain, suffering, and limitations caused by the decay of our body – and we don't know what to pray for so that God will be most glorified, Christ will be most magnified, and the gospel will be best served – the Holy Spirit helps us by bringing our hope-filled groanings to God and by conforming our will to embrace, joyfully and triumphantly, the thing that is most necessary to glorify God, magnify Christ, and advance the gospel.

V. Why is this important? *How this helps us in our weakness.*

God has provided His creation with guidance systems – bats have an internal guidance system very similar to radar. Other animals have heightened senses that make them highly attuned to their surroundings. Some animals have unusually developed instincts that guide them safely through life. They all have innate guidance systems.

God has given His Saints two powerful forms of guidance – one external and one internal. Externally, He has given us the Word of God, which

functions like a map. Internally, He has given us the Holy Spirit, who functions as a guide.

The Holy Spirit intercedes for us so that God's will would be done when the precise nature of that will is unknown to us.

There are things we know God wants for us – the part of His will that has been clearly revealed to us. ***We know exactly what to pray for when it comes to these four things:***

1. That we would be conformed to the likeness of His Son (8:29).
2. That we would be sanctified – set aside and dedicated for His use and purposes (1 Thess 4:3; 5:23; Rom 12:1).
3. That His Son would be magnified by our bodies, whether best done by our death or by our sustained life of continued service (1 Cor 10:31). This speaks to the “why” behind your asking God for more life or restored health.
4. That our bodies (how we use them, what God does with them) would bring many sons to glory so that His son might be the firstborn among many (Rom 8:29).

But there are other times when we don't know what to pray for because we don't know what will actually best accomplish these four goals that God has for our lives!

I don't know if God's purposes will be better served by healing my cancer or giving my grace for the death that will come to me through cancer. I don't know if God will be most glorified by raising up my sick dad, leaving him in his sick bed for now, or taking him home to be with Christ. I don't know if God will be most glorified and the gospel be most advanced by Him healing my sick son or by leaving my son in his infirmity. I don't know if the gospel will be better advanced by my staying in this hard place and facing terrific danger and possible martyrdom or by fleeing and staying alive to spread the gospel in a

different place – should I go to a place of safety for myself and my family or should we stay here and face the deadly danger?

That is why this kind of praying is restricted to mature believers – because immature believers don't think this way – they already know exactly what they want God to do for them and they pile up their prayers insisting that He do their will on the matter.

But a mature saint who has come to the point in Romans 12:1-2 where he has fully dedicated and presented his or her body as a living sacrifice to God – will look at a circumstance and say, *“I don't know how much more I can stand; I don't know what to do in this case; but I do know that God knows what will best accomplish these four objectives – He know what will best conform me to the likeness of His Son. He knows exactly how to best use my earthly life and the body that I have dedicated to His use entirely. He knows whether my life or my death will be the best way to magnify Christ. He knows exactly how to deploy me and what to subject my body to that will bring many sons to glory! And so as I groan, not knowing what to pray, the Holy Spirit takes those groanings to the Father and intercedes for me!”*

And God, who fully knows the mind and heart of the Spirit, hears and answers these groanings according to His Will – which is what we should ultimately want as mature and surrendered believers living out Romans 12:1-2!

Conclusion: *So what does this look like in real life under pressure?*

1. God will always do the right thing with my body to ensure my sanctification and to display His power.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 – the Satanically inflicted thorn in his flesh. Paul prayed three times with deep groaning, and God's answer was to leave the thorn and the pain but to give Paul this assurance, *“My grace is*

made perfect in this weakness; your sanctification is best accomplished by this weakness."

2. God will always do the right thing with my life to ensure the good of His church and fruitfulness in ministry.

Phil 1:20-26 and Paul's conflicting desires. Paul said it this way, *"This is what I really want – to be free from the suffering and pain that is my lot in this life and to be with the One whom I saw personally on the Damascus Road. I know that there is a boatload of more suffering to come my way – more beatings, more rejection, more physical agony in the service of the Gospel – and I long to be free of all of that pain and to avoid the pain that is yet ahead of me – BUT – I don't know if that is what is going to be best for you! And part of God's will for me is to serve in ways that are spiritually best for you – and I suspect that there is more that I need to do in this life for your benefit (like write several more epistles)!"* And God left him here to endure much more suffering for the good of the believers, the strengthening of the church, and the advance of the gospel! And we are glad that God did so, or we would not have the book of Romans!

3. God will always do the right with my life to bring many sons to glory.

Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. *"Let this cup pass – the pain and agony that is about to come upon my body – nevertheless, not my will but thine be done!"*

What produced this kind of praying in these three examples? What energized it and what sustained it? The Holy Spirit!

Are you willing to pray this way? Are you willing to ask the Holy Spirit to intercede for you with God to bring about what is necessary so that these three things are accomplished through your body in your life and/or by your death? Only the Holy Spirit can help you pray this way!