

Romans 8:26-27 **“The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.”**

Dear Christians who love to speak with your Father:

On a blistering hot August day a family entertained guests for dinner. The father asked his 6-yr.-old son to say the table prayer. The boy said, *“But I don’t know what to say!”* The father responded, *“Just say what you’ve heard me say.”* So the boy bowed his head and began, *“Oh Lord, why did I invite all these people here on such a hot day like this!”*

Sometimes we’re all like that little boy, unsure of what to say when we pray. In these words written by God through Paul in Romans 8, we’ll see especially the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives of prayer. He reminds us: **“Yes, We Can Pray!”** (1) ***Our prayer problems are real***, but (2) ***The Holy Spirit overcomes them***.

1

Paul writes, ***“The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray...”*** I’m sure we’d all admit that we all have prayer problems.

#1) One problem is that sometimes we don’t take advantage of God’s gift of prayer when we could. It’s like having a 2 ½ ton hydraulic jack in the trunk of the car, but when you have a flat tire, you forget it’s there and try to lift the car with your arms. God wants us to know that it’s silly for us to take on burdens all by ourselves when the Creator of the universe is at our disposal. God wants us to use this gift of prayer instead of let it go unused and then complain that God doesn’t seem to be around when we need him. As James wrote: ***“You do not have, because you do not ask God”*** (Jms 4:2).

#2) A second problem we have with prayer is perhaps best summarized by this old sailor adage: ***“Once on shore we pray no more.”*** We tend to use God’s gift of prayer only when we’re in big trouble. I read a story of 3 Christians discussing the best way to pray. One said it was best to pray with hands folded. Another said with head bowed. The 3<sup>rd</sup> said on one’s knees. A telephone repairman, working in the room, overheard the conversation. He interjected, *“Personally, I found that the most heartfelt prayer I ever spoke was when I lost my balance in a bucket lift, fell out, and was dangling upside down from a power pole 40 feet above the ground!”* I’ll bet that was quite the prayer!

Certainly, praying when we are in trouble is not wrong. God says, ***“Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you...”*** (Ps 50:15). But praying only then is not enough. Don’t we have daily needs? Don’t we have reason to thank Jesus every day; even many times every day? Don’t we have fellow Christians, local and national leaders, and law enforcement personnel who need our prayers constantly? Absolutely!

#3) A 3<sup>rd</sup> problem area is exactly what Paul says here: ***“We do not know what we ought to pray for...”*** The best remedy for not knowing what to pray about is time spent in God’s Word. It’s in the Word that God reveals his will and where we learn what is in harmony with God’s will for us and others. Our natural inclination is to be selfish with our requests: *“Me, myself, and I.”* God’s nature is to be altruistic and generous, thinking first of others before myself.

Also, we have a tendency to pray about temporal or physical blessings more than spiritual blessings. That, of course, is convoluted. The Lord’s Prayer has 7 petitions (requests). 1 of those 7 is for temporal things: ***“Give us this day our daily bread.”*** The rest have to do with our souls, spiritual things. That is informative for us and our pattern of prayer.

#4) And one more problem or obstacle to prayer is our helter-skelter lifestyle. We dash through life. We don't slow down enough to speak to God from the heart. We are losing out in the process. Truly, in order to take time we need to make time. We do that with priority items in our lives.

2

While those are 4 common prayer problems, here are some very helpful words from Paul: ***“The Spirit helps us in our weakness...The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express...The Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.”*** He's simply saying that the Holy Spirit, who lives in us, is always with us and helps us overcome our many prayer problems!

#1) The Holy Spirit gives us access to the Lord. Our sins separate us from our holy, perfect God. We have no right to speak to him! But when the Spirit draws us to faith in Jesus, who forgives all our sins, the lines of communication open up completely! It says, ***“The Spirit intercedes for the saints.”*** Saints? Yes, you are saints -- perfect through Jesus. Therefore James says, ***“The prayer of the righteous (the perfect, the saints) is powerful and effective”*** (Jms 5:16).

#2) The Holy Spirit helps us pray even when we're "speechless." There are times when we are so overwhelmed by a circumstance or situation in life that we can't even think of what it is we want to say to God. Paul reassures us, ***“The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”*** We sigh in exhaustion. We cry in the pain of grief. We shed tears of joy. We marvel and gasp at the beauty of a sunset painted by God. The Lord knows our prayer. The Lord hears words that are not there for us.

A mother passed by her little daughter's bedroom one night and overheard her repeating the alphabet in an oddly quiet way. Mom popped her head in the door and asked, *“What are you doing, honey?”* The girl explained, *“I'm trying to say my prayers, but I can't think of exactly the right words tonight. So I'm just saying all the letters. God will put them together for me because he knows what I'm trying to say.”*

Out of the mouths of children often come wonderful, simple, spiritual truths!

Fellow Christians, yes, we can pray! Yes, we have plenty of prayer problems and weaknesses. But thanks to God, the Holy Spirit, who overcomes them all. Yes, we can, we *will* pray!

Amen.