

Our Ever-Present Partner in Prayer

Series: Connecting with God in Prayer
Brad Bailey, February 21, 2016

Jude 20

"... build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit."

Ephesians 6:18

"... pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

1. The Spirit reveals God's love...the foundation of prayer.

Romans 8:15-16 (GW)

You haven't received the spirit of slaves that leads you into fear again. Instead, you have received the spirit of God's adopted children by which we call out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Ephesians 3:16-19

2. The Spirit enables our prayer

"He who keeps you will not slumber... nor sleep....The LORD is your keeper" - Psalm 121:3-5 (NKJV)

3. The Spirit transcends our weakness and words

Romans 8:26

In the same way, 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.

1 Corinthians 12:1,4,7,13; 13:1; 14:1-5, 14-15, 18-19

¹ Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. ...⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ...⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the

common good....¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

¹³ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal....¹⁴⁻¹

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.² For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.³ But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.⁴ He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.⁵ I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. ...¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.¹⁵

So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind....¹⁸ I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.¹⁹ But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

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Intro

We are continuing our focus and series on *Connecting with God in Prayer*.

We have also begun the season of Lent...in which we reflect upon the last week of Christ's earthly ministry as he came to the culmination of confronting the powers of this world.

We do well to consider what he faced...and how he faced it. When we feel even far less challenges...our default might be to try and **figure our way out**...or to **force** our way through. We can see in Jesus ...that he went to pray.

In fact the longest prayer recorded of Christ is in the 17th chapter of John's Gospel...where he speaks to his Father in heaven of completing the work he had come for...and now praying for the provision needed for his followers...and "for those who will believe in him through their message." (John 17:20) That is us.

It's in this transition...that Jesus tells the disciples that he will be sending another...the Holy Spirit... the Spirit of God...who will empower them. (John 15-16)

This is so essential, that he later says that they should not go forward into the world until the Spirit has come.

Just as Jesus came to break into the world and provide the foundations of reconciliation ...restoration...so the Spirit is now with us carrying that on. The Spirit is the empowering presence of God.

So the Scriptures describe **our prayer** as being **empowered by the Spirit**.

Jude 20 —

"... build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit."

Ephesians 6:18 —

"... pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

What does it mean to “pray IN the Spirit?” While sometimes people have **tried to define** this as some very **specific** experience...Paul doesn't suggest anything so specific. **I believe** it refers to the **breadth of ways** in which the **connection between our spirit is empowered by God's Spirit**. **It's the meeting of our spirit with God's Spirit**. **As prayer is the active engagement of our spirits with the will and work of God... it is not merely the formation of words...but engaging what God is doing.**

Illus – conversing with a friend... sharing our hearts... then said, “Let's pray”..and is so often the case, a lot of my human process sort of fell to the wayside... the clutter of my head was quieted and I was drawn into a more centered sense of what God desired. In that subtle way... there was a sense of being drawn into the Spirit.

What we discover is that **the Holy Spirit is an ever present partner in prayer.**

If prayer is the connecting space... the Spirit is the connecting force.

To 'pray in the Spirit' ... or 'by the Spirit' are phrases that focus us on the prayer partnership we're meant to have with the Holy Spirit!

There are three ways I want to highlight in which the Holy Spirit wants to partner with us in prayer. First of all —

1. The Spirit reveals God's love...the foundation of prayer.

The Bible says in ...

Romans 8:15-16 (GW)

You haven't received the spirit of slaves that leads you into fear again. Instead, you have received the spirit of God's adopted children by which we call out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

The Spirit testifies... reveals... that we are loved by God....that we are his children.

That is the foundation for connecting with God.

Everything flows from that identity.

The ministry of Jesus is marked by the point in which he is baptized by John...and as he rises out of the water...they see that the Spirit of God comes upon him...almost indescribable.. and they hear God declare his identity...that this was the son..the one he loves and is well please in. It is out of that identity which Christ would now fulfill his ministry...would now confront he powers of this world. Not surprisingly...immediately the enemy came to challenge that....to try and persuade him to accept alternatives identities that offered forms of power.

But here is the truth: to know who you are to God is the most powerful force you bear. His claim on you is the most powerful force that you can bear. But there will be many other claims upon you...contending...competing. Every other form of power will try to claim us. Wealth will try to claim us with a sense of power and identity. Being able to control others will try to claim us with a sense of power and identity. Our knowledge will try to claim us with a sense of power and identity. But all such power will only defy us. **Your identity is the most powerful truth that you bear... and you will never bear more power than when you know the love of God.**

That is why Paul prays for that power...

Ephesians 3:16-19 (NIV)

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

God gives us power through the Spirit to realize how much He loves us.

It transcends our minds. He says we are to "know this love that surpasses knowledge" (vs. 19.) It is revealed in our spirits from the Spirit of God. The Spirit does His work in our "inner being." With our unaided human understanding, we may miss this. As we can't see far planets without the aid of a telescope, we can't comprehend God's love unaided. It is revealed to our inner being by the Spirit.

Out of this rooting...

2. The Spirit enables our prayer

We may view prayer as our idea ... as something we initiate. When we are desperate we may hope we can get God's attention... wake him up. We may presume that we see what he hasn't seen yet.

I was at this past Friday morning time of praying over the city... As I stood there in the early morning...sun rising... I was drawn to an awareness of those who were lost and unseen...the homeless...those cleaning the streets before anyone was awake... and as I began to pray I realized that while I wanted to get God's attention... it was not God who needed to wake up...it was me. I realized that I was in the process of waking up physically and mentally to intercede for them. God had never been asleep. God was not like me. The Spirit of God was always working. He had seen these lives all night... His heart was always upon them.

Describing God's continual concern for us, the psalmist declares,

Psalm 121:3-5 (NKJV)

"He who keeps you will not slumber... nor sleep....The LORD *is* your keeper ."

We don't have to awaken God... it's we who He awaits.

Prayer doesn't start with us knocking on God's door ... prayer starts with God knocking on our door!

Revelation 3:20 —

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

God is the initiator.

Why could Jesus pray through the night ... while his disciples couldn't pray for an hour? Jesus gives us the answer when he said "**The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.**"

Our bodies may have limitations we have to work with...but there is a spiritual force that is not limited. Paul writes: "...Outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day!" (2 Cor. 4:16)

Which leads to the third way that the Spirit is an ever present partner...

3. The Spirit transcends our weakness and words

Romans 8:26 (NIV)

In the same way, 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.

Not only does the Holy Spirit help us pray ... by stirring us and strengthening us ... but there are times when He steps in and personally stands for us in prayer!

Illust: A couple years back... I had a trip to India departing the next night... and that morning I was about to meet with a ministry leader from out of town in the café here...and I was on the phone with Joel, one of the pastor's here... and he said: "So are you ready for India... got your tickets.... Passport... visa..." On that last word...I froze... I had traveled to India countless times... I knew the whole process...the longest one was getting a visa. There is no consulate in Los Angeles...so it involves a longer process of applying and sending passports to San Francisco...a process usually done 4 to 6 weeks ahead...and without it...you can't get on the plane. So with that shock...I see the friend coming into the café at the same moment... all I could do was share the dilemma with Joel...and tell him I will call him back. Needless to say I was a bit distracted... knowing I was now in a meeting with no way to even engage this need. So after the meeting I call Joel back...and he has found out that there is a walk in possibility in San Francisco if I am there at 8 am the next morning...that could give me a visa by the afternoon...and he has found a round trip ticket to San Francisco that will make it possible to get it and get back before my flight. So while I was meeting...I had a partner who was working to meet a need I didn't know how to meet. In the same way...we have a partner working beyond our limitations. The Spirit is interceding...working... even when we don't know what to do.

Now he describes how we may not even know what to pray... but "the Spirit intercedes with groans that words cannot express." While Paul does not elaborate... perhaps we can sense what he means.

- Have you ever been so burdened ... so overwhelmed with a need or a situation that there were no words to express the cry of your heart?
- Our lack of words does not mean there is no prayer. The Spirit raises the longings in in prayer.

Now this work of the Spirit to transcend our words... can relate to the spiritual gift or grace that is often referred to as 'speaking in tongues.'

Speaking in tongues refers to prayer that flows out in a language that is not our own...but rather flows from spiritual unction... transcends our own process of forming thoughts into words...and flows out in what has been referred to as a spiritual or heavenly language. Paul speaks of the gift as one of the ways that the Holy Spirit works in us and through us in supernatural ways. It is a gift as a gift that should be welcomed by all because it blesses the one who enjoys moments of flowing in heavenly language.

Now **there is a distinction** between the role that such a gift plays in our church culture ...from that of either **some Pentecostal traditions** or some **non-charismatic traditions**. So let me take a minute to **help clarify** what we believe about **how the Spirit empowers our lives and prayer...as it relates to the gift of “speaking in tongues.”** It’s been helpful for me to see that **part of the distinction comes with how we emphasize references to this gift in two portions of Scripture.**

The Book of Acts is a unique book in the New Testament... It follows the Gospel accounts which conclude with Christ’s resurrection. But one of those writers, Luke, provides the powerful account of what followed...of how the movement broke out after that. Luke is continuing with a living testimony of how the church was birthed. He begins with Christ ascension to heaven... leaving a confused group of Jewish followers who now know that he was the Messiah promised to the Jewish people has come... who was God incarnate...and defeated death. But they are to go to Jerusalem and pray...and wait...and at some point...the Spirit comes upon them...and the group that had been gathered during the feast time...separated by languages from various regions...begins to praise God in words unknown to them...but at least some of which is known to others. They are “baptized in the Spirit”...which simply means immersed in the Spirit...and one of the things that flows are some praising God with words that are not in their own language. It is the fulfillment of God pouring out His Spirit and beginning to unite all people. But at this point they are still all Jewish.

But then this same phenomena is discovered upon a group of Samaritans...the Samaritans were those Jews who had come into Samaria and inter-married and as such were half Jews... deemed half-breeds...and outside God’s people. So as the Spirit came upon them with the same phenomena ...it served as a sign that God was working among the Samaritans...and a powerful wall is left fallen. And then again... the same phenomena happens upon Gentiles who began to believe. The false separation and exclusion that God’s people had raised...had crumbled...as God showed that through Israel...all the nations would be blessed.

Now some Pentecostal traditions have presumed that this same phenomena carries forth for all who follow... that every believer is to have a similar moment and begin to speak in these foreign languages. It can carry the sense of being as a rite of passage into God’s family...or at least into being those who are “spirit filled.” And following this idea, receiving the gift of speaking in tongues is seen as the particular sign of having the Holy Spirit.

But what I believe we should see ...is that this was a sign that was unique to the first disciples declaring God's intent to include all people in the ministry of the Gospel. What was unfolding among those first followers of Jesus in the Book of Acts was the unique work of God to re-capture that they were no longer define themselves as God's people by their Jewish ethnicity. It was about showing that the times had come...God was breaking out into the world by the outpouring of His Spirit. [1] What is important to realize is that this transitions was night a **change from a "carnal" state to a "spiritual" one, but from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant** under which a new work of God ushered an invitation to all humanity to be His people.

Now...at the same time...others have reacted to the ways in which some have emphasized experience... they have found this all too strange...and considered all such moving of the Holy Spirit to be finished when the the church was birthed... and they suggest that when the Scriptures were set in place...they became the only thing needed for knowing God. This idea is sometimes referred to as cessationsim ...because it presumes that all the gifts of the Spirit ceased when that process was complete.

What speaks into both positions is the whole **remainder of the New Testament**. The whole rest of the New Testament tells us **what the church was to understand following these events**. There is no reference ever made to some distinct experience that any who followed Christ were to have...nor of speaking in unknown languages as a sign of such. In fact something clearly different seems to shape their lives.

Moving beyond that initial historical context found in the Book of Acts, the idea of a "second baptism" in the Holy Spirit as a sign-event develops into a broader understanding of a more continuous "filling" as a strengthening experience. And the gift of praying or praising in a spiritual language or tongue is now one gift among many. The longest teaching of this comes in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth... and we need to understand that it comes in the context of trying to bring some corrective. They were enjoying how the Holy Spirit filled them and the gifts that flowed...and he wants them to keep a healthy sense of purpose and perspective. Here is a portion of what he writes...

1 Corinthians 12:1,4,7,13; 13:1; 14:1-5, 14-15, 18-19 (NIV)

¹ Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. ...⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ...⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good....¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

¹³ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal....¹⁴⁻¹ Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. ² For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. ³ But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. ⁴ He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵ I would like every one of

you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. ...¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.¹⁵ So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind....¹⁸ I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.¹⁹ But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

There are a few points that can serve us well...

All who receive Christ are united by the same Spirit....share in bearing the Holy Spirit...who is at work in ALL of us. There is no exclusion based on any particular gift. And so it is that we understand that rather than noting a particular experience that sets apart some believers into a different class we believe **all who receive the work and person of Christ** into their hearts **are to seek an ongoing intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit.** There is **no waiting** for a **particular experience or any sign of inclusion.** [2]

There is a gift of praying and praising in a heavenly language... it's **not a unique sign of the Spirit...** it's **neither a gift all should expect** any more than any other...and **it is the least of the gifts...in the one sense Paul is emphasizing....which is how it serves others.** Paul is saying **that in church his goal is not to speak unknown syllables to people because no one understands and therefore that doesn't encourage other people.** When we are in church, in public worship, our goal is not simply to have a great personal experience. The goal of being together in public and in community is to encourage other people. **BUT...he is very clear...this is a gift which can strengthen or edify us as individuals...and should be desired by everyone.**

What I believe is most important...is to hear this: that the work of the Spirit was not completed and closed off like some believe. I understand that for some the way God moves and acts upon us **may seem weird.** The simple truth is that **God is not bound to our comfort.** God knows that the **finite being cannot know the infinite merely by reason...or deduction...or words.** He is beyond our desire to control and contain with our minds or words...and that is something WE may have to get comfortable with.

So while Paul is rather clear...that speaking in a Spirit inspired heavenly language ...or "tongue"... is not a sign of being spiritually elite or mature... it IS a part of what we should **"desire."** We should desire all that God wants to fill us with that can strengthen us and serve others.

The central truth is that we all need connection with God...and we need the Spirit as our ever-present partner. So it is that the emphasis of the New Testament... is that we should seek to continue to be filled. The ongoing work of the Spirit is understood as God's ever-present source from which we are to "drink" (1 Cor. 12:13) and "walk-in" (Gal. 5:16). He describes it perhaps most clearly when he "do not be drunk with wine, but instead be filled with the Holy Spirit." (Eph. 5:18) Be "under the influence" of God's Spirit.

Closing:

I want to invite us to welcome God to fill us. Will you welcome God to immerse you afresh...more deeply.

Outward postures are not some form of spiritual magic...but they do reflect the posture of our hearts. Folded arms... can serve to express a closed posture. In the same way, open arms reflect open hearts. So as you are led, I encourage you to consider opening your arms as we welcomes God to fill us afresh.

Resources: Jeff Brawner's message 'The Saint's Senior Partner'

Notes:

1. Acts 8 - Samaritans who were only partly Jewish; Acts 10 - Gentiles; Acts 19 - Disciples of John the Baptist.)

2. The Holy Spirit is part of God's personhood (Father, Son, Spirit.) As the Son of God serves as the reconciling life between God and humanity, so the Spirit of God serves as the reconciling power by exalting, extending, and empowering the life of the Son in the world. Everyone who receives Christ is in-dwelled by Holy Spirit. (Matthew 3:11; John 3:5-8; John 14:15-27; John 16:5-15; Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 1 John 4:13-15) Consider...

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. John 7:37-39

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 1 Corinthians 12:13

This continuous work of the in-dwelling Spirit may be complimented by experiences of heightened presence or "in-fillings" of special empowerment. (Luke 1:35,41; Luke 4:18; Luke 11:11-13; Acts 4:8, 31; Acts 9:17; Acts 11:28; Ephesians 5:18)

Our Ever-Present Partner in Prayer

Series: Connecting with God in Prayer
February 21-26, 2016

Home Church Discussion

We are continuing our focus and series on *Connecting with God in Prayer*. At the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus tells the disciples that he will be sending another...the Holy Spirit... the Spirit of God....who will empower them. (John 15-17) This is so essential, that he later says that they should not go forward into the world until the Spirit has come. (John 14:26; Acts 1:4) Just as Jesus came to break into the world and provide the foundations of reconciliation, now the Spirit is sent to dwell with us to carry this forward. What we discover is that the Holy Spirit is an ever present partner in prayer. If prayer is the connecting space... the Spirit is the connecting force. So we are encouraged to "pray in the Spirit."

Jude 20 —

"... build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit."

Ephesians 6:18 —

"... pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

1. Discuss what this phrase "in the Spirit" may describe.

2. As prayer is the active engagement of our spirits with the will and work of God... it is not merely the formation of words...but engaging what God is doing. How have you experienced The Spirit engaging your spirit in prayer?

3. Read Romans 8:15-16 (GW)

You haven't received the spirit of slaves that leads you into fear again. Instead, you have received the spirit of God's adopted children by which we call out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

What does this tell us about the working of the Holy Spirit in us?

4. It could be said that having our identity rooted in the love of God is the most powerful force we bear. Why is knowing we are God's beloved children so powerful?

5. On his final night before being arrested, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. He called his disciples to come and nearby. When he found that they were falling asleep, unable to pray through the night, he explained "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." What might this tell us about the significance of being both physical and spiritual beings...and what is distinct about the work of the Spirit in prayer?

6. Read Romans 8:26 (NIV)

In the same way, 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.

What might Paul be referring to when he speaks of our "weakness?"
How might this suggest that there could be prayer beyond our words?

7. Read and reflect upon the following Scriptures.

1 Corinthians 12:13 (NIV)

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Galatians 5:16 (NIV)

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Ephesians 5:18 (NIV)

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

What are we told we should do in relationship to the Holy Spirit?

8. Conclude praying along the lines of Pau's prayer.

Ephesians 3:16-19 (NIV)

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.