

MBC - 9/17/2017 - Pastor Doug Thompson  
"The Spirit Who Helps Our Weakness"  
Romans 8:26-27

Last Lord's Day we looked at Eph.4:30—

- Ephesians 4:30 <sup>30</sup>And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Let me remind you what learned: "*The Holy Spirit is God, and He is a Person who loves us deeply and can be hurt deeply by us. But His love is so strong that regardless of how much we grieve Him, He remains with us and in us as the seal and guarantee of our full and final salvation.*"

- I want you to love the Holy Spirit as God and I want you to worship Him as God. He is holy. He is infinitely majestic and glorious, and He is to be feared and honored and exalted, in every way, as God. You and I should tremble when we think that the Holy Spirit indwells us as His holy temple! What kind of temple are you for the Holy Spirit this morning?

But I also want you to experience the personal, intimate relationship you have with the Holy Spirit, if you are a Christian. He is your Encourager and Comforter, and your Heavenly Friend who is committed to conforming you to the image of Jesus Christ. He will not stop! Yes, you can grieve Him by your words and your actions, but nothing can ever separate you from His love.

And we are going to see this morning that He is especially with you in your weakness. Do you feel weak this morning? God's Word tells us that He is the Spirit Who helps our weakness. Turn with me to—

- Romans 8:18-27 <sup>18</sup>For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup>For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup>For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup>And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup>For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup>But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. <sup>26</sup>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. <sup>27</sup>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.

{Let's pray: O Father, Jesus told us that "*it is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh is no help at all,*" so pour out Your Spirit on each of this morning. Help us to see our weakness that we might surrender to the Holy Spirit and cry out to Him to help us in our weakness. Father we need this help from heaven, and we want it. Show us Your strength and Your power toward us, Your weak, needy children. . . }

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Some of you remember that I preached on this passage on two years ago on a Thursday evening, September 11, at the Exalting Christ Conference in Vallejo. It was a glorious evening: Erroll sang the Getty's song on the Holy Spirit, and then I got up and preached on how the Spirit helps our weakness. I talked about how weak we are and how we groan in our weakness, and how the Spirit intercedes for us and groans through our groanings.

- Then two days later, on Saturday afternoon, I stood out in our front yard and took a video on my iPad of the smoke that was billowing over my head, coming clear from Cobb Mtn - at least I thought it was that far away. I drove my truck to Hardesters in HVL and while I was standing at the checkout, someone came running in the store and said, "Hidden Valley is evacuating!" I ran outside and saw the fire coming down beside Putah Creek. As I drove on Hidden Valley Road I looked up and saw houses burning - and I wondered if one of them was mine. I called Janice and said, "We've got about 3 minutes to gather what we can and get out!"

We spent the next week at the Sandman Motel in Santa Rosa. For the first few days, we didn't know if we still had a home, or if the church still stood. It was like being in a dream. And I began to get calls from my pastor friends and seminary students who had been at the conference just a few days earlier asking how our church was doing, and I said the same thing to all of them: "*We're groaning, brothers! Please groan with us!*"

Right after preaching about being weak, I was really weak. And I found what many of us here found, *the Spirit was there to help us in our weakness!* Amen? Do you remember? The Spirit who we so often ignore, and make sad by our words and actions - He didn't neglect us in our hour of need, and in our *weakest* moments. He helped us in our weakness. Amen?

I want you to look at v.26: Paul doesn't say that the Spirit helps our weaknesses, he says *weakness*. I.e., Weakness is our perpetual condition. It's where we live. We don't just have lapses of weakness - weakness pervades our lives. All of our lives. This explains a lot, doesn't it?

- We are *physically* weak: we're not as strong or as healthy as we wish we were. We're *mentally* weak: we don't think as clearly as we should, we struggle for wisdom. We are *emotionally* weak: we like to think that we're pretty stable, pretty chill, and then the pressure comes, and we have meltdowns and breakdowns and panic attacks.

Weakness is the backdrop of our lives! Amen? And it's the backdrop of all of our ministry. It was even true of Paul—

- 1 Corinthians 2:3 [He said to the Corinthians]: <sup>3</sup>And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling.
- 2 Corinthians 10:10 [they said about him:], "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account."

But Paul *accepted* his all-pervasive weaknesses—

- 2 Corinthians 12:10 <sup>10</sup>For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses.
- 2 Corinthians 11:30 <sup>30</sup>If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.
- 1 Corinthians 9:22 <sup>22</sup>To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak.

He figured if he was stuck with being weak he might as well turn it into ministry!

But you know where we're going with all of this: weakness is a good thing, the very best thing because, "*the Spirit helps us in our weakness!*" Not when we're at the top of our game, when we are bursting with confidence and self-sufficiency. He comes to help us when we're out of cards, busted. Groaning and groveling. And I'm telling you, that's where I am most of the time. But that's when the Spirit of God rushes to our side with comfort and power.

That's why Paul boasted about his weakness. To put it in modern psycho-babble terminology, he *wanted* to "get in touch with his inner weakness," because that's when the heavens opened up and the Holy Spirit of God came to his rescue. That's right where he wanted to live - in his weakness and the Spirit's power. *The Spirit helps us in our weakness!*

- Let me talk to you: This means that God is not *against* you in your weakness. God is *for you*. More than that, He is *with you* in your weakness, right *beside you* in your weakness. That's what Paraclete means, right? God didn't put His Spirit in you to *spy* on you; to search out your sins and report back to Him. No, when He finds you weak and struggling, He helps you, He intercedes to the Father for you.

So let's see how He does it—

### I. We groan in our weakness.

Let's put our passage in context—In vv.18-25, Paul is describing the contrast between our present suffering and our future glory. The two aren't to be compared, are they? Our future glory far surpasses our present suffering. But for now, we suffer - we *groan*.

Now Paul isn't talking here about the everyday suffering that's common to every person. We all groan because of the consequences of Adam's sin. Christians and non-Christians lost their homes in the Valley Fire and the Clayton Fire. Christians and non-Christians lost their homes and belongings in Harvey and Irma. We all groan over our aches and pains; and Alzheimer's and arthritis.

But there is a huge difference between the world's groaning and ours: the world moans in the throes of death, but God's children groan in the pangs of birth because we know that through Christ's resurrection, God is birthing a new creation - this is why Paul can say, that our groanings now don't compare to *glory* to come! And all of creation groans with us for that day—

- Romans 8:22-23 <sup>22</sup>For we know that the whole creation has been *groaning* together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup>And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, *groan inwardly* as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Creation groans for the same reason that God's children groan, because we aren't completely saved yet! Our souls are redeemed, but not our bodies - and creation groans under the curse. And it won't get its *extreme makeover* until we get ours. So until that day we all groan.

But Christians groan for another reason: look at what Paul says in v.23: "*we ourselves who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly.*"

We groan because we've got a piece of heaven in our hearts, but we groan for more! Lord bring us to Beulah Land! The Holy Spirit is in you as the down payment on the glory to come, but that's a bittersweet thing: We've tasted and seen that the Lord is good, but we cry out

with the Psalmist “*O Lord-- how long?*” Don’t you literally groan sometimes? I do, and it’s not just my arthritis - it’s because my heart and my treasure is in heaven, but my body’s stuck in *Middletown!*

But right in the middle of my groanings and my weakness - here is the promise in v.26: that the Holy Spirit is *for* me, *with* me, and *in* me to help me in my weakness. Praise God! Heaven to the rescue!

- The word here for *help* is so good. It’s a long Gk.word: *sunantilambanomai*. The root is *lambano* - to take hold of, and then it has two prefixes in front: *sun* = together with, and *anti* = facing. A couple weeks ago, some of us were helping a gal south of town move some stuff. I started to pick up a dresser but couldn’t lift it, so Matthew Campbell came alongside, got on the other end, facing me, and together we took hold of the dresser and moved it! That’s what the Holy Spirit does for us when we are weak and struggling: He comes along and grabs an end. He helps our weakness and bears our burden.

This same word was used in Exodus 18 when Jethro told Moses to appoint some able men to help *bear his burden* in judging the people. And it’s used in Numbers 11 when God again gave help to Moses. Listen to what God said—

- Numbers 11:17 And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.

What is more amazing than knowing that God the Holy Spirit wants to help you in your weakness? He doesn’t want you to bear your burdens alone. He doesn’t expect you to bear them alone. But do you cry out to Him in your weakness?

## II. We do not know what to pray for.

And the specific weakness the Spirit helps us with here is our prayer life—

- Romans 8:26 . . . the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought,

In these fallen, groaning bodies, we’re weak when we pray. When we need God’s help the most, that’s when we don’t know how to pray as we should. We feel like we’re frantically dialing 911 and the line is busy! God invites us to come into His presence, He extends His scepter - He says, “Just ask, seek, and knock, and I will answer!” and we babble and stammer and don’t know what to say! So often, we just groan.

- John Bunyan spent 12 years in prison for preaching the Gospel. You would think that at least he could pray while he was there. But he wrote: “I find that my heart is slow to go to God; and when it does go to Him it does not seem to want to stay with Him; so that very often I am forced in my prayers, first to beg of God that He would take my heart and set it on Himself, and then when it is there, that He would keep it there.”

Paul says that “*we don’t know what to pray for as we ought.*” What does he mean? Paul’s not talking about the *way* we pray: Should it be on our knees? Do we have to close our eyes? He’s talking about the *content* of our prayers: we don’t know what to ask for “as we ought,” meaning, we don’t know how to pray according to the sovereign, unrevealed will of God.

Let me explain: we know what we want - but we don't know what God ultimately wants! And isn't that why we are praying? I mean, we're hoping that what He wants is the same as what we want! But we don't know, so we cry out to God, just what Jesus, in His hour in the Garden cried out to His Father, "Not my will but Your will be done." Jesus knew what His Father's will was. He knew how He would answer His cries. But we don't know what God's sovereign will is when we cry out.

*"We don't know what to pray for as we ought."* This is the weakness in prayer that you and I face every day.

- Awhile back an urgent prayer request came over the prayer chain for a young mom who was in terrible pain, critically ill, and she was not expected to live. How do you pray for a person like that? Of course we prayed for her salvation, but do you pray that God would heal her miraculously? Or that He would take her quickly and end her suffering? Neither of those are wrong to pray. As it turned out, she passed away that night. And I thought: for some folks that was a merciful yes from God, and to others it was a no. We don't know what to pray for as we ought.

So we groan in our prayers, trying to pray in faith, while sensing our weakness and ignorance. This passage has changed forever the way I pray: I think it was Amy Carmichael that said we shouldn't give advice to God in our prayers, and I find myself constantly doing that: "God, do this, or that, here's the way it should be done . . ." And then I realize what I'm doing, and I just groan: "Lord, You know! You are God! You have the perfect plan, the perfect end, and the perfect means to that end. . . Abba, Father, not my will, but Your will be done!"

- Parents you pray constantly that God would protect your children. You never want to see them suffer, but you also know that they will never grow up and become mature adults without getting some bumps and bruises. So how do you pray? You groan.
- I think about people I pray for who have drifted away from Christ, and they're in deep weeds due to their sins. And I wonder if that's the discipline of God in their lives for their good. So do I really want to pray that God takes away their suffering, if He put it there to begin with? I don't be working against God! But I don't know. So I groan. Oh, I need help.

And Paul included himself in everything he says here: it's "our weakness," "we don't know what to pray for as we ought." You know, he expressed that perplexity when he wrote in—

- Philippians 1:21-23 <sup>21</sup>For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup>If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. *Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.* <sup>23</sup>I am hard pressed between the two. . .

I.e., "Lord, should I stay or should I go?" Even Paul didn't know how to pray as he should. So he groaned.

\*So how does the Holy Spirit help us in our weak, ignorant, groaning prayers?

### III. The Spirit joins us in our groanings.

Look at v.27: "*the Spirit Himself intercedes for us*" - i.e., on our behalf - He stands between us and God, and *He* prays! - "*with groanings*" - literally, "wordless utterances," and jump down to the end of v.27 - "*according to the will of God.*"

I want you to put this all together: It's so deep, but it's so good: During your weakest moments, you sense how helpless you really are. You aren't strong enough, wise enough, godly enough to handle what you are going through. And on top of it, your body is tired, your brain is tired and distracted. You want to pray to God. You need to pray. But you're weak! How often are you in that place?

- Beloved, this is exactly where God wants you to be! God hears the cries of the humble and the weak and the afflicted and the brokenhearted. You aren't ready to pray to God until you acknowledge your insufficiency and your utter dependence on God! And this when the Holy Spirit comes alongside you to bear your burdens to God! He doesn't criticize you or judge you - He helps you!

So the way I understand this text, as you groan to God in your weakness, seeking His will, but not knowing what it is - it's the Spirit who is producing those groanings, and He is groaning along with you, but while you are groaning in ignorance, He is groaning according to the will of God! He carries these intercessions to the Father so that - are you ready? ***Your prayers ascend to heaven as God praying to God according to the will of God. Wow!***

The point here isn't whether we are groaning with words or without words - remember how Hannah prayed in the tabernacle but her lips weren't moving? The point is that when all we can do is stutter and stammer or just lift up our hands in silence, the Holy Spirit of God is there for us, groaning with us and interceding for us. And He joins together our weakness with Christ's strength! Our emptiness with His fullness. Oh, don't you love the Holy Spirit?

One more connection I want to make. Look again at—

- Romans 8:27 <sup>27</sup>And he [the Father] who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Now I want you to see some very similar wording back in—

- 1 Corinthians 2:10-12 . . . For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup>For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup>Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

In this passage, Paul says that the Holy Spirit *searches* (same word as in Rom. 8:27) and knows the depths of God and then opens up our hearts to understand His Word.

In Rom.8.27, the Spirit *searches* the depths of our hearts, and intercedes for us to take our groanings to God.

*So this is a mind-boggling thought: the same Holy Spirit who reveals God's thoughts to us through His Word, reveals our thoughts to God through our prayers! Amazing! Do you see how the Holy Spirit works from both directions to bring us together with God? And what comes next is incredible—*

#### IV. God hears and answers those prayers.

- Romans 8:27 <sup>27</sup>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.

When you pray and groan *in the Spirit*, those prayers are prompted by God the Holy Spirit. They are according to His will, because they come from His own work in your heart! So those groaning, stumbling, weak prayers of yours - those prayers originate in heaven, and they are heard in heaven - do you get that?

- John Calvin said, “The Spirit stirs up in our hearts those desires which we ought to entertain; and He also affects our hearts in such a way that these desires by their fervency penetrate into heaven itself.”

They penetrate into heaven! And don't you think the Father will *answer* prayers that have originated from His Spirit, and are offered up by His Spirit, according to His will? Absolutely! God will never turn down a request from His own Spirit.

It's just like what we read down in v.34, that Christ Jesus is at the right hand of God, interceding for us before His Father. Does God hear and answer the prayers of His Son? We sang earlier that He does—

*The Father hears Him pray, His dear anointed One;  
He cannot turn away, the presence of His Son;*

If God hears and answers the intercessions of His Son in heaven, we know that He hears and answers the intercessions of His Spirit on earth! Don't you love the Holy Spirit?

- Now His answer isn't always 'yes,' have you noticed? But when we're praying in the Spirit, He is conforming our desires to His, so that what we really want is the will of the Father and the glory of His Son.

When we groaned in prayer over that sick mom, our desire was for Christ to be glorified whether she lived or died. In His weak humanity, Jesus groaned to His Father: “*Abba! Father! All things are possible for you. Remove this cup from Me! Yet, not what I will, but what You will.*” And God answered His Son's desire.

- We need to remember that “No” is an answer too. And if God gives it, then it's the very best answer! We need to thank God for the “No” answers, don't we?
- And then there are other times when God answers our groanings by doing even—“*far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us!*” Is that OK with you?

Think about what this means the next time you pray: Because of the Holy Spirit's intercession you can have the confidence that your thinking, and praying are not the limit of God's acting. God isn't limited by your limited prayers!

So in those moments in prayer when you sense how weak you are and how ignorant you are of what God would want - and how inadequate you are to even articulate what's in your heart - be encouraged that you are not expected to know the will of God in everything. This text says it's OK not to know. There is One who knows. Don't add to your burdens the worry that you don't know all the will of God.

The Holy Spirit knows, and while you're groaning, He's praying. You don't have to worry about your grammar, or getting every theological jot and tittle just right. He will make sure it gets to God according to His will.

- You just groan - He'll “*fix it on the way up!*”

**\*The connection with 2 Corinthians 12:7-10**

Now I want to show you an amazing connection in Paul's life that's puts all of this together. About a year before he wrote this passage in Romans, he wrote about an experience he had, while he was weak and struggling in prayer. He wrote about it in—

- 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 <sup>7</sup>So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. [Paul was weak! And God wanted him to know how weak he was.] <sup>8</sup>Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. [Paul didn't know how to pray! But the Holy Spirit helped Paul and interceded for him according to the will of God. And God answered:] <sup>9</sup>But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. <sup>10</sup>For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with *weaknesses*, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am *weak*, then I am strong.

God answered Paul's prayer by giving him something much more precious than *thorn-removal*: It's not what he asked for, but the Holy Spirit interceded and God answered by giving Paul what he most desired - "*that the power of Christ will rest on me!*"

What more could you want than the all sufficient grace of God, and the infinite power of Christ? What more could you possibly need than that?

\*But will you admit that you are weak? We heard it earlier, "apart from Christ you can do nothing?" Will you admit that you are helpless in your own strength, and your reasoning - haven't you seen that? He can only fill the empty and help the helpless. Don't quench the Spirit by your pride and self-sufficiency.

\*And will you groan? Will you pray? The Spirit will not intercede for you according to the will of God unless you are groaning in prayer? "Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear! All because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer." But if you will groan, He will intercede.

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I was reading my notes from that sermon I preached at the Exalting Christ Conference to a whole room full of pastors. And I had no idea how it was going to apply to me and the rest of us here just two days later. Let me read it—

- "A moment is coming *very soon* in your life - in your ministry - when you will be stripped of every resource. Nothing to lean on, nothing to fall back on. Weak and empty. And *at that moment*, rejoice! The Spirit will be there, to help you in your weakness, to work His desires into your heart, and then to join with you as you groan to your heavenly Father. Your Father will hear and answer your groanings, and the power of Christ will rest on you."

Think back about how many, many incredible answers to prayer we had 2 years ago! How much mercy God showed, and how much love and support we experienced from all over the country. Think about the ministry opportunities we had we PG&E right on our campus - with the Relief Center - with Mercy Chefs. And we are still helping people from our Fire Relief fund.



We were weak. We groaned, and the Spirit was right there. He came alongside us, and lifted our burdens up to our Father. God praying to God according to the will of God, and how He answered!