

## INTRODUCTION

There was a lady who had a female parrot and the only thing the parrot said was, "Let's pray." Well, the lady met a man at a parrot lover's meeting and he had a male parrot who never said anything but "Let's kiss." Eventually the man and woman married. Not only was it the uniting of a man and a woman, it was also the uniting of two parrots. They put those two parrots in the same cage and the female parrot looked over and very demurely and piously said, "Let's pray." and the male parrot said, "Let's kiss." The female parrot said, "Praise God, my prayers have been answered!"

If you want to know how to get your prayers answered, one of the key ways is right here in Romans, chapter 8 beginning in verse 26. The Bible says, "In the same way." You never start a passage of scripture with those words because that means it's tied to something else. Remember a couple of weeks ago I said there are three mentions of the word "groan." It talks about how creation is groaning and nature is groaning, because there is going to be a future renovation of all the heavens and earth. Then, right above this passage it talks about how we as Christians groan inwardly, because our physical bodies grow tired and they wear out and we're looking forward to the redemption even of our bodies. Here's the third example of groaning. "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. 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." This passage is all about how sometimes we are weak in prayer and the Holy Spirit helps us to pray—two sides of one coin. On one side we're going to talk about how you and I have a weakness when we try to pray and on the other side of the coin is about how the Holy Spirit helps us to pray.

### I. OUR PRAYERS ARE HINDERED BECAUSE OF OUR...

Our prayers are weak because of at least three reasons. Verse 26 says, "The Spirit helps us in our weakness." Perhaps the first song I ever learned as a Christian was "Jesus Loves Me." Have you ever sung that song and thought it was only talking about little children? When it says, "little ones to him belong." I don't know about you folks, but when I think about the greatness of God, I am pretty little and you are too. Did you ever think that song was talking about little children when it said, "They are weak, but he is strong?" Wrong again because the Bible says we are all weak, and because we are weak in our prayer life, we need some help. So before you can ever get any help in your prayer life, you have to admit like this scripture says, "Hey, I am very weak when it comes to prayer."

#### 1. Failure to pray

There are at least three reasons we are weak. We are weak in prayer because of our failure to pray. Sometimes we just don't pray. We often sing hymns and don't even pay attention to the words. The Bible says in Jeremiah, 33. God says, "Call upon me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things that you did not know." Can I ask you this question? Have you ever spent 15 minutes in prayer? Have you ever spent 30 minutes in prayer? Have you ever spent one hour in doing nothing but praying your entire life? Do you remember when Jesus was praying in

the Garden of Gethsemane? He went to the disciples and asked them, "Can't you watch and pray for one hour?" It would be a good idea if Jesus would come up to every one of us at one time or another and look us right in the eye and say, "Hey, can't you pray for one hour?" When you really start examining how you spend your time, how you invest the 24 hours a day God has given every one of us, you realize you may not be spending very much of that time in prayer. Prayerlessness is not just an inconvenience. According to the Bible prayerlessness is a sin. Look at 1 Samuel 23:23. Samuel says, "As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you." Prayerlessness is a sin. I will teach you the way that is good and that is right. One reason we are weak is simply because we fail to pray.

## **2. Ignorance about prayer**

We are weak because of our ignorance about prayer. We simply don't understand enough about prayer. Since 1970, I have personally been trying to consistently pray and learn more about prayer and be a Prayer Warrior. I am here to tell I do not consider myself an expert in prayer. I am nothing but a student in the school of prayer. The school of prayer is a study from which you never graduate. You never get to a point where you say, "I know everything there is to know about prayer. We are always learning. For me personally, the more I learn about prayer, the more I realize how ignorant I am about it. We're going to talk about some deep things today about prayer and you have to ask yourself, "Am I still learning about prayer?" or "Am I still doing the same, 'Now I lay me down to sleep?'" "Am I still doing the same, 'God bless this food and all the missionaries. Amen?'" Are you growing in your knowledge of prayer? Luke, 11:1 says one day Jesus was praying in a certain place, when he finished, one of the disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples." Never once did the disciples say, "Lord, teach us to preach." They never said, "Lord, teach us to heal." They never said, "Lord, teach us to baptize; teach us to organize." They said, "Teach us to pray." If you really want to learn how to pray, God will answer that prayer.

Look at verse 26. "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness." The problem is we do not know what we ought to pray for. I hope most of you know—if you have been praying for a while—that there are several conditions to prayer. In other words, there are some conditions we must meet if God's going to answer our prayer. God doesn't just arbitrarily answer any unilateral that we throw at him. Some of the conditions are listed in Matthew 21:22. Jesus said, "When you pray, believe that you shall receive and you will have it." In other words, believing—praying in faith—is a condition. If you ask God for something and you don't believe you will receive it, that prayer is worthless.

Here's the second condition to praying. Jesus said in John 14:13, "When you pray, whatsoever you ask in my name, you'll receive it." Not only do you pray believing, you pray in the name of Jesus.

Here's a third condition in John 15:7. Jesus said, "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you can ask what you will and it will be done unto you." Before you come to God in prayer, you have to make sure His word is abiding in you and you are abiding in Christ. There's one other condition and it's the toughest of all of them, because let's face it, sometimes it's easier to pray with belief; anybody can pray in the name of Jesus, and you can let his word abide in you.

### **3. Inability to know what to ask for "according to His will"**

The fourth condition is you must pray according to God's will according to 1 John 5:14, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God that if we ask anything, according to his will, he hears us." Have you ever had this problem? You go to the Lord and you want to pray about some pressing issue in your life or in the life of someone you love and you don't know what to ask for. You don't know what God's will is in that particular instance and so that's where you are. "God, I don't know what your will is." You know you have to pray according to his will for that prayer to be answered. It is true we sometimes ask for things that are not God's will. I remember in high school I was dating a girl and I wanted to marry her. I even prayed for God to let me marry that girl. I thank God for unanswered prayer. Have you ever asked God for something and he didn't give it to you and later on you said, "Whew! Thank you, God." It wasn't his will. You have to know what to ask for because if you ask for the wrong thing, you won't get it.

That's like the fellow I heard about who was talking to God and said, "God, you are such an awesome God. How long is a million years to you?"

God said, "My son, a million years is just like one second."

"Well, God, how much is a million dollars to you?"

"My child, a million dollars is like one penny."

So the man said, "Lord, would you give me one of your pennies?"

The Lord said, "Certainly, my son—in a second."

Sometimes we ask for the wrong thing and if it is not according to his will, we won't receive it.

The problem is how do you know what God's will is? That brings in the other side of the coin.

## **II. THE SPIRIT HELPS US PRAY AS HE:**

### **1. Intensifies our burden to pray**

Our weakness is the first thing, but the second thing this passage talks about is how the Holy Spirit helps us pray. He helps us pray as he intensifies our burden to pray. The word used here in verse 26 is *groaning*. That speaks of intensity. Sometimes we are reluctant to pray and we may be reluctant to pray out loud sometimes and that is because we don't think our prayers are eloquent enough. We've all heard people who can pray so eloquently. I've heard people when they go into church and pray out loud take on a whole different tone of voice and they sound like they have swallowed a communion table. "Dear Gooooooodd..." They pray so eloquently. Sometimes you wonder, "Are they praying to be heard by man or to be heard by God?"

I heard a preacher say one time the best prayers are the simplest and shortest. They don't have to be eloquent. It's like Simon Peter the night he walked on the water and took his eyes off Jesus and started thinking, "Lord, save me!" That was his prayer, only three words. That's a pretty good prayer, don't you think? A preacher talking about that said, "You know if some of our preachers today had been praying that prayer, it would have been so eloquent, they would have drowned to death." "Dear Lord, we come to you on this starlit night with the wind blowing and the waves...glub, glub, glub..."

The best prayers are the shortest and the simplest and the most heartfelt, because this passage is talking about prayers that don't emanate from the mouth, but prayers emanating from the heart. The word there is *groan*. Sometimes we go before the Lord and we are so burdened we don't even say any words. I know there are many of you in this room who are intimate enough with the Lord that there are times you have gone before the Him and you have gotten on your knees and you've been so burdened this is pretty much all that comes out, "Uhhhhh...Uhhhh...Uhhhh..." It's just like a groan. That's the only thing that can come out and that's straight from your heart because the Holy Spirit intensifies that burden.

I think the problem with a lot of our prayers is that they are such half-hearted, apathetic, lethargic, lackadaisical milquetoast that they don't mean anything. Look what James said in James 5:16. "The persistent [continual], fervent [burning] prayer of a righteous man avails much." You say, "Well, my prayers are not availing much." Check it out with those two requirements. Are you praying persistently? Is there fervency or intensity in your prayers?

I told this story several years ago when I was preaching through the Book of James. Mary Taylor, a lady in our church when Cindy and I were living in Alabama, was a happy Christian. Her husband was an alcoholic at the time. Every Wednesday night and every Sunday we prayed for her husband. One wintry Saturday afternoon I was sitting by the fire watching college football and my telephone rang and it was Mary. She said, "Brother David! Brother David! Come over right now! Roy is ready to get right with God! C'mon let's pray for him." So, I hopped in my car and drove across the river to a little house in the area we called "Mill Village", because all the people there worked in the textile mill. I walked up the sidewalk to the little house. It was a cold day and I can still remember the oppressive heat from one of those little gas space heaters. I walked to the back of this little modest home and there was Roy, sitting at the table.

Roy was exactly what you imagine when you think of a caricature of an alcoholic. He was overweight. He looked just like Otis on the "Andy Griffith Show." He was wearing a t-shirt and pants, but no shoes, and his head was down in his hands and the little bit of hair he had flopped over his head. There were bottles of whiskey on the kitchen counter. Mary said, "He's ready to get right with God. He's ready to quit drinking. Let's pour this whiskey down the drain." We stood there and poured whiskey down the drain—it cleaned out the drain like you wouldn't believe, better than Drano! She said, "Now let's pray for him." So I sat down in a chair and she sat down on the other side of Roy and we started to pray. I prayed something like this, "Dear Lord, I thank you that Roy's ready to get right. And Lord I just pray..." At that point Mary reached over and touched me and said, "C'mon preacher. You can do better than that!" I had never had anyone interrupt me in my prayers before. I didn't know what to do so I toned it up a couple of notches, increasing the volume a little bit. "Dear God I pray that you'll just do something in Roy's life. She shook my arm again and said, "C'mon preacher. Pray! You ain't praying." I didn't know what else to do so I fell on my knees and I grabbed this guy and I am just praying as loud and as fervently as I could and finally I said, "Amen!" I looked up and Mary was not in the room. Sometime during my prayer she left and I didn't know where she was. Then I heard coming from the living room what I can only describe as a moan, a groan. "Ohhhhh, God. Save my husband!" I went in there and here was this lady laid out on her face, stretched out nose

down on the shag carpet, weeping and groaning unto God for deliverance of her husband. Well, Roy got saved. We buried him not too long after that. I believe he went to heaven. But I learned a lesson that day about the intensity of prayer and I learned a lesson about what it really means to pray in the "groaning of the Spirit."

Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever been so burdened about something the only thing that came out was a groan? That's what the Bible is talking about here. The Holy Spirit helps us with the intensity of our burden to pray.

## **2. Intercedes for us in prayer**

Notice the last part of verse 26, "the Spirit himself intercedes for us." Then look at the last phrase of verse 27, "the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." What that's talking about is sometimes we need somebody to intercede between us and the Father. If you don't know what "intercede" means, let me just give you a good English definition. "Intercede" means to "mediate between two parties." I love words. I want to know what words mean. Our English word, "intercede" is two Latin words: *inter* meaning between and *cedere* meaning "to go." Someone who intercedes is a "go-between."

### **a. Jesus (in heaven) intercedes for us in prayer**

For years I read this passage of scripture and I thought the intercession of the Holy Spirit in prayer was the Holy Spirit interceding to the Father from us, but I have come to understand that many times it's talking about how the Holy Spirit intercedes *from* the Father to us. The direction of the intercession is critical. Actually, did you know as Christians we have dual intercession, intercession in both directions? Think about the Lord Jesus, the Savior. Jesus is in heaven, He speaks to the Father for us. That's what it says in 1 John 2:1, "but if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense." It's the word, "advocate." Jesus Christ, the righteous one is our High Priest and, "he ever lives to make intercession for us." (Hebrews 7:25)

Where is the Lord Jesus right now? You say, "Well, he is here." He is actually here in the person of the spirit. But did you know Jesus Christ was crucified, he was buried, he was resurrected, and he ascended into heaven and the Bible says right now he is seated at the right hand of God, the Father and do you know what he is doing? He is interceding for me. He is interceding for you. The Bible says there is one mediator between God and man. It is the man, Jesus Christ! Isn't it good to know Jesus is praying for you?

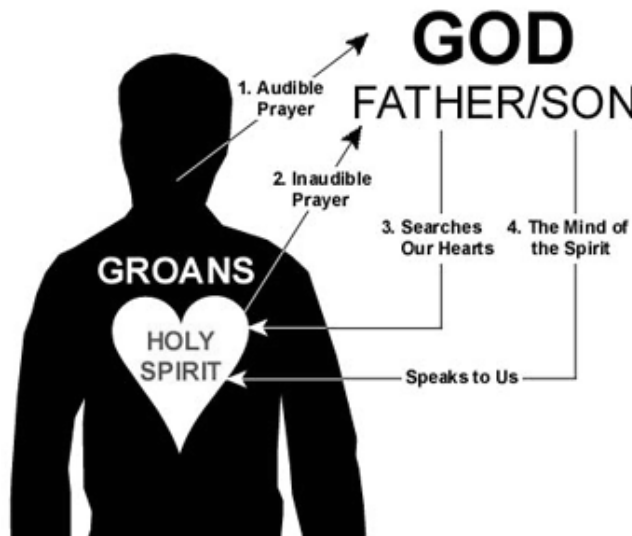
Remember in Luke, chapter 22, the night before Jesus was crucified, he said to Simon Peter, "Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat." Do you remember the old sifters that brought up the lumps and the imperfections? That's what the devil's trying to do to us. "I have prayed for you that your faith won't fail and when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." I think the thing that kept Peter going, even though he failed the Lord, even though he denied him three times, the thing that made him come back to the Lord was to realize Jesus was praying for him? Wouldn't it help you to know that Jesus is praying for you when you face temptation? When you are discouraged? And when you are depressed? He is. He ever lives to make intercession for you. I like what that great Scottish preacher, Robert McKean said. "If I could hear Christ praying for

me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies.” Yet distance makes no difference. He is praying for me! The direction of the intercession Jesus is involved in is from us to the Father but the other direction is the Holy Spirit.

### **b. The Holy Spirit (in us) speaks to us for the Father**

Do you remember we I said earlier one of the problems in prayer is that we don’t know how to pray according to his will? How do we determine God’s will? One way is we read his word and if his Bible says something, then it is his will. But how else can we determine how to pray according to God’s will? This is how! The Holy Spirit intercedes; he speaks to us from the Father! Some of you are saying, “I’m not too sure about this. Does the Holy Spirit actually speak?” Certainly, he does. There is an example in Acts 10. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. So, get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.” The Holy Spirit does speak. So sometimes when you are trying to determine what is God’s will in this matter, it is the intercession of the Holy Spirit from the Father to you that reveals his will to you.

I can tell some of you are confused. I want to show you graphically what it means to pray in the Spirit. By the way, Ephesians 6:18 is all about putting on the whole armor of God and what do you do when you are dressed for battle? You pray—that’s where the battle is—in prayer. “And 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.”



Look at numbers 1-4 in this picture. 1) There is a kind of prayer that is an audible prayer. We are all familiar with that. It’s the way most of us pray most of the time. “Dear God, Thank you for this food.” “Dear God, bless my family.” It’s an audible prayer that comes basically out of our mouths and of course, God hears our prayers. 2) There is a second kind of prayer. I made a mistake when I sent this into the printer. I should not have said, “inaudible,” because “inaudible” means you cannot hear it and you can hear the “groaning of the Spirit.” So the word I would rather have instead of “inaudible” is “inarticulate.” It means you hear it, but it doesn’t sound like words. Notice where that prayer comes from—it comes from the heart—in which the Holy Spirit of God is dwelling and it comes out as the Bible says “a groan.” How does God respond to that kind

of prayer? 3) Did you notice the first part of verse 27 says, "and he who searches our hearts," I have good news for you today: God searches your heart and he knows what's there. I also have bad news for you today: God searches your heart and he knows what's there. You can't fake God out. You can't put a move on God. You can't fool him. You can't defeat him. He knows what is in your heart and he's the one who determines whether or not that prayer is earnest and sincere, from your heart, So you might as well be honest with him. 4) He also knows the mind of the Spirit. Why? Because the Spirit is God and it is the mind of the Spirit as God speaks to us to reveal his will and the key to this whole passage is the final phrase in verse 27, "He intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." Do you want to know how to pray according to God's will? Pray in the Spirit!

I want to finish by giving you a couple of examples of this "groaning of the Spirit." One is from the life of Jesus and one is from my personal life.

Once again, the night before Jesus was crucified; he went into the Garden of Gethsemane. Would you agree with me that he was terribly burdened? He himself said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful even unto death." How burdened was he? The Bible says "there were sweat drops of blood on his forehead." He threw himself on his face and this is what he prayed. Do you remember the prayer? He said, "Father, take this cup from me!" Let's put that on hold for just a moment. Was it God's will to take the cup away from Jesus? No! But that's what he asked for. "Father, take this cup from me, but not my will *but yours be done!*" That's the key. He goes back and finds the disciples asleep. "Get up and pray!" He says it three times and in the course of making that request three times, what happens? The Father reveals his will to Jesus, so no longer does he say, "Take this cup away from me." He is willing now to drink the cup. In fact, later when Peter pulls out his sword, Jesus says, "Will I not drink the cup the Father has prepared for me?" He had come to an awareness of God's will and he turned and he was ready to face the mob that would arrest him. He was ready to face the soldiers who would torture him, he was ready to face the cross upon which he would be nailed, he was ready because he had found his Father's will. How did he do that? In prayer! Now you say, "I don't like that example of Jesus because that's Jesus—and he doesn't count! I can't relate to him!" Yes, you can because he was giving us a pattern.

Here's an example from my life. It's exactly like the example of Jesus. Many of you know my testimony. You know in 1983 my mother had breast cancer which metastasized into her bones and into her lymph system. She was living with us. It was a very tough time for us all. I can remember my mother falling at home and Cindy calling me and say, "David, come help me. Your mother has fallen and I can't get her up." I was driving my mother down to the hospital in Birmingham, which was a 45-minute drive one way to take chemotherapy and those times we spent together in the car in those last few months of her life were some of the most precious times I ever spent with my mother, because I got to know her as an adult, which is a neat thing to do. All during that fall I was praying? "God, heal my mother! But not my will but yours be done." "God, heal my mother." Many of you have prayed the same kind of prayer, "but not my will but yours be done." I met all of those conditions. I was praying in the name of Jesus, I was praying—believing it so strongly that I would get up from my prayers and say, "Thank you, God, that she is healed." I was abiding in his word and he was abiding in me. But I remember in December of 1983 as I was continually praying that prayer, asking for what I wanted, but, also

submitting to his will, God revealed to me and the Holy Spirit interceded. And this is what God said to me through the Holy Spirit: "David, I'm not going to heal her the way that you want her healed. I'm going to heal her permanently." and I knew what he meant. He was going to take her on to heaven! And at that moment I could pray according to God's will. Never again did I say, "God, heal my mother." I got up off my knees that day and I had a new sense of assurance and a new sense of victory and much of the anxiety and the pain and the struggle was gone and I began to pray, "God, thank you that you are going to heal her permanently and I just pray now that you keep her as free from pain as you can."

I think that's what the Bible is talking about when it says, "Do you want to know what God's will is? Do you want to pray according to his will? Intensify the burden of your prayer and keep on asking, keep on asking, keep on asking, and in the process of that prayer the Holy Spirit will speak to you." You say, "Will he speak to you in an audible voice" NO. It's much louder than that. It's that spiritual intuition the Holy Spirit gives us. If you want to know what it is to pray in the Spirit, just get on your knees and ask the Holy Spirit to burden you and you keep on asking and God will reveal his will to you!



## OUTLINE

### I. OUR PRAYERS ARE HINDERED BECAUSE OF OUR:

#### 1. Failure to pray

"As for me, far be it from me that I should sin again the Lord by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right." *1 Samuel 12:23*

#### 2. Ignorance about prayer

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples." *Luke 11:1*

#### 3. Inability to know what to ask for "according to His will"

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. *1 John 5:14*

### II. THE SPIRIT HELPS US PRAY AS HE:

#### 1. Intensifies our burden to pray

"The persistent fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." *James 5:16b*

#### 2. Intercedes for us in prayer

"intercede" means to mediate between two parties"

##### a. Jesus (in heaven) speaks to the Father for us

But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. *1 John 2:16*

##### b. The Holy Spirit (in us) speaks to us for the Father

While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." *Acts 10:19-20*

## PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT

And 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. *Ephesians 6:181*



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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes