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Series: People in Step with the Spirit
Message: Praying in the Spirit

Transcribed Message
January 6, 2019
Romans 8:26-27

If I were to say to you this morning, turn to the chapter in the Bible that could be called the Holy Spirit chapter. If I were to say to you there is a chapter in the Bible that has 20 specific references to the person and work of the Holy Spirit, that book is in the New Testament and it is contained in Paul's greatest theological treatise, I know you would already be turning to Romans chapter 8 because it's on the screen in front of you as well. This is a great chapter. Romans chapter 8. We're going to go back to our series that we left off back in December on people who are keeping in step with the Spirit. We spent 13 weeks looking at matters related to the Holy Spirit's ministry. This morning this is what we want to do. We want to see that we should pray and not lose heart. It is the Spirit who helps us reach the ear of God with just the request that we need.

Let's start off with a very quick review to catch everybody up. We had a great break. Christmas was awesome, but now we're back to our series. Let's start off 2019 with a review by looking back in this new year at what we learned last year. So here we go. I'm going to throw it out and you just throw it back to me. We learned who the Holy Spirit is, and the Holy Spirit is? God. The Holy Spirit is God. The uniqueness of Christianity is that we have one God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God just as the Father and Son.

What is the Spirit? The Spirit is not a force. Not an it. The Holy Spirit is a person. Just as the Father and the Son are persons, so is the Holy Spirit.

What does the Holy Spirit do? If you think of the Holy Spirit's ministry in relation to the physical world, we could say the Holy Spirit is creator. Genesis one. We open up with the Spirit of God moving over the face of the deep. The Holy Spirit was engaged in the creation of our world.

We think in terms of the Holy Spirit and the Word. We would say the Holy Spirit is the author. The Holy Spirit is the one who has given us the Word of God.

We think of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus. There could be a number of words here. I've got the right one down on the page here. What would be a word that would correlate to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in relation to the life and ministry of Jesus? We would say the Holy Spirit did what? Empowered. There were other words that were said that are probably just as good. But the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to live every moment of His life filled with and controlled by the Holy Spirit of God.

Then we think in terms of the Spirit's ministry in relation to the believer. We looked at all kinds of things that the Holy Spirit does on our behalf. It all begins with new life which we call what? New birth. We're born again. Regeneration. The Spirit of God is the one who makes us alive, who brings that new life to us. The Holy Spirit without water brought us into the body of Christ. He baptized us into the body of Christ without water. We are brought into the body of Christ. Every believer is baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit lives within us and we call that the indwelling. We are indwelt by the Spirit of God. We are the living temple of the living God. The Spirit of God lives within us. It is the indwelling ministry. We are secure because the Spirit has done what? He has sealed us. The Spirit has sealed us until the day of redemption. So we are secure in this wonderful salvation. We are told to be controlled by the Spirit which is another way of saying we need to be filled with the Spirit. Ephesians 5:18 commands us to be filled with the Spirit. We spent a number of studies looking at that. The number one priority that the Spirit of God has in our lives was our last lesson on December 2. What was that? To sanctify us. Somebody probably has gone online and got all the answers because that's really good. You guys have kept pace with that. He sanctifies. He transforms us into the image of Christ. That is His number one goal and perspective in our life.

Our goal in this series which will continue now until probably February is that we would grow in our understanding of the Holy Spirit of God and of His ministry in our life. After all, the Holy Spirit is the one who lives within us. We need to know who the Holy Spirit is and what He is doing in our life. But I also have a desire and goal that we would learn to love the Spirit just as we love the Father, just as we love the Son. We should be growing in our love for the Holy Spirit because He is the one whom God the Father and

God the Son have sent to live within us and to bring about this incredible transforming work once we have placed our faith in Christ. One of the things that the Spirit does, and that's what we get to look at this morning, the Spirit's ministry of intercession. The Spirit's ministry of intercession is what we'll look at.

I'm going to start off with a very brief look at this matter of praying in the Spirit. Praying in the Spirit. There are two references in the New Testament to this matter of the command that we're to pray in the Spirit. In Jude verse 20: "But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit." Praying in the Holy Spirit. Then Paul says in Ephesians 6 and verse 18: "praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints." So there's these two references in which we're told that we're to be praying in the Spirit. There are different ideas that are put forward as to what that means. I'd like to keep it simple. I don't think it's talking about a prayer language or speaking in tongues. Other ideas are put out there. I don't think that's what it is at all. I think when Paul says in Ephesians 6:18 that we are to always pray this way. Pray at all times in the Holy Spirit. He is not talking about some kind of special prayer. He is not talking about some special occasion. He tells us very plainly we are to pray every time we pray in the Holy Spirit.

When we talk about prayer, we often say we pray to the Father. After all, when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray He started off and said pray in this way. Our Father who art in heaven. So we talked about the fact that we pray to the Father. We pray in the name of Jesus because Jesus is the one who has mediated. He is the one who would come between us and God. He has made it possible for us to come to the Father. So we pray in the name of Jesus. We pray in the power of the Holy Spirit. We pray in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When I look at this, I think what it means is that we are to be directed by, guided by, moved by the Holy Spirit of God. It's another way of saying you're to be filled with the Spirit. You're to walk in the Spirit. You're to be under the control of the Spirit. In this instance, He's bringing it into the context of prayer. He is saying pray in the Holy Spirit.

Remember the psalmist in Psalm 66 in verse 18 said if I regard sin in my heart the Lord will not hear me. We talked about the number one reason we're not filled with

the Spirit is sin. So if we regard sin in our heart, there's no way we're praying in the Holy Spirit, are we? We deal with that. We confess that and we are brought back into this fellowship relationship with God. I think that is true in this matter of prayer. The Holy Spirit wants to help us in this matter of prayer. So that's what we get to look at this morning.

Let's look together at this matter of praying and the Spirit's help. Romans chapter 8 verse 26 and 27 read this way: "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. 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." There are three things that I want to see this morning about the Spirit's ministry of intercession on our behalf. It begins first of all with our understanding the need. The need for the Spirit's intercession. We have to start off in this understanding of what it means to pray in the Spirit and understand what it is that the Holy Spirit wants to do to help us by first of all acknowledging that we need the Spirit's help. The Spirit is there to help us. In fact, if you look at verse 26 it starts off with that word "likewise". It's just another way of saying "just as". So he wants us to look back into the previous context. Some people take it all the way back through all of chapter 8. I don't know that we need to do that because I think if we look at the verses just before this, it fits very nicely because he talks about this hope that we have. This hope that we have is what moves and encourages and blesses us. In a similar way, likewise, the Holy Spirit is there to help us in this matter of intercession. So the Spirit gives help in prayer.

That word "help" is a really big word. It's two prepositions in addition to the verb. It is a word picture of somebody who's trying to do something and they can't do it by themselves. They're trying to do something and they need help. It is only used one other time in the New Testament in Luke chapter 10 and in verse 40 when Mary and Martha have Jesus in their home. Remember Martha is doing all the work. She finally comes to Jesus and says Jesus, it would be nice if you would tell Mary to come and help me. That's the same word that you see here. She didn't feel like she could get it done herself so she wanted help.

One of the illustrations that I read about this word a guy talked about needing help to move a piano. Do you know what came to my mind? Years ago, we used to move that great big huge grand piano off of the platform. Some of you guys will remember that. We don't do that anymore. It was probably a bad idea from the beginning. But I would say I need 10 really handsome strong guys to come down here and help us move this piano off the platform and hundreds of men would come forward. Actually, we'd get eight or 10 guys to move that piano and we would just literally carry that thing right off the stage and put it on the floor. I would always try to position myself between two really strong guys and I got to the point where I could do it with one hand. That's the word that he is using here. We need help with certain things, don't we? We can't do things by ourselves. He says that about the Holy Spirit and prayer.

So we start off and we acknowledge that we need help. Now what does He help us with? What does the Holy Spirit help us with? He says the Spirit helps with our weakness. The Spirit helps us with our weakness. Do you know what encourages me in this? Did you notice that Paul includes himself in this? He's an apostle, but he says: "likewise the Spirit helps us." Plural. He's including himself with this matter of our weakness. Here is the apostle Paul. Here is the man that God used as great as any human being to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. He said you follow me as I follow Christ. I have the mind of Christ. He gave us Scripture. And yet you know what he says? I need help in this because I have a weakness in this regard. Jesus is the one who said to us without Me you can't do anything. Paul said I not only agree with that but I also realize that with Christ I can do all things. So here's a picture of the Spirit's ministry coming alongside of us to help us with our weakness.

Here's the question. What is the weakness that we have? What is in view here when he says we need to admit our need and we need to understand that we have a weakness? I want you to notice as you look at that word that it is in the singular. There's a specific weakness evidently that he has in mind for us to grasp and understand. I would say this. In general, we can look at this and we can acknowledge and agree that what is in view is our fundamental need because of our fallen condition. Because of the impact of the fall on all of creation, literally in all of humanity and even yet as followers of Christ, we still are in the struggle every day. There's this fundamental issue I think

that is in view here that we simply acknowledge our weakness (singular) that comes as a result of the fall.

As we look at that we would also hopefully quickly acknowledge that we have plural weaknesses. Physically, there's weakness. Have any of you ever fallen asleep praying? That is the physical weakness. The disciples did. They had a physical weakness. They just couldn't keep up with Christ. We have emotional weaknesses. We go through times of difficulty and depression and discouragement and just emotional things that we're grappling with that reveal our weakness. We have spiritual weaknesses. So we can look at that and we can say there is in general a principle here of how the fall has impacted us. But, I think Paul has something particular mind. I believe we could say that this is specifically manifested in our prayer life. That's the context in which he is speaking here. For we do not know what to pray for, he says. This matter of weakness that the Spirit is coming to help us with and engage us with is directly related to prayer. We don't know what to pray for.

Let me ask you. when do you not know what to pray for? Is this saying to us that you don't know what to pray for in those really hard decisions of life? You know, those big ones that come along every so often. Should we move? Should I get married? Where should I go to school? Should I take this job? We would all confess probably at that point we don't know what to do. So we could look at that and we could ask is this just sometimes? Is this special occasions? Is this hard cases that we literally don't know how to pray? When I look at the text, it simply says our weakness is we do not know what to pray for. Period. No qualifier there. He didn't say we don't know what to pray for when it's really a difficult circumstance. You don't know what to pray for when you're up against some special issue in your life. I look at this and I say unless I am praying in absolute concurrence with the revealed will of God, which is of course the whole Word of God, unless I am praying in specific concurrence with the Word of God. God, I want You to transform me more into the image of Your Son. Obviously that's the revealed will of God. There are all kinds of things that we can and should be praying right out of the Word. In those instances, we know what to pray because God told us.

I would offer to you that in every other instance we do not know what to pray for. We do not know what to ask for. I suggest that on the basis of at least three reasons.

One, because we don't know oftentimes what God is doing in our life at that present moment. We can't see the weaving of God's work in our life and why He's doing the things that He's doing. We can look at our present circumstances and oftentimes we have to say I'm not sure what God is doing right now in my life. Paul acknowledged that in 1 Corinthians 13 and said that we see in a mirror dimly. We see in the mirror darkly. It's only when we'll see Him face to face that we'll fully understand. So one of the reasons we don't know how to pray as we should is because we don't really see all the pieces that God is moving at the present moment.

Secondly, I think there's the reality that we don't know what His plan is for the future. We can't see into the future and see what God is going to be doing in our life tomorrow, let alone a year from now. It's not just the present moment that we're struggling to see what God is doing. It is for the future as well.

I think another piece of that that causes us to say that this is every instance is because most of the time we don't fundamentally know what it is that we need. We think we know what we need, but we don't know what we need. God is at work in our life. He is doing something that we can't always be certain about. We can't see the future and we don't even know at times know what it is that we need.

Now there's all kinds of examples to support that understanding. For instance, if we went back into the well-known story in the Old Testament of the life of Joseph and we were assigned to pray for Joseph. Just think of all of the ways we'd be praying for Joseph that were really an exact picture of what Paul says here. We don't know how to pray as we should. We'd look at his brothers and we'd say Lord, when he comes to his brothers, please work in their hearts so that they treat him well. They didn't, and we'd see that he's thrown into the pit and here come the Egyptian slave traders. We would be praying God, do not let them sell him to those Egyptian traders. He will never see his family again! And God does. We'd get to see Joseph in Potiphar's house and we'd say please protect him from Potiphar's wife and don't let his reputation be ruined. Don't let him be thrown into jail for an undetermined period. You see how that worked out? He at the end of that whole story said you guys meant it for evil but God meant it for good. We don't know what God's doing in our lives right now. We don't know what the future

holds. We don't know ultimately what we need. It is right on to say we do not know what to pray for.

The apostle Paul is an example. He prayed three times God, remove this thorn in the flesh, whatever that was. Some physical infirmity. Some circumstance in his life that he thought was a hindrance. Finally, the Lord just said Paul, drop it. I'm not going to do what you're asking. You don't know what to pray for in this matter but you're going to see that My grace is sufficient for you.

Or step in to church history. Augustine. One of the greatest theologians of all time lived the life of dissolution and immorality as a young man. His mother was in his life to the extent that she could be and was trying to be a godly influence in his life. He announced to her that he's moving to Italy. Her prayer life ramped up and she prayed God, please do not let him go to Italy. He's around bad people and their influence is going to grow. He's going to get farther away from You. He goes to Italy. He hears the gospel. He is gloriously saved.

You can think of a hundred things right now that you have prayed about that you simply have to acknowledge in light of what Paul says right here you and I really don't know what to pray for. But the good news is we have somebody who does. We have somebody who does. We don't get to see the big picture until we look back in the rearview mirror. But we have one with us who is there to help us. So we have this constant need. That's first of all the need of the Spirit's intercession.

Now look secondly at the nature of the Spirit's intercession. What is it that the Holy Spirit does? The help we need is now clarified because he says in verse 26 even though we don't know what to pray, the Spirit Himself intercedes for us. The Spirit Himself intercedes for us. He starts off that statement with an adversative. That is to cause us to sit up and say we don't know what to pray for but the Holy Spirit does. So a strong contrast there.

I want you to see that the Spirit's ministry of intercession is an advocacy that is personal. It is an advocacy for us that is personal. The Spirit Himself intercedes for us. This is the only reference in the whole of Scripture of the Holy Spirit's ministry of intercession. Romans 8:26. We have nothing else to compare this to. We have nowhere else to go. This is the only time we are told of this unique and beautiful and needed

ministry of the Holy Spirit in our life. The Holy Spirit doesn't give this assignment to anybody else. He could have assigned it to an angel. He had Michael bring an answer to prayer to Daniel. But the Holy Spirit says no, this is Mine. I am going to be the one who is going to intercede on behalf of God's children. That word "intercede" is in the present tense so it's a ministry that He is constantly engaged in on our behalf. He pleads in our favor in our behalf.

Now listen, folks. How incredible is it? How encouraging is it to know that we have two advocates? Hebrews 7:25 and 1 John 2:1 tell us that Jesus is our advocate. Jesus is interceding for us. Now here in Romans 8:26 we learned that yet another member of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, advocates for us for our unrealized, unknown needs. It says to us in part that we are never alone. Whatever it is that you might be going through, and maybe you haven't even shared it beyond a very small circle or maybe you haven't shared with anybody. The enemy would come to you and say this is not going to work out for good. This is not going to be to your advantage. You are in this deal alone. You can on the basis of the Word of God say absolutely not! I have a Savior who is interceding for me, who is my advocate to the Father. And not only that, I have the indwelling Holy Spirit and He is advocating for me personally as well. This is an amazing thing for us to realize.

How does He do that? We learn that next because His advocacy is inexpressible. His advocacy for us is inexpressible. With groanings too deep for words. As you can imagine, there's a lot of debate about what this means. It's really all over the place as to how are we to understand that the Holy Spirit of God as He intercedes for us does so in an inexpressible groan. As you look at this 8th chapter, not only is it the Holy Spirit chapter because there are 20 references of the Holy Spirit, there is a good amount of groaning going on in this chapter too. Look back at verse 22. All of creation is groaning under the weight of sin. All of creation waits for redemption. Verse 23. We as believers are groaning too. We're groaning for the same reason. We're looking forward to this new and glorious body. We groan and it seems the older we get, maybe a little bit louder those groans get. But that is the groaning of our heart. Then he says the Holy Spirit groans in verse 26 pleading on our behalf in longings that are verbally inexpressible. Some people read that and they say I think the Holy Spirit groans. The

Holy Spirit is God. Why would He be groaning? This must be us groaning and somehow the Holy Spirit is connecting our groans by means of intercession. But again you just come back to the simple text. It says but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. I think this is probably one of those places where it's better to simply bow before the mystery of Scripture and realize that there is an inter-Trinitarian communication taking place. There's a communication that is taking place between the Father, between the Son, between the Holy Spirit. It is such a nature that as Paul describes this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit says when I'm bringing these things to the Father, these are inexpressible groans. This is a beautiful picture of God's work on our behalf.

Remember back in a previous lesson we noted that in 1 Corinthians 2:11 it says the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. It was an indicator to us of the fact that the Holy Spirit is God. The Holy Spirit is a person. He knows the mind of the Father. The Father knows the mind of the Spirit. Here is a mystery and a huge encouragement. The Holy Spirit praying directly to the Father on my behalf. My weakness and ignorant prayers are complemented by the prayers of the interceding Holy Spirit of God. I'm weak but He's strong. I'm ignorant but He knows full well exactly what it is that I need.

Someone might very well at this point say what are we praying for then? I mean if the Holy Spirit is the interceding one for us, why is it that we're praying? When we ask that question, which is a valid question, we step into the arena of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. This isn't the only difficulty that we encounter as we read our Bible with regard to what it is that God's doing and what it is that He wants me to be doing. But as I would understand this, I think it would say to me that if I'm not praying, the Holy Spirit is not interceding. It doesn't say that the Holy Spirit is interceding except as a part of my own prayer life. That's what moves the Spirit of God to intercede on our behalf. Do you think this may fit somewhat with James 4? You have not because you ask not. It might very well be another insight into the work of the Holy Spirit as we pray. We're commanded to pray even apart from that. We're commanded to pray. God has ordained the means and has ordained the end to that means. That wonderful statement: God will

not do a part from prayer what He has ordained to do by prayer. So here is a great motivator.

Just very briefly look at the effectiveness of the Spirit's intercession. Verse 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." So the first thing we notice is the Holy Spirit's intercession is always according to God's will. I take it that the one searching the heart there in verse 27 is the Father. The Father is engaged in this as well and He is searching the hearts. The Spirit is responding to our prayer and He is interceding with inexpressible groans that are known by the Father. The Spirit always prays in perfect harmony with the will of God because He knows what the will of God is. The two are always in full agreement. So we pray in ignorance. We pray in weakness. The Holy Spirit comes along and He lifts our prayers. and He takes those prayers and He in inexpressible groans takes them to the Father. He does so in exact accordance with the will of God. Do you know what results? Those prayers always will be answered. It doesn't mean what I'm praying is always answered. Far from that! But what the Holy Spirit brings to the Father is what is answered because the Spirit and the Father are always in full agreement. The Spirit knows the heart of the Father and the Father knows the heart of the Spirit. Both in conjunction with our Savior are working to do what? Romans 8:28. Knowing that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. He is working all of these things for good.

What an encouragement as we begin 2019 to realize that all three members of the Godhead are actively engaged when I enter into the ministry of prayer. Praying to the Father. Praying in the name of Jesus. Praying in the Holy Spirit. So what do we do? Pray and don't lose heart. It is the Spirit who helps us reach the ear of God with just the requests that we need.

What do we take away? I would suggest this. The best prayer you will ever pray is the one of daily surrender. Father, not my will but Yours be done. There is the simplicity of submitting ourselves to the will of the Father. You and I pray to the extent that we are informed about what is going on in our life. We pray to the extent that we think this would be the best or that would be the best. But my friend, at the end of the

day we do not know what God is doing in our life. We do not see the future. We don't see the big picture. We don't fundamentally know what our greatest need is, but we know somebody who does. That is our heavenly Father, our living Savior, and the indwelling Holy Spirit who ever lives to make intercession for us. This is simply an acknowledgment of the Lordship of Christ in our life. Father, whatever it is that You want to do in my life, please do that.

It all begins with an acknowledgment of our need of Jesus as our Savior which simply brings us back to the gospel. Everybody here this morning needs to understand that we were born into this world separated from God because of sin. God's remedy to that problem that all of us own is not to say to us do the best you can and I hope it all works out. His remedy was to send His Son the Lord Jesus, who lived a perfect life, who died a terrible death, and he did so for you and for me that we could have a relationship with our Father. The Bible says that if we will but believe on the Lord Jesus Christ we will be saved. Believe that what Jesus did was all that needed to be done and God will give you the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Precious Father, glorious Lord Jesus, indwelling Holy Spirit, we as Your people are humbled this morning to know of Your ministry on our behalf. Father, even as we lift our voices in praise, as we lift our voices in confession, as we lift our voices in adoration, thanksgiving and petition, You are at work on our behalf. We are thankful that as we begin this new year Your promise and Your provision and the sufficiency of Christ is all that we need. We are forever grateful. We ask, Father, for Your Spirit to bring to mind to someone this morning who may not yet have trusted You as their personal Savior to make certain that their eternity is secure in Christ, that they will put their trust in Jesus as their Savior. What a glorious way to begin the year, Father. We thank You in Christ's name, amen.