When We Don't Know What to Pray

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Date: 04 October 2026

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[0:00] By way of introduction to my sermon this morning, I'd like to take a moment to imagine a someone sitting in this room right now.! Now, I'm not referring to anyone specifically here this morning.

So you can relax. It's like, uh-oh, what's Greg going to start with already? But I do want us to imagine a someone sitting in this room this morning.
Perhaps this someone got up early this morning and she made sure the kids were dressed. She probably smiled at someone in the parking lot as she walked in.
And she's sitting right here looking to all the world that she's perfectly fine. But she's not fine. Not at all. Perhaps it's a someone who lost his job several months ago because he refused to do something that he knew was wrong.
And now he is deeply frustrated and discouraged because the Lord has not provided another job and the bills are piling up. And he feels the stress of that.
[1:08] Or perhaps it's a someone who has been dealing with a health diagnosis that she has not yet told anyone. And the fear of it has crowded out everything else in her life.

Maybe it's a someone who is watching his marriage unravel in slow motion and does not know how to stop it.
And he's feeling desperate and hopeless. Or maybe it's a someone who is carrying a grief that is so old and so private that she has never once spoken it aloud.
And she tried to pray about it this morning and nothing came. Nothing. No words. Not even tears. Just a hollow, aching silence where her prayer was supposed to be.
Well, many of us have maybe found ourselves in one of these places or in a similar place of seeming desperation or even hopelessness.
[2:13] And one question that perhaps we ask when we're in one of these places is, why is God silent in this? Or perhaps for the believer, there are deeper, more troubling questions as he looks in the mirror and as he asks, what happens when I am the silent one in this?

What happens when I simply have nothing left to bring to the Lord? What happens when I am so crushed by grief, so troubled and burdened in this place that I find myself, that I'm simply left without thoughts and without tears and without words?
Complete silence. Because I just don't know how to pray or even what to pray. Well, this morning I would like to take us to one of the most quietly magnificent passages in all of Paul's writings.
Romans chapter 8, verses 26 and 27. Now these verses were written for believers who suffer in this present time while waiting for the glory that is yet to be revealed to us.
And that's verse 18 earlier in that chapter. These are God's words for Christians living between the groaning of the present and the glory of the future.
[3:36] And that means that these verses are particularly tremendous comfort to those facing the kind of situations and places that we have just imagined, for those who have run out of words and have nothing left to bring before the Lord.

So my title for my sermon this morning is, When We Don't Know What to Pray. So turn with me, if you haven't already, to Romans chapter 8.
We were there this morning in our call to worship. But this morning's verses, we will look at verses 26 and 27. Now actually, and I'm going to apply what men were learning on Tuesday morning, right?
I'm going to back up a little bit, and I'm going to start at verse 18. I'm going to read from verse 18 through verse 30. And why am I doing this? Right? To capture the larger context of verses 26 and 27.

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And we'll look at 26 and 27 in depth this morning. So let me read Romans 8. I'll start at verse 18 through 30. So follow along with me. Verse 18.
[5:11] Verse 18.

Verse 18.
Verse 18. Verse 18.
And those whom he predestined, he also called. And those whom he called, he also justified. And those whom he justified, he also glorified.
Amen. Pray with me. So, Father, we pause right now, Lord, at the conclusion, the reading of this passage, and we thank you, Lord, for your word. We thank you for your truth.
[7:08] And I would pray this morning that as we open your word, that you would sanctify us with your word, which is truth, Father. Thank you for our time together. Thank you for the truth of the word that penetrates and teaches and convicts and transforms.

In Jesus' name, amen. So, Romans 8. I've organized our study this morning into four sort of points, right?
Sort of a standard three points and an application, all right? So, it's going to be a little textbook with how we organize the thoughts this morning. So, first, we're going to look at the honest diagnosis that Paul gives us about our own weakness, and we'll see that in verse 26.
Then, secondly, we will see the extraordinary claim that Paul makes about what the Spirit does in that weakness. Then we'll move on.
And the third point, we're going to learn of the Trinitarian shape of the whole transaction. Now, that's just a fancy way of saying the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. What are their roles in this whole transaction of intercession for us?
[8:15] And then, lastly, by way of application, we're going to talk a little bit about what that means for us today. So, again, we want to understand what God's Word says.

What is the intent, men? What is the intent of the author, the Apostle Paul? What he intended at the time of the reading? So, we understand that, that correct interpretation, right?
And at the end, we will apply what that means for us today. So, as we read and prayed through Romans 8, 1 through 17 earlier in our call to worship, we were reminded of some of the most precious promises in all of Scripture.
So, rewind a little bit back to Romans in the first half of chapter 8. And as we read this morning in our call to worship and as I prayed, there were several precious promises.
Paul writes that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Paul writes that we have been set free by the Spirit from the law of sin and death.
[9:16] Paul wrote that the Spirit who dwells within us empowers us to put sin to death. The Spirit bears witness that we are God's children. He enables us to cry out with confidence, Abba, Father.

And by the Spirit we are no longer slaves living in fear, but we're adopted sons and daughters of God. We're heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.
So, Paul's aim in the first half of chapter 8 has been to assure believers, to assure us of our identity and our standing and our security in Christ through the powerful ministry of the indwelling Spirit.
And yet, if you noticed in verse 17, he ends that section of verses with a rather sobering but necessary truth.
If you look at verse 17, our union with Christ means sharing not only in His inheritance, but also in what? Right.
[10:20] Also in His sufferings. The path to glory. Our path to glory is the same path that our Savior walked. Thus, verse 17 leads Paul into the subject of verses 18 through 25, the subsequent verses, where he describes the believer's present experience of suffering while eagerly awaiting the future glory that God has promised.

Let me reread a couple of verses in 18 through 23. Let me read 18 and 19, and then verses 22 and 23. So again, Paul writes, And jumping down to verse 22, For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.
And not only creation, so Paul differentiates non-human creation with we as humans, His special creation. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we groan inwardly as we eagerly await for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.
It's that theme of now, but not yet. We are adopted into God's family. Today, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you are an heir of God, a co-heir with Jesus Christ.

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But the glory is yet to come. Now, but not yet. Well, did you catch what Paul wrote in verse 22? He writes that the whole creation groans.
[12:07] And then he writes in verse 23 that we groan. And so I want to look a little bit at these two verses here. And I'm not going to do a lot of looking back at Greek, but there are a couple of key terms in this section of verses that I think it's important for us to understand the meaning of the original Greek in order to have an impact on our understanding.

As we interpret this. So the word that Paul uses for groaning, we see groaning several times in this section, is the Greek word stenodzomen. Stenodzomen.
And this is the word, and it's here on the slide, it's a deep involuntary sigh that comes from something pressing heavily on the chest.
So this is not some type of polite, you know, it's not like a lightweight sort of polite sigh of inconvenience.
No, this is the groan of, for example, a woman in labor. Big difference. It's the groan of someone crushed under a weight of something that's too heavy to carry alone.
[13:18] As I was studying these verses, I picture two things in my mind. I sort of picture of being crushed under the weight of like, you may have seen pictures on the news in the past about when buildings collapse, right, and there's someone pinned under a slab of concrete, right, just a crushing weight and a groaning that takes place if the guy, if the person is not killed because of that.

But that crushing weight that the person was never designed to bear. And on a lighter note, so I think of a weight that is not designed for someone to bear.
So Caleb and I went to Lowe's this past Tuesday evening to get refills for our five-gallon water jugs that we have out in the water cooler. And so when we got here, you know, we had the jugs strapped in the back seat, and I said, hey, Caleb, you think you can carry that in the church for me?
And so I got it out of the car. It was out of the Jeep, and I put it on the ground. And so Caleb, you know, Caleb's game for anything. So he bends down, and what does he do audibly?
Oh, he groans, and he picks up that 45-pound, five-gallon water jug, and he's bearing this weight. And I said, son, can you make it into this church? No, no, right, right?
[14:41] No, so he set it back down. He gave me the privilege of carrying two of those in. But, yeah, five-gallon water jug, good job, 45 pounds. You know, it's the groaning of a weight that's pressing heavily on your chest.

Well, this is the world that Paul is describing when he says that all creation is groaning. It's a world under the weight of sin and persecution, of suffering and incompleteness.
A world, our world, where bodies break down, some of us know that more than others, relationships fracture. Unfortunately, some of us know that more than others.
Children wander. Loved ones die. We are a people who groan. We groan because these present circumstances press so heavily upon us.
And also because, as believers in Christ, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we wait eagerly for adoption as sons. We groan, but we wait eagerly.
[15:49] The redemption of our bodies into that glorified state. So our groaning, therefore, expresses both the pain of what remains broken, but also the longing of hope for what God has promised to complete.

And we see here, as we read in Scripture, Paul does not apologize for this or even rush past it. He names it because it's real and it's true for us as believers.
And it's in this context, the context of genuine, heavy, embodied suffering and groaning, that Paul makes a confession in verse 26, that I think many of us would find simultaneously alarming and relieving.
Verse 26. What's verse 26 say? Some of you in your translations may read, we do not know how to pray for as we ought.
Either one works. We do not know what to pray for. We do not know how to pray for as we ought. Now, this is a striking thing for an apostle to write.
[16:59] This is not a spiritual novice throwing up his hands in frustration. This is the apostle Paul, the man who has been caught up to the third heaven, according to 2 Corinthians 12, who planted churches across the Roman Empire, who wrote most of what we now call the New Testament.

And he says, the apostle Paul says, yeah, we don't know what to pray for as we ought. Well, the Greek is even more pointed than our English translations sometimes capture.

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So let me put this up here on the screen. Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. Oh, let me, yeah. The verse says, likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know what to pray for as we ought.
So if we look at the word weakness here, we see the Greek translation, and it's the same word used throughout the New Testament for sickness, frailty, and just fundamental human limitation, right? We are weak. Paul writes that we are weak. For we do not know what we pray for. The Spirit helps us in our weakness. And the phrase do not know, I have that in yellow, right?
[18:17] For we do not know. It's not, well, sometimes we're uncertain. That's not what the Greek conveys here, right? The Greek word for we do not know, this phrase, it's a statement of categorical, and you see that on the presentation, it's a statement of categorical human limitation before God.

Think about it. In the truest sense, we are not equipped to know what we actually need. And therefore, we do not know how to pray for it rightly.
Let that settle on your soul for just a moment. Paul, the Apostle Paul says, we do not know what to pray for as we ought.
We do not know. We are categorically, we have a categorical human limitation to know how to pray and for what we ought to pray for. Well, Greg, that was really encouraging.
Thanks for that note, that clarification. So, I want to be careful here. Now, what Paul is not saying is that prayer is futile, right? Maybe that's the conclusion you make.
[19:28] Well, Greg, if Paul writes, hey, we are limited in what we know what to pray for or how to pray. If we're human and we just don't know it, the Spirit helps us, well, then, prayer is futile.

If I don't know what to pray for, then why even take the effort to pray? Wrong conclusion. Wrong application. Right? Or maybe that our words don't really matter when I pray.
Right? Since I'm limited, since I'm not sure if I'm actually praying for what is right. And maybe we should just stop praying. Well, wrong interpretation. Right? The rest of Paul's letters and indeed the very remaining part of Romans, the book of Romans, are full of exhortations to pray.
What Paul is diagnosing here is something more specific. There are moments and perhaps whole seasons when we genuinely do not know what to ask for.
When the suffering is too deep, when the persecution is too severe, when the situation is just too complex, when the future is too unclear for us to even formulate a coherent response or a coherent prayer.
[20:42] Well, for those of us with a few years under our belts, and I have one more year now today, all right? For those of us with a few years under our belts and have lived a life long enough, we've likely been there.

You know what I'm talking about. We found ourselves praying for the wrong thing. We find ourselves praying for the pain to stop when God was using the pain to shape us all along.
We find ourselves praying for the circumstances to change when God was using the circumstances to change us. And just maybe, at times, maybe we found ourselves sitting in the dark and we go to open our mouths to pray and we find that nothing comes out.
No words. You're speechless before God. Well, brothers and sisters, please know that you're not alone. The Bible is full of people who prayed the wrong thing or just ran out of words.
So this is not a uniquely modern problem that you have or any sort of character flaw in you. And so what I want to do is turn to a couple of references in Scripture that shows us that we're not alone in these circumstances.
[22:05] So turn back with me to 1 Kings. So let's go into the Old Testament briefly. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings.

So go about a quarter of the way through your Scripture to find 1 Kings. And let's take a small glimpse at Elijah. So in 1 Kings 19 is where we'll sort of focus our attentions here for the moment.
Now, if you're there, if you look back into chapter 18, and because of time, and we can't read through 1 Kings 18 and 19, but in chapter 18, we learn that Elijah had just won the most dramatic spiritual showdown in Israel's history.
He saw fire from heaven, 450 false prophets of Baal were defeated, and there was a three-year drought that ended. And then, in the very next chapter, in chapter 19, when Jezebel, now, Jezebel is the wife of King Ahab.

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Both are very evil. 1 Kings 16 states that Ahab did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him. So we have Ahab, his wife Jezebel.
[23:23] Well, Jezebel threatens Elijah's life just in the next chapter. So Elijah, coming off this dramatical spiritual showdown, what did Elijah do?

He ran. He ran. He fled into the wilderness. If we were to read the account, he sat under a broom tree. I don't know what a broom tree is. I didn't research that, but he sat under a broom tree, Scripture says, and he asked God to let him die.
He didn't pray for victory that he just recently had. He didn't pray for guidance. He prayed, it's enough, Lord. Take away my life.
1 Kings 19.4. reads, But he himself, Elijah, but he himself, went a day's journey into the wilderness. He was fleeing Jezebel.
And he came, and he sat down under a broom tree, and he asked that he might die, saying, It is enough. Now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.
[24:28] That is a man who did not know what to pray for as he ought. A little bit of Elijah and us, huh? He was asking for death when he needed, well, what he needed was food and rest and renewed commission from God.

And by the way, before we move on, do you know what God did in response to Elijah's prayer? Did he kill him? Did he take his life from him? No. God didn't rebuke Elijah.
What did God do? Instead, he sent an angel, twice, with bread and water, and he said, Arise and eat, Elijah, for the journey is too great for you.
The Lord ministered to Elijah in his time of hopelessness. Well, that was Elijah. Well, let's also briefly consider the psalmist David.
So turn forward in your copy of the scriptures to Psalm 22. Psalm 22, where we read the very words that Jesus would later cry from the cross.
[25:35] And this is Psalm 22, verses 1 and 2. Familiar words that David spoke. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me from the words of my groaning? Oh my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer.
And I cry by night, and I find no rest. This is a man in such anguish that even the form of his prayer has broken down.
Notice that he is not even making a petition to the Lord. He's certainly not offering praise. He is crying out in confusion. Why? And he's receiving no immediate answer.
Now this is David, a man after God's own heart. This is David, the king through whom God promised to send the Messiah, establishing a royal line that would lead to Jesus Christ.
[26:41] A little bit of David in us too, huh? Elijah, David, one more example. Turn into the New Testament, 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians. Chapter 1. In 2 Corinthians, chapter 1, the apostle Paul writes this in verses 8 and the first half of verse 9.
Paul writes to the Corinthians, For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction that we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.
That's the apostle Paul writing this. We despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death.
Now, Paul never tells us exactly how he prayed during this crushing time of affliction that he describes in these verses, but the intensity of that moment, right, the words that he's using here, so utterly burdened beyond strength, despairing of life itself, life itself.
[28:02] You know, these words at least suggest that there was a time marked by wordless groaning rather than polished petitions. And it's interesting to remember that 2 Corinthians was written two or three years before the epistle to the Romans that we're looking at today.

So by the time Paul wrote Romans 8, verses 26 and 27, he had already lived through that overwhelming trial that he's referencing in 2 Corinthians.
So when Paul writes that the Spirit is helping in our weakness, for we do not know what to pray for as we ought, Paul is not offering some abstract theology, church.
Right? Paul is under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and he is drawing from his own memory of his own near breaking point. Well, if you have ever sat in that place like Elijah or David or Paul, where

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perhaps you're just praying for the wrong thing out of desperation or just don't have any words to pray at all, let me say to you plainly, my dear brothers and sisters, you are not less spiritual than you should be.
You are not. You are living in the frailty that Scripture says is common to all of us. You are, as Paul says in verse 26, weak. You are weak and I am weak.
[29:33] And the remarkable news of this passage is that God has made provision, now get this, God has made provision not around your weakness but directly into your weakness.

And we shall learn that next as we move on to the second half of verse 26. So see, verse 26 does not end with a diagnosis that we are weak and we don't know how to pray.
Verse 26 ends with a cure. And the cure is nothing less than the third person of the Trinity taking up residence in the gap between our inarticulate suffering and the throne of God.
And let me pull that slide up here next. There we go. Verse 26b. Paul writes, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.
The Spirit Himself, not an angel, not a fellow saint, not your pastor, not your dearest friend, the Spirit Himself intercedes.
[30:41] The word translated intercedes, and I have this here on the slide. I'm not going to even try to pronounce it. But the main point here is that the Greek meaning behind the word intercedes, it carries the sense of coming alongside someone.

Right? The Holy Spirit comes alongside you. He's an advocate in the legal context for you. He represents you. Come alongside someone who is struggling, who takes up the cause, who pleads on your behalf.
It is the word, as I've mentioned here, in the legal context for an advocate who stands with the defendant before the judge. And the prefix hupo, H-Y-P-E-R, you see that in the Greek word.
It intensifies this coming alongside. The Spirit comes alongside us and pleads above and beyond what we could ever plead for ourself.
Isn't that sweet? The third person of the Trinity pleads beyond what we could plead. Goes above and beyond to come alongside us and intercede for us.
[31:49] Well, church, this had to be the most remarkable claims in the entire New Testament. Think about this. The Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who hovered over the waters of creation, Genesis 1, the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, we read that early in Romans 8, the same Spirit who has been poured into your heart as a guarantee of your inheritance, we read that in Romans 8, but also in Ephesians, that same Spirit right now the Holy Spirit is interceding for you.

Isn't that remarkable? The Holy Spirit right now is interceding for you. He is not waiting for you to pray correctly before He gets involved. He is not standing at a distance, arms crossed, disappointed in your silence, just nodding His head.
That's not the Holy Spirit. He enters into your weakness and He prays from within it. The Spirit Himself intercedes for us.
Now, let's spend a few moments looking at the phrase groanings too deep for words. In some of your Bible translations, you may have unutterable groanings or inexpressible groanings, right?
A groaning too deep for words. And let me first, probably it's easier for me to share with you what this does not mean. I do not believe and I'm confident in this, that Paul is not describing the sign gift of speaking in tongues, right?
[33:21] This is not what the Greeks suggest here. The Greek word used here literally means wordless or unable to be spoken. It describes something beyond verbalization entirely.

It's not a different kind of speech, but you can think of it as the absence of speech. I mean, if these words were spoken words of any kind, then they would not be too deep for words, right?
This is the Spirit talking to God the Father. And notice this, Paul says that the Spirit intercedes with groanings. And this is the same word that we looked at earlier.
He's the same word that He used for the creation groaning and we as believers were groaning in the prior verses. The Spirit enters our groaning and He transforms it.
He takes the inarticulate ache of our suffering and He presents it, He presents it perfectly, comprehensively, and according to the will of God, He presents that before the throne of the Father.
[34:40] Do you see that Scripture tells us that the Spirit does not observe our suffering from a safe distance? As I said, He enters it, He groans with us, and then He groans for us as our advocate.

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Well, do you realize that this is precisely what Jesus promised in the upper room on the night He was crucified? You don't have to turn here, but in John 14, verses 16 and 17, John writes, And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him.
You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. What we read in Romans 8 is the fulfillment of the promise that Jesus shared in the upper room.
The word translated helper or advocate, it might be familiar to you. It's the Greek, the translation is paraclete, right? So if you've studied this, it might be familiar to you.
A paraclete. Again, it's the same meaning that we saw earlier. One who comes alongside to advocate and to strengthen. So Jesus said here in this account in John 14, when I go, I will send you another paraclete.
[36:05] And now when Jesus said this, right, when I send you another paraclete, that word another, Jesus is communicating another of the same kind.

Now why is that important? When Jesus said, I will send you another helper, another helper. So here's the implication here. The Spirit, the Holy Spirit is not some lesser replacement for Jesus. Sometimes we think there's a hierarchy, right? We think God the Father, that's it. He's the highest. And then there's Jesus, died on the cross. He's there as well. But then there's a Holy Spirit, right? And hopefully our thoughts don't betray that sort of off thinking, that the Spirit is some lesser replacement. When Jesus said in the upper room, I will give you another helper, it's another helper of the same kind.
Right? This Spirit is going to be just like me. And we know the Father and the Spirit and the Son are one. Three persons, but one. And that's beautiful.
[37:12] The Spirit is not a lesser replacement for Jesus. He's the same kind of helper, the same quality of presence. And He has the same commitment to your welfare. And crucially, Jesus said the Spirit will be in you.

Don't pass that by too quickly. Not merely near you, not merely available to you, standing at the side, ready. No. No.
In you. He takes up residence in the believer, which means when the Spirit intercedes for you, He intercedes from inside you. He knows not just your circumstances, but the Spirit knows your innermost thoughts, your innermost heart.
And when the Spirit intercedes, He prays to God the Father with full knowledge of what you are. And full knowledge of what God intends for you as well.
Well, let's remind ourselves that this picture of God who enters our weakness, but it's not unique to the New Testament. Just briefly, just wanted to share with you that Isaiah foresaw this.
[38:24] Writing to the Lord's care for His people in the wilderness, Isaiah 63, verse 9 says, In all their affliction, He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them.

In His love and in His pity, He redeemed them. He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. In all of their affliction, He was afflicted.
The God of Scripture is not an unmoved mover, indifferent to the suffering of His creatures. He enters their affliction and suffering, and He bears it with them.
He bears it with us. So the groaning of the Spirit that we read in Romans 8 is the New Testament fullness of this ancient conviction that our God is not distant from our pain.
If you think that, that's wrong thinking, and Scripture bears that out. God is close, and the Spirit indwells us. So one more thought to consider before we move on to verse 27.
[39:27] The silence that you feel when you cannot pray is not evidence that God has gone quiet. It may be evidence that the Spirit has taken over, so be encouraged.

Be encouraged in those times when you think that God is silent. It could be, and it likely is, that the Holy Spirit that's inside of you, that He's busy interceding for you.
Well, verse 27, we'll move on. Verse 27 brings us to the first member of the Trinity, God the Father. And it does so in a way that might seem a bit alarming before it becomes comforting. This is twice it's happened in these references, right? A little bit alarming that the Apostle Paul says, ah, we don't know how to pray.
And so, let's look at this. Verse 27, And he who searches hearts, that's God the Father, 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.

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[40:35] He who searches hearts, again, that's an attribute of God. Psalm 139, perhaps the most intimate meditation on divine omniscience in all of Scripture, Psalm 139, verses 1 and 2 says, Oh Lord, you have searched me and you have known me.

You know when I sit down and when I rise up. You discern my thoughts from afar. It might feel alarming, but it shouldn't be surprising as a believer in Jesus Christ, right?
God knows your innermost thoughts. The Hebrew word for search, right? Oh Lord, you have searched me, right? It's the word for deep, thorough investigation.
So God does not merely observe the surface of our lives. He searches the depths of our lives. He knows not just what we say, but what we cannot say.
He knows the grief underneath the composed face on any given Sunday. He knows the longing underneath the silence, and He knows the faith that persists even when prayer has run dry.
[41:47] And that knowledge, far from being fearful or troubling, right, it should be the very basis of our confidence in Him. Because the Father who searches hearts also knows the mind of the Spirit.

The Father exactly understands what the Spirit is interceding for on our behalf. There is no miscommunication between God the Father and God the Spirit.
there is no lost signal. The Spirit prays, and the Father perfectly comprehends. And then the Father acts according to His own will and for our ultimate good.
I want to pause here for just a moment, and I want to make extra sure. I've shared a lot with you in these last five or ten minutes about the interaction between God the Father and God the Holy Spirit and God the Son.
And I want to make sure that we understand, if you take anything away from this morning, I want to just make sure we understand because this interaction, this Trinitarian action between the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, it's not only structural, remarkable, and I say that as an engineer, right?
[43:01] When I see the interactions, it's a remarkable structure. But seeing this and truly understanding what's going on will, I think, leave you in a tremendous jaw-dropping awe of the love of God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Paul has drawn us a picture of a divine conversation in which every person of the Trinity is engaged and on our behalf. All right, so let me slow down a little bit and make sure we're on the same page, so to speak.
The Spirit is in us, interceding for us with groanings too deep for words. That's Romans 8, 26. The Spirit's in us, interceding for us with groaning too deep for words, talking to the Father.
Meanwhile, the Father searches our hearts and knows the mind of the Spirit. Verse 27, right? God the Father searches your hearts. He knows your heart and He also knows the mind of the Spirit that's indwelling within us.
And as we learn from other passages in Scripture, and I haven't shared this one yet, but Hebrews 7, 25, God the Son, Jesus Christ, is also interceding for us at the right hand of the Father.
[44:23] And Hebrews 7, 25 says, Consequently, He, Jesus Christ, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

All right? So let me bring, so I, you know, I have to do a diagram. I have to have at least one diagram here. And for me, pictures help understand what's going on. So I put this diagram together to make sure that we understand these two simple verses, verses 26 and 27, and then also Hebrews 7, referring to God the Son, how this interaction is taking place.
Jesus, the Son, always lives to make intercession. All right? The ascended, glorified Christ, the same one who prayed for Peter, the same one who prayed in John 17, He is right now, at this moment, interceding for us before the Father.
And so this diagram sort of recaps what I've just sort of gone over in the past few minutes. Right? We have God the Father searching your hearts. God the Father knows the mind of the Spirit.
The Spirit, meanwhile, indwells us and He's interceding for us with wordless groanings. Meanwhile, the Son who is seated at the right hand of God, He always lives to intercede for us before the Father.
[45:45] In Hebrews 7, 25. And how is all this wrapped up? Well, God the Father acts according to His will for our ultimate good.

Isn't that sweet? Isn't that a sweet picture? Who are we? Who are we that the God of creation, the God of the universe and His Son and the Holy Spirit, who are we that we would have such attention

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and such love and such grace?
Isn't that amazing? It's amazing. So when you cannot pray, as we go back to some of the introductory thoughts, when you cannot pray, here is what's happening.
The Spirit's interceding, the Son is interceding, and the Father searches hearts and receives both. You are being prayed for by the Triune God. And folks, there is no more secure position to be in in the universe than here.
Well, one more phrase in verse 27 that deserves careful attention. And let me move on. These slides are all downloadable on our website. But let me move on to the last few phrases in verse 27.
[47:02] One more phrase here. The Spirit intercedes according to the will of God. And this is not a throwaway qualifier, okay? This is not just sort of a postscript, so to speak.

Right? It's actually the theological load-bearing wall of this entire passage that we're looking at. Because it answers the question that haunts many of us, what if I'm praying for the wrong thing? Like, Greg, you just told us, Paul just wrote, that we're incapable of knowing what to pray for and how. So, what happens if I pray for the wrong thing? Well, let me assure you that you are praying for the wrong thing.
Right? Scripture has convinced us of that. You are, we all are, some of the time. Right? We pray for outcomes that would not actually be good for us. We pray for removal of the very trials that are producing in us, as Paul says in Romans 5, steadfastness and character and hope.
Don't we pray for the easy path? We pray for the easy path when God instead has prepared for us a fruitful one. But the Spirit, here's some good news for you, the Holy Spirit does not make this error like we do.
[48:17] Right? The Spirit who knows the mind of God and the depths of our hearts simultaneously He intercedes with perfect alignment between what we truly need and what the Father wills.

The Spirit's intercession cannot miss. It cannot be misdirected. His intercession arrives at the throne of God perfectly calibrated for our good and for God's glory.
Can you repeat that with me? For our good and for God's glory. Amen to that. By the way, this is why Romans 8.28, the very next verse, if you would turn back to Romans 8 if you're not there, this is why the very next verse is so familiar to us, but it's not some flowery platitude.
Right? Let me read Romans 8.28. It's a logical conclusion to the things we're talking about. What's Romans 8.28 say? And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose.
All things work together for good, not because God is making the best of a bad situation, not because if He's trying to write your silly prayers that are missing the mark, right?
[49:36] All things work together for good because the Spirit is praying our prayers for us. He's praying them rightly, and the Father is answering them perfectly according to His sovereign good and unbreakable purpose.

Isn't that glorious? Doesn't that bring encouragement and peace and life? Well, application time, church, as our time draws to a close.
What do these truths mean for us today? This interaction, this intercession that's taking place between God the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit? What does that mean to us?
All right, well, I've got three or four applications here, and you may have more in your mind as you've been sitting here listening to this. So the first one, the first and probably the most important implication of this passage is that you are never beyond prayer.
Now, that's not because of your own eloquence or spiritual maturity that you have access to God, right? Your access to God has never rested on those things to begin with, right?
[50:46] So it's not flowery words, cute, tricky, wise words that you have, right? You are never beyond prayer because the Spirit of God Himself is your intercessor.

There is no valley so dark, no silence so complete, no grief so disorienting that the Spirit has not already entered it and taken up your cause before the Father.
If you have struggled to pray or if your prayer has felt dry or impossible or futile at times, I want you to hear this not as a rebuke but as an invitation.
This passage does not say try harder. It does not say that. You don't see that hopefully in there. It says that the Spirit helps in our weakness and the help arrives precisely where the weakest is deepest.

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Be encouraged that you are never beyond prayer. Secondly, silence before God is not the same thing as absence from God. Now, there is a kind of silence that is the silence of abandonment, right?
[51:59] The silence of one who has walked away. I think you understand that type of silence, right? Where it truly is, there's no one there. The silence of abandonment. But that's not this one.

There's a different, another kind of silence. The silence of a person sitting in the presence of someone that they love and trust, too overwhelmed to speak, but not alone.
You know that silence, the presence, right? Think of being in a hospital room. You've gone to visit a family member or a friend, right?
And they're asleep. And so you just sit there. There's silence in a hospital room, but there's not abandonment. There is presence there. You are there. I love the phrase ministry of presence.
This church does great at performing the ministry of presence, to come alongside someone, even when words are not necessary. Psalm 4610, be still and know that I am God.
[53:01] To be still before God is not to be absent from Him. It is, in fact, one of the most profound forms of trust, a quieting of the self before the one who, as we have read this morning, who already knows our hearts, who already hears the Spirit interceding within us, and who is already at work on our behalf.

Don't confuse silence before God as being absent from God. Thirdly, I must say this clearly, nothing of what I've preached this morning or that we've read in God's Word is a license for spiritual passivity.
The same Paul who writes the verses in Romans 8 that we've read, he also writes in 1 Thessalonians 5, pray without ceasing. Paul commands prayer.
He models prayer. He asks others to pray for him. We see that all throughout Scripture. Romans 15, Ephesians 6. So the prayer, I'm sorry, the Spirit's intercession does not replace our praying. Sorry, no shortcut. No loophole here this morning. That's not what Scripture is saying, and that's not what I'm saying. It does not replace our praying. It undergirds it.
[54:19] The Spirit's intercession undergirds our praying. It fills the gaps. It carries the weight when we cannot. But the invitation, the command to come before God with our words and our requests, it remains.

What this passage does is remove the anxiety that we must pray perfectly in order to be heard. Do any of you feel that way? If I don't pray just right, if I don't have the words just right or the thoughts just right, I'm afraid that I might not be heard.
This Scripture removes that anxiety and that worry. Our perfect, broken, halting, tearful, sometimes wordless prayers, they're not wasted.
They are received by a Father who already knows our hearts, already hears the Spirit groaning within us, and is already working all things together for our good.
You notice that I keep repeating a few key things this morning, right? I'm not done yet. Sometimes we have to hear something. What is it? You have to hear something eight times before it clicks? So I'm working myself up to eight.
[55:32] So bottom line, the Scripture this morning, this all means that we are to pray. We are to pray when you have words and you pray when you don't have words.

Pray eloquently if you want, or pray in silence. Pray with others, pray alone. Pray in the morning with fresh confidence, but also pray at 3 a.m. in the morning when you're holding a child who hasn't stopped crying for hours.
Or pray when you're sitting with a diagnosis that you haven't told anyone yet. Pray when you're lying awake with a grief that just doesn't have a name.
And then rest. Rest in knowing that the Spirit will take it from there. Pray. Our fourth application. A couple of concluding thoughts.
Do you know this teaching this morning in Romans 8, 26, and 27, do you know what all of this is about in its heart? If you think about it, it's the gospel applied to prayer.
[56:38] Now let me draw the parallel here. As we think about the gospel, this is the gospel, but applied to prayer. The gospel says that in Christ, God does for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Right? We could not atone for our sins. So what did God do? He sent His Son to atone in our place. We could not be righteous before Him, so God credited us with the righteousness of Christ.

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We could not close the distance between heaven and earth, so God came down to us. That's the gospel. Now, there's a parallel with prayer that we've been learning this morning, right?
In the vital ongoing conversation between the creature, us, and the Creator, the same principle holds. We cannot pray as we ought. But we do not know what we need.
We are weak. So God, in the person of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, prays for us. The Spirit closes the gap. The Spirit fills in the silence.
[57:40] He carries the words and thoughts that we could not even articulate. And the Spirit presents it perfectly, powerfully, and according to God's divine will.

He presents that before the throne of grace. Isn't that amazing? What we've learned about this morning is the gospel applied to prayer. Well, in conclusion, let me back up to where we began this morning when I asked you to imagine with me various someones, right?
That someone, that woman sitting in the chair with us this morning, the one who got out of bed this morning and came to church carrying something that was too heavy for words, the one who tried to pray and couldn't pray.
I want to speak to her right now this morning and I want to speak to every version of her in this room, male or female, old or young, whatever heavy burden that you're carrying today as you eagerly await the glory that is to be revealed to us at the coming of Jesus Christ.
Christ. You are not beyond prayer. Back to application number one. You are not beyond reach in your circumstance. You are not outside the care of God.
[58:55] At the risk of being redundant, please allow me to remind you one more time. Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit himself, the very Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead and now dwells within you, the Spirit is interceding for you, Christian, right now.

And Paul describes it with groanings that go deeper than any word that you could have prayed. And have confidence that the Father hears and that the Father knows and that the Father acts.
And also be encouraged that you don't have just one intercessor. We have two intercessors, right? We've talked about the Spirit who prays within you, but remember what we mentioned earlier, the Son, Jesus Christ, your great high priest, who at the Father's right hand ever lives to make intercession for you.
Church, we've got two intercessors, and they're the two persons of the Trinity, right? God the Son at the right hand of God interceding for you, and the Spirit who indwells you interceding for you.
So draw near with confidence. Again, not because you have the right words, not because you have the right posture, or the right feeling, or the right level of faith, but because you have the right intercessors.
[60:18] Right? Because the Son who suffered knows your weakness from the inside, because the Spirit who dwells in you, He knows your grief before you can even name it. Last point.

Romans chapter 8 ends, the end of the chapter, we didn't read this, but Romans chapter 8 ends with six faith-stimulating questions and one declaration.
If that sounds vaguely familiar, Professor Scott Bashur from the Virginia Beach Theological Seminary, when Jeff was out earlier this year, he preached on Romans 8, the last several verses of Romans 8.
And his sermon title was Six Faith-Stimulating Questions and a Declaration. So I'm borrowing from what Professor Bashur said. Paul's sixth and last question in verse 35 asks, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? And then Paul answers his own question in verses 37, 38, and 39. And he answers it in a bold declaration.
[61:22] And here's the answer. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing in all creation separates us from the love of Christ. Not tribulation. Not distress. Not persecution.

Not danger. Not even death. Nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. And may I add, not even our silence when we're in a situation where we don't know what to pray and don't know how to pray.
Our weakness doesn't separate us from the love of Christ. Nothing. And why is that? Because, likewise, I'll read verses 26 and 27 and I'll close.
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.

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And he who searches hearts, God the Father, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.
[62:33] Let's pray. So, Father, we thank You for Your Word this morning. We thank You, O Lord, for the encouragement that You give us through Your truth. Father, we pray that You would sanctify us with Your truth.

Your Word is truth. Thank You for these words that Paul penned under the inspiration of You, Lord, of the Holy Spirit, that You penned these words to the church, to Rome, and that we can benefit from these.
Father, may we be encouraged, Father, for my brothers and sisters, our guests who are here this morning, that they are facing a trial or a tribulation. If they are undergoing some sort of suffering and they are at the end of the rope, they just don't know how to pray, they don't know what to pray for. Father, may the words this morning may be an encouragement to them, Lord. I would pray for them in their situation, Father. Help them through their suffering, through their trial, through their tribulation, Lord, as You have promised in Your Scripture.
Thank You for our two intercessors. Thank You for God the Son, and thank You for God the Holy Spirit. Father, we are humbled and we are blessed beyond measure.
[63:42] Thank You, Father, for Your truth. Thank You for our time together in Your Word. In Christ's name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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