

The last time I saw my niece Brooke she was just learning to talk a summer ago. She would have moments where you almost understood what she was saying. Mom and dad usually figured it out because they were familiar with her attempts and knew her pointing and gestures. Still there were other times when I got nothing. Whatever was going through her little mind wasn't coming out in anything intelligible to me. Instead of asking three or four times for her to repeat it with little improvement it was best to just nod and say sure to whatever she was saying.

Christians aren't that different from little toddlers learning to speak. Christians have so much in their minds they want to get out but it just doesn't come out smoothly. There's belief and faith in Jesus. There's also the battle everyday with their sinful nature which remains. That pushes and pulls between what God wants and what the sinful self wants. That sinfulness which remains is worse than a weakness. It's total lack of anything good before God.

As the apostle Paul continues from last week he still is talking in the context of our sufferings of today and future glory. We learned from last week that we still have waiting to do but the future glory is a guarantee. Even so while we wait we still are weak. And when Paul addresses praying as the Word of Romans in the second lesson that too is effected by that weakness. So he says...

**The Holy Spirit prays with us
Helps us in our weakness
Keeps us in line with God's will**

Paul gets specific about how weakness effects our prayers. **"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for..."** That could be as simple as laying down at night and thinking "I should pray." But as you try to consolidate your thoughts to say just the right words not wanting to sound selfish before you know it you haven't prayed at all but you have fallen asleep. It's a real weakness because we know we should pray. But would it be right if I haven't prayed in a while? Is praying for a million dollars okay? What if the million is for a fancy boat? What if it's for putting your kids through college? Is there a difference? Would it be alright if you prayed for relief from anxiety on the first day of school? Is it alright to bother God with something so small? But shouldn't I not be worrying, so then I'm praying for relief from some sin I'm committing against God. What's the right prayer when a family member is stricken with cancer on the hospital bed? Get better? Go home to heaven? Live longer even with the cancer just so we can be with them longer? Any and all might sound right at different times. But what's right before God? Because of our sinfulness we don't know.

With sin caused weakness we can't even pray right. That might just be enough to cause us to give up praying. Listen to what Paul says happens when we don't know what to pray for. **"We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."** God the Father sends God the Holy Spirit to intercede for us. Not some angel. Not a prophet. Not another human being. God sends God personally. Where have we heard of God sending God personally to get a job done before? Why, Jesus of course was true God sent by true God to this earth to get the job of saving us done. When God the Holy Spirit works in us he isn't taking over so we get a pass. The Holy Spirit exists inside the Christian working and praying with us, helping in our weakness.

In the Bible story of Martha and Mary you might remember Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus her Savior listening to him speak the gospel message. Her sister Martha was inside the kitchen prepping the meal. At one point Martha gets so frustrated her sister isn't helping that she says to Jesus **"Lord, tell her to help me!"** Martha isn't asking Jesus to get Mary to do all the work. Just help. Hold up her end. Give her effort. Even in your weakness you aren't praying alone. You have help, someone holding up the other end giving effort. When you pray know with full assurance that the Holy Spirit is helping you out. He's holding up the other end of your prayer. You pray and he fills in where you are weak. He's faithful and always helps when you pray.

We continue to pray even through the weakness. It is right to pray and not use our weakness as an excuse. We continue to pray because that unleashes the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit grows our confidence through the Word of God and strengthens us in our faith for our life ahead by pointing us back to Christ Jesus. We can continue to pray because we have the divine invitation from God to pray. We can make use of it often for this very reason.

When you groan people probably ask what it means. Why are you groaning? What are you groaning about? They know something is probably bad or frustrating, but they need details to know exactly. Not so with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not groan in frustration. In helping the Christian with their prayers the Holy Spirit groans in a way we can't fully explain. We don't have to worry that we can't understand. We do know that the Holy Spirit is God and God the Father and the Holy Spirit are one God. We know they understand each other perfectly. When the Holy Spirit helps us he's keeping us in line with God's will.

It would be safe to say that the Holy Spirit, God the Father, and Christ Jesus are all in perfect alignment. They know what the others are thinking. Such is the mystery of three persons in one God. So when the Holy Spirit joins the prayers of the saints then God the Father knows exactly what the Holy Spirit is getting at. **"And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit..."** There is nothing the Holy Spirit could groan or utter that God the Father wouldn't already know about. With the Holy Spirit aiding Christians in their prayers, God is ready to listen to those prayers. In the Holy Spirit each prayer is perfectly in line with God's will.

In our sinfulness we are anything but in line with God's will. Our sins carry us far outside God's will. We can't understand what God understands. Our sins pull us farther and farther from what God wants. Only in Christ are we pulled back. We are forgiven of our sins in Christ. We are called saints only through Christ. **"The Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."** Only for saints does the Holy Spirit intercede. Only saints are kept in line with God's will through this divine intervention. God's will is that we are reminded of Jesus every day. God's will is that in the middle of suffering and waiting we still remember the heavenly glory that is ours. This is where the Holy Spirit keeps us every day.

So we continue to pray. Since we have been made saints of God through Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit works with us as saints and intercedes for us before the Father we continue to pray. The Holy Spirit knows exactly what we need to keep in line with God's will. He joins himself to our prayers and thus makes them perfect prayers. They will always be perfect prayers in the Holy Spirit. Prayers that have one intention and one focus. Whatever the thoughts or content of our prayers the Holy Spirit keeps those in line with God's will which is always to get this saint through the suffering to the glory. The one who searches our hearts love us. He is our God, the one who sent the Savior.

When a toddler is trying to talk it's good to have an interpreter parent or grandparent close by to help understand what they're saying. Otherwise communication would be impossible. For the sinner without Jesus communication with God is impossible. But for the Christian made a saint in Christ talking with God in prayer is encouraged and helped by the Holy Spirit. He prays with us helping us past our weakness. And he keeps us perfectly in line with God's will as we pray so that everything focuses us on our Savior and the future we have with him. For this we can be thankful the Holy Spirit prays with us.