

# Pray, because the Spirit helps us!

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[ 0 : 00 ] Hompak, if you don't know me, I'm Pastor Brian, and a warm welcome to those of you visiting this morning. We're currently in the middle of a series on prayer, as Elder Hompak said, and we've been thinking over the last two weeks about how God the Father and God the Son have been involved, or are involved, in our prayers.

And this morning we're going to consider the role of the Holy Spirit. So make sure your Bibles are open in front of you to Romans chapter 8, and also there's a sermon outline as well that you can use, that's found in your bulletin.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you that in Christ we have access to you by the Holy Spirit. And we ask that you encourage our hearts today, and remind us that you are at work conforming us to the image of your Son, and that those you justify, you will also glorify.

All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now being tongue-tied is no fun. When I was 10 or 11, my class had this assignment, where we were supposed to memorize this little speech and then present it in class.

[ 1 : 15 ] Unfortunately for me, I was chosen to be the very first person to present. So there I was, standing in front of all my classmates, and I couldn't get beyond the first sentence.

I was trembling and beginning to feel more and more light-headed. Finally I said, Chikgu, kepala pening lah. I'm going to faint.

And so I went back down, feeling humiliated. Probably the worst part was when the teacher asked me later, you really didn't feel like fainting, right?

You were just trying to get out because you didn't prepare. Now my guess is that many of us know what it's like to be tongue-tied. Your heart is beating loudly, your voice just stops, and you find that you just don't have any words.

It happens maybe when you're in illustrious company, and you're feeling out of your depth. At Oxford, where I went to university, I had to go for what is called a tutorial every week during term time.

[ 2 : 25 ] So that's when it's just you and your tutor, or maybe you and another student and your tutor, and you're meeting for an hour to have an intellectual discussion about whatever it is you're studying or writing about, whether that's post-colonial theory or the legal philosophy of Ronald Dworkin's or behavioral economics, something like that.

So you can just imagine how nerve-wracking that is when it's just you, some no-name average 19-year-old, and then this professor, often a world-class expert in his field.

It wasn't uncommon to be tongue-tied. Or perhaps you're tongue-tied when you're at a social event, and everyone is a stranger.

No thanks to your friend who pulled out at the last minute when she promised to accompany you. And so there you are, you're standing in the corner, you're holding your drink, when somebody says hello.

So you open your mouth, but you find that words aren't coming out, even though the voice inside your head is screaming, okay, play it cool, just find something light and easy to talk about, right?

[ 3 : 39 ] Not so hard. And you just wish, at that very moment, someone will come and untie your tongue and make your conversation go smooth as silk.

While we can be like that with the Lord, over the last couple of weeks, we've been reminded of some wonderful things about God.

We've seen how much the Father loves us, and we've seen how perfectly the Son connects us. But we find that making the call to God is still hard.

When we pray, our mind goes blank, or it's filled with, um, and us. We find ourselves stopping mid-sentence and realizing that we've forgotten what we're praying for. We get tongue-tied. We feel a bit shy and nervous and out of our depth around the Almighty. We kind of know that God is our Father, and yet He still feels like a stranger.

[ 4 : 47 ] We just don't know what to say. So awkward silences become the order of the day. And that's, well, awkward.

It's no fun. Praying becomes daunting. Well, this morning, God is going to offer some relief for this state of affairs.

You probably noticed that the verses in our passage this morning, which focus in particular on prayer, are verses 26 and 27. And indeed, that's going to be the climax of our message today. And you will notice that the Holy Spirit gets prominent airtime in those verses. But, to understand what the Holy Spirit is up to, and to feel the full force of those verses, we're going to need to get a sense of the larger context.

Because so often, those verses, looked at in isolation, are misunderstood. And often the result is that Christians get confused, or worse, feel inadequate, because they've been told something about the relationship between prayer and the Holy Spirit that is just not true.

[ 6 : 06 ] And that's really sad. Because in reality, the Holy Spirit is wonderfully the biggest help we can have when it comes to praying.

You know how there are some people on whom you can, whom you know you can just rely on for help? So I'm one of those guys who's not very interested at all in cars, although I watch F1.

And then I know nothing about cars. So if something goes wrong with my car, I feel pretty useless. But if my friend Alvin was to come along at that time, I'll breathe a huge sigh of relief.

Because he knows all about cars. And I know he will be a big help. And it's a bit like that with the Holy Spirit. When he's present, help is available.

So I don't want you to feel sad or confused or inadequate this morning. But I want you to feel enlightened and encouraged and empowered.

[ 7 : 13 ] My hope is that when you understand what Romans 8, verse 26 and 27 really says about the Holy Spirit and prayer by the end of this morning, well, you'll be rejoicing in the Lord and ready to pray.

You'll be ready to come for that prayer morning next Saturday. So you can pray even now that I will do my best this morning and that as we hear God's word, the Spirit will illuminate our hearts and minds.

And what I want you to do is just to follow along with me as I work through the logic of this passage from verse 14 until we get to verses 26 and 27.

And hopefully the sermon outline will help you in that as well. So here's the first thing I want us to see from verses 14 to 16. Romans 8 is frequently cited as one of the mountaintops of scripture.

Now it certainly is a very rich chapter and hopefully you will get to revisit it in the future. And it's full of the Holy Spirit. In the first 13 verses in the NIV, I counted that he gets mentioned 12 times.

[ 8 : 37 ] And here in verse 14 he gets mentioned again. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

Now in many Christian circles we often use the language of being led by the Spirit to refer to guidance. the Spirit led me to pray for her this morning we might say.

But that's not what *po* means here. Verse 14 follows straight on from verse 13. For if you live according to the flesh you will die.

But if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body you will live. For, notice that that's a linking word which means because, for, those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

So basically this is what *po* means. In verses 1 to 13 the focus is all on the Spirit who gives life. Just look at verse 2 for example earlier on.

[ 9 : 46 ] Because through Jesus Christ the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. So verses 1 to 13 is all about this Spirit who gives life.

And all Christians have this Holy Spirit. That's the point of verses 9 and 10 especially. And so as people who have this Spirit of life we naturally want to fight sin which leads to death.

And that's verses 12 to 13. we want to keep battling sin putting away sin or to put it another way we want to live for God.

And so verse 14 when we have this desire to live for God when we are led by the Spirit so to speak we know we are children of God.

we know the Holy Spirit Himself is in us and with us. He's not just the Spirit of life but the Spirit of adoption.

[10:54] And that's great news. You know what it's like don't you when you have a toxic and negative boss? He has influence over you in a bad way.

He monopolizes your time steals your energy decreases your motivation. In one sense such bosses disempower you and make you a slave to their punishing and harsh demands.

So you're resentful of them and you try not to have anything to do with them. But that's not what happens when you come under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 15 The Spirit you receive does not make you slaves so that you live in fear again. When you come under his influence you're not worried that you're going to be dominated in an unhealthy way. You're no longer fearful of any condemnation and contempt. Rather verse 15 again The Spirit you receive brought about your adoption to sonship and by him we cry Abba Father.

[12:07] You see if you're trusting in Jesus and his death and resurrection to pay for your sins you're not just pardoned wonderful as that is.

By the Holy Spirit you are adopted as sons and daughters. Think about that for a moment. Earlier this year the young di-Pertuan Agong granted a pardon to Anwar Ibrahim and that's great news for Anwar but just because he's pardoned doesn't automatically give him a relationship with the Agong. He doesn't just walk out of prison into the istana pull up a chair with the Agong at the dining table and say so Abang what's for dinner tonight?

How about that special nasi kerabu from Kota Baru? But that's what we can do. We're not just pardoned we are adopted.

As one commentary says the term adoption is filled with the ideas of love grace compassion and intimate relationship.

[13:23] It is the action by which a husband and wife decide to take a boy or girl who is not their physical offspring into their family as their own child.

When that action is taken by the proper legal means the adopted child attains all the rights and privileges of a member of the family.

And the Holy Spirit's job is to personally assure us that that's our present status. Verse 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Just as witnesses to a Roman adoption had the responsibility of testifying to its validity, so the Holy Spirit himself is constantly present to provide inner testimony to our divine adoption.

He confirms our status is legitimate. It's really true. And if the son connects us to the father, then the spirit assures us to make use of that connection as much as possible.

[14:45] We are not strangers to God. We've been made family. God's God's God's God's God's God's Holy Spirit by definition, this is not just the special experience of some, but the common experience of all.

This morning, are you someone who is struggling with assurance? are you a Christian who's not sure if God loves you? Well then, my question to you is, are you praying?

Because it is actually when we pray that the spirit assures us that we are God's children, for we are approaching God as father.

We are applying the gospel. people. When we pray regularly, we are acting as if we really believe that through Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit, we are going to God not just as creator, although he is that, not just as ruler, although he is that, but as Abba father.

And so we are reinforcing gospel truths to ourselves. And that will have a hugely positive impact on your assurance.

[16:21] So already the spirit is a help in this regard. And so that's the first step in this chain of logic.

The spirit helps assure us we are really God's children. Now here's the next step. if we are children, then we are heirs.

If children, then heirs. And that's the headline of verses 17 to 25. Just look at verses 17. Verse 17.

Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.

If indeed we share in his sufferings, in order that we may also share in his glory. So as children, we are heirs to all of God's promises.

The final resurrection of the body, where at the end of time, we'll get new bodies with no tumors, no cancerous cells, no permanent scars.

[ 17 : 30 ] The guarantee that the eternal love of God rests on us forever. The fact that we will rule the earth together with Christ. We are heirs to these promises.

But to say we are heirs is to look ahead in time. An heir apparent is someone who inherits something in the future, whether that's a title or an office or an estate, and whose status is secure. And so as heirs, we will share in Christ's glory. That's our future. It's secure. But that's not the present.

An heir, a parent, doesn't get everything now. So what is our present experience? Well, verse 17 tells us as well. It's sharing in Christ's sufferings.

We follow the same road as Jesus. Suffering first, and then glory. glory. And Paul tells us what suffering first, and then glory, looks like.

[ 18 : 48 ] Firstly, creation groans. That's verses 18 to 22 in a nutshell. Let me just read verse 22.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Paul is comparing what's happening in this world now to childbirth.

The old age is passing away and the new age is being born. And so just like new parents, we're eagerly waiting in the world for something that is going to transform our lives.

But in the meantime, there's going to be plenty of discomfort and pain and even agony. After all thanks to sin, verse 20, that the creation, that is the entire world, is subjected to frustration.

It labours under the curse of sin. The world is not as it was intended to be. In the news this week, I read about climate change in Europe, the earthquake in Lombok, monsoon floods in Myanmar.

[ 20 : 07 ] The world is not as it was intended to be. When we finally come into our inheritance in the new creation, verses 19 and 21 says that will all be gone.

But for now, this is our present experience. Cars break down the moment you want to go on holiday. The water supply cuts off just when your kids come back from playing football.

The laptop fails when you're about to do a presentation at school or at work. Creation groans in hope, not in despair, but it still grows.

groans. Secondly, we groan. That's verses 22 to 25 in a nutshell.

Look at verse 23. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

[ 21 : 25 ] Now, that's a bit weird. I thought we just said that we're definitely adopted as sons and daughters. So, why are we waiting here for our adoption?

Well, here's a classic example of what we call the already not yet tension that we find all over the New Testament. So, take another example for a moment.

Let me ask you, do you have eternal life when you trusted in Jesus? Well, yes, you do. The moment we said in our hearts, I believe we have eternal life.

And yet, on another level, we do not yet have it because we are still going to die in this life. Eternal life remains in the future when we are given new bodies after we are resurrected.

And so that's an example of the already not yet tension. And so similarly, are we adopted as God's children?

[ 22 : 33 ] Yes, we are already welcome into his family. But we are not yet God's children the way we one day will fully be, possessing the full inheritance, seeing God, face to face.

That's why we wait eagerly. We're groaning in anticipation. If we hope, verse 25, for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

The adoption papers have been signed, but we're waiting to go to our new home. sorry, I'm a bit thirsty today.

But just like creation, we groan because there's still frustration and tears in the meantime. We groan because we still sin in this life.

Just this week, I can already see the times where I was more selfish when I should have been helping my wife, when I was impatient when I should have spoken more gently, when I put off things because I was lazy.

[ 23 : 55 ] We know fully well our weaknesses, our inconsistencies, the way we can passionately care about the plight of refugees and victims of sex trafficking while being mean or indifferent to our own family members.

we're inconsistent. And so living in this world is hard because creation groans and we groan.

So what then? How can we cope with our present experience? How can we live in this age in the meantime when sin and its consequences are still with us?

Well, finally we get to verses 26 and 27. So follow the logic so far. The Holy Spirit assures us we are God's children.

If we are God's children, we are heirs. we will share in Christ's glory. But that's in the future. For now, we share in suffering as creation groans and we groan.

[ 25 : 12 ] So how can we as God's children cope? Well, in verses 22 to 25, Paul says, you cope when you realize that future glory is certain.

Your hope is secure. And now, verse 26, in the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

Just as you cope by knowing about your future certain glory, you also cope by knowing that in your weakness, the Holy Spirit is here to help.

And as we'll see in a moment, He helps us by praying. Now, that's a thought.

But first, notice that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness, not remove our weakness. He does not transform us into strong men and women.

[ 26 : 19 ] Instead, He helps us in our time of need. It could just be physical weakness. When you're exhausted, when you can't pray, the Holy Spirit is there to meet us in our time of need.

When you're struggling with unbelief, unable to trust that God will come true, the Holy Spirit is there to meet us in our time of need. When you're weakened by the remnants of sin, feeling guilty, and unable to come to God with confidence, the Holy Spirit is there to meet us in our time of need.

When you're feeling emotionally empty, or just struggling with a critical spirit towards others, such that you just want to grumble and grumble, not ask God, the Holy Spirit is there to meet us in our time of need.

That's the encouragement of verse 26. When you have no energy, no wisdom, no knowledge, no idea of what to pray, how to pray, the Spirit helps us in our time of weakness.

He loves dependent people. So by all means, pray to God to help you to pray. Say, God, God, I can't pray.

[ 27 : 46 ] I can't do anything at all. I have no words to get out. Please, please help me pray. And often, our biggest struggle is simply that we do not know what we ought to pray for.

Verse 26 gets it exactly right. Life is complicated, isn't it? And sometimes we are not even sure what it is that we need, or what the friend or family we are praying for needs.

When a loved one is terminally ill, what should we pray for? Should we pray for healing? Should we pray for God to prepare him and us for his passage home?

Should we pray for perseverance during this trying time? All three? Something else entirely? Life is complicated. When we're going through a tough time financially, should we pray to God just to provide just that one thing?

Or should we pray to live more simply within the resources that we have? Both? Something else again? Life is complicated.

[ 29 : 06 ] complicated. When we reach a crossroads and we need to make some major decisions, what should we pray for? Clarity?

A willingness to accept whichever path God has in store? Life is complicated. Just this week, a friend of mine from Bible College shared about his colleague in Albania where they're missionaries, whose six-year-old daughter pass away suddenly.

What to pray? I have another friend who shared about a girl that she's currently trying to help, who has a volatile relationship with her father and in fact has run away from home and was stranded in Sabah.

What to pray? Creation groans and we groan and that often fills our lives with plenty of grey areas and we don't even know where to begin.

We become tongue-tied in prayer. Well, here's the precious truth of verse 26.

[ 30 : 20 ] The Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. Last week, we saw that we had an intercessor, God the Son, Jesus.

He's interceding for us in the heavens. And this week, we discover we have another intercessor, God the Holy Spirit.

Did you know that if you are Christian, you have two intercessors, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit? One in heaven, one here on earth with you.

that just blows my mind. Your words may be wrong. You might not even be able to find any good words.

Your tongue tied. But the Holy Spirit himself prays for us through wordless groans. Now, some interpreters have thought that those groanings refer to tongues.

[ 31 : 26 ] But that cannot be for a couple of reasons.

It's universal to all Christians here. Secondly, Paul is speaking of the Spirit's intercession for us, not his inspirational prayer, whether in tongues or not, by us.

tongues. And so this isn't about tongues. It's about something better. The Holy Spirit is praying for you and presenting your case in a way that's better than you and I could ever do.

To adapt something C.S. Lewis once said, God in you is speaking on behalf of you to God. And the best thing is, he can translate our prayers.

Look at what happens when the Holy Spirit takes our feeble and perhaps even mistaken prayers to God. Verse 27, And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

[ 32 : 57 ] It's a bit like this. When I was overseas, especially, one of the things I enjoyed doing was helping international students whose English wasn't very good. And so I would look at their assignments, proofread them, and help them polish it and turn it into something understandable.

And that's what the Holy Spirit does. He knows our prayers are often offered in weakness and ignorance. He knows well our frustrations with ourselves because we have trouble praying and expressing our hearts.

But he makes sure that our tongue-tied, confused prayers are polished, and turn into something in accordance with his will.

He expresses our right longings to God better than we can. Sometimes at our Wednesday night prayer meetings, I know I struggle to pray.

What to pray for those people in a country I've never heard, who are under pressure in ways I cannot imagine? Where to start in praying for our church for the opening of blind eyes and deaf ears and revival of the heart.

[ 34 : 14 ] But God does. And he will always answer prayer in ways that are best for us so that we will become more and more like Jesus, as verse 29, which is just beyond our passage today, puts it.

And so friends, I want you to take away a few things from today. Firstly, all Christian prayer is by the Spirit.

There's no such thing as some Christians who can pray in the Spirit and others who can't. Because it is the Spirit who assures that we are God's children and brings our requests to the Father.

He perfectly translates what might sound like baby talk to others. And we don't pray when we feel strong. Or sometimes we get the impression that people who say that they pray in the Spirit are the strong ones because they sound impressive.

They're the ones who seem to have a direct hotline to God. But as I've said, all Christians by definition pray by the Spirit because all Christians have the Holy Spirit.

[ 35 : 28 ] And we pray when we are weak. We don't need to wait till we feel super spiritual. We pray when we are frightened and fragile.

We don't have to feel discouraged when we get tongue tied, when we don't have the words, when we're not sure what to pray for. Because the reality is you have two persons of the Trinity praying for you right at this moment.

In our weakness, we don't pray enough, but they never stop interceding. And that gives us amazing freedom to just speak to God while we live in a world of present suffering.

So pray. Pray because the Father loves us. We are his children. Pray because the Son connects us.

We can come with confidence. And pray because the Spirit helps us. In our weakness, he still works through our prayers.

[ 36 : 44 ] Pray because actually the gospel becomes more real to you as you pray. You relate to God as Father. You rely on the grace and mediation of Christ.

You confess your sin and weakness. You ask for help. And you do so because the Spirit lives in you. These are all realities that flow out from the truth of the gospel.

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, all working together to draw you near to him. So church, let's pray.

I'll just give us ten seconds or so just to let what we've heard sing in and then I'll lead us in prayer. heavenly Father, we know that the creation is currently subjected to frustration.

[ 38 : 08 ] We know that it is in bondage to decay, to the curse of sin. but Father, we wait in hope because we know one day the creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay when the children of God are finally revealed and when we can know you face to face in our new creation.

Thank you that it is the hope that we have. But Father, please help us to wait for this hope patiently that in this present age as we share in Christ's sufferings.

Lord, you know that we are weak. We often do not know what we ought to pray for. We get tongue-tied. We find ourselves stumbling through.

But thank you so much for the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us through wordless groans. Thank you that he searches our hearts, that he sanctifies us, and that he is able to bring our prayers in line with your will.

And so Father, please would you help us to hold on to that hope. And will you continue to conform us to the image of your Son. All this we pray in Jesus' name.

[ 39 : 30 ] Amen. Amen.