

Help with Prayer

 **in groans and sighs (v.26)**

 **searching for answers (v.27)**

In the name of the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – dear holy ones of God:

In today's great "Victory Psalm 18 of David," two verses stand out: ***"It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights."*** (18:32f NIV84) High atop those landfills we heard about last Sunday where we bury our sins in Baptism, high above the valleys of darkness and despair, God gives us a new life with Him. Last week's sermon on Romans 6:1-11, took us high into this new life with God. But Paul plunges into a valley the next chapter, where the Holy Spirit inspired him to share his frustrations at being a Christian. The classic Romans 7:19, from the King James Version says, ***"For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do,"*** or more literally, ***"...that I keep on doing."*** Then Paul cries out in the agony of His soul, ***"Oh, wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*** (Romans 7:24f) See? Triumph in Christ!

This ***"rescue"*** is where we live the high life, that new life in Christ which is filled with prayer and blessing. But the closer you come to God, the more you realize your unworthiness, the more helpless you feel to say and do what pleases God. Not out of guilt, but out of thankfulness you want to pray more fervently, but you feel more than ever how much we all need **Help with Prayer**. Today, take heart because God wants to give us some of the greatest encouragement in the Bible about **Prayer** even...

 **in groans and sighs (v.26)**

In the Bible the Holy Spirit teaches us to pray. Strange as it may seem, sometimes true prayer comes not in words, but only **in groans and sighs**. I've encouraged you to mark in your Bible this 8th Chapter of Romans as the "Great Victory Chapter." You want to be able to go right here when you're "all out of aces," as gamblers like to say. When you're "between a rock and hard place," or "between the devil and the deep blue sea," you need to know where there's a Refuge to which you can run. You need to know why God the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to start this chapter with this absolute assurance: ***"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*** (Romans 8:1 NIV84) When your guilt is gone, you can pray with confidence as God commands and trust His promise to answer.

Remember those pictures a few months ago of the tsunami in Japan? Remember the houses and cars washed away like toothpicks, or some poor soul totally defenseless? By nature we cannot stand before the wrath of God. Not water, but fire is what God has promised for the Last Day. But God has rushed to rescue all people from the tidal wave of terror. It's like the Coast Guard air lifting us to high ground before the destruction comes. Seven chapters of Romans have told how God saved every soul and how faith accepts this gracious deliverance to live in thanks and praise for His kindness and love.

Yet there are times when we feel totally helpless. You ate well, stayed in shape, went to church, paid your taxes, took care of your family, loved God and your neighbor – then came cancer. You know why Job kept asking, "Why?" You know God did not answer Job, just as God the Father did not answer Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. God's own Son was sweating great drops of blood, praying for some other way to save us, but – silence! In that silence your tears can flow freely until you're past crying, and no words will come. There's nothing left but **groans and sighs**. Nothing except this: ***"The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."*** God's own Son shed His blood for all. When you're convinced "all" means you, you don't even need words to pray.

A California couple suffered tragedy. The husband rushed to one hospital only to discover his daughter had died. In another hospital his second daughter passed. At the hospital where his wife was recovering, their only son was brought on life support for them to say, “Good-bye.” A blind intersection, a semi-truck slammed into their van – who can describe the grief? Where can you find the words? Likewise in a coma or the waning months of Alzheimer’s when you can’t remember the beginning of a thought to finish it. In deep valleys filled with grief the dear Holy Spirit translates our unspoken prayers into **groans and sighs** pleasing to our Father in heaven. The Holy Spirit who adopted us into God’s family through Baptism (Romans 8:15f; Matthew 28:19), understands like a mother’s heart. For that couple who lost three, our great Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier gave triplets in their place. Heaven brings a sweeter rest. Here below we have this: *“The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”*

searching for answers (v.27)

So much stands against our prayers. If despair doesn’t bring us down, personal pride can throw up road blocks. God has to bring us to the point where we throw up our hands and say, “I just don’t know! I don’t have the answers for this one!” How can I know what to ask when I don’t know the problem?

Here’s the Holy Spirit’s answer: *“And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”* We can praise God for modern medicine, good psychology, helpful counseling and the wise use of drugs. But these can only help the body and the mind as God allows. Where they cannot go is deeper, down into the spirit and the soul where only God can see. This is the realm of the God the Holy Spirit. When I hear Jesus knocking at the door of my heart, I’m glad to let Him in with the dear Holy Spirit. By faith I can hold up to God whatever trouble, fear or anxiety is gumming up my heart and life. I don’t have to know what to call it. God knows. Along with Jesus (v.34) the Holy Spirit is glad to go to bat for us with God. He makes us holy by faith in Jesus as our Savior. *“The Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance...” – totally in line with – “...God’s will.”*

When we’re **searching for answers**, it’s good to know how eager God is to help. God searches out our deepest desires even beyond our needs to give out of the goodness of His heart. He promised through David in Psalm 37: *“Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires,”* not just the needs, but *“the desires of your heart.”* (v.4 NIV84) Far beyond the bare essentials, here’s how this works.

Years ago our four kids were sitting two on either side of the dinner table. I asked, “What do you guys want for Christmas?” And they all started crying! “What’s wrong?” I asked. “We want a dog so bad and you won’t let us have one and Mom wants one too?” I looked at my better half, and Cindy was nodding. “You too?” I asked. “I thought we agreed we would not have a dog in the city.” “That was your agreement,” she said. “I’ve always wanted a dog.” Small deal? Not to my dear family!

That night during our prayers I told my kids, “You ask our heavenly Father about this because your earthly father can’t see how it will work.” They must have been praying because I started to see answers. A dog could live in my heated shop space off the family room – inside, but not really in the house. The little woods by the garage could help keep our lawn clean. Then a fellow pastor out of the blue said, “Hey, Mark, your kids are at the age they could use a puppy.” “Have you been talking to my wife!” “No, but my two boys breed golden retrievers that make great family pets. They’re trying to earn enough to study to become pastors.” O God, you are too great. And sometimes really funny. For ten years Hunter was a great blessing as my son learned to care for and discipline his own responsibility.

We don’t always know what to ask. But **searching for answers**, it’s good to say to God, “You do what you think is best!” because our ideas tend to be too small. Knowing that God gave His Son into death to be the Savior of all, trusting that God raised Jesus from the dead, we can pray with full confidence that God will hear and answer in ways beyond what we can ask or imagine. Even **in groans and sighs** God is good. Valleys or heights, here is **Help with Prayer** – in Jesus’ precious Name. Amen.