

The Bible Speaks

by Jeffrey Frantz

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

(Romans 8:26-27)

Prayer and spiritual growth. These verses from Romans 8 capture some of the best of the Bible on the essence of prayer. They remind us of the vulnerable element in prayer, while at the same time taking us deeper.

When you pray, do you ever feel challenged about *connecting* with God? Do you wonder on what level you are connecting?

For me, prayer is a very human experience. It is utterly vulnerable activity. I've always been struck by the Apostle Paul's words in verse 26 above: *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought.*

With prayer, there is always the question of *distance* from God. How to bridge the distance, how to find the *right* words?? Always, these challenges are before us. When we view God as utterly awesome, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and on and on, we're left with the sense that our words, no matter how eloquent and heart-felt, are to some extent always inadequate.

How can we put the deepest murmurings of our hearts to words? How do we bring the emptiness of the spirit, the lingering ache of the soul, to speech? It's like: no matter how hard we try, our efforts fall short.

To be sure, we don't *know how to pray as we ought* because there is always something lacking. However, the fact that there is something *lacking* is why we engage in prayer to begin with.

A time to be human. I gave up worrying, a long time ago, about finding the perfect words for prayer. There aren't any. But isn't what's important the sincerity of the spirit and the intent of the heart? Whatever words we use, can't God sort it all out?

Our words simply do the best they can to make the connection—to unpack our burdens, reveal the impulses of our spirit, create a connection to the Almighty.

Clearly, Paul understands this when he notes how *the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words*. However, what is unique here is the actual function of the Spirit (which is God's presence in the world). The Spirit takes us to another level. It intercedes on our behalf consistent with the *will* of God.

If we think about it, that's good news indeed! It's also a reminder that, at the end of the day, we don't always know our deepest needs, to say nothing of the depths of our potential for spiritual growth. But the Spirit does.

However, having said that, how can we know the uncoverings of the Spirit apart from an active, eager prayer life?

Prayer invites us into a world of spiritual growth unimagined by us at the outset. Still, it takes effort; and it asks something of us—namely, that we surrender (yield and let go) to the Spirit in trust and in hope.

In the small group experiences that our church is offering (sign ups are in Fellowship Hall, after worship), beginning the second week of September, we will have the opportunity to expand our prayer life, both through our study of Scripture and our group-focused moments of meditation and prayer.

Please feel invited to *sign up* soon to become a part of this spiritual growth experience!