



# THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

## Light of the Valley Lutheran Church

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### The Spirit Intercedes for Us

Romans 8:26-27 (NIV84)

<sup>26</sup> In the same way, 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. <sup>27</sup> 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.

"What's your perfect Sunday?" That's one of those icebreaker kind of questions you ask people to get a little bit of insight into who they are, what they like to do, their hobbies, their pastimes, what they value and consider to be important. And it's kind of a catchy question.

What probably isn't all that catchy would be an icebreaker question such as, "What's your perfect prayer?" What do you mean perfect prayer? I don't sit around all day and daydream the perfect content of what I want to pray about. I pray because grandma isn't doing so well. I pray for the friend who is grieving the loss of a loved one. I pray for that promotion. I pray to make ends meet. I pray for suffering to stop. I pray that I don't make a fool out of myself.

When we think of our act of praying, we typically go right to the requests. We need help, and so we are asking for it. Yes, we pray for other things as well. We give thanks to the Lord. We pray for people to know the forgiveness that Christ offers. We pray that our faith and the faith of others in Christ as their Savior would be strengthened. We pray that unbelievers would become believers. But what would constitute a perfect prayer?

I suppose a natural place to look for a perfect prayer would be to go to Scripture. Surely the Bible has perfect prayers recorded there. I mean, it is God's Word. Can you get any better source material? But the Bible is so big. To find one perfect prayer in this big, large book, you're going to have to sift through a lot of pages.

In thinking about looking for those examples, I started by searching the books of the Bible that Paul wrote, the same person who wrote these words here in Romans chapter 8. As I read various sections of Paul's letters such as 1&2 Corinthians, 1&2 Thessalonians, Philippians, and more, it became clear to me that Paul had many things to pray about, such as giving thanks for the congregation that he was writing to, that the love of these congregations would continue to abound, that they would continue to grow in their knowledge of the Lord, that their trust in God as their Savior would increase and fill their lives. He would pray that they would live lives worthy of the calling that they had received from God, to faithfully represent him in thought, word, and action so that God would be glorified.

In reading Paul's letters, you also see that it wasn't just him praying, but also him giving guidance, direction, and instruction to these congregation members for their own prayers. He instructed them to give thanks to God in all circumstances, to pray for the rapid and faithful spread of the Word of God, to pray for him, that he would be given the words to say when testifying about the salvation that comes only by Christ's work for us, that God would open doors for his message, that he would proclaim that message clearly.

How do your prayers line up to those examples? Are your prayers filled with petitions that the Lord would strengthen your faith and make you bold to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ? Are your prayers laden with requests that you, your brothers and sisters in Christ, your pastor, would all have avenues opened to tell others about our Savior? What is the content of your prayers when compared to the prayers we see in Scripture?

When I reflect on my prayer life and I think about the content of my prayers, I immediately feel the need to confess. I'm not a prayer warrior. Yes, I pray. Yes, I teach my kids to pray. But there are many times when I feel that I have neglected that wonderful gift of prayer. I know that I pray many times keeping the focus all about me and making my life better and easier and happier instead of praying often that God's work be done. I don't always pray as I ought. And I'm sure that as you analyze your prayer life, you're in the same boat, acknowledging that you do not always pray as you ought.

This is our weakness. "We do not know what we ought to pray for." (verse 26) Our prayers are affected by our sinful nature which pushes us to think only about me, myself, and I. It pushes us to focus only on praying for things that make my life easier and happier while I neglect the bigger picture of God's kingdom and the salvation that he has prepared for you and me.

But, is it really all that bad to pray for my life to be easier? Well, no. God invites us to bring before him in prayer anything and everything that is on our minds or that we care about. You want to pray for good weather, go for it. You want to pray for your team to win, do it. You want to pray for a million dollars, ask away. You want to pray that life go a little easier on you, don't hesitate. The beautiful thing about praying for anything and everything on our minds is first that God commands us to do so. It is not wrong to pray for these things.

The other great beauty and great comfort about praying for anything and everything is found here in our verses from Romans chapter 8. Even though we have this weakness of not knowing what we ought to pray for, "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express..." (verse 26) Even though we may not know what we ought to pray for, the Holy Spirit actually helps us with our prayers. He prays to God on our behalf. Even if we don't know the words, the Holy Spirit talks to God for us with groans that words cannot express.

Sometimes you and I are at a loss for what we should pray for, what words to use, how to phrase things. And when we feel like we don't even have the words to pray, then we feel even more so that our prayers are just useless. I don't know what I ought to pray for or even how to pray right, so why would God even listen to me? When you feel like that, God tells you and me that he has the right words. He prays for us with those groans that words cannot express. Our weakness of not knowing what we ought to pray for is not overcome by having the right words or the right formula. Our weakness in our prayers is overcome as the Holy Spirit actually prays for us in exactly the right words.

How can the Holy Spirit know the exact words that we ought to pray? It's because God searches our hearts. (verse 27) He knows exactly what we are going through. He knows exactly how we are hurting and what we need. And to top that off, God also knows the mind of the Holy Spirit who is praying on our behalf. There is absolutely no breakdown in communication from God the Father to God the Holy Spirit. He knows our hearts better than we even know ourselves, and he is the one praying for us, for our needs! He's going to get our prayer requests right every single time.

If that's not enough encouragement to know that our weakness in our prayers will be overcome as the Holy Spirit has searched our hearts and knows exactly what we need, consider also that the Holy Spirit tailors his intercession to God the Father to be "in accordance with God's will." (verse 27) This is huge that the Holy Spirit does this with our prayers. As the Apostle John wrote in his first letter, chapter 5 verses 14 and 15, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him." Because the Holy Spirit intercedes for us in accordance with God's will, we can be absolutely sure and confident that God not only hears our prayers, but that he also answers them.

Now that you know that your prayers absolutely will reach God and that he will answer them, maybe it's time we refocus on the whole, "not knowing what we ought to pray for" problem. First of all, remember that no matter what you pray, the Holy Spirit will make it acceptable before God because you are one of his saints, a holy one, a person bought by Jesus' holy and precious blood, a sacrifice given in perfection, his life substituted for ours. God has made you a saint by bringing you to trust in him as your Savior. Because you are a saint, all of your prayers are acceptable before God as the Holy Spirit is interceding for us on all of our prayers.

But we could still use some help when it comes to the "what" of our prayers. To learn the things that we ought to pray for, we go to the Word of God. If you have a concordance for your Bible – a list of words in the Bible and the verses where you can find them – start there. Look up the word "pray" or "prayer" or "praying" and then you will see the "what" that was given when people were told to pray. Google "Bible passages on prayer." Read through the passages that come up, and you will be amazed as you see all the things that God encourages his people to pray for. And then you can start incorporating them into your prayer life.

Another helpful tool is an acronym I learned. The acronym is simply: PRAY. It stands for Praise, Remember, Ask, Yield. Praise God for who he is, our almighty God. Declare the things that make him God and make him glorious. Remember what he has done for you, that he has made you a saint, that he has taken away your sins and has given you promise upon promise to always love you and care for you and take you to be with him in heaven. Ask. As Jesus himself tells us, ask God. Don't be afraid of him. Ask whatever it is that you want to ask. Then yield. Put it in God's perfect hands. Let God's will be done.

We don't always know what we ought to pray for, but the Holy Spirit conquers that weakness and intercedes for us. He makes our prayers perfect. No matter what you and I pray for, God gets the words right. He has searched our hearts. He knows the mind of God. He prays for us in accordance with his will. This is how the Holy Spirit overcomes our weakness when it comes to our prayers. So, pray in complete and total confidence knowing that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. Amen.