“LORD, Help Me When I Pray”

October 4, 2018

Psalm 71:1-8

Please find with me the eighth chapter of the Book of Romans.

Weaknesses. During an interview process, you might be asked this very personal question. “What are you strengths and can you list at least one weakness?” How could you honestly answer this question? I think the best answer would be, “I think I know my strengths. That’s why I applied for this position. I also don’t want to focus on my weaknesses. But I do have some.” And why would a prospective boss want to ask you about your strengths and weaknesses. Here’s why. Here are the top ten weaknesses that your boss will likely not want to see in you.

* Not taking criticism well
* Impatient
* Lazy
* Easily bored
* Procrastinate
* Persistent
* Takes things personally
* Strong willed
* Passive
* Does not like conflict

Most of us do not want to be known for our weaknesses, do we? But, without realizing them, you can be sure you aren’t growing.

Today I’ve got one specific weakness on my heart. And it so happens that it’s *the most* widespread weakness in our Church. And, just for clarification, I have the exact same weakness.

Do you remember the words of I Corinthians 10:13? It says this *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man…”* Well, there is no weakness taken you that is more common to man than this one specific weakness. See if you can spot it in the Word of God in this eighth chapter of Romans.

Look with me at Romans 8:26 *“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities [weaknesses]: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself [Himself] maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”*

I’ve titled today’s sermon “LORD, Help Me When I Pray.” Shall we pray?

If we were all completely honest with each other, the one area that we *should* be able to succeed in is prayer. But the one are that we most often fail in is prayer. So, if you are weak in the area of prayer, remember this. You are in in the same boat as all of us here this morning. Let’s look at what Paul is saying here.

This word “infirmities” is our modern word “weakness-es,” plural. Do you have any pain today? Any illness? Do you have any trouble or difficulties? Do you have any ailments or handicaps? Well, here’s a simple fact. Our entire medical profession is rooted in your weaknesses. Ever wonder why so many people are sick? Why is it so many people hurt?

The answer is simple. Weakness is a significant part of humanity. To say you are only human is to admit that you have weaknesses. The basic meaning for “infirmity” is this “lack of strength.”

And Paul often refers to his infirmities in his letters to the Churches. Paul wrote this to the Galatians. Galatians 4:13 *“Ye know how through* ***infirmity of the flesh*** *I preached the gospel unto you at the first.”*

Infirmity is always “infirmity of the flesh.” We don’t like them. But we all have them. And, then Paul adds this. II Corinthians 12:5 *“…yet of myself* ***I will*** *not* ***glory****, but* ***in mine infirmities****.”*

Strengths sometimes make you proud while weaknesses have a tendency to produce humility.

The one infirmity I want to speak about today is the most basic infirmity there is; the weakness of not knowing what you should pray for as you should.” So, as some would say, let’s be clear. Every one of us has this same weakness.

And today I want to show you how important it is for you to admit it. If you’ve got this weakness of not knowing what to pray as you should, then you have come to the one passage in the Bible that shows you the solution to it.

Romans 8:26 *“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities [weaknesses]: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself [Himself] maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (27) And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”*

Here’s my first question. “Do you have a weakness when it comes to prayer?” Answer: yes, I do.

Here’s my second question. “Who or what or where can I go to get my weakness met?”

And the answer: the Holy Spirit.

Then, third, “How does the Holy Spirit help me when it comes to prayer?” There are many things the Holy Spirit has already done and is doing right now for you. Look at what He does for you.

Romans 8:26 *“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities [weaknesses]: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself [Himself] maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”*

One, He helps your weaknesses.

And two, He makes intercession for you.

All of the ministries of the Holy Spirit are practical. And all of His ministries are personal. And, of all the practical and personal ministries of the Holy Spirit, this one is the most important.

I’ve learned over the years that you are always on a learning curve when it comes to prayer. Praying is a constant learning experience. You see, just when I think I’m learning how to pray, I discover that I really know very little about it. The needs I bring to the LORD are often overwhelming. But, since I know that God is the God of the impossible I bring them to Him anyway. And most of the time I bring Him things that I’ve prayed for for years.

And why? Because, just like you, I keep discovering exactly what the Bible says *“You don’t know what you should pray for as you ought.”*

So, since we’ve all got so many weaknesses and we are all prone to the weakness of praying as we should, God has provided you with a solution; the only solution, the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said it like this. Luke 11:13 *“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”*

You need the Holy Spirit more than you need food and water. And the LORD promises to give the Spirit to you as quickly as a parent gives good things to his child.

You see, before you were born again, the Holy Spirit brought your sins to your mind and heart. And He brought your attention to the Cross of Christ. Then, the Holy Spirit gave you a new birth at the moment you recognized that you stood condemned in your sin and believed on Jesus as your LORD and Savior. The Holy Spirit also became your Teacher once you found Christ as your Savior.

But, of all the works of the Spirit, this might be the most important. The Holy Spirit is the Only Person Who can handle your weakness regarding prayer.

Let me show you what He does, verse twenty-six again. Romans 8:26 *“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities [weaknesses]: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself [Himself] maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”*

Here’s what happens when you pray. The Holy Spirit prays along with you. This is what the words “maketh intercession for you” mean. It actually is a word that implies this. He comes alongside you and prays along with you. The Holy Spirit prays together with you as you pray.

Romans 8:26 *“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities [weaknesses]: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself [Himself] maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”*

Let’s say you decide you are going to pray and you begin and find it quite difficult to keep your thoughts under control. But you stick with it. You don’t let your thoughts get the best of you. You pray. You ask. You surrender. You look to the LORD. You know the need is there and you know that it’s your place to pray. So, you stick with it just like Jesus teaches you.

Luke 18:1 *“And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; …”*

I can’t tell you the number of times I didn’t feel like praying, yet I stuck with it. I didn’t give up even when I didn’t feel as though I had a lot of faith. And just like Jesus said, He rewards openly those who pray in secret.

The best illustration of this is found in Acts 12 when Peter had been put in prison. Here’s Acts 12:13 *“And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. (14) And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.*

*(15) And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. (16) But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.”*

They were astonished? What did they expect? Why were they holding an all-night prayer vigil? Here’s the point. None of us feel as though we are good pray-ers. And yes, when the LORD answers, we respond just like this group of people responded. “They were astonished.”

But, even when you’re tired and you still pray; even when you don’t know *what* to pray and still pray; even when you have to corral our thoughts and just turn ourselves to the LORD in prayer, He answers. And then, in His love and kindness, I think the LORD also must be astonished when He sees we’re astonished that He does just what we asked Him to do.

Why does it work this way? Because this is how prayer works. This is how God set up a prayer life. The Holy Spirit in you is praying at the exact moment you are praying. Only He doesn’t use words like you and me. He groans with groanings that can’t be put in words.

Romans 8:26 *“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities [weaknesses]: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself [Himself] maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”*

That’s the way pray works. God’s Spirit prays alongside you when you bring your burdens and thoughts and words to your Heavenly Father. Praying John Hyde once said this about prayer. It’s *“the communion of two wills.”*

True prayer happens when you keep praying even when you feel you are too weak or too tired or too whatever to get it right. You see, the Spirit’s ministry in prayer is this. When you pray, He prays within you. And, even when you don’t think you’ve prayed well or prayed with the right words, prayer is effective because the Holy Spirit is groaning inside all of your words, your tears, and your feelings. Without the Holy Spirit every pray you pray is a failure. But, with the Holy Spirit, all your prayers are effective.

Again, here’s how Jesus puts it. Mark 11:24 *“Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.”*

Matthew 18:19 *“Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.”*

Matthew 21:22 *“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.”*

John 14:13 *“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”*

The key to becoming a man or woman of prayer is simple. That key is faith. It’s not how great a prayer *you* are, but how simple is your faith. The LORD says *“Pray and don’t faint.”* Pray when it appears as though you are not making a lot of progress. Pray like a little child asks for something from his mother. Pray and know that when you pray, the Holy Spirit in you is groaning at the very same moment that you bring your words and your thoughts to your Father.

Think about that little child, you son or daughter, asking you for something. That’s prayer.

And just like you, a parent, don’t always give your child what they’ve requested that very day, you, in adult love and wisdom, withhold that request until the right day and time. And maybe the reason why it seems as though God is taking too long to answer your prayer is because “God withholds that man may ask.” (G. MacDonald).

So, first, “Do you have a weakness when it comes to prayer?” Answer: yes, you do. And we all have that very same weakness.

And here’s the second question. “Who or what or where can I go to get my weakness met?”

And the answer: the Holy Spirit.

Third, “How does the Holy Spirit help me when it comes to prayer?” He prays right along with me with groanings that cannot be uttered. Doesn’t that, in and of itself, help you see the way prayer works? The Holy Spirit prays inside the very words of my prayers with groanings that can’t even be uttered.

Then, fourth, does prayer work?

While you’re concerned with how well or how poorly you pray, God is listening to the One Who fixes your prayers.

Please look again at your Bible. Romans 8:27 “*And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”*

We, likely, can’t understand the process. But we *can* see it. While you are praying, God is doing what He does best. He’s searching your heart.

So, does prayer work? Do you remember the two men who came to the Temple to pray and one prayed the pray of the braggart while the other simply said *“Be merciful to me a sinner”*?

One said Luke 18:11 *“God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. (12) I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.”*

And the other sensed he had a need for God’s mercy.

So, do you see what prayer really is? It’s the LORD in search of that pure heart of a simple man or woman. Can you tell me who was searching the heart while these men were quote “praying” at the Temple that day? It was the LORD. And Jesus said that the man with the simple *“Be merciful to me a sinner”* prayer went down to his house justified while the other did not. His prayer was answered.

And did you see what the LORD does the LORD as He searches your heart? He listens to the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking in you. Why? Because the Holy Spirit is making intercession for the saints according to God’s will. He’s making intercession for you and me.

So, does pray work? Absolutely because it’s the Holy Spirit’s intercession that is taking place when you pray.

Romans 8:27 “*And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”*

You see, your Heavenly Father hears you pray. And while He listens, two things are taking place and both are between the Father and the Holy Spirit.

One, He knows exactly what the mindset of the Spirit is. And two, He receives the intercession of the Spirit on your behalf because the Holy Spirit can only pray according to the will God. No, says Paul, you don’t know what to pray as you should. But Who does? The Holy Spirit in you.

I know right now that some of you think you are quite poor at praying. But, is that a good reason to not pray? Is that a good reason not to join in the fellowship of those who pray together on Wednesday evenings? Does that really mean you are as poor at prayer as you say and think?

Listen, there’s not a good pray-er among us. But, if God calls us to pray together as a Church and we fail to do so, that’s really just a matter of disobedience. And, folks, obed-ience in prayer might just be the highest level of obedience there is.

First, “Do you have a weakness when it comes to prayer?” Answer: yes, you do. And we all have that very same weakness.

And here’s the second question. “Who or what or where can I go to get my weakness met?”

And the answer: the Holy Spirit.

Third, “How does the Holy Spirit help me when it comes to prayer?” He prays right along with me with groanings that cannot be uttered. Doesn’t that, in and of itself, help you see the way prayer works? The Holy Spirit prays inside the very words of my prayers with groanings that can’t even be uttered.

Then, fourth, does prayer work. Absolutely.

Fifth, what happens when you pray? Answer. You get to know God.

One of the greatest of the Congregational preachers from the state of Connecticut was a Pastor by the name of Horace Bushnell, born April 14, 1802 in Bantam, Connecticut and died February 17, 1876 in Hartford, Connecticut.

This story comes from Bushnell’s friend, a Dr. Parkes Cadman. At one point in his life, Bushnell was suffering from an incurable and terminal illness. His recalls that a friend and fellow Pastor Joseph Twichell stopped by to visit and encourage him. As they sat together under a beautifully starlit sky, Bushnell said to his friend *“One of us ought to pray.”*

Pastor Twichell said “Why don’t you pray?”

Pastor Horace Bushnell began to pour his heart out to the LORD. There came over him a wonderful sense of God’s nearness. He says: *“When Horace Bushnell buried his face in his hands and prayed, I was afraid to stretch out my hand in the darkness, lest I should touch God.”* Was the psalmist of old conscious of such a thought when he cried, *“My soul, wait thou only upon God”*? (Psalm 62:5). E.M. Bounds adds this. “Nothing but prayer can bring God and man into this happy communion.”

And Oswald Chambers puts it so simply. *“Prayer is the way that the life of God in us is nourished. Our common ideas regarding prayer are not found in the New Testament. We look upon prayer simply as a means of getting things for ourselves, but the biblical purpose of prayer is that we may get to know God Himself.”*

So, today I’ve asked you five questions on the topic of prayer.

First, “Do you have a weakness when it comes to prayer?” Answer: yes, you do. And we all have that very same weakness.

And here’s the second question. “Who or what or where can I go to get my weakness met?” And the answer: the Holy Spirit.

Third, “How does the Holy Spirit help me when it comes to prayer?” Answer. He prays right along with me with groanings that cannot be uttered.

Then, fourth, does prayer work? Answer: absolutely

Fifth, what happens when you pray? Answer. You get to know God.

Sixth, and finally, will you pray?

One final word from E. M. Bounds, “Many persons believe in the efficacy of prayer, but not many pray. Prayer is the easiest and the hardest of all things; the simplest and the sublimest; the weakest and the most powerful; its results lie outside the range of human possibilities; they are only limited by the omnipotence of God.” (E. M. Bounds)

So, folks, prayer is always a matter of the will and the heart. So, will you pray? Will you pray “LORD, help me when I pray?” I am absolutely sure He will.

Shall we pray?

Hymn # 640 “Sweet Hour Of Prayer”