

Prayer and the Holy Spirit

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 July 2017

Preacher: Jason Webb

- [0:00] Well, I think if I were to take a survey, probably every Christian here would say, I wish I prayed better.
- ! I very, very much doubt that anyone here would say, I'm very comfortable and I'm satisfied with the status of my prayer life. I know I in no way could say that.
- And prayer is one of the hardest things that we do. It's probably one of the hardest things because it's the most spiritual thing. It's the most anti-flesh thing that we can do.
- In the book that we're studying, the ministry, the work of the Holy Spirit, Octavius Winslow goes through all kinds of things that prayer is. Prayer is the expression of our wants.
- It's the expression of our desires, of our need. It's the acknowledgement of our poverty. It's the language of dependence. And that is the exact opposite of what the flesh is all about.
- [1:09] The flesh is the anti-dependence upon God. We want to be like Him. We want to be like God. And not having needs.
- And not having poverty. There's no needs, no poverty, no dependence. It's interesting. They've done studies on just social interaction.
- And people, they've found that people like other people better when those people have asked them for something. In other words, if you want to get someone to like you, ask them for something.
- Ask them to do something for you. And that can be the exact opposite of what we think. We think, oh, I don't want to bother them.
- I don't want to annoy them. They won't like me or something. But people like to be wanted. People like to be needed. And provided we don't ask too much, and provided that they can give us what they want, people like to feel benevolent.
- [2:19] People like to feel needed. They don't like wanting. They don't like needing. They don't like asking.
- And that's why prayer is so hard, because prayer is the feeble child turning to the Father it loves. In a word, it is God and the creature meeting and blending in one act of blessed, holy, and eternal fellowship.
- And Winslow says it's the soul reaching out and touching God, having fellowship with God. And so that's why I say prayer is, that's probably why prayer is so difficult for us.
- On the one hand, we don't like to ask. We don't like to need things. We don't like to be shut up to God. And we don't, in our flesh, we don't want to have dealings with God.
- Our flesh is that anti-God principle within us. And prayer is the most pro-God principle put in us by the Holy Spirit, where we say, I'm going to go to my Father, and I'm going to ask Him for everything I need.
- [3:33] Winslow also says prayer is the breathing of the life of God in the soul of man. Let me repeat that. Prayer is the breathing.

It's not the breath. It's the breathing of the life of God in the soul of man. Prayer is the inhaling and the exhaling, the breathing of the Spirit of God in us.

So prayer is hard. But the Spirit lives in us. And if the Spirit is in us, then there's prayer. That's why the very first things that a new baby born-again believer does is they begin to pray.

They begin to go out to God. And so there's breathing. There's action. There's life. It's happening. And so where the Spirit is, that's where prayer is.

And that's what we're going to talk about this morning. We've seen so far that the Spirit gives us life. The Spirit indwells us. The Spirit sanctifies us.

[4 : 42] The Spirit testifies to us. That's what we saw last week. And then this week we're going to see that the Spirit is the author of prayer.

He's the author of prayer. He's the one that puts prayer within us. He's the one that helps us to pray. He not only helps us to pray, he intercedes from within us.

He prays for us. And those two are related. His prayers. Do you think of the Spirit praying for you? The Bible tells you that he does.

The prayers, his prayers, his life, his desires. They're turned into our prayers. They come out of our mouth.

And then Romans, we're going to see this in a minute. The groans and the desires, the longing of our lives, of our hearts. It turns into his prayers.

[5 : 45] So his desires become our prayers and our desires and needs become his prayers. So Jesus intercedes for us. He intercedes at the Father's right hand. But the Spirit is a closer intercessor than even him.

Because he prays from within our own hearts. From here. He lives in us. And so from there, from that very intimate place, from that very familiar place where he knows our hearts.

He knows our groans. He prays for us. And so that's what we're going to talk about today. The Spirit as the author of prayer. And the first thing that we want to do is what we've sort of done all throughout the series is we want to start with the Bible.

And I want to show you that this is just my ideas. This is what the Word of God teaches. And so I want you to see in the Bible this connection between the Spirit of God and prayer.

And us praying and him praying. So we're going to begin with Romans 8. And I've already sort of referred to this passage. But turn to Romans chapter 8. And we're going to look at verses 26 and 27.

[7 : 02] Romans chapter 8. And I want you to look as I'm reading for the Spirit praying and how he does that.

And the connection to our own hearts. So Romans chapter 8 verse 26. 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. And he who searches our hearts.

That's God. He searches our hearts. He knows the mind of the Spirit. Because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

You saw it two times. The Spirit himself intercedes for us. The Spirit intercedes. And the Spirit groans within us.

[8 : 10] Now, that idea of groaning is... It really begins earlier in this passage. This idea of groaning in this verse.

It begins earlier in the passage. Go up to verse 22. And in verse 22, it says, The whole creation has been groaning.

As in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

So, the whole creation is groaning. It's groaning under this frustration that God has subjected it to because of sin and because of Adam's sin.

The whole creation is groaning. And it's... If you were here several years ago when we talked about Ecclesiastes or went through that book, it's the idea of Havel.

[9:10] It's the idea of death is shot through this creation now. And so, it's a world where death ruins all of the earthly hopes that we have.

Death undoes so much of our work. We don't have time to go through with that. But the problem of death is addressed in Romans 8.

And then there's injustice and there's frustration everywhere. There's just the curse that the ground is under and the plants are under and everything is under. And so, the creation is groaning.

And then verse 23 says, we ourselves are groaning. But the Spirit is in us. And because the Spirit is in us, Romans 8 says that if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who lives in you.

In Romans 8, there's these categories of thought. There's the flesh. And there's death. And then there's the Spirit. And there's resurrection.

[10:27] And those two are pitted against each other. And what Paul says is, now here we are. We're contending with the flesh and we're facing death and its frustration.

But that's not all our experience. Our experience also, the Spirit has now come in us. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Christ from the dead, if the resurrection Spirit is within us, He who raised Christ from the dead will also raise our mortal bodies.

And so, because the Spirit is in us, that means that now there is resurrection in our future. It's not just frustration that ends in death. There's now hope.

We eagerly hope for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. Resurrection. But the Spirit's presence in us does more than assure us that we will one day be resurrected.

resurrected. The Spirit of life is in us. That means we're going to be resurrected. But the Spirit of God helps us right now.

[11:32] It's not just that He is an assurance of that future gift. He is that. But He helps us right now in our weakness. He takes those groans.

He takes those groans. Those things that we feel. Those pains. That hurts. He takes those groans. And Romans 8 says He makes them His very own.

He Himself intercedes with groans that words cannot express. Do you see the Spirit's closeness to you? You don't go through any frustration.

Christian. No frustration. No heartbreak. No sorrow. Without the Spirit of God Himself taking your groans and making them His very own.

He's right there with you in it all. Something I've been trying to emphasize in this class and just to bring to your mind again and again is do you see the Spirit's love for you?

[12:40] Remember, He's a person. And He has personal love for you. Do you see the Spirit's love for you? He doesn't run away in the pain.

He's there. And He's groaning with your spirit. And from that place, from that place of hurt and weakness, the Spirit prays for you. And how does He pray?

We don't know what to pray. That means sometimes we don't know what God wants us to pray. We don't know what to do. We don't know what to say. We don't know the way forward.

But how does the Spirit pray? What does it say? What does verse 27 say? Does He know how to pray? He prays in accordance with God's will.

He knows exactly how to pray. He knows exactly how to pray in the middle of all that pain. He knows what we need. He knows what God wants. And the Spirit intercedes for us.

[13:42] So He sees, He feels our groaning. And He takes those groans to God. And He prays according to God's will. And because He prays for us according to God's will, so there's the Spirit.

He's praying for us in the middle of our suffering. Because He's praying for us. Verse 28 happens. Verse 28 isn't sort of like floating out there all by itself.

What does Romans 8.28 say? And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him. Do you see the connection? The Spirit prays according to God's will.

He prays for us according to God's will in the middle of all the hurt. And God then uses that hurt to do us good.

Romans 8.28, that wonderful promise is a result. It happens through the Spirit's praying for us.

[14:48] It's not just us praying. And we do pray, Lord, use this hurt. Use this pain for my good. And we hold on to Romans 8.28. We believe it in the frustration of life and the sorrow of life.

But the Spirit Himself prays according to God's will. Work this for their good. Take this pain and use it for their good. And so, really, so who's for us?

Who's for us? Well, God the Father is for us. God the Son is for us. God the Holy Spirit. And so verse 31 says, if God is for us, if the Trinitarian God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are for us, then who can be against us?

So, who that's really the next few verses. And who, what can then stand? What frustration? What power? What difficulty?

What sorrow? What sin? What anything can stand against the Father's love? Because we're now His children. What can stand against the Son's sacrifice?

[16:03] He died. And who can stand against the Spirit's prayers? What can stand? And so that's Romans 8. It's this glorious passage.

So, the Spirit prays for us. We're praying. And our prayers and His prayers are somehow unified. And they're presented to God.

There's more. can you turn to Ephesians 2.18? We're, again, looking at this connection between the prayer, praying, and the Spirit of God.

Ephesians 2.18. And really, to really get the big gist of this, we have to read a whole bunch of it.

But, what I want you to just look at is verse 18. For through Him, and Paul is talking through Jesus Christ, we both, Jew and Gentile, we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

[17:17] Now, prepositions in this passage are of supreme importance. You know what a preposition is, right? It's those by's, and four's, and two's, and those kind of words.

Prepositions are important in this verse. We come through who? We come through someone answer me.

We come through Christ. We come through Jesus Christ. And we have access through His, so His ministry, His sacrifice. He's the door.

What did Jesus say? No one comes to the Father except through me. So He's the door to the Father. But that's not the end. We come to the Father.

So, God the Father is the end point. Jesus opens the door, but we come to the Father. He's the one that we have access to.

[18:19] So Jesus is the door to the Father. But that's not the end. That's not where it stops. He says, by one Spirit.

And that's just as important as the other two. The through Jesus Christ to the Father. It doesn't end there. It says, by one Spirit.

So, the idea is, who actually brings us to God? How do we get there? Well, the Spirit, in a way, carries us to the Father.

the Spirit brings our souls through Jesus Christ to the Father. The Spirit bears us. Or to change the metaphor, He's the instrument.

He's the engine that drives our souls to God. And so, like, or to change the metaphor again, He's the wind that blows our ship to the Father.

[19:23] And so, without Him, I want you to imagine that. Imagine it just as through Jesus to the Father, but the Holy Spirit plays no part.

Well, without Him, Jesus could have died and the Father could be sitting on a throne waiting to hear it for us and we would never come. We would never get there.

Because He's the one that gets us there. He's the instrument. He's the one that brings us. It would all be in vain. But the Spirit takes us to the Father. So we pray by the Spirit.

Jude 20 puts it like this, but you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

Pray in the Holy Spirit. is that just a throw away line? Does it mean just build yourselves up and pray?

[20:29] Well, praying in the Holy Spirit, in the Holy Spirit, it means praying in the midst of the Holy Spirit. Praying with His thoughts, with His Word, with His desires.

Praying with Him helping you. Pray in the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 6.18, pray in the Holy Spirit on all occasions.

Again, praying in the Holy Spirit. Leaning on Him. Maybe that's one reason, and this is not an accusation, this is a real suggestion, maybe one reason prayer comes so hard for us is that we don't know what Paul is talking about here.

We don't understand that. We don't pray leaning on the Holy Spirit. And it goes harder than it needs to because we don't rest our faith on the Spirit. And so, so to speak, when we pray, we don't pray in the Holy Spirit very well.

it's something to think about. As I'm praying, am I relying on the Holy Spirit to help me to pray?

[21:48] So, there's more we could say, but do you see in the Bible, prayer and the Holy Spirit go together. He's the author of prayer. He helps us as we pray.

So secondly, how does He help us to pray? How does He help us to pray? How is He the author of prayer? What does He do to bring out prayer in our hearts?

Well, He makes us to see our needs. He makes us to feel our needs. The Spirit teaches us our true needs.

That's how the Christian life begins. It's when a soul, when a person, for the first time, has their eyes opened to their true need.

Now, they might have thought they needed a lot of things before. You could ask them, what do you need? And they could say all sorts of things. But the Holy Spirit teaches us at the very beginning of our Christian life, at the very of our birth, what do I really need?

[22:54] And what do I really need? Tell me. A Savior. I need to be saved. I need to be forgiven.

I need mercy. I need grace. None of those things were on my list of needs before, but now the Spirit has taught me. These are my needs. Only one thing is needful when the Spirit comes in convicting power.

And how does the Christian life, well, the way the Christian life begins is how the Christian life goes. The Spirit is ever teaching us through the Word.

As the Word shapes us and transforms us, as our minds are renewed, the Spirit is ever teaching us through word and experience and those interacting of what my true need is, what I truly need.

And let me just say how we need that, how we need to be taught how much we need. do you remember in Revelation 3, the church in Laodicea, do you remember what they said about themselves?

[24:08] I'm rich. I don't have any needs. I need nothing. Do you think they were a praying church?

Do you think Wednesday night prayer meeting was a well-attended thing at Laodicea? Well, who needs to pray when I am rich and I need nothing?

But what Jesus says and what the Spirit says is they didn't know how poor they were. And the Spirit shows us our poverty. And the Spirit shows us when we're in decline and when we need revival.

And the Spirit shows us when we're like Achan and we've hidden sin in our tent. But unlike Achan, we don't know it. We don't see it until someone teaches us.

And the Spirit is that teacher. That teacher to show us that ongoing hourly need for grace, for mercy, for help. The growing Christian is growing in a sense of his need.

[25:20] And that's why his growth and his humility rise together. and his growth and his pride are inversely related. Because the further he goes, the more he sees his true need.

The declining Christian is saying more and more of himself or herself, I'm rich. I don't need anything. It's all going great for me. And someone said if I could bottle desperation, then I could teach anyone to pray.

because to go to the throne of grace, we must, this is Winslow, to go to the throne of grace, we must have something to go for. Some errand to take us there.

Some sin, some guilt, some need, some infirmity. And the Holy Spirit teaches us those things. We don't teach ourselves.

We don't teach ourselves these things. The Spirit opens our eyes. And yes, experiences and trials come and the Word comes, but sometimes those things just bounce right off of us, don't they?

[26:28] I wish we got them the first time. I wish I got the lessons the first time, but they bounce right off of us. David Murray is a pastor, a professor in Grand Rapids.

He's actually going to be speaking at this year's GA. But he was working way too hard, too long, too much, trying to do more than what he was capable of and what he was.

And it ended him up in the hospital and he said to himself, I need to stop, I need to slow down, I need to learn my lesson. And something like a year later, he's back in the hospital again, blood clots filling his lungs.

and he says, I wept and wept because I didn't get it the first time. And that's us, unless the Spirit teaches us.

So the Spirit teaches us what we've lost in our spiritual life. It's ever going up and down the spiritual life. And sometimes virtues and graces go and decline.

[27 : 38] And once where I was very patient and kind, now I've become short and ill-tempered. Once I was generous, but now I've become greedy.

And once, you know, I've lost things. And the Spirit teaches us those things. Sometimes we lose the sense of our adoption and pardon and acceptance.

So there's the Christian and he's empty and he's broken and he feels isolated and alone. He feels like he's at war with God. He doesn't feel the sweetness of the gospel. And maybe they don't even know it.

They don't know what the problem is. They're like Ephraim. It was said of him, strangers have devoured his strength and he doesn't know it. But the Spirit teaches us our needs.

And in teaching us our needs, it teaches us to pray. It teaches us to pray. So how is he the author of prayer?

[28 : 41] Secondly, he wakes up the spirit of prayer within us. In Zechariah 12, we saw this some time ago, God says, I will pour out on the house of David and the people of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplication.

The spirit of grace and supplication. That's the Holy Spirit. So the spirit within us can go and decline, but the author of prayer, the spirit of supplication can wake that spirit of prayer up again.

And so now we feel like praying. And now we say, I have these needs and I know who to go to. And we go before the throne of grace and we're down on our hands and knees and we're supplicants.

We're asking, well, who brings us to that place? Who gives us that heart? It's the Holy Spirit. He teaches us our needs and then he puts within us this desire and this love and this movement to pray.

And so we do pray. We go to God with new fervor, with new hope, with new desires. Now we're not standing afar off. Now we're coming really close and we're asking. That's the spirit of supplication.

[29 : 53] He's teaching us to pray. Third, how does he teach us to pray? Oh, he teaches us to plead the atoning blood of Christ.

That is, he teaches us to pray on the basis of the gospel. Remember last week we talked about he testifies to our hearts.

He testifies to our hearts about it is finished. Your sins are forgiven. Well, the one way that we see that testimony working itself out is in our prayer life.

So now we're praying on the basis of the atoning blood of Christ. And again, listen to Winslow here. He puts this great and prevailing argument in the believer's mouth.

love. And when sin seems a mountain, an unbelief would suppress the aspiration and a deep consciousness of unworthiness would cause the soul to stand afar off, he opens to his view.

[31 : 02] That is, the spirit opens to the person's view. This precious encouraging truth. The conquering, the all conquering blood of Jesus with God on behalf of his people.

And in a moment, the mountain is leveled. The mountain of sin is leveled. And unbelief is checked. And the soul unfettered and unrestrained draws near to God.

Yea, he rushes into the bosom of his father. The Holy Spirit teaches us to pray because he testifies to Jesus Christ and on the basis of that we rush to our father.

And so Winslow says, do you see, we're going back to this again, do you see the love of the Holy Spirit for you? How often has guilt caused the head to hang down?

Am I talking to people that can understand that? Head to hang down. And a sense of utter vileness and worthlessness covered the soul with shame.

- [32 : 11] Even the sense of destitution has kept back the believer. Then does the blessed spirit and the greatness of his grace and tenderness unfold Jesus to the soul as being all that it wants to give it full, free, and near access to God.

He removes the eye from self and fixes and fastens it upon the blood that pleads louder for mercy than all his sins can plead for condemnation.

I love that line. His blood pleads louder for mercy than all the sins can plead for condemnation. He brings to the righteousness near which so clothes and covers the soul as to fit it to appear in the presence of the King of Kings, not merely with acceptance.

acceptance. Not merely with acceptance, not merely with toleration, but with delight. Beholding him thus washed and clothed, God rests in his love and rejoices over him with singing.

the Spirit brings us to God. He reminds us of the gospel. He reminds us of the Father's love.

- [33 : 34] And that's again what we were talking about last week. The Spirit testifies to the grace of the Lord Jesus. His death for my sin, his righteousness to cover me.

It's called double imputation. the doctrinal word. It's so important. It's double imputation. It means that my sins are imputed.

My sins are counted to Christ. And he dies for them. And his righteousness is counted to me. So that I am clothed in the righteousness of God himself.

not my words, Paul's words in Romans. So it's not just Jesus' death is counted as my death, but Jesus' lifelong, perpetual, and finally his obedience even at the cross is counted to me as my righteousness.

And the Spirit says, now all that is yours. All your debts are paid for. And you are clothed in Jesus Christ. And he says, now go pray. Go pray. Go talk to your Father.

- [34 : 53] So you're going to a throne of grace. Pray. Winslow says, God sits upon a throne of grace. He has many thrones, so to speak.

The thrones of creation are the throne of creation, the throne of providence, the throne of justice, the throne of redemption. But this is the throne of grace, grace, and it's just the throne I want, and it's just the throne I need.

I'm poor, and I'm needy, and I'm sinful, and a lot else beside. But I'm going to a throne of grace.

And then if I'm going to a throne of grace, it's not about my righteousness. It's not about my worth. it's not about what I've done.

It's not about my religiosity or my strength. No worth or worthiness gets any of these blessings. No self-righteousness earns anything from the throne of grace because it's grace.

- [36 : 00] And so when you go there, it's not on the basis of any of those things. It's on the basis of God's own love and God's own grace in Jesus Christ.

And so therefore, whatever your situation, you can come. You can come right in. Because it's your Father that loves you who sits on that throne. And beside him is the Son who died for your sins and who pleads for you.

And so that throne is a throne of grace. And so everything that comes from that throne is grace. There's help. There's mercy. There's more of Christ.

There's more of his kingdom. There's more of his rule. There's more of his kindness. There's more of Jesus Christ. And so the Spirit moves us to pray. He takes us through Jesus Christ. And he takes us to the Father.

And he gives us that spirit of adoption that says Abba Father. And so we pray. Do you see the connection? Do you see the love of the Holy Spirit?

[37:04] Do you see how he helps us to pray? And so I'm going to end with the words of Jude. Build yourselves up in your most holy faith. Build yourselves up in the most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

There's much to say. There's much more I could say. But build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. That's your privilege.

That's your privilege as a blood-bought child of God. God, I want you to delight in it and rejoice in it. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are for you.

And if God is for you, who can be against you? Well, we are dismissed. God's