

# The Holy Spirit's Ministry in our Weakness and Suffering

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**Bible Text:** Romans 8:26-27  
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Well, it is a joy this morning to minister the word of God to you and study it together with you. On behalf of my wife and I want to certainly extend our appreciation for the hospitality and the fellowship that we've enjoyed over the last day in particular, yesterday was a wonderful time as we spent the day together here and certainly we were blessed from it. We were edified and so encouraged by the fellowship that we have. I want to thank Pastor Dale and his wife for their gracious hospitality as well. We're looking forward to spending some time with them this afternoon and, of course, to Daniel for, I don't see him anymore, oh, there he is. Yes, there. Yeah. For helping to get all the plans in place for our arrival and our stay here. Thank you for that and for the opportunity to spend looking at prayer.

Well, as we draw the theme over the weekend to a close this morning, I want to look at a text which is so very important as it relates to prayer. The text is found in Romans 8 and we will look specifically at verses 26 to 27. Romans 8:26 to 27. Now as you turn in your Bibles to that text, it is important to consider for a moment the context of these verses. Now we know the letter of Romans stands in a special place in our Bibles, it is a tremendous letter filled with very profound doctrine. If we were to summarize this letter to the Romans in one word, it would be the word righteousness. Romans is an exposition of the righteousness of God. It is the revelation of the righteousness of God, in fact, we know these verses at the very beginning of Romans, Romans 1:16 and 17, explain really the thrust of this whole letter when Paul writes, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it," in the gospel, "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" And if we were to look, then, at the development of this concept of righteousness from those verses on to the verses that we have in our study this morning, we would see that from chapter 1, verse 18, to chapter 3, verse 20, Paul first looks at the need for God's righteousness. Those initial chapters from 1:18 to 3:20 focus on the depravity of man and how he stands rightly condemned because of his sinfulness. But then Paul moves beginning in chapter 3, verse 21, to chapter 5, verse 21, to look at God's provision of righteousness, through the justification, through the act of justification that Paul focuses on in those chapters, from chapter 3, verse 21, to chapter 5, verse 21. Then in chapters 6 to 8, getting closer to our text now, in chapters 6 to 8 Paul focuses on the demonstration of this righteousness in the practical

life of the believer, of the one who has been justified. And so these chapters, Romans 6, 7 and 8, focus on what we call sanctification, the outworking of righteousness in the life of the one who, though he was condemned, has been declared righteous and now he lives in that new status, and that declaration of righteousness begins its work of sanctifying the believer in his practical everyday living. Our verses that we will study this morning, verses 26 and 27, occur in this section that show or that expound the sanctification of the believer, how God's righteousness is then made practical in the life of the believer. And just to look then more specifically at chapter 8, when we look at chapter 8 or Romans, chapter 8 of Romans focuses specifically on the ministry of the Holy Spirit in this particular work of sanctification. Paul emphasizes that for righteousness to be worked out in practical everyday living, the Spirit's work is indispensable. God has given us the Spirit specifically for this work of sanctification as we who have been declared righteous on the basis of the work of Christ now begin to live righteously by the power of the Spirit.

So in the first 11 verses of Romans 8, we see the victory of the believer achieved by the Spirit. It is the Spirit who has set us free from the law of sin and death. It is the Spirit who gives life and peace to the believer, life and peace with God. It is the Spirit who dwells within us, and it is the Spirit who will resurrect our mortal bodies. Verses 1 to 8 show us the victory that the Spirit accomplishes. Then in verses 12 to 17 of Romans 8, Paul focuses on the adoption of the believer that is achieved by the Spirit. We are led by the Spirit which marks us as sons of God and the Spirit is called the Spirit of adoption because the Spirit is the one who empowers us to address God not as judge and the one who condemns but as Father, as Abba, the one who is our adopted Father. The Spirit himself bears witness. He gives us this affirmation, this assurance that God is now our Father and we are now his children. Then at the end of verse 17, we read this, "if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may be glorified with Him." At the end of 17, verse 17 of chapter 8, Paul then begins to talk about a very important topic as it relates to our lives in this age of sanctification, it is the topic of suffering. Suffering. Then in verses 18 to 30, Paul focuses in on this reality of suffering. He describes it as a present reality that occurs in the midst of our sanctification and shows how the Spirit brings us through this time, this life of suffering. Verse 18, for example, begins with these words, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Verse 18 begins this section on suffering. It is part of our sanctification, it is a reality of this present time in our lives, that though we have been at a point and time justified, then declared righteous, the declaration of condemnation has been removed because of Jesus and what he's done for us, we have now been made children, we enter this period called sanctification and it is a period that Paul describes as a life of suffering. It will not always be that because at the end of this particular section in verses 29 and 30, we read that those whom God foreknew, he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that he may be the firstborn among many, and those whom he predestined, he called, those whom he called, he justified, and those whom he justified, he glorified. And that glorification speaks to that time that is still future for us when all the struggles of this life will be ended once and for all. But the reality of it is, if you are in Christ, you're there today, you live in this intermediate period.

You have been justified, you have been declared righteous, but you have not yet been made perfect.

It is this intermediate period that Paul focuses on in Romans 8, particularly in these verses beginning in verse 18, and what we might expect as those who have been made children of God, as those who have been justified, we may expect that this life would be easy now, that the suffering would be done away with, that the curse of sin would be ended and we would now enjoy a period of prosperity, a period of comfort, a period of ease even before our future glorification. But Paul lets us know that that's not a reality right now and he addresses that issue in these verses and gives us much needed instruction.

Let me begin reading this whole section beginning in verse 18 all the way through the end of the verse that we will study this morning, verse 27. Paul says this,

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. 24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. 26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; 27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He [the Spirit] intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

In this text, Paul addresses the issue of our suffering, the issue of our ongoing poverty, the issue of our weakness even in this life as Christians, as those who have been justified but are still eagerly awaiting the moment of glorification. What is this suffering that he speaks of? How do we define it? It is not the suffering of persecution per se, he's not focused on what we face from the world around us per se, rather when he addresses the issue of suffering, he is describing our lives here on this earth as we live under the effects, the ongoing effects of the curse and our struggle with sin in this present age.

Suffering here is a reference to living in a sin-cursed world with bodies that still bear the marks of the curse, with a flesh that still has a desire for sin. This is the suffering that Paul is referring to and it's a suffering that all true believers will admit is part of daily experience. This is the decay of living in this world. This is the daily suffering that

Christians are so acutely aware of. This world isn't the way it is supposed to be. Our bodies don't function the way that they should. The effects of sin are still experienced in our circumstances and even in ourselves. In fact, Paul just spoke of that in the end of Romans 7 when he said, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me free from this body death?" And this reality is what leads Paul to speak some very very comforting words. Though he does not promise that God will remove the suffering in this present age, in this present period, he does say there is supernatural assistance.

The Apostle Paul provides crucial instruction here in our verses, verses 26 and 27, crucial instruction about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in order to encourage us as we live awaiting perfection. As we look at these two verses, we're going to notice this instruction take place with three important assertions. Three important assertions. Let me summarize them this way. 1. Remember your persistent poverty. Remember your persistent poverty. Reflect upon it, and this is going to be found in the middle of verse 26. And then secondly, he is going to command us to recognize our personal helper. Recognize your personal helper, and this is going to be found in the beginning of verse 26 and at the end of verse 26. And then he's going to lead us to rejoice in his perfect intercession, rejoice in this helper's perfect intercession, and we'll see that in verse 27.

Now let me go through each of these in order. First of all, remember your persistent poverty. Remember your persistent poverty. The middle of verse 26 exposes this, it describes it. Notice verse 26 and pay special attention to this middle statement. Paul says this, "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should." Let's focus in on those words "our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should." Paul makes two assertions here about this suffering. He makes a general one and a specific one.

First of all, he refers to our general weakness. He says the Spirit helps our weakness. Let's focus in on that first. He's saying that the believer has an intrinsic weakness. This word for "weakness" is a very broad term. It doesn't allow us to minimize it or to limit it to a specific area. It is intentionally broad and general. And notice also that it is singular. He's not talking about a set of besetting problems. He uses a singular word, a general word so as not to limit this concept of weakness but rather to use it to describe all of the Christian life. And notice that he uses a certain kind of pronoun here. He doesn't say "your weakness," he says "our weakness." Paul includes himself in this, "The Spirit helps our weakness." This is not something that is just limited to immature believers or a certain kind of believer. Even Paul is this great missionary, the one who has written so much of our New Testament, the one who enjoyed such communion with God, even he includes himself in this. This is our weakness. This is our weakness. It is not specifically limited to a certain kind of sin, to a certain kind of suffering, it is our weakness, and this weakness is a reference back to the suffering that Paul mentioned in verse 18 when he said, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

You see, we suffer in this present age because we're weak. We have a weakness. We live in a world under the curse, a world that is fundamentally broken. We live in a world that

Solomon described as a world of vanities. We have bodies that are weak. We still struggle with ongoing battles with sin. We yearn, as Paul said in verse 23, for the redemption of our body, and if you're a true genuine believer, you know what he's talking about. You know of all the physical ailments and you also know of the spiritual ones which still confront you on a daily basis. What Paul is doing here is reminding us that this period between justification and glorification is not a period of utopia. There are some in this world today, some who even profess to be preaching the Bible who would say that you can have your best life now, and that, according to Paul, is damnable heresy. Paul says it's a life of weakness. It's not utopia. Don't expect it. It's not paradise. It is weakness.

It is described as suffering but ironically this is comfort, isn't it, because sometimes in the midst of that weakness we think that God must be displeased, "If I was truly saved, everything would go easy." And it doesn't. And we may even have some friends like Job did who would come alongside and say, "Well, if you're suffering, you must not be saved. If you're suffering, you must have some egregious sin in your life because truly if you're walking with Christ, you wouldn't be weak. If you're walking with Christ, you wouldn't suffer." But Paul reminds us that this period of time, and he puts himself as part of this, this period of time between justification and glorification is a time of suffering, it is a time of anticipation of release, a time of anticipation of glory, of redemption, and when we realize it in those terms and we know that we suffer, we go, "Okay, this is encouraging. I'm not alone."

This is actually the way that Paul describes it to be, a time of suffering, and he describes it, first of all, in that general sense, a time of weakness, but notice this general weakness is also described in a more specific sense. As we remember this persistent poverty, he says it's marked by a general weakness but then, secondly, as he continues to describe this poverty, he describes it in a specific way. Notice what follows in the middle of verse 26. We have our weakness and then he makes a specific application of it, "for we do not know how to pray as we should." Or as the ESV states in a little bit more accurate language, "for we do not know what to pray for as we ought." That especially shows our weakness.

It's a specific one, "we do not know how to pray as we ought," and again Paul includes himself in this. He doesn't say, "You do not know how to pray," or, "You do not know what to pray for as you ought." He says, "we don't." Paul puts himself again as a mature saint in the middle of all of this and says, "I have this weakness as well." Even though we have been reconciled to God and even though as Paul states in the preceding context, the Spirit is the one who helps us now address God as Father, we still have ignorance about what to pray for. In the midst of this suffering, in the midst of this weakness, we have ignorance. Literally the text says this, "though what we should pray for according to need, we do not know." The "what we should pray for according to need, we do not know," and what Paul is emphasizing here is not that we don't know the manner of how to pray, whether that is to be on our knees, to have hands outstretched, to be laying flat on the ground, Paul's not talking about manner here, he's talking about the very content of prayer and he's saying we do not know what to pray for as we ought to pray.

And you say, "Well, wait a minute. Doesn't the Bible give us all of the content of our prayers?" Certainly in general terms it does. Daniel 9. The book of Psalms. Jesus' example for disciples in Matthew 6:9-13. The prayers of Paul in Ephesians and Philippians and Colossians and Thessalonians. They're model prayers and they give us these paradigms for the content of our praying, but Paul here in Romans 8:26 is not talking about the general contents of prayer. He is talking about the specifics of prayer as it relates to our very unique circumstances of suffering.

You see, we can't turn to a prayer that addresses every single circumstance in specificity about how to pray for our suffering. We have general categories but God has specifically withheld from us revelation about how to pray for those specific moments of suffering, and so as Paul says here, as a result we don't know what to pray for. We're ignorant. It leaves us speechless and sometimes it even leaves us, this ignorance, to pray the wrong prayers. In the fog of the suffering caused by this broken world and this broken body, we lack the understanding of what to ask for specifically. We don't know how these trials are working in our lives. We don't know what role the suffering plays. We are ignorant about the specifics of these wheels of divine providence and how they're turning and so we're weak, we're impoverished.

There's a great illustration of this even in Paul's life. You remember that text in 2 Corinthians 12, the thorn? Paul illustrates this in very similar terminology in his own life. He talks about this thorn in the flesh and then he says this in verses 7 to 10, "Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, 'Paul, My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." You see, when we are weak, then God gets the glory for getting us into glory. When we experience the struggles of this present age, then God gets the glory for finding that perfect way to bring us to the redemption of our bodies, the moment of perfection, the moment when the process of sanctification comes to its end and we enjoy that perfect conformity to Jesus Christ.

So first, acknowledge this persistent poverty, this general weakness and this specific weakness, this suffering as well as the ignorance and confusion that you will experience in prayer. Acknowledge it, it's part of the Christian life and we can take comfort in that. But let that not lead you to discouragement and that's what brings us to the second major truth that we need to recognize in these two verses and it's this: recognize your personal helper. Recognize your personal helper. This is found in verse 26 as well at the very beginning of the verse and at the very end. In the midst of our weakness there is a marvelous solution. Paul says this in verse 26, "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." Here Paul gives two activities of the Spirit that the Spirit does for us in light of our general weakness and our specific weakness; two ministries of the Holy Spirit, one that is general as well, that focuses on

our general weakness, and one that is specific as well, that focuses on our specific weakness.

First of all, we read this at the beginning of verse 26, "In the same way the Spirit helps our weakness." As I've said before, this chapter, the whole chapter is about the ministry of the Spirit. Paul has pinpointed various ways that the Spirit is alive and at work in the life of the Christian. For example, in verse 9, we read that the Spirit of God dwells in the Christian. So he dwells within, that's a particular special ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is everywhere. He's omnipresent but he manifests himself in a special way within the believer. That is the responsibility of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

In verses 13 to 14, we read that the Spirit also helps the believer in his struggle against sin, we're not alone in that. In verse 16, the Spirit is the one who indwelling in us, testifies to our hearts that we are the children of God, so he's the one who gives us that assurance. An amazing ministry of the Spirit that in those times of doubt he's the one who comes to us and says, "No, you're a child. Look, you're a child of God." Notice where you turn in the midst of these struggles, you keep saying, "Father, Father, and that's because you're a child."

But now in verse 26, Paul gives us another aspect of the ministry of the Spirit. He says he helps us, he also helps us. Now that word "help" in English is a very mundane word. We use it all the time. You're going to use that word "help" probably numerous times today. But don't skip over this verb too quickly. It's not a mundane usual word in the Greek, in fact, it's anything but. It's a very very unusual word in the Greek. It is made up of two parts. So the word "help" in English, very simple, but the word "help" in Greek here is made up of three words. Paul just throws these words together to create a new word, and whenever he does that, he does it for the sake of emphasis and this is what he does, he takes the verb "to hold," he takes the verb "to hold," and then he attaches to it two other words, one which means "in the place of," and another word which means "together with." So the idea of "help" here is this: the Spirit holds in the place of together with. That's a complex idea and the idea is this, the Spirit is one who takes hold of something, namely us in our weakness, he takes hold of something together with us and for us. He takes hold of it together with us and for our benefit.

That's the idea of this verb and when we look at the context, we see this: we're weak, we're suffering, we have this burden, we groan under the weight of living in this fallen world and in this fallen body. But what does Paul say? He says we're not alone. What happens? This fear comes to our assistance but notice what the Spirit doesn't do, the Spirit doesn't come along and just remove it from us. That's what we'd want but what does the Spirit do? He comes to take hold of the weakness together with us for our benefit.

You probably have seen little children and their propensity to fill up their backpacks with way more than they can carry, you know, so they'll get ready for an outing, for a trip, and it's time for them to gather a few things. You say, "Put a few things in there but you have to carry it." And so they'll start putting in everything and they'll zip it, or barely zip it up

and then when they do put it on, they fall off to the side, you know, they can't carry it but they will not let you take anything out. And so what does the parent do? The parent comes alongside and doesn't take it off but helps the child bear the weight. That's somewhat of the idea here. The Holy Spirit, he doesn't just take it off of us, he comes alongside and helps bear the weight of the suffering. That is his ministry. That is why he is sent to us. He is the great burden-bearer and he will meet us where we're at and help carry it for our benefit to get us to that point of final glorification.

If it was just up to us, we wouldn't make it there but he is the one who has been given specifically for the purpose to help us bear this weakness until we reach that final redemption, but notice there's also a more specific way that he has been given to us, to minister to us, that is found at the end of verse 26. Not only does he also help us but in light of the fact that we do not know what to pray for as we ought, "the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." This is a precious statement. So we see this general activity of the Spirit in helping us bear the weakness, but now this specific ministry of the Spirit having to do with prayer. Paul creates this very strong contrast. We do not know what to pray for as we ought. We've searched the Scriptures, we can't find the revelation, God hasn't revealed it to us as to how this suffering is specifically working in our lives. It's a mystery to us. This providential work of God is a mystery. We don't know what to do and so we don't know what to pray as we ought to pray, but Paul contrasts that ignorance, he contrasts it strongly with what the Spirit does.

He says, "but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." This is the second activity of the Spirit in response to our poverty. There's a very deliberate contrast here. We are ignorant, we do not know what to pray for, we are speechless perhaps even frustrated and discouraged, heavy-laden, but then we have the Spirit who is described as the one who intercedes. Now again, this word "intercede" is a very special one, very rare verb, and it means this, "to meet, in, on behalf of." Again, three words Paul places all as one. To meet, in, on behalf of. It has the idea of to meet someone in the midst of their need, to meet them in that midst and on their behalf. He intercedes for us specifically on our behalf, for our good. He doesn't come to chide us. He doesn't come to make light of our weakness. He doesn't even come to slap us around for bearing this weakness and not being able to pray for it as we ought to. Instead he comes to meet us in the midst of it, and on our behalf.

Now it's interesting to note this verb appears in a more simpler form a little bit later on in Romans 8. If you would turn to verse 34, just a few verses later, we see a simpler form of this very verb found in verse 34 described about Christ, "who is the one who condemns?" Paul asks. Romans 8:34, "Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." But that verb for "intercede" is a little bit different than our verb here in verse 26. And notice this also, that Jesus is the one who intercedes at the right hand of God. We could look at Hebrews 7:25, it says the same thing, that Jesus always lives to make intercession for us, and in the context of Hebrews 7, it is at the right hand of God. Jesus is our great intercessor. He is our great high priest. But his intercession is done in the throne room of God and here we have a description of the Holy Spirit who is our intercessor as well, but he does not intercede for us in the

throne room of God as Jesus does. He intercedes for us in us. He is the one who indwells us. He is the one who speaks to the Father from us. In fact, notice this, what Paul says, he intercedes in us and for us, he intercedes with groanings, with groanings too deep for words.

Now what are these groanings? Now some would say that this is charismatic tongues speaking language and that is very contrary to the context here. Paul has already mentioned groanings. He's mentioned that the creation groans, the creation groans as it awaits to have the curse of sin removed. The believer groans. The believer groans. In verse 23, we ourselves groan within ourselves. But now in verse 26, now you have this climactic groaning. It is the Holy Spirit who is groaning and what is amazing here is the kind of condescension that Paul states. When we saw that the world groans and we saw that the believer groans, it's because these things are under the burden of the curse of sin, and now it's even the Spirit who is groaning. He's not under the curse of sin but because he is so intimately acquainted with the believer and meets the believer in the midst of his groanings, he takes it upon himself. Now he is the one who groans.

Paul says this is not some kind of groaning that we even hear. This is not an audible groaning. You're never going to hear this groaning. It's a mysterious groaning. It is a groaning that is too deep for words. There's nothing heard here. There's nothing heard but rather silently to our ears, that groaning is taking place, that mysterious prayer language is taking place within us to the Father on our behalf. That's the Holy Spirit's ministry in us. He comes to meet us in our need, he comes to help us bear the burden, and in those moments when we are at a loss for words over what to pray, because the suffering is too confusing, the Spirit is the one who is in us praying and these groanings on our behalf that are not even audible.

And take comfort in this. We give very little awareness and recognition to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and as Jesus himself said, the Spirit's ministry is to make much of Jesus, but in that ignorance of the Spirit's work, we sometimes have this idea that we're all alone, especially in suffering, and we fail to realize the precious gift that we have been given, that there is an intercession for us going on 24/7 whether we're aware of it or not, whether we have the right attitude in the midst of the suffering or not, independent of our merit. If we are in Christ and have been justified, we know the suffering and that Spirit is day after day, hour after hour, he is groaning and he is praying and notice now verse 27, rejoice in his perfect intercession. Verse 27 says this, "and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is." That's a reference to God, God the Father, who searches the hearts, knows what the mind of God the Spirit is, "because He," the Spirit, "intercedes for the saints according to God the Father." Now let's look at how we can rejoice in this perfect intercession.

Now let's consider that idea of intercession for just a moment. Think of the greatest mediator that you can think of in human history, some mediator who stepped into some geopolitical strife and tried to bring peace to that strife, between two governments. Well, even in the best of illustrations, the one who mediates between human entities is still marked by imperfection and ignorance. There is this recognition that the one who

intercedes really doesn't know what the motive of both parties really is. All you can do is base it upon the words and the concrete actions, but any great human mediator whether it's in a geopolitical context or even if you're mediating between a brother and a brother, or a husband and a wife, and you're the mediator there, you know that that mediator is ignorant. He really doesn't know what is at the heart of the strife and what the person on this side or this side really wants. But that isn't what we find here. Verse 27 is added to say, "That's not the case with how the Spirit intercedes. This is a different kind of intercession." On the one side, yes, indeed you have the weak believer, the one suffering. On the other side, you have the one who knows all things. You have the Father who is perfect and omniscient, who searches and knows every human heart and all the ignorance therein. They're radically different. But you also have a perfect intercessor who knows both perfectly and this is the idea of verse 27. There's a perfect effectiveness in this intercession that despite our weakness and our ignorance, and despite the omniscience and perfection of God the Father, the one who searches the hearts, he knows what the mind of the Spirit is because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Paul is emphasizing there is perfect unity here between the Father and the intercessor, and the intercessor is not taking advantage of the one who is weak and ignorant but he is doing all his intercession for the sake of the one who is ignorant. There is perfect communication here. The Spirit who has taken his abode in us and the Father is in heaven and that Father knows the mind of the Spirit. Those prayers, though inaudible and unheard by us, are heard by the Father. He knows the mind of the Spirit. This great heart-searcher who searches hearts knows exactly what the Spirit is praying for the sake of that ailing believer and what do we find as a result? Perfect perfect intercession. Verse 27 by its assertion the God who knows the hearts, isn't meant to frighten us but to encourage us. It's meant to encourage us because the Spirit who is in us as he groans without these words could give the impression that there's some kind of dissonance between the Father and the Spirit, and Paul says there's no dissonance whatsoever.

And here's the amazing thing, notice the very end of verse 27, "He intercedes for the saints." The saints. Paul uses this term "saints" now to refer to the very one who's ignorant and who is weak. He is a saint because he's been declared righteous by God himself. But this one who intercedes for these saints does so exactly "according to the will of God." What we don't know what to pray, we don't know what is the will of God in this suffering, the Spirit exactly knows what to pray and he prays exactly according to the will of God.

And we know 1 John 5:14-15 says this, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him." Now that has to do with the revealed will of God, that when we pray, our prayers according to what has been revealed here is the will of God, then we know, we have confidence that God will answer those in the affirmative because it's his will. But what about in the midst of suffering? If you have a physical illness, what is God's will? He hasn't described it for you in here and so there is this ignorance. We don't know what

the will of God is in the midst of this trial in our lives, and so our prayers are fraught with ignorance and even error, but that's not the case of the Spirit because the Spirit knows what we don't, the Spirit knows what the will of the Father is in the midst of that suffering and so he is praying within us to the Father, "Father, do this work. Do what You have promised to do through this trial in the life of this dear child of Yours."

You don't know what the will of God is in your suffering. Maybe it is to take it away. Maybe it isn't. Maybe it is to suffer for decades, or maybe just a short time. You don't know the will of God but the Spirit does and he prays and the Father hears him and says, "I'll grant that. Yes, I'll grant that." And when we see that, that then helps us understand verse 28. Now verse 28 is often found isolated on placards, on mantles, but it can't be separated from verse 27. What is verse 28? It's this, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

Now here's an interesting contrast. Back in verse 26 there was something we don't know. We don't know what to pray for as we ought in the midst of our suffering according to very specific circumstances of our weakness and our suffering, but there is a knowledge that we do have that has been revealed to us and it is this: we know this, that God causes all things to work together for good for those who love God. We do know that so we do know the ultimate end, and so what we know for sure is that somehow we're going to get there, somehow it will work together for good. Somehow. Maybe not now, maybe not 10 years from now, but at the moment of redemption, that final redemption, it'll all work out good and we'll look back and say, "This was exactly what I needed in my life." But in the midst of that period of time, we don't know the specifics, the circumstances, but that's where the Spirit comes in and he comes in to intercede for us. Every step along the way in that suffering, whether five days or 10 years or a whole lifetime, that Spirit is praying what we can't pray, to ensure, to get us there to glory in the end.

That is the ministry of the Spirit. People sometimes ask, "Why doesn't God answer my prayers, especially when He sees my suffering? Why does God not grant me my request? Why isn't God more imminent and involved in my life? Why does God appear so distant? Why doesn't He answer prayer?" This text tells us. He is answering prayer. He's answering the right ones, the ones that'll get you to glory. The Holy Spirit is praying what you can't and whether you recognize it or not, 24/7 in the midst of that difficulty he's interceding. He wants your best and the Father will grant all of his requests. Remember your persistent poverty. Recognize your devoted helper and rejoice in his perfect intercession.

Just a few applications as we close. First, don't be impatient with the sufferings in this life as if God has lost control. Don't be impatient with the problems, the sufferings, the weakness you experience as if God somehow has lost control, they've spiraled out of his hands or he's distant. Our sufferings are due to our weakness, not to God's weakness. Moreover, God in his sovereignty and goodness has planned to turn these sufferings into glory. Don't be impatient. It will come.

Second, don't become disappointed in prayer. Don't become disappointed in prayer. Paul's point isn't to focus attention on the practice of our prayer. At the end of any conference on prayer, we've got to stop and realize, you know, it's not our prayers that get us to glory and be thankful for that because they're fraught with errors, and that's okay because there's someone's prayers who matter most and that's the Holy Spirit's prayer, and we can rest in that, we can rest in our weakness, in our dependency, in our ignorance knowing that it's going to be okay because the prayers that matter most are the right ones and they will be answered in the affirmative.

Third, don't think that you know the best path to your final redemption. Don't think you know the best path to glorification. All of us would like to be able to chart out that path. "Yes, I can somehow conceive of glory and perfection and I think this way, along this route would get me there best." And so we like to plan and expect and even demand, but we need to realize that our plans aren't the best. We must rest in the fact that God knows the best path for each and every one of us to final glorification, and it takes different routes for each one of us but we can know this, that when that final destination comes and we look back on the route, we will all affirm that it was the best way.

Finally, in your thanksgiving to God on a daily basis, do not fail to give thanks for the Holy Spirit. He is the one who will get us there. He'll hold the burden with us. To make sure that we get to that destination, he will pray the right prayers. We need to be much more thankful for his ministry in our lives. We're weak, we're really pitiful in many ways but God has a great plan for us and he's ensured that we will get there, and that comes through the ministry of the Spirit.

Let's pray.

*Father, we are thankful that You have sent the Spirit to us to enable us to address You as Father, and that is such an amazing thing considering the condemnation that we incurred as those who are alien to You, separated by our sinfulness, and yet now we come to You and call You Father. And the Spirit is the One who enables us this way, and often in the midst of our struggles even in the midst of our doubts, it's interesting to note that even with questions and even sometimes with inappropriate accusations, we still have that reflex to say, "Father," and that testifies to the Spirit at work in us, that even in that cry we are acknowledging what You have done for us. We confess to You the ignorance, even though we think we know so much, we consider ourselves to be the experts in our lives and think we know how best to get to glory. We confess that's so ignorant and we're thankful that that ignorance is not held against us and, in fact, much to the contrary, what You have done is You've sent Your Spirit to dwell within us, to do everything for us that we cannot. And at the end, we'll look back and realize it was never our prayers that got us through, it was the prayers of Him, the Spirit. So we give thanks to You that You have sent Him to abide in us and we give You glory for that in the name of Jesus. Amen.*