

Why Pentecost Matters – The Holy Spirit Helps Us Pray

Dr. John Carmichael

[Rom 8:26-27 NASB95] 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 intercedes for the saints according to [the will of] God.

- For us to truly believe that God is working all things together for our good, we must not ignore the call to intercession. Romans 8 does not present verse 28 as an excuse for passivity. It presents the ministry of the Holy Spirit in prayer as part of the process by which God works in and through His people.
- We need intercession for self, family, church, and nation. In our lifetime, few moments have seemed as unstable, confused, and spiritually contested as the days in which we are living now. That is why we must grow in our understanding of intercession. If the church is weak in prayer, it will be weak in discernment, weak in power, and weak in victory.
- Romans 8:26 is not merely a comforting verse. It is a revelatory verse. It shows us that when we are weak, limited, and unsure, the Holy Spirit comes alongside us and helps us pray.

If the Holy Spirit has been given to help us in our weakness and empower our intercession, why do so many believers remain weak, inconsistent, and uncertain in prayer?

In Romans 8:26, Paul opens up the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the believer's prayer life. This verse teaches us that Spirit-led intercession is not a luxury for a few spiritual people. It is part of the normal Christian life. To understand this, we need to see several truths in the text.

I. The Spirit Is the Divine Person at Work in Our Intercession

- a. Romans 8:26a — “In the same way the Spirit also...”
- b. [Gal 5:16, 22-23 NASB95] 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ... 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
- c. [1Co 12:7-10 NASB95] 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another [various] kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.
- d. Paul begins by drawing attention to the Spirit. Intercession in Romans 8 is not first about human discipline, though discipline matters. It is first about divine assistance. The Spirit is not an impersonal force. He is the active divine Person working in the life of the believer.
- e. The word “likewise” or “in the same way” ties verse 26 to the larger argument of Romans 8: no condemnation; freedom from the law of sin and death; overcoming the flesh; adoption; hope; and now intercession
- f. The same Spirit who frees us, leads us, and assures us is the Spirit who helps us pray.
- g. There are at least two broad results of the Spirit's work in a believer's life: Fruit - Galatians 5:22 - 23; Gifts - 1 Corinthians 12:7–10
- h. If these realities are absent, it may reveal either that a person is not truly walking with God, or that the things of the Spirit have not been cultivated in their life.

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- i. Application: A believer cannot walk strongly in intercession while neglecting fellowship with the Holy Spirit. If we want deeper prayer, we must also pursue deeper yieldedness. We are called to walk in the Spirit, not merely talk about the Spirit.

II. Our Weakness Explains Why We Need the Spirit's Help

- a. Romans 8:26b — “helps our weakness”
- b. The text says the Spirit helps our weakness. The word points to frailty, infirmity, feebleness of mind or body. It speaks of those places where we are not as strong as we need to be.
- c. That is deeply humbling. Paul does not say the Spirit helps our strength. He helps our weakness.
- d. A helpful way to describe weakness is this: any place in your life where you are not firm. Some areas of our lives may be solid and mature; other areas may still be loose, underdeveloped, unstable, or vulnerable. We are in process.
- e. Even mature believers still have places where they need help: weak understanding; weak emotions; weak discernment; weak consistency; weak faith under pressure
- f. Application: One of the greatest hindrances to intercession is pretending to be stronger than we really are. The Holy Spirit helps those who acknowledge they need help. Spiritual maturity is not pretending you have arrived. It is recognizing where you still need transformation.
- g. Weakness is not the end of the story, but it is part of the story. The Spirit does not shame our weakness; He strengthens us in it. Honest believers become helped believers.

III. The Spirit Helps Us by Taking Hold Together With Us

- a. Romans 8:26b — “the Spirit also helps...”
- b. [Jhn 14:26 NASB95] 26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.
- c. The word “helps” is rich and powerful. It carries the idea of taking hold together with someone, assisting them, working alongside them. It is similar to the idea of one person coming alongside another to help bear a load.
- d. This means the Holy Spirit does not pray instead of us in a way that removes our participation. He helps with us. He does not replace our prayer life; He empowers it.
- e. This harmonizes with Jesus' language in John 14:26, where the Spirit is called the Helper. He is the One called alongside us.
- f. So when we pray, we are not left to our own limited ability. The Spirit joins Himself to our praying and makes weak prayer more effective.
- g. Application: Believers should stop approaching prayer as though they are alone in the room trying to generate results by effort. The Holy Spirit is our divine Helper. When you begin to pray, you should begin with an awareness that heaven has sent you assistance.
- h. The Spirit does not eliminate your responsibility; He empowers it. Intercession is cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Prayer becomes stronger when it becomes partnership.

IV. The Spirit Helps Because We Do Not Always Know What Prayer to Offer

- a. Romans 8:26c — “for we do not know how to pray as we should”
- b. Paul is very direct: we do not know. Sometimes the problem is not a lack of sincerity, but a lack of knowledge. We may not know: what is really needed; what God is doing beneath the surface; how to pray in a given situation; what steps are required in obedience; how to pray according to timing and purpose

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- c. The Amplified sense is helpful here: we do not know what prayer to offer or how to offer it as we should.
- d. There is a right way and a wrong way to pray in general terms. In general, prayer should be: scriptural; offered in faith; free from cherished sin and unforgiveness; offered in love and submission
- e. But specifically, there are moments when we do not know what is needed in that situation. We do not see the whole picture. That is where the Spirit's help becomes essential.
- f. Application: We need humility in prayer. Sometimes people pray strongly but not accurately. The answer is not to stop praying, but to let the Holy Spirit direct our prayer life so that we align with the will and wisdom of God.
- g. Sincerity alone does not equal precision. We need more than desire; we need divine guidance. The Spirit knows what we do not know.

V. The Spirit Helps Our Intercession With Groanings Too Deep for Words

- a. Romans 8:26d — “but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words”
- b. [1Co 14:14-15 NASB95] 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. 15 What is [the outcome] then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.
- c. [Eph 6:18 NASB95] 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,
- d. Paul says the Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words. This points to prayer beyond ordinary articulate speech. There are dimensions of intercession that exceed natural vocabulary.
- e. In Pentecostal understanding, this certainly includes the ministry of the Spirit through prayer that goes beyond natural understanding, including praying in the Spirit (praying in tongues.) Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14 that when he prays in a tongue, his spirit prays though his understanding is unfruitful. Jude says we build ourselves up on our most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 6:18 commands us to pray at all times in the Spirit, especially in the context of spiritual warfare.
- f. There are moments when burdens are too deep, situations too complex, and spiritual opposition too strong for merely natural expression. In those moments, the Spirit enables prayer beyond the limits of the mind.
- g. Application: Do not limit your prayer life to what your mind can fully explain. There are seasons when the Spirit will lead you into deeper intercession than your intellect can organize. Those are not moments to resist. Those are moments to pray in tongues.
- h. Some burdens cannot be fully carried by natural language. The Spirit gives utterance where the mind reaches its limit. Spirit-led prayer reaches places natural prayer cannot.

VI. Praying in the Spirit Produces Powerful Benefits in the Believer's Life

- a. This is where we can gather the benefits of praying in the Spirit, especially in tongues, into one strong point. Praying in the Spirit is not merely a doctrinal distinctiveness. It carries real spiritual benefit for the believer.
 - i. It edifies your faith - Jude 20; [1Co 14:4 NASB95] 4 One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. - Praying in the Spirit builds you up. The idea is like charging a battery. In a draining world, the Holy Spirit provides a way to keep spiritual strength, zeal, and inner fire alive.
 - ii. It purifies your walk - [Jhn 14:16-17 NASB95] 16 "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 [that is] the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or

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know Him, [but] you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. - The Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and as you yield to Him in prayer, you become more aware of His presence and more responsive to His sanctifying influence. Praying in the Spirit keeps you conscious that you are not alone and helps you rise into the life God has called you to live.

- iii. It assists your warfare - Ephesians 6:18; [1Co 14:2 NASB95] 2 For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in [his] spirit he speaks mysteries. - Part of our praying is spiritual warfare. There is a real enemy opposing the church. Praying in the Spirit allows you to pray about matters you do not know naturally and to speak mysteries to God that bypass human limitation.
 - iv. It expands your worship - 1 Corinthians 14:15; [Eph 5:19 NASB95] 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; [Col 3:16 NASB95] 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms [and] hymns [and] spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. - Praying and singing in the Spirit deepens worship. It opens the believer to spiritual songs and fresh expressions of praise. It magnifies both private devotion and corporate worship.
 - v. It focuses your prayer - Romans 8:26; 1 Corinthians 14:14 - Praying in the Spirit helps keep selfishness and mere human limitation out of prayer. It allows the Spirit of God to pray the will of God through yielded lips.
- b. Application: Many believers have received this gift, but do not consistently cultivate it. What God intended as a continual source of strength becomes neglected. If you want to stay full, stay yielded. If you want to stay sharp in prayer, stay active in praying in the Spirit.
 - c. Praying in the Spirit is not just an initial experience; it is a continual resource. It builds, purifies, strengthens, expands, and focuses. What many neglect is one of God's greatest provisions for victorious living.
- **The Holy Spirit strengthens our weak places by coming alongside us in prayer, helping us intercede according to the will of God with supernatural assistance.**
 - Romans 8:26 reveals both our need and God's provision. We are weak, limited, unfinished, and often unsure. But we are not abandoned. The Holy Spirit comes alongside us to help us intercede.