

Life: A Life You Can't Live on Your Own

December 30, 2013

• *The Bible Studies for Life* lesson for Jan. 12 focuses on Romans 8.

I sat in my chair that night clutching my Bible and journal. I wanted to pray, but I didn't have the words. It was Saturday night, and I knew there would be faces missing from the pews on Sunday morning. Conflict had exploded in our small congregation, and people had been hit by the shrapnel. There didn't seem to be any good solutions. What had happened grieved me, and all I could do was weep over our brokenness and failure to love.

"Lord," I whispered, "I don't know what to pray."

The words that came into my mind were familiar: "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 through wordless groans" (Romans 8:26). It comforted me and gave me hope. We are not alone in prayer. The Spirit of God works in us and intercedes for us when there are no words.

Power in prayer

There is power in prayer that surpasses our human frailty. We are redeemed by God's grace, but we continue to struggle with the weaknesses and limitations of our human condition. Our fallen world still labors under the tension of a kingdom both now and not yet. We are citizens of the kingdom of God, yet that kingdom will not be fully revealed until Christ returns in glory.

We are set free from the burden of sin, yet we still have to walk out a

process of sanctification in which we learn to live by the Spirit. Sealed by the Spirit, our bodies, minds and emotions still bear the residue of living in a world stained by sin. We are weak. In our finite condition, we cannot fully grasp the depths of God or perfectly understand his will. Sometimes, we don't know what to pray. Sometimes, we pray for the wrong things. By his grace, the Spirit of God intercedes for us, helping us in our weakness.

When Jesus told the disciples he would send the Holy Spirit, Jesus said he would send them a “helper” so they would not be alone. The Greek word for “helper” is *paraclete*. It means advocate, or one who comes alongside. The *paraclete* was the person who offered a defense for the accused in the court of law. One aspect of the Spirit's role as our helper or advocate is through interceding for us in prayer.

Spirit as intercessor

The Spirit's role as intercessor is connected to Jesus' intercession for us. John 17 records Jesus' longest prayer. The night before Jesus was arrested and crucified, he gathered his disciples in the upper room. Jesus began to prepare them for what was coming, but the disciples did not understand. They were filled with sorrow and grief at Jesus' coming departure, not understanding what that meant. They still did not see Jesus' path to victory included the cross. That night—with his disciples gathered around him—Jesus prayed for his disciples and all those who would believe in his name.

The disciples did not fully understand God's will, but Jesus interceded for them. God the Son spoke to God the Father and prayed on their behalf. It was not just prayer; it was divine conversation. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ present with his people (John 14:16-18).

Just as Jesus showed his disciples what it meant to live righteously, understand the Father and love others, the Holy Spirit works within us to

do the same. Jesus continues to make intercession for us before the Father's throne (Hebrews 7:25).

Enter the divine conversation

The Spirit intercedes for us from our inmost being. In prayer, we have the opportunity to enter the divine conversation as the Holy Spirit continues to pray to the Father on our behalf.

Prayer is not using our words as a battering ram against God's unchanging walls of stone. He is not indifferent. He is for us. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us from within our hearts, bridging the gap between finite and holy. We don't have to fear God doesn't hear our prayers or doesn't understand—his own Spirit is praying with and for us in groans too deep for words.

When we come up against the limits of our human conditions, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, building a bridge between finite and infinite. Even when we do not fully understand or grasp the will of God, the Holy Spirit is praying for us in perfect accord with the will of God. God, who searches our hearts, knows the mind of the Spirit and hears the Spirit's cries on our behalf (Romans 8:27). God knows our weakness and transcends it by his own Spirit.

If God does this for us in prayer, how much more is his Spirit with us in every part of life? The Spirit is there when we face opposition, giving us the words to say when we proclaim Christ in a hostile world. The Spirit reminds us of the words of Christ and helps us to understand the will of God. Through the Spirit, God gives us the strength to resist temptation and shows us what it looks like to live as children of God. God did not leave us alone. Our helper and advocate is the very Spirit of God.