

LET THE HOLY SPIRIT HELP
Survival Guide
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Romans 8. A very brief passage of scripture this evening. Verse 26-27. “In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray. But the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”

These verses form the second principle of the survival guide when life gets difficult. The first principle found in verses 18-25 we looked at this morning: compare the groaning to the glory. The second principle of surviving when things get difficult is the Holy Spirit is helping.

As we look at this theme tonight I want to take a diversion in the beginning and just examine a footnote to Romans 8. That is the whole subject of illness and prayers for divine healing and what the scripture is saying to us in this passage about healing. We recognize that there is no explicit mention of illness in Romans 8. The closest that we come to the subject of illness is in verse 27 “The Holy Spirit helps us in our weaknesses.”

The word “weakness” in other places in the New Testament can describe either physical weakness or it can describe areas of spiritual weakness. I think it’s fair to take it both kinds of ways. It therefore is appropriate when we look at the word “weakness” that we take a moment to examine the whole subject of healing and what perhaps could be said about healing in a biblical sense. I would imagine a lot of us here in this audience could give a personal testimony of being the subject of healing yourself or have witnessed that in someone else’s life. It was healings in our own family that kept me true to faith in Jesus Christ in the years when I was questioning the reality of the Lord and of the church.

Seven things I want to say about healing before we look at the Holy Spirit helping us. The first thing I want to say is that as we look at the scripture we can say I think we confidence affirm that it is always right to pray for healing. Whenever I’m called upon to pray for someone who is ill my instinctive reaction is to always pray that God would reverse their illness and their adversity. It’s not a prayer initially of Lord help them to bear up under this and get through it. Nor is it a prayer of simply relinquishment. As sometimes I think the Holy Spirit will bring us to that as in a case of a terminal illness. But it is right to pray for healing. The Lord gives us carte blanche in scripture to ask him anything and we may come to him.

That asking for healing is not meant in the New Testament to be a passive kind of thing but it’s meant to be an active faith in the Lord. Lord we come to you and we know that you have power and authority over all illness and disease. And when you left this world you give to the church and to the apostles’ authority over all manner of illness and disease. There is no disease Lord Jesus that you have not healed in the past. The disease I have is not uncommon to your power. Touch and move.

The second principle that falls after that is when the Lord doesn’t heal we don’t have a Why to that any more to we have a Why to all the problems related to suffering. But Romans 8 is given to encourage us when the Lord is not changing our circumstances. That is in regard to illness if the Lord is not healing us in response to our prayer, Romans 8 comes alongside of us to

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encourage us. I'm glad there are scriptures like that that the Lord simply doesn't leave it either/or. You prayed for healing and if you're not healed by the Lord then the Lord doesn't leave you hanging with nothing to catch you. Romans 8 is a wonderful example of the Holy Spirit through the scripture coming alongside of us to wrap the arms of love and encouragement of the Lord about us and sustain us when we have not had the answer that we sought. We must therefore always be careful not to set the scripture against the scripture. On the one hand come marching into God's presence "God, I prayed for healing and you must heal me." For we have along with the invitation to pray for healing counsel that the scripture gives that especially tells us what to do when we are not healed. Compare the groaning to the glory the Holy Spirit is helping and we'll look at two other principles as we examine the scripture next week.

The third thing that I think needs to be said about healing is that however we are healed, whether it's through direct or indirect means God ultimately is the healer. I have therefore no problem praying for people that are going through medical tension or going through surgery and saying, Now Lord bring healing in this process. Because no physician no matter how skilled he is in any kind of practice of medicine can be responsible for bringing healing in an ultimate sense. Only God can bring that healing.

There's a wonderful example in the book of Exodus that God works by indirect means the children of Israel, Exodus 15, were coming through the wilderness and they've run out of water and they're really thirsty. They come to a spot where there is water and the water is bitter. Moses is instructed by God, "Throw a tree in the water." When he throws the tree in the water the waters become sweet.

Could the Lord have made the waters sweet through Moses without having had him chop down a tree and throw it in the water? Of course. Why does he have a tree chopped down? Did it have medical qualities? We're not told why he did it. We're simply told that the waters were made sweet by an indirect means that the Lord used in order to bring sweetness to the water.

That for me has always been theological justification to take an aspirin. If the Lord could make water sweet through an indirect means, he could heal directly. Yes, he could heal the headache directly. But he could also heal it if I "throw" something inside of me – an aspirin or whatever. He always heals when healing is accomplished. That healing is through God whether it's direct or indirect means.

The fourth thing I think the scriptures have to say about healing is that the proof of your being healed is not your faith but it is the healing itself.

I say that because there's been a good deal of emphasis in the body of Christ that you should claim your healing when in fact you have not yet been healed. I have no problem at all with people in their quiet walk with God asserting faith and saying, Lord, I believe you for this. I guess where I have my problems is where I don't see any scriptural precedent for people ever claiming their healing and then after saying, I am healed, ran around still sick. To do such a thing would destroy the credibility of the testimony in the gospel. Because the world doesn't judge our healing nor does the church judge our healing on the basis of our confession but on the basis of whether or not there is indeed evidence that the healing took place.

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If for example in Acts 3, which is the first great miracle in the early church, there was a man who lay lame at the Gate Beautiful. He'd been lame from birth. When Peter reached out to pray for him, if in fact the man had not been healed but only had been given a gift of faith that the healing would be some time down the road and he began screaming out at the top of his lungs, "I'm healed! Praise God, I'm healed!" And people come along and saying, "What are you saying? You're still down there on those stumps of legs. What do you mean you're healed?"

Had there been no physical cooperation or evidence to the healing what would have happened would have been a lack of credibility of the gospel and there certainly would not have been thousands of people who came to the Lord that day as a result of the crowd that gathered to hear Peter preach on the healing.

I would simply suggest that one of the things we need to do is to be careful in respect of how we testify of healing. If we bring testimony to healing the testimony is meant to actually give witness to the fact that a healing took place. When that rule is violated when people begin claiming healings that have not yet happened, we can get into very severe trouble.

I think the classic example of that is contained in this little book We Let Our Son Die. It's the story of Larry Parker from Barstow, California tells about their ten year old boy who had diabetes. They got into the faith, positive confession teaching of claiming your healing. They claimed that Wesley had been healed and did not need to take insulin any more. The end result of that was the little boy died. The Parkers were indicted by the grand jury of San Bernadino County and convicted and given a prison sentence that was worked out in a work program. He later made a very astute observation: "We realized as we watched our son suffer while we were claiming his healing that we had violated a fundamental principle of scripture. And that is we had elevated faith above love. Love told us to do something for our son and faith was telling us to continue to claim the healing. And we lost our son by being confused over this and by being confused over claiming things."

A fifth principle of healing is we're not to be ever afraid to medically document a healing. Jesus does this to the man who is a leper whom Jesus heals. Luke says the man was full of leprosy meaning that he was in the terminal stages. But as soon as he was healed Jesus said to him, "Go and show yourself to the priest and offer for cleaning what Moses commanded as approved to the people." The priest was equivalent in Jesus' day of the medical doctor who certified that a relief indeed had been found from the illness so that the person was well again. So if you're in doubt whether or not you'd be healed, do something very sensible. Get medical documentation. The healing will look all the better as a testimony if you can have doctors cooperation.

The sixth thing I would say about healing is be content to stay within biblical boundaries in the quest for healing. If you're ill and want to be healed then go at it the biblical way. Call for elders, have them anoint you with oil, have them pray for you. But don't get into a shrine of lords mentality that wanders across the earth or the charismatic landscape and goes from this evangelist to this meeting to this event to this personality to this new "trick or devise or artifact" that if you do this you're going to be healed.

I think somehow the body of Christ in these days needs to disassociate itself from magic and from fantastical kinds of cures, cures that have fantasy to them. I see innocent and well meaning people that are dashed time and time again with these kind of methods. Look to the Lord for

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your healing. Don't look for some magical thing or some magical thing that you haven't yet done. Put your hope in the Lord. Follow biblical injunctions and rest your case with the Lord. He loves you dearly. He loves you more than any evangelist or pastor can ever love you. Rest your case with him.

Then the last thing I would simply say about healing is physical healing is not everything. An inner rest in God is far more vital even than healing. It's interesting that when the paralytic was lowered through the roof by the four friends in Mark 2 that the first thing that Jesus addressed was his inner condition because Jesus knew that it was no good if the man were physically well but inwardly ill. So the Lord rearranges the inner data of his life and then goes to work on the exterior man.

Some of the people who have ministered most to the body of Christ are persons who were not healed.

The Holy Spirit helps. There are two comparisons or contrasts that we are to note in these verses. The one comparison or paradox is this: we know not but we also know. Isn't that intriguing? Verse 18 "We know," Paul says, "that the whole creation has been groaning. Then verse 28 he says "We know that in all things God is working for the good." Then verse 27 "We do not know how we ought to pray."

The Christian life varies back and forth between this ying-yang. Between this knowingness and not knowing. We always know God is working for the good. We always know fundamental things about our life and our salvation. But there are moments when we get stuck and life is a mystery and we do not know.

Then we know not, Paul says, "We do not know how to pray as we ought." That doesn't mean that when we start to pray we haven't the foggiest idea of where to begin. There are some very clear pattern prayers that the scripture gives us that no matter what our circumstance in life that we can always pray. For example we can always say "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

We know to pray that. We know that that prayer tells us as the foundation of all Christian praying that there are six basic requests of prayer. That our prayer first focused upon concerns that God has. His name to be hallowed, his kingdom to come, his will to be done. We just know we're to be praying for those things.

Then three requests for ourselves – we'll have enough to get on with life on a daily basis. We'll have forgiveness for our past and we'll have guidance for our future. So the Lord's prayer tells to us we can bring the present to God – the daily bread; the past – our sins; and the future – the need for guidance. So we do know basically how to pray.

But there are times when we get stuck. And even though we know to pray the Lord's prayer which guides us and informs us in all the basic decisions of life there are nevertheless those moments when life is so overwhelming we do not have wisdom or insight to know what the Lord should do in this particular situation. The "we know not," may come in moments like a tragedy,

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like a door that we felt like the Lord was going to open that closed, a death of a loved one, a debilitating illness in our life, a loss of courtship, an erosion of relationship within marriage or rejection within marriage. A kind of unexplainable event as happens in Acts 12 where James is suddenly killed while Peter is being released. There are time when we do not know why. It is those moments when we have the right to come according to Romans 8:26-27 and ask the Holy Spirit to pray through us because we don't know how to pray.

I think all pastors and public speakers come up with glib phrases that you really believe in. Then you get rocked at some point in life and you realize that what you've been glibly saying all your life really isn't true after all. That's frustrating.

One of my glib phrases, "The Lord doesn't always tell us why. So when we don't have an answer to the question why we must ask ourselves, What now? And the Lord walkways tells us what we're to do – what now? We're to not get bitter. We're to go on living a day at a time. We're to not lose ourselves in self pity and blame." We always know the What now even when we don't know the Why. I've said that for years. I've said that as your pastor. I still believe that's mostly right. But there are times when I don't even know to say, What now? What do I do now? I don't have the foggiest idea. I am really stuck on this one. I not only do not know why this has happened, I don't know what to do next.

So in our not knowingness the Holy Spirit is given to help us. We also know in our not knowingness in the ultimate sense as we remain faithful to the Lord that he will bring us through in the long haul. We do not know... but we know.

That is a comfort for us. In all the Whys of life there are some things I simply have to say, those are true even though I do not know how to get through this present moment.

The second comparison that Paul leads us to is not only do we know and yet not know there is a comparison that when we do not know, he knows.

"In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray or how we ought to pray. But the Spirit himself intercedes for us. He who searches our hearts, knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." Who has ever said in the body of Christ, don't condition your prayer by praying "In God's will." You decide what God's will is and therefore whatever you want, that becomes God's will if you ask it in faith. Here's Paul saying God has a will and the Holy Spirit knows where the plumblines of God's will is and when we don't know how to pray ourselves the Holy Spirit is in there with words that cannot be expressed praying for us according to God's will that God's will will be done in our life.

The Spirit is helping us. The word "help" in the English language does not convey perhaps the strength that is here in this word. It means "together, over against, to take." It's to come to one's assistance and do some dynamic relief and help.

When is the Holy Spirit helping us? When in prayer we are groaning. When we do not know how to pray as we ought and we're just sighing or groaning or speaking in other languages. Indeed perhaps any of those interpretations of this verse can fit. There are times when our English language does not suffice to give us guidance on the prayer. So we may fall back on

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speaking to the Lord in a language of intercession and a tongue we do not know. For Paul actually the literalness of this verse says the Spirit intercedes for us with words that cannot be articulated. Thought forms do not have an expression we understand. It could be either sighs, groans or unarticulated words. Other tongues mainly. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:14-15 “If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit and I will also pray with my mind. I will sing with the spirit but I will also sing with my mind.”

One of the great releases we can have as we pray is at times is simply park our mind in prayer and let the Holy Spirit pray through us with words we do not understand.

The groaning also can simply represent longings and heartaches and aspirations which well up from within the spiritual depths and cannot be expressed with every day words and nomenclature. Whatever, groaning is a proof in our life that the Spirit is at work. When we come to those terrible moments of life when easy speaking does not come to us and when we are left with gasps and moans, that is the moment in which nevertheless the Holy Spirit is praying through us from God’s point of view. The Holy Spirit knows what is in the mind of God and he intercedes in us for the will of God to be done.

It’s like riding a two-seater bicycle. When I’m no longer able to pump the Holy Spirit is able to pump to keep things moving.

“As God searches the heart of the children of the Lord he finds unuttered and unutterable groanings through they are thus inarticulate there is a meaning that cannot escape the omniscient eye of God. They are holy intelligible to him. And furthermore they are found to be in accordance with his will. Since they are the intercessions of the Holy Spirit they always meet with the understanding and approval of God. They are as agreeable to his will as are the intercessions of Christ at the right hand of God.” In other words God is reading the inarticulate moanings that the Holy Spirit is doing in our life.

So the scripture is saying to us, Cheer up when you’re going through difficulties. You have an intercessor in the heart, the Holy Spirit. Other parts of scripture will go on to tell us that not only do we have an intercessor in the heart but we have an intercessor in the heavens – Christ Jesus who is the advocate with the Father, at the right hand of God. When you are in great difficulty there is always someone praying for you. That is encouraging to me. When I am in difficulty, when I’m not even praying for myself, and when no other human being is spraying for us there is someone praying for us – Christ in the heavens and the Holy Spirit in the heart.

Many people have indicted to me that they pray for me. I value that and appreciate that. We ought always to pray for one another. I always valued my mother’s prayers. I remember the last Mother’s Day she was a live in 1979 I asked her a question, “Do you ever remember day in your life when you did not pray for me?” That question was sort of asked off the wall without any advance notice that I was going to ask it. She rolled her eyes and thought for a moment. She said something that sort of floored me because I realized I could not give the same answer toward my own children. She said, “At the most two or three days.” Out of all the days of my life up till then she had only missed two or three days she could ever think that she hadn’t prayed for me. I knew when my mother was alive there was always someone prying for me.

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When Mom died there was a group of ladies in the church that signed a scroll that said, We'll stand in the gap. They pledged their names to pray for me. I realize that some of those perhaps forgot as time went along or they moved away or whatever. But I knew I could always count on my mother's prayers. I miss them keenly. I can remember my mother talking many times about her dad who always prayed for her. She said, "When Dad died, the thing I miss most was his prayers."

This passage from Romans 8 is telling us we always have someone praying for us. If a human being isn't praying for us and if we can't pray for ourselves, the Lord is interceding in the heavens and the Holy Spirit in the heart.

Hudson Taylor said, "It doesn't really matter how great the pressure is. It only matters where the pressure lies. See that it never comes between you and the Lord. The greater the pressure the more it presses you to his breast."

We need to pray that our pressures press us closer to him. And in the midst of pressure we can relax and trust the Holy Spirit to pray for us according to God's will.

Lord, as we come to you now at the close of this service we can all think of moments when we are hard pressed to find words to come to you with. We have been confronted with problems that seem beyond human reconciliation and resolution. Maybe some in the service this evening, find themselves in that place in life when no matter how long they think about a problem, how hard they think about it, there appears to be no earthly solution, no concrete thing that they can pray. No way out of the dilemma. Lord, it's so wonderful to know that in times like that, in the Christian's life, you're taking over and saying, I understand. You can only go this one so far yourself. Now I'm taking over for you. I'm praying for you according to the Father's will. How many times Lord, have we been blind to the ways you've protected us. Because the Holy Spirit has been praying for us we have been kept from danger and adversity and trial and falling because the Holy Spirit, our faithful friend, is seeking to preserve our life for the Lord. We want to thank you, Father, for that. We want to be aware that some of the greatest benefits that happen to us in life happen to us when at the time, our not even being consciously aware of them. It's wonderful to know that you, the higher power in our life, are active on our behalf and are praying for us. As we take some moments to worship you at the close of the service tonight we ask that your Holy Spirit would pray through every heart here that needs a release, needs an inner assurance that all is well. Needs help today from you. We thank you that you'll be here to minister to us as we wait upon you. We open ourselves to let you pray through us.