

“Even if you don’t know...Go!”

Romans 8:26-27

September 13, 2020

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen. (Psalm 19:14) Dear Christain Friends...

Do you have a favorite chapter of the Bible? A place in Scripture you find yourself returning to on a regular basis for comfort or confidence? If we polled the congregation today, I’m sure we would hear a variety of responses. Maybe Psalm 23 is your “go-to” chapter; not just because of its familiarity, but the real reminder that Jesus walks with us through the highs and lows of life. Or maybe Psalm 46 quiets your soul and provides strength? Or is a chapter from the gospel of John? Maybe chapter 3 (... *“for God so loved the world...”*) or John 14 where Jesus provides true direction from this life (... *“I am the way, the truth and the life...”*).

How about Romans 8? Is that the “go-to” chapter of the Bible for anyone here this morning? I can’t begin to tell you how Romans 8 has become a cherished chapter for me both in my pastoral ministry and also personal life. I’ve used selected verses in hospital rooms and in counseling sessions and at wedding services. I’ve opened it to help navigate the challenges and changes and uncertainties in my own life. For me, Romans 8 has been my “go-to” or favorite chapter in the Bible; it’s what I call the “National Park” chapter of Scripture. Let me explain: earlier this summer my family and I took our vacation out west. We visited five national parks. And it was beautiful and grand and full of take-your-breath away moments. After touring the first park (Arches in Moab, Utah), we wondered if it could get any more beautiful. And then we went to Zion...you get the point.

Romans 8 does that too! You start reading, “*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...*” Wow! What an amazing statement...what grace God has chosen to give me! And then around the bend comes this thought: “*our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed.*” And soon after: “*we know that in all things...*” and still more “*...if God is for us who can be against us... [because] we are more than conquerors...*” The entire chapel is simply grand with gospel gems! Our eyes are lifted up from our present sufferings and shortcoming and insecurities to glories of heaven.

Today, we won't take a full tour of Romans 8 (I encourage you to do that on your own!), but we will look at one short section. A part of the chapter that I've haven't quoted yet and maybe doesn't get as much of the spotlight as other verses. But it is no less worthy of our time! Here's why: if you need a boost in your prayer-life; if you sometimes stumble or bumble through your prayers; or if you find yourself praying for your own wants and wishes (instead of “thy will be done”) then this section is for you! Two short verses: ***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. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people (saints) in accordance with the will of God.*** With those Spirit-inspired words in mind, our theme for today is: ***“Even if you don't know, Go!” Part 1: Go... (to God in prayer) depending on your “prayer partner” for help; (Part 2) Go...trusting your Father's will is done.***

If you had to give yourself a grade for your prayer-life, what would it be? Now I realize it's hard to self-analyze and a lot of us tend to be harder on ourselves than we deserve, but either way where would you be at? Would it be below-average? You pray at meals and bedtime (if you remember) and that's about it. Might it be average: you pray at

meals and bedtime and when life throws you a curveball. Or is there more to your prayers? Are you someone who has regular conversations with your Father in heaven? Wherever you might be on that prayer-spectrum, I think it's safe to say we echo the disciples, ***“Lord, teach us to pray!”*** (Luke 11:1) And we can find great comfort in Paul's words today using our theme: ***“Even if you don't know...Go!”*** We don't pray alone...we have help!

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us...” The same Spirit who brought you into God's family is the same Spirit who continues to work in us and through us and in spite of us! Nineteen times the Spirit is mentioned in Romans 8 alone. That means the Spirit's work is a big deal. In fact, we couldn't fight sin or have hope or pray without stumbling if the Spirit wasn't at work. Left to ourselves, our weakness would be too much to overcome. And what might that weakness be? First, it goes without saying, but our #1 weakness is the fact that as a sinful and selfish individual, I don't deserve to have the privilege of talking to a holy God! And yet we have been blessed with this remarkable gift of prayer...an opportunity that exists because Jesus first interceded for us on the cross and the Spirit brought us into a faith-relationship with God and continues to intercede on our behalf. (In fact, we are called “saints” in this passage!) And specifically thinking about the context of this section, Paul is talking about the present sufferings of this world which leave us overwhelmed. And despite our best efforts, we can't help but question, *“Where is God?”* or *“How could he let this happen?”* or *“Why won't he stop it?”*

Dear Christian, ***“Even if you don't know...Go!”*** Even if you feel at a loss for words; even if you've said to yourself, *“if only I knew where to start...”* ***Go!...to your Father in prayer because we can depend on our “prayer partner” for help.*** At my son's grade school, they have a program called Prayer Partners. An older student is teamed up with a

younger student. And at various times throughout the year, they get together and write notes to elderly members of our congregation. They pen encouragement from Scripture and prayers as well. Think about what that looks like: my first grader knows what he wants to say but struggles to put words into nice, flowing sentences. Enter the 7th grader who helps.

That's what the Holy Spirit does for you and me! We aren't left to ourselves...we aren't told to "grin and bear it" or "suck it up." We have help! And this word "help" gives us the picture of someone else doing the heavy lifting alongside us. The Holy Spirit takes our bumbling prayers (I'm sure you can think of a few examples) and presents them as pleasing before our Heavenly Father.

So let me ask you: where do you need the Spirit's help in your prayer life? Here might be some examples:

- **Prayer apprehension:** you might be a person who knows God's call to be a spiritual leader, but you don't like to speak publicly, so you are short-changing your family by not leading them more often in prayer. Dear Christian, *"Even if you don't know...Go!"* Maybe the first few prayers will be awkward, but remember who's helping (interceding as the go-between). You have the Spirit's help, so pray often!
- **Prayer impatience:** you might be a person who wants immediate answers and you get frustrated with God because your plans aren't going according to your plan! Then remember Paul (in 2 Corinthians 12.) He was taught a valuable lesson in patience and perspective: *Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in*

persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. You have the Spirit's help, so pray like Paul, with patience and perspective!

- **Prayer despair:** you might be a person who talks to God like you're walking on thin ice even though there's solid depth beneath you and so your prayers aren't bold and filled with trust. Dear Christian, remember, there is nothing too big for your God to handle! He who took care of your salvation, he can certainly take care of whatever is on your heart. You have the Spirit's help, so pray and trust your all-powerful God!

- **Prayer content:** you might be a person who talks to God only when times are tough (we call those 9-1-1 "emergency" prayers) or for things you need now ("gimme prayers"). Dear Christian, recall the model prayer that Jesus himself taught us to pray. By those petitions we are guided in our prayer content. Recall that 6 petitions deal with something spiritual by nature and only one (daily bread) is for something physical. Might that teach us something about the content of our prayers? Might we pray more often for a stronger faith, an opportunity to share our faith or in thanksgiving for the blessings of faith? You have the Spirit's help, so pray for spiritual things. Friends, that is by no means an exhaustive list. Rather it is an encouragement to make use of the Spirit's presence and power and partnership through prayer! *"Even if you don't know...Go! Go* depending on the Spirit's help and then trusting that God's will is done. Hear again Romans 8:27: ***And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people (saints) in accordance with the will of God.***

Doesn't it take an abundance of humility to pray *"thy will be done"*? If you're honest, you know yourself all too well and you know that many of your frustrations in life stem from not getting what you want. And so this verse speaks to that part of our nature. And once again, what a comfort to know the Spirit is on our side!

This side of heaven we simply don't have a clear view of God's will. And there are many-a-prayer struggles that result from that. And yet that doesn't mean we should stop praying... *"Even if you don't know...Go!* Even if you don't know whether you should be praying for renewed health and healing or for a loved one to go home to heaven - let the Spirit help you in that struggle! Pray that God's will is done! And no matter the situation, if life is foggy and frustrating - if you don't know whether you should be praying to get into this college or that; to find employment here or there; to make this life-changing decision or not...keep on praying and trusting that God's will is done! It always is...and some day it will be clear to us!

Permit a final poem which was written by "Corrie" ten Boom - a Dutch Christian watchmaker from the early 1900s and author of the book *The Hiding Place* - which chronicled her time in a WWII concentration camp.

1. *My Life is but a weaving
between my Lord and me; I cannot
choose the colors He worketh
steadily.*

2. *Oft times He weaveth sorrow
And I, in foolish pride,
Forget He sees the upper, And I the
under side.*

3. *Not til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Shall God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why.*

4. *The dark threads are as
needful
In the Weaver's skillful hand,
As the threads of gold and silver -
in the pattern he has planned*

5. *He knows, He loves, He cares,
Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives His very best to those
Who leave the choice with Him.*

It's my prayer that this short but beautiful section of God's word gives you encouragement in your prayer life! *"Even if you don't know...Go...boldly, confidently and regularly depending on your "prayer partner" for help as you approach your dear Father in heaven! And may his will be done! Amen.*