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Sermon Series: *Native Prayer, No. 4*

It's Possible

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Romans 8:18-27 (NIV, ©1984)

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

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 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.

We're in Romans, Chapter 8, if you'd turn there with me. There are Bibles in the seats if you need one. The book of Romans, Chapter 8.

I think one of the most fun parts of parenting, so far, for me, was watching my kids learn to communicate.

The fact is, newborn babies aren't really all that much fun. They just lie there and sleep and eat and cry and, well, make messes, you know.

A quart-sized Winston Churchill in a bassinet.

But after they get to be a few weeks old, that's when they begin to realize that you're there. And they start looking and smiling at you.

That's when you start to see some personality.

In other words, it's when **communication** begins that things get interesting and funny, because kids try to say words, but they don't always get them right.

When R.J. Corman's helicopter would fly over our house, Benjamin would look up and point and say, "hepadopter."

Of course he finally grew out of that—the year he left for college.

Both of our older boys—instead of saying, "animal," would say "aminal."

And frankly I was never in a hurry to correct them on that because I still think "aminal" is kind of cool. Annette and I were probably working against each other there.

It took Paul a while to get the concept of an aunt, A.U.N.T., so for a little while there, we had "Uncle Paul and Uncle Mary."

Paul also had trouble with the letter *r* for a while, so when he was little – back when Pastor Reed was here, it was always, "Pastor Weed," with a *W*.

Let me say too—that was funny in another way.

From time to time, the church would get promotional stuff that abbreviated the church name to the Wilmore Free Meth. Church.

So, for a while, we had Pastor Weed of the Wilmore Free Meth. Church.

The point is, it's fun hearing kids learn to communicate. They don't always get it right, but parents can figure out what they're trying to say.

When Ben would point to the sky and say, "hepadopter," Annette and I knew what he was talking about.

At the same time though, we would always say back to him, "helicopter," because even though "hepadopter" is cute at two years old, it's not at cute at five, or ten, or twenty, and that's because there *is* an **expected progression**. There's an expected **development of speech** and **communication** in people.

Now, I realize that some move faster than others.

Some need extra help in learning to communicate.

Some physically *can't* communicate in certain ways, so they learn to communicate in other ways – they learn sign language, they write what they want, they read lips, they learn Braille – they invest lots of work and effort learning to communicate, because it's important that people interact with the world around them.

If we don't, we have no real context for anything. If we don't learn to engage with others, we become isolated, and we never live to our fullest potential for Christ.

People are created to communicate, and we are made to **develop** in our communication – with each other and with God. It's abnormal if we don't.

We've invested four weeks so far in our study of prayer, which is simply **communication with God**.

Although we won't, we really **could** invest another year or two in this, because learning to communicate with God – learning to pray – is at least as important to the Christian as learning to communicate is important to a child.

That first week, we said that prayer is **natural**. Prayer is native to us. We were made to communicate with God.

Right from the beginning, children cry. That is their way of communicating need or displeasure, as noisy and crude as it is – especially at three in the morning.

Babies communicate right from the start. It's native. It's built in.

Just the same, prayer is built into us – all of us. Human history proves that if we don't pray to Yahweh,

the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, then we *will* invent idols to pray to.

The urge to communicate with the divine is natural – *native* – to you and me.

We've also said that prayer is *beautiful*.

Our God – our Creator – loves us. He wants us to talk with him and listen to Him, and as we'll do that, He'll provide calm when we're worried and assurance when we're shaken.

Just as King David found, *we* can also find in God a refuge, a quiet place of security and rest and hope.

Communion with God is like coming home after a long, hard journey. It's like looking through your car windshield and seeing your own home after thousands of miles of interstate.

Prayer is that kind of beautiful.

Last week we said that prayer is also *critical*, because it's through prayer that we learn obedience to God.

We please our Heavenly Father when we're obedient to Him. And we obey those we trust, and we trust those we know, and we know God through prayer.

That's how prayer leads to obedience. That's how prayer led *even Jesus to obedience*.

So, prayer is *natural*, it's *beautiful*, it's *critical* for living the Christian life, and today – prayer is *possible*.

You and I: we can pray. And, we can pray effectively.

In that Romans 8 passage that was read for us, we find the Apostle Paul talking about suffering.

He says, "You know what? Humans suffer."

No surprise there.

Then Paul explains why. He says, "Humans are going to suffer in this world because this world isn't like it was created to be."

"All creation," Paul says, "suffers today in some way."

All creation is in a state of decay, Scripture says, because of sin.

Because of Adam's choice to eat what God said not to eat. Because Adam chose His way over God's way initially. Then add to that the compounding effect of every human choice after Adam's to do things our own way and not God's way. Because of all that, verse 20 there says that all creation "*was subject to frustration and is in bondage to corruption.*"

Put simply, things are not right here, and so Paul says in verse 22 that "*the whole creation is groaning as in the pains of childbirth*" even today.

"But even more than that," Paul says, "*we are groaning*. You and I, along with every human being, are groaning because all is not right with us."

Some days, our groaning is more evident than others, isn't it?

As we get older and try to do the things we used to do when we were younger, we usually wind up groaning in some way.

Even when we're young, we often can't do what we think we can do, either physically or mentally.

We get confused. We don't know the answers. We don't know what to do – in which direction to go.

Why is that?

Because of this weight of sin in the world, our bodies are not what God intended them to be. They're weak. There's fatigue and disease and aches and pains.

In the world, there is injustice and hurt and hunger and heartache. So, we humans groan right along with all the rest of creation. We all groan for redemption, for Jesus to come back and set things right.

And He *is* coming and He *will* set things right one day.

But in the meantime, in our groaning, do we have help?

Until Jesus comes back, is there anything that can ease our groaning?

There is! While we walk this road, there are two things God has given to encourage us, according to Paul here.

The first is *hope*. We have hope for the completion of our adoption as God's own sons and daughters. In verse 23 there, Paul writes, "*We who are in Christ – we wait for our adoption as sons and daughters.*"

We were orphans living here – spiritual orphans, you see? But God has visited our orphanage, as unpleasant a place as it is – still. God came!

And you know what? He picked us! He chose to save us.

And in Jesus' death and resurrection, God even went to the orphanage office and paid the price. All the paperwork has been signed, so the deal is done. So, for all who have received and follow Jesus, we're just waiting, you see, for Him to come and take us home.

So, there's no need for us to sit in this crummy orphanage and wonder what the future holds for us.

No, we have this hope that we won't have to live in these broken-down buildings forever.

And, by the way, ours is a hope that is far more than a wish or dream. Our hope is substantial. It is a hope that is based on every prediction and prophecy of God that has come true through all the ages – and even in our lifetimes.

This book, and the testimony of Christ's Church through the centuries, is filled with God's fulfilled promises.

So, our hope isn't founded on a blind faith. Not at all.

Our hope rests on an entirely reasonable, proven, predictable faith. Our hope for the future is based on fact from the past.

So, our hope is sure.

Now today, we may still be living in the orphanage, but we're no longer orphans. We're children of the King, and someday soon, He'll come to get *us* – and *everyone* who trusts and follows Him.

God has given us the sure hope of full adoption into His family, and that helps sustain us until He comes.

But, you know, hope is not all God has given us as we wait.

God has given us another gift – another means of help in our present weakness. We may have to wait in the orphanage, but we *won't* have to wait *alone*.

We have the gift of God's Holy Spirit. Jesus said He would send Him to us. Jesus said He wouldn't leave us here alone as orphans, but that He would send us a companion.¹

And He did.

Paul says there in verse 23, "*We who have the first fruits of the Spirit...*"

We in Christ have *what*, or rather, *who* Jesus promised we would have.

The Holy Spirit is here.

And what's the big deal about that?

Again, there in verse 26, "*The Spirit helps us in our weakness.*" The Spirit does just what Jesus promised He would do – another fulfilled promise, you see? The Spirit is here to help us in our mortal weakness.

Is Paul, though, speaking of a specific help or specific weakness here? He is!

Here, Paul is talking about our communication with God the Father.

The Spirit is here to help us communicate with our Heavenly Father through prayer.

Verse 26 there, Paul writes, "*The Spirit helps us in our weakness – we do not know what we ought to pray for.*"

You see, in human strength alone, we don't always know how to pray.

Why? Because we don't know what tomorrow holds.

As Christians, we know the end game, but as far as the day-to-day details, we don't know those.

Listen, if we knew that a family from the church would be in an accident out here on KY 29 right after they left worship, we'd pray for them, wouldn't we?

If we knew that [name someone in front rows] there was going to have heart trouble, we would have prayed for that long ago, wouldn't we?

I have a cousin, 65 years old, who loves the Lord and is ready to meet Him. If he has a debilitating stroke and is hospitalized and unresponsive, how do I pray: that he lives or that he dies?

Paul says, "*We don't know how we ought to pray.*" And in many, many cases, that's absolutely true.

We don't always know how we ought to pray.

But God does!

We don't know how to pray because we don't know tomorrow. But God does! And so, God sent His Spirit to reveal things to us that we might pray as specifically and correctly as possible.

The Spirit speaks to us – nudges us to say this, pray this, think about this, go here, do that. The Spirit is God's navigation tool for His people, especially, as Paul says here, with regard to how we should pray.

What a tremendous blessing and gift!

But you know, that's not all the Spirit does.

God also sent His Spirit to actually *pray on our behalf*.

In verse 26 there Paul says, the Spirit Himself supplicates or intercedes for us with *groans* that words cannot express.

You see, to a groaning creation and a groaning people, God sends a groaning Spirit: a Spirit who identifies with us that closely, but who is able to do, say and pray things we simply can't.

Sometimes, even with the Spirit, we don't know what to say. And even if we did, we wouldn't know how to say it – how to pray it.

But the Holy Spirit does, and so as we'll open ourselves to Him, He lifts us above ourselves and our own abilities.

In the Spirit, we're not limited. Our prayers aren't limited to our own strength or understanding or knowledge or wisdom or vision of what's happening.

God's Spirit injects His divine perspective into our prayers. In becoming our intercessor, as Paul says, God's Spirit actually becomes our interpreter; He prays for us *and* He translates our prayers to God the Father.

Paul says in verse 26 there, "*He helps us.*"

The word translated "help" there is the Greek word *synantilambanetai*, and it means, "to take hold of with someone in support and help."

The Spirit, you see, joins with us – takes hold of our prayers along with us. He comes alongside those who are open to Him, and He makes their prayers good and right and sensible to the Father.

It's sort of like when we're young in the faith and we look up in the sky and we say to God, "Look, there's a hepadopter," the Spirit says to the Father, "A helicopter. He means a helicopter."

Or when we say, "I really like the animals," the Spirit says to the Father, "He means animals."

He interprets our prayers according to the right and good will of the Father. He's our ever-present interpreter. Anyone who's tried to speak in a language you don't know – you know how important an interpreter is.

But you know – the Spirit does even more!

As time goes on and we grow closer and closer to God, the Spirit transforms us. He actually enables us to form the words to our prayers correctly ourselves.

We grow – we mature in our prayers because of the teaching and guiding work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

As far as we'll submit ourselves to Him, He will develop us. He will teach us how to pray more and more correctly, because God shares more and more of His heart with those who walk more and more closely with Him.

All of this – the hope, the help, the interpretation and the transformation – all of this is how the Holy

¹ John 14:16-17; 15:26

Spirit works to make us people who pray faithfully and maturely – and effectively!

What a tremendous gift God offers us!

No wonder Jesus said, *“It’s good for you that I go away, because then the Father will send His Spirit!”*²

But, first things first here.

If you’re here today and you don’t know Jesus, God’s Son, you need Him in your life. He’s the bridge between us and our creator.

Jesus died to pay for your sins and mine, that we might know God and walk with God, just as Eve and Adam did in the Garden. If you’ve never received Jesus, you can do that *today* just by admitting you need Him: you need His forgiveness and you want to follow Him.

That’s the first step in experiencing the help of the Spirit.

Now, once you’re a Christ follower, the Spirit is already working on your behalf. He’s working as an interpreter between you and God.

But He’d like to do more. He’d like to work more fully *in and with* you. He wants to “come alongside and take hold of our prayers with us,” that’s what Paul means when he says the Spirit “helps” us – so that we might grow and mature in faith.

He’d like to be your *counselor* and *guide* and *teacher*.

Are you open to that? To inviting Him in like that?

²John 16:7

Are you willing to say, “Holy Spirit, I need Your help! Come and fill me and guide me and help me in any way you like.”

What crisis in your life brings you to the end of your wisdom today? What is it that you simply don’t know how to pray about?

Ask God to fill you with His Spirit, to lift you above yourself, so that you can know how to pray.

It’s the real, living presence of the Holy Spirit in the Christian’s life that makes all the difference in so many ways – but in this way so importantly.

He helps us to know how to pray.

Prayer

Closing Song: *Come, Holy Spirit*

Benediction:

D. L. Moody was to have a preaching campaign in England. An elderly English pastor protested, “Why do we need this ‘Mr. Moody’? He’s uneducated. He’s inexperienced. Who does he think he is anyway? Does he think he has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?”

A younger, wiser, pastor rose and responded, “No, but the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Mr. Moody.”

May the same be said about every one of us: that God’s Spirit has a monopoly – has complete control of us, so that not just our prayers, but all our lives, will be productive and peaceful and pleasing to God.