

Introduction

How many of you know the name George Mueller? If you do, it's probably for his intercession. When I say intercession, I mean praying – asking God to do or give things. Over a century ago, Mueller kept a complete record of his prayers that covered 3000 pages, contained nearly a million words, and chronicled over 50,000 specific answers. Some consider him, as a result, the greatest of all intercessors.

But he isn't. I know that for a fact, as sure as I'm standing here before you. Neither Mueller nor any other human being is the greatest of all intercessors. Who is? Our text tells us. It's the Holy Spirit. It also explains why He is that and what it means to us that He is.

Not Knowing How to Pray as We Should

Let's begin with verse 26, which reveals a **"weakness"** that all of us have. We sometimes **"do not know how to pray as we should."** Praying as we should has to do with the specific things we ask God to do or give. Let's face it. We're so finite and circumstances are usually so complex. Few of our requests, therefore, are fully informed ones. Sometimes, there are things we need to know to pray competently but don't know. The result is we don't pray as we should. The idea of our request, in other words, is wrong, which can mean one of two things.

The first is that it's a bad idea. God doing or giving it would be more harmful than helpful. I once heard a father pray for his daughter who had a critical exam coming up. He asked God to help her get a good grade knowing full well she was a slacker in school. God granting his request would have harmed his daughter more than helped her. It would have reinforced that destructive quality of hers. It was a bad idea.

That an idea is wrong can mean a second thing. It isn't the best idea. It's a good one that's helpful. But it isn't the most helpful. There's a better idea. A Christian prayed and asked God to help her get into Ohio's State's law school but He didn't. So, she went into education

and became an outstanding teacher instead. She realized later that she was doing more good and getting more joy teaching than she would have practicing law. It's said that the good is sometimes the enemy of the best and that was the case there. What we ask God to do or give may be a good idea but there's a better one.

That then is what it means not to pray as we should. Since we're rarely full informed about the subject matter of our requests, we sometimes ask incompetently. The idea of our request is wrong.

The Holy Spirit Prays *with Us*

Many of us, as a result, are insecure, hesitant, about asking Father God to do or give things. But we don't have to be because of the stirring reality Paul reveals in the second half of verse 26. It's that **"the Spirit Himself intercedes with us with groanings too deep for words."** That statement teaches us what the Holy Spirit does. He **"intercedes"** or prays. He does so with **"groanings too deep for words."** I interpret that to mean that He communicates with Father God mind to mind, non-verbally, without spoken words.

Now, the Greek word for **"intercedes"** in 26 has a preposition attached to it, *upper*, which means **"instead of, in the name of, acting for."** Paul's point is this. When we pray to Father God, the Holy Spirit also always prays – instead of us, in the name of us, acting for us. Simply put, we never pray alone. The Holy Spirit always prays with us. He helps us in our weakness by actually accompanying us in our prayers. He's a presence in us and when we don't know how to pray as we should, He perfects our requests. Richard Foster explains it so insightfully: **"When we stumble over our words, the Spirit straightens out the syntax. When we pray with muddy motives, the Spirit purifies the stream. When we see through a glass darkly, the Spirit adjusts and focuses what we are asking until it corresponds to the will of God."** Foster's right. That's precisely what verse 26 implies. The Holy Spirit perfects our requests and presents them to Father God as our own.

A Christian asked me to pray that God would give him a particular job he wanted. On the one hand, I knew this job would solve the financial problems he had. On the other hand, I feared it might be a bad fit for the employer and him. I was incompetent to pray, but I did anyway because of what I knew. I didn't pray alone. The Holy Spirit accompanied me in my request and presented it to Father God with a clarity, precision, and rightness that I could never achieve.

That illustrates what the Holy Spirit does. He reshapes, refines, and reinterprets our feeble, muddled, wrong-headed requests and makes them presentable, acceptable to Father God. That means we can't pray a wrong prayer. The Holy Spirit perfects all our requests.

Pray Boldly

And we should pray boldly because He does. Many Christians don't. They pray timidly, asking in general terms for God's will to be done. But we should pray specifically instead. We deliberate over the persons and circumstances involved and then ask God with precision, in detail, to do or give what we think is best. That's what it means to pray boldly.

In his classic book *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, Andrew Murray instructs us to do just that: **"Our prayers must be a distinct expression of definite need, not a vague appeal to His mercy or an indefinite cry for blessing. We should learn to pray in such a way that God will see, and we will know what we really expect."** That is an insightful directive. Pray in such a way that God will see and we will know what we really expect or want.

I was concerned about my son Moses getting a job when he left the Marines, for instance, and so prayed about that. I didn't ask, **"God, please give him the job you will for him."** I asked instead: **"God, please give Him a job that pays at least \$15 an hour, has health insurance benefits, doesn't possess his life, and is enjoyable to him."** That request met Murray's guideline. God saw and I knew what I wanted. I asked humbly, not presuming on God. But I also asked boldly

(specifically) trusting the Holy Spirit's intercessory work *with* me.

The Holy Spirit Prays *for* Us

But the Holy Spirit not only intercedes *with us*. According to verse 27, He intercedes *for* us as well.

This verse reveals a fascinating insight about life in the Trinity. Father God "**knows what the mind of the Spirit is.**" 1 Corinthians 2:11 states it from the Spirit's perspective, "**Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.**" What a remarkable revelation. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit communicate with each other "**mind to mind.**" Each merely thinks something and the others immediately know it. Their communication is instant, intimate, and full.

But what is it that they communicate or converse about? The first clause in verse 27, by implication, tells us. God is "**He who searches the hearts.**" That means the heart of every person who lives. Psalm 139:1-6 elaborates on that. He knows everything there is to know about every person, including what he or she is thinking and what's happening to him or her. And that "**everything**" about every person is a primary topic of conversation between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A Christian told me that she'd love to have a dog, but her landlord won't allow it. At one time or another, we can be sure, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have conversed about that unfulfilled desire of hers. The astonishing reality is this. The three persons of God constantly converse about the details of your person and life.

Paul goes on in verse 27 to reveal a specific ministry of the Holy Spirit in that regard. He "**intercedes for the saints.**" The Greek word translated "**saints**" connotes those who are consecrated to something. In this case, it's to Jesus. Saints are disciples or friends of His. Notice what the Holy Spirit does for saints. He intercedes *for* them. Remember the preposition attached to the word "**intercedes**" in verse 26. The Holy Spirit prays *with* us. The word "**intercedes**" in verse 27 doesn't have that preposition. So, it means that the Holy Spirit prays *for* us.

That's an extraordinary reality. The Holy Spirit is aware of and attentive to all the details of our persons and lives, big and small. And in His mind to mind conversations with Father God, He actually asks Him to do for us or to give to us specific things.

A Christian was overjoyed to be accepted into Vanderbilt's Ph.D. program in chemistry, but concerned as well about his capabilities and finances. Or a Christian mother and wife was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis and concerned about how long she'd be able to take care of her family. Verse 27 teaches two things. First, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit conversed about his and her circumstances and concerns. And second, the Holy Spirit asked Father God to do or give specific things in, to, through, or for them.

Many of us have prayer partners. I'm talking about people who have committed themselves to routinely pray for us. But our ultimate prayer partner is the Holy Spirit. He prays unceasingly, night and day, *for* us.

Live Confidently

And we should live confidently because He does.

Verses 27-28, together, give us another glimpse into the dynamics of the Trinitarian life. They connect one of the most celebrated truths in Scripture with the Holy Spirit's intercession *for* us. Whenever bad things happen to us, the Holy Spirit asks Father God to do or to give specific things for us. Father God then does what He asks, which results in everything working out for our good. In response to the Holy Spirit's requests, Father God puts His hand on all the ugly and bad things that happen to us and turns them into something beautiful and good. That necessarily means that irredeemable harm never befalls us.

It is for that reason and that reason alone that we can live confidently in this fallen and therefore dangerous world. We don't fret or stew over what happens to us. We aren't striving inwardly and outwardly. We have peace and joy instead. Why? It's because the Holy Spirit's praying for us and we're beyond ultimate harm because He is.

But there's something we have to do in order to live confidently that way. We have to identify our will with God's. That's the message of the prepositional phrase in verses 27, "**according to the will of God**" and the one in verse 28, "**according to His purpose.**"

What God always wills or wants is what is best for Him, His kingdom, others, and us. So, He always works things out to achieve that. But we sometimes don't want what He wants and that's the problem. We live on the edge of the bad thing happening and wonder, "**Will God do what I want?**" We're certain He'll do what He wants. But we want what we want instead, which the promise of verse 28 doesn't encompass. And because it doesn't, we have reason to fret or fear and do.

There's only one way we can live confidently. It's to identify our will with God's. My wife has had cancer and chemotherapy. The Holy Spirit is praying, I know, and asking Father God to do the specific things that are ultimately best for Him, His kingdom, our family, her, and me. That's what He wants and so do I. I am, therefore, living confidently in the presence of her condition. Let's identify our will with God's.

We identify our will with God's by doing two things. First, we recognize His supremacy, that He and He alone is utterly good and utterly great. Second, we concede to His supremacy in practice, as best as we can. We learn what He wills in all things and try and train the best we can to do it. Doing those two things brings the transforming grace and power of the Holy Spirit into our lives. That in turn slowly but surely aligns our will with His. We then live confidently in a dangerous world.

Conclusion

That then is what the Holy Spirit does. He prays *with* us and *for* us. I could never exaggerate the significance of that. It isn't just nice talk or pretty words. It's one of the most awesome and life-defining realities we'll ever hear. You and I can pray boldly and live confidently. Why? It's because the Holy Spirit is the greatest intercessor.