

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: The Helper

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Scripture:

Romans 8:26-27

26 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 in accordance with the will of God.

Transcript:

Scripture comes from Romans 8, that's our sermon series, versus 26 through 27. "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, and he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God." So Holy Spirit, this is about you, so in these next few minutes help us know you better, and experience you more, in the name of Jesus, amen.

Well, a while back I was talking with a friend about what amazing helpers dogs are. Dogs are amazing, for 15,000 years their survival strategy has been figuring out how to please humans so we feed them, so it's resulted in a completely people pleasing animal, which is totally dysfunctional for the dog, but it's great for us. Dogs help us find lost people, they give us emotional comfort, they even know when we are having a nightmare and can wake us up from it. Dogs are amazing helpers, and you know what's coming next, right? Can cats do that? Yes, they can, they just refuse to. They are not helpful at all, they're not helpers at all. Amen?

So in a way that's what the verses I just read are about, who is our ultimate helper? We have this ultimate supernatural helper better than dogs called the Holy Spirit. And today is Pentecost,

and that's the day we celebrate and remember the day when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the first disciples, in Acts chapter two, "God is one God in three persons, father, son, and holy spirit, and if you have made Jesus your leader and forgiver, his Holy Spirit, the spirit of God himself, lives inside of you." And when we cooperate with him, he empowers us to overcome temptation, overcome failures, discouragement, setbacks, disappointments, fear, worry, and become more like Jesus day by day.

And that's what the two verses I just read out of Romans 8 are getting at, so let's look at them a phrase at a time, starting with verse 26, which says, "The Spirit helps us in our weakness." And if you break this verse down and analyze the original Greek you discover that what this verse means is the Spirit helps us in our weakness. Isn't that amazing, how I got that subtle, deep point like that? That is what a PhD in literature does for you, amazing insights. Spirit helps us in our weakness, which we all have. Addictions to shopping or substances or pornography, out of control temper, worry, fear, discouragement. And in the original Greek that this text was written in, the word for helper means someone who comes alongside and bears a burden with, like if you're trying to lift something heavy and someone comes alongside and helps you lift it.

Where do you feel like you are carrying a heavy burden? The Holy Spirit is your helper. Maybe it's guilt over something, or grief over some kind of loss, or worry about school, or job, or money, or friends, or finances, the Holy Spirit helps you bear that when we cooperate with him, and I'll talk about how we do that in a bit. When my wife and I brought our first child home from the hospital it was super hard. She didn't eat, she basically cried for four days straight, our daughter, not my wife, though a little bit my wife. We didn't get any sleep at all, it was terrible. Now if I had said to my wife at that period, "You know what, honey, you got this, God won't give you more than you can handle, I'm going to work, praying for you, you go girl," that would not have worked, which is why that's not what I did. We shared that together, and that's what the Holy Spirit does.

When we're tempted to do something we know is going to be destructive, the Holy Spirit gives us power to choose a better way. When we're worried, the Holy Spirit helps us have more confidence. When we're suffering, and we all are going to suffer, the Holy Spirit helps us have more courage and hope and joy, and I'll say more about suffering in a bit. The Holy Spirit even helps us pray, which is what the next phrase says, "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans." And what this means is the spirit intercedes for us. I am on a roll, that's just amazing insights.

Are you ever so tired, so angry, so discouraged, so sad, that you just can't even find the words to pray? You don't even know what to pray? Well, the Holy Spirit does, and this text says he intercedes with wordless groans, and this is the third time in just four verses that this text uses the word groan. And that's such a vivid word. And I've never liked the word groan, I mean, there's just words I don't like, like sofa. I hate that word, sofa. Party, I don't like the word party for some

reason. Moist, nobody likes that word, everybody hates that word. And I hate groan, it just sounds so groaning and terrible and awful, and this text uses it three times in just four verses for a hopeful reason, when you are too tired, angry, sad, discouraged to find the words to pray, remember this, if you can groan, you can pray. If you can groan, you can pray.

When I'm sad I can say, Jesus. When I'm worried I can say, Jesus. When I'm mad I can say, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit carries that to the father and son and says, "What Dudley meant to say is," and he translates it for us. If you can groan, you can pray. So we're going to practice, you're all going to go, oh, on the count of three. Okay? Ready, 1, 2, 3, oh. In Jesus name, amen. If you can groan, you can pray. The spirit can also help us figure out what to pray for other people. We train our prayer ministers here, who pray for us after the service, pray for people after the services, we tell them first listen to the Holy Spirit before you start to pray, and then pray. And sometimes they don't even know why they're saying what they're saying, whatever the spirit puts in their brain they pray, and often the other person is like, "How did you know? How did you know? That's exactly what I need to hear."

I remember once being at this church, highly charismatic, speaking in tongues, slaying in the spirit kind of church in Kansas City, and worship there lasted an hour, the music alone just lasted an hour, and people walk all over when it's happening, and this man walks up to me and he put his hand on my shoulder and he started praying and he said, "Lord, help his preaching to change lives, give him wisdom as he leads his church." I never met this man in my life and I said, "You know I'm a pastor?" And he said, "Yeah, of course." And I'm like, so unless I emit some kind of pastor aura, or pastor odor, or whatever, that was a miracle. The Spirit knew what to pray for me.

Okay, next verse, 27, "And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God." In other words, the Holy Spirit helps us pray ourselves into God's will. Because sometimes, I don't know about you, but sometimes my prayers, here's how my prayers go, they go, God, this is what I think should happen, so if you could just arrange it that way, that would be awesome. Thanks, God, you're the best. You know what, it is okay to pray that. You can pray boldly for what you want, and if God is doing something different than what we're praying for, over time he will conform your will to his.

Maybe it's a prayer for a certain relationship to work out, but the Spirit inside starts to say, no, I got something different, that's not it, and over time begins to change our hearts. Maybe it's for a certain job, or a certain college, but the Holy Spirit goes, you know what? I'm going to do something different, and he starts to change what we want. It is so easy to confuse my plans with God's purposes, but over time, if we're paying attention, the Holy Spirit can correct us. When I first started doing college ministry I inherited a very small group, 10, 15 people maybe, and I felt a lot of pressure to make it grow. And at first, for a while, it just didn't grow. And one

day I was talking to an older, wiser person that I knew, and I said, "I keep praying about it, but it's not growing," and this older, wiser person said, "Well, what if that's not what God is doing? What if what God is doing is your group is going to be really small, but they're going to go on to be CEOs and Supreme Court justices, and start nonprofits. So your group will be small, but the impact will be big. What if that's what God is doing?" And I was like, "No, that is not what God is doing. God is not allowed to do that. Who asked your opinion anyway?" I did. But that changed how I thought about ministry, it changed how I did ministry. I started to look at what's happening in the student's lives, not just numbers, numbers are important, numbers matter, but I focused more deeply on are the students lives being changed, because that's the point anyway. Drawing a crowd is relatively easy in college ministry. Man, if they had just let me tap a keg every week I could have had a packed through. But that's not the point, the point is life changed. Now eventually that group did grow, it grew very big actually 300, 400 students, but not until the Holy Spirit refined me and my way of doing ministry.

See, sometimes God says no to our prayers because he has something better, and often it's something we want deep down, we just don't know we want it. Because there's the surface level wants we're conscious of, but then there're the deep down ones that we don't even know we have them. Because not only do we not always know what we need, we don't even know what we want without the Holy Spirit. That's why the verses say he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, he searches our hearts, the Holy Spirit searches our heart to help us know the want deep, deep, deep down inside of us.

As I've shared before, one of my greatest unanswered prayers in life is all of you. You are not what I prayed for, at all. And I mean that in the best of ways. For years I was like, God, don't make me a pastor, don't make me a pastor, don't make me a pastor, and here I am, and I am so grateful for it because God knew what I wanted way better than I knew what I wanted. The Holy Spirit goes all the way down and searches our heart to discern our deepest ones. When we pray for a certain relationship, deep down what we're really wanting is intimacy and connection, and if we can find that in God, it fulfills in a way no relationship can. When we pray for a certain career, deep down we're maybe wanting significance and meaning and purpose, and God may lead us to a place different than that career where we get more of it.

Because see, the purpose of prayer isn't to get God to do what I want, it's for God to get me to do what he wants. And the Holy Spirit helps us pray ourselves into the will of God. And just as an aside, when we're talking about will of God, just as an aside, there is a difference between the specific will of God and the general will of God. Sometimes God has a specific will for us, go to this college, move to this city, take this job, but when he does have a specific will he tends to make it very, very clear. Most of the time he doesn't have a specific will, he'll work with whatever we decide. But his general will for all of us is that we all know Jesus and become more like Jesus over time.

Now all of this raises a question, well what about those things we pray for that it's unimaginable that it would not be in God's will? Maybe for a young person to be healed of a terminal illness, but then they die. Does that mean it was God's will that person died? No, no, and no. Because of sin, nothing works the way God intended it to, our bodies, our culture, our relationships, and one day Jesus is going to return and fix all of that, and his resurrection was the first instance of his beginning to make all things new, already as he started to remake this world, but not yet is he finished. And so in between the already and the not yet where we all live there is suffering. That is not God's will, not his will.

However, my last point, the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness, helps us pray, helps us find God's will, and then finally the holy spirit helps us in our suffering, and he does that in a couple of ways, so we've got some subpoints in this sermon. The Holy Spirit helps us in suffering in a couple ways. First, he helps us by connecting us to the father. A few verses earlier it says, "The spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship and daughtership, and by him, the Spirit, we cry Abba Father." And back then Abba was the familiar word for father, sometimes translated daddy, and it sounds like a little kid just learning how to talk, mama, papa, Abba. It's not the language of duty, it's not the language of obligation, it's not the language of religion, it's primal, it's deep, it's personal. And the Holy Spirit helps us experience that, because what we need most is not just intellectual knowledge that we are children of God, but an experience of it. If you know Jesus you are never alone, and the Holy Spirit helps us experience God's presence.

Two weeks ago I told you about McKayla Butler and her husband, and how they lost two kids, and how God met them in that and brought good out of it. Now that doesn't mean there isn't still suffering over that for them, of course there is, of course there is, but they have also experienced the goodness of God in the land of the living, and that brings courage and hope and joy. Second way the Holy Spirit helps us in suffering is that he ensures that we grow through our groaning, because we're all going to suffer, we're all going to grow, and the question is, do we shrink under it or do we grow under it? And when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit we grow through our groaning, grow in wisdom, grow in courage, grow in hope. As Pastor Tim Keller says, "Prayer is not a consumer tool, it's a refiner's fire," and the Spirit helps us over time grow through our groaning to become more like Jesus.

And then finally, the Holy Spirit helps us in suffering by empowering us to heal the suffering of others. So for instance, as we've shared with you, there is ongoing ethnic violence in Congo, and this directly affects people in our New Hope Community whose family and friends are being killed. And last year you all gave to a special offering that we've been able to use to help provide food and supplies to the victims of that violence, and one of the things we've learned is that one of the primary roots of this violence, one of the primary causes, is poverty and the despair it brings, and the sense of hopelessness, as well as resentments and competitions. And so a solution to that is to create hope by giving young people from all the different warring tribes, bring them together in a Christ-centered environment focused on reconciliation, and give them

job skills, train them vocationally. And then by creating economic success for everyone, we can further the work of reconciliation, and bring an end to the violence.

So next week, over and above our regular offering, we will be receiving a special offering that will provide vocational training for the people in Congo. That's next week, don't start to give it yet, you're all always very eager about this, we love you for that, but we're not ready yet, you'll bury us. So next week, next week. And then at the end of this month, at the end of June, I'll be going to Congo with some folks from Bell Press to meet with some of our partners there, that'll be at the end of the month. Because one of the ways the Holy Spirit helps us in our suffering is empowers us to heal the suffering of others.

To review, the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness, helps us pray, helps us find God's will, and helps us in suffering. So then, really quick, practically, how do we experience this? How do we experience the spirit? Well, it ain't rocket science, it's just you got to do it. Pray, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray. Pray your hurt, pray your hopes, pray your anger, pray your joys, pray your triumph, pray with other people, it can be very helpful. Get prayer from one of our prayer ministers after the service. You can't experience the presence of someone you never talk to. You can't experience the presence of someone you never talk to, so pray and cultivate a relationship with the Spirit over time so that when the hard times hit, because they will, you don't have to gin that up in an instant. Pray.

Second, listen to those thoughts that maybe come from God, or the images that pop in your mind, or a memory. It may even happen hours after you've prayed and then you realize, oh, that was the Holy Spirit talking to me. Third, worship. Worship is essential to experiencing the Holy Spirit, and so thank you for being here. And just a reminder, online is great for when you can't get here, and that happens, so online is great for when you can't be here, but worship is more powerful in person. So encourage you to be here in person frequently. Pray, listen, worship, and finally look at the ways the Spirit is helping you. Look for it, because he is. Maybe it's a sudden surge of hope, or a turn in your circumstances, or you see good coming out of bad, look for the Holy Spirit's work in your life, because he is working, sometimes we just don't notice.

A while back I heard a guy, I'll call him Tom, talking about going through a really painful breakup with his fiance, and it was a huge loss, and he was in a lot of pain, and they went to the same church so it was awkward, and he thought, I'm never going to get married, I'm always going to be alone. And he kept praying and praying about this. Well, one day he got in an elevator in his apartment building, and suddenly the Holy Spirit answered his prayers and called to mind a moment, a time years before when, Tom's dad was still alive, and Tom was going through another painful breakup, way back then, and one day his dad, who had a really hard time showing any kind of love to anyone, so Tom always felt distant from him, one day Tom's dad came into his room, sat on the bed, and just put his arm around Tom. And Tom said, "I

knew in that moment, if my dad could take the pain that was in my heart out and put it in his, he would do it in a minute."

So in that elevator the Holy Spirit gave him this sudden thought that if his dad loved him that much, and his dad who was flawed and imperfect loved him that much, then how much more must his heavenly father love him? And he said, "When the elevator doors opened I was a different person," and the Spirit worked fast, because it was only five floors, so the Spirit worked fast, and Tom said, "I was flooded with love, and the fear of never getting married was gone because I'm never alone because God's spirit is always with me." And in the days that followed Tom was more able to focus on others and not just himself, which changed how he related to his fiancée. He could bless her and he could encourage her. The Holy Spirit helped him in his weakness, interceded in his sighs and groans that were really prayers, helped him discover God's will, and helped him in his suffering feel connected to the Father and grow through his groaning to become more like Jesus.

Now that is an ordinary everyday story, it's not a change the world story, on purpose, because we all need our elevator stories where the Holy Spirit meets us, not just once, but over and over and over again, so ask for them, pray for them, look for them, maybe get prayer after the service for them. It's interesting to me that this text says that the Holy Spirit intercedes with groans, it uses that word, and the Holy Spirit is the spirit of God himself, which means that God is groaning, and the Greek word for groan is often used to describe the cry of someone who's about to face death. So at first it might seem odd, why would God groan, I mean he's God, why would he groan in that way? Except, of course, Jesus, who is God on the flesh, on the cross, quotes the first line of Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Do you know what the second line is? "Why are you so far from my groaning?"

So when this text says, "The Spirit groans with us," it means it. God himself and the person of Jesus experienced all the pain that we feel, he understands, but he didn't just experience it, he conquered it by rising three days later from the grave. And what that shows is that already he's begun to make all things new, not yet is he finished, and between the already and the not yet where we live, his Holy Spirit is with you, and he is for you. And he has wisdom beyond your knowledge, he has power beyond your strength, he has blessings beyond your ability, and he has hope beyond what you could ask or even imagine. You are never alone, he is with you always.

So Holy Spirit, thank you, thank you. Thank you that you are with us, thank you that you are always with us. And Lord, we ask that you would help us be aware of your presence. We know you're with us, we sometimes just don't experience it or see it. So help us see and experience your presence with us. We ask this in the name of Jesus, amen.

Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Icebreaker Question: What was something you thought would be easy until you tried it?

Opening Question: Looking back...Last week we talked about how God works all things for our good. How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Have you experienced the Holy Spirit helping you in some way? How?
- What steps could you take to have a more meaningful prayer life?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing Group Prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.