

This is tape number SHS311. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical references are quoted from King James Version.

In this lesson we will look at the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, as He helps us in our prayer life and enhances our prayer life. Romans 8:26-27 says,

Likewise also the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

“He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” It is important that we realize that the purpose of prayer is not to change the mind of God. It is not to convince God to see things your way. Many people make a great mistake in thinking that by prayer, they will be able to change the mind of God. That is not the purpose of prayer at all. You would not want to change the mind of God. God said,

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.  
(Jeremiah 29:11)

God’s plan for you is much better than anything you could ever devise for yourself. And for you to think that you can improve upon the plan of God is sheer folly.

The purpose of prayer is not to change the mind of God. You say, “Well if it is not to change the mind of God, then why should we pray? What is the purpose of prayer?” The purpose of prayer is to open your heart and your life to allow God to do the things that He wants to do—those things that He knows are best for you.

You see God has given to man this gift of free will. We have the power and capacity of choice. And God will not violate that free will, for to violate it would be to invalidate it. Now God will do things to influence our choices—like the old song in the South says, “He will not compel you to go against your will, but He will sure make you willing to go.” And God will allow circumstances, pressures, or difficulties to come into your life in order to help influence the choices that you make. But He will not violate that choice that He has given to you. God will allow you to resist His will. He is the awesome, sovereign Creator, and so many times, here is man, puny little man, resisting the will of God. And He allows him to do so. He will not violate your free choice.

So the purpose of prayer is not to change the mind of God. I am convinced that every good and right thing you have ever prayed for, God intended to give to you before you ever prayed. Jesus said, “Your Father knows what you have need of before you even ask Him.” But prayer opens the door of our will, whereby we allow God then to do those things He desires to do for our benefit and for our good.

Jesus said to the disciples in John 15:16,

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

It does not say He *shall* give it to you. It does not say He *might* give it to you. But it says He *may* give it to you. In other words, God wants to give it to you. Through prayer you are opening the door to allow God to do the things that He desires to do. You are giving Him permission to do in your life that which is His purpose.

True prayer moves in a cycle. True prayer begins in the heart of God, in the purposes of God, and in the desires of God. And God places those desires upon our heart—“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do” (Philippians 2:13). And so, He writes His law on the fleshly tablets of our heart. As the psalmist said, “Delight thyself also in the Lord and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Psalm 37:4). He puts His desires in our heart. And as He places His desire in my heart, I then express it to Him in prayer. And as I express it to Him in prayer—you see, it began with God. It moves down, touches my heart, and then it goes back to God. And thus the cycle is complete, and the door is now open, and God has the opportunity now to do those things He wants to do for you because of His intense love for you.

The prophet said to King Asa in 2 Chronicles 16:9,

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.

In other words, God is just looking for people whose hearts are in harmony with His. He wants your heart to be in harmony with His. He is looking throughout the entire world. The eyes of the Lord go and to and fro throughout the entire earth to show Himself strong, to manifest Himself, His power, and His love to those whose hearts are perfectly in harmony with His heart. God is just looking for instruments through which He might accomplish His work, and through which He might pour His resources unto the needy world. And so, He seeks to bring our hearts and our minds into alignment and harmony with His. And He then channels His love and His blessings through us.

So, the most important thing is to just discover the will of God. Get your heart in harmony with God’s heart. Get your heart beating with God’s heart. John said,

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us. (1 John 5:14)

Now, remember the Holy Spirit makes intercession with us according to His will. And this is the confidence that we have: “if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us, and if He hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have desired of Him” (1 John 5:15). If we are praying according to the will of God, we can pray in confidence that we have the answers to those petitions, because we have now opened the door for God to do what He desires to do. The key, of course, is asking according to His will.

Now that brings us back to the basic issue that we started out with and that is the difficulty of knowing the will of God. “The Spirit also,” Paul said, “helps our weaknesses, our infirmities.”

And one of the infirmities that we have is that we do not know how to pray as we ought because we do not always know just what God's will is in every particular matter.

For example, people who are careless with their finances are, as a result of their carelessness, in a real financial bind. They have spent money foolishly. Although they did not have the money, they were on the phone long distance and now they have a \$127 phone bill. They do not have the money to pay for it and the phone is going to be shut off. How shall I pray for them? God send them the money so they can pay the phone bill? Well, maybe God wants to teach them how to be wise and prudent in the expenditure of their money. And maybe if I go in and pay their phone bill for them I would be defeating what God is trying to teach them.

You see, we do not always know how to pray as we ought to pray. We do not always know what God is working out in a person's life or working out in our lives. And that is one of our weaknesses. God said, "My ways are not your ways. My ways are beyond your finding out" (cf. Isaiah 55:8-9). And I have discovered through the years by experience, and as time has gone on, that I am able to see the picture more completely. I have discovered that many of my prayers were completely out of the will of God. Things that I asked God to do and things that I asked God for were completely out of His will. At one time, I was almost insisting that God do certain things; but in His love and goodness to me, He did not do them. And so, as the years have gone by and I have gained understanding by my experiences, I am as thankful for the prayers that God did not answer as I am for the prayers that God did answer.

But you see I did not always know what the will of God was for my life. And so many times, not knowing the will of God, I prayed amiss. I have prayed for the wrong things. And that is where it is dangerous—to get insistent with God and to start demanding of God. And there are people who are so foolish that say, "God if you do not answer this prayer, then I just cannot trust You and I am not going to serve You or believe in You any more. If You do not succumb to my will and to my desire in this issue, Lord, I am through. I am walking away." How ridiculous! How utterly foolish! And so, one of our human weaknesses is not knowing the will of God.

Now, how does the Holy Spirit help us with this problem? The Spirit Himself will make intercession for us with groanings, which cannot be uttered. I think of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, the wife of Elkanah, and how she shared her husband with another wife by the name of Peninah. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24) and I do not think any man can love two women equally in a marriage situation. There would be conflicts and there were conflicts for Elkanah. Peninah was able to have children. She would get pregnant every time he turned around. But Hannah could not have a child. And in that culture it was considered a curse not to be able to bear a child, or not to be able to give your husband a son. That was considered a curse.

And so, because Elkanah sort of favored Hannah, Peninah was constantly just getting on her. "Ya, ya! You cannot have any children. Look at all I have. You have not given Elkanah any children." And she was just vexing Hannah sorely. Well, Peninah did not realize there were advantages to not having children. When her husband went up to the tabernacle for the feast, Peninah had to stay home and take care of all of her kids. But Hannah was free to travel with him and so as they were travelling together, she was in such great distress. Peninah had just given her a bad time again about her barrenness. And Elkanah said, "What's wrong? You are so sad. We are taking a vacation and you ought to be happy." She said, "Give me a child or I am going to die!" He said, "What, am I God, that I can do that?" And he said, "Look, I love you. Am I not worth many children to you?" Husbands do not always understand a lot of things. So they got to

the place of worship, the tabernacle—and let me just read what the Scripture says concerning that:

And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head. And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee. And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto. Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.  
(1 Samuel 1:10-17 KJV)

Now first of all, we see how God, through circumstances, brought Hannah into harmony with His desires. You see at this particular period in the history of the nation of Israel, things were bad, very bad. Eli was the high priest—a fairly good man. But his sons were totally wicked and evil. And they were turning people against God because of their wickedness and their evil ways. And they were to take over the position of religious leaders of the nation at the death of their father, Eli. The nation was in a desperate condition. Spiritually, it was at the bottom.

God needed a man who would be a spiritual leader, who would lead the nation out of this spiritual morass and into a real relationship with Him again. God had to get a woman before He could get a man. And so, He closed up Hannah's womb so that she could not bear any children. And it finally became such an irritant to her—she was so desperate that she said, "Lord, if You will just give me a child, a man child, I will give him back to You. He will be consecrated, dedicated to You. I will give him back to You, Lord, all the days of his life." Now Hannah is in harmony with the purposes of God. God has brought her into harmony with His will. And now God can do for her what He wants to do because He needs a man, a spiritual man, one that would be dedicated from youth unto Him. He needed that kind of a man to lead the nation spiritually.

Now notice though, secondly in the story, how the burden of Hannah's heart was so great that no words were coming out. It was just a groaning—a groaning in the spirit. Hannah's lips were moving without sounds. No utterance was heard because the grief and the pain was so deep. This was the groaning of the spirit. She was just lying there in deep agony, groaning in the spirit. To the extent that the priest thought she was drunk and rebuked her for drunkenness. But that was an example of groaning in the spirit, as God brought her into harmony with His desires.

Another example that we find in the Old Testament of groaning in the spirit is the case of Hezekiah, the king of Judah. When the prophet Isaiah came to the king and said, "Set your house in order. You are going to die and not live" (Isaiah 38:1), the king turned his face to the wall and

began to pray unto God. And he speaks about how he was praying all night long. And he describes it in Isaiah 38:14,

Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail with looking upward: ‘Oh LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me.

Hezekiah was groaning and mourning like a dove. He was chattering like a sparrow or a crane. Unintelligible sounds were being uttered unto God from the desperation of the spirit—the groaning of the spirit.

And even so, in our hours of great grief, sorrow, and pain, there are times when we cannot even articulate our requests to God. We are hurting so deeply that all we can do is just, more or less, groan. But it is so beautiful to know that God interprets those groans as intercessory prayer, according to His will? Even though they may not be our articulated words, God understands the sorrow and grief of your heart and responds.

Now we are commanded in the Scriptures to pray in the Holy Spirit. In Jude 21, as he is giving these exhortations, he tells us that we are to pray in the Holy Ghost and to keep ourselves in the love of God. When Paul was writing to the church in Ephesians 6, he talked about the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged and how important it is that we have the whole armor of God. He instructed us, that we might stand against the wiles of the devil. And having done all to stand, having placed the armor upon us, having girded us with the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit and the helmet of salvation and the feet shod with the preparation of the gospel—finally, having then gotten us all outfitted, Paul said,

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.  
(Ephesians 6:18)

Praying in the Spirit—How do we pray in the Spirit? Well, one way we pray in the Spirit, which we have already mentioned, is that groaning in the Spirit. The second is found in 1 Corinthians 14,-as Paul said:

For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: (1Corinthians 14:14-18)

So Paul is saying, when I pray in an unknown tongue my spirit is praying though my understanding is unfruitful. I do not know what I am saying. What shall I say then? Well, I will pray in tongues and I will pray with understanding. I will sing in tongues and I will sing with understanding, but not in church. I would rather speak five words in a known language than ten thousand in an unknown language, that the whole church might be benefited. And if you are in church and there is no interpreter present, then keep silent and do not exercise the gift of tongues. Because if you do speak in tongues, those who are sitting there in the seat of the unlearned—will not understand the language. How can they say, “Yea, amen!” at your giving of thanks, if they do

not understand what you are saying? Indeed, this is a good way to give thanks and it is a good way to praise the Lord, but not in church. It is appropriate in your own private devotional life.

If you have the gift of tongues, you can pray in tongues and thus be praying in the Spirit. And I think the basic difference between groaning in the Spirit and praying in tongues is just that the groans are not articulated. And yet in both, you are being assisted, aided, guided, and directed by the Holy Spirit. And you know that the Holy Spirit is thus guiding your prayer. It is according to the will of God.

So what are the advantages of praying in the Spirit when you do not understand what you are praying? Well, the first advantage is that you can be assured that your prayers are according to the will of God. If the Spirit, knowing the mind of the Father, makes intercession, you know that it is according to the will of God.

Secondly, it eliminates selfishness as the primary motive behind our prayers. Have you ever noticed how many of your prayers are prompted by selfish motivation? James said,

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may  
consume it upon your lusts. (James 4:3)

In other words, this kind of prayer is selfish. It is something for you. It is something that you desire for yourself—a selfish motivation. “God, I want this! I want this, Lord!” And it is for you—a selfish motivation. And you ask and receive not because you ask amiss, that you might consume it upon your own lust. But if you are praying in the Spirit in an unknown language, you are not understanding. It eliminates selfishness as a motive of your prayer.

Thirdly, it enables you to pray for things that you have forgotten to pray for. Many times a person has said, “Oh my, I am really in desperate need. I do not know what I am going to do.” And you say, “Well we will remember you in prayer.” And how many times you have forgotten to remember. You promised you would pray. There was definitely a desperate need for prayer and you intended to pray for them, but somehow you forgot. Or maybe you do not do that. Maybe that is just me. I have some clothes in the backseat of my car that I have been planning to take to the cleaners for two days. I keep forgetting. They are in the backseat and I am going to throw them into the front seat tomorrow, so I cannot forget. There are just things that I forget.

But the wonderful thing about allowing the Holy Spirit to guide my prayer and intercede through me is that He is able to pray for those issues that I have forgotten—those needs that I have forgotten to pray for. And so it gives me a great opportunity to just cover all the bases and to pray for all of those who have asked for prayer, because He knows their needs and He knows my promises to pray for them.

Fourthly, praying in the Spirit allows the opportunity to give unto God the full expression of the praise and the thanks that you feel in your spirit but have difficulty expressing to God because of the limitations of the human language. I feel in my spirit much deeper than what I am capable of expressing verbally. In fact, many times in just the endeavor to express it, I feel that I am lessening that which I am feeling. Just the very attempt to express it in words seems to diminish that sense of gratitude, of love, of appreciation, of just being so totally overwhelmed by God’s grace, God’s mercy, and God’s goodness to me. I feel it in my heart and in my spirit—it is just a pressure, just oh! But words, words, words! They are not there. “Oh, thank You, God.” No, that is not enough, it is more than that! And so, the words that I use of thanks and appreciation seem trite

in comparison to that which I am feeling in my spirit of rejoicing, praising, thanksgiving, and loving.

Now when Paul said, “when you bless with the spirit,” and he speaks about giving thanks, and indeed, you do give thanks. When I pray in the Spirit and I do not understand, really it gives a far vaster expression unto God because it does not have to be channeled through the narrow funnel of my intellect. It can just go directly from my spirit to Him. And it does not have to be all pressed through this little narrow channel called *my brain*. Rather, it is just an open, full expression of the Spirit.

Now, if you do not have the gift of tongues, at least groan. Give the Spirit an opportunity of interceding in your prayer time. But do not spend it all groaning; Paul said, “I will pray with the Spirit and I will pray with understanding.” So there is the value of praying with understanding. There is the value of seeking to articulate our needs and our requests. And there is real value in that. But even before seeking to express them in English, ask the Holy Spirit to guide and to direct your thoughts concerning the things that you are praying for. Our desire is that we might pray according to the will of God in order that we might have that kind of confidence in our prayer time. Then we know that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us; and if He hears us, then we have received those petitions that we have asked of Him.

Now there are a lot of things we know are the will of God because God has expressed them as His will in His Word. So we can have confidence when we pray over these things that God has already expressed as His will. You can pray with confidence that the Lord will draw you closer to Him. You can pray with confidence that the Lord will fill you with His Holy Spirit. You can pray with confidence that the Lord will help you to be bold in your witness for Jesus Christ. These things are all the expressed will of God for us; and so, in these things we can pray with confidence. There are other areas, in which we cannot know the will of God. That is where the Spirit comes in and helps us with weaknesses that we have. And He will intercede through groanings, or through unknown tongues, if you have that gift. And you can be thrilled as you see God working and moving in a greater way in response to your prayers than you have ever known before.

Shall we pray?

Father, thank You for the help that You give us. And oh, we need it! Thank You, Father, for the Holy Spirit and for the assistance that He gives to us in so many ways, and especially in our prayer time. Lord, fill us with Your Holy Spirit until, Lord, our lives just overflow. Fill us until there springs forth from us that glorious flowing of Your Spirit like a river of living water, springing up from within, flowing out from our lives—flowing unto the needy world around us. In Jesus’ name we ask it. Amen.