

26Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. 27And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

29For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. 30And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

31What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? 33Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

34Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. 35Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." 37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What shall we pray for today? For the families of the victims of TWA flight # ?
 Shall we pray for children at play, their parents at work, for a bumper crop to feed the hungry?
 Shall we pray for a cure for cancer, and Aids and MS? Shall we pray for those whose minds are being lost to them as they grow older? Shall we pray for those who have sinned and are burdened with guilt? For families that are moving? Shall we pray for this congregation, for growth and prosperity in our life together? Shall we pray for people of Bosnia, Liberia, Cleveland, Lorain? Shall we pray for the mayors of Avon Lake and Sheffield Lake and Avon? For the congress? For the United Nations?

Or shall we pray for ourselves? For health, for success, for healing, for a time to relax, for peace of mind, for wealth, for an end to anxiety? For understanding, for faith, for self confidence, for a forgiving heart, for renewed energy, for a courage, for a renewed sense of commitment?

Or shall we ask God for poverty, for weakness, for pain, for humility, for sorrow, for persecution, for defeat, so that we might rely more fully on our God?

Writing to people he had never met, St. Paul wrote these words: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.”

St. Paul did not say: I do not know how to pray as I ought, but “we,” Paul and the Roman Christians and you and I. “We do not know how to pray as we ought.”

God's own Spirit, the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ prays for us with sighs too deep for words.

Paul is not talking about some technique of prayer that could be taught, nor even about knowing the right words to pray. He is talking about our not knowing. If the one I pray for is healed, what then? Will faith follow, or a falling away? What of his children, his co-workers? Will peace today in Bosnia bring a greater bloodbath tomorrow? Will wealth and success cause me to fall away from God? Or my children to do so? Would Paul's authority and power in the church become a snare to him, trapping him in himself?

We do not know. Always, in every situation we do not know. Yet we pray.

Like Jesus in the garden. “Abba Father, all things are possible for you, Let his cup pass from me, yet not what I will but what you want.”

Not even Jesus knew. He prayed that he would not have to drink of cup of rejection and betrayal, of mocking and dying. But we are so very thankful that he did. For what Jesus hoped to avoid the Father has transformed into our forgiveness, our hope, our salvation.

Yes, we do not know how to pray as we ought. But Jesus own spirit in us prays for us with sighs too deep for words.

Pray, as Jesus prayed. Do not fret whether the words are the right ones, or that you are praying for the right things, pray what is in your heart and for God's will to be done. Pray.

As you pray know this: “The one who searches the heart knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We may know know how to pray as we ought, but God's own spirit searches our heart, then intercedes for us according to God's will.

We pray that God's will be done in us. “Thy will be done,” Jesus prayed, and in the Lord's Prayer taught us to pray. In the sighing, in the interceding, this is what the Spirit of Jesus is praying for us also.

For God's will is that faith will grow in you, and love, and hope. God's will is that you will be in Christ in all your words and deeds, kept in Christ through all of life and death and be raised with Christ for all eternity. That much you do know. Christ died for you, was raised for you that you might be possessed by Jesus' own Spirit.

Even now Jesus is pleading that not one of those he has died for will be lost, but that you will be saved from sin, and from eternal death, and from the power of Satan.

Because Jesus own Spirit in you is pleading for you, Paul is able to write the very next sentence in this letter: We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

We do not know how to pray as we ought, but Jesus' Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is interceding for you so that the road you walk will bring you into the presence of God. For that is the good for which all things are working together.

So pray, knowing that with your words go the sighs of Jesus own Spirit, pleading for you, clinging to you.

And live through hard times and sickness and death itself, knowing that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor rulers nor things present, nor things to come, nor power nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation shall be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus your Lord. Amen