

**SAFE AND SECURE  
ARE YOU READY FOR UNANSWERED PRAYER?**

**Romans 8:26-27**

If you don't have a bible or you didn't bring one, there is one under a chair near you. You are welcome to take that. You are even welcome to keep it if you would like. I think it will help you if you follow along in the scripture as we study Romans 8:26-27 this morning. Let me pray then we will jump in to the study of God's word. Father, open your word to us. We pray for help to understand. We pray for help to apply. And Lord, we pray for the help of your Holy Spirit, that we might respond in faith to your truth. As it goes forth, we pray it would renew and strengthen. Lord, we pray that you would even enlarge our capacity for you, to know you, to experience you, and to live for you. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Are you ready for unanswered prayer, delighting in the will of God?** The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:26-27:

*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

We are looking at Romans 8 in this series: "Safe and Secure." We are studying the topic of insecurity, and how Jesus produces security. He makes us secure. **There is complete security in Jesus Christ.** We started with a message where we discovered that the root of insecurity is condemnation, and it is cut off. It is severed when we are in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now, insecurity is by nature a tough topic. It's not something that we easily talk about or easily admit. In fact, it's a little bit like pride. It's something that we readily see in other people, but seldom admit in ourselves. I don't want to be known as an insecure man. I don't want to be known as an insecure leader. I don't want to be known as an insecure husband. I don't want to be known as an insecure father. The whole idea of insecurity is not attractive.

I phrase it this way because I want us to acknowledge the obstacle that's in front of us. I don't want to be insecure, but as much as I don't want to experience it, I really don't want to be known as it, and

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that is a block to the discussion. If we acknowledge it out front it's helpful, because the reality is that we all battle insecurity. We just do. It's a part of our human existence.

It takes all kinds of forms. It can be internal, emotional. It can be external, environmental. It may be relational. It may be circumstantial. It can attach itself to the past, to the present, to the future. We may have a fear about our past coming back on us. We may fear having security in the future. It takes a lot of forms.

Here's the amazing thing: Romans 8 deals with all of it. It's a comprehensive, massive assault on insecurity. We are in Christ, Paul says, if we believe in him. His Spirit lives within us, and he wants us to have assurance. This assurance will produce a pervasive sense of security.

Today's passage deals with a specific kind of insecurity, a specific source of insecurity. It's the disappointment of unfulfilled desire. Can we live without getting what we want? What happens when God tells us no? How do we respond when we deal with delay or disappointment? What if my legacy has a limp? What if the measure of my life when it's all over isn't exactly what I thought it would be or wanted it to be?

I was talking with a ministry leader at the end of 2017. This person was saying, "You know what? We prayed. We had some goals and we didn't meet those goals. There was profound disappointment. One of those goals was financial." This person was saying, "You know, we asked God specifically. We believed and we prayed. The disappointment started to take this shape: 'Why even pray?'"

I could relate. I could identify. I'm not always ready for unanswered prayer. I'm not always ready when God says, "No, not yet, delay. No, I have something different." It's surprising, but this passage actually leads us into a place of delight in the will of God for our lives instead of the disappointment over not always getting our will.

Of course, the supreme example is Jesus in the garden right before the crucifixion, saying, "Father, if this cup could pass from me...but not my will, but thine be done." This is the Savior who went to the cross for us, wanting the Father's will, who taught us to pray: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done."

We experience this because we live in a broken world. We looked at that last week. We looked at the fact that life just isn't easy. In fact, all of creation – the world itself -- is characterized by this sense of futility. Sometimes we are working and we are going at it and it's not working and everything is tough. We find ourselves saying, "Why is it so hard to do the right thing? Why is it

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hard to adopt children? Why is it difficult to just help people? Why is it difficult to get my own act together?"

We talked about how Paul said, "Listen, all of the pain in this life is like labor pain. We are moving toward this place of restoration. God is restoring everything - even creation. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. As a child of God you are a part of it, and here is what I want you to do. The Spirit lives within you. He is going to help you live with hope and patience so that you don't go around moaning and groaning all the time." Right? We don't go around moaning and groaning all the time. But we say, "Wow, look. God is working," with patience for God to work his redemption and restoration.

That brings us to today's text. Because when there is delay, when things are broken, when we are trying to live a life of hope, with patience, it can be intensely personal. "Please God, would you? Lord, why can I not get past this sin? Why does it have such a grip on me? Why is this relationship so difficult when it's so important?" There are times when we find ourselves just groaning out to God in prayer. It's so close to our hearts. It's so deeply passionate that we can't even put it into words.

What Paul does here is masterful. He takes that theme of futility, and futility in creation, and he is pointing us to hope in what God is doing. Then he brings it down to this really personal level. He says, "Listen, when you're just groaning to God in prayer, it's not futility. It's not. In fact, the Spirit of God is working in that moment to turn that into a perfect intercession for God to do his will in your life." That's really good, isn't it? Doesn't that make you feel secure? Okay, don't get your hopes up. I'm not quitting yet.

That's his point. It's a tough point to get because when you read it you are asking yourself, "Okay, the Spirit intercedes for me?" I do not think the best interpretation of that is that the Spirit is outside of me praying his own prayer for me. It's not replacement. It's the Lord helping me. It's the Spirit helping me pray. The emphasis of the chapter is that the Spirit is within us. We are groaning, and through that the Spirit of God is at work. In fact, Leon Morris says it this way, if I could just skip to this quote:

*Paul seems to be saying that when we cannot find words in which to express our prayer and can do no better than make inarticulate sounds, the Spirit takes those sounds and makes them into effective intercession. It's an encouragement to us all who find praying difficult.*

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This is a unique little addition that Morris gives us. He says, "The natural man does not groan over his weakness in prayer. Believers do..." He is saying that if you find yourself at times groaning in prayer, it's a mark that you are a follower of Jesus. Isn't that encouraging? "...and this groaning is the work of the Spirit in them."

That is what's happening in verse 26. I just want us to understand the passage as we get ready to apply it. Why then, verse 27? Because if this is the activity -- we are groaning, the Spirit is interceding for us -- Paul then writes, "And he (that's the Father) who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." Here is what he is saying. He is saying, "Okay, God knows your heart and God knows the mind of the Spirit." Really, I read that and say, "Well yeah, isn't that obvious? Paul, why are you telling us this?"

He is wanting you to see something. He is wanting you to have this aha moment, where you realize, "Wow, this is not just, "Oh well, I'm groaning. God is somehow in it." He is saying, "No. Know for sure that God is doing a divine work and he is going to answer this prayer. This prayer is according to his will. He has a plan for you. It's marvelous. It's going to work. It's not detached from you. He is not indifferent to your situation. He is actually there with you in that moment of despair, personally identifying with your deepest need. He is not removed from you. He is there with you, perfectly turning that into prayer and intercession that is according to his will, and you know it will be answered."

So that's what's going on. The Spirit is helping you. The Spirit helps us in our weakness. This has been a theme throughout the chapter. I'm going to remind you of this then we'll apply today's passage. Let's see it in its context, because it's pretty encouraging. He has already told us that the Spirit helps us in our weakness. That's his first phrase today. Let's review three things that he has already told us.

### **1. He helps us to grow in godliness.**

Do you remember verse 13 when we were there, for those of you who heard that message? He says, "...if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." He is saying that in our desire to grow in godliness, when we struggle the Holy Spirit is there to help us overcome, to help us put to death those sins. So, the first way that the Spirit helps us in our weakness is to help us grow in godliness.

### **2. He helps us experience God's love.**

Verses 15 and 16 of Romans 8: "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." So the second way that the Spirit helps us in our weakness is that we experience God's love. He helps us grow in godliness, overcome sin, and then he is in our hearts over and over telling us, "The Father loves you. The Father loves you. It's grace. He gave the Son for you. You are forgiven. You are not condemned. You are righteous before him. He loves you." The Spirit is over and over bearing witness in our hearts that we belong to him.

The third way that we experience help from the Holy Spirit is:

### **3. He helps us live with purpose in a broken world.**

This is what we've already referred to. Verse 23: "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit (so there's the reference to the Spirit again), groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." What is he saying? He is saying, "Okay, all of creation is groaning. We are groaning, but the Spirit is within us, telling us we've been adopted into the family. Don't lose hope. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he sees, but if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." The Holy Spirit is in us, helping us live in a broken world.

Three powerful ways: He helps us grow, he helps us know we are loved, he helps us deal with the frustration of living in a broken world. And on that platform, he is adding today's point, the fourth help of the Spirit.

### **4. He helps us delight in the will of God over our own.**

The Spirit helps us in our weakness. He helps us delight in the will of God. How do we live this out? How do we apply this? I could tell you just go home and groan in despair, but I'm not sure that would really be helpful for you. That kind of groaning just happens, right? So what are some ways

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that we can, according to scripture, identify that God's will is really better for us than our will for ourselves?

I've said this before here, but there was a time when I had a crush on a girl back in middle school. I prayed, "I want to marry her." Thank God he said no, because look at what God had for me, right?! I know that that's a silly illustration, but really, we are perpetually in middle school in terms of our desires. We just want it and we want it now. No offense to all the middle schoolers who are here.

So how do we walk this out? I'm going to give you four ways.

### **I. Wait on God.**

Sometimes God is not saying, "No," he is just saying "Wait." He is giving us a delay, a divine pause. A great biblical illustration of this is the life of David. David was the greatest king in the history of Israel, but coming to power was a tremendous trial for David. It seemed like he would never get there. In fact, his predecessor, Saul, was a wicked man who was trying to kill him. He was pursuing him to take his life. Really, if you were David you had to be thinking, "I'm not going to make it because he's going to kill me." On two occasions David miraculously found Saul in a vulnerable moment where he could take his life, and on neither occasion did he take his life. But he could have.

As he was running from Saul for his life, he refused to. If you look at the circumstances, there was every possible justification for him to tell himself that this was God's will for him -- to take the life of Saul. After all, wasn't it really just protection? It wasn't revenge; it was self-defense, right? Saul was pursuing him.

The prophet of God had anointed David, anointed him to be king, told him he was God's choice. He had faithfully served Saul. All of David's men were around him saying, "Listen, God has delivered him into your hand! Do it! Take his life! Let *me* take his life!" Even Saul's own son Jonathan had said to David, "You are God's choice for Israel." Beyond that, even Saul himself, in a rare moment acknowledged that David was the better man.

You see, David had every opportunity to justify the wrong action - to murder Saul, to take the life of the Lord's anointed. (Saul had been anointed to be king.) Had he done that, he would have done two disastrous things.

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- He would have sown into his own reign that betrayal, and
- Almost for sure eventually would have reaped the same fate.

But God had a purpose. God was using this time to shape and to mold his character. God was saying, "You know, I've made it clear to you that this is my will, but not yet, not yet, not yet." Wow, there are so many applications for us here, right?

All of our single people - where are you? I have a feeling you're in the rowdy group over here. Some kids just love attention, you know? You will have a lot of temptation to take shortcuts, right? You will hear this voice: "This is your only chance." Isn't that ridiculous? "This is your last chance." Acting in faith instead of fear... This is probably a little too close to home, but I could bring some people to you from this congregation who would say, "Don't do it." Right? They've learned that lesson -- that God's will is better. Better acting in faith and waiting on the Lord than acting in fear and unbelief. There are a lot of ways that this comes home to us. The first one is **Wait**. The second one is:

### II. **Accept God's boundaries.**

I'd like to illustrate this with a look at another great leader in scripture. This one is Moses. God tells Moses no in a way that from my perspective is rather shocking. Moses has led the children of Israel and was ready to go into the Promised Land. He is probably, in my opinion (this is just opinion), the best leader in Scripture outside of Jesus himself.

We are now using this little acronym GOAT. Do you know what GOAT is? The Greatest Of All Time. People are saying that the Patriots are the Greatest Of All Time and Tom Brady is the Greatest Of All Time. He is the GOAT. I never thought GOAT would be a compliment. Moses is the GOAT, the Greatest Of All Time, an amazing leader. Think about his accomplishments. He leads almost two million people out of slavery without an army. He experiences the supernatural presence of God to do it. He leads them, though they are rebellious, for 40 years in the wilderness. In that time, he establishes the law, gives us the Ten Commandments, the priestly system, the tabernacle, a worship calendar, a liturgical calendar...amazing, innovative, determined, powerful leader. And he does it all after he's 80 years old. He is the GOAT. Alright?

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He comes to God and says, "God, we're here! Finally, we are about to cross the Jordan. We are going to go in. Let me go! Let me experience the fulfillment of what I've given my whole life to." We read about this exchange in Deuteronomy 3. God says, "No." He actually says this. He says, "Don't mention it again. I don't want to hear from you again on this subject." That is shocking.

There are perhaps a number of reasons for that. We could say, "Okay, Moses had become such a prominent a leader, so successful. The people depended on him in such a massive way that a new leader had to lead them in for the people to be able to in any way, shape, or form transition and occupy and possess the land that God had for them. There are probably a number of practical reasons that we could speculate about. But on the face of it, I want to make these last two or three points by calling your attention to the example of Moses. He accepts God's no.

Now, God gives him a reason there. He says, "You got angry and sinned when you struck the rock." Just a little refresher: On two occasions God miraculously provided water for the children of Israel. They are out in the wilderness. They are in the desert. They don't have water. On the first occasion God tells Moses: "I want you to go to this rock. I want you to strike it and water will supernaturally come forth." The second occasion is in Numbers 20. In Numbers 20, God changes the instruction to Moses. He says, "Don't strike the rock, but *speak* to the rock." Moses is angry at the people and he gets up and verbally rebukes the people and in anger strikes the rock and disobeys God.

That is the sin that keeps him from taking the people into the Promised Land. I read that and I'm thinking, "Wow. Two million grumbling people, all this time, and in one moment he just strikes a rock?" I'm thinking, "Lord, I could be in trouble!" Right?

I think that that leads us to the third application. The first one is **Wait on God**. The second one is **Accept God's boundaries**. He sets boundaries for you. His will is best. But the third one I think is connected to this, and it is this:

### III. Delight in Christ.

Why do I say that that leads us to this one? This is a little scriptural gem here. I'm not going to go too deep on it, but in 1 Corinthians 10, the Apostle Paul is writing. He looks back hundreds of years to that moment and tells us what no one there could have known. He says, "The rock from which Israel drank was Christ." Oh, wow. So now, striking the rock takes on a whole new significance,

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right? Striking the rock is a picture that living water will flow when Jesus is struck. Jesus will go to the cross and pay for the penalty of our sin. He will be struck. Clearly that is the interpretation that Paul is giving to that Old Testament experience.

So what happens the second time he strikes the rock? What did the Father tell him to do? He said, "Speak to the rock." We don't re-crucify Jesus, right? We proclaim the Good News because Jesus has been struck. That may be a little too nuanced for some, but I think it's the right understanding. Certainly Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 10 is this (you can read it on your own – I encourage you to):

**Christ is everything. Christ is more important than the legacy you leave. He is more important than your lifetime accomplishments. He is more important than all of our dreams wrapped up into one. It's not at all that he's indifferent about that, but the real source of joy, the only true God is God himself. Delight in Jesus Christ.**

That is what leads us to say, "Alright, I'm going to accept your boundaries. I'm going to wait on you. And when you say, 'No, no, no, that's not what I have for you,' I'm going to trust that that's better for me than what I want for myself." This leads us to the final one.

### **IV. Invest in others.**

What does God tell Moses there in Deuteronomy 3? He says, "Instead of going in, I want you to encourage Joshua. I want you to strengthen Joshua. I want you to prepare him to go in." This is God's economy. This is what God allows us to do. He says, "You have some dreams. You are not going to fulfill all those, but you are going to prepare the next generation to do it. **I want you to live a life of blessing others and serving them.**"

So here I am. I am groaning, "Oh God, am I going to make it? It's the fourth quarter and the finish line is coming! I'm asking you for this, and I am believing you for this, and for my children, and for this..." And God is saying, "Listen, wait on me. Accept my boundaries. Delight in Christ." Some of the fulfillment may come for others to experience. But in eternity we are going to all celebrate it together.

If you will allow me to close with a personal moment....I was meditating on this verse and these truths some time ago. I was thinking, "Okay, Lord, how is it that I want to step outside of your boundaries? How is it that I want to get where I'm not supposed to be?" The Lord reminded me of this verse in

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James chapter 3. He says, “Not many of you should be teachers, because you will be judged more strictly.” I thought, “Wow, that’s so good, isn’t it? You see, sometimes I have aspirations of what I want to do as a pastor and teacher. And it’s like in that moment the Lord is saying, “When you get to heaven, you’ll be really happy if you don’t step outside those boundaries, if you just accept and delight in it because you are going to *thrive* in my will for your life.” Will you accept? **Will you happily embrace God’s will and delight in Jesus? The Holy Spirit will help you do it. He is helping you pray right now as you call out to the Lord.** Let’s bow our heads.