Spurgeon, Charles
The Practice of Powerful and Effective Prayer

9. The Holy Spirit's Intercession (Romans 8:26–27)

A sermon by Spurgeon on how the Holy Spirit helps believers pray. Paul is comforting an afflicted people, and after pointing them to their adoption as sons and to hope, he names a third comfort: the Spirit dwelling in them. The sermon has three parts — the help the Spirit gives, the prayers he inspires, and why those prayers always succeed.

Key takeaways

- Prayer lightens any burden — but sometimes grief or confusion leaves us not knowing what to pray for, or how. That is exactly where the Spirit steps in as 'a very present help in time of trouble.'
- The Spirit helps by teaching us our need, shining light on the right promise in Scripture, and directing our minds to the specific thing to pray for — guiding both negatively (forbidding) and positively (prompting), as he did with Paul and Macedonia.

- The Spirit doesn't literally groan or pray himself; he stirs up intense desire in us and creates the 'groanings that cannot be uttered.' He also strengthens the faith without which prayer cannot prevail.
- Three pictures of his work: a prompter feeding an actor his lines; an advocate at home preparing a poor man's legal case; a father laying his hands over his son's to help draw a bow too strong for the boy alone.
- God values a heartfelt groan far above 'fine' or performed prayers. Fine language is 'sounding brass'; a groan 'has music in it' because it comes from the depths and is the Spirit's own work.
- This intercession is only for the saints — the regenerate. The unbeliever must first come to Christ to receive the indwelling Spirit.
- Such prayers always succeed for three reasons: God reads the heart's meaning even in wordless groans; they are 'the mind of the Spirit,' which is one with the Father and Son; and they are always according to God's will. Prayer prompted by the Spirit is 'the footfall of the divine decree.'

Passages worth keeping

> *"A mother can translate baby-talk: she comprehends incomprehensible noises. Even so doth our Father in heaven know all about our poor baby talk."*

The sermon's central comfort — God understands even our inarticulate prayers.

> *"To him fine language is as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, but a groan has music in it."*

God weighs the heart, not eloquence.

How it connects

The Spirit's intercession runs parallel to Christ's: both plead for believers, and neither leaves God's own. Spurgeon ties the Father's momentary forsaking of the Son on the cross to the promise that no adopted brother will ever be forsaken.

Scripture referenced

- **Romans 8:26–27** -- The text: the Spirit helps our infirmity and intercedes with unutterable groanings
- **Romans 8:14** -- Those led by the Spirit are sons of God — the ground of comfort Paul builds on
- **John 14:26** -- 'He shall teach you all things' — the Spirit instructing us in prayer
- **Acts 16:6–9** -- Paul forbidden to enter Bithynia, called to Macedonia — the Spirit guiding negatively and positively
- **Matthew 6:8** -- The Father knows our needs before we ask — assurance our prayers are heard

- **John 17:9** -- 'I pray... for them which thou hast given me' — intercession is for the saints, not the world