

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

When I read these two verses, a memory pops up from my early years in the ministry. I'm in a hospital room. In that room is a church member. He is surrounded by all kinds of monitors. He has more tubes poking out of him than I care to count. He is unconscious. The doctors have informed us it is only a matter of time. I say "us" because I am not alone in that room. In a chair beside me is that man's wife. She is hunched over, sitting only a little straighter than a rag doll. Gentle tears have streaked her cheeks. Her eyes are a bit sunken—she hasn't slept much lately. I hope you can identify with that woman. She is the kind of person for whom these two verses of the Bible were written!

No, you don't have to be losing a loved one to appreciate our text. If you've ever felt like you're scraping bottom... If you've ever been trapped inside a prison of turmoil... If you've ever been stymied because you want things to be one way when God is letting them happen in a different way... If you've ever not known what to do, this text is for you.

But what if you're not the one facing the trouble? What if it's your sister or brother or cousin or friend who's got that blank stare? If you're not a psychologist or a trained counselor, what can you do to help a person like that? Let's take this woman as an example, whose husband is breathing his last 500 breaths. Do you pat her on the back? Do you say, "I know how you feel"? Occasionally we think we can say

that because we've experienced a similar situation. But I wasn't able to say that to the woman. I still haven't been married for over fifty years like she was. I can only begin to imagine the emptiness of losing a lifetime mate. I've never been seriously injured. None of my teenage friends died in a car accident or by their own hand. I've never had a doctor tell me, "You've got cancer: be sure your house is in order within the next six months." I lost a dear step-father, but my mother and all of my siblings are alive. It is unwise to say, "I know how you feel."

So then what do you say all those times when you can't comprehend someone else's heartache? You could suggest: "Would you talk to a counselor or someone?" Good idea. When you connect with the right person—maybe your wise Christian grandpa or grandma, or mom or dad, maybe a spiritually mature Christian in your church who has a history of saying just the right thing, maybe your pastor, or maybe you and your pastor work with a professional Christian therapist who has the right expertise for your problem... When you connect with the right person, it's amazing what God can do for you.

What would such a counselor be worth to you? ...a counselor who understands you better than you understand yourself; ...a counselor who knows your innermost fears, knows what you fret about or cry about when no one else is around; ...a counselor who instantly cuts through all the ways you try to keep your concerns hidden, who knows all the little things you are going to talk about until you finally get

comfortable enough to talk about what's really bothering you, who knows your whole range of emotions and can't be shocked by the depth of your sadness or by the heat of your anger? What would such a counselor be worth to you? How much would you pay if you could find a counselor who was never too busy to listen, a counselor who empathized and sympathized with you so perfectly and completely that you might as well have known each other since you came into this world?

Are you already googling "IsThisAHoax.com"? Go ahead. When you look into this further, you'll find that the counselor I'm describing has the ability to reduce every problem to a manageable size and soothe every disappointment. This counselor has the ability to heal any sickness you might have—body, mind, or spirit.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you must have realized by now that you have such a Counselor in the Holy Spirit. And it's a good thing we don't have to pay him: we could not afford the sessions. So the Holy Spirit does not charge. His services are a gift of God's grace, freely given, paid for by the death of our loving Savior Jesus Christ on the cross. Because of Jesus the perfect Counselor invites you to come to him regardless of whether **you** created the mess for yourself or you're suffering because of someone else's actions.

Listen to the Apostle Paul: "*The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We don't know what we should be praying for; the Spirit himself, however, intercedes [for us] with*

*inexpressible groans.*" When does the Holy Spirit help us in our weakness? When does he intercede for us? Right now. Notice the present tenses. The Spirit helps us in our weakness right now. And right now. The Spirit intercedes for us right now. And right now. God the Holy Spirit wanted us to know that He's always helping us and always interceding for us in the right now.

Think what that means when it's time for you to be the wise Christian friend or parent or grandparent. You haven't been through every experience. But it sure is great to be able to say, "Although I don't know what you're feeling, God knows exactly how you feel. You are not alone in your problem."

[sobbing] "Then why doesn't God fix it?" Apparently it's not time for him to fix it yet. Apparently you're supposed to struggle with this problem a while longer. "But this problem makes me feel so weak." Well then you're in a particularly appropriate place to hear this Bible passage: "*The Spirit helps in our weakness.*" "How? How does he help us? I'm not feeling particularly helped right now. I don't even know what to pray for." Now you sound like the apostle Paul who wrote: "*We don't know what we should be praying for.*" Well, sometimes we do. Lots of times we do. Then there are the times we take out our Bible, turn to the Psalms, pray through a section of that ancient prayer book, and the Holy Spirit calms us down or builds us up.

But sometimes a person gets so weak, so weary, that the words for prayer won't even come out anymore. Most of us have been at that point at least a time or two. You feel like a sack of sugar that fell off the grocery shelf and spilled on the floor. All kinds of people notice you and step around you. They may pity you in their hearts and even want to help, but they didn't bring a broom or a dustpan with them to the grocery store. They act like they can't help you at all.

When such moments insist on inserting themselves into your life, remember: you have a Counselor who knows exactly how you feel. And about him the Bible says: "*the Spirit himself intercedes [for us].*" What a relief to hear! The Holy Spirit never loses interest. He can devote his total attention to you, to me, to all other believers, especially hurting believers, all at the same time! He can do this 24/7/365, because he is God. He's the Almighty. We don't have to worry about scheduling our next appointment or running up against the 50 minute count-down timer. He is always aware of what you're going through, always interceding for you.

Do you know what a prayer chain is? It's a group of people who are organized to intercede for others. As soon as a prayer request comes in, one person calls the next who calls the next until everyone in the chain knows what's going on and is praying for the person in need—a wonderful way to show love! And with

social media, the chain doesn't break down because everyone in your group gets the information at the same time.

Let me introduce you to the ultimate prayer chain. Paul says, "*He who searches hearts knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, because [the Spirit] intercedes on behalf of the saints according to God's way.*" Not only does the Holy Spirit understand and feel our heart's anguish, but in our most trying times he even understands how muddled or lacking our prayers can be! That woman in the hospital next to her dying husband asked me: "Should I pray for a miraculous recovery? Or is it time to let go and ask God to take him home?" Since the Holy Spirit knows everything we feel, he does in prayer what we cannot do when we don't know what to pray for. He links up with the Father, presenting our prayers in "inexpressible groans."

Think how expressive a groan can be. When the Spirit lays out a prayer before the throne of the Almighty, he casts that prayer in just the right groans, thoughts that please our heavenly Father. The Spirit lays out our prayers in the way God wants to hear them. And because the Father, who searches our hearts, also knows what is in the mind of the Holy Spirit, we are guaranteed to get exactly the right answer to our every need! I'm not saying we always like the answer, but it is the right answer, because God gave it.

But what if your life is going along pretty well right now. Can this text help you? I

find this passage comforting and energizing for my regular, daily prayers. When I think about this verse, a whole scenario comes together in my imagination. I envision one of my prayers ascending to God's throne. The Holy Spirit, my personal prayer Counselor, is watching for my prayers to rise. He sees my prayer speeding toward God's throne like a fast ball. He sticks up something like a catcher's mitt, intercepts my prayer, reads it over, and realizes that something I've asked for is going to harm me, like when a three year old asks, "May I play with that sharp knife? Please?" God never wants to let us harm ourselves. So I imagine the Holy Spirit changing my prayer, editing it right there on the spot so that it asks only what is good for me. Then the Holy Spirit turns and presents my request to the Heavenly Father with an inexpressible groan. The Father sees that I am now asking for something that lines up with His will, and exclaims, "Of course he can have what he asked for!" When the answer comes, I often don't receive precisely what I asked for. But then God gives me something even better. When you're in Christ, your prayers always come out right, even when you say them wrong. What a great thing to think about when life is going rather well.

I said this section is describing a kind of divine prayer chain. So far it is only a chain with two links—the Holy Spirit and the Father—or three if we count us,

the praying Christian. But there is one more vital link in this divine prayer chain. Although the text doesn't mention him, let's not forget our Savior who also is "*interceding for us*" (8:34). Think about it: you have the second person of the Almighty Trinity, and the third person of the Almighty Trinity, asking the Almighty Father to bring about a proper resolution to your problems. God is one. Do you think everything will turn out okay?

Eventually. Sooner or later all our troubles will be over. And in the meantime we wait. God understands our desire for deliverance. That's why the Holy Spirit has made it his highest goal and his most important work to point us to Jesus our Savior, to assure us day-in and day-out that our sins have been forgiven for Jesus' sake and that heavenly joy and glory will burst out for us on Judgment Day. Until then he groans for all of us saints. Yes, that's right. Here's yet another Bible passage which refers to us sinners on earth as saints. That's what we are through faith in Christ Jesus—holy in God's sight.

What grace! Bad day, good day, it doesn't matter. **GOD'S GRACE GIVES ME MY VERY OWN PRAYER COUNSELOR.** The Holy Spirit knows what I feel and knows how to present my prayers to the Father in just the way God wants to hear them. In other words, even my worst day is still pretty good.