

Pray in the Spirit...you'll grow spiritually

Text: Eph 6:18-20, Gal 5:16-25

Well friends, we've been focusing on learning more about prayer over the last couple weeks, in order to use it more intentionally to bring about change in our community and the lives of people around us.

And last week we discovered that the scriptures teach us that if we pray in the Name of Jesus, God will hear us and respond to us. But we also learned that praying in Jesus Name is not a magic phrase that you tack on to the end of your prayer...

It means that you pray with thankfulness for the Agape Love God has shown us, you pray with an understanding that you've been made a partner in God's plan to save the world, and that you pray to ask for what you need to accomplish the kingdom work which God has called you to do.

That all sounds really fine, very lofty and inspirational - Agape Love, a partner in God's plan, a kingdom calling!

But... how good are we at actually praying like this?

How often do we slip back into throwing up a frantic "Hail Mary" - instead taking time for a proactive intentional conversation with God?

How often do we take time and actually pray more, and pray in Jesus name – for other's salvation, for what we need to pursue our kingdom calling in life... Probably not enough... right?

And friends I understand how difficult being intentional with prayer can be for us. We all have a limited amount of time, and everyone wants a piece of it, everyone wants some of our time for their particular cause...

And we are bombarded with messages about making sure we do what is important for us and our families to stay healthy: We should take time to exercise, eating right, making sure make sure our kids are involved in activities, watching our

RRSPs, spend quality time with the family... and we have to earn a living somewhere in there too.

These things all need our time, and in all honesty there are more good things that we ought to do than what we have time for.

So - when you come to church on a Sunday morning and hear me ask: are you reading your bible, are you praying intentionally... I can understand you might feel like “oh no...not another good thing to do”

But friends – there is some good news for us - we have Prayer Help.

Just like a nutritionist or a personal fitness trainer who helps us to eat right and exercise properly, the bible tells us that the Holy Spirit is there to help us in our prayer life.

You see the apostle Paul realizes that it is going to be difficult for us to pray the way we need to - in fact in the first part of

this passage Paul gives that famous talk about putting on the armor of God so that our faith is protected – because it’s a struggle to believe and live as a Christian... and not just because we are so busy that it’s hard to find the time...

But because the enemy will use whatever He can to prevent us from growing spiritually and strengthening our faith and trust in Jesus Christ – including convincing us that we need to be so busy - that we have no time to pray.

And so Paul encourages us this morning to “Pray in the Spirit” because friends – life happens, business happens and if we know how to pray in the Spirit, and what that is all about we will grow in our spiritual character, our Christ-like character...

In spite of how busy we are, and we will be able to endure the difficulties of that life and whatever the enemy throws at us and our faith will remain standing at the end.

So the first thing we begin to understand about “Praying in the Spirit” is that it means the Holy Spirit is here to help us pray.

Now this sounds kind of funny because when Paul says to “pray in the Spirit” – we tend to read this and understand it as if it were something that we do - like praying in a certain style or manner. Or that we are to pray from our spirit as opposed to our mind or something like that.

But what it actually means is that the Spirit is doing something to us as we pray - He helps us to pray and so Paul is encouraging us to seek out His help - “to pray in the Spirit”

And the more we know about this - the easier it becomes to cooperate and partner with the Holy Spirit, “to keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal 5:25)

So, how does the Holy Spirit help us pray?

Well friends, the Spirit often speaks to people and instructs them to do things; He led Jesus into the desert to fast and pray, He led Phillip to the Ethiopian Ruler in his chariot, and he told one particular ancient church to set aside Paul and Barnabas for evangelism of the gentiles.

So the Holy Spirit may very well give you nudges, bumps, or maybe shout at you from time to time “to pray” about something.

And the Spirit gives us the confidence that we can actually speak to our Heavenly Father through prayer and ask for what we need.

Let’s look at Romans 8:14-16 ¹⁴ *For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.* ¹⁵ *The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”* ¹⁶ *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*

This echoes what we learned last week, where Jesus told his disciples they are no longer slaves but friends, and whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.

The Holy Spirit makes us believe this is true, He convinces us of it, enables us to accept it, and allows us to feel it. So we are in a place where we can pray confidently.

But, confidence is only part of it – what do you say, how do you ask???

Well friends – Jesus tells us in the scriptures that the Spirit will also give us the right words to say;

¹¹ "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, ¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say. (Luke 12:11-12)

Friends - If the Holy Spirit gave the disciples the right words to say when they needed it – (and that is recorded in the book of Acts) how much more will he help us to know what to pray for when we come before God in prayer...

Again – going back to last week where we need to seek the Spirit's help to pray about all our needs in the framework of God's Kingdom.

Now, we must also be realistic. In spite of our best intentions and what we are learning about prayer, there will be times when we are so anxious, distraught or in such extreme circumstances that we are unable to function, unable to pray.

We may be so overcome with grief, or shock, or wrestling with doubt, or disabled by disease that prayer is impossible.

Friends, let me tell you this morning, before... you encounter a situation like this that the Holy Spirit is praying for you! And... more than likely, He is shouting at someone else to pray for you as well.

The Holy Spirit prays for us when we can't. Romans 8:26

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

That's pretty amazing isn't it? These ways in which the Spirit helps us to pray – to "Pray in the Spirit"

Now another the great thing about the Spirit's help is that it can come in all sorts of ways.

Some people experience His work in a spectacular fashion – they feel like they are zapped with electricity, they might fall down, they speak in tongues...

Others experience the Spirit's work in a quiet way – they may get a premonition, an intuition, a thought a desire as the Holy Spirit helps them in their prayers.

The thing is not to get hung up on how we experience the Holy Spirit's help, what's more important is that we are experiencing it, and cooperating with it so that we are bringing about a prayer revolution in the community around us.

So what does it mean to cooperate with the Spirit, to seek out His help in prayer?

Well, in our Ephesians passage, Paul says that when we pray in the Spirit we can use all kinds of prayers and requests and we are to pray this way always.

So what we learn here is that the Holy Spirit's help doesn't depend on what kind of prayer we are using – like silent prayer, the Lord's Prayer, written prayers, or spontaneous prayers.

Nor does it depend on what we are praying about; our personal situation, our friends, or for someone to be saved

Nor does it depend on when we are praying; before meals, at church, daily devotional time early in morning, or at an all night prayer vigil...

Friends, if you want the Holy Spirit to help you pray the way the scriptures teach us to pray, just ask Him for it.

After Jesus was taught his disciples the Lord's Prayer, he said to them;

¹³ If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13)

Friends, if you have not experienced the Holy Spirit helping you pray – maybe it's because you have not asked for Him, so just ask Him.

Now asking the Holy Spirit to help you pray is a bit like asking a consultant to come in and help you run your business better.

It may cost you some of your pride, but in the end you're business will run better, you'll grow, and you'll become more profitable.

So when the Holy Spirit comes to help us pray He's going to bring things to our attention in our lives that need to change in order for us to pray better.

But If we consistently ignore the advice that He gives us, He will stop – after all why did you ask for his help if you won't follow the advice that He gives you.

The bible calls this "grieving the Holy Spirit" and Paul talks about this earlier on in Ephesians 4:30 – 32.

³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

So here we see a situation where people want the Holy Spirit to work in their lives, but they would like to be able to continue to be bitter, angry, fight and slander each other.

Paul says that doesn't work, instead how you relate to people needs to be like how God related to you in Christ - remember we talked about that last week as well – Agape Love...

It's kind of like how the doctor will tell me that I should eat less fast food and exercise more, and my dentist always tells me that I need to floss each day.

These people are giving me this advice so that I can stay healthy and energetic.

But If I consistently ignore it and yet still ask them to help me with my health – eventually they're going to say what's the point... you won't listen.

It works the same with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is going to show you what is getting in the way of you praying like the scriptures teach us to - but we need to cooperate with Him.

If you aren't experiencing the Holy Spirit helping you – maybe you've been ignoring his advice and he's just waiting patiently for you to get around to obeying him before he can help you further.

So... if follow the advice that you've been given, He can continue to help you in your prayers...

Now this is where we begin to see how Praying in the Spirit leads to us growing spiritually.

Galatians 5 gives us the "Fruit of the Spirit" as a guide line to measure ourselves in terms of spiritual growth.

How much agape – sacrificial love, patience, kindness, gentleness, etc... are we showing evidence of in our lives?

On the other hand how much of the acts of our sinful natures are evident?

Sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

Or how comfortable do we feel around this sort of stuff?

When the Holy Spirit comes to help us pray He may say to us... our flirtations with sexual immorality need to go, our fascination with psychics, horoscopes, and the occult needs to go, our selfishness, our misuse of alcohol, making good things into god things – idolatry... it needs to go.

Whatever it might be... the Holy Spirit is going to show us what our sinful nature is up to and tell us to fight against those manifestations of our sin. To discipline ourselves against those habits, or at the very least start by confessing them as acts of our sinful nature...

And In their place He will put His fruit instead – agape love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control.

Now as the fruit – *not fruits...because this is a whole package, a fruit salad if you will, none of them are optional...*

So as this fruit becomes more and more evident in your life I will guarantee that you experience the Holy Spirit helping you to pray more and more

So you will become much more motivated to pray, and prayer will become a high priority for you.

You will be able to see that amidst all the good things that we need to do – there are those which are ***the best things*** to do... and prayer is one of them.

Second you will have the words to pray, you will be able to pray in Christ's name as we learned – praying for the specific needs in whatever situation you encounter, and knowing precisely what to ask for.

And finally, when the times of crisis hit you'll be prepared and already prayed up... and, should you lose your capacity to pray you'll be able to rest in the fact that you know the Holy Spirit is praying for you in ways that words cannot express.

So, friends this is what it means to Pray in the Spirit, to pray empowered by the Holy Spirit, to pray with the help of the Holy Spirit.

So my prayer is that what we've learned this morning will not simply be more information – but that you will experience more and more of the Spirit's power in your prayers.

That it will help to revolutionize how you pray, what you pray for and the results that you experience.

Friends, few things are as important and critical in our spiritual life as prayer.

Few things are as important and critical to the success of our mission as Christ's church in reaching our community as prayer...

And the good news is that the Holy Spirit has been sent to help us pray – friends, the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk... but of power! (1 Cor 4:20)

May you be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit – and may you pray! Amen.