

## What to pray for ?

### Introduction

A sombre cloud has descended upon the world as result of things like the virus pandemic, racial issues, the collapse of the economy and extreme weather patterns. In our own country reports of violence, crime and corruption add to the general sense of dejection.

Christian believers are also being affected and many confess that they are becoming low in spirit and that they do not how to pray anymore.

Paul had the same problem. To the believers in Rome he admits that he sometimes also did not know what to pray for, but he also testifies that in times of weakness, he was strengthened by the Holy Spirit (**2 Cor. 11:23-30**).

### How did the Holy Spirit help him to pray?

*“...the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, since **we do not know how to pray** as we should. But the Spirit himself **intercedes for us with groans too deep for words...**”*  
(**Rom. 8:26-27**, ISV, my emphasis).

*“In the same way the Spirit also comes to help us, weak as we are. For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us **in groans that words cannot express**”* (**Rom. 8:26-27**, GNB, my emphasis).

### What does the term “groans that words cannot express” refer to?

It cannot refer to groans uttered by the Holy Spirit, because He always knows what to intercede for (verse 27). Also, it cannot be, like some try to explain, refer to praying in tongues, because praying in tongues involves the use of words of which the meaning has to be interpreted and understood (**1 Cor. 14:13**), whilst the “groaning” type of prayer that Paul refers to is a type of prayer that one does not have words for.

**Romans 8:23** provides us with a possible explanation:

*“However, not only the creation, but **we** who have the first fruits of the Spirit also **groan inwardly** as we eagerly await our adoption, the redemption of our bodies.”*

From the context we must deduct that the Holy Spirit, instead of interceding directly for us before the Father, inspires His will in our hearts. I am of the opinion that in some situations where we do not know what specifically to pray for, the Holy Spirit intercedes through us by giving us an inner burden which, because we find it difficult to put into words, can only express with a “sigh” or a “groan.”

Does this not perhaps explain why in certain critical situations in the past where we desperately needed help, we could only utter a “Lord help?”

In the Beatitudes Jesus proclaims the importance of having the correct attitude towards certain matters. So for example, to be comforted, one has to “mourn.” I believe that what Jesus says about “mourning” ties in with what Paul writes about “groaning” in prayer:

*“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4).*

The mourning that Jesus speaks about cannot refer to the general type of mourning that all people experience, because even criminals grieve when somebody close to them dies. The mourning that Jesus speaks about must refer to a deep feeling of sadness about all the pain and suffering which is caused by sin and unrighteousness in this broken world.

### **Conclusion**

There is a difference between a sigh of dejection and a deep sigh which is an expression of an inner need for God’s intervention in certain matters – the one is a mere soulish response to problems, whilst the other represents the deep interceding work of the Holy Spirit.

The danger exists that because we are overwhelmed by so many prayer requests, we tend to pray down the list in a mechanical way. Perhaps we should become more quiet before the Lord and in faith wait for the Holy Spirit to instil an attitude in us which will cause us to *“inwardly groan”* and *“mourn”* more about our own condition and also about the needs that surround us.

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