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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION[®]

Our Partner In Prayer

By Greg Albrecht



Have you ever had a difficult time coming up with the right words to say? Prayer is certainly one of those times when we can't find appropriate words—similar frustrations can occur when you're writing a card or an e-mail to a friend who has just lost their husband or wife, or a friend or family member who has just been told they have an aggressive cancer. Maybe the "right words" don't come when you're asked to stand up at a funeral or memorial service and "say a few words."

I have been actively serving in ministry to others for 49 years. As a result, many people feel that I will know the right things to say to God or about God in any given situation. They often say something like, "You're a man of God, say something inspirational—say something from God." I have to tell you that I feel absolutely inadequate in such moments,

because I know it's not within me to say uplifting, encouraging and inspirational things.

Sometimes I'll be standing before a memorial service or by a graveside as others await some profound thought or uplifting advice I might offer. At such times, the thought often crosses my mind that the words I have prepared might be trite, empty and over-used. So I ask God to ensure what I say is from him, not from me. Sometimes I am leading others in a spoken, public prayer—and as I do I am silently asking God to speak in and through me so that his words and thoughts are shared—and I often think at such times, "Greg, you don't have what it takes to say what needs to be said—but He does."

We all have so many times when we feel our words are inadequate—many times when we feel unable to articulate what needs to be said—and many of those times happen when we pray.

It Doesn't Matter if We Don't Know How or What to Pray!

"We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans" (Romans 8:26).

Eugene Peterson uses contemporary phrasing when translating this verse: *"If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our*

wordless sighs, our aching groans" (Romans 8:26, The Message Bible).

There are times when our prayers seem to be surrounded and obscured by a huge cloud or fog bank of our personal grief, depression and pain. Sometimes we hurt so much we just don't know what to say. It doesn't matter if we choose just the right words. Leave the eloquence to God.

God the Holy Spirit helps us by translating sighs and groans on our part into meaningful discourse, and that's just one of the reasons God the Holy Spirit is called our Comforter. **God the Holy Spirit is our Partner in prayer.**

When you don't know what to pray because you hurt so much... when you don't know what to pray when you hear about the horrible abuse of children...when you don't know what to say or pray when a loved one or friend is wasting away on their deathbed with only days or a few weeks to live...when you

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inner pain has you so conflicted and confused that you seem to be suffocating, gasping for spiritual breath... **a groan or a moan or a sigh or a wail or even a silent thought is enough.**

Audible prayer is simply a sound, of any kind, breaking through the silence and the loneliness and the separation you may feel between you and God—and an unspoken thought is also “enough” for God to hear and understand.

The book of Romans is a masterpiece of spiritual inspiration—in tandem with the book of Galatians the magnum opus of Paul’s soaring teaching on God’s grace. The book of Romans (specifically the 8th chapter) provides us with wonderful insight and teaching about prayer.

One author, who was working on a commentary of the book of Romans, asked a group of 20 pastors, Bible teachers and scholars to name their favorite chapter in the Bible. He knew that this task was somewhat like asking a father or mother to choose their favorite child, so he posed this situation to the group:

If you were shipwrecked and washed up on a desert island, and you could choose only one chapter of the Bible as your companion as you awaited rescue, what chapter would that be?

Five out of the 20 people in the group chose Romans 8. Romans 8 is the gospel in miniature—it clearly and concisely describes the love of our gracious God, inviting us to personal and intimate relationship with him—inviting us to be his very children, adopted children, heirs of the kingdom of heaven, heirs who will never be separated from him. Romans 8 tells us that nothing can come between us and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and that in Christ we are safe and secure forever.

We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express (Romans 8:26). Prayer is the heart of the gospel, for prayer is the good news that God

so longs to be connected with us that he himself, God the Holy Spirit, the third divine person of the Godhead, provides the way for us to be and remain connected with him.

God the Holy Spirit Listens and Responds

“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 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.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Romans 8:14-16).

• Those who are led by the Holy Spirit are the children of God.

The verses in Romans 8 that immediately precede vs. 14 tell us that when we surrender and yield to God we are given the precious standing as his own dear children, putting to death the deeds of our bodies, as we are enabled and empowered by the grace of God the Holy Spirit.

Our spiritual death to purely physical goals, ambitions and lusts is the evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit—and the work of the Holy Spirit is the driving force and power behind any and all of our Spirit-led activities.

• God the Holy Spirit is not a spirit of fear driven by bondage and slavery.

God is not a law-defined or law-limited divine taskmaster, but rather he is personally and relationally revealed to us as our heavenly Father—therefore we are not slaves of God but we are his own adopted children.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we have the high privilege and honor of calling God “Abba”—which we might roughly translate in



...we have the high privilege and honor of calling God “Abba”... “Daddy.”

English as “Daddy”—an endearing term for our human father.

• God the Holy Spirit responds positively and affirms our cry.

God the Holy Spirit says you have the honor and privilege to call the Father “Daddy” because that’s what he is to you, his dear child.

As his children, the Father doesn’t expect us to have the exact and correct words and terms that describe specifically how we feel and what we want to express. God is always listening intently and carefully to you and me. He does not expect a formal recitation or an impassioned and eloquent prayer—nor is he impressed with the same-old, same-old, tired recitation of words that have long since lost their meaning to us.

I’m sure you have seen photographs and even televised footage of long receiving lines, where a dignitary receives guests. If you’re like me, you wonder when someone meets a president or a prime minister what can they say in a few seconds that has any lasting significance?

According to an account I once read, President Franklin D. Roosevelt disliked the long receiving lines at White House receptions. The people he met always said the same things, as he did in response, and it all seemed so meaningless. So one evening he



God the Holy Spirit is like wind—always blowing—but in order for us to move forward we must hoist our sails.

decided to see if people were actually listening to what he said.

On this evening, reportedly, when he shook hands with the person in the receiving line and they said something to him, he responded by saying, “I murdered my grandmother this morning.” No one seemed to acknowledge what he said, because they all said something like “nice to meet you” as they moved down the line.

Finally, one person heard exactly what the President was saying and caught on to this little game Roosevelt was playing. So he said, “Well, I’m sure she had it coming to her.” They both had a laugh at President Roosevelt’s listening and communication test.

We can be assured that God is listening (intently and carefully) to us. We have his full attention and he is interested in our concerns and cares. He hears exactly what we say, and more than that, he understands what we are unable to say.

Our Comforter

In John 14:16, Jesus told his disciples, and all of us, that God the Holy Spirit is a comforter.

That word *comforter* today generally makes people think of a thick, blanket-like covering that provides warmth to us when we lie down and sleep. But the word Jesus used that is translated “comforter”

means so much more—the Greek word is *paraclete* and it means “called alongside to help”—with the idea of an assistant, a helper and aide. Some verses speak of the Holy Spirit as an advocate—the divine Someone who will stand with us, defend us, support us, intercede on our behalf and plead our case.

All of that, and more, is the work of God the Holy Spirit for us in prayer. He finds and assists us with the right words. He intercedes, he pleads our case and supports us. He comforts us, assuring us that we are indeed the very children of God.

We want, and beyond that we need, God to help us pray. Think of how many prayers we’ve offered to God that have been almost completely self-centered, with utter disregard for the needs of others. Think back with me to prayers we have asked God that, would he have answered them as we asked, our lives may have been devastated.

Humility and Dependence

The very beginning of Christ-centered prayer is the admission that most of the time we don’t have the right words—and that we really don’t know how to pray. We depend on God for everything—even helping us to pray!

When we pray, we are not praying on our own. The eighth

chapter of the book of Romans assures us that God the Holy Spirit is praying with us.

God the Holy Spirit is our Partner in prayer. In John 3:8, Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, as the Spirit who blows where it wills. We don’t see the wind, but we can feel the wind, and we can see the effects of the wind as it blows trees and leaves.

We don’t know exactly where the wind comes from or what makes the wind blow—but the wind, nevertheless, is real and dynamic. So too with God the Holy Spirit, who dynamically empowers us to pray. God the Holy Spirit is our partner in prayer.

The Holy Spirit was also likened to the wind in the book of Acts, when Acts 2:2 says the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost like a violent blowing wind from heaven. God the Holy Spirit is like wind—always blowing—but in order for us to move forward we must hoist our sails.

Don’t just sit there and not hoist your sail because you don’t know what to say. Don’t be intimidated, thinking that your words and thoughts are so meaningless that God will be embarrassed or offended by what you say.

All you need to do is groan, moan, sigh or grunt—or just think of what you want to say—**God the Holy Spirit, our partner in prayer,** will help, translate, advocate and support as you plead your case.

God stands with us in our prayers, he interprets and translates our cries and our inner groaning. We are not alone. God is with us.

Thank you for the comfort, support and assurance that no matter where we are geographically or no matter what state in which we find ourselves emotionally or spiritually, you are always with us. You are our partner in prayer. When the right words won’t come, you give us the right words or you interpret and translate. When we feel empty, you fill us. When we feel our prayers are not going anywhere, you fill our sails. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Amen. □