

Just When I Thought I Knew How to Pray

Rev. Donald Wachenschwanz

Wall Street United Church

Sunday, July 26, 2026

Romans 8:24-39 (NRSVUE)

For by hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words. And God, who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together[e] for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son but gave him up for all of us, how will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ who died, or rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sermon notes

We don't know how to pray! The Spirit intercedes with groans ... too deep for words. Meditation, Contemplation, Reflection.

God searches *hearts*, which the original writer, readers, and hearers believed to be the seat of reason. This seems strange to us who believe it to be the head! And the heart is also where decisions and choices are made.

The Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God

All things work together for good for those whom God foreknew, whom God predestined, whom God called. And who is foreknown, and who is predestined, and who has God called? For God so loved the **world**! That includes everyone! All things work together for the good of everyone. How is that possible?

The reason we don't know how to pray is not because we haven't heard a 12-point sermon on prayer. The reason is we don't know how to make things work out for the good of everyone.

God is for us, so who is against us?

How will God, who gave his only begotten one, not give us everything else?

Prayer is an expression of Hope – for in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Who can bring a charge against us? Who can condemn us?

Christ intercedes for us.

Who will separate us from the Love of Christ?

Prayer is an expression of Trust – *Our Trust in Christ's Faith. Our trust that God works everything out for the good of all.*

Part of that trust is being God's children, God a perfectly loving and caring parent, and our trust in God as such. A perfect parent who, like good parents, wants to hear what the children say. God wants to hear whatever we pray.

Your heavenly father/mother/parent wants to hear God's child's prayer, wants to hear your prayer.

We are more than victorious. Why?

Because nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God.

This gives us two things for which to pray.

Expressions of Joy and of Gratitude. You feel it in the build up:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Prayer is also an expression of Love. Not for 'prayer mathematics' that will create an outcome for someone we love. Not for 'prayer alchemy' that will create an outcome for some situation in the world. Not for a weighted plea to change an outcome for ourselves. But as an expression of *love* – love for self, love for neighbour, and love for God.

A life of Love is a Prayer.

So maybe, Mr. Righteous Roman Writer, we don't know how to pray! But we know what to pray.

We can pray without words, in silence, in meditation, contemplation, reflection.

We can wait in patience, knowing the Spirit intercedes for us.

We can express hope. We can express trust.

We can express love – for ourselves, for others, for God.

And we can be a living, breathing, walking prayer by living the way of Jesus, living the way of love.

Amen! Thanks be to God.