

Partnership with the Suffering of God
Romans 8:26-30
April 22, 2020

²⁶ 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 sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸ We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Since WWII theologians have taken up the insight by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Only the suffering God can help.” Books on the pain of God, the vulnerability of God and the heart break of God, have helped pastors over these 70 years come to grips with the tragedy of those days, and the pain of these days. From these insights we have gained a new understanding of God. But we must be clear. God does not suffer in the way we do. God does not suffer the pain of not knowing the future, the pain of death or the worry and anxiety of present circumstances. God suffers with us, and even because of us. God’s love for us is so strong that his longing to liberate us drove the Father to give up the Son, on the cross. In this way, God’s pain grew deeper and more profound. When Paul says in Romans 8:26, “***²⁶ 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 sighs too deep for words,***” Paul is letting us into the heart of God. When the Spirit, which is God, intercedes with sighs too deep for words, Paul is letting us into the secret---God suffers with us in order to help us. But how does God help?

First, when we step into the position to address God, we find it a frightening, yet a joyful experience. We don’t know what to say. We stammer, sometimes, through our sentences or thoughts to express what is on our heart. In this stammering communication there is often pain or frustration to express what we want. This is why Paul says that the Spirit is there in your stammering’s. You are not alone. God in fact is suffering with you, helping you make clear what is in your heart. This is indeed a spiritual help.

Second, Paul reassures us that God searches our heart and God knows what is in the mind of the Spirit. The combination of this communication before God then becomes clear to God. But the more helpful event that follows is this: we are touched by the knowledge that transpires in our conversation with God, through the work of the Spirit. This is indeed helpful. Even though we might enter prayer ignorant and empty; the Spirit awakens in us the very thoughts in our hearts and in God’s. Therefore, the pain that causes us to stammer becomes a beautiful voice of joy and understanding.

Finally, Paul again reassures us with the words, “***We know that all things work together for good for those who love God.***” While suffering in our ignorance, fear and frustration, Paul lets us know that we know all ready that God is going to work things out. Of course, this does not mean that he will heal everybody, or make everything we want come to

pass. What he means is that God has a way of taking whatever suffering we have and turning it into a glimmer of hope for us, or for someone else. Why does God do this? Because he is the Suffering God, who suffers with us. God turns those who suffers with God and for God, into servants of grace for the betterment of the world. But only if we understand the mind and heart of God, and how God aches for the world.