
But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and will bring to your remembrance all the things which I have said to you. John 14:26

“I’m not your friend anymore.” Have you ever heard someone say this? It is not uncommon amongst little children, for such words to be expressed. But as we get a little older we may perhaps not say such words, but live them nevertheless.

What does it mean to ‘be a friend’? What does it mean to ‘have friends’? Can a person truly live this life without any friends?

In an article on ‘well-being’ an author has stated six reasons for having friends: (1) Friends Are Good for Your Physical Health; (2) Friends Encourage Healthy Behaviours; (3) Friends Give You Emotional Support; (4) Friends Help Build Your Confidence (5) Friends Help You Beat Stress; (6) Friends Push You To Be Your Best.

When it comes to having ‘good friends’, we may also speak of certain qualities of good friends. These may include: (1). They’ll always be honest with you. (2). They love you for yourself. (3). They give more than they take. (4). They compromise. (5). They forgive you even without an apology. (6). They believe in you. (7). They make time for you. (8). They are respectful of you. (9). They are thoughtful. (10). They stick around.

You could probably add a whole other list to the benefits of friendships, and the qualities of a ‘good friend. What else could you say? We know that friends help us interact with just about everyone. The people we bring into our lives as friends will show us how to forgive, laugh, and make conversation. The basic components of any relationship, from our marriage to our co-workers, are all founded in friendship. We learn how to interact with people because of our friends, even the ones that are opposite from us or share a different worldview.

We all need friends. Surely there have been times you wished that you had a friend—someone to help when the chips are down. Surely you have wished at times that you had someone to talk to when you were lonely—someone to listen to your problems, someone who cared, someone who would love you even if you were in the wrong. Or you were glad you had a friend like that.

For most of us it is important to have friends. For most of us it would be important to know—beyond the shadow of a doubt—that God is your friend.

To think that the One eternal God, maker of heaven and earth, wants to be your friend is mind blowing—it's incredible to know that he wants to be your friend. It means that as God is your friend, no situation is ever hopeless. Things will work out eventually because you have a divine friend.

Just before His death on the cross our Lord Jesus said to His disciples (John 16:7,13), "But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you... But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth."

As Jesus prepared to lay down His life for us, He promised the disciples another paraclete (see John 14:16), which is often translated Comforter. The word comes from two Greek words: *para* meaning "alongside of" and *clete* meaning "come." So, the Holy Spirit comes alongside us. And what power He wields for us—this Advocate, Counsellor, Helper! He is not a spiritual force, but the divine person of God who does the work of the Father and the Son here on earth as He walks with us through life. He is our true friend.

This weekend our congregation, together with most Christian congregations around the world, celebrates 'Pentecost'. Today we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit.

But let's begin by answering the question: "Who is the Holy Spirit?" The simple answer is the Holy Spirit is God, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Spirit is not some impersonal 'force', but very importantly, the Holy Spirit is God at work in the world, and God at work in our lives. And the Bible is chock full of some pretty eye opening things that happened to people led by the Holy Spirit: The Virgin Mary: became a pregnant teenager when the Holy Spirit came to her; Joseph and family were led into exile in Egypt by the Spirit; Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil for 40 days; When Jesus began his three-year ministry, the Holy Spirit led Him to announce that He was the Messiah to his hometown synagogue. Jesus was run out of town and the people tried to throw Him off a cliff; When the Apostles received the Holy Spirit they proclaimed Jesus and were beaten, thrown in jail, driven out of town and all but one were martyred.

The Holy Spirit is the gift of God in our lives leading us to Jesus. To understand this, an illustration of a floodlight building: When floodlighting is well done, the floodlights are placed so that you do not see them; in fact, you are not supposed to see where the light is coming from; what you are meant to see is just the building on which the floodlights are trained. The intended effect is to make it visible when otherwise it would not be seen.

This is the Holy Spirit's role. He is the floodlight shining on the Saviour. God the Spirit leads us to know Jesus. He leads us to know a love so profound that we

can barely understand it. He leads us to know forgiveness so complete that even the most vile person is made holy. He leads us to know a life so abundant that it will last for eternity. And He leads us into an inheritance as sons and daughters of the living God. Truly, the Holy Spirit is our 'best friend'.

Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the "Comforter". Our "Comforter" is our advocate, intercessor and friend. Even when we don't feel the presence of the Holy Spirit, we are assured that He does not leave us hanging especially in our time of need. After all, He resides in us and will continually remain with us. The Holy Spirit not only comforts us by being with us, but also points us to the truth about our relationship with God.

Life changes but God does not. A change of season can sometimes cause us to doubt God's love for us. The Holy Spirit however, comforts us with the gospel. He reminds us that we always have a right standing with our Father and that there is nothing, and absolutely nothing, that can separate us from His love.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:10, "These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God."

Is the Holy Spirit still at work among us? A preacher, speaking to a large audience, once held up an empty glass and asked, "How can I get the air out of this glass?" One man shouted, "Suck it out with a pump!" the pastor replied, "That would create a vacuum and shatter the glass." After numerous other suggestions the pastor picked up a jug of water, and filled the glass, saying, "There, all the air is now removed." He then went on to explain that victory in the Christian life is not accomplished by "sucking out a sin here and there," but by being filled with God's grace and love that comes from Jesus.

Jesus explained the role of the Holy Spirit to His disciples in John 16:8. He works in the world to convince and convict unbelievers of sin, drawing them to Christ and helping them realise how desperately they need a Saviour. His work continues after salvation as He continually works in the lives of believers to help us grow up and mature spiritually (Galatians 5:22-23).

Jesus told His disciples in John 16:7 that He will send the Holy Spirit to them, which implies that the Holy Spirit will be in close fellowship with them. As believers, we the Holy Spirit is at work in our everyday lives (2 Corinthians 13:14).

Whenever we confess the Lord Jesus; whenever God splashes a new believer into the Kingdom at the Baptismal Fount; Whenever God feeds us with the Body and Blood of Christ at the Altar – we know that the Holy Spirit is doing his work. These are the marks and signs that the Spirit of the Living God is gathering believers under the Cross of Jesus. These are the signs that God is

at work blessing and confirming us into the faith that forgives and loves; the faith that makes us children of God; the faith that God has entrusted to us so that we can share it with the world.

Do you sometimes feel that no one understands you or cares about your problems? God does! He knows just what you need. The Apostle Paul writes (Romans 8:26-27): “In the same way, 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, and the One who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, for the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to God’s will.” The Holy Spirit is our Helper. Jesus fully intended for the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the things of God — to help you out when you cannot see God in the details of your circumstances.

We live in a culture where faith is questioned. We need help in our closest relationships. We need boldness to pray for those struggling: to share the message of hope with direction and discernment but also without fear. We need wisdom and courage to walk boldly with love into a world that doesn’t always understand or believe in Jesus. Thank God the Holy Spirit that He is at work within us! The Holy Spirit lives in each of us. (1 Corinthians 3:16) As we embrace Jesus’ promise of a Helper, it’s with the assurance that God will work through us.

Have you ever questioned whether the Holy Spirit is at work within you? Some seem to think the Holy Spirit is difficult to get to know or is continually watching to condemn their sins, but this is not correct. If you are a Christian, He is inside you, closer than your breath, to be your friend in every situation. In friendship with the Holy Spirit, we begin to experience a sense of wholeness and joy unattainable through any other relationship or aspect of life. In friendship with God comes peace, security, honesty, healing and freedom.

The most important thing the Holy Spirit does is bring us to receive salvation; to give us faith in Jesus. May you – His dear ones – always be led by the Spirit of the living God! We may battle uncertainty or fear from time to time, but with a Spirit-led heart, we gain confidence that Jesus’ promises are Yes and Amen and that they are for us, too. Amen!