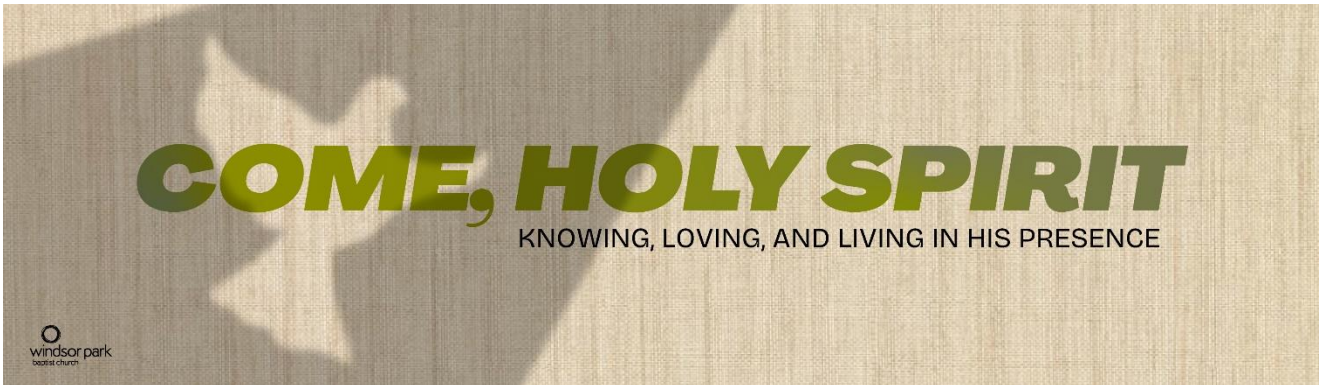


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Week 2: Never Alone

Introduction: More than a recipe book

In January Keely and I celebrated our tenth wedding anniversary. I was 23 when we got married and I lived at home right until we got married, so I never experienced flatting life or had to fend for myself. I had it pretty good at home. And then, with no disrespect to my parents, I had it even better with Keely. Her cooking game was strong when we got married and it's only gotten better! She really is a fantastic cook.

But when we lived in Wellington, she had an opportunity to go and serve as a nurse in Senegal with Mercy Ships. I was super excited for her - but I also faced the prospect of 10 weeks of looking after myself! Keely's friends asked how I would cope. Our families asked how I would cope. My work colleagues made it clear I wouldn't cope!

But Keely had a plan.

I'm going away, she said, – but I won't leave you alone.

In my place there will be someone else that can help you... I've made you a folder.

Here are your recipes, explained in the way that you'll understand, handwritten with love.

Stick to these and you'll be fine, and know I am with you always, even until the very end!

Okay well she didn't say that last bit!

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Today we are looking at Jesus' farewell speech to the disciples and what He promised them in His place. For now, let's just say they needed *more than a recipe book!*

Two weeks ago, we began a new series called "**Come, Holy Spirit**" and Grant gave us summary of the Holy Spirit's active presence from Genesis to Revelation. Literally from the first chapter of the Bible where the Spirit of God hovered over the waters, to the final chapter of Revelation where the Spirit and the bride say come.

This morning we zoom in on a key moment in the story as Jesus' prepares His disciples for what will be a painful goodbye for them. All the passages we'll read come from what is referred to as the **Upper Room Discourse**. This is recorded in John's gospel where the-disciple-Jesus-loved devotes a whopping five chapters to this one kai and korero session between Jesus and His disciples. Over the meal Jesus comforts and prepares His disciples for what is about to happen. His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His final return. He doesn't have much time left with them in person and He must get some things through to them and one of the most significant themes is the promise of the Holy Spirit, so we're going to look at every mention of the Spirit in Jesus' farewell speech.

The first comes in John 14:15.

John 14:15-18 - "Another Advocate"

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

I want you to try to understand is how hard it would have been for the disciples to say goodbye to Jesus. They had been with Him every day for three years. Living off His every word. Following Him wherever He went. Whenever there was a decision to be made, every head must have turned to Him. He was their purpose, their protection, their provision, the very presence of God

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with them – just stick with Him, He'll work it out. And now He's saying goodbye. When Keely went away for 10 weeks I needed help! The disciples without Jesus needed more than a recipe book.

And that's exactly what Jesus promises them. More directly than ever before Jesus repeatedly promises His disciples the personal presence of the Holy Spirit and provides more details about who the person of the Spirit is, and what He will do.

The name Jesus uses for the Spirit here is **“advocate”**. An advocate is someone who defends and acts on behalf of someone. The most common image for this is in a court of law where a defense lawyer advocates for their client. The Spirit advocates for believers, defending them from their opposition, especially the enemy, Satan, who is known biblically as “the accuser”. The devil accuses with lies, the Spirit advocates with truth.

Another meaning of the word Jesus uses for the Spirit is **“counsellor”**. The Spirit is our counsellor helping us work through our woundedness. Like a skilled counsellor the Spirit of God gets below the surface of our presenting issue – to the real issue. Although it's important to note I am not saying the Spirit replaces our need to see a human counsellor. As I'll say again in this message and this series – it's a **“both-and”** not an either-or approach required!

These images help us get to know the person of the Spirit but “advocate” and “counsellor” are English translations of the Greek word used by John. What Jesus called the Spirit in Greek is a **“parakletos”**. The most direct translation of the word is “one called alongside to help”. In the culture of the day the word had a maritime meaning. In that setting a *parakletos* was a rescue tow boat that would pull up alongside a smaller boat caught in a storm and help it back to shore. This is the word Jesus chooses to use for the Spirit. Jesus had calmed storms for the disciples but He was going back to the Father and they'd face many more storms. In the coming storms they would not be alone because the *parakletos*, the Spirit, would come alongside them to help, to advocate, to counsel, to comfort, and to guide them safely home to Father.

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During the Covid pandemic I relocated a number of times with my work. At the time I was working as a strength & conditioning coach for the Wellington Phoenix. As the team was involved in a trans-Tasman competition, we had to base ourselves in Australia living away from family in hotels for months at a time. There was no work life balance because we all lived together and had very few freedoms outside of training for fear of getting sick and passing it to the team. As I sat in my hotel room in Parramatta contemplating three months of this, I sensed the Spirit's quiet voice. Not in a dramatic or showy way, but in a confident reassurance: "I am overwhelmingly with you."

As we conclude this first section let's pause to pray.

Whatever storms we may be facing today, *come Holy Spirit,*

draw us safely back to the shore of the Father's love.

Whatever woundedness we carry, *come Holy Spirit,*

counsel us guiding us into greater freedom in Christ.

Whatever lies the accuser is attempting to sabotage us with, *come Holy Spirit,*

be our advocate reminding us of the truth. Amen.

Let's look at what else Jesus had to say about the Promised Spirit, this time focusing on the name "***Spirit of Truth***".

John 14:25-27 and 15:26-27 - "The Spirit of Truth"

"All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning."

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In these sections Jesus highlights the truth telling function of the Spirit. As we mentioned earlier, the accuser tells lies, the Spirit speaks truth. Jesus calls Him the *Spirit of Truth*. For three years the disciples had apprenticed under Jesus. He had been their teacher, their rabbi. Now he's saying that the Spirit will be their teacher. The Spirit will continue their truth education. And like Jesus, he will not speak on his own, but will speak what comes from the Father. There is perfect alignment in their messages because they are perfectly unified in the Trinity.

If this was a human coalition you'd imagine some leadership tensions. But with the trinity there are no mixed messages, no competing agendas, no competition for attention. The Spirit reminds believers of Jesus' teaching and testifies to Him.

This is why I find it so saddening when Christians pit the Spirit against the Bible. There is no conflict between the two. When it comes to the Spirit we need a **“both-and”** perspective:

- Sound biblical teaching **and** prophetic insights.
- Deep thinking **and** deep feeling.
- Fruits of the Spirit **and** gifts of the Spirit.
- Slow change through steady spiritual disciplines **and** occasional instant breakthrough by the same Spirit.
- Strategic planning **and** prayerful discernment.
- Structured services **and** openness to disruption.

Finding the balance between all of these is not easy. But when we work from a “both-and” perspective it becomes a lot easier. To elevate the Spirit is not to downplay the written word which the Spirit of God inspired. To elevate Scripture is not to downplay the Spirit that breathed those words. The Spirit and the Word are not in competition, they work together, just as Jesus promised.

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Have you ever had that moment when a scripture just jumped off the page and hit you between the eyes?

That was the Spirit.

Have you ever noticed after years of unspectacular discipleship and consistent showing up, that you've slowly become, in some small way, more like Jesus?

That was the Spirit.

Have you ever felt prompted to share an encouragement with someone and it turned out to be exactly what they needed in that moment?

That was the Spirit.

Last year I went to a prayer school in Tairua run by Strahan Coleman and while walking back to one of the sessions I had this sense from God saying: "he loves my fullest self". That I could boldly express who I was and not hold back, and God loved that! The prayer school was Friday and Saturday and as great as it was, I was tired when I showed up to church on Sunday morning to preach both services and teach at Lean In in the evening. I was feeling a little less bold and full than I had in Tairua. Five minutes before I got up to preach I got a text from a friend in Wellington, who had never sent me a personal text before, and who certainly had no idea of what my weekend had involved. The text said: "may you be bold in your love for Jesus... who God has made you be Aidan is enough. Be Bold."

I can't remember what I preached about – but I remember that text.

That's the power of a word in season from the Spirit of Truth.

The final passage we'll look at today is the most astounding thing Jesus says about the Spirit!

John 16:7-14 - An Upgrade?

"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. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the

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Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.”

This is the craziest part of Jesus’ farewell speech: He says it’s better for the disciples that He goes! It sounds kind of a like a breakup text designed to make you feel better about ending it with someone, ‘*you’re better off without me*’.... but that’s not the way Jesus is saying it. Neither is this Jesus being humble and saying, ‘*if you like me you’ll love the Spirit, He’s way cooler...*’

He knows how difficult His departure will be for them but He also knows that the *personal, indwelling, empowering presence of the Spirit*, is even better for the disciples than his bodily presence with them. According to Jesus, God’s **Spirit** in **all** believers, in **all** countries, **at all times**, is **better** than God in **human form** in **one upper room in the middle east**.

Jesus is saying the post-Pentecost experience of the Spirit is an **undeniable upgrade** on His personal presence on earth. In case I haven’t made it clear yet – this is a big deal!

Jesus also points to the Holy Spirit’s role in the world at large, saying the Spirit will prove the world to be wrong about sin, judgement, and righteousness. One of the Spirit’s role is to bring **conviction of sin** and to reveal the truth about Jesus to those who, until then, had not recognised Him for who He is.

Standing outside the Browns Bay Boating Club as a sixteen-year-old I first truly felt this conviction from the Holy Spirit. I had recently arrived in New Zealand and had just heard a youth group message which cut right through my teenage banter and bravado. I realised that Jesus had died for me, had given me every opportunity to know him, and until then I had thrown it back

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in his face. Standing there, by the war memorial, looking out to the moonlit ocean I truly repented, not because I was righteous or had it figured out, but because the Spirit had opened by eyes to both my brokenness, and God's pursuing love for me. That is the power of conviction brought in love by the Spirit.

Conclusion: Never Alone

As Jesus prepares his disciples for a painful goodbye his clear promise is that they will never be alone. He will not leave them as orphans. He will come to them. He will be with them until the very end of the age. And **how** will He be with them?

One day yes, He will return ***in person*** and bring the fullness of the victory He achieved. But until that day He is with us ***through the Holy Spirit***.

Our **advocate** against the devil's lies.

Our divine guidance **counsellor** in a confusing world.

Our **teacher** pointing us to Jesus.

And our ***parakletos***, coming alongside us in the storm, and drawing us back to the safe harbour of the Father's love.

Today although we may feel alone, abandoned, or adrift... if we are followers of Jesus, the Holy Spirit lives within us and we are never truly alone. The God of the universe lives in You.

We're going to close by singing a song which celebrates God's constant presence with us. The song is grounded in the words and imagery of Psalm 23 and overlays the New Testament experience of God's Spirit living within us.

Let's allow these words, through the Spirit, to remind and reassure us that we are never alone.

Amen.

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Reflecting on Sunday 24th May 2026:

Last Sunday we celebrated our 75th anniversary as a local church! Grant spoke from 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 on the aroma of Christ. Where have you noticed the fragrance of Jesus this week?

The following questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

- Why do you think some Christians separate the work of the Spirit from the Bible, or vice versa? What dangers can come from emphasising one while neglecting the other?
- Jesus described the Holy Spirit as the *parakletos* — “one called alongside to help.” Which image of the Spirit stood out most to you: advocate, counsellor, comforter, teacher, or rescue boat in the storm? Why?
- Have you ever experienced a moment where you sensed the Holy Spirit’s presence, guidance, comfort, or conviction in a tangible way? What happened? How has it shaped your relationship with God?
- In what environments do you find it easiest (or most difficult) to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit? How can you put yourself in these environments more?

If you’d like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we’re better together and no perfect people are allowed.**

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. **The Familiar Stranger** is a book by Tyler Staton on the Holy Spirit. It informed much of this teaching and I highly recommend both the **book**:
<https://manna.co.nz/shop/9781399814102-the-familiar-stranger-p-b-uk-edition-84557>
and the **Right Now Media series**:
<https://app.rightnowmedia.org/en/content/details/934849>
2. **Beyond the Message Podcast**. If you want to continue the conversation around this Holy Spirit series you've got to check out our weekly podcast further unpacking each message and answering your questions! You can access episodes and submit questions here:
<https://www.windsorpark.org.nz/podcasts>
3. **The Upper Room Discourse** was the source of all our biblical material for this sermon. Here's a short video of Dr. Sinclair Ferguson explaining what the section teaches us about the heart of Christ.
<https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/what-does-the-upper-room-discourse-show-us-about-the-heart-of-christ/>