

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

JOHN 16-17

I ran across a great quote, “If you’re brave enough to say good-bye, life will reward you with a new hello.” And this was the discovery made by Jesus’ disciples.

In Chapters 13-17, Jesus says good-bye, and in His place, He promises His followers “*another Helper*.”

Specifically, “another of the same kind...” The Holy Spirit took up where Jesus left off *in the training of His disciples* and *in the building up of His Church*.

The book of Acts, as well as church history, shows how the Spirit extended Jesus’ influence globally and generationally. The ministry of the Holy Spirit expands the Church even to this day. This morning, we pick up from last week in the last two verses of John 15...

Verse 26, “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me...” Notice, the Holy Spirit comes to “*testify of Jesus*.”

When I grew up, the dean of late-night talk shows wasn’t Jimmy Kimmel or James Corden, but Johnny Carson. *You’ve probably heard of Johnny Carson!* Yet a key to Carson’s success was a man you’ve never heard of, his long-time producer Freddy DeCordova.

One night, during filming, the camera panned off stage and focused on Freddy DeCordova. This was both unusual and unplanned. When Freddy realized he was on camera, he was

furious. He started shouting, "No, no, no! Get the camera on Johnny. He's the star."

And this is the job of the Holy Spirit. Rather than attract attention to Himself, He focuses the spotlight on the star, Jesus. The Holy Spirit is to *"testify of Jesus!"*

This makes for an interesting observation - it may sound odd, but it's true: "A church that's preoccupied with the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit - to the exclusion of Jesus - is not being led by the Holy Spirit."

Some charismatic churches get so wrapped up in the things of the Spirit they fail to glorify Jesus and neglect His Lordship... A Church that's truly Spirit-led will be all about following Jesus! *The Holy Spirit will see to it...*

Chapter 15 ends, "And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning."

The Holy Spirit will testify of Jesus, *but so will His disciples.* And they did largely through the writing of the NT. God gave these men unprecedented access to Jesus so they could report on His life and teachings.

Chapter 16, "These things I have spoken to you, that you should **not be made to stumble**. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service."

Excommunication from the synagogues was Jewish persecution. But that was just the tip of the iceberg. In the future, Rome too will grow a distaste for Christians.

Jesus continues "And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these

things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.” Jesus is being brutally honest with His disciples. The road ahead will not be easy. Persecution looms large. Their chief consolation will be *the Helper*.

Too often we talk to a new or prospective convert about the love, joy, and blessing they'll find in Christ, but we say nothing of the persecution that's promised.

Yet two thousand years later this is still a threat.

We shouldn't scare folks needlessly, but Jesus kept His disciples from stumbling because He was straightforward about the persecution that lay ahead.

Jesus warns there'll come a time when fellow Jews will think they're doing God a favor by killing Christians. This was exactly the attitude Rabbi Saul had in Acts 9.

In 325 AD, a council of 318 church leaders met in the Persian town of Nicaea to nail down the doctrine of Jesus' deity. It was a response to decades of false doctrine. The creed they composed is one of the most definitive statements on the deity of Jesus in history.

In it, Jesus is said to be “*very God of very God.*”

For the three centuries prior to Nicaea, the Church was an underground movement. Believers lived and the Church grew in the cross-hairs of Roman hostility.

Just prior to Nicaea, the Roman Emperor Constantine had become a Christian and legalized Christianity. At Nicaea, for

the first time in 300 years, Church leaders were able to gather openly without fear of reprisal.

Nicaea was a moment where you wish you could've been there. Imagine the men in attendance that day...

A pastor from Egypt had one eye. The Romans had plucked it out of its socket when he refused to renounce his loyalty to Jesus.... Three men had ugly scars on their faces... A few of the pastors limped on one leg... Most everyone in the room had lost an appendage of some sort - an arm, a hand, a finger, an ear... A lot of the pastors had burn marks from scalding oil... Every man's back was a crisscross of scars...

These men had weathered decades of persecution. Members of their churches had been slaughtered by gladiators and fed to the lions. Yet now these leaders were proof of Christianity's triumph. As Jesus said in John 15, the road would be hard, but *the Helper* will ensure that His disciples will *"not be made to stumble."*

Verse 5, "But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' "But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." Jesus' departure meant the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Even though it was hard to grasp at the time, Jesus knew this would prove to be an advantage.

The man, Christ Jesus, was limited to one place at a time. The Holy Spirit would be with all believers, in all places, at all

times. For Christianity to go global, it was necessary for the Jesus to be replaced by God's Spirit.

Beautiful and true is St. Augustine's prayer, "You ascended from before our eyes, and we turned back grieving, only to find you in our hearts" - *the Holy Spirit!*

Jesus says of the Spirit, "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment..." During His ministry on earth, Jesus upset the apple cart. He changed the rules of religion.

Jesus redefined "sin," true "righteousness," and "judgment." Now it was the Spirit's job to convince the world that Jesus was right and everyone else had been wrong. The Spirit's job was to "convict the world..."

"Of sin, because they do not believe in Me..."

Our biggest problem is not sin per se. There is a remedy for sin - the cross of Jesus. But if you reject Jesus, there is no remedy. No one goes to hell because of adultery, or lying, or stealing, but because they failed to believe in God's one provision for sin - Jesus Christ.

He also convicts the world "of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more..."

The Pharisees stressed an outward righteousness, a paltry, stilted legalism. But the life of Jesus was a ballet of beauty and truth - of love for others and purity toward God. When the disciples looked at Jesus, for the first time, they saw true righteousness on display.

Yet righteousness is not a dance you choreograph and teach. I'll never be a great dancer because I lack rhythm. You can't live out what you don't have inside.

And this is the key to righteous living. Jesus returned to the Father so He could send and plant His Spirit inside us. The life Jesus lived, He now lives in us.

And the Spirit convicts the world **“of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”** Rather than judge every sin individually, God has relegated the unpleasant act of judging sin to one place at one time.

God heaped up all the guilt into one pile, and with one bold stroke settled the score. **On the cross, the world was declared guilty; all sin was placed on Jesus' innocent shoulders and sentenced to death. The price He paid forgave us and defeated our accuser.** And now the judgment that's yet to come is just a formality.

In verse 12, Jesus says, **“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.”** At this point, the disciples were in overload. Jesus had more to tell them, but they lacked the ability to comprehend...

“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.” So often our logic and thinking is earthbound, whereas God's truth is heavenly. We need the Spirit to help us understand.

It's interesting, back in 14:26 Jesus promised the Spirit would bring to the disciple's remembrance **the things He had**

spoken - *the Gospels*. Here we're told the Spirit will guide them into all truth - *the Epistles*. And He will tell them things to come - *the Revelation*.

Put all three promises together and Jesus' predicted the Holy Spirit will inspire all of what we call the NT.

Then Jesus says of the Spirit in verse 14, "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you." Jesus is saying the Holy Spirit will speak on His behalf. He'll always be in harmony with His nature and teaching. *God's Spirit* is in sync with *God's Son*.

This means if someone spouts a thought contrary to Jesus' teaching *and says the Spirit told him so*, it's not the Holy Spirit. The Spirit never contradicts the Son.

"A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father." We learn later from Jesus that this "*little while*" is the interval between Jesus' death and resurrection.

For we're told in verse 17, "Then some of His disciples said among themselves, 'What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?' They said therefore, 'What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying.'" They were all confused over the phrase, "*a little while*," but too proud to ask for an explanation...

“Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, "Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'?"

Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.” His crucifixion brought crushing sorrow to the disciples, but it was followed by the immense joy of His resurrection.

Jesus says, “A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.” A woman with multiple kids is proof of Jesus’ statement. The **glee** of having a child overshadows the **grunts** that got them here.

And this is so true, I don’t think any experience in life has the pendulum swings of childbirth. One moment the gal is screaming, “*Never again.*” Five seconds after the baby arrives, the same woman is in sheer elation.

This was the swing experienced that first Easter, as the disciples discovered Jesus had risen. “Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. And in that day you will ask Me nothing.” In other words, His resurrection will answer all their questions.

Verse 23, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have

asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” I’m sure these guys had prayed to God, but never in Jesus’ name. They didn’t realize that Jesus would intercede for them.

Yet after His ascension to heaven, this became His chief ministry. Jesus is now our high priest. He is our Advocate who takes our requests to God’s throne.

Which means why would a Christian bother to pray through the saints or Mary? How could anyone have more clout than God’s sinless Son? That’s an insult to Jesus. The saints don’t listen to our prayers. They are praising Jesus. It’s His job to intercede for His peeps.

"These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world." Realize, when Jesus intercedes, it’s not as if He’s overcoming a reluctance on the Father’s part to bless us. *What comfort His words should bring us, “the Father Himself loves you.”*

God desires to answer our prayers. Jesus has given us access to God, He hasn’t changed the Father’s heart toward us. *Our Father God has always loved us.*

“Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.” His disciples said to Him, "See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no

figure of speech! Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God.” Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe?” In other words, are you guys ready to face the challenges to your faith that are coming?

Verse 32, “Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone.” The disciples were sounding so confident in their faith, but soon they’ll abandon Him. They’ll be *scattered*, and their faith will be *shattered*.

Yet Jesus says, “And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.” Jesus will be betrayed by His self-confident disciples. To a man, they’ll abandon Him in His hour of need. Only His Father will be faithful.

Jesus summarizes what He’s been saying to them, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Jesus has warned them, life in this world will not be all sunshine and smooth sailing: “*you will have tribulation.*”

For a follower of Jesus, this world is hostile territory. We’re guaranteed to take some licks and absorb some jabs. At times, we’ll feel like the devil's dartboard.

Yet in the midst of this tribulation, Jesus says to “*be of good cheer*” for He promises us His peace...

Here’s a great definition for peace, “It’s knowing you possess adequate resources.” Peace is knowing that I’ve got whatever I need for the challenges I face. It’s the assurance I can tackle life - head-on - in Christ!

Notice too, Jesus says *“I have overcome the world.”*

When the great French reformer, Theodore Beza, was brought before the king, he made the statement, *“Sire, it is truly the lot of the Church to endure blows and not to strike them. But please remember that the Church is an anvil that has worn out many hammers.”*

The Protestant Reformers in England had a motto they lifted from the burning bush passage in Exodus. *“Nevertheless, it was not consumed.”* This is how we have had to close each new chapter of church history.

Though the world beats at the Church, **we are not consumed**. When Jesus rose from the dead, He defeated all the forces that nailed Him to the cross. Thus, when we trust in Jesus, we become overcomers.

Chapter 17 begins, *“Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said...”* John 17 is often called, *“The Holy of Holies of the New Testament.”*

This is what Jesus prayed just prior to His arrest.

This prayer is the prelude to the prayer in Luke 22 that Jesus concluded, *“Not My will but Yours be done.”*

Jesus *pours* out His heart, and by the end of this prayer, His *pores* are oozing sweat like great drops of blood. This was an emotional moment in the Garden of Gethsemane, or as the name means, *“the garden of crushing.”* Like an olive Jesus is being squeezed...

I've heard it said, "If you really want to know someone's heart; then listen to them pray." And we discover a lot about Jesus by studying this prayer.

This night began in the Upper Room; then Jesus and His disciples walked across the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane. They've now kicked out the fire and unrolled their sleeping bags, but Jesus walks off a short distance and bears His heart in prayer...

"Jesus... lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come." Jesus had always been on a strict timetable. Three times - in John 2:4, 7:30, and 8:20 - we were told, "(His) hour had not yet come."

Jesus refused to take His cues from people. He was never pressured by circumstances - never hurried into a premature maneuver. His timing was impeccable, because He always set His watch to His Father's clock.

It's true, if you don't have a plan for how you're going to use your time - people will plan your time for you.

The key to living a life that counts for Christ is not *doing it all, but following God's call.* Are you doing *what* the Father tells you to do, *when* He tells you to do it?

Jesus prays to the Father that the hour has come to "Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You."

The cross was Jesus' moment of glory. It's why He came into the world. His obedience brought the Father glory. But it was after the cross, that the Father glorified the Son. After He ascended, Jesus sat down on His Father's right hand. The Son was crowned with glory!

Hebrews 12:2 says of Jesus, "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame." Jesus endured the pain of crucifixion because His eye was on the prize of His Father's pleasure. The Father's **glory** got Him through the **gory of the cross!**

In verse 2, Jesus prays, "As You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." Notice eternal life is not so much *longevity of life*, as it is *a quality of life*.

Eternal life is knowing Jesus. Remember, it doesn't begin when you get to heaven. An everlasting quality of life starts the moment you open your heart to Jesus.

Verse 4, "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do."

Recall Jesus' final words on the cross, "It is finished." It was an echo of His prayer here. Jesus always finishes what He starts... *Yet, let's think this through...*

At this point in history were all the blind eyes able to see, or all the lame legs able to walk? Had all the sinners repented of their sins? The answer is "No."

Apparently, Jesus didn't come "to do it all." Even the Son of God didn't feel pressured to do everything. There were a few select tasks God had given Jesus to accomplish, and He was faithful to finish them.

“And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” Jesus is longing for home. From eternity past He dwelt with His Father in glory. But He had laid aside that eternal glory, He had humbled Himself as a man, become a child of time - a resident of Earth.

And now, His mission is almost complete. Jesus is looking forward to returning to His former glory...

"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them." Throughout Jesus' prayer, there's a beautiful harmony between Father and Son. What belongs to Jesus belongs to His Father and vice versa. Their relationship is seamless. Which makes the separation which occurred on the cross all the more momentous.

When Jesus cries out, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* It was a feeling He had never had.

Jesus continues to pray, *"Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father,*

keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.”

On the eve of Jesus' crucifixion - on the night of His betrayal and arrest - just hours before His departure from this world - *as if He didn't have enough to think about* - **Jesus prayed for unity among His followers.**

And yet when you look at the church today - fraught with schism, and division, and competition - *you wonder what happened?* If the Church is the body of Christ; then we are an uncoordinated and spastic body.

Early church father, Augustine, was so exasperated with the divisions that existed in his day, he wrote, "The clouds roll with thunder that the House of the Lord shall be built throughout the earth; and these frogs sit in their marsh and croak - 'we are the only Christians!'"

Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:3, we should "endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."

We can't create spiritual harmony. Unity is a work of the Holy Spirit, *but we can work to preserve* that unity.

We can avoid favoritism, and cliquishness, and pride, and prejudice. We can be kind, and tolerant, and forgiving. We can cut each other some slack *and love.*

I think it's interesting that Jesus prayed for us to **be one just as He and the Father were one.** The Godhead is a blend of both unity and diversity. God is one God, but three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. All three persons are equal but very different.

Our oneness should also be a combination of unity and diversity. Oneness doesn't ignore our uniqueness. We can have *unity* and still enjoy our *diversity*. In fact, real unity respects the very real differences that exist.

Spiritual oneness is not the denial of our distinctives, but the realization that Jesus, our *one commonality*, is greater than our *differences*. When we stay focused on Jesus it causes us to bind rather than gravitate apart.

Christian unity is *not synchronized swimming*. This is an Olympic sport. Women who dress alike and who look alike, jump in the pool together and mimic each other's moves and gestures. The goal is **uniformity**.

Whereas, *pairs figure skating* is the opposite. Teammates skate in tandem. But they don't *copy* each other. They **complement** each other. Pairs skating is a beautiful sport. Synchronized swimming is hokey.

This is the difference between *uniformity* and *unity*.

Jesus doesn't care about *uniformity*. He prays for *our unity*, not *our uniformity*. We should celebrate our differences. We're enriched by variety and diversity.

Several times now I've officiated Nigerian weddings, and attended African celebrations. *I know God doesn't make mistakes, but I've often confided in Kathy that I think I should've been born Nigerian.* I love the culture. Africans in general are all about *family, faith, and fun*.

I was born a white Southerner - a long way from Africa - but I feel a great unity with my Nigerian family.

Remember, Jesus' goal isn't to make Christian clones or *synchronized saints*. Be leery of a church where everyone looks and acts identical. Our pursuit of the glory of Jesus should merge our diversity into unity.

Verse 12, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled."

All twelve disciples will deny Jesus and run away, but they were kept by God's power and eventually made their way back. Judas was the one lost soul.

Here, Jesus calls Judas, "*son of perdition.*" Do you know the one other person in Scripture referred to with the same title? *The Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.*

In verse 13, Jesus continues His prayer, "But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves."

Jesus' goal is for us to experience His joy, even in the midst of a wicked world! For "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one." *Ever wondered why Jesus didn't transport us to heaven the moment we were saved?* That would take care of a few problems, but that wasn't His desire.

He wants us to struggle with temptation and opposition. **It's resistance that makes us stronger.**

As the old saying goes, **“We're to be in the world, but not of it.”** We can **blend in culturally** as long as we **stick out spiritually**. We need to be *in the world* building bridges to lost people, but if we're *of the world* no one will see the need to cross the bridges we build.

We need to live for God - boldly and attractively - and display godly alternatives to the world's values.

For a boat to be useful, it has to be in the water. But let the water in the boat and you've got problems.

Likewise, the Church should be in the world, but woe if the world gets in the Church. That sinks our witness.

In verse 16, Jesus prays for His disciples **“They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”** People absorbed in God's Word will be different people. And in a good way. Love will flavor their dealings, and integrity their character. They'll march to a different drummer.

“As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” And here's where we could camp out for weeks. *How did God's Son enter the world?*

Philippians 2 details the attitude behind His incarnation. Rather than flaunt His status, *He made no appeal to His reputation...* Rather than flex His muscle, *Jesus served...* Rather than focus on His superiority, *He identified with our weaknesses...* Rather than force His own will, *He submitted to the will of the Father...*

And Jesus is praying that we too will adopt the same attitude toward life and others as He demonstrated.

Verse 19, “And for their sakes, I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” This is incredible. **Two thousand years ago, Jesus prayed specifically for you and me!** He prays for His disciples yet future who will trust in Him later.

The unity Jesus prays for and desires in His Church stretches across continents, ages, and generations.

A man once visited a mental hospital that was seriously understaffed. There were only three guards in charge of hundreds of dangerous inmates. The fellow asked one of the guards, “Aren’t you afraid these people will use their numbers and overpower you?”

The guard replied, *“No, no, lunatics never unite.”*

It’s been said, **“The devil does not fear a big church, he fears a united church.”** We need to smarten up and put our trivial differences aside. God wants us united. We can do more for Jesus together than we can apart.

Verse 22, “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

Say **you're on the street and you see a lone penny, there's a good chance you won't even pick it up.** But if you see **a roll of**

pennies, that's a different story. The point is, Christians will attract more attention in a group than by themselves. Bring a lost person into a community that loves others, and they'll want more.

Verse 24, “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”

We can only imagine the intense love the Father has for His only begotten Son. It was a love formed before the beginning of time. Yet the Father gave up His beloved Son to die in our place! *He must love us too.*

The chapter closes, “O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

Imagine the difference we would make in our world if the love the Father had for the Son was seen in us!

Remember, *lunatics never unite.*

One of the last prayers Jesus prayed before His crucifixion was for our unity. Few things are more important. We can celebrate our diversity, just as long as we stay united over our love and loyalty to Jesus.