

# The Gospel of John

Text: John 14

Reading: *Daring Faith*, pp. 135–147

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## The Farewell Discourse (John 14–17)

John 14-17 tells of the events surrounding Jesus' final meal with his disciples, a time when Jesus spoke of his impending death and the upcoming trials that his disciples would face. Upon hearing this news, the disciples' fearful and anxious reactions seem only natural. How could anyone who walked with Jesus expect to carry on without their teacher and friend?

Despite their concern, the disciples' new life and future hope would not be lost in the departure of Jesus. As Jesus speaks to the immediate future of the disciples, he leaves them with words of assurance, calling them to embrace the future with hopeful expectation. He also addresses their need for encouragement in the struggle against their enemies and gives instruction about how to act toward each other and those who will oppose them.

The meaning of the farewell discourse is therefore shaped by its location in the narrative of Jesus' life. In the context of the Last Supper, following on the heels of the prediction of Peter's denial, we expect Jesus and the disciples to leave for the garden where he will soon be arrested. After all, none of the other Gospels inserts such a lengthy discourse between these events: the Synoptics all move directly from the Last Supper to the garden (see Matt. 26:30-31; Mark 14:31-32; Luke 22:38-39).

In John, however, a lengthy discourse intervenes. It is as if time stands still for a moment, so that Jesus can prepare those he loves for the life they will lead during and after the events of his hour. Jesus explains the significance of his death and departure to his disciples before the events happen, so that when they occur, the disciples will be able to see the events through the eyes of faith and not despair.

Jesus' words address his disciples' concerns, but they also speak to the future experience of the reader. One of the key marks of this address is the fluidity of verb tenses. As we will see, Jesus declares the fulfillment of the events of his hour in the past, present, and future tenses. Thus it is important to remember that the words of encouragement and instruction that Jesus speaks are directed to future as well as present disciples.

Still, some may wonder who or what will make it possible to carry on without the physical presence of Jesus. How is it that Jesus is "coming" (14:18), "going" (16:28), and "abiding" (15:4), all at the same time? Jesus promises that upon his departure, God the Father will send the Holy Spirit to the disciples, and the Spirit will be the abiding presence of Christ in and through them. And throughout the discourse, Jesus explains that the Holy Spirit will play five important roles in the lives of his disciples.

### The Holy Spirit:

- › will be the abiding presence of Jesus in and among them (14:16)
- › will teach and remind them of Jesus words (14:26)
- › will testify on Jesus' behalf (15:26-27)
- › will expose the sin and righteousness of the world (16:7-11)
- › will lead the disciples boldly into the future, speaking the words of Jesus about the things that are to come (16:13-15)

## “I Will Not Leave You Orphaned” (John 14:1-31)

**Background:** In John 14:1, Jesus turns from speaking directly to Peter to address the disciples as a whole. Jesus’ words continue to address the distressing situation of betrayal and denial of the previous chapter. He now speaks words of comfort: “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” The condition Jesus names in his disciples, being “troubled,” is the same condition used to describe Jesus’ own distress in the face of death (11:33; 12:27; 13:21). In the face of death, Jesus counsels the disciples not to despair.

### A. “I AM THE WAY, AND THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE” (14:1-14)

1. The source of the disciples strength at this time of trouble is their faith in God and in Jesus. Although Jesus is “going” (v. 2), faith in him makes possible a new kind of relationship with God. Jesus invites believers to dwell with him. “Dwell” is a metaphor for relationship with God and Jesus, and Jesus promises that his departure will enable believers to share in that relationship. Reading verses 1-4 primarily as a reference to believers’ future place in heaven limits what Jesus is saying here. Jesus’ hour creates new possibilities for relationship with God in the present life of the believer.
2. John 14:6 expresses the central theological conviction of the Gospel of John: Jesus is the tangible presence of God in the world. The language of Father and Son points to the intimacy of the relationship between God and Jesus. Humanity’s encounter with Jesus the Son makes possible a new experience of God as Father.
3. [*See Discussion Question 1*] John 14:6 celebrates the fact that Jesus’ very presence in the world, and all that he says and does, reveals God to the disciples in a new way; it is not a claim of superiority or a statement about the relative worth of the world’s religions.
4. [*See Discussion Question 2*] The truth, the life, through which we know and find the way, is Jesus himself: the Jesus who washed the disciples’ feet and told them to copy his example, the Jesus who was on his way to give his life as the shepherd for the sheep. Only when the church recovers the courage to follow Jesus in his own mission and vocation will it be able to recover its courage fully in making the claim of verse 6.
5. Beginning in verse 12, Jesus turns his attention to the works the disciples will do after he is gone. The ability of the disciples to do “greater works” is tied directly to **belief** (“the one who believes in me,” v. 12), **the events of the hour** (“because I am going to the Father,” v. 12), and to **prayer** (“whatever you ask in my name,” vv. 13-14).
6. [*See Discussion Question 3*] The promise of continued (and even greater) works is a consolation to the disciples, who are to understand that Jesus’ departure does not mean an end to the life he has enabled but is the beginning of their own participation in that life.

### Discussion Questions:

1. What bold claim does Jesus make about himself in verse 6? Why does this kind of claim often make people uncomfortable?
2. How might we proclaim and embody the significant message found in verse 6 in a way that is humble and faithful to the example Jesus set for us?
3. What is your reaction to Jesus statement in v. 12? How have you experienced or witnessed these greater works of the Spirit in your life or in the lives of others around you?

## **B. “ANOTHER HELPER”: THE PROMISE OF PRESENCE (14:15-24)**

**Background:** Verse 16 is the first reference to the Holy Spirit or Paraclete (Greek, *parakletos*). The Greek word has a wide range of meanings, which are reflected in its many English translations: “Comforter,” “Advocate,” “Counselor,” “Helper.”

The Holy Spirit (Paraclete) plays a larger role in the teaching of Jesus in John than in any of the other Gospels. The Holy Spirit is key to Jesus’ preparation of his disciples for their life after his return to God. The Spirit in John is not a private possession of an individual believer. It is a gift to all disciples, witnessing to the life of Jesus and continuing to speak his word.

1. The first promise of the Holy Spirit in verse 17 points to the ongoing presence of Jesus in the community of believers. The promise is stunning. They will see him and know him. He will live with them and be in them. The Spirit will be the very essence of Jesus, present with his disciples again.
2. Along with “Advocate” or “Helper,” this word can also mean “Comforter.” Comfort is a wonderful and strange thing. Have you ever noticed how, when someone is deeply distressed, the fact that having other people with them, hugging them and being alongside them, gives them strength for the next moment? When the Spirit is spoken of as the “comforter,” this kind of extra strength to meet special need is in mind.
3. In reality we find ourselves very much in need of the same thing the Twelve were given in order to deal with Jesus’ departure. We need the hope and comfort that there is, in fact, a continuing experience of Jesus available to us. Not just a book, but an indwelling presence. Not just stories, but a person. Not just ancient words of wisdom but a forever companion.
4. Because this promise is for all of Jesus’ disciples, there is an experience of the living and indwelling Spirit available for us today. Through the Holy Spirit, we have a Companion and a Helper along the way. The same living relationship that sustained Jesus’ first disciples upon his departure is available to sustain us. Through the indwelling Spirit we may do “the same works, and even greater works” than Jesus has done.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Who is the “other helper” Jesus promises that the Father will send the disciples when he’s gone, and what will this helper do (vv. 16-17)?
2. What is your initial reaction to this promise? Why is this good news?
3. Do you believe Christians today are in a better situation now as a result of the coming of this “other helper” than the disciples who walked with Jesus? Why or why not?
4. How does Jesus’ abiding presence within us through Holy Spirit enable us to live our lives as Christians with confidence?

### **C. THE PROMISE OF TEACHING AND THE PEACE OF CHRIST (14:25-31)**

1. The second promise of the Spirit (v. 26) points to the continuity between what Jesus said during his ministry and what the Spirit will teach in Jesus' absence. Jesus speaks the word of the One who sent him during his life (vv. 24-25), and the Holy Spirit will continue to speak after his departure. The Spirit "will teach you everything" and will "remind you of all that I have said to you."
2. Here Jesus addresses the larger issue of the mission he will soon pass on to his disciples. The Spirit will not only remind the disciples of Jesus' words but also explain them further, deepening the disciples' understanding and giving them insight. The Spirit will teach everything that flows from Jesus' life and ministry, which includes the calling, mission, and message of his disciples.
3. In other words, the Holy Spirit's activity appears as part of that ongoing witness of the community to Jesus, bringing to mind the words of Jesus and aiding the believer to understand them in a new way. These verses present the Spirit's teaching as continuing Jesus' teaching (v. 26; see 16:13).
4. The promise of a teaching Spirit is accompanied by the promise of "peace" (v. 27). This is not the world's peace, nor does it imply that everything shall go smoothly for Jesus' followers, who are instructed not to be afraid (lit. "cowardly," v. 27). Jesus' peace is a gift for disciples who live in a troubling world.
5. Today we need these same promises. We need Jesus' continuing presence to lead and instruct. We need the confidence that comes from knowing what to do, the boldness that comes from knowing what to say, and the peace that comes from understanding what is happening.
6. This offer of a teaching Spirit—showing, instructing, calming, encouraging—is for all believers. We are not alone. We have not been abandoned. Jesus is alive and present with us through the Spirit. He continues to teach us, direct us, and give us peace through the Spirit.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What is your reaction to the teaching role of the Holy Spirit? Why is this good news?
2. Describe a time when you felt the Spirit remind you of Jesus' words and give you the confidence to know what to do.
3. What kind of "peace" does the *world* promise? Why is the world unable to give us the kind of peace that Jesus promises?
4. Describe a situation in which the peace of Christ is needed now more than ever. How can we (individually or as a church) be an extension of the peace we have received from Jesus?

#### **Sources:**

Gail O'Day, *The Gospel of John*

Gail O'Day and Susan Hulen, *John*

N.T. Wright, *The Gospel of John*