

5 THE COMFORTER, PART 1

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter....

— John 14:16

As Jesus taught His disciples about the Holy Spirit during their last night together in the Upper Room, He referred to the Holy Spirit as the “Comforter” on four separate occasions (see John 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, and John 16:7). For Jesus to repeat this title four times in the space of three chapters tells us that the point He is making must be very important. When a truth is repeated in quick succession in Scripture, it is always for the sake of emphasis. Here we find that Jesus was trying to penetrate His disciples’ hearts — as well as our own hearts — with the truth of the Holy Spirit’s role as a “Comforter” so they would fully understand this truth.

However, to fully comprehend the message Jesus was trying to convey, we must look to the original Greek language to understand exactly what the word “**Comforter**” means. This title is actually a translation of the Greek word *parakletos*, which is a compound of two Greek words, *para* and *kaleo*. Today I am going to focus on the first part of this compound word, the word *para*, and then tomorrow we’ll discuss the second part of the word, *kaleo*.

Simply put, the word *para* means alongside, and it carries the idea of near proximity or being very close to someone or something else. However, this term is quite versatile and can thus be seen in a variety of contexts throughout Scripture. Let’s look at several New Testament examples to glean a better sense of its meaning.

The Bible says in Luke 5:1, “And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret.” The word “by” in this verse is a translation of the Greek word *para*. Here it conveys Jesus’ close proximity to the lake of Gennesaret. He literally stood alongside this lake as He preached to the multitudes. In Mark 5:21, which follows the account of Jesus casting out a legion of demons from the demoniac of the Gadarenes, this term is used in a similar way. Mark records, “And when Jesus was passed over again by ship unto the other side, much people gathered unto him: and he was nigh unto the sea.” The phrase “nigh unto” is also a translation of the word *para*, and it tells us that so many people were pressing forward to touch Jesus that He couldn’t even get away from the water’s edge. He was forced to walk alongside the sea.

In Second Timothy 2:2, we see a different usage of the word *para*. Here Paul used it to describe his close relationship with Timothy, writing, “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” When Paul said, “...and the things thou has learned *of* me...,” the word “*of*” is the Greek word *para*. This conveys powerful information regarding Paul and Timothy’s relationship to one another. The elderly apostle was reminding Timothy, “You learned everything *para* me. I allowed you to get alongside of me.”

As a current example from my own life, I could say that my wife is *para*, or alongside, me. She lives with me, talks with me, shops with me, travels with me, prays with me, pastors with me, and has reared our children with me. She is always with me. We are side by side, close at hand, and alongside each other all the time. When two people are close in this way, they profoundly affect each other — even to the point where they begin to share the same attitudes, feelings, personality traits, habits, and gestures. In fact, they eventually know each other so well that they don’t even have to ask what the other person is thinking — they already know.

The spiritual mentor-disciple relationship Paul and Timothy shared was probably similar in certain ways to the kind of close relationship I just described. Paul and Timothy had walked together for many years, spreading the message of the Gospel throughout the Roman world. To some degree, Timothy no doubt had picked up some of Paul’s gestures, mannerisms, and thoughts, and he probably even sounded a little like Paul when he preached. The close relationship they shared allowed the truths of Paul’s life to be transferred into Timothy. That is a natural consequence of this kind of intimacy.

This level of closeness is exactly what the word *para* refers to where it is used to form the compound word *parakletos*, or “Comforter,” in John 14:16 and the other three references listed above. Thus, we see that the Holy Spirit is close by and alongside each of us at all times. His relationship with us is not a distant one that requires us to beg and plead for Him to draw near. He is always with us.

As we saw in the June 1 Gem, the Holy Spirit comes to reside inside us at the very moment we receive our salvation. However, this is not the full story. The use of the word *para* in ***John 14:16 reveals that He also comes alongside us to assist us in our daily affairs and to bring the reality of Jesus Christ into our lives.*** From the moment the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts, we can continuously rely on His partnership to help us overcome any obstacles we might face in life.

In other words, when you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit comes into your life to provide you with the assistance Jesus would offer if He was present in the flesh. Whatever Jesus would do to assist you, that is precisely what the Holy Spirit will do. He dwells in you as a permanent Resident and as the most reliable Partner you’ll ever have in this life. That is why some newer versions of the New Testament translate the word “Comforter” as “**Standby**.” The word “Standby” perfectly describes the Holy Spirit’s close, side-by-side position in you from which He helps, empowers, leads, and guides you every step of the way.

There is no doubt that this word *para* describes the alongside ministry of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps you were raised in a wonderful Bible-teaching church just as I was, but you have never experienced this kind of intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit that I am describing to you. If not, today would be a great time to lift your hands and declare, “Holy Spirit, I receive You as my side-by-side Partner!” Then get ready for a divine adventure that never stops as He takes you to ever-higher levels in Him!

My Prayer For Today

Holy Spirit, I know You live inside me, but I never understood that You are also side by side with me as my Partner in life. I have treated you like an invisible Guest, when, in reality, You have been sent to me to be at my side as my Helper and Standby in times of need. Please forgive me for overlooking and ignoring You when You have been waiting so long to assist me in life. Today I throw open my arms and my heart, and I say ‘Welcome, Holy Spirit’ — I receive You as my side-by-side Partner who has been called alongside my life! I pray this in Jesus’ name!

My Confession For Today

I confess that from this moment onward, I am wide open to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus sent the Spirit to be my Helper, and I certainly need His help. I will no longer ignore Him or disregard His presence in my life. I open my heart, mind, and soul to His ministry, and I will endeavor to recognize His voice, His leading, and His guidance, and I will strive to receive His supernatural help. I declare this by faith in Jesus’ name!

Questions For You To Consider

1. Of course the Holy Spirit lives inside you! But have you experienced moments when it seemed like He was right alongside you — side by side — assisting you in decisions and actions that you needed to take? In what ways do you need to cooperate with Him more?
2. What were some of the times when you really experienced the “Standby” ministry of the Holy Spirit? Have you ever recalled those moments or shared them with someone else? Take a few minutes to tell a friend how you’ve experienced the ministry of the Spirit in your life.
3. After reading this devotion, what are you going to do differently to embrace the “alongside ministry” of the Holy Spirit in your life? In what area of your life do you most recognize the need for His help?