

Title: The Promise of God's Comfort and Strength

Subtitle: Divine Help in Time of Need

One day, a next-door neighbor visited with a mother of three young children. When the young mother began describing how exhausted she was, her neighbor asked, “If you had to do it all over again would you have children?” Then, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, the mother said, “After the day I just had with them, I would have to say, “Absolutely, but just not the same ones!”

I want to tell all moms today that my hats are off to you for all you do. I honestly believe there is not a more influential force in the world than a godly mother. The number one reason I am in ministry today is because of the prayers of a loving mother who refused to give up on me, even though I stretched her patience and drove her to tears more often than I would like to admit.

When I think back to our times together, her words were a source of comfort and strength, especially in perplexity. Today’s message from John’s Gospel was also intended to do the same.

The context occurs just after Jesus told his disciples, **“I am with you for only a short time longer. You are going to look high and low for me. But just as I told the Jewish leaders, I’m telling you: ‘Where I go, you are not able to come.’”**¹ Hearing this news, the disciples were distraught because they couldn’t imagine living without him.

They thought they would be left helpless without His words of encouragement and faith. Others feared they would be left alone and defenseless without their wise friend, who always had an answer to silence their enemies. But here, Jesus repeatedly assures His disciples that His death will not leave them **“orphaned.”**

¹ John 13:33, The Message Bible

An orphan is someone who doesn't have a home or place that they can call their own. So they tend to be restless and always on the move, feeling that they must reject others before they are rejected, for that is the only sense of control they have.

As a hospice chaplain, I cared for someone who grew up as an orphan in a Baptist children's home. Being rejected for adoption due to his mischievous nature, he grew up with a rebellious streak. When he joined the army during World War II. Due to drunkenness and disorderly behavior, he often ended up in the brig. The military, in many respects, was the tool God used to bring discipline into his life. Then when his ship landed in Italy, an Italian girl was waiting at the dock, hoping to meet an American GI. When she saw him, it was love at first sight. They were married within three weeks. She came into his life like a lion-tamer who fearlessly whipped him into shape. With his wife at his side, he finally straightened up and dealt with the rough edges of his life. They both loved each other, and their marriage lasted a lifetime. At last, he found in her arms a sense of what it means to have a home where he belonged.

Whenever I think of their love story, I can't help but think of the words Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit when He said, ***“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate², to be with you forever.”³*** The word “advocate” was used for someone “**called in**” or “**called to the side of another**.” That woman, who married that young GI, was his Advocate. She lovingly stood by his side and was a source of strength.

The word Advocate was used for a family attorney. When trouble was brewing due to accusations or business disputes, he would be called in to defend his client in court. He was there to

² The Greek word is (par-ak'-lay-tos') translated: (a) an advocate, intercessor, (b) a consoler, comforter, helper,

³ John 14:16

come alongside as a helper so his client would **not be left alone to fend for themselves**. The Holy Spirit is the presence of a true friend, willing and able to give practical counsel and help. For this reason, the Message Bible translates this word as “**Friend**.”

This friend, who stands by our side, is illustrated by an event in the life of Jackie Robinson. Jackie was the first African American to play major league baseball. But as he was breaking baseball’s racial barrier, he faced jeering crowds in every stadium.

While playing in his home stadium in Brooklyn, he committed an error, and his own fans began to boo with ridicule. He stood at second base, humiliated, while the fans jeered. Then, shortstop “Pee Wee” Reese came over and stood beside him. He put his arm around Jackie’s shoulder and faced the crowd. The fans grew quiet. Robinson said later, “That arm around my shoulder saved my career.”

When Jesus said, “***I will ask the Father, and he will give you another⁴ advocate,***”⁵ he knew the kind of comforting presence his friendship represented to his disciples. He knew they would miss many of the dynamic ways in which he was a true friend, who was always at their side—accepting and being accepted as their defender and wise counselor.

The Apostle John writes about this in his first epistle, “***If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but for the sins of the whole world.***”⁶ Therefore, “***if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts.***”⁷ When Jesus asked the Father to give us another Advocate, he prayed that

⁴ Strong’s concordance #243, *állos* (a primitive word) – *another* of the *same* kind; *another* of a *similar* type

⁵ John 14:16

⁶ 1 John 2:1-2

⁷ 1 John 3:20

we would receive the Holy Spirit, who would come alongside us, providing courage and strength.

When the translators for the King James Bible chose a word to describe the presence of this Advocate, they decided to use the word Comforter. This particular word had a closer connection to its Latin roots and the influence of the Latin Vulgate Bible. In this instance, the word comforter comes from the combination of two Latin words, “cum,” meaning “with,” and the word “forte,” meaning strength. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is a comforter who “comes with strength.” So the Holy Spirit is a comforter and an advocate. He is the one we need as we face the harsh realities of life.

The words of the famous hymn, “How Firm A Foundation,”⁸ seem to catch the implications of these exceedingly great and precious promises. Listen to its message:

V2 Fear not, I am with thee; oh, be not dismayed!

For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

V3 When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
the rivers of woe, shall not thee overflow;
For I will be with thee, thy trouble to bless,
and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

Each verse of this hymn was based on precious promises taken from various verses of the Bible and converted into a poetic stanza. Each line speaks about the presence of the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Comforter in times of need.

So whatever comes our way, we can have the peace and assurance that God is for us, with us, and in us, giving us the confidence to stand tall amid winds of adversity. Amen.

⁸ Hymn 636,637, The Church Hymnal, 1982