

LIFE IN HIS NAME

THE HELPER

John 14:15-18

Just a heads up: A week from today is Mother's Day. And today's message is part one of a two part message, so we will complete this message, Lord willing, on Mother's Day. We will specifically talk about help for the helpers. We will make special application to moms. And moms, we have a gift for you - a special gift that we are going to give you next Sunday, so I hope that you'll be here. We are also going to have a photo booth where we can get your picture - a picture with you and your family. So we are going to celebrate moms next Sunday and we have a special gift for all of our moms.

Let's go to the text: John 14:15. The passage runs through verse 31, but today we will look at 15 through 18.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

In the book of Exodus there is an account where the children of Israel are in a battle. Moses goes up on the top of a hill. He is praying for the people of God who are in a battle below. And as Moses prays, he holds up his arm with the staff of God in his arm, representing his prayer and intercession for the people of God. As long as he does that, the people of God prevail in the battle. But Moses gets weary and is unable to hold up this staff, and when his arm comes down, the battle goes the other way. Aaron and Hur discern what's going on, so they go up to the top of the hill and roll out a big stone. Moses sits on the stone, they hold up his arms, and the children of Israel prevail in battle.

The message that God teaches us through that biblical account is twofold.

- First, the battle is his. He wins the battle. He saves us. He made us and he is the solution for all of our problems. He brings us into a relationship with him and he does it. We don't save ourselves.
- But there is a second message that's vividly taught through that account, and that is: We need help, even to grab ahold of God's salvation.

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So if I tell you this morning, “Listen, all you need to do for your life to get sorted out and to be on track -- all you need to do is pray,” that’s a great message. Except, we struggle to pray. If I tell you that all you need to do is to trust God -- trust God and anxiety and fear will go, you will have no worries, you say, “That’s great. That’s good news, but I’m having trouble trusting God.” “All you need to do is obey God!” “Well again, that’s wonderful, but I need help.”

In this passage, Jesus teaches us that the Holy Spirit is our Helper. The third person of the Trinity -- God himself, in the person of the Holy Spirit -- helps us. This is a marvelous truth that Jesus is teaching his apostles, his disciples, right before his crucifixion, saying to them: “I am going to give my life for you. I am going to pay the penalty for your sin so that you can be forgiven. I will ascend to the Father, but I’m not going to leave you alone. In fact, I’m going to live in you in the person of the Holy Spirit and he will help you.”

This is a marvelous truth for us. I want to take a minute and develop this central idea of what it means for the Holy Spirit to help us. It starts in verse 15, where Jesus tells us: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Now, obedience is not a very popular idea. In fact, obedience gets a bad rap, even amongst Christians. It’s not often a very popular idea – the whole idea of obeying God.

Just in the past few days, Brad Pitt did an interview with GQ magazine. I haven’t seen the entire interview, but I’ve read soundbites and portions of it. Brad Pitt grew up in a Christian home. He grew up, first of all, in a Baptist setting, and then his parents moved into a Charismatic/Pentecostal setting for church life, and he has been critical of Christianity.

If you know anything about the split between Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie – they have six kids, and it’s been very public, very painful, and Brad Pitt has been accused of some inappropriate things. We won’t go into those details. God alone and Brad Pitt only know what’s true in all of that. That’s not really the point of this illustration. But he was critical of Christianity, and in this interview he talked about Christianity in terms of “It’s all about the don’ts.” Let me give you a specific quote. He said, “I never understood growing up with Christianity. Don’t do this. Don’t do that. It’s all about the don’ts.” In previous interviews he has talked about the guilt that Christians put on people. Now he has come to a place of saying that he is either an atheist or an agnostic.

It would be easy for me as a pastor to turn on Brad Pitt and attack him, right? I mean, really? This is your view of Christianity? You are accused of this and this and this. What did happen on that

airplane? You are going through a divorce. You are holding up your lifestyle of liberty as some example? But that's not the message. That's really not the point. In fact, Brad Pitt is right to some degree. If Christianity is just about what you can't do, I'm not sure that's enough.

Jesus does something here. He is setting us up to receive this amazing truth: God himself desires to dwell in you. Just linger there for a moment. That's the message of the entire bible. If you read from beginning to end: God makes Adam and Eve, he walks in the garden with mankind, mankind sins, and we lose the presence of God. But then the story of the people of God throughout the Old Testament is God desiring to dwell in the middle of his people. He wants them to have a tabernacle. He wants them to have a temple. He has the ark of the covenant. A sacrificial system is set up to take care of the sins of mankind. All of this is dwelling around the fact that God wants to remove our sin and live right in the middle of us. Now Jesus is saying: "Here is the fulfillment of that. This is it! The Spirit of God is going to dwell in you!"

And as Jesus sets up that truth, he starts with the subject of obedience. Why? Well, he gives us a sequence. He tells us that it starts with love - that love expresses itself in obedience. In fact, the whole sequence biblically goes like this: God loves us, and in response to his love we return that love and we express that love - at least in part, not completely -- but part of our expression of that love is in obeying God. We need that opportunity to say to God that we love him through obedience. And the call to obey is actually not legalism, but God's grace.

So, we go to the garden. What happens in the garden? All that God blesses Adam and Eve with, but there is one tree that they are told not to eat of. They are given this opportunity in God's grace to express their love to him in obedience. Now, here's what's interesting. Here is the order: God loves us, we return love to him, and we do it through obedience. Listen very carefully: We try to reverse, we flip the order. "If I obey God, then I am proving I love God, and then God will love me." Let's say it again. We flip the order. We say, "If I obey God, then I am proving that I love God, and then God will love me."

Jesus is saying, "No, you need help. You need help to love God. You need help to obey God. You need help to trust God. So I'm going to give you a Helper, the Spirit of God." He actually calls him "another Helper." This foundational truth is very rich and I'm only giving you the highlights, but it's important. The term translated "Helper" is Paraclete. It's very difficult for us to translate this whole idea, because "Helper," sounds subservient. There are some connotations with it that give us a little

bit of a wrong idea. It has a way of making it more about us than about God, and that's not really healthy.

Other translations translate Paraclete as Counselor, Comforter, Advocate, and what those translations tell you is that there is an aspect of this term which is legal. He comes to your defense to aid you and to strengthen you and to help you. God himself deals with your shortcomings, your failures, your guilt -- and God defends you.

Now, we know from scripture that Christ has done that. Christ has taken our guilt, our shame, our sin to the cross and it is paid for. And we are forgiven. And it's a gift. But we need help. We have trouble understanding God's love and the freedom that is ours in Christ, so God deposits the Spirit of God in our hearts to bring that home to our hearts: the Helper.

I want to give you two of the ways that God helps us, that the Holy Spirit helps us. The first is:

- I. The Holy Spirit helps us to receive indwelling truth.

Let's look at verse 17: "...even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you." The Holy Spirit comes in and he is called the Spirit of truth and he abides within us. What does he do? It's this whole concept of indwelling truth.

I want to just illustrate it by telling you about my son's LEGO sets. David graduated from high school yesterday. We are so happy. I was the youngest, David, and I was worried that when I graduated from high school my parents would be undone. My dad told me that he and my mom literally danced on the roof the day I left home. I don't think that's what we'll do, but we are proud of you.

David has these two LEGO sets. He actually has a bunch of LEGO sets. He built these when he was young. One of them – I don't even know what it is – it's like a corner store. It's intricate, with lots and lots of pieces. So, mom, one-of-a-kind mom, she seizes the day. "Okay, we're through homeschooling. We've homeschooled all our kids. I've got all these books and curricula and stuff – I'm going to sell them at the CEDAR book fair." She packs it all up in boxes and boxes and boxes. She thinks, "Well, David is grown. I'm going to get rid of his LEGO sets." So she brings these two LEGO sets down to the book fair and puts a price tag on each LEGO set: \$30.00, dust included, because they were covered in dust. This is important, for her defense, where this story is going. So

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David, to his horror, walks into the book fair to find his LEGO sets, dust included, for sale. He tells his mom: “What are you doing? You can’t sell these! These are mine!” “Sweetheart, you’re done with these things. Trust me. Let’s get rid of them. Look! Look at the dust on here. You’re not using these! These don’t mean anything to you.” But David pushes and insists.

So, I’m discerning this moment. It’s funny -- when David gave his graduation speech yesterday he started it off with this. He went through the family and thanked all of us, each one individually, and when he got to me he goes, “Dad, I want to thank you for protecting us from Mom.” My wife is such a good sport about all of that. It’s another lesson for another day -- about how God takes a man and a woman and together we complement one another. So I pull my wife aside and say, “Sweetheart, maybe David is struggling with, you know, the end of his childhood. Maybe there’s something emotional going on here. Maybe you should not push this too far.” My wife is like, “Ugh, okay.” So she takes them and throws them back in the car. He takes them home. That night he comes to us. He has gone on Google and has found out that those LEGO sets are discontinued and they start selling at \$2000 a piece. He has \$4000 worth of LEGOs in two sets!

Here’s what’s interesting. This truth is like a bomb in the whole discussion. Forget your childhood, right?! You have this perspective, and it’s not built on reality at all. Then, you know, “Wow! People really want this! And some of them are selling for a lot more than that, brand new, out of the box!”

The Spirit of God comes into your heart and the truth explodes in your heart. It’s a paradigm shift. God loves you! God loves you and he’s not some impersonal force. He’s not leaving you to figure it out on your own. He has given his Son to remove everything that separates you from him. And we have trouble believing that truth! We have trouble believing that God loves us as his own children, because our own experience is so laced with rejection and failure and shame and guilt. Obedience flows out of an experience of the love of the heavenly Father. When and as we experience that, we can’t help but want to obey God. It doesn’t mean it’s not a struggle. It is a struggle.

Let’s reverse the order. Here is a point of application. When I’m just completely overwhelmed and overcome in sin and I’m losing the battle, I have a love problem. I’m not convinced of the love of God for me in this area. I have believed a lie. I have believed that this thing will make me happier than God can make me. Somehow God is holding out. He has not quite got my best in mind. And if I really sell out to God and trust him, I’ll live less of a life. I’ll miss out. We believe this lie, and at the root of our confusion is a lie. The key to my happiness is _____, and you fill in the blank.

No, the key to our happiness is God. He loves us and he alone is able to bring us to that point of fulfillment.

So, through the Holy Spirit, we receive indwelling truth. That's the first way the Holy Spirit helps us. We will look at two ways today, and then we will continue the list next week. The second is:

II. The Holy Spirit helps us to experience belonging.

Jesus continues in verse 18. He says: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." Jesus is telling us: "I'm going to dwell in you. I'm going to give you another Helper." That's what he calls the Holy Spirit. It's one like Jesus, but who dwells in us - the person of the Holy Spirit. He removes this identity as an orphan and gives us an identity of a child, belonging in the family.

Really, the scriptural concept is sonship. I apologize to all the ladies and to all the daughters of the Lord. It's not an exclusion, but the biblical concept focuses on sonship because the son is the heir and receives the inheritance. Scripture says men and women who come to Christ have sonship. They all have standing with God. They all have a guarantee of sharing in the inheritance of the Son of God, and being a part of the glory of Christ and his inheritance.

The message here is that the Spirit of God communicates to us the love of God and that we belong as a part of the family of God. Romans 8:14 and following: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Daddy! Father!) "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God..." Then he continues in verse 17: "...and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ..."

Do you know who is writing this? The Apostle Paul. Think about Paul's life. Paul was a rabbi. He was a teacher. He was a premier rabbi. And he participated in the persecution of the Church. In fact, scripture tells us that the first Christian martyr was a young man named Stephen. Stephen had a bright future as an evangelist, as a church worker. He was stoned. He was executed. When that happened, we are told that individuals took their cloaks, their outer garments off, and they laid them at the feet of Paul, who was then called Saul.

Many of you have had the experience of watching someone pass from this life to the next - maybe a loved one, maybe a friend. It's a difficult experience for us. It's a deep loss. But when you see someone taken, murdered, it's deeply troubling, defiling even. Think about the images -- how vivid

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they must have been for Paul -- and the knowledge of his own participation in that, and how in his life that was multiplied many times over. He stood there, and the scripture tells us that Stephen had a face like an angel, and that he forgave his accusers, his executors. Do you not think that Paul vividly relived that moment in guilt? And Paul is the champion of grace. He is the one that God chose to come and say, "You know what? My grace is free, and I will cleanse you of anything you've done."

So Paul said, "I'm the chief of sinners and God chose me because he wants my life to be a pattern for all who come to faith in Jesus Christ." Friend, I just want to tell you, if you're here and you say, "My sin is too great; you don't understand what I've done." I don't understand. But it's not too great. Jesus is greater. Christian, you say: "I've lived in a cycle of sin." Jesus is greater.

We have a love problem. Your experience of God's love does not start with your triumph over your sin. It starts with God's love. He loves you. He saves you. He helps you. He helps you so much. "I can't hold my hands up." "Okay, I'll do it. I'll help you!"

I have used this image many times. Our oldest came in for David's graduation. When he was a little guy he wanted to help me cut the yard, so that meant I put him on my shoulders and I pushed the lawnmower. Then he would come in and tell his mom, "Hey, I helped Dad cut the yard!" That's what we do. We help God. God loves you! He longs for you to experience his joy, his forgiveness, his peace.

Well, I have more but I'm going to stop here, because I think this is a stopping point for today. I'm going to ask you to bow your head, if you would.