**The Helper**

John 16:1-11

***“The one constant in life is change.”*** We have experienced this both as the cause of change for others and experiencing the result of change through others. In our 25 years of marriage, we have lived in 13 different homes in 5 different cities. So, we have relocated our family 12 times and four times we have moved hundreds of miles to a new city. We have now been in Tampa 7 years, which is well beyond our previous record of 5 years in Louisville.

***So, our four boys have grown up with the reality of change.*** Their childhood was similar to Kristin’s, who grew up as an Army brat, moving every couple of years. But those childhood moves prepared Kristin to be married to an unpredictable youth pastor, then family pastor, then associate pastor, then senior pastor, then outreach pastor then senior pastor again. Her experiences of change enabled her to care well for our boys through our many seasons of change.

I, on the other hand, grew up in the same town and we did move one time, after seventh grade, about a mile down the street to a bigger house. It was a massive transition, some deep and serious trauma; but don’t worry. I’ve come through it ok.

What we have found here, staying put for seven years, is that ***even when YOU don’t move, life still moves around you.*** Change still happens. Friends switch to a different school. Roommates leave school and join the Air Force. The job you thought you’d pursue doesn’t prove practical and you have to change course.

***CHANGE is CONSTANT.***

***Change was coming for the disciples of Jesus.*** He kept telling them and warning them and encouraging them and trying to prepare them for the fact that He was leaving. They were understandably distressed that their Rabbi and Master, who they had rightly concluded was the true Son of God, the Creator of the World and Lord of all things, was leaving them. He had been their guide, their teacher, their comforter, their trainer, their supervisor, their referee for many conflicts, for almost every day for over three years.

“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.” John 16:1

Here in the very middle of his message Jesus reveals his main point: don’t fall away. When this change happens and I am gone, you will be in danger of falling away. But if you listen and remember and understand what I’m telling you, you will NOT fall away. What has Jesus said so far? Let’s review.

“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.” John 16:1

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| “I washed your feet… now you do it” Jn. 13 | “Abide in my love.” John 15 |
| “Trust me, I will come back” Jn. 14 | “Expect persecution.” John 15 |
| “One command: love one another” Jn. 14 | “I will send the Holy Spirit” John 15 |

Jesus opened this whole sermon with a concrete illustration in the **foot washing**. He showed them what true servant leadership looked like by embracing the most menial task. Then he said, “This is your example. Lead this way, by serving.”

He told them repeatedly that ***he was leaving, but that he was not leaving them alone***. He will come back for us and in the meantime He will send the Holy Spirit to remind us of all of His teachings and enable us to bear witness to Jesus. The new command in John 13 to love one another he repeated again in John 14 as his one command. I am leaving, but you have each other. So don’t fight. Don’t bicker. LOVE each other.

And you’ll only be able to do that as you learn to ***abide in MY LOVE***. The world will hate you as it hated me, but there is blessing in that persecution because it will force you to depend more on Me. So he kept talking about the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Helper. Now in chapter 16 we get more on the Holy Spirit. Apparently the coming of the Holy Spirit is a big deal we need to understand if we are going to handle the changes that come in life - both big and small.

We will see **three principles to handle change**.

**How to Handle Change:**

* **Remember** the teachings of Jesus

“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.” John 16:1

First, since we have all of these teachings from Jesus, it is essential that we REMEMBER them. We need to ***regularly read the words of Jesus***, to discuss them, to meditate on them, to memorize them, to help each other keep his principles and lessons fresh in our minds.

And a theme Jesus kept coming back to over and over again was PERSECUTION.

**How to Handle Change:**

* **Remember** the teachings of Jesus
	+ Expect **Persecution**

“They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.” John 16:2

***Jesus never sugar-coated things.*** He was very clear and upfront that following him meant denying yourself and taking up your cross. He said in that first sermon, up on the mount, that his followers would be persecuted as the prophets of old were, but they would find blessing in that suffering as it prepared them for the kingdom of God.

Throughout his public ministry opposition and persecution increased steadily. The cross was no surprise to Jesus – ***it was the inevitable destination of his life and teachings.*** You can’t confront the entire Jewish ruling establishment and the government of the Roman Empire and expect to live very long. Those in power always take measures to protect their power and to get more power. Just watch this election cycle if you need more evidence. “Power corrupts and absolute power… corrupts absolutely.” Macchiavelli perfectly anticipated American politics. And all politics - because it is humans fighting for control.

And tragically, it happens in the church too.

**How to Handle Change:**

* **Remember** the teachings of Jesus
	+ Expect **Persecution**

“And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.” John 16:3

Within the church it should be different because we do know Jesus, we do know the Father, we do have the Holy Spirit. But power and control issues crop up in the church almost as much as they do outside the church even though we have so many resources to live in unity and harmony with one another.

But outside the church, ***apart from the Lord, people are blind and dead in sin.*** As God said to Jonah, they don’t know their right hand from their left. They are the blind leading the blind and both fall into a pit. If they don’t know God, how can they possibly have a framework for morality? Once you remove God, as Nietzche rightly predicted, you remove morality. Nature alone, without God, does not reveal right and wrong, only POWER. And the big fish always eats the little fish. That’s what nature shows us.

And this is why we need the Bible so badly and why it’s such an important gift from God to us. God spoke into history and especially to His people, to show us what is right and wrong. To make it crystal clear.

**How to Handle Change:**

* **Remember** the teachings of Jesus
	+ God will tell you what you need to know **When** you need to know it

“But I have said these things to you that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.” John 16:4

It would not be long before ***each of the disciples would be tested.*** Judas was already gone to betray Jesus. He had failed his test. Peter would soon be tested as people asked if he knew Jesus and was with Jesus, and Peter, too, would fail his test. All of the disciples, when Jesus asked them to pray with him for one hour, would one by one fall asleep. Then, when the group came to arrest him, all 11 would run for their lives, disappearing into the darkness and leaving Jesus alone.

How did the disciples process the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus? ***No doubt they kept going over and over the things he had told them.*** Remember, they wouldn’t have a full gospel account like Matthew or Mark for about 20 years. John’s gospel would be another 20 years after that. So they couldn’t just flip through a book and say, “Look here at John 16:4.”

**What the disciples had was EACH OTHER**. What most forgot, one remembered. And their educational culture was ORAL - they were used to reciting Scripture and repeating it as a group, helping each other memorize key passages. No doubt they had been doing that with the teachings of Jesus throughout his ministry. And we all know that when YOU TEACH material you remember it much more than when you just listen.

**How to Handle Change:**

* **Remember** the teachings of Jesus
	+ God will tell you what you need to know **When** you need to know it

“I did not say these things to you from the beginning because I was with you.” John 16:4

***Jesus was so careful and compassionate in how and when he told the disciples things.*** He explained things in detail to them that the crowds never heard. He answered their questions and was patient with their confusion. And he waited on the hard teachings until later in his ministry. The whole “Eat my flesh, drink my blood thing,” wasn’t in the intro class, it was more of a 301, 401 course. He called for commitment from the beginning but didn’t focus on persecution or his own departure until these final talks.

And the reason he didn’t have to share everything early on, is that he himself was WITH THEM. ***He could remind them personally of the early lessons*** from the sermon on the mount, and the parables he kept telling over and over. He could correct their wrong understandings and their mis-applications. Yes, there’s a kingdom banquet coming, and yes, you will have seats of honor but it’s not good for you to focus on that or start comparing yourself with each other. Maybe serve instead of grandstanding. How about that?

Look down at verse 12.

**How to Handle Change:**

* **Remember** the teachings of Jesus
	+ God will tell you what you need to know **When** you need to know it

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” John 16:12

Even now, after three years with him, Jesus couldn’t share everything with them. After the resurrection he had several more meetings with them and shared the rest of what they needed to know.

And think of **how progressively the New Testament formed**. We don’t know for sure the exact dates of each book, but a common understanding of the timing looks like this:



If Galatians was the first or second letter circulating it was because that book - confronting the Jewish legalists who wanted to make the early church visibly Jewish with circumcision and food laws and hair length and everything; that was the need of the moment.

In time other letters were passed around and copied. Then the gospels were finished and published and circulated. Imagine the joy a small church would experience when a new letter arrived and they could copy it down and pass it on to the next church in the town over?

***Wycliffe has this great joy still today***, when they complete a translation of the NT or the whole Bible. The celebration is amazing as a whole village or region dances and sings and praises the Lord for the gift of HIS WORD in THEIR HEART LANGUAGE. It used to take decades to produce a full translation, now it still takes a couple of years. But the response is the same it always has been: grateful joy to be able to hold and to hear God speak in your own language, in your own hands.

Think of this. Why doesn’t God answer every question you ask him?

**How to Handle Change:**

* **Remember** the teachings of Jesus
	+ God will tell you what you need to know **When** you need to know it

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” John 16:12

We simply can’t handle it. It’s very **Jack Nicholson** - you want the truth? You can’t handle the truth. Not all of it. Not all at once.

Hear this brother, sister – ***Jesus has MANY things He will say to you personally***, but you aren’t ready for all of them right now. He will tell you what you need to know WHEN you need to know it.

And sometimes the questions we have are not for us to know ever. Peter asked about John after the resurrection. “What about him? Is it true that he won’t die?” Not sure how that rumor got around. But Jesus told Peter, ***“What is that to you? You follow me.”***

It’s like Aslan the Great Lion told Shasta when he asked what happened to the girl he was traveling with. “That’s her story. I’m telling you YOUR STORY. No one gets to hear any story but their own.”

* But what about ***that person who harmed me?*** I’ll deal with them, God says, you follow me.
* What about ***my husband or wife*** who doesn’t love or serve me very well? I’ll deal with them, God says, you trust and follow me.
* What about ***my son or daughter*** who is straying into trouble? I’ll deal with them, God says, you walk with me. Abide in me.
* What about ***that person in my office*** who keeps getting promoted and doesn’t deserve any of it? I’ll deal with them, God says. You follow me.

If we are going to handle the changes and difficulties of life, we must first remember the teachings of Jesus. Second:

**How to Handle Change:**

* Trust in God’s good **Provision**
	+ It won’t be the **Same** as last time

“But now I am going to him who sent me and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’” John 16:5

Jesus is trying to gently but clearly **explain the Father’s plan**. He was leaving them. It was going to be scary. It was going to be wildly unfair, in terms of the trial that would mock justice in every way possible. It was going to be dramatic with darkness descending and the earth trembling.

There was ***no way the disciples could fully understand*** the nature of the Trinity, the atonement or God’s overall plan for salvation history. Even with 2,000 years of study and discussion we still debate a lot of the meaning of those things. For example, where did Jesus go for the time he was in the tomb? Noodle that for a minute.

By this point none of the disciples was about to open his mouth and ask a question. They had done in chapter 14 and no one was raising a hand this time. “We’ve got it Rabbi. Crystal clear.”

**How to Handle Change:**

* Trust in God’s good **Provision**
	+ You will **Grieve** as you adjust

“But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.” John 16:6

They were understandably stressed. They were beginning to grieve because it was increasingly clear that Jesus was leaving and by leaving he meant dying. How far off, therefore, was death for all of them? Days? Minutes? Hours?

***Everything they knew was about to change.*** Jesus, the miracle working Son of God, was leaving. He promised this mysterious gift of the Holy Spirit, but who could have guessed what a relationship with the Holy Spirit would look like? He promised to come back, but who could have any idea when that would be?

Sorrow filled their hearts. What is Jesus saying to you these days? Is change coming for you? Has it already come? Whether it’s change you have chosen or you have to choose; or change that simply happened to you, sorrow can fill your heart.

Change feels like loss.

We had this amazing **lake house in Wisconsin** my whole childhood. It was a magical place. I learned how to water ski there and later to wakeboard. We spent so many weekends there as a family when my grandparents still lived there and then after they died. We brought tons of friends up to enjoy a day on the lake with us. So many wonderful memories.

When we moved away from Chicago and were living for 4 years in NC and then 5 years in KY, it simply wasn’t practical to visit the lake house anymore. Eventually my parents listed it as a VRBO and then, very begrudgingly, they sold it. It felt like the end of an era.

In the scheme of things, not that big a deal, right? Oh, let’s feel bad for the pastor who was so abused and neglected he had a lake house growing up and then it went away. Serious trauma there. Right.

The point is that change happens. And it’s sad when it does. It represents loss. It means those old fun ***memories won’t happen again IN THAT PLACE***.

And then we moved to Florida and my poor Mom just cried. But now they visit down here a lot and Dad can golf in the winter. Change can be good sometimes.

***What has changed in your life recently?***

* Have kids grown and gone?
* Have you lost parents?
* Some of you have lost children.
* Has work changed?
* Has your health changed?
* Many of you have recently relocated.

Here is our key verse for today. V. 7

**How to Handle Change:**

* Trust in God’s good **Provision**
	+ Cling to the **Goodness** of God

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away.” John 16:7

To your advantage. ***It’s better this way.*** Trust in God’s plan. He knows what’s best for you. It must have felt to the disciples like an absurd statement. What could be better than having the Son of God living and traveling with you?

Jesus adds emphasis to this statement with his usual “verily, verily.” Listen. Pay attention. It is to your advantage.

Whatever change you are going through, ***it is to your advantage.*** It is better. It may not feel better. But in God’s perfect sovereignty, according to His mysterious will, He has allowed and directed things TO YOUR ADVANTAGE.

One of the best books I’ve read in the last ten years is John Piper’s *A Camaraderie of Confidence*. If you need to be reminded of the sovereign goodness of God, that is well worth the read. It combines the stories of Charles Spurgeon, Hudson Taylor and the old pastor to both of them, George Mueller.

***Mueller’s wife ended up dying after a prolonged illness.*** Mueller was known throughout England, and throughout history, as the man of prayer and faith. He built and oversaw orphanages that served over 10,000 children in the 1800s when there were no social services for orphans. He pastored the same church for 63 years. And he never asked for money. He just prayed about any need as it came up; and God provided what was needed.

So as he prayed for his wife who was sick and dying, Mueller knew how to pray in faith. No one had to teach him to ask and believe and trust God for miracles. He had seen miraculous provisions over and over in his life.

The verse that Mueller held onto in those unending weeks and months of his wife’s illness was Psalm 84:11.

“For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.” Psalm 84:11

***God is the Giver of every good and perfect gift.*** He does not change like shifting shadows. He does not say yes and then no. He is ALWAYS good. Always wise. Always generous. A sun and shield. The giver of favor and mercy and love and honor.

And the key phrase, “NO GOOD THING does he withhold.” ***Mueller clung to that truth.*** He reasoned, “If my wife lives, that must be what is good for me. If she dies, then it must be – somehow, in ways I cannot understand – that her death is what is good for me.”

Brother, sister – **cling to the goodness of God**. He is working in you and around you. He has not forgotten you. He is not withholding any good thing from you. It is not a test of your uprightness. If it were, none of us would ever get any good thing from the Lord. No, His goodness is the overflow of His loving, righteous, holy character.

**How to Handle Change:**

* Trust in God’s good **Provision**
	+ Cling to the **Goodness** of God

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away.” John 16:7

Jesus’ departure made no sense to the disciples. Neither did his suffering or death. But were those to their advantage? Were they to our advantage? Nothing more supremely!

But Jesus explains another reason his departure is a good thing.

**How to Handle Change:**

* Trust in God’s good **Provision**
	+ Cling to the **Goodness** of God

“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 go, I will send him to you.” John 16:7

This is mysterious. Couldn’t Jesus have stayed on earth, after the resurrection and still sent the Holy Spirit? It’s not like there’s only room on earth for one member of the Trinity. They are ONE. Where you see Jesus you have the Father and the Spirit as well.

No, that would be like a Netflix account with one too many users. Your son gets on and bumps you off. It doesn’t work like that with the Trinity.

Couldn’t Jesus have asked the Father and the Father would have sent the Holy Spirit? Sure. Of course. ***But that wasn’t the plan.*** That wasn’t the order.

Jesus came. He finished His work the Father gave him. Then He continued his work at the Father’s right hand, interceding for all of us from heaven. And the Holy Spirit took over operations on earth.

**The point is the GIFT**. The Father GAVE the Son. The Son gave His life. Then the Father gave Him His life back. And then the Son poured out all of HIs life and love into all of His followers in the person of the Holy Spirit. Giving. Giving. Giving. Overflow.

One more key to handle change. First we need to remember the teachings of Jesus. Second we need to trust in the goodness of God’s provision. Third:

**How to Handle Change:**

* Let the Holy Spirit do **His** job (v. 8-11)
	+ Convicting people of sin and **Unbelief**

“And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment.” John 16:8

Here is **the Holy Spirit’s PUBLIC job description** – His work in the world. Next week we will see His PERSONAL job description, within the church and among believers. But in the world, the Holy Spirit has a job and He does it perfectly. Let Him do it. Don’t try to take over. You don’t have the skill set.

**How to Handle Change:**

* Let the Holy Spirit do **His** job (v. 8-11)
	+ Convicting people of sin and **Unbelief**

“Concerning sin because they do not believe in me.” John 16:9

The first thing the Holy Spirit did for you was convict you of your sin. He showed you the holiness of God and your own sinfulness in comparison. The first gift God gives to anyone is GUILT and SHAME. Those early twinges of conscience that grow into full blown conviction and guilt, are wonderful gifts from our generous God.

And the great sin – ***the sin underneath all the other sins – is unbelief.*** They refuse to acknowledge Jesus as Lord. They refuse to admit their need for a Savior. So the Holy Spirit brings conviction of that. You are trusting too much in your own understanding, in your own strength, in your own plans. Often He has to let you fail over and over and over so you can begin to wonder if there might be a better way.

**How to Handle Change:**

* Let the Holy Spirit do **His** job
	+ Convincing people of **Right** and wrong

“Concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you will see me no longer.” John 16:10

While he was on earth, ***Jesus SHOWED everyone what righteousness looked like***. After Jesus left it was up to the Holy Spirit to take over that job. He mainly does that through the Word of God with subtle teachings like the 10 commandments.

Jesus confronted hypocrisy and evil; now the Holy Spirit does that for each individual.

From there it’s **like Pharaoh**. Read the Exodus account, you’ll find that sometimes GOD hardened the King’s heart. And other times the King hardened his own heart.

But the Holy Spirit never failed. He never slipped or missed a beat. The King always knew the right thing to do; he just chose not to do it.

And so do we. Think back to your childhood sins – lying about that grade; glancing over to look at your friend’s test; exaggerating that story to impress a girl… You knew the right thing and the wrong thing. Sometimes you responded to your conscience and the Holy Spirit; other times you didn’t. But you always KNEW. You’d be lying to yourself if you claimed, “I didn’t know!”

The Holy Spirit is very good at His job.

***So let Him do that job.*** Don’t try to take over in your marriage, with your grown kids, in your workplace or with anyone to whom you are reaching out with the love of Jesus. Be patient. Pray. Trust the Lord’s timing. Don’t judge or be judgmental. Don’t criticize or nag.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment.

**How to Handle Change:**

* Let the Holy Spirit do **His** job (v. 8-11)
	+ Confirming the **Justice** of God’s coming judgment

“Concerning judgment because the ruler of this world is judged.” John 16:11

Hear this. ***The devil is already condemned.*** His verdict has already been read. His sentence pronounced. He knows the lake of fire is waiting for him, where he will suffer forever and forever.

The Holy Spirit makes this clear to the people of the world – that sin and evil must be punished. We have this deep internal sense of justice. Right and wrong is programmed into our being. Just try to cut in line at Publix. Try it. I dare you. Alarms will sound. People will shout. Fist fights will break out between sweet old ladies.

Think of the **cultural phrases** that express this truth.

* ***“Sure as…”*** don’t say it! What is the one sure thing? The one certainty? Judgment.
* ***“See you in…”*** Han Solo said that as he left to go save Luke. So even our noble heroes know they’re not so noble. “See you in…” shows us that we know other people deserve punishment, but we do too.
* ***“Hot as…”*** is obvious. Though they should say “hot as Florida.” Or “Hot as a soccer practice in August in Florida.”
* One more. ***“Go to…”*** Why is that such a conversation ender? It’s a pronouncement of judgment on another person.

The point is clear. The Holy Spirit is very good at His job. Don’t try to take it from him.

This will help us walk through times of change, uncertainty and suffering.

**How to Handle Change:**

* **Remember** the teachings of Jesus
* Trust in God’s good **Provision**
* Let the Holy Spirit do **His** job

Brothers and sisters, change is coming. Both to your life and to our whole world. Things shifted 2,000 years ago, and they seem to be shifting mightfily again right now.

So remember what Jesus said. Rehearse His teachings and discuss them. Trust in the goodness of God – especially His provision for you in Jesus and in the Holy Spirit. Cling to the goodness of God. And leave the work of the Holy Spirit to the Holy Spirit.

As I navigate my late 40s and Kristin reminds me she is still in her mid-40s, we are realizing that our bodies are changing in this here middle age thing. I was taking a shower a couple of weeks ago and in the process of lifting my foot up to wash it, my back let go. Never happened before. But I could hardly get out of bed the next day – which conveniently was a Sunday. I stood up and walked like a 100 year old man – and my family gladly made fun of me.

My wife just gets more beautiful and wise and amazing as she ages. Amen? But my body seems to be telling me something. Change is a reality. You can’t do the things you did in your 20s. Pain is this persistent reminder of our physical limitations.

So we walk every night. We keep reading our Bibles and sharing how the Lord is speaking to us. We try to listen to the Holy Spirit and follow His direction. And we cling to the goodness of God as we pray for each of our boys and our extended family and all of you. His provision is the best.

Let’s pray.