

[JOHN 14:15-21](#) YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND

You just call out my name
 And you know wherever I am
 I'll come running, to see you again.
 Winter – spring – summer - or fall
 All you have to do is call
 And I'll be there
 You've got a friend.

The song – of course – is “You’ve Got A Friend” – written – I think – by Carol King – and made famous by James Taylor. It’s a beautiful song with a beautiful message of commitment and love. Please wait to sing the rest of the song until after you have finished reading the Message.

We all need friends. Especially at this time when we cannot meet up with each other. It is so good we now have the technology to be able to skype each other or just a telephone call it makes these times much more tolerable. We are glad to have our friends – someone to help when the chips are down - someone to talk to when you were lonely -- someone to listen to your problems -- someone who cared -- someone who would love you even if you were in the wrong? Or you were glad you had a friend like that? Wouldn't it have been nice at those times in your life to have a prayer? Wouldn't it have been nice to talk to God and know that He is listening? You just call out my name and you know wherever I am I'll come running to see you again. Winter – spring – summer - or fall, All you have to do is call and I'll be there – You've got a friend.

It is good to know that God is also your friend? That God loves you and will help? Because, if God loves you, you are not hopeless! If God will help you, you have hope! If God loves and will help you, things will work out! If God is your friend – then you can make it through the hard times in life.

Philip Yancey is the author of the book *Where Is God When It Hurts?* He talks about interviewing the beautiful people -- famous football players -- movie stars -- authors - - TV personalities. He talks about how we idolize them -- how we want to be like them -- how we want to know every detail of their lives -- their clothes -- their romances -- even their toothpaste. Then he goes on to say:

"Yet I must tell you that, in my limited experience, these our 'idols' are as miserable a group of people as I have ever met. Most have troubled or broken marriages. Nearly all are hopelessly dependent on psychotherapy. In a heavy irony, these larger-than-life heroes seem tormented by incurable self-doubt." (Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?*)

"Tormented by incurable self-doubt!" Hard to imagine, isn't it! But we know that it's true. We know about their broken marriages -- their addiction to drugs and alcohol. We know that their talent has a dark side. If the beautiful people find themselves "tormented by incurable self-doubt," we need not feel odd if we, too, sometimes feel lonely -- isolated -- uncertain – like we need a friend. That is part of the human condition.

That is how Jesus' disciples felt -- lonely -- isolated -- uncertain. Like they needed a friend. You might even say that they felt betrayed. Jesus was talking about leaving them. He was talking about dying. The disciples had made great sacrifices to follow Jesus. They had staked everything on him. They had walked away from their fishing businesses. They had left home and hearth. They had allowed themselves to believe that Jesus was the one who would turn everything around -- would make everything right. They had believed that he was the Messiah -- the one who would save Israel. And now he was talking about leaving them. Can you imagine how they felt? The sense of betrayal! Why had Jesus asked them to follow him if he intended to leave them? Why had he brought them this far only to abandon them? Jesus knew that his disciples were afraid -- that they felt that they needed a friend -- so he made them a promise. He said, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." A friend. In the original Greek, the word we translate as "Advocate" is "*parakletos*." So what? What does "*parakletos*" mean? Well it means "someone called in to help in your hour of need. A friend. Jesus, knowing that he would soon ascend back to the Father, promised his disciples a "*parakletos*"-- someone on whom they could call when they needed help -- someone who would be there for them in their hour of need. A friend. Jesus promised that this friend would be with them forever. That is where we come in. The friend -- that Jesus promised to these first disciples is available to us as well. This friend -- is there to help us when we need help -- to guide us when we need guidance -- to steer us rightly -- to protect us from harm. When Jesus talked about "the friend" -- He was talking about the Holy Spirit -- God's Spirit dwelling within us -- God's Spirit living in our hearts. The promise that Jesus made to those first disciples is a promise to us as well. Jesus has made it possible for us to have a friend-- a helper on whom we can call in time of need -- a friend -- God with us -- God dwelling in our hearts. Jesus is saying -- in effect -- You just call out my name, And you know wherever I am, I'll come running to see you again. Winter -- spring -- summer - or fall, All you have to do is call, And I'll be there -- You've got a friend.

I found this item about Colonel Thomas Schaefer, the highest-ranking military officer in the U.S. Embassy in Teheran when that embassy was overrun and the Americans taken prisoner. Colonels are seasoned veterans and tend to be strong -- and Schaefer was no exception. However, being taken prisoner in a hostile nation -- not knowing if he would ever see his family again -- held in solitary confinement in a tiny cell with nothing to read and nothing to do -- Schaefer found himself at the edge of his limits. But he was a Christian, and so he got down on his knees and prayed, "God, I cannot handle this. I need your help." He says, "And I got it!" He received the help that he needed to survive those long, seemingly endless, days of captivity. The friend -- the Holy Spirit -- gave him the strength that he needed. All I know is, "the Lord did provide as he promised and coming to trust in him is enormously encouraging to me as I face the future."

As you see from the example, those who live in the presence of the Holy Spirit cannot expect easy lives -- Jesus never promised us a bed of roses -- but the Spirit helps us to prevail no matter how difficult the circumstances.

Earlier in this sermon, I mentioned Philip Yancey, who interviewed football heroes -- movie stars -- television personalities -- only to find that these beautiful people had feet of clay -- that they were "tormented by incurable self - doubt!" He went on to write about the other side of the coin -- people whom he calls "servants" -- missionaries -- doctors and nurses working in Third World countries -- linguists living

among primitive people in remote places, often for decades, to translate the Bible for those people. Yancey says, "I was prepared to honour and admire these servants, to hold them up as inspiring examples. I was not, however, prepared to envy them. But as I now reflect on the two groups side by side, stars and servants, the servants clearly emerge as the favoured ones, the graced ones. They work for low pay, long hours, and no applause, 'wasting' their talents and skills among the poor and uneducated. But somehow in the process of losing their lives they have found them." (Philip Yancey, *Where is God When It Hurts?*)

Jesus promised us the Holy Spirit, and has delivered on that promise. Those of us who believe in Christ can expect the Spirit to help us when we need help -- anytime - - day or night. The only question is whether we will follow faithfully. If we will, God will bless us with lives that become stronger day by day -- with faith to drive out fear -- with lives solid at the core.

You just call out my name, And you know wherever I am, I'll come running to see you again, Winter – spring – summer - or fall, All you have to do is call, And I'll be there – You've got a friend.

"O Lord, help me to understand that you are not going to let anything come my way that You and I together can't handle. Amen.

Yes, you've got a friend! Amen.

The Spirit beside us

John 14.15-21

Jesus promises his disciples that God will send the Spirit of truth, who will be with them for ever. He reminds them that those who love him are those who keep his commandments. These are the ones to whom he will reveal himself

Spirit of truth, come close to us. Unite us into the body of Christ. Enable us to worship God in Spirit and in truth. Help us to support and encourage each other. Help us to love as we are loved. Spirit of truth, come and abide in us. Amen.

Gracious God, we come before you, drawn by the power of your welcoming love. We come with our sorrows and joys. We come with our expectations and apprehensions. We come with what we have done. We come as who we are. In your love we find peace and hope. God of love, we are sorry that at times our love for you falters; that we have wrong priorities; that we overlook your guidance. O God, forgive us. O God, renew us. Loving Saviour, we are sorry that we disobey your commandments; that we fail to love; that we walk by on the other side.

O God, forgive us. O God, renew us. Spirit of truth, we are sorry that we disregard your presence; that our thoughts and feelings are unrighteous; that we follow the world's way.

O God, forgive us. O God, renew us. May your presence abiding in us lead us in the

right way, in the name of Jesus. You make yourself known to us, and you are present in our lives even though we do not always recognise or acknowledge you.

For all that you are, we thank you, loving God. You do not leave us orphaned, but embrace us with parental love that encourages and comforts us. For all that you are, we thank you, loving God. You ensure that we are not alone by filling us with your Spirit of truth, that inspires and empowers us.

For all that you are, we thank you, loving God. Thank you, Father, for your presence, your love and your encouragement. Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Dear Lord, we bring into your love those who do not know you and your love; those who have turned away from you; those who struggle to accept you; those who refuse to listen.

May your love touch them, and transform their lives. Dear Lord, we bring into your love those who need parental love; those who are alone; those who are abused; those who are neglected. May your love touch them, and transform their lives. Dear Lord, we bring into your love those who seek the truth; those who work in the justice system; those who campaign and advocate on behalf of the voiceless. May your love touch them, and transform their lives. May we show the power and presence of your love in our church, our community and our world – for Jesus' sake. Amen.