

“The Advantage Plan” (John 16:5–15)

Have you ever been on a long family road trip? I have. When I was growing up, my family took a great many road trips. The two most memorable were six week cross-country jaunts across the US. Yes, that’s right: Our family of four packed into a small Subaru wagon . . . and not once but twice. My parents planned the trip and would pack food, clothing, and everything else we needed. I didn’t pack anything except my Sony Walkman and a few books. My Dad was the driver and my Mom was the navigator. I didn’t do a thing except frequently ask, “How much longer?” As a boy, I didn’t really have a care in the world. I depended upon my parents for everything.

I discovered that there were many advantages for a kid traveling with his parents. I never worried about how we would get from Wyoming to Wisconsin. I never worried about where our next meal would come from, or if we would run out of gas. I never worried about traveling in the darkness during heavy rainstorms or where we would spend the night. I knew my parents would take care of everything.

For most of us, life is more like a long road trip than a short vacation. There are long days of steady driving; there are times of driving down dark and lonely roads. There are some nice hotels and some absolute dives. Today, you may be at a dark point in your journey. You may be stuck in heartbreak hotel. You may be discouraged, depressed, and even defeated. Perhaps you’re on the verge of calling roadside assistance. Jesus wants you to know that He has given you a Helper who can provide you countless advantages. Most importantly, He can guide you through your earthly life and then take you to your eternal home. Jesus will say: *The Holy Spirit is a God send.*

In John 16:5–15, Jesus is talking to His disciples on the night before He is crucified. The disciples are heartbroken to hear that He is leaving. They are scared to death. They are shocked and baffled, confused and disoriented. Their Master, their Lord, the miracle working Son of God, is going to be taken away from them. He is going to suddenly disappear and go back into heaven. They understand nothing. It makes no sense to them at all. They huddle like scared sheep around their Shepherd in the blackness of night. They are scared to leave Him. They are waiting for an explanation. In these stressful moments Jesus says, **“But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks¹ Me, ‘Where are You going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled² your heart”** (16:5–6). Once again, Jesus tells His disciples that He is going to His Father. At this point, however, the disciples don’t dare ask Jesus any questions. In their minds, ignorance is bliss. In 16:6, Jesus explains the reason the disciples don’t ask where He is going: They are sorrowful because of what He has just shared. The phrase “these things” pertains to what Jesus has just spoken of—coming persecution (16:1–4). The cause of the disciples’ grief, lamentably, is largely preoccupation with their own fate. This caused them to miss the positive implications of Jesus’ departure, both for themselves and for the continuation of His mission.³

Jesus is seeking to engage His disciples in a discussion about His own suffering and departure, but they are too preoccupied with themselves. There is a principle here: When you and I are consumed with our own problems, it is impossible to focus upon another person’s dilemma. Yet, we have been called to live a supernatural life where we take our eyes off of ourselves and care for others. In what way are you hurting today? Do you have a physical sorrow (e.g., migraines, back pain, cancer)? Reach out to someone who has a physical sorrow and extend care. Do you have a marriage or family sorrow (e.g., rocky marriage, disobedient kids)? Reach out to someone who has a family sorrow and extend care. Do you have a vocational sorrow (e.g., loss of job, low salary, difficult boss and coworkers)? Reach out to someone who has a vocational sorrow and extend care. When you reach out to others and bear their sorrows, you will discover that you don’t really have it so hard. Furthermore, you will realize one of the reasons God has allowed you to experience sorrow: to comfort others (see 2 Cor 1:3–4). Indeed, *the Holy Spirit is a God send.*

Unfortunately, the disciples haven't yet learned this important principle. They are caught up with their own sorrows. Consequently, they don't realize that Jesus' departure and their own suffering is the best thing that could happen. This is often true in the spiritual realm. What seems like the worst thing may actually be the best thing. In 16:7, Jesus says, "**But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage⁴ that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper⁵ will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.**" Why is it better for the disciples to have the presence of the Helper than the presence of Jesus Himself as they do now? Because the Holy Spirit will not only be with them as Jesus has been, but *in* them as well (cf. 17:23, 26).⁶ We tend to think that it would have been more advantageous to have lived when Jesus lived, to have seen Him, touched Him, and heard Him. But it's actually to our advantage that He left and sent the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus,⁷ and He dwells within everyone who believes. Clearly, these are the best days to be living in. Through the Spirit, Jesus is here inside each and every believer right now. *The Holy Spirit is a God send.*

However, if the Holy Spirit is to serve as an advantage in your life, you must ask the Helper to help you. This really isn't so tough. In your daily life, you ask others to help you, right? If there's a jar you can't open, you ask for help. If you're climbing a ladder, you ask someone to steady it. If you run into computer problems, you call someone who knows computers to help you. If you're driving and you discover that you're lost, you ask for help (at least most women do). To succeed in life, you need to ask for help. If you don't, you will continually fail because no person has all the necessary skills to pull everything off in life. Similarly, in your walk of faith, you need help. You can't do it by yourself. You ought to be continually calling on the Holy Spirit to help you to live this life. Not in the "Hamburger Helper" sense of help, where you throw together a meal with the "help" of Hamburger Helper. Rather, God is looking to "help" you in the sense that He takes over and consumes you. He wants to do His work in and through you.

In the remaining verses, Jesus speaks of two major advantages of the Spirit's coming: He convicts the world (16:8–11) and He communicates to believers (16:12–15). First, Jesus focuses His attention on how the Holy Spirit convicts the world. In 16:8, Jesus says, "**And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.**" Verse 8 summarizes the Holy Spirit's role in the world. Interestingly, this is the only place in Scripture where the Spirit is said to perform a work in "the world."⁸ The word "convict" (*elegcho*)⁹ comes from the drama of a courtroom trial. It refers to what the prosecuting attorney does when he argues his case. He puts the defendant on the witness stand and begins to pile up the evidence. Fact upon fact, witness upon witness, truth upon truth, slowly, inexorably, irresistibly building his case until finally the enormity of the evidence is so overwhelming that the judge is forced to say to the defendant, "I find you guilty beyond a reasonable doubt." Not only that, this word means to present the evidence in such an overwhelming fashion that even the defendant is compelled at the end of the trial to step up and say, "I admit it. I confess. I am guilty."

Jesus expounds on 16:8 in 16:9–11. In these verses, Jesus explains what it means to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. **First, the Holy Spirit will convict unbelievers of their sin.** In 16:9, Jesus declares that the Holy Spirit will convict the world "**concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me.**"¹⁰ Jesus is not saying the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin in a general way (though He does that). He is talking here about a very specific sin because He says, "they [humankind] do not believe in me." What is the greatest sin? Is it murder? Is it theft? Is it adultery? Is it dishonoring your parents (I wish!)? Is it cursing God? Is it coveting? Is it extortion? Is it racism? Is it hatred? No. None of those things would be called the greatest sin in the world because there is one sin which, in its effect, is greater than all the rest. It is the sin of refusing to believe in Jesus Christ. That's what Jesus is saying in 16:9. "I will convict them of sin." Not sin in the general sense, but, "I will convict them of the greatest sin of all because they have not believed in Me." Until people see themselves as sinners they will never see their need for a Savior. However, one's personal sin is not the focus; Jesus has already paid for sin. The focus is the acceptance or rejection of Jesus. What will you do with Jesus? This is the question that we must pose to people.

The second reason the Holy Spirit convicts the world is because they need to understand their lack of righteousness. In 16:10, Jesus declares that the Holy Spirit will convict the world “**concerning righteousness,¹¹ because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me.**” The Holy Spirit will convince the world of its need for God’s righteousness by making the world realize the poverty of its own righteousness.¹² In Isa 64:6 of the Greek Old Testament, Israel’s “righteousness” (*dikaiousune*) is likened to a menstrual cloth. The Holy Spirit needs to convict unbelievers of their need to believe in Christ and not trust in their own righteousness, which is like filthy rags.

The third reason the Holy Spirit convicts the world is because of the reality of judgment. In 16:11, Jesus declares that the Holy Spirit will convict the world “**concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.**” At first glance this might appear to be a reference to some future judgment. But this text is not talking about future judgment. It’s talking about past judgment. Notice the phrase “has been judged.”¹³ Jesus is saying Satan “has been judged in the past, continues to be judged, is now judged, and will continue to be judged into the future.” The judgment is past, present and future. Satan may be a great power in this world,¹⁴ but he is already a defeated foe. This will be fully realized when sinful mankind, fallen angels, and Satan himself stand before the righteous God (cf. Phil 2:6–11).

The Holy Spirit will fulfill His responsibility to convict the world, but He also expects and commands you to fulfill your ministry to unbelievers (cf. 15:26–27). When it comes to sharing the gospel, there are three important principles to keep in mind. ***(1) Pray for those in your life who have yet to believe in Christ.*** Keep sharing Christ, but remember that only God can change a human heart. Your first step should be to pray by name for your neighbors, coworkers, classmates, friends, and family members who have yet to believe in Jesus. It’s as simple as writing these people’s names down on a 3x5 card or post-it-note and putting it inside your Bible cover. Ask the Holy Spirit to convict these individuals of their sin and their need to believe in Jesus. When you drive in and out of your neighborhood, pray for your neighbors by name. Pray that the Holy Spirit convicts them of sin and draws them to faith in Christ.

Our unsaved family members and friends are like the wasp that landed on a sandwich and began eating the juice of the jam. The wasp was so busy enjoying the sweet stuff it didn’t even notice that the person on whose sandwich it had landed had picked up a knife to slice the sandwich in half. In other words, the wasp was suddenly in great peril. But you know something? He kept right on eating. An unredeemed person is so busy eating the jam of this world order that it takes a disaster to get his attention. In fact, many people are believers today because God first got their attention in some unique way. They were indulging themselves and enjoying the jam of this world until God sliced through their lives. Then it dawned on them that this world wasn’t as tasty as they thought it was. This is the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. His job is to get our attention so that we take seriously the things of God.¹⁵

(2) Proclaim Christ as the only way to God. Let’s suppose that you and I are standing 50 feet away from the edge of a cliff. If you fall off, you will drop 1800 feet before you hit the jagged rocks on the canyon floor. There are no guard rails to keep you from falling. As we stand there chatting, we see an old man walking slowly toward the edge. As he nears the edge, we realize that he is blind and has no idea the danger he is in. Suddenly, he calls out, “Which way should I go?” What would you think if I yelled out, “It doesn’t matter? Go any way you like?” Would I not be criminally negligent when he falls to his death? If I care about him at all, I will call out, “Don’t take another step. I’ll come and get you.” And then I would take him by the hand and lead him to safety. Love compels me to speak the truth and to do what I can to save his life. I recognize that most people throughout the city of Olympia would laugh at the notion that not believing in Jesus is sin. They would say, “We believe in tolerance, diversity, pluralism. Christianity works for you, but it doesn’t work for me. That’s your way of thinking, that’s not my way of thinking. Don’t lay that Jesus stuff on me.” But if you claim Jesus’ words: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me,” (John 14:6) you will tell them the truth.

(3) Share the bad news before you share the good news. When I sit down to eat, I like to eat my vegetables first so that I can enjoy the rest of the meal. It has become commonplace and even fashionable to offer the gospel of Christ to the world as a solution to an inconvenience. We are told we need to believe in Jesus because if we do it will give us purpose in life. It will give peace in our hearts. It will help us make sense out of the world's chaos. Now as desirable as those things are, they tend to trivialize the gospel. After all, a person might gain a sense of purpose through landing an excellent job that helps people. He might gain a sense of peace from a pill or a bottle, albeit a short-lived one. The Holy Spirit is concerned for more than those things. He does what no job and no bottle ever could do: He awakens lost people to their lostness and that has to happen before they are ever found. *The Holy Spirit is a God send.*

The gospel of Jesus Christ must be faithfully shared. It is the most important message in the world. A Mercedes-Benz TV commercial shows one of its cars colliding with a concrete wall during a safety test. Someone then asks a Mercedes engineer why the company does not enforce its patent on their car's energy-absorbing car body. The Mercedes' design has been copied by almost every other car maker in the world in spite of the fact that it has an exclusive patent. The engineer replies in a clipped German accent, "Because in life, some things are just too important not to share."

So the first major advantage of the Spirit's coming is His involvement with the world. The second major advantage of the Spirit's coming is that He communicates to believers (16:12–15).¹⁶ In 16:12, Jesus says, **"I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."** Jesus informs His disciples that He'd like to share more with them; however, at this juncture of their spiritual maturity they're not able to bear His words. They are distracted and disillusioned. This is equally applicable for you and me. Jesus has so much truth and insight that He longs to share with us, but He will only do so as we are able. One of your goals should be to be an eager receptor of Jesus' words. Pray for a spiritual sensitivity to God's Word. When you hear it, obey it, so that God will impart more truth to you.

In 16:13, Jesus says, **"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come."** This is not a promise to the church at large. This is a promise to these eleven men, which benefits the church at large. The text literally says, "He will guide you into all the truth." There is a particular body of truth that Jesus has in mind. This is not a promise to guide people generally in their exploration of physics and horticulture or atomic energy. The truth is the truth about God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the truth with which the Holy Spirit concerns Himself.¹⁷ But, God's Spirit doesn't only show us the future in a prophetic sense . . . He tells us what is to come in a practical sense. He guides us in our decision making. God's Spirit gives us guidance when it comes to practical matters. In Acts 15, the Spirit brought peace to a troubled church as they had to adjust their style of ministry to reach a new group of people. The Spirit also helps us in the selection of a college, choosing a job, finding a mate, and making investments. But we must have ears to hear. Moreover, we must first obey His revealed will before He reveals His explicit truth.

Nine years ago, when our family accepted the call to Emmanuel we lived in a townhouse in Lacey. Our townhouse was adjacent to the Lacey Train Station. In fact, I like to say we were on top of the train tracks because the train would drive through our master bedroom and shake our bed several times in the middle of the night. Initially, this caused us many sleepless nights but after a few months I never heard the train in the middle of the night. (This was not true for my wife.) I just slept through the shaking and the whistle blowing. It's not because the noise was no longer there . . . I just tuned it out. That's what has happened to many believers. We have silenced the Spirit's whispers so many times that we don't hear them any longer. We have read God's Word and chosen not to obey it. We have listened to countless sermons, but have ignored the Spirit who was seeking to apply the Word to our lives. When we continually tell the Spirit "no" or "not now," we eventually stop hearing from Him.

If you want the Holy Spirit to guide you in all truth, you have to listen. You have to obey when you're prompted to turn from wrong behavior. You have to follow through when you're "moved" to talk to someone about Christ. You have to move forward when you sense a need to visit someone. You have to obey when you sense God's call to serve in a certain capacity. You have to respond when you feel overwhelmed by a mountainous task.

The Holy Spirit communicates to believers by exalting Jesus. In 16:14 Jesus says, **"He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you."** The Holy Spirit's primary job description is to glorify Jesus. When you hear a lot of talk about the Holy Spirit or the Holy Ghost, you can be sure that there is a foul spirit. The Holy Spirit doesn't attract attention to Himself; instead, He points people to Jesus. When the Spirit is moving mightily in revival and in various ministries, Jesus is the center of attention. Our goal must be the same. Like the Holy Spirit and John the Baptizer, we must decrease and Jesus must increase (John 3:30). Our personal lives and ministries must not be about our glory and our accolades; we must point people to Christ.

This passage closes with a critical truth. Jesus says in 16:15: **"All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you."** Here the Spirit is seen in complete submission to and in harmony with the Son and the Father. He does not act or speak from Himself. Nothing originates from Him; all comes from the Son, and all is done to glorify the Son. Just as the Son did not do anything from Himself, but only that which He heard and received from the Father, so the Spirit never acts independently from the Son. The Spirit's function is to reveal the Son in all that He is to believers. Yet, in revealing the Son, the Spirit is actually revealing the Father because all that the Son has comes from the Father. Thus, the Spirit reveals the Son, who, in turn, expresses the Father. It is a clear revelation of the mutual interdependency of the Trinity.¹⁸

Another emphasis in 16:15 is that the Holy Spirit discloses Himself through the Scriptures. This means you and I must be in the Word in order to hear the words of the Father and the Son. Have you ever walked in the dark along an unfamiliar path without any illumination except a flashlight? A flashlight allows you to see a few feet—not a few miles—ahead of you. It provides just enough light so that you can see clearly to take the next step. In the same way, God rarely provides us with enough light to see every step we need to take in the future (perhaps so that we are not tempted to run ahead of Him). But He promises to give us enough direction to take the *next* step. This is why the Psalmist says God's Word is a "light" (Ps 32:8) not a "floodlight" to my path.¹⁹ In like manner, who among us really wants to know what the future holds? If God were to reveal our future, many of us would be aghast at what calamities and/or diseases await us.²⁰ We must walk with God in His Word step by step. The Holy Spirit will enable us to do this for *He is a God send*.

When I was growing up, my dad functioned like the Holy Spirit in my life. On our road trips and throughout my life he protected me, he provided for me, he guided me, and he cared for me. In the same way, the Holy Spirit will protect you, provide for you, guide you, and care for you. All you have to do is ask for His help. He will then empower you to live the abundant life here on earth (10:10), and then He will take you on a journey to a Heavenly destination. All it takes is the faith of a child to believe in Him and place your trust in His ability to take you home. *The Holy Spirit is a God send*.

Scripture References

John 16:5–15

John 5:21–30; 8:16, 26; 9:39

Luke 24:13–53

2 Corinthians 2:14–17

2 Corinthians 4:1–6

Hebrews 9:25–28

1 John 2:27

Study Questions

1. When do I tend to lose heart and become sorrowful (16:5–6)? What typically brings about these emotions? How do I usually seek to deal with these feelings? In what way is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit more desirable than Christ's personal presence in my life (16:7)? How can I communicate the significance of the Holy Spirit without drawing unnecessary attention to Him instead of Christ (cf. 16:14–15)?
2. In my attempts to share the gospel with others, have I spent too much time trying to convince someone and too little time seeking the Spirit's convicting power (16:8)? Who has been resistant to the gospel in my life? Am I asking God to work through His Spirit in their lives? How frequently do I pray for such individuals? How can I become more dependent upon God to do His work and bring forth a harvest?
3. How can I more effectively discuss with others humankind's greatest sin—the rejection of Christ (16:9)? Will I strive to keep the main thing the main thing and make the ultimate issue belief in Christ? How can I explain the concepts of "righteousness" and "judgment" to an unbeliever (16:10–11)?
4. How does the Holy Spirit minister to me in my spiritual walk (16:13–15)? Do I truly believe that when it comes to guidance, the weighing of options, seeking of counsel, and reading books cannot yield the degree of guidance that comes from seeking God in the Bible and in prayer? Am I facing a big decision? Have I asked for God's help? Why or why not?
5. Have I relegated the Holy Spirit away to a corner of my life? Am I trying to combat the world, the flesh, and the devil in my own strength? How can I cultivate a more intimate and dynamic relationship with the Holy Spirit? How can I follow His example and point people to Jesus?

Notes

¹ Comfort and Hawley write, “It is important to note that the verb for ‘asks’ is present; otherwise, the statement would contradict 13:36 and 14:5. The disciples had asked (past tense) where Jesus was going. In this verse Jesus is asking for an immediate reaction to his words about his departure.” Philip W. Comfort and Wendell C. Hawley, *Opening the Gospel of John* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1994), 259.

² The perfect active verb *pepleroken* (“to fill”) “indicates that there was room for nothing else” in their hearts. J. Carl Laney, *John*. Moody Press Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 287.

³ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*. Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 468.

⁴ The term “advantage” (*sumphero*) meant “expedient” and is also used in John 11:50 and 18:14 in connection with Jesus’ death.

⁵ The term *parakletos* can be translated “advocate,” “comforter,” or “helper” (cf. John 14:16, 26; 15:26). It was used in Greek literature for a defense lawyer called alongside to render aid.

⁶ W. Hall Harris, “The Gospel of John”: www.bible.org.

⁷ See Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19; and 1 Pet 1:11.

⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*. Revised edition. New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 618–19.

⁹ Burge writes, “In the New Testament, *elencho* occurs seventeen times and in most cases describes an instance where someone’s sin is exposed (leading to the related idea “to convict”). Thus John the Baptist exposes and convicts Herod of sin (Luke 3:9). Similarly, prophecy has the power to convict (1 Cor. 14:24), and we are charged to convict or rebuke sinners (1 Tim. 5:20; James 2:9; Jude 1:5) and antagonists to the faith (Titus 1:9). Therefore the meaning of the verb has to do with exposing sin and its guilt.” Gary M. Burge, *The Gospel of John*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 437. The same word that is translated “convict” (*elegcho*) here is applied to believers in the non-judicial sense of “reprove” in 1 Tim 5:20; Titus 2:15; and Rev 3:19.

¹⁰ See John 3:19 and 12:37.

¹¹ “Righteousness” (*dikaiosune*) occurs only here in John’s gospel.

¹² Erwin Lutzer, *How to Have a Whole Heart in a Broken World* (Wheaton: Victor, 1987), 105.

¹³ The Greek word *kekritai* is a perfect passive from the verb *krino* (“to judge”).

¹⁴ Cf. John 12:31; 14:30; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2; 1 John 5:19.

¹⁵ Tony Evans, *The Promise: Experiencing God’s Greatest Gift the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 139.

¹⁶ These verses begin the fifth and final *paraklete* passage in the Upper Room Discourse (14:16–17, 26; 15:26–27; 16:7–11, 12–15).

¹⁷ Doug McIntosh, “The Mystery of Conviction” (John 16:1–15): www.cornerstonebible.org/html/Sermons/UpperRm/UpperRm07.pdf.

¹⁸ Comfort and Hawley, *Opening the Gospel of John*, 262.

¹⁹ Robert Jeffress, *I Want More!* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2003), 85–86.

²⁰ Comfort and Hawley, *Opening the Gospel of John*, 261.