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FOLKS Like Us THE HOLY SPIRIT Our Misunderstood 'Counselor'." Fran Sciacca Timeless truths from our ancient past, for a journey with God in the modern era.

"Folks Like Us" — an introduction

Over the years I've written and published a number of Bible studies that collectively have sold well over a half-million copies. They were forged, most of them, in the furnaces of pain, doubt, and loneliness. Maybe that's why they were well-used, they touched people where they hurt most.

Recently, my publisher decided that they no longer wanted to handle the books that contained these 60 or so individual studies. So, I've decided to make them available to any who might benefit from them. At no cost.

I have always believed that because God thought it best to become human in the Incarnation, that perhaps "incarnational truth" was His preferred method of revealing Himself and His purposes to us. I suppose that's where the basic genre of these studies originated. I wanted to provide believers with Bible studies rooted in our ancestral past. The lives of men and women, who it turns out, are "folks just like us" in so many ways.

So, please take your time and work slowly through as many of these studies as you care to do... there's a lot of them! And may God use the combination of the struggles and insights of your *ancient* brothers and sisters, combined with those of mine, your modern brother, to help you in your spiritual journey. That is the goal of this project.

Warmly in The Lamb,

Hear Science

Fran Sciacca

Birmingham, AL

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THE HOLY SPIRIT

"Our Misunderstood 'Counselor'."

BIDING PRINCIPLE – In our rush to find our way out of difficulty, we may be overlooking the larger purposes of God.

"Every time we say "I believe in the Holy Spirit," we mean that we believe there is a living God able and willing to enter human personality and change it." – J.B. Phillips

any people have questions about who the Holy Spirit is. He is given a number of titles in the Bible, including "Counselor" (NIV), "Comforter" (KJV), and "Helper" (ESV). These three titles are ways of expressing the Greek word *parakletos*. A very similar Greek word is translated "encourage" elsewhere in Scripture (Philippians 2:1).

Unfortunately we sometimes end up with the wrong impression of the Holy Spirit because of our modem ways of thinking of these terms. Nowadays when we use words like "encourage" and "comfort," we tend to have images of solace, sympathy, and compassion. Consequently, the Holy Spirit—"theComforter"- is pictured as One who is deeply moved by our pain and relates to us mostly on the level of our feelings.

"Encouragement" is a modem buzzword for emotional consolation. While this is of course true, it is not the primary meaning of the words in the *parakletos* word family, nor is it the focus of the Spirit's work in our lives. In some cases, it may be the opposite! The original English word "comfort" used to mean to fortify or strengthen. The word "encourage" actually meant to *infuse* with courage.

In short, the word *parakletos* involves providing strength more than solace, courage more than consolation, and stamina more than sympathy. It characterizes a kind of help that enables those on the verge of collapse to stand and remain standing.

Seeing this distinction and understanding its implications is essential because not only will it affect whether or not we will look to God the Holy Spirit as our first option in times of discouragement and depression, but also what manner of help we will expect from Him when we do.

KEY SCRIPTURE: John 14:15-27, 16:5-15; Romans 8

STUDY QUESTIONS...

- 1. a. What do the following verses, taken together, say about our tendency when facing difficult and painful circumstances (Isaiah 65:2, Jeremiah 2:13, Galatians 3:3)?
 - b. Why do you think we tend to do this?

2.	a. God's description of one who tries to "fix" things by his own strength is found in Jeremiah
	17:5-6. Rewrite this passage in your own words.

b. Why do you think things turn out this way?

3. As we saw earlier, the "comfort" of the Holy Spirit consists more of fortitude and courage than of solace and sympathy. Write out what the following verses have to say about the different areas in which the Spirit "fortifies" us, and how or why He goes about it.

Verses	Comfort From the Spirit
Psalm 73:21-26	
Romans 15:4	
Romans 8:26-27	
Colossians 4:8	
Hebrews 3:12-13	

4. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, God provides us with a powerful statement about why He wants to comfort us. What is it, and what principle can you draw from this passage about Christians and pain?

LEARNING FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT...

t is certainly true that God is our compassionate and loving Father and that He wills what is best for His children. But it is also true that often His desire is to strengthen us through the Holy Spirit in the midst of our difficulty and pain rather than merely to deliver us from it. Sometimes

our circumstances are the very vehicles of growth and change. He promises us His strength and provides it for us through His Word, His people, and His Holy Spirit.

One of God's reasons for comforting us in our distress is so that we can comfort others in similar circumstances. For the Christian, pain sometimes has a measurably good purpose. Our greatest temptation when we face painful circumstances is to prefer consolation over true comfort, and thereby we often miss the real ministry of the Holy Spirit.

AI 5.	PPLICATION QUESTIONS List, in order of your own preference comfort or guidance when in need.	Several ex	xamples are given. (Yo	ou may also want to ask
	someone close to use this same list ar	nd let them	give their perspective	on your inclinations.)
	(1)			
	(2)		Possible Examples:]
	(3)	•	a close friend	
	(4)	•	a spouse	
	(5)	:	God (in player)	
	(6)	•	1 11 1/	
	(7)	•	Semptane	
		:	your pustor	
	(8)	Ľ	your parents]
	(9)			
6.	Now, using what you've learned from you believe it <i>should</i> be.	n this lesson	n, prioritize your list or	ne more time, this time as
	(1)			
	(2)			
	(3)			
	(4)			
	(5)			
	(6)			
	(7)			
	(8)			

7.	What do you normally expect the Holy Spirit to do for you when you go to God during difficulty?
8.	Describe how you have been able to minister genuine <i>comfort</i> and <i>encouragement</i> to someone else because of a painful experience in your own life.
9.	Look back over your answers to questions 5 and 6. Is there any indication of a need for a change in your thinking or behavior during difficulty? If so, what, and what would be a good first step?
SC	RIPTURE MEMORY (optional)
	• Our need for encouragement – 2 Peter 1:3
	• Our source of encouragement – Romans 15:13