

The God Who Stayed Behind



TouchPoint 10

In Acts 1, a physician who was loyal to Jesus wrote about what happened about 40 days after Jesus burst out of the grave. Verse 9 says that as Jesus was talking to His friends, He began to be carried up into the air, soon obscured by the clouds, and left our planet to return to heaven. Romans 8:34 says that Jesus is now in heaven, sitting at the right-hand of God, interceding for us.

It's hard for me to fully imagine what Jesus' leaving did to the disciples. The closest I can come is to think of someone who was very important to me who died, then came back to life again, only to leave after six weeks!

Because Jesus had actually come back from the dead, it may not have occurred to them that He would ever leave, even though He told them clearly that He would. John 14:1-3 is one example of when He tried to let them in on it.

Actually, Jesus had told them something else recorded in John's Gospel that they probably dismissed out of hand because they really couldn't imagine it could ever be true. In some of His very last words to His friends before His death, Jesus said:



**“..the prince of this world
now stands condemned”**

I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer;

and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now

bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.
John 16:7-13 (NIV).

Jesus told His friends that it was to their advantage that He leave! Sometimes Jesus said things that left them scratching their heads, but this was off the deep end! How could things possibly be better if He left them?

For awhile Jesus had been trying to introduce them to something, or rather Someone that was sort of hard to explain. In John 16 He referred to Him as “the Counselor” and also as “Spirit of Truth.”

In reality Jesus was trying to introduce them to something both completely distinct from and yet also something fully a part of Himself. Now, I realize that this is about as hard to fathom as Jesus Himself being God/man, but hang in there with me for awhile longer.

The Christian Bible teaches (and most Christians agree) that there are actually three distinct “persons” that make up what we think of as God. The theological term for this is “Trinity,” the 3-in-1 God.

Remember way back in one of our earliest TouchPoints where we explored the Genesis account of how we all came to be? There’s some very subtle wording in there that lets us know that what I’ve just been saying has been true since the beginning. I want you to read Genesis 1:26 and write down the words that reveal what I’ve been talking about:

Did you see them? Let us...in our image. Plural. More than one. Three, actually.

We’ve already read several passages along the way where Jesus talked about His Father. John 3:16 said that “God (the Father) so loved the world that he (the Father) gave his only Son (Jesus) that whoever believes in him (Jesus) should not perish but have everlasting life.”



Now Jesus makes concrete what had been hinted at many times in Scripture – a third part of what we call the Godhead. The Counselor, the Spirit of Truth.

One God. Three Parts. Three “persons”, if you will. Each different, each perfect,

each holy, each fully God. Perfectly unified, yet each one distinct.

Actually this helps some things make sense. For example, you might wonder why God would bother to create planets and people and stuff anyway. Well, for starters, the incredible community of pure love and holiness that this 3-person God experiences they sought to share with other beings.

I believe that when God said they wanted to create people in their image, part of the image stamped onto our very being is the desire to be with and a part of the life of others. We have families. We have friends. We love to be with certain people because they give us a sense of wholeness, of completion.

When we feel those things, we are feeling, in an imperfect way, the sort of community that God enjoys within themselves. They enjoy it so much they shared that part of their nature with us when we were created. Pretty cool, eh?

“He delights when your relationships work well.”

So when you want to be with good friends, when you want to spend quality time with your children or your spouse, you are, in a very real sense, acting like God! He delights when your relationships work well.

Without getting too deep into theology here, a careful study of the New Testament reveals that it was actually Jesus who was the active agent in our creation (see John 1:1-4 and Colossians 1:15-17). And it was Jesus, our very creator, who was the One who chose to come to this earth to live our life, die for us, and He is the one who is planning our exciting future right now.

God the Father stayed behind, giving a part of Himself, His son, and He was the one who directed and protected Jesus while He was here. Every Gospel writer records the close and constant relationship that Jesus had with His Father every day He was here.

The Counselor, the Spirit of Truth, was also present with Jesus while He was here, but His presence was to be felt in a whole new way when Jesus left this earth. This Counselor, or the Holy Spirit, as He is also called, would be the presence of God to the church throughout the entire world – at the same time.

While He was here, Jesus was always somewhere specific. Always in one place at one time. No funny magic here allowing Jesus to be present in more than one

place at one time. Jesus was physically limited to the same sorts of limitations we have – there’s just one of us and we can only be in one place at one time.

Now granted, Jesus at times would disappear and then reappear somewhere else, but even those episodes were few and far between. Mostly He walked around like everyone else. But always only in one place at any one time.

Part of the incredible power of this Holy Spirit is the ability to be present in the lives of people all over the world simultaneously! This is one of the most powerful aspects of the God of the Christian Bible.

Most “gods” have to be approached in their location because they are in one place. Only this Spirit of the living God is “omnipresent” throughout the world, living in and with each human who declares their allegiance to Jesus.

Let’s pause the conversation a bit so that you can let your imagination catch up to this mystical reality. While you are trying to absorb this, I’ll list a few texts that you should read that talk about the Holy Spirit. Use the blank lines to fill in the facet or function of the Holy Spirit that surfaces in each text:

Luke 11:9-13 _____

Acts 1:1-8 _____

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 _____

Ephesians 1:13-14 _____

Ephesians 4:29-32 _____

Romans 8:5-11 _____

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 _____

Galatians 5:19-26 _____

I know that was a lot of reading, but I wanted you to clearly see that the Holy Spirit is not some obscure spiritual after-thought or minor player in the grand scheme of things. He has a central and critical role now that Jesus has returned to the Father. The Holy Spirit is the very presence of Jesus on this earth, and He is responsible for teaching us, convicting us of what is right and wrong, of building into us fruits that make us changed people. Did you notice how central the Spirit is shown to be in those texts you just read to the good things that happen in a person's life?

And this Spirit is an incredible comfort when needed – in fact Comforter is one of His names, and He is the force of the Godhead that directs and empowers the people who make up Christ's church. He is, in fact, your direct link to heaven. I love how Romans 8 puts it:

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.”
Romans 8:26-27.

The Spirit is so closely linked with us and with God the Father and Jesus, that when we pray, He literally takes our prayers, translates them into a language for heaven, entreating God in ways we cannot.

This God Who Stayed Behind is one of the most important gifts ever given to humanity. Especially now, when we are still facing life down here before Jesus' final plan for us has been fully put in place. We need to know we are not forgotten. We need to know that God will guide us. We need to know that He will provide the gifts and tools and direction we will need



to live until Jesus is ready to make everything right again.

For all of these things, the Holy Spirit is our great gift. And since He's everywhere at once, He's with me as I'm writing this for you today. And, most importantly, He's there with you while you are reading it. I am praying as I write this that this gentle Spirit will settle into your life. He'll come in if you ask Him. It's up to you. •

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Questions

Why did Jesus leave them after He rose from the dead? (John 16.7-13)

What does the term “Trinity” mean, and who is in it?

What are some of the special attributes or functions of the Spirit? (look back at the passages listed in the TouchPoint if you need to review)

Sometimes we wonder if God really understands what’s deep in our hearts when we pray. What does the Spirit do for us when we pray?

Please send this answer sheet, either by e-mail or land mail

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