
KNOW AND GROW IN CHRIST

GROW

Matthew 1

Today we are going to learn how to have a quiet time. If you are new to the church or to church things and you hear that, you may be thinking “Wow, I think we’re going back to preschool. We’re going to pull out the mats and we’re going to take a nap.” Though there may be some people around you napping this morning that is not what we are going to do. That is not what we are about. “Quiet time” is shorthand for Protestant Christian descriptions of what it means to spend time with God, to have what we might call a devotional time. I think probably the best word is “commune.” We desire to commune with God.

It’s a time where we, in the reading of God’s word, the study of God’s word, reflection and meditation on God’s word, combined with prayer, we commune with God. You may say, “Brian, you moved from preschool to commune and you lost me with commune.” Okay, “commune” is a word that we would say is communication with God, but I think that’s an inadequate term. It’s deeper than just communication. It’s very personal, spiritual communication with God. And I want to tell you the good news that God wants to have a relationship with you. He wants to commune with you. He wants a very deep, personal, spiritual connection with you personally, and that happens in and through Jesus Christ. That’s God’s desire for you.

If you are a Christian and you’re not experiencing that, you are missing the best part of the Christian life. This is what God has actually created you for -- to know him, to enjoy him, to walk with him, to commune with him, to have a relationship.

Now, we are in this Vision series and we have said there are four things that you need to know and grow in Jesus Christ: Gather, Connect, Serve, Grow.

I. Gather

We are gathering right now. You have done that well. You are here. You were all here on time and early and ready to go. I say that in faith, actually. You are here, though. You are gathering.

II. Connect

Connecting relationally. This is typically the one commitment or context that is critical for spiritual growth, because we are isolated in so many ways. And truthfully, you have an enemy of your soul who wants to keep you in isolation. The moment you come out of that isolation, overcoming whatever your concerns or fears or anxieties or apprehensions –

whatever those things are that keep you from connecting, and you move into relationship with other people and you begin to connect -- you begin to grow spiritually.

If you say, "Well, it's just so hard to do; I don't know how to do it," we've given you the ABC's.

- A: A Shared Life.
- B: Bible. Bible centered in terms of your content. It doesn't mean you are always talking about the bible, but it does mean that Jesus Christ is a part of your conversation.
- And C: Caring for One Another.

So, A: A Shared Life (it's hard to get that A, but ABC – somehow we did it). That's where you begin to open up and let other people in. You take an interest in their lives and you are sharing life together. You don't have to go to a meeting. You don't have to go to a home group. It's wonderful if you go to a home group. It's wonderful if you come to a class. All of those are great contexts, but we are in those programs just trying to facilitate you connecting, because you are God's program. That's right. You are God's program. God has changed the world through you. Now, you tell me. Is God in trouble or is God in good shape? We connect. We share life. We share with one another the bible and the things of God's word.

I was just reading this week about Apollos. Apollos was a really gifted communicator. I mean, he had the goods. People wanted to come and hear him. And he spent time with a couple named Aquila and Priscilla. That's kind of cool if you get married and your names rhyme, right? Aquila and Priscilla -- they are in the bible and they were tentmakers like Paul. In the providence of God, they lived together with Paul for a while and they made tents. You can imagine, you would grow with Paul living in your house, wouldn't you? So he disciples them, and then one day they meet Apollos. All these people are coming to Apollos and they are hearing him, but he's confused. So they pull him aside. They take him into their home. They spend time with him, and they disciple him. They begin to share with him more clearly the things of God while he is influencing all these other people. It's a very vivid biblical picture of how we connect relationally, share Christ, care for one another, and we grow together.

Connecting is a very critical point and usually the launching pad for considerable growth. If the enemy can keep you isolated, he can keep you from growing. That's typically the truth.

III. Serve

This is just a spiritual principle. If God is in you and God is blessing you, you are going to be turned outward. Giving, serving -- giving of your time, talents, and treasures. Sharing not just your finances, but the gifts that God has given you

to bless other people. And if we violate that spiritual principle, we begin to experience an eternal corruption, where we just turn in on ourselves and say “It’s about what I get.” It’s impossible to have prolonged spiritual health if we’re not turned outward.

Now we come today to:

IV. Grow

We have used this term to talk about what it means to spend time with God, to really walk with God. But that’s focused upon a time where you come aside with God, to spend it in his word and in prayer. You talk to God and God talks to you and you are empowered to do what God has called you to do. If there is anything going on in your life right now where you feel like “Okay, I just lack the power of God -- I even lack the motivation to do what God wants me to do,” I would say that this is the key for you and for me in this area.

Scripture tells us that we are in a spiritual battle -- that we wrestle not against flesh and blood. That term, that phrase is so descriptive. We are in a spiritual battle. We have a foe that is opposing us and trying to destroy and bring destruction in our lives. However, it’s not one of those battles where we are dropping bombs at 40,000 feet. We are wrestling. There is an intense, personal struggle going on in our lives. And scripture tells us we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but that we are opposed by principalities and powers and supernatural powers. We are in a spiritual fight. And learning to walk in the word of God, learning to receive and commune with God, receiving power -- the power of his promise, the power of his good news, the power of the gospel, the eternal word of God coming in and making new, giving us strength, answering prayer as we lift up our requests to God – that’s how we overcome. That’s how we cut away obstacles that are opposing us as we progress together in the Lord.

As I was reflecting on this this week, I was thinking about the intense, very, very personal requests that I’ve brought before the Lord, where I was concerned about this child, and praying for my marriage, and praying for my wife, or praying about our finances, or praying about health issues. Many of these things would be so intensely personal that I couldn’t even share them with you. But how God moved and answered prayer, and how I would say my entire life is just a testament to God’s mercy and God’s grace that I’ve received from him in prayer. So many times I’ve gone to that place to commune with God, where my heart hasn’t been right, and God turns the dial, adjusts my heart, and realigns me with him so that I can progress through the day.

Today’s message really is going to be on how to do that, because I recognize that it’s a struggle. Hopefully in this introduction you’ve been motivated to say, “Yes, I want this. I need this. So how do I do it?” You need four things to begin with. Really, you need two things. You have to have two things. I’m going to give you a list. You need:

1. A Bible.
2. Yourself.

Those two things are essential: a bible and yourself. The next two are optional, but I think they'll help you.

3. A Bible Reading Plan.
4. A Journal.

We have a bible reading plan here at Riverside that we encourage people to use. I'm not going to describe all of it to you, but it has you read two chapters of scripture a day. If you're here right now and you are saying, "I am not communing with God. I am not consistently spending time with God," if you will allow me, I'm going to give you some advice. You can ignore this advice, but it is good advice. I want to encourage you to listen to the advice, because that's why I'm giving you the advice. You are God's program. It is not first and foremost about being able to say, "Okay, I've read the whole bible through. I've read the whole bible through in a year." No, no, no. It's communing with God.

You didn't sit down at breakfast today and say, "Okay, I have got to get through a year's worth of breakfasts and I've got to just start today and I've got to have 365 breakfasts. No, you got your nourishment, right? The goal is for you to be nourished in the Lord and to commune with him. My encouragement is to just do the New Testament. If you're not doing anything right now, just do one chapter in the New Testament, starting in the gospel of Matthew. Go to January 1 and start there in the gospel of Matthew and begin to progress through the New Testament readings. If you don't stay up, if you fall behind, it's okay. Just pick back up. Keep going. If you don't get through a whole chapter, it's alright. You are the goal. We are wanting to learn to commune with the Lord. Okay?

I was going to bring my journal out here and I forgot to bring it, but any journal will do. I encourage you to follow that plan and to write down as you progress through in your time with God, and I'm going to tell you exactly how to do that. Before I do that, though, we have to talk about generally understanding the scripture that you're reading. If you are a young man and you are dating a woman and she sends you a letter and this is a "Dear John" letter, by definition she is saying goodbye. She is cutting you loose, right? If you take a part of that letter and say, "Oh look. She thinks I'm wonderful. It says right here, 'I have so enjoyed the time that we've spent together. You are a wonderful person,'" and you go around saying, "Look at what she thinks of me!" No, what she thinks of you is that she wants you to leave. Okay? If you interpret "she thinks I'm wonderful" out of the context of "Dear John, goodbye," you are not being true to the context of that letter, right?

When we read the scripture, we must understand the context that we are reading. If we just pick a line and we pick a verse and we pick a phrase and we don't know how it fits, we may not be understanding accurately what we are reading. You may be thinking, "Okay, this is a challenge. I want to just commune with God, but now I've got to do a whole bible study." I get it. It can be frustrating, but I'm going to give you two simple questions that you answer. Okay? Here are the two questions:

- 1) What did the author originally intend to say to his first readers?

That's the first question you want to answer. So, Matthew wrote this. He had an original audience in mind. What did he intend for those readers to hear and take away from this passage of scripture? That is the first question you want to be able to answer.

- 2) Then the second question: How does this fit in with the rest of the bible? How does this fit in with the overall story of scripture?

We understand that this is the message of the bible: God created everything. God created man as the crown of his creation, and man has sinned. Man has fallen short of God's glory. Man is unable to help himself. Man is unable to save himself and the penalty for that sin is the judgment of God. The penalty of that sin is actually a very severe eternal separation from God and judgment. And we are unable and really unwilling to help ourselves. But God in his mercy, God in his grace sends his son Jesus Christ to die for us, to live for us, to live a perfect, holy life and to offer himself as a sacrifice to pay the debt that we should pay and that we are unable to pay so that we can be forgiven of our sin. There is salvation in Jesus Christ. There is grace. Salvation is a gift. All who trust in Jesus Christ receive this gift. The Holy Spirit comes into their lives and they are changed forever and they receive the promise of eternal life. That is the story of the bible.

Now, if you come to a proverb or a law and you read this and the scripture tells me that I should be, according to God's word, "slow to speak and quick to hear," you are receiving a tidbit of wisdom, right? It's very valuable information, but what you'll discover is that it's very hard to do, very difficult to do.

If you interpret that truth "Be quick to hear, slow to speak" – if you interpret that out of context for the arc of the story of the bible, of the whole message of the bible, you might say something like this: "Okay, God wants me not to be talking all the time. God wants me to care about people. God wants me to really listen. All of that's true. And if I do that, then God will approve of me, God will love me, God will accept me, and I'll have a relationship with God and God will be able to use me and I'll have spiritual power." And that will never work. You are interpreting that truth out of the context of the whole entire message of scripture, because scripture tells you though that in and of itself is true, you are completely

unable to sustain that kind of obedience. You need a new heart. You need God's mercy. Many times you have spoken when you would have been better off to listen, and you have listened when maybe you should have spoken. We are all guilty of those types of sins. The message of the bible is the good news that there is forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

So:

- 1) What is the original intention of this passage by the author to his original readers? and
- 2) How does it fit in the overall message of the bible?

Let's do Matthew 1 right now. Let's jump in. This is your worst nightmare. You're starting. You are going to study the scriptures. You are going to commune with God, and the first 16 verses are a genealogy. Let's see.

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.

We are communing with God, right?

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

Now we are deeply communing with God. I'm not making light of God's word. I think you understand that we come to these passages and we are saying, "Lord, this is just not how I pictured it." Continuing in verse 12:

And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the

father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Now, what I do as I'm journaling is write the date: Sunday, March 5, 2017, and the passage of scripture: Matthew 1. Then I divide the paper into three parts. Here is an outline for your communion with God.

- I. God and Me
- II. Christ and Me
- III. The Holy Spirit and Me

If you understand or know the Trinity: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, you've just memorized our outline. Really, we're focusing here on God in general, but if we were looking at a person in the Trinity, it would be God the Father and me, or my response, Christ and me, or my response, and the Holy Spirit and me, or my response.

Let's look at the first section.

- I. God and Me

I want to encourage you to ask one simple question of the text: What does this passage teach me about God? What does this passage reveal to me about who God is? As we do this, here is what I'm going to do. I'm going to share with you a couple of highlights from last year when I went through Matthew 1 and what I recorded in my journal. I'm going to let you into some of my own personal recordings for a moment. Don't worry, nothing too messy. I say that because I want you to understand this: I'm not attempting right now to do a comprehensive bible study of Matthew 1. That's not the goal. The goal is not for you to sit down and flesh out all of the themes and everything that's here. The goal is for you to commune with God.

So when you read Matthew 1 and you ask this question: "Alright Lord, help me. Open my heart. Show me here what this passage teaches me about you," you may come up with some very different things. There is a lot here in Matthew Chapter 1. Let me just give you the overall outline. After you do that, then your response, me. Ask this simple question: What is my response to that truth? The most common responses include worship (adoration, praise, thanksgiving) and/or repentance. And when it involves repentance, my encouragement to you is to get brutally honest before God. He knows you. Don't hold back. Open your soul. Be very descriptive and lay your soul out before the Lord in prayer.

Here's the good news. All you really need is this first question. If you say, "Brian, I need something so simple," just take this first question to God. "God, what does this passage teach me about you?" If you really begin to see God then you allow your soul to respond, you will commune with God. Everything starts with God. I just want to drive this home for a minute. Begin with God. Always begin with God. You can take this pattern for your quiet time, your communion with God, and use it all through life. You get in your car, you go out, you pull out onto Rock Island and someone cuts you off, you just say, "Lord, what does this experience teach me about you?"

Just start with that question. Let this be the routine of your life. Begin with God. God, what are you doing in this moment? What are you teaching me? What are you showing me? Give me eyes to see who you are and what you are doing.

When I was in this passage last year, this is what I immediately came away with. I read the genealogy and then I read this description: 14 generations from the time of Abraham to the time of David, 14 generations from the time of David to the deportation, 14 generations from the deportation until Christ. I know from scripture that he's not giving a comprehensive layout of every generation, but he's giving highlights. He's giving an overview. But you don't even have to know that. He's emphasizing the perfect form and majesty of God's plan. That's one of the major themes that jumps out for me in Matthew Chapter 1. It is this: God has an amazing plan, an amazing master plan, and he's working this plan to save us.

I take that from these two aspects in the passage: 1) He tells us about the succession of generations and the perfect uniform plan of God. 2) Then he tells us about the birth of Jesus, the conception of Jesus, and he emphasizes what? That

this was prophesied by Isaiah hundreds of years ago. So God has a plan. And God isn't just making this up as he goes along, but he has laid all of this out in advance. He has ordered the generations and he has prophesied what he's going to do. He put this in the heart and on the lips of Isaiah, and now Jesus comes at the perfect moment, perfect response to the perfect fulfillment of God's plan. Okay?

So, what is my response to that? On that particular day, my response was this: "Lord, I'm a mess. I get impatient if I don't get what I want right now. And I can be harsh and mean and ugly. I'm not living like, 'Wow, God's got a perfect plan and my life fits in that plan.' If I were living beforehand I'd be one of these three fourteens of generations and who knows? Right? I'm just filling the spot that God has for me. Lord, I'm living like, 'Where are you?' I'm not living full of confidence that you are calling the shots."

So I begin to repent. I begin to worship God and say, "God, you are amazing in terms of your wisdom. And you are amazing in terms of how you order the universe and order our lives and order history. And you have called me into that. What this passage tells me is that even though on my own apart from you I can be impatient, I just fail to see the big picture. Well, that was your plan. It was to save me from that. It was to save me from my impatience and that I'm cleansed in Christ. And now you are opening my eyes to see what it is you are doing."

That's a little bit what communion with the Lord on that day last year looked like for me. I would suggest to you that if you are coming into that moment and you are in a bad place spiritually, or you are battling a certain sin or you are really anxious about something, that's likely to define what communion looks like for you that day. But you need to hear from God. You need to hear God's truth, the perspective of who God is, and that he reigns to give you perspective into what you are dealing with.

The next segment is Christ and me.

II. Christ and Me

Here we ask this question: What does this passage teach me about Christ? Note: You may not be able to answer this question. We are in Matthew 1. The passage is about the conception of Christ, so there are things that are taught here about Jesus. Hopefully you will be able to draw some of those out. But you may be in Leviticus and you might be reading a passage of scripture where you are saying, "I don't see any obvious reference to Christ."

What I would say to you is that you want to move to a place where you understand the bible -- what we would categorize as bible literacy, where you have a general ability to read the scripture and answer those two initial questions: What did the author originally intend? And how does this fit into scripture? You grow in your bible literacy, but then as you grow,

you become fluent in bible. Right? Then you are able more easily to answer questions of “How do I see Jesus Christ at work in Leviticus?” It will come with time. Don’t be frustrated if you’re not able to answer this question.

What I want to emphasize is that even if you can’t answer this question, Jesus Christ provides for you everything you need as revealed in this text, no matter what the text is. Jesus is your provision. Think of it theologically this way: God is the source of all good things. He is loving. He is the source of all good things, and he provides those to you in Christ. So what did I say I needed? I need wisdom. I need patience. Where am I going to get that? I get it in Jesus. Jesus provides that. Jesus cleanses me of my sin and he provides for me everything I need. He is wisdom for me. He is the character of patience and his promise is to do that in me, and I receive it in Christ.

Here’s what this looks like for me. “Alright, Lord, I am so grateful. Your plan is amazing. As I am in awe of your plan, I am aware of how short I can be. Just yesterday I spoke this way to someone I love very much. I was short and impatient. I want to ask you to forgive me. God, thank you that you don’t rule the universe according to my ups and downs and my whims. I praise you for your wisdom. Then Lord, as I ask for forgiveness, I receive forgiveness in Christ, because he has provided that for me. But not only do I receive forgiveness, Lord, I’m so grateful that he has promised to give me wisdom and that in Christ you give me wisdom. You promise those who ask will receive, and you are changing my character. I thank you Lord that I am no longer that impatient, angry person, but you are molding me more into Jesus every day.” How does Christ provide all that I need to respond to this text? That’s really the key question in this section. Grab ahold of that. See Christ as your provision in all things.

III. The Holy Spirit

Ask: “What can I receive by faith in Christ according to this text? How would God have me obey according to this passage?” In my quiet time, in my communion with God, I’m moving to the point where I want to receive, I want to ask, and I want to commit. Those are three key phrases for you to write down: I want to receive. I want to ask. And I want to commit.

I want to give you a 15 second Trinitarian lesson. The emphasis of scripture is that all good things originate with God the Father. He is eternal love. He is eternally loving and all good things come from him. He is the source. When you begin with God and me, that’s the idea. Everything good comes from God. Christ and me – all those good things are provided to me in Christ. I cannot get them any other way. They are provided to me in Jesus Christ. Then the Holy Spirit makes those blessings present in my life right now. The Holy Spirit manifests God’s goodness in my life in this moment.

Originating, provided, made present right now. You need this “made present” moment before you get up and say, “Amen,” right? You say, “God, thank you. Anoint me with your Spirit. Empower me. Thank you for forgiving me. Thank

you for cleansing me. I receive right now the promise that you are giving me all the wisdom I need and that I will go from this place renewed in your strength and in your wisdom. Anoint me in your Spirit. I commit to obey today. I commit to trust in you.” And as you are progressing, you know what you discover? It’s like, “Wow, now that I think about it, yesterday I was grumbling and complaining. That’s really not a manifestation of trusting in God and his wisdom and his plan.” I am now communing with God, his word bringing power. I am expressing my requests to the Lord in prayer.

Let me end with this. If you are journaling and you are writing this out, I encourage you to write to the Lord. You are addressing everything you are writing unto the Lord. And after you do that, if you haven’t been verbalizing it throughout, stop and pray through it. Verbalize it all to God. Then I would end with this in the Holy Spirit section. Whatever you need from God, you write it out to him. You ask him: “God, I need you to bring me a wife. I am done being single. Bring me a wife.” If that is the emotion of your soul, say it just like that. Unless you are a woman. You would say, “Bring me a husband.”

“Lord, I need money. I know you are able to provide for me what I need without my heart running after it, but Lord I need it and I need it now.” “Lord, I need healing.” “Lord, I need wisdom.” You may sit down and open God’s word and read Matthew 1. You say, “Okay, God and me. What does this passage teach me about God?” and nothing comes. It’s just blank. God’s not there. You’re not even sure you’re there. That’s what you pray. “God, I’m at a place spiritually where I see nothing here. And that tells me that my spiritual tank is so empty, and my understanding is so low right now, I need help Lord. My prayer this morning is for you to bring a revival to my soul and open your word.” You may pray for 10 days straight. “God, just help me to pray. I’m in Matthew 10. I still haven’t learned a thing about God. Lord, help me. Open my eyes. I’m a mess. I’m a bigger mess than I thought. I’m just coming to you saying, ‘Lord, I’m praying until I can pray.’” And God will answer that prayer. Amen?!