

RECEIVE FROM GOD

John 14:16

As you find John 14:16, let me just remind you that we are preparing for Easter. We are two weeks away from Easter Sunday morning, April 1. A week from today will be Palm Sunday and we will be full throttle into our Easter celebration. On Good Friday we will have three services: 7:00 am, noon, and 7:00 pm. You are invited and encouraged to attend one of those three scripture readings and share the Lord's Supper together. The Apostle Paul told us that every time we take communion we proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. So we will gather on Good Friday, proclaiming the death of the Lord through the sharing of communion together in a wonderful, intimate worship service that will last approximately one hour. So, 7:00 in the morning, noon, 7:00 pm. Find out which service works best for you. There will be ministry for children only during the evening service at 7:00 pm, and that's up through age 3. Otherwise, we are anticipating that children will join us for the service on Good Friday.

John 14:16: "Receive From God." "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever."

We are preparing for Easter. These verses in the gospel of John are Jesus' words to his apostles immediately before his crucifixion. This section in the gospel of John is a marvelous section to look at as we move into the Easter season because it is the Passion Week in scripture. It is the week that these events took place, and Jesus is teaching us some very important material.

In fact, Jesus is teaching us some of the richest, some of the deepest scriptural material on the nature of God. We understand from this section of scripture that God is triune. God is Trinity. God is one. God exists in three persons and each person is fully God. Let me say again those three statements that unpack the doctrine of the Trinity for us. God is one. God exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God.

Now, think about this for a moment. If you pray and if you fellowship with God and are not aware that God is triune, that God is Trinity, then ask yourself the question: How well do you really know God? How much does the nature of God, as revealed in scripture, influence and define and direct your very fellowship with the living God? Well, the verses in this section of John (John 14, 15, 16, 17 –

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right here in this area) teach us a lot about fellowshiping with God, about walking with God, about prayer, about the word of God.

If you're here and you are a follower of Jesus Christ, then I'm going to think you probably know it's important for us to pray. It's important for us to spend time in God's word together. But I find it rather fascinating that Christians often struggle to spend time with God in prayer and the study of God's word. Am I alone in that assumption? Probably not, right?

It's interesting – there is a study that was published in the “Annals of Internal Medicine” in 2014. And no, I do not read that on a regular basis; I read it in a secondary source. This is what that study said: When a doctor prescribes some medicine (a prescription), one third of people will not even fill the prescription. Then another third will not take the medicine following the directions. They will not take the medicine as prescribed. That's troubling, isn't it?

What makes it even more troubling is that when that number is compared to the administration of medication to our pets, studies show that when we take our pet to the vet and he/she prescribes medicine for the pet, we are actually more faithful to give the pet their medicine than we are to take the medicine that our own doctor prescribes for us, which can only mean that our pets are more important to us than we are to ourselves.

Why don't we read the word of God? Why don't we pray? The comparison only takes us so far. The message is not: Take your medicine. There is a helpful connection: It's good for us. It helps us. It helps us to be spiritually whole. It does cure us of malady and spiritual disease. It is essential. But spending time with God does not have the unpleasant connotation that taking medicine often does for us. It doesn't have undesirable side effects.

Do you know why I think people don't spend time with God? This is an unscientific answer based on personal experience, 30 years in ministry, a lot of pastoral experience, a lot of relational experience. I think people don't spend time with God because they don't know how to receive from God. They don't even think in terms of spending time with God as receiving from God. We are so pushed by: “I ought to do this.” We are so pushed by guilt. We are so pushed by shame and manipulation and legalism that we just don't get it. We don't get that when we spend time with God, we are to receive from God.

I married an amazing cook. She is just so gifted. Imagine that my wife calls me to dinner. “Hey, it's dinner time!” “I just did this last night. Again?!” The entire experience is one where I know I need

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the nourishment I'm receiving. My problem is not, "Ugh, I've just got to eat." My problem is that I don't want to stop eating, because this is so delightful! We really don't see spending time with God in that regard. I think it's the number one reason why we don't pray, why we don't open God's word.

Interestingly enough, as I share this message, there is the likelihood that you will take steps to put it into practice. You will go home and you'll open God's word tomorrow and you'll be thinking about receiving the word of God. Now, I hope before the message is over that I give you some very precise, exact answers on how to do that, and how to relate to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- how to receive from God -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But be aware of this. You may very well have this experience. You open God's word, you go to pray, and...it just doesn't happen. The reason is because you haven't learned to receive from God. You haven't learned to eat God's word. So you are still taking in milk and haven't moved on to the good stuff.

I remember when our kids were little that we would heat some food and try it out. Beth would say, "Here, taste this." It tasted horrible! No salt, no seasoning. If your whole spiritual life is characterized by only having infant's milk, yeah, you sit down for a meal and you just can't take it in. Here's what Hebrews 5:12 says: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food." We have to grow. Don't hear me condemning you. "Oh, you're just drinking milk, drinking milk." No, no, no, no. Drink milk so you can move on, so you can graduate, so you can proceed forward to receive from God a wider diet.

So, let's do it. How do I receive from God? Well, in our text for today: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever," we see Jesus telling us about how to receive from God -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We get some indication of how we relate to God. So we will start with the Father.

I. The Father.

"The Father will give you..." He says, "I will ask the Father, and the Father will give you...." Here's the first thing we need to know about receiving from God: Always, always begin with God. I encourage you, when you sit down and open a text of scripture, do not think primarily about reading your Bible through in a year. It's wonderful if you read your Bible through in a year. It's great if you read the

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whole Bible through in 40 days. I'm all for reading scripture. But my desire for you is that your goal would not be to finish the scripture. My desire for you is for you to meet with God when you open the scripture. My desire for you is for you to commune with God. My desire for you is for you to fellowship with God, for you to know how to receive from God. Always begin with God.

What do I mean by "Begin with God?" I mean this, very simply. Ask this question: What does this verse, what does this paragraph teach me about God? What does it reveal to me about who God is? Begin with God. I want to encourage you. I want to give you two words to associate with the Father. Now, I am summarizing for you John Owen. Puritan John Owen, Communion with the Triune God - it's a 400+ year old amazing work. I recommend it. I think we have it at our bookstore. We may be out because we are just selling these 400-year-old Puritan books like 10 to 12 a day, so they may be all gone. We buy three copies and they last two or three years. It's amazing. You don't have to read Communion with the Triune God, but I want to point you to that source because it deeply impacted me in terms of understanding how our fellowship with God relates to God as Father, Son, Holy Spirit. We begin with God. "God, what are you doing? What does this teach me about you?" Two words to filter your answer: plan and love.

God the Father is initiating his plan in his creation to redeem his creation. Salvation is pictured to us in scripture as the initiation of God's plan for our salvation. God is first. God is primary. God is self-sufficient. God is this awesome being who needs nothing. And he is giving his love.

So, think John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." God is giving. It's the overflow of his love into his creation, "...that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" - John 3:16. James 1:5 tells us: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all generously without finding fault." God gives. God gives generously. He gives without underhandedness. He gives without using it as a chance to bring repercussions that are negative.

Think of Luke 11, Luke 18. "If you, as a father who is not perfect, who is not good as God is good, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" God gives as an expression of his love. God has a plan. When we open the scripture, we want to be saying, "Okay, God, what are you doing? What are you beginning? What is your plan? What are you doing?"

Now friends, this whole orientation, I'm going to suggest to you, is so radical and so uncommon that this truth alone will absolutely change your life. If you learn to just look for God and ask, "Where is

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God? Who is God? What is God doing?" here is my supposition. Here is why I am making the argument that it's radical. If you're here and you're like, "I don't know where I'm at with Christ. I don't know if I believe. I don't know where I'm at with the whole thing of church," I'm so glad you're here. And if you will allow me for the next 30 seconds just to talk to people who are followers of Christ, you should not leave. Just stick around. It will be interesting to you. But I want to speak to that group for a minute.

Here is why I know it's radical. Because it has become common for people to walk out of church, get in their car and say, "You know what? I didn't like that song. The music was too loud today. Can you believe how long Brian preached? What's with the sport coat? When did he start wearing jeans?" Right? On and on and on! Where is God? Where is the talk that comes out and says, "Today, God met with me!" Aren't you tired of the human? Of the created? Of the mundane? Aren't you tired of evaluating? Where is God in our lives? Where is the excitement to say, "You know what? I was captured by this view of God giving his Son at the cross -- for me!" It doesn't take any faith to see what God is not doing. God is awesome and he is working. Start with God.

Be aware. You are going to sit down. You are going to open the Bible. And you are going to say, "I don't see anything about God. I'm drinking milk." Here's what you need to do. You need to stop and say, "God, forgive me! Forgive me that I'm spiritually impoverished and spiritually blind and that I'm so enamored with the created that I don't see the Creator. My whole life is taken up with the temporal and the material, which isn't evil. It's okay. But shouldn't I be able to see you in that?"

You see, what I am advocating to you in terms of fellowship – it's not just a way to read the Bible. It's not just a way to pray. It's a way to live. We walk into a room: "Where is God? What is God doing? Is he here? Yes, he's here. He's everywhere! What's he initiating? How is his love being expressed? What does he want me to do here to express his love?" I wake up. I pray. I eat. I go to work. Well, God, what are you doing? Where are you? What are you initiating? What do you want me to believe you for? It's a way to live in anything. It's a way to see life. It's a way to begin with God. That's #1.

II. The Son.

Jesus says, "I will ask the Father." The Son provides all we need. He is the one and only mediator between God and mankind. God's plan of salvation begins with God the Father in sending and

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giving the Son on our behalf. And now we read the Son saying, “I will ask.” It’s not because it is initiated with the Son, but because the Son has come in obedience to the Father, and now he is fulfilling the Father’s will. There is a marvelous truth here that as soon as we start with God, it’s transforming as we see a dim glimpse of the glory of God. Immediately, I become aware of my own shortcomings and my own sin and my own failures and my own weakness. I become aware that I open the word of God and I’m not spiritually enthralled and that I need grace. And as I begin with God, I then receive from the Son. Everything I need comes to me through Jesus Christ. Everything. So if my initial vision of God leads me to repent, then I receive forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ.

This, friends, is the hinge on which the door swings, if I could say it like that. Because as soon as anything spiritual starts to happen and we are drawn toward God, we will have a decision to make. Will I seek to just work harder, clean myself up, earn my way to God, or will I receive grace by faith in Jesus? It either shuts the door and slams it shut, or it swings wide open into the economy of God. It’s the pivot point. It’s the hinge: grace. So that as I’m seeing God, everything I need to respond – to worship, to repent, to obey, wisdom, creativity – everything I receive by faith in Jesus Christ.

The key words with the Father are: plan, love. The key word with the Son is: grace. I receive grace from Jesus. Jesus said he is the living water. Jesus said he is the way. Jesus said he is the truth. Jesus said he is the life. Jesus said he is the bread of life -- all of these images, over and over, to teach us that he is everything.

So, just a couple of biblical reminders. 1 Corinthians 2:2: “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Philippians 1:21: “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” This is life! As long as I’m here, it’s Christ! Jesus is everything! And death, Christian, death only makes it better, because then I’m face to face.

How many of you remember my bucket list sermon? Anyone remember the bucket list? What in the world does a Christian need a bucket list for? I’m going to paradise! “Oh, before I go to paradise, let me just skydive.” I’ll fly in heaven! Right?! It’s crazy.

The man who is saying, “I just want to do this before I get married,” is not ready to get married. He doesn’t understand the treasure, the intimacy of marriage. And the Christian who is saying, “I’ve

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just got to experience this before I go to heaven,” is... Colossians 1:27: “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Listen to this quote from one of my heroes, John Newton. John Newton was saying: “There are a thousand reasons why I shouldn’t be saved, why I can’t be saved. But I am saved because God saves.” And he continues that thought by saying this:

When I am beaten from everything else, it still remains true that Christ has died, that he now lives and reigns, that he is able to save to the uttermost (Hebrews 7:25), and that he has said, “Him that cometh I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).” “In no wise,” and “to the uttermost” – these are great words. They have an extensive significance and take in all varieties of cases, characters, and circumstances. Upon such unlimited sovereign promises I cast my anchor, and they hold me. Otherwise I should be the sport of winds and waves. Dr. Isaac Watts’ motto shall be mine. It’s big enough for him, for me, for you, and for thousands that approve it: “In Jesus alone is my everything.” In him I have an offering, an altar, a temple, a priest, a sun, a shield, a savior, a shepherd, a hiding place, a resting place, food, medicine, riches, honor, wisdom, righteousness, holiness – in short, everything. In Christ I have everything.

I was talking to someone about the vision of the church, about how simple our vision is. “We exist to know and grow in Jesus Christ.” If that seems complicated, let me simplify it: Jesus is our vision. Jesus Christ is everything. He is the only way to the Father. He is the only way to the kingdom of heaven. He is the only way to eternal life. He is the only way to a restoration of all that matters -- grace that we receive from Christ.

III. The Holy Spirit.

We commune, we receive from God the Father. We begin with God. We receive from Christ the Son grace upon grace. Grace and truth we receive from the Holy Spirit. “I will ask the Father, he will give you another Helper, another Helper to be with you forever.”

A proper doctrine of the Holy Spirit is so essential to our Christian experience, because the Holy Spirit manifests the kingdom of God here and now in this moment, in this place, in you and around

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you, in us and around us. The word “Helper” – we transliterate the Greek into Paraclete. It’s a difficult word to precisely translate. We say advocate, counselor, helper, a helping presence. The ESV study bible uses that little designation.

The verse really makes it clear. If you look at the verse, Jesus is saying he will be another Helper. He will help you all the time, forever, as I am helping you here with my physical presence. “Better for me to go,” he tells his apostles, “so that I can give the Spirit, than for me to stay.” That’s a dramatic statement if we understand the implications of it. The Holy Spirit is manifesting the presence of God right now in our lives and around us.

Here’s what’s so critical in terms of receiving from God. There is this “here and now” component that the Holy Spirit brings home to us when we have this understanding and anticipation that the Spirit of God is here working right now.

There are so many places in scripture where we could go to demonstrate this. I am going to demonstrate it just in one reference compared to another. In Luke 11:20, Jesus has been accused by his adversaries of casting out demons by the power of Satan. They commit a horrible sin -- the sin that’s without pardon, because they know they are experiencing something supernatural. They even know it’s from God. But rather than humble themselves before God, they want to grasp in their own pride for their own power, so they call God Satan. It’s a dreadful condition, where our hearts use the things of God, misuse the things of God, and attribute them to Satan in order to elevate our own position or status.

Jesus refutes that -- that’s the context for this quote. “But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” The finger of God there is a reference for the power of God. “If I’m casting out demons by the power of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” Jesus sets people free by the power of God. Jesus liberates. There is freedom in Jesus Christ. That’s the message.

Look at the parallel in Matthew 12:28 -- same context. “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” I want you just to see how the Spirit of God comes in power in this moment to manifest the power of God to bring the kingdom of God.

Don’t misunderstand me. We don’t experience the kingdom in fullness now. It’s significant, but partial. The final fulfillment will only come in eternity. It will only come when God settles the whole thing and wraps it all up. But this is why Paul can say, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” I

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am experiencing Christ by the Holy Spirit. Everything that God has for me is through Christ, manifested by the Spirit right here and now.

So friends, if you come from a tradition where you have debated about the gifts of the Spirit and the work of the Spirit, I don't want to engage in that debate. It's the wrong question. The right question is: Do you understand that it's the Spirit of God who manifests the kingdom of God and that God desires to come on you and in you and through you in power?

There is a lot of controversy that swirls around specific individual gifts. It's not helpful. It's just myopic. We need a broader perspective to say: "You cannot get saved apart from the work of the Holy Spirit." If the Holy Spirit is in you, God desires to bring his kingdom through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

I find it so helpful when I'm in a place of opening God's word. I begin with God: What does this passage teach me about God? As I react, as I respond, as I begin to see, I'm saying, "God, open my eyes. Help me see that everything I need is found in Christ." But now there's a life to live. There's wisdom that's needed. There is courage that's needed. There is faith that's needed. There is obedience to walk in. God wants to save and restore and work all around me. That will happen as I commit to obey through faith in Christ, believing that the Holy Spirit is at work here and now. And the Holy Spirit does just prompt and do wonderful things.

In preaching right now, I'm reminded of Kathy Roe. One day I'm sitting in my office and I'm just praying, "Lord, I want to see people saved. I want to see you work." I'm there at my computer and an overwhelming impulse came to go down to the laundromat. We own the shopping center, if you're new. The laundromat is a tenant at the end of the center. So I went down there, met Kathy Roe and led her to the Lord. She came to the church how many years ago? Twelve years ago. She now works for one of our ministry partners.

Listen, I wish that happened to me all the time. I wish it was that dramatic. God wants to work through your life. God wants to manifest his presence now in and through you.

So why don't we spend more time with God? Why don't we come to the dinner table when we're called? We haven't learned to receive from God. We haven't understood that there's a buffet of grace and a marvelous revelation and intimacy with God waiting to be unveiled. We haven't understood that it's not just for the future, that the Holy Spirit wants to work in your life right now.

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So commune with God. Deeply fellowship with him - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - receiving from him, giving back as you receive, returning worship, obedience, faith. Do this when you open God's word, when you begin the day, when you enter a room, when you begin a task, when you face a trial. Begin with God. Trust in Jesus for everything and walk now in the Holy Spirit. Amen?

Worship team, would you come up and join me on the platform, please? I want to encourage you now in this time of response to receive from the Lord. There are individuals here who need to receive salvation. You need to receive forgiveness of your sin and respond by trusting in Jesus Christ. As God's Spirit stirs you, the promise for you is eternal life through Jesus Christ, not through your own righteousness, your own goodness, your own works, your own performance. It's a gift that you receive by faith in Jesus Christ.