

Would you pray with me?

Father, we thank you that you're here.

Thank you for being with us. In Jesus mighty name, Amen. My name is Darin Flieger. If we haven't met yet, I am the director of our high school and our college ministries here at Covenant. And we're going to be continuing this series unveiling the heart of God from Genesis to Jesus.

And Olivia Estep has been putting together this awesome picture of of Jesus. And you've noticed it's filled in with color and detail a little bit more each week. It's not Jesus with highlights. Don't panic. He's getting more and more detail.

So it'll be really fun when we reach the end of this and you get to see the whole progression. She's been painting. It's been fantastic. So thank you, Olivia Eastet, for putting that together. Now, if I'm honest with you, I feel weird standing up here sometimes because I work at a church.

But my honest experience is that Christianity has and often does disappoint me. Quite frequently. I find myself let down by Christianity a lot. And I don't know if you do too, if you find that Christianity sometimes disappoints you, but if you do, you're not alone.

The truth is, I have certain expectations for what Christianity should be and for what Christianity should do. And those expectations aren't often met because we know that any disappointment is really just. Anytime you have expectations that don't meet reality, there's a disconnect. I don't know what your expectations are for Christianity, but you have some because you're here this morning. So for some reason, you feel that Christianity is offering you something and you have some kind of expectation for what that is and what it should be.

So my question for you is, why are you sitting in this church right now? What are you expecting? What do you want out of this? What is Christianity doing for you? Is it to give you some sense of purpose in life?

Is that what Christianity is doing? Is it giving you meaning? Is it helping you alleviate some guilt and shame that you feel in life? Is it making your life less painful? Is it making you just feel more comfortable and at peace?

Is it a thing that makes sure God is happy with you and you're on his good side so he'll bless you and get you a closer parking spot or something? Is that what Christianity is? Is Christianity a self improvement program? Are you here because you want to be a better

person and you think by going to church that's the way to do it is that what Christianity is. What does Christianity actually offer?

Now, if I came up to you and I said, that will be \$5,000, what would you say? What are you talking about? Right. Well, good. That should be your right response.

What will be \$5,000? Now, here's the deal. Jesus teaches his followers to count the cost. And in Luke 14, verse 33, he's very clear. If you're going to follow me, if you're going to do this Christianity thing, it's going to cost you everything, everything you have and everything you are.

That's the cost. But what do we not do? Calculate what we're getting for that? What are we getting out of this? What is this Jesus guy actually offering us?

Now, maybe you have John 3:16 in your head and you're going, eternal life. That's a good answer. Yeah. Christianity, I'm in this for eternal life. I'm here so I can have whatever that is.

But wait a second, what is that? What is eternal life? Because you're right, Christianity does offer that. But what is eternal life? Because if it's just like the chronological, infinite subsequent day going on and on and.

No, what is this eternal life thing that Christianity claims to offer? Now, for the first time, not for the first time, one of the rare times Jesus is so very clear about this and you get about the closest thing to a Merriam Webster definition from Jesus as you'll ever get. In John 17, he says this. Now, this is eternal life. He's about to give you a definition.

This is what I'm talking about when I'm talking about eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. That's what eternal life is. So when Christianity says it costs you everything and it gives you eternal life, what is it saying? It's saying you get to know God. Now, that word know in the Bible is really important.

It means to have a relationship with. And you need to get that because a lot of Christianity says God wants to have a personal relationship with you. You've probably heard that a lot. But if you look in the Bible for the place where it says God wants to have a personal relationship with you, you'll never find it. It's not there.

Instead, it uses this word know. But it means the same thing. To know somebody is to have a relationship with somebody. And you'll notice eternal life is not to know about God, it's to know him personally. So what in the world does it mean to actually know God?

That's what we're going to explore today. But we need to be very clear. Christianity will disappoint you, as it often does me. If you think it's offering you anything else other than to know God, to have a relationship with him. If you think it's offering you anything else, you're going to end up confused and disappointed.

That's the offer that Christianity makes. Now, if you enter a marriage for any other reason than because you are committed to having a relationship with that person, you're going to be confused and disappointed. You get it. There's. If you marry somebody for the money or because you want to have some purpose in life, or because you want some more power, whatever, you know that marriage is going to disappoint you.

That's not why you marry somebody. Why do you become a Christian? Because you want a relationship with this God. That's what's on the table. That's what we're talking about.

Now, how can we see. Oh, my goodness. If you're anything like me, you've looked at the Bible and you've seen that it's a chaotic mess. There's just all kinds of stories and things going on, and it all looks crazy and convoluted and jumbled. And how in the world can we actually see that God's heart, as this series talks about, is to be with us?

Is that actually clear? Like, is that really what God has wanted this whole time? Is that what God wants now? And is that what he's always wanted is to be with us, to have a relationship with us? Yes, it is.

And we're gonna look at that now and explore the ways that we can see that. So for the next five and a half hours, we're gonna buckle in and we're gonna go through the whole Bible. You're gonna love it. It's gonna. No, I'm just kidding.

Okay, so we need to start at the beginning. Technically, before the beginning. So before the beginning, which don't think about that too hard. Before the beginning, God was and is and always will be. He's there.

And what we know about God is that. I'll turn this this way so you chapel people can see my beautiful drawings. What we know about God from the very beginning, and we learned this in John chapter one, is that God exists as Father, Son and Spirit. From the very beginning, he always is this. Now, this is important because that means that if you cut to the core of who God is at the very center of his being.

What is God? He in and of himself is this with he is relationship he always has been in perfect relationship. He is perfectly unified. He's a tri unity, a trinity. That's why we call him that.

He's perfectly unified. So in and of himself, God is relationship. And that's why creation actually makes a lot of sense. So if our creator made creation, we should expect to see a lot of the characteristics of this triune creator in reality. And you can, because at the core of all of creation is relationship.

What is chemistry? Chemicals relating to other chemicals. Math is numbers relating to other numbers. Art is paint, colors relating to other colors. And music is notes relating to other notes.

All of nature is trees and animals. It's all relationship. Everything relates to one another other. It's a unified whole made of many parts reflecting our creator. Now, humanity is made.

And God says very clearly that humanity is made in God's image. And that's noteworthy because in the very beginning, when he makes us, in Genesis chapter two, we realize that God has made us one man. There we go. God has made us woman and man. And we, just like God, made in his image, are at our very core relationship.

We're made to be like him in that way. You got it. Now, this is jarring, because in Genesis chapter two, after God has just made everything, he's gone. It is good. It is good.

It is good. He does it seven times for every day of creation. And then in Genesis chapter two, you get this jarring moment when God says, it is not good. You're like, what? Wait?

But everything's good. There's one thing that's not good, and you know what it is? It is not good for the man to be alone. That's the first thing you learn about humanity. It's not good for us to be alone.

There's a reason loneliness is more likely to contribute to your death than smoking 15 cigarettes a day. It's because you're made to be with. And so this is where we find you actually know this to be true. If you've ever sat with someone on their deathbed, one of the saddest things you can hear is when they start talking about the things that they regret. And you will never, ever, ever sit with somebody who's laying there nearing their demise.

And they say, man, I wish I'd spent more time at the office. I wish I'd made more money. I wish I'd been more productive. Never. What do humans know at the end of our lives?

We calculate it all, and we decide how worthwhile our lives were based on. Man. How much time did I spend with my Family. And those are always the things that people regret. They say, man, I wish I'd been home more.

I wish I'd spent time with the people who are going to be sitting in the front row of my funeral. I wish I'd poured into them. Because at our core, we're made to be with in the same way that God in and of himself is with. Are you following? Cool.

I got like three nods out there. So you three are with me. So what we have is humanity has two dimensions of relationship, and this is important for you to know. We have our relationship with others, which we'll call our horizontal. And we have our vertical relationship with God.

And you can see that here, too. That's how we're made to be from the very beginning. Now we enter this first story in Genesis, and it's the story of Adam and Eve in the garden. Fun one. You have these two trees in the garden.

Bible nerds, you're about to have so much fun. Lock in. Okay, there's two trees. Please do not comment on these trees. I will cry.

We have two trees. There's the Tree of Life and there's the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Now, in the ancient near east, you would have believed that the two things that separate gods from human beings is that gods live forever. And they also get to decide what is right and wrong. Okay, those are the two things in the ancient Near Eastern mindset that separate gods from humans.

So when the humans are put in the garden, they're told they can eat all they want from the Tree of Life. They. But they are not to decide for themselves what is right and wrong. That's God's job. So they're to live under God's rule.

And you know that the snake comes in and he says, do you really want to live in a world where you're not deciding for yourself what's right and wrong? Do you really want to be subject to this God? Don't you feel like he's kind of holding you back? Wouldn't you like to decide for yourself? So here's the trade that we make.

Humanity eats from this tree, the knowledge of good and evil, and we get to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong. But the trade off is this. Now we die. And that's why when God says, when God kicks them out of the garden, the reason he gives is in Genesis 3. This is God talking to himself.

Listen to how fascinating this is, this self conversation he's having. Look, the human beings have become like us, knowing both good and evil. They ate from that tree. What if they reach out, take fruit from the Tree of Life and eat it? Then they will live forever.

In essence, the damage they will do will be infinite. Okay, so the Lord God banished them from the Garden of Eden. Now, the Garden of

Eden is symbolic. It's God's presence. It's to be in God's domain.

It's his place. It's where he is. And we're banished from it. And what you find is God. Oh, man, I can't draw.

God puts a sword. That's a sword. Can you tell? It's a sword and it's on fire. It's flaming.

Oi, oi, yoi. Don't look too hard at that. So God puts a flaming sword that guards the way to the Tree of Life. We can't get back to it. And now the reality is we, instead of living in a world where we live under God's rules and we live forever, you now exist with me in this world where everybody in this room is going to die one day.

And everybody in this room has their own subjective experience of reality. And we're all trying to figure out what is right and wrong in our own eyes. And you see that every single day, everyone is determining for themselves what's right and what's wrong. And it's chaos. That's terrible.

That's the world we live in. And by disobeying God in the Garden, we find very clearly that our vertical relationship with God is now destroyed and humanity is powerless to fix this. That's one thing you really need to note about all of this. There's nothing we can do. Because disobeying God really is compared to adultery a lot in the Old Testament.

And you think about what it is to have an affair. If you cheat on your spouse, you do not have the power unilaterally to fix it. You can't make things right. You can sing and dance all you want, but unless your spouse reaches out to you and extends mercy, forgiveness and grace, there's nothing you can do. You are powerless.

You're at their mercy. So in our relationship with God, when we break this, in a sense, what he says is we've committed adultery and the ball is in his court. Either he extends mercy or we never get this back and we never get to be the people we were created to be from the very beginning.

There's another story that comes up after this. It's the story of the Tower of Babel. You know this one? It always made me wonder if the Sears Tower was inherently evil?

I don't think so. But I do believe that calling it the Willis Tower is a sin. So don't do that. It's not that. Thank you.

Thank you, Chicago people. Okay, so what's so wrong with building a skyscraper? I'm so glad you asked. What are these people doing? They are trying to do what they know they can't do.

We just talked about the fact that we can't fix this. The ball's in God's court. We're at his mercy. They're trying to build a tower to ascend up to him, and it's not going to work. And so God, in His mercy to spare us from making everything worse, once again scatters us.

And this is what he says. Chapter 11, verse 6 of Genesis. He says, look, the people are united. He's talking to himself again. And they all speak the same language.

After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them. So at this moment in time, humanity is united. Your horizontal relationships are still set. But what does God do? He says this.

Come, let's go down and confuse the people with different languages. Then they won't be able to understand each other. So at this moment, we're all united in horizontal relationships, but for the sake of committing evil, okay, so God in his mercy, scatters us. And in this moment at the Tower of Babel, these different languages destroy our horizontal relationships. And you remember last week, Michelle talked about the word of God, and we talked about how being able to communicate with each other is the lifeblood of every relationship.

By removing the ability to have words with each other, we're no longer able to have the relationships that we were designed to have at the beginning. And you remember, God was very clear. There's one thing that's really not good, and it's for humanity to be alone. And after this, we find that that's exactly where we are. Humanity is alone.

We can no longer be with God, and we can no longer be with each other. That's where we're at now. The rest of the Old Testament is a mess. It's just disgusting. You see the continuation of relational breakdown, and things get, like, terrible.

I don't think, you know, some of the stuff that's in there. I'm going to be honest with you. You got to dig a little bit because things just get bad. Horizontal and vertical relationships continue to break down. People manipulate and use each other, and they try to manipulate and use God.

Evil continues to grow. They promote injustice. There's self interest Corruption, manipulation, wickedness, evil, sin that you can't even imagine. It's like, how did you even come up with some of this stuff? This whole time they're trying to ascend back up to God.

But you have to remember the ball's in God's court. We're at his mercy. It's not working. And so the entire Old Testament is just a continued failure of humanity to try to do what only God can do, and that's to fix things. Trying to fix our relationship with God is about as possible as me trying to walk to Mars from here.

I literally don't even know how to even start. But the whole time throughout the entire Old Testament, there's little glimpses, and these are really important. There's little glimpses that are given to us that God actually is intending to descend, that even though we can't ascend up to him, he's coming down. And you see this so many times, I can't list them all. But you see the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, where God comes down to actually be with his people and guide his people.

You see the ark of the covenant, where God creates a dwelling place to be with his people again, as we were made to be. You see the tabernacle, where God travels with his people, or the temple, which is like the house of God that Solomon builds, and God lives among his people. You see the prophets that God sends to communicate with words with his people all throughout the Old Testament. And finally this moment happens in Isaiah that's monumental because there's a promise made. It says this.

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel. Which means what? God with us? God will be with us again. And not because we're going up to him, but because he's coming down to us.

God in his core, is determined to come down to be with us. He's going to do it. That's the essential promise. And this is obviously pointing us to Jesus. And so what does Jesus do?

Jesus is God coming down, descending to be with us. And the life you see Jesus live is amazing because what Jesus does is he lives the life that none of us could actually live because we keep destroying ourselves. And then he dies the death that we deserve to die because we can't live the perfect life. And then he gives us the credit for his perfect life. That's crazy.

And he does it all to absolve our guilt and shame. Now, this doesn't come out of nowhere. There's a fascinating little moment in Corinthians that I won't spend too much time getting into. But it talks about how God had to do this all mysteriously. Because if Satan had understood that God's plan the whole time was to have Jesus crucified and then rise from the dead, Satan never would have crucified him.

So the idea is that the Old Testament had to be muddy enough that Satan couldn't figure out what was going on, but clear enough that once it happened, you could look back and see very clearly, oh, this was about Jesus the whole time. So how do we see these little glimpses? First one you see actually is right here, this flaming sword. If you live in the ancient near east, you understand that that is a very powerful symbol. And it actually pops up in other mythologies.

In the ancient near east, fire symbolizes purity, holiness, perfection, really something perfect. And the sword is your symbol for sacrifice. Something has to die. So what is this telling you? It's telling you that if you want to get back to the tree of eternal life, the tree that you were meant to eat from, from the very beginning, something perfect must be sacrificed.

That's the way back to eternal life. You got that from the very beginning. You see that? You also see at the very beginning when Adam and Eve are filled with guilt and shame because they realize that they're naked and they've messed up. Do you remember what they do?

They make fig leave coverings for themselves and they hide. That's what they do. And it's not good enough. So what does God do? God shows up with animal skins.

Now this is fascinating because God just declared that those animals were good and then he sacrificed some. Doesn't tell us what kind he sacrifices an animal, makes skins out of it, uses it as clothing to cover the guilt and shame of Adam and Eve. God is the one who does that. It's not them. Their covering is not good enough.

Do you see it? This is pointing you to Jesus the whole time. When Jesus comes, he does all of that. He covers entirely our guilt and shame, and he earns his way back into the tree of Life. And we're welcome to eternal life again.

And what is eternal life again? That you can know God. You can do it. You can get back into the Garden of Eden, not because of anything you did, but because he took complete care of it for you. Okay, so in Jesus, this vertical relationship with God is restored.

It's back. It's made possible again. But it doesn't stop there. There's a moment. Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends on all these people and they begin speaking the same languages.

That story is brilliant because it's a complete inversion of the Tower of Babel. At Babel, the people are building up, trying to ascend to God, and God scatters and confuses them. We come to Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit descends, God comes down to his people and unifies a bunch of people speaking different languages so they can understand each other. What does that mean?

Do you remember what God said in Genesis when the people were uniting for evil? Well, now you can see that he actually intended that for good. Verse 6. Look. He said, the people are united.

They all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them. That's the beginning of the Church,

that the people are brought back together with a common tongue. They're united, they're with one another. And now they're filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

In Pentecost, the Holy Spirit redeems our relationship with others. This is said again. Now, because of the Holy Spirit's work, we can have relationship with God restored and horizontally restored. And remember, eternity eternal life means to be with God. It doesn't mean anything more than that, and it doesn't mean anything less than that.

So what do you expect from Christianity? Because Christianity is offering you a life with God. And what I want you to see is that this personal relationship with God thing is all over the New Testament and you might just kind of glaze over it. So I'm going to read you some verses that you know, but listen to how God's heart to be with you is so clearly demonstrated in them. This is John 14, 16, 17.

Jesus is talking about this promise of the coming Spirit. He says, I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and to be with you forever. The Spirit of truth. Colossians 3 says that you have died and now your life is hidden with Christ. In God you are with him.

Galatians 2:20 says, I have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. Jesus, last words on earth before he ascended. He says, surely I am with you always to the end of the age. That's what he came to do, to be with us.

Philippians 3 says it so beautifully. Everything else is worthless, absolutely worthless. Everything is worthless when compared with the infinite value. Of what? Of knowing Christ, Jesus, my Lord.

Not knowing about him, knowing him for his sake, I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage. Why? So that I could gain Christ himself. The person, Christ, I could gain him. That's what the gospel is.

It's about a person. It's not about anything else. And those verses are just describing your current reality. But that's not it. There's a future reality in this, too.

Look at what God describes heaven to be. In Revelation 21:3, it says this. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with humanity. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. This is the entire point of the gospel.

How do we get back with God? That's what this is after. And if you expect anything differently out of Christianity, you're going to be confused and disappointed. So when I tell you that the gospel message

is about bringing you back into a relationship with God, nothing more, nothing less, I want to know, does that get you excited or be honest? Is that kind of disappointing?

If I came up here and I said, the offer that Christianity makes is that you could have \$5 million right now, would you be more excited?

The offer of Christianity is that you can actually know and have a relationship with the one who holds the very fabric of those \$5 million together in the first place. That's the beauty of the gospel. John Piper has a quote that destroys me. He says, Christ did not die to forgive sinners who go on treasuring anything above seeing and savoring God. Catch this.

People who would be happy in heaven if Christ were not there will not be there. The gospel is not a way to get people to heaven. It's a way to get people to God.

Is Christianity still worth it to you when I tell you that God's goal this whole time is to be with you, not all these other side missions we go on, but his main goal is to be with you. Is this all still worth it to you? You want that because at your core, that's what you were made to be with Him. And the offer of Christianity is that you can be the very thing that you were created to be from the very beginning.

If you don't know God and you want to. And you want to have a relationship with Him, I would love to talk with you. I'd love to pray with you. I'd love to introduce you to Him. There are many people here that would.

You can come talk to me or Brentley or Rob or Travis or anybody. And if you do know God and you've been walking with him for a little bit and you don't know what to do. We'd love to baptize you. We'd love to see a public profession that you know Christ and are living life with Him. This is the opportunity we have is to walk out of here actually knowing a person.

A living, active being. God himself better. That's why you come to church. That's why you're here, to be with him and to be with one another. Will you pray with me?

Father, we thank you so much that we can know you. Father, we were at your mercy. There's nothing we could do to earn our place back with you. We just man. Father, we thank you that you chose to be merciful when there was no need to be.

We thank you that you've never given up on us. We thank you that even when you came here yourself, God with us. Emmanuel, even when you came here and we responded to your presence by murdering you, you still sought us out.

Father, I pray that we would walk out of here knowing you better today than we ever have before. And Father, I pray that you would fill this place with the power of your Holy Spirit.

We love you and we will give up everything. We've counted the cost. We give up everything if it means we can know you and be with you forever. It's in Jesus, mighty name we pray. Amen.