

# John 17:3 "Eternal Life"

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 20 October 2024

Preacher: Will Spink

[ 0 : 01 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us. We've come in our study of John's Gospel to Jesus' prayer in John 17.

Last week we heard Jesus begin by praying for glory, for shared glory with God the Father and this relationship where they have enjoyed being fully known, fully loved forever since before the world existed.

And we started to see that as Jesus prays about that relationship, amazingly, He prays for us to share it with them.

In their infinite love, Father, Son, and Spirit before the foundation of the world. He was so purposed to adopt us into that family, that fully known, fully loved relationship.

That's what Ephesians 1 explains to us. You could say relating with God like that is what we were made for. Jesus cracks the door into that reality a little bit in verse 3.

[ 1 : 24 ] And I don't want us to miss it. So we're going to stay there this morning. Let's read the beginning of this prayer again. We'll settle in on verse 3. Eternal life and knowing God.

John 17 at verse 1. When Jesus had spoken these words, He lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come.

Glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You, since You have given Him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him.

And this is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work that You gave me to do.

And now, Father, glorify me in Your own presence with the glory that I had with You before the world existed. This is God's utterly perfect word of life.

[ 2 : 31 ] Pray with me. Knowing You, Jesus, it's true what Ron's saying.

There is no greater thing. May that reality be true for every one of us. Would You work a fresh love for You, delight in You, passion for Your kingdom, and for others to know You in us even now. Holy Spirit, show us Jesus. We ask it in His name. Amen. We are focusing on verse 3 this morning, partly because I have FOMO.

Kids, you may need to help your parents understand what the fear of missing out is. Okay? It's a terrible fear to have. But I fear that many of us, even in this room, are missing out on the life that we were made for.

Listen to Jesus. This is eternal life. That they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.

[ 4 : 00 ] Elsewhere, Jesus says, life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions.

Life is not in the stuff of this world, the wealth of things and success. And I just want us to think honestly for a couple minutes about how most of us actually experience life.

From the moment that we can remember as young kids, we grab things and say, mine, that's mine. And we are convinced, we seem to assume that life is about having enough of what I want.

Right? Having all the fun I can have with all the friends that I can. In our teenage years, that grows into a longing for freedom. To have what I want, whatever it takes for me to fit in with the group that I want so my life can be good.

But of course, most of us never get enough of what we want. And we start to think, if I can just get through high school, right? Some of you are feeling that right now.

[ 5 : 19 ] There will be college. College, what I've been told is the pinnacle of this life of freedom. Ultimate pleasure.

Whatever I want. Except that it seems like, as many of us have been through college, that no matter how abundant our possessions are, no matter how much pleasure we've enjoyed, somehow, most of us graduate still not feeling fully satisfied with life.

And so several young adults have told me recently, we look for that good life in a successful career. In great relationships. Perhaps even in reinventing or finding ourselves in that season of life.

At some point, sooner or later, though often still unfulfilled, many settle down with a family to look for life, right?

By living for the same exact things through our kids that never fully satisfied us. Helping them have enough things and taste enough success and enjoy enough fun vacations.

[ 6 : 37 ] And that's where life will be, except that they grow up. And as they move on and seek life for themselves, we pour ourselves into something else. Maybe back into our careers or a house remodel or whatever, because it's still not enough.

Maybe we'll get grandkids. That'll do it. Or at least retirement. It's another pass at college, right? Then I'll be able to do whatever I want.

Finally, the freedom. That's life, right? Whatever I want to do. Having enough experiences.

Traveling enough places. That'll be the life.

But somewhere along the way, many of us have believed in Jesus. We've trusted Him. What have we trusted Him for? For eternal life, most of you would say if I asked you that question.

For heaven, of course. And we've settled that. Oh, that feels so good, doesn't it? And then we've put eternal life up on a shelf. While we keep searching this world for life.

[ 7 : 47 ] Where is it? What will a fulfilling life consist of? We're going to find it somewhere. We've got eternal life on layaway for when we die. Why? And occasionally we stop into a place like this to thank Jesus for that.

Because that sure does feel good to have something to hold on to. But most days, we're living life right here. And we're searching for what's really going to matter. And what's really going to soothe my soul looking all around me.

Do you feel like that? Do any of those seasons of life describe your experience? I think it's increasingly the model, the mindset of American Christianity.

Eternal life one day. A busy search for life today. Searching for life in these many good things.

Y'all, they're good things. But searching for life in them is part of our brokenness. Not part of our good design. That's why we repeatedly find them not enough.

[ 8 : 50 ] It's why Ecclesiastes calls this search for life a chasing after the wind. You can't catch it. That's because as Jesus tells us, we can't have the life we were made for unless it's given to us.

Maybe that's the first surprising reality about eternal life that we learn here. Maybe you came thinking, I know about eternal life. I've been in church. I hear about eternal life. There's lots of verses.

I know one about that. It's in John 3, 16. I think there's eternal life. I've always known that. But we wake up breathing. We feel alive.

And yet Jesus prays for us to have eternal life because we don't naturally have it. And Jesus says he gives eternal life, verse 2, implying that we don't have it on our own.

We need it provided to us. That is why at every stage of life we long for more. We aren't fully satisfied. The Bible always talks this way about eternal life.

[ 9 : 57 ] It's a gift, right? The free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6, 23. Well, second surprise for most of us about eternal life is that it's a present reality.

Eternity starts today. This is exciting. See, God never designed eternal life to be put up on a shelf until you die. He meant for you to enjoy it while you live, right now.

This word translated eternal means of the age to come. Life characterized by a different world, a different age, which we remembered last week.

It's glorious. But the glory of all glories in heaven is what? It is that fully known, fully loved relationship with God himself.

It's not so much going to a different place as it is enjoying a different relationship that becomes the center of reality for you. We're going to see this more in a minute.

[ 11 : 07 ] But nothing characterizes heaven, the age to come eternal life, more than close relationship with God.

So all through John's writings, this eternal life is spoken of not as a future hope, the way we often think about it, but as a present possession.

You may recall this from John chapter 5. Truly, truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.

He has passed already from death to life. Or maybe in John chapter 6. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

And here it's such a present experience that Jesus goes on to say, the one who has it will not die, but live forever. I don't know about you, but for me most of the time, and for most professing Christians these days, when we hear eternal life, that means future hope.

[12:14] Something to look forward to. And it is not less than that, okay? I'm not here to tell you eternal life is not wonderful in the future. But Jesus says it is about this relationship with God now.

Think about it this way. What if you asked me today how my marriage is going? How I'm enjoying that relationship? How it impacts my life today?

And I said, well, I mean, we're looking forward to retiring together one day. And you said anything else? And I said, no, we're looking forward to that one day.

It's going to be great. You might say to me, you don't have much of a marriage right now. You're missing something, right? Eternal life is knowing God.

Or as theologian D.A. Carson helpfully says, eternal life is not so much everlasting life as personal knowledge of the everlasting one.

[13:19] See, it's about quality of life, not quantity. Listen to this. Some of you are going to be so grateful for this truth, okay? Because for you, life day in and day out is unbearably difficult.

It's painful. It's exhausting. Emotionally. Physically. And if all that Jesus changes in giving you eternal life is the amount of time it lasts, you can hardly imagine the burden of living this frustrating life without end.

With no end to what you're facing today. It's hardly bearable to think about. But we know this promise is more than that, isn't it?

It's not just about quantity of days. It's about quality of life. That's what changes the quality of life in the age to come, highlighted by that close relationship with God.

It becomes ours. And yes, it never ends. That's true. But the primary point is that it's an entirely different level of life from what you've been living.

[14:35] As far above mere human existence as human life is above plant life and animal life. It is certainly not fully what it one day will be.

We still see through a glass dimly, right? We are not home yet. That explains a lot. But it actually changes everything.

It's actually satisfying. Finally fulfilling. Endlessly glorious to know God. And I could say that with confidence because you were made for it.

That's what he made you for. The eternal life we're made for. Jesus is really clear. We won't find it in the abundance of our possessions, experiences, successes.

Do you believe him? It's not difficult to understand. The question is, do we believe him on that? He says it's actually simple where we find life as far as understanding it.

[15:44] Knowing God. Father, I pray. Father, I pray. Jesus comes to pray what's on his heart. I pray they would know you and me.

That word for knowing here is best understood as a close relationship. In this case, it's the glorious one between father and son that we're being invited into.

It's intimate, personal, loving. What the life of the age to come, the life we were made for, is marked by.

Think about how prominent this is through the Bible's whole story. Just walk with me for a minute. All the way back to the way God designed the world. He made Adam in his image for relationship with him.

God walked with Adam and talked with Adam. That's what perfect life was marked by. By time in God's presence.

[16:43] Being with God. And just a few chapters into the story, we read of Enoch. Who walked with God. And then he didn't show up one day. Why? Because God took him into eternal life.

Because he so lived with God. He was so marked by the life of the age to come that it pleased God to bring Enoch on home to that life. That's so what we were made for that it's no surprise that when

wanting to make a life for ourselves and live for our own pleasures, we broke our relationship with God.

That it is that relationship with him that we long for. That's the ache, by the way. That's the hole in our hearts. That's the one you feel. For generations, for millennia, we've shared the psalmist's hearts even when we didn't have the words.

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When shall I come and appear before God? We're longing to know him, to be with him, even when we don't know that's what we're longing for. I love the way God reminds us of where life is not found and where it is in Jeremiah chapter 9.

[18:05] Thus says the Lord, Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom. That's not the thing to be excited about. Let not the mighty man boast in his might. Let not the rich man boast in his riches.

But let him who boasts boast in this, the one thing worth being excited about. That he understands and knows me. The Lord who practices steadfast love and justice and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord. Knowing him, that Lord, that's worthwhile life. It's so worthwhile that the prophets all paint the same picture of sinful man's future hope.

The pinnacle of all the new covenant promises over and over comes back to the same thing. Isaiah and Habakkuk say it the same way. Knowing knowledge of the Lord.

Filling the earth, that's the promise. As the waters cover the seas. Jeremiah says it this way. They shall all know the Lord. No longer will they be asking one another.

[19:09] They will all know me. From the least to the greatest. Do you see there how it is?

How will they all know the Lord? Notice, it's not by memorizing facts about him. By having sins forgiven.

Relationship restored. That's the promise. And so when we turn to the New Testament, stay with me. It's of course Jesus who comes to make God known. So that we can know him.

First John says because no one's ever seen God. So Jesus comes close. The way God's relationship was designed, right? Walking and talking with Adam in the garden.

The way it used to be. So that when Paul realizes who Jesus is. And it took him a while. He says, Christ who is your life. That's it. Just Jesus.

[20:06] Jesus. That's your life. God with you. Knowing you. And loving you. So that what Paul says he longs for more than any other religious achievement.

You remember what Ron sang? It was the words from Philipians 3. Beautifully put to music. Everything else is weak and worthless compared to this.

Knowing you. Knowing you, Jesus. The surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

And of course that close relationship, that eternal life does last forever. As Revelation points out. It pictures the dwelling of God.

Right with man. So close that no other light is needed. Nothing else than being near him. Life coming from God to man. Always the river of the water of life. Flowing from where?

[21:00] From the throne of God. To provide healing and life constantly. Okay, that's a lot. You don't have to remember all the details. There's a lot more examples in God's story.

But I wanted you to get a taste of how important it is to God that you know him. That therein you experience the life that he made you for.

It's all through the story. It's what he's working towards in your life. There may be some of you who are thinking, That doesn't really make much sense.

Well, I've been in church all my life. I know more things about God than most anybody else I know. And I don't feel any of that close relationship.

Surpassing worth of knowing Jesus? What Jesus says is eternal life? Am I missing something?

[22:02] You might be feeling that or asking that this morning. I'm glad that you asked. Thank you. I always appreciate those questions that I get to answer now. Because it may be that what you're missing is in fact eternal life.

I say that not at all to be mean. But because I don't want one of you to miss it. See this knowing God that Jesus is talking about here is more than knowing about God.

We certainly do learn many things about God and in his word. And that is great. Knowing God is certainly not less than that. But Jesus is clear that that is not in itself eternal life.

The close loving relationship kind of knowing that he wants with you. See Jesus is not just warning us against looking for life in the abundance of our possessions.

He's also warning us against looking for life in the abundance of our religion. The first is a worldly struggle. The second is a churchy struggle if you will.

[ 23 : 14 ] Jesus told the religious leaders of the day about this a lot. They were the ones who assuredly knew the most about him. And what did he say? He said to them that they didn't actually know him or his father.

Package deal, right? You don't even know him. He speaks to the Pharisees in John 5. And he says to them this.

It's a little scary. He says, you search the scriptures. John chapter 5. I think it's the next one. Because you think that in them you have eternal life.

And it is the scriptures that bear witness about me. Yet you refuse to come to me that you might have life.

You're going to lots of Bible studies, Jesus says. But you're not coming to me. You're missing it. You're missing life.

[ 24 : 13 ] It's not about how much you know. It's not about how well you perform. It's about receiving me. The one who gives eternal life, right? See, Yahweh, that's his first name, so to speak.

The God of the Bible, the only true God, is personal. So we have to know him personally as he reveals himself to us.

Not just learn some things about him from a distance and make up our own conclusions about him however we would like. You wouldn't let somebody do that to you, would you? And say that they know you just because they've made up a few things.

They decided they like to think about you that way. Pastor Tim Keller is really helpful in explaining that this is true for all people. We know them personally by revelation, not by how we just like to think about them.

For example, I would be appalled if you came up after the service and said to me, Pastor Will, you know how I like to think of you? I like to think of you as a big South Carolina Gamecock fan.

[ 25 : 26 ] A lazy pastor who works one day a week. Who loves mushrooms on his pizza and hates dessert. That's how I like to think of you.

Many people in here would assure you that you don't actually know me. If that's how you would like to think of me. You can't know a person like that.

So why would we say, well, I like to think of God as a jovial Santa Claus grandfather in the sky kind of figure.

No, he's not. So no, you can't think of him that way. Or I like to think of God as a vengeful judge who's always peering over my shoulder, looking to catch me messing up and punish me.

Well, no, he's not. So no, you can't. Not him. Do you see what Jesus is saying here? Knowing him, knowing Jesus is knowing the Father.

[ 26 : 34 ] Yes, in case you've been here for a few months, Jesus has said this before. And yes, he's saying this is eternal life. See, one of the themes of John's gospel is that Jesus has come into the world.

Why? To make God known to us. To reveal the person, the character, the heart of God to us so that we can finally write accurate theology textbooks.

That would be so wonderful. No. That's not why he came. He came so that we can know, so that we can have a personal relationship with the God that he really is.

Not some figment of our imaginations. So that we'd actually become children of a heavenly Father whose perfect love and justice meet at the cross of Jesus as we saw last week.

So that we would actually begin, this would change our lives, we'd start to bow before a God more holy than we comprehend. So that we'd feel the embrace of a God more loving than we dream.

[ 27 : 44 ] So that we'd rest in the providence of a God who's more sovereign and more wise than we imagine and we'd be able to trust him.

That's why Paul sees the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus. Why the longing to know God, the promise of his presence with us becomes fulfilled in this close relationship with Jesus as he comes in the flesh followed by the indwelling of his spirit in us and the glorified relationship with the triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit in heaven forever.

It's all part of knowing him now and always. When I want to know if I'm on the right track about the big issues of life, it helps me a lot to sit with people who've been living a lot longer than I have. I find that's a really helpful thing to do. Last week I sat in a chapel at Brookdale Place Retirement Home with some of our neighbors. Several living over 90 years.

They're ahead of me. Some married over 70 years. Also got a long way to go. And they were sharing about the heartaches of life.

[ 29 : 07 ] Losing a spouse after 70 years. Facing the death of children. Relationships at the center of life for them for years and years, for decade after decade.

Could there be any life in the face of such grief? Death? I don't think I would have kept going if it weren't for God in my life.

One of them said, smiling through tears. I didn't have anyone else left. But I had Him. No one said that about the abundance of their possessions.

They'd have to give many of them away. No one said that about their professional success. There is life in knowing God.

In being close to Him. I can't tell you all the ways you'll experience the quality of that eternal life in your life even while you're here.

[ 30 : 21 ] Because life here is genuinely hard. This doesn't make everything easy all of a sudden. We broke that good relationship and God's good creation. But you can start now glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.

See, many of us who say that's our chief end. That that's our purpose in life. We think what that means is that we're supposed to glorify God now. And then one day we'll get to enjoy Him forever. In heaven, listen, start enjoying Him now. Both of those are to be now and forever. Pull that eternal life off the shelf into the sunlight and the rain and let it grow.

Nurture that life that He gives you. Every opportunity that you get. Every chance you have to get to walk with God. Every moment you carve out to talk with God.

Enjoy that relationship. Every close relationship takes time to grow, doesn't it? Are you living closer to Jesus than you are to your work?

[ 31 : 35 ] Or your phone? Or your stuff? Which one are you closer to if you were to describe your relationship?

You need to see your day and your week and your year and your life through that reality of Him so that it changes your quality of life in every area and your life starts to reflect the glory of that relationship that's unlike any other.

See, there's so many ways. When you pull eternal life off the shelf and it starts to be living today and the reality of that relationship with God through Jesus, there's all sorts of stuff that changes. You can battle anxiety and find peace in the midst of it. I mean, in the middle of the night, you can be reading Psalms and trusting that He's more in control than you feel like He is and you can actually experience that.

You can walk through grief and find joy. I talked to Tara Calhoun this week. She just, her mom went to be with Jesus. She couldn't have been more excited for her mom.

[ 32 : 44 ] There was a deep joy that mom's home in a better place and she believed it deeply. You can look at your life at 80 years old and you could say like some people I've heard, I'm just getting started.

My body may be slowing down, but my soul is picking up speed with Jesus and that is not ever going to stop even when my heart does. You can live with purpose even when life is slow or work is just not coming because the primary reason that you were made is to know God and that relationship with Him can grow in any season, whatever else is going on.

You can face things like greed and lust and envy that you feel like are just part of who you are and you can actually find true contentment even while you battle those.

Because more and more you find your true treasure, the one who really satisfies is yours forevermore. He's not going away and He's not letting go of you and there's so much peace there and fulfillment.

You know, you can even slow down with your kids or your grandkids. You don't have to feel the pressure of finding life in the scholarship or the vacation or the perfect obedience because you've got life in the Savior who is perfect for you and for them, who's present with you and with them.

[ 34 : 23 ] And those are the ways that you were made to live. And knowing Jesus, you can in those ways and so many other ways. In 1297, facing seemingly insurmountable odds and quite certain death at the Battle of Sterling, William Wallace, or at least the movie version of him, famously said, every man dies.

Because not every man really lives. I know I'm going to be able to talk about this part, but I want every one of you, every boy and girl, every woman and man in this room, to know real life, to really live.

Don't miss out on this. I am here because Jesus offers you life and he has sent me to open his word and let you hear how he prays for you, what he longs for you to know, what he made you for, the relationship he wants to live with you in forever.

I don't want one of you to miss out on that. You exist. You're breathing this morning. But where are you looking for life?

Where's life going to be found for you? This is eternal life. That you know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he sent.

[ 36 : 12 ] And even better than me wanting you to have that is that Jesus wants you to know God and have life.

So he prayed for it and he gave his life for people hopelessly separated from life, apart from him, so that you would have eternal life forever and today with him.

Let's pray. Jesus, thank you. Thank you that I don't have to make up where to find life.

That I don't have to pretend that this world's enough. That if we just work a little harder and try a little better, we'll be satisfied. It's not true.

We've tried it. Thank you that there is life in knowing you. Life that will really fulfill and life that will never end.

[ 37 : 15 ] So might we know you and know you more. Draw us more deeply into love with you.

Make us more certain today. Don't let any of us leave unsure of where we think life might be found. Help us to know that you came for that.

You're not hiding from us. You came to show us the life that you made us for. The God who created. Jesus, the one who will be with us forever.

Give us joy in that, that we might really, really live and know you. Do that work even now, we ask in your name. Amen.

For more information, visit us online at [southwood.org](https://southwood.org).