

ONWARD

from the desk of Chris Greer



Hey . It's Chris!

Have you ever missed the forest for the trees?

A few years before meeting my wife, Kerry, I had a long-term, long-distance relationship. I agonized for *months* about whether or not to end it. I wrestled back and forth with my feelings, obsessed over the pros and cons, and analyzed advice from friends.

Above all, I prayed — diligently and fervently — for direction. But on this topic, God's lips were sealed.

At the height of my confusion about the relationship and my frustration with my heavenly Father's silence, I called my earthly father to express my vexation.

"Dad," I said, "I'm confused and frustrated. I've asked God about it over and over again, but he refuses to show me what to do. Why won't he just give me the answer?"

Dad kindly asked a question I'll never forget. He said...

"Son, are you praying only to know God's answer? Or are you praying to know God?"

His keen question has become a regular and vital consideration in my ongoing journey of faith. And it's a big one for all of us wanting to get unstuck and move onward with Jesus.

quote(s) of the week

"I know my own sheep, and they know me."

— Jesus (John 10:14)

"What makes eternal life desirable is not just that it lasts forever, but that it is knowing and enjoying an infinitely satisfying Person."

— John Piper

For the past decade, one Bible verse has captivated me more than any other --

and it undergirds my dad's poignant question.

See if you recognize it...

***“Now this is eternal life:
that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ,
whom you have sent.”***

(John 17:3 NIV)

In these opening words from his Good Friday prayer, Jesus clearly *defines* eternal life.

And here's why it captivates me...

Jesus' definition of eternal life is markedly different from the one often used in Christian vernacular today.

For many of us, "eternal life" implies the hope of salvation, the home of heaven, and our life everlasting. Or something else. But look again at how Jesus defined it:

*“Now this is eternal life: that they know you,
the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”*

Jesus defined eternal life in *relational* terms, not geographical or chronological ones.

Eternal life (according to Jesus!) is nothing less — and nothing else — than knowing God.

And here's the rub: If we keep the wrong definition, we'll pursue the wrong things.

If we define eternal life only as a legal standing, divine location, or never-ending life, then we'll set our sites (as I'm prone to do) on the ancillary "trees" of righteousness, heaven, and life after death. And we'll miss the primary and perfect "forest" of actually knowing and experiencing God.

This is why Jesus lamented — and warned — that on judgment day he'll have to say to many who did good things, "*Get away from me*" because "*I never knew you.*" (John 7:22-33)

It's why he described the center of our heavenly future with these words: "*Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.*" (Revelation 21:3)

It's why Paul prayed, "*I want to know Christ...*" (Philippians 3:10a NLT)

And it's why I encourage you to pray prayers like these:

- God, will you show me again — through Jesus and your Word — what you're like?
- God, what are you revealing about yourself through my current opportunities, problems, relationships, and conversations?
- God, which spiritual practices will deepen and enliven my relationship with you?
- Holy Spirit, how can I stay awake to and aware of you all the time?

Heaven is beautiful, but God himself is the heart and soul of eternal life.

Knowing God is more than just possible: it's the point.

And I don't want to miss the forest anymore. How about you?

Onward,

Chris

dad joke of the week

What type of tree fits in your hand?

A palm tree. ☐☐

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