

Text: [Genesis 3:1-10](#)
Date: October 14, 2018
Title: “Life OVER God” – With – Wk 1
Theme: We were made for RELIANCE and RELATIONSHIP with God.

Intro

This week, we’re starting a new series
It’s called *With*, and it’s based on a book by Skye Jethani
It’s an examination of 4 typical approaches people take in their relationship
to God – some of which sound, on the surface, very good and holy
But in reality, each falls short of a true experience of life WITH God

Why is this important?

Faith is frustrating enough, even in the best of times
But when we misunderstand how God works, or when we fail to look at our
own motivations for following – then the bottom can fall out
I think this is one of the main reasons why people walk away

Here’s the problem, though

Every one of us operates out of one or more of these faulty approaches, at
one time or another

None more so than this week’s – life OVER God

To get down to this one, we’ve got to go the whole way back to the garden

Question

When you’re learning something new, would you rather have a mentor or a
book? Why?

Sermon

1

This story is where it all starts, right?

Adam and Eve in the garden

You may be skeptical of the historicity of the story

But don’t doubt its ability to reveal the human condition

We all want to be our own little gods

The snake knows this is the one phrase that will turn the whole situation in his favor: “Taste this, and you’ll be like God”
Isn’t that, more than anything, our dream?

Now, you might say to yourself, “that’s not me”
“I’m humble, I don’t seek power”
I’d say that too, except, I know it’s really not true
How often have I said, “if I were in charge...” or even “if I could wave a magic wand...”

We may not feel it, but we definitely think it
We want to be in control
We assure ourselves we’d use our powers only for good, of course
To make things better for others

But it’s about us too
Being in control sometimes looks like wanting to be secure and safe
To ensure the people we love are taken care of
To ensure we never go without

“Eat this, and you will be like God”
This is our temptation, all the time

2

This is fundamentally what we’re talking about when we’re talking about life
OVER God

Some variations on this theme are overt
So, for example, avowed atheists who simply declare that God doesn’t exist & go on about their days – that’s a life lived OVER God

But that’s not the only way to do it
The Scripture knows very little of atheism, but it has many examples of people putting other things in God’s place

In the Old Testament, the prophets constantly railed against idolatry
Isaiah in particular paints a picture that sticks with you:
The prophet talks about a man who cuts down a tree,
takes some and throws it in the oven to bake his bread,
takes another piece and burns in the fireplace to keep warm at night, and
then sets aside another piece to carve a god for himself.¹

He bows down to it and says, "Save me!"
He prays to the same tree he used to bake bread yesterday and keep
warm today.
We read that and we say, "It makes no sense. It's obvious how dumb that
is."
To create a God that you can carry around on your back

3

But at least, that's honest.
The way we go about it is different. More subtle.

Go into a bookstore, and you'll find a million self-help titles.
Our measure of safety and security is how many zeros trail the first number
in our bank account balance
We sit alone in our rooms amassing followers on social media – including
any number of people who, if they were here with us in real life, we'd
probably not even want to talk to

"Eat this, and you will be like God"
The game has evolved, but it's still the same, even for people of faith

The atheist believes that the seed of the universe really is chance, and that
if you slice open the core of the universe, all you'll find is natural law
A Christian believes that the seed of the universe is the deep love of God
who created all things,
And that the core is a set of divine principles as to how people should live

What's so incredible about our capacity for self-deception is that a life
OVER God can sometimes also look like this:
Pastor, teach me what the principles are, and I'll go and apply them, ok?
So we end up with books about the spiritual principles of everything from
relationships to parenting to business

Is there wisdom in the Bible for all these things? Absolutely.
But when the Bible itself becomes a self-help book,
When we try to extract and distill the wisdom into bullet points,
We've once again lost the message
We've slipped into a life OVER God posture
By believing that we can live a godly life

Without the God who gave us the wisdom to begin with

4

Why do we do that?

Because principles are a lot easier than relationships

Principles put us in control of things

We understand, we apply, and we get what we want

But relationships – including our relationship with God – don't work like that

When we're in a relationship, we're not in control

That other person has ideas of their own, a will of their own

They can resist us, push back on us, to move us in a direction we don't
want to go

That's especially true of God – and what we fear, whether we're willing to
admit it or not – is being challenged by God to change

So we fall in love with the principles of the Christian life

Rather than with the God who gave them to us

It's a subtler way of choosing to live life OVER God

A subtler form of idolatry

But idolatry nonetheless

5

That's not how this is supposed to work

When we set off by ourselves

Armed with what we think is sufficient wisdom to meet life's challenges

Whether that's worldly wisdom, or spiritual wisdom

When we set out as islands unto ourselves

Our own little gods

We'll eventually learn – as all people must

That we are not OVER anything

No principles for living can save us from tragedy

Can save us from pain

Out there, we'll come up against challenges that our principles never
anticipated

Being let go from our jobs
A cancer diagnosis
Losing a child to addiction
If you want to try and be your own god through these things, go ahead
But I can tell you – it doesn't work

And even if we DON'T face any of these challenges
There will come a time when the idols we've set up for ourselves will start
to look a little worn
When they don't dazzle us like they once did
Because nothing we can invest in: not work, not family, not earning and
spending, not sex or drugs or alcohol –
Is big enough for our hearts to dwell in

There comes a day for all of us
When we realize that a life OVER God is no life at all
That we are, in fact, built for reliance on God
For relationship with God
Not life OVER but life WITH God

And so the famous words of St. Augustine ring true:
"O God, you have made us for yourself
And our hearts are restless, until they find their rest in you"

Amen.

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¹ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+44&version=NRSV>