

**Text:** [John 17:1-7 \(CEB\)](#)  
**Date:** November 3, 2024 – All Saints’ Sunday  
**Title:** “Living Into Eternity” – On Time Series, week 4  
**Theme:** If we are made for eternity, God must think we are something pretty special.

# 1

In 20+ years of preaching, I’ve celebrated a lot of funerals  
Something over 200 at this point

Every one’s been different  
And if I go back and look through them, I can remember most  
every one

I’ve had some funerals that absolutely tore me apart  
Where the circumstances were tragic, where the person was far  
too young  
And you just couldn’t make sense of it  
I’ve experienced many others that reminded me how beautiful life  
is, and what a good life can look like  
Where there is sadness, but also great joy for a life well lived by  
someone who learned to love well

It’s my practice, as often as I can, to sit with the family before the  
service and talk about their loved one  
Just to listen to the stories  
I cherish those moments  
They’re some of the most meaningful times you get as a pastor

One question I like to ask is this:  
“How do you think your loved one would like to be remembered?”

The answers that I hear are typically variations on a theme:  
“They’d want to be remembered as someone who really loved  
and cared for their family.”  
Nothing more complicated than that

## 2

I think growing up in the US – and maybe everywhere, I don’t  
know  
There’s a lot of longing for greatness

We dream of doing great things  
Things that people will remember and celebrate  
Things that will still matter in generations to come

We humans have within us a drive for immortality  
And we imagine we can achieve it by doing the great thing  
The thing no one else has done

I’m grateful for those who do great things, of course  
I mean, their obsessions help to move the world forward

But let me ask you this:

If I asked you to name someone who lived 1000 years ago, could  
you do it?

We’d know some names, right, but unless we teach history, would  
we really be able to say much about what they did?

Fast forward to 500 years ago, I think we could certainly name a  
few, and probably what they did would get clearer

200 years ago, 100 years ago, definitely more

In the past 50 years, a whole lot

My point is, that even doing great things doesn't mean our stories  
will be told forever

History, even for the greatest among us, has a half-life  
If we try to achieve immortality by what we DO, I don't think that's  
the way

Do you remember what we were talking about last week?  
About the need to **deprioritize** productivity and **re-prioritize**  
relationships?

If you study the lives of "great" people, you read their biographies  
They've got some things in common

They're smart, they work really hard, and a lot of them are pretty  
unhappy

It turns out that doing really great things doesn't leave a lot of time  
for much else

And I kind of wonder how the family might respond to the  
question: "how do you think they'd want to be remembered?"

It feels like the way humans generally conceive of immortality, you  
have to be willing to sacrifice relationships in order to get  
there

### 3

But listen here to what Jesus says:

"This is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus  
Christ whom you have sent."

As opposed to human ways of seeking immortality that often  
*sacrifice* relationship

God invites us into eternal life *through* relationship

Jesus knows how to speak to two of the deepest desires of our  
hearts simultaneously

One: the longing for immortality  
And two: the longing for relationship

Our calling is to know God through Jesus Christ  
And “know” here isn’t just like “understand”  
It’s not about having a concept of God  
Not even to just understand what Jesus taught

But to really know him  
To have a relationship with him  
To talk with him, to put your trust in him  
This is what it means to find eternal life

#### 4

I sometimes wonder whether, when the preacher starts talking  
about eternal life, people just tune out  
I mean, it is a nice concept  
Foundational to our faith, for sure  
But difficult to wrap our heads around

I mean, it’s like I said  
We *want* to be immortal – we *want* the things we do to last  
But when we think about it: do we really want to *live* forever?  
I don’t know

I think maybe that’s what we misunderstand about eternal life,  
though  
Surprisingly, the most important thing about eternal life isn’t the  
living forever part  
Instead, eternal life is about two things – one speaks to  
immortality, and the other to relationship

First, the fact that God makes us a promise of eternal life means  
God thinks we're pretty special – that we matter  
You matter so much that you're invited to become like God  
To share in God's timelessness, and that's pretty cool

And if you've never felt like you mattered, then that's a big deal  
But that's exactly why Jesus stepped into our world  
To invite us to live in God's world

So, eternal life means we matter. That's first.

And the second thing: eternal life is about relationships  
The idea that eternity wouldn't be complete without us, and all the  
people we care about  
Jesus says it: he's come to give eternal life to all those God gave  
him

I don't think that wanting to live forever is ultimately about wanting  
to LIVE forever  
It's about wanting forever WITH the people we love  
It all comes back to relationships

And that's the invitation  
To a forever relationship, not just with God  
But with all the people you love, because God loves them too

## 5

Christians are people who are called live with eternity in our  
hearts

And that's what we celebrate on All Saints' Day  
We give thanks that we matter  
That we worship a God who says we matter enough to offer us  
eternity

When we read these names, we celebrate that the ones we love,  
God also loves  
Trusting that even when we let them go, God holds them fast

When we remember them, on a day like today,  
When we bless God for all they gave us  
When we remember all they taught us  
When we think about the pieces of them that live in us

We are experiencing a little taste of eternal life with them  
The promise of a reunion  
This is what we mean by the “communion of the saints”  
The sense that they are still with us  
Encouraging us, cheering us on

And challenging us to live with eternity in our hearts  
And this question in our minds:  
“How do I want to be remembered?”

If we’re made for eternity, Church, God must think we are  
something pretty special  
So special, in fact, that God wouldn’t want eternity without us

**by Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ**