

Knowing the One True God

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Today we conclude our time in 1st John. We've thought about the real flesh-in-blood Jesus, loving one another, the indwelling Spirit, and eternal life. *How has God spoken to you?* Got down some thoughts. We'd love to hear what Jesus has been doing on Story Sunday. Email: stories@austincityife. As John closes his letter he says, *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.* And *that* is why I've preached these things. I want you to know, not just objectively but subjectively, vibrantly, eternal life. John really wants us to know; he uses the word 7 times. Let's: *Know Eternal Life, Know Sin, Know the One True God.*

Know Eternal Life

My son has been watching the Netflix series *Stranger Things*, and the other day he asked, Dad do you think heaven is on top of the upside-down? The upside-down is a mostly invisible realm of evil that reaches into Hawkins to bring sadness, misery, and death to everything it touches. Demagorges and demons prey upon the living. Are we living on top of the upside-down? John says the *whole world lies in the power of the evil one*. A realm he calls darkness. But he also talks about a realm of light, insisting God the Father sent his Son to bring the light of life into our dark world. Those who believe in his Son are born again into an overlap of the realms, the realm of darkness and the realm of light. And it is in that overlap where the children of God live. *But* to obtain this new life, to experience the light and joy of God's world in the overlapping of the realms, *you have to believe in the name of Son of God*. Otherwise you're left under the power of the evil one. Everything rides on belief in the name of Jesus. Now why the *name*? A name is synonymous with a person's character and action. If I say the Alexander the Great or Rosa Parks a certain character and course of life springs to mind. If I say Jesus Christ, his birth, crucifixion, and resurrection come to mind, events didn't just change history. They changed eternity: ruptured evil; overthrew death; absorbed the cost of sin. *Jesus changed everything*. He brought life from the age to come into the age that is. In him, the ages overlap until eventually they eclipse into a whole new, world. Which is why John says: *He is the true God and eternal life*. Eternal life and the Son of God are not two independent things. Jesus is the location of eternal life. If you can get

into him, eternal life gets into you: [Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life](#) (5:12). So, you want victory over evil, death abolished, sin forgiven?—it's essential to believe in his name. It's what it represents. And when you do, his victory becomes your victory, his life your life, his love your love. And if that's true, why wouldn't we throw *everything* into him? That's why John wrote *that we might believe in the name of Jesus and know we have eternal life.* What might be the evidence that you possess this life? John says: [And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him](#) These verses can seem abrupt, believing for eternal life to prayer. But if believing the name of Jesus gets you into Jesus, then prayer is the next most natural topic. Prayer is our connection with the outside, our walkie-talkie into the realm of light, with the Lord of all. How should we pray? John says we can be confident Jesus *will hear us* (twice). That might seem like a logical formality—don't you have to hear before you can answer?—but Jesus knows every word before it is on our lips. He hears us not because he must but because he cares. Jesus hears us because prayer is personal. It is not primarily a way of getting things, as if God is a cosmic genie who grants wishes. He doesn't just want to hear our shopping list; he wants to hear your heart. *What is hard in life? What is good? What is confusing? What are you grateful for? What are you sad about?* Prayer is not primarily about getting things but getting God. So bring your questions, concerns, hopes, hurts, and he will listen. He goes on to say [we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.](#) Then: Why aren't I making more money? Why don't I have a nicer home? Why hasn't God given me a baby, a spouse? Look at verse 14, [if we ask anything according to his will.](#) His will modifies our asking *and* his answering. He grants those things that are *according to his will.* Prayer is not a way for us to leverage God but for God to lead us. Not a blank check but a bent knee. It's an invitation to ask but to ask with awe. Those who know they have eternal life *pray.*

Know Sin

John has repeatedly talked about how sin isn't compatible with the Christian life: [We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.](#) He returns to this theme in his

conclusion because sin is such a serious threat to life. Sin is colluding with the evil one, choosing the upside-down instead of overlap of the ages. In *Stranger Things* those who are irresistibly drawn to the evil realm typically end up dead. But those who resist, who fight *together*, often gain victory over evil and keep on living. But when they lose sight of the upside-down, the seriousness of the threat, they often fight among themselves. John says [If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life](#). Notice he says *anyone* sees his brother committing a sin. He does not say if any elders or pastors; he says *anyone*. What should you do if you see your brother or sister being drawn into darkness? *Ask*. Ask God to give them life where they are choosing death. Notice the posture is not judgmental; it's prayerful. Is that your first response when you see someone sin online or in person? Do pray for them or judge them? Ignore them or ask that they experience the all-satisfying, eternal life of Christ? Remember, prayer is your wartime walkie-talkie, your connection to the Son of God. Ask for his life, truth and grace to break in on your brother or sister. How cruel do you have to be to just watch someone get sucked into the upside-down? There's a scene in season 4 where one of the friends is slipping away. She's entranced and levitating, almost gone, but then her friends band together to play her favorite song over a walkie talkie and it snaps the spell. She is disentangled from evil and sprints back to her friends, to the light, to the sound of music. Your prayer is a spell-snapper. A sin-defeater. An evil-overthrower. It's music to Jesus ears. Ask and he will give them life. Now John mentions sins that **lead to death**. What's he talking about? It's unlikely that this is a singular sin, like the mortal sins of Catholicism: murder, adultery, etc. If so, then Moses and Paul (murders) and David (adultery) wouldn't inherit eternal life. The sin that leads to death isn't a single sin but persistent unrepentant sin. It's walking over into the darkness and refusing to come back to the light. Dangerous disregard for Christ. So choose life. Ask for life. For [the one who has the Son has life!](#)

Know Him Who is True

Know eternal life, through belief in his name and prayer. *Know sin* and *ask for life* for one another. Pick up the walkie-talkie. Our battle isn't against people but against the powers. Use weapons of light. Finally, *know him who is true*: [And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true](#). The Son came

for two reasons here: to give us understanding and to know. To understand is to think, reason, know a fact. Christianity is a thinking faith, but too often we stop there. We love ideas and information, but it gets lodged in our brain. But the Son gives understanding *so that we may know him who is true*. This word know means *to have personal knowledge of, to experience*. You see, its not enough to agree with Jesus; we're meant to know Jesus. Jesus didn't come just to be studied but to be experienced. Known, not as one truth among many but as *him who is true*. Three times its repeated. When I got engaged to Robie, she lived in Dallas and I lived in Minneapolis. We emailed, talked on the phone, but it wasn't the same as being together. It was hard being in a long distance relationship. I didn't propose to talk on the phone. I wanted to be *in her presence*. I wanted *to know* her, to experience her, so as soon as we married she moved in with me. *You* are married to Christ. Don't settle for a long distance relationship. Move in. Talk to him; experience him. How? What threatens experiencing Jesus? John warns: [Little children, keep yourself from idols](#). An idol is a thing we long to experience in place of Jesus. It can be anything: clothes, travel, relationships, comfort, respect, security. What's the dominant idol that takes his place in your heart? Are you going stand by and just watch one another get dragged into darkness? The word keep means defend. I challenge you to defend yourself from idols all summer long with your discipleship group. Fight together. *Ask for life* for one another. Read a book on your idol together. Pick up the walkie talkie and break the spell. Know the one true God together and enjoy his eternal life. If you don't know what to focus on, don't spend a month thinking about it. Ask a spouse or close friend to be really honest with you. **What idol do I need to defend myself from?** Then spend the summer knowing eternal life, knowing your idol, and knowing the *one true God*.