



Does It All Belong to God?

Sermon Notes · Week Two of Three

Genesis 28:20-22 | Bethel AME Church

"If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey... then the LORD will be my God... and of everything You give me I will surely give You a tenth."

Genesis 28:20-22 (condensed)

Following the Message

The vow. One verse after naming Bethel "house of God," Jacob adds conditions: if God does this, then Jacob will do that. This kind of bargain wasn't unique to him — it's a recognized ancient pattern (see Judges 11, Numbers 21) — but it's still a hedge, not a full surrender. The giving came before the getting. Jacob converted a gift into a contract anyway.

The situationship. Today's most common shape for hedged commitment: all the closeness of a relationship, with an escape door left open, so you never have to find out if you're fully chosen. Most people who end up there don't actually prefer it — they wanted the closeness *and* the clarity, but clarity felt too exposing. That's Jacob's vow with better branding. Some of us have been in a situationship with God for decades and just never had a word for it.

Why the gap persists — three reasons:

- *Rival catechisms.* Something is always discipling you — the algorithm you never chose, or the manifestation and vibes culture you did choose, because it felt like faith without the cost of faith.
- *Fear disguised as control.* Doomscrolling isn't really about the news — it's an attempt at control dressed up as information-gathering. Curated identity, keeping up appearances, buying what we don't need to impress people we don't even like — different decades, same engine.
- *Trust that curdles into title.* God gives real responsibility and real trust — and over enough time, "trusted-with" has a way of quietly becoming "felt-like-mine." The most respectable way to end up hedging, and the easiest to miss in yourself.

The charcoal fire. Peter denied Jesus three times at a charcoal fire. After the resurrection, Jesus meets him again — at another charcoal fire, the only other one named anywhere in the New Testament. He doesn't meet us somewhere cleaner once we've tidied up the story. He meets us at the fire, and asks the same question three times: *do you love me?*

What's not settled today. Paul tells the Athenians that idols are "engraved" to our own design (Acts 17:29) — we do the same thing with God when we hedge. If He governs it all, suffering isn't exempt from that question, and it deserves more than four minutes. Named honestly here, handed to our ministerial staff's five-week August series rather than rushed.

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

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About this series. Week One said it: it all belongs to God, not to the founders, not to whoever stands in this pulpit next. Week Two asks it: do we actually live like that's true? Week Three — the last Sunday before the ministerial staff continues this conversation through August — turns toward what it looks like to close the gap, and widens the word “it” to include the things we’re most sure belong to us alone: our worry, our fear, the parts of ourselves we haven’t yet handed back.

Words Worth Knowing

Situationship — a relationship with most of the intimacy of commitment and none of the definition; an escape door left open on purpose.

Charagma (Greek, Acts 17:29) — “engraving.” The word Paul uses for how an idol gets made: not discovered, but designed to specification.

Anthrakia (Greek, John 18:18 and 21:9) — “charcoal fire.” Used only twice in the New Testament: once where Peter denied Jesus, once where Jesus restored him.

Putting This Into Practice — Continuing Week One

1. **Go back to the Bethel you named.** Find the *if* you were still carrying when you said it.
2. **Tell the hedge behind the testimony.** Was there a condition you never admitted?
3. **Find the escape door in your handoff.** Are you hedging on what you’re preparing to release?
4. **Remove the asterisk.** Go back to what you marked as His. Mark it all the way.

For Reflection

1. Where have you kept an “escape door” open with God — close, but not fully defined?
2. What’s one rival catechism — an algorithm, a habit, a vibe — that’s been discipling you without your choosing it?
3. Where is your own “charcoal fire” — a specific place, not a vague memory — where Jesus might be waiting to meet you, not to condemn you?
4. If someone asked you honestly this week, “do you love Him?” — what’s underneath your answer?

Talk About It — For Families and Small Groups

- What would it look like in your house, or your group, to “remove the asterisk” on something you’ve marked as God’s?
- Share one honest “if-then” you’ve caught yourself thinking about God this week — no follow-up questions, just listening.

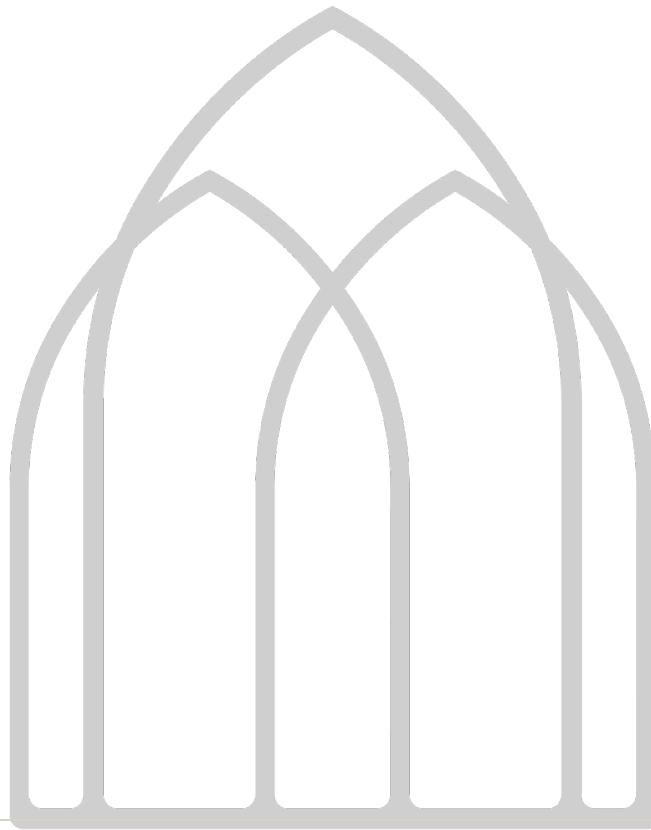
Notes



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It all belongs to God. Even the fire where you failed Him. Especially that one.

Next week: what it looks like to walk back into it. ·

In three weeks, the fall Financial Discipleship series begins.

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