

# Untitled #1

## By Christopher Lyons

[video audio]

Christopher Lyons:

Thank you. And it has been fun to be here on your campus. I feel very comfortable among college students because all of my ministry really has been spent in college towns. I spent 15 years by Gordon College out in the Boston area. You'll pick up that Boston accent. And then I spent 15 years just a block away from Wheaton College.

And now I'm enjoying being in California. I feel comfortable, more comfortable around college students really than high schoolers. I remember the story of a pastor who was taking a missions trip and he brought a college student along with him and a high schooler. They were flying across the Atlantic, going to Africa, when suddenly the plane began to shake and the engine began to sputter and then die. And the airline pilot came back and said, this plane isn't going to make it.

We're going to crash. And I have bad news for you. There are four of us, and I only have three parachutes. And I am the president of the airline. And obviously my family needs me. And so I'm taking one of these parachutes and I'm jumping and you three can decide who's going to take the other two. So then the high schooler spoke up and said, the world needs me. I am the brightest high school student there ever was. I've already received a full scholarship to Oxford University. I'm going to be a chemistry major. I'm going into medicine. Undoubtedly, I will find the cure for cancer. The world needs me. I'm going to save myself. And so he jumped out of the plane.

Then the pastor looked at the college student and said, Son, I've lived a good life. I'm older now. I know Jesus Christ is my Savior. I know that if I were to die, I'd go to be with the Lord, so you take the other parachute and you save yourself. And the college student looked at him and said, don't sweat it reverend, the brightest high school student in the world just jumped out of this plane with my knapsack. I thought that was funny myself. Maybe I'm not as comfortable around college students as I thought I was.

I invite you to turn in your Bible with me to the 12th chapter of the Book of Jeremiah. I know some of you came prepared with a New Testament. We're in the Old Testament tonight and again tomorrow. And in Jeremiah 12, I want you to study with me tonight one of the greatest questions of all the Bible. That question in 12:5. We ask our questions of God. We're studying about that in our elective sessions in the morning as we study, why is God silent messages from the Book of Job? And we ask our questions of God. Why God?

Why have you allowed certain things to happen? I remember at our church at Wheaton, we had an outstanding soloist. He blessed our hearts in a gospel music concert. And he was there with his wife and he introduced her and told us that in just a few months they were going to be parents and they were expecting twins. And a number of months later, Tim called me to say that their twin girls had been born. And he just asked us as a congregation to pray for them. For one of the little babies had been born blind, and the other little baby had this like instant death crib syndrome. And they were taking her in for surgery for operations. And I thought of Tim and that

night at our church and the way we had just been brought into the very presence of God with his gift, with his talent.

And you can't help but ask the question, Why? Why God? Why do you allow things such as this to happen over and over again? We ask our questions of God, and he never seems to answer them. But tonight I want to study with you Jeremiah 12:5, one of the greatest questions of the Bible. And this is a question that is asked by none other than God himself. Jeremiah had been going through all sorts of trials, all sorts of difficulties, all sorts of confusion. And God asked the question, if you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the overflow of the Jordan? As I say, one of the great questions of the Bible, this is a verse that you ought to memorize.

You ought to write it out and then post it over your study desk and look at it from time to time. It's one of the most challenging verses in the Bible. One of the most encouraging verses in the Bible. Why? Because it tells us that God has us in a training program and that he has not only a wonderful plan for your life, but what? A great plan for your life to challenge this world and to change it in your generation. And one of the reasons I enjoy ministering to college students is, you know, you're in the years of preparation. The 20s are the years when you're getting your academic credentials, your preparation, your training. The 30s are when you're beginning to get established in your career.

The 40s for the most part. Now, some of you will do this before then, but the 40s are when you begin to make an impact in your career in your career area. And by the 50s, the world is going to

hear from you. By the 50s, you're going to make an impact upon the world. But right now, these years are years of training. They are years of preparation. And this is what God is teaching Jeremiah. Jeremiah, I'm training you to be able to walk on the level ground because someday in your lifetime, the mighty Jordan is going to overflow. And you're going to stand for me when everybody else is breaking, panicking, running. You're going to stand and you're going to make a difference. Now, you know, as rivers go, the Jordan River isn't really much of a river.

It has its birth up in the snows of Mount Herman, over 9000ft tall, the highest point in the nation of Israel. And some of you have visited their walk in the forest preserve of Dan. And from all of the rocks, these streams, these rivulets come gushing forth and they begin to form together into streams. And then a stream into a river. And just a little way away is one of the tallest, one of the highest waterfalls in all of Israel as the Jordan begins its mighty flow through the land for about 200 miles. And yet as rivers go up, the Nile is over 4000 miles long. The Jordan River starts in the snows of Mount Herman, but it ends in the deepest place in the Earth, the Dead Sea. I was visiting in Jordan a couple of years ago, and every time we go there, we go to the Jordan River and have a baptismal service. And I'm a swimmer. In fact, the joy of being here on your campus at the conference the last time, as the conference was a little longer.

And Ron and I get out running and we got swimming in your beautiful pool. I love to swim. And I just thought, after this baptismal service, I'm going to swim the Jordan. And so I plunged in under and began to swim. And I was singing to myself and I'd only sing to myself. I was singing to myself, roll, Jordan, roll, roll, Jordan, roll. I want to go to heaven when I die to hear old Jordan

roll well, you know, if you know the Jordan at all. But by about the time you've said that chorus in your mind, you have crossed the Jordan. It's really only a stream. It's not much of a river.

But you see, when the snows have been particularly heavy on Mount Herman, and then the spring has come suddenly and with great warmth. Oh, it doesn't happen today because Israel takes most of the water out of the Jordan for agriculture and drinking. But in the days of Jeremiah, suddenly it would get very warm there in the Galilee, and the snows would begin to melt. And the rivers would begin to run. And the water would begin to flow down through that 200 miles. And the Jordan would begin to overflow. And the snow leopards and the lions and all the other wild animals would come out of the thicket would come out of the brush and go into the town. And there was a mighty challenge. It was a scary time when the Jordan would overflow.

And God said, Jeremiah, don't you understand? Do you not know what I'm doing in your life? I'm training you to stand on level ground in order that someday when the Jordan overflows, you will be able to stand for me. And so I just want to look at this question and the time that we have left to us tonight. I want to look at this question with you that we find in 12:5. And yet you cannot take a text out of its context. So let's look at all of these verses. And for those of you who are taking notes, and what's a preacher without points, what do they say? You know, three points in a poem, or I have four points. I want you to see in these verses tonight that we have a conclusion, and then we have a complaint, and then we have a call. And finally we have a challenge. So I want to look at those four key words with you.

Let's begin with a conclusion in 12:1. As Jeremiah concludes, you are always righteous, O Lord, when I bring a case before you. Now you know that you don't begin with a conclusion. You've written enough term papers already this semester that you begin with an introduction, and then you state the theme. And then there's the main body of the paper. And then you come to a conclusion. But why is it over and over again in Scripture, you begin with a conclusion. You have the conclusion here. This is what I've learned Jeremiah says. This is what I know. You are always righteous. When I bring a case before you, or you take the Psalmist and Psalm 73. And he says, God is always good to Israel, to those who are of a pure heart.

And why is it over and over again in Scripture, you find that they begin with a conclusion. But isn't that true of your own life? And isn't that true of your own experience? Maybe it's something that happened to you so early in childhood you could hardly even remember it. But there was a time when you came to understand some of the greatest truths that man will ever know. God is. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. God blesses the righteous individual. God promises his blessing upon the person who believes in him and is a rewarder of those who faithfully seek him.

And what is there about the Christian? He lives his life no matter what the question is, no matter what the challenge is, no matter what the problem is, he begins with a conclusion. He knows that God is sovereign. God is all powerful. God is all present. One of the critics of the Christian faith says, the problem I have with you Christians is you know too much about God. Yeah, that may be his problem. That may be his complaint. But what is there about the Christian? Sometimes we say it with tears in our eyes.

Sometimes we say it with a heart that is breaking. But we know that God is always righteous. God watches over us. We begin with a conclusion. But having begun with a conclusion, note that now Jeremiah, in the midst of all of his problems, in the midst of all of his difficulties, moves on to a complaint. We've been talking about that in our sessions together. God, we have a fundamental problem with you. If you are God, why don't you show yourself as God? Why don't you show yourself with more power? Remember in our session, we talked this morning about God, the God of the still small voice. Like in Elijah's day, I want the God of the earthquake.

Remember Elijah had gone to Mount Horeb and there he met God. But first of all, there was this mighty earthquake. Boulders rushing, crashing down the mountainside. There's a God a man can be proud of. There's a God a man can witness to. But God wasn't in the earthquake. And then after the earthquake, a mighty wind. I lived 900ft up here in California for 16 years. I lived on the flat prairies of the Midwest. And, boy, to live on a hill. But every once in a while, the wind comes up and I'm sure we're history. I'm sure we're out of there. A powerful wind. And once again, here's a God for a man with hair on his chest. Here's a God that you can be proud of. And God wasn't in the wind.

And after the wind, a fire. Some of you here in Southern California, remember the fires of last summer and God wasn't in the fire. And after the fire, what? A still small voice. Hey, how embarrassing. Have you ever seen a big man, tough, and he's got a little voice? And who is this God of the little voice anyway? And yet, you know, tonight you heard that voice. And what is there about this still small voice of God? It broke you up. You couldn't eat, you couldn't sleep, you couldn't get away from it until finally you surrendered. I give up.

I abdicate. I'm not big enough to be God. God, you come into my life and you save me and you be my God. And having met this God, and having drawn this conclusion, he has this fundamental problem with God. And so we move on to a complaint in our outline. As now Jeremiah says, yet I would speak with you about your justice. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease? God, as I just look around at my experience as I just look around at what's going on, I see the wicked prospering. I see injustices. I see racial injustice. I see dishonesty, and they seem to get away with it. In fact, look at 12:2. I hear people. Your name is always on their lips. Maybe a curse word, but they're far away from you in their heart. Look at 12:4. These wicked people are following the water, they're burning up the rainforests of Brazil.

They're destroying the world. How long will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered? They're killing off all of the animals. God, I have a complaint against you. If you are God, why don't you act more like God? Remember, I used the quote from Elie Wiesel the first morning. This author this man who has spent his lifetime as a Jew documenting the horror of the Holocaust. And Elie Wiesel said he does not believe in God. But if there is a God, he ought to step aside and let somebody more capable handle the situation. Well, Jeremiah wouldn't come across quite that strongly.

Obviously, he's a prophet of God. But he says, God, I have a complaint against you. And my complaint is, why do the righteous suffer? And why do the wicked prosper? And you know the problem once you begin to complain against God and God's sovereignty, and what God is doing is you're liable to make some of the same major mistakes. Can you believe it? Jeremiah is a prophet of God, and all of this is written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is the word

of God, and it's profitable. But complaining against God leads to wrong thinking. And here we have this prophet of God, and he's not thinking clearly.

What does he say in 12:2? You have planted them and they have taken root. No, Jeremiah, that's where you're wrong. That's where you don't understand the Word of God. That's the one thing the wicked can never be sure of. They can never be sure that they will not be blown away tomorrow. In fact, if you turn in your Bible to the first Psalm, would you notice in Psalm 1 that we have a description of the godly man and the ungodly man? What is it to be ungodly? The neighbor next door. He doesn't know Christ. He doesn't go to any church. He is an ungodly man. Does that mean he lives immorally? Does that mean he robs banks? Does that mean he doesn't pay his income tax? No. What does it mean to be ungodly? Why it just means to live your life as if there were no God, as if God doesn't count. As if you never have to take God into consideration.

And here in Psalm 1 or the first Psalm, excuse me. We're told that the ungodly are like the chaff, which the wind drives away. See, Jeremiah, in his complaint against God, says you have planted them. But Jeremiah doesn't understand. They're not planted. They are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Everything is all right in their life as long as everything is all right. But let the storms come and they're gone. But in contrast, the godly person, in contrast, the person who knows God and loves him and follows him. How is he described in the first Psalm? He is like a tree planted by the rivers of water, not there by chance, not a wild tree, but planted by the very hand of God. When I moved to Wheaton a number of years ago, we bought a brand new home,

and that home was constructed for air conditioning. It had windows at the front and windows at the back, but none at the side. It was hard to get cross ventilation in.

And the Midwest gets mighty hot even at night. Here in California, it cools off in the evening. But in the Midwest, it is just as hot at night as it is all day. And it was tough to sleep. And I knew that I needed to air condition that home. But I had spent all my money on the house, and so I knew coming from New England, hey, what this house needs are some trees. And so I went to my local tree store and one of our major. Even as I got out of my car, I saw exactly the tree I wanted there in the lot across the way, and I walked over that tree over to that tree, prepared to buy it, and looked at the price tag. \$600. I was planning to plant a forest of trees. It would be cheaper to air condition the place I knew what in the world. And today in today's economy, we'd be talking \$1200 for that dumb tree.

So I went to another nursery, faith nursery. And there I bought four trees for \$10 each. Now, granted, they were about the size of my little finger and only four or five leaves on the top. But I took them home and I dug the hole and I put mulch and fertilizer in there, and I planted those trees and I watered them, and I took care of those trees. I sprayed them. I would go and pick the caterpillars off each one of the four or five leaves with my own hand. Winter would come in the Midwest, and I would tape up their little bark with tape so that they wouldn't get cold against the winter winds. When I left Wheaton 16 years later, you should have seen my yard. It really ought to be declared on national oiberitum. When those trees began to have little seedlings, I would run around and gather them up and put them in Dixie cups. And I was like a grandfather. And these were my trees.

But my friends, do you see that? What? You are like a tree planted by God. You might say as Jeremiah, look at the wicked. You've planted them now. No, the wicked can never be sure of that. They can never be sure that they're not going to be blown away by the very next storm. But not you, your God's tree. And just as I cared about those dumb little trees in Wheaton, God cares about bright, creative little you and God cares for you. And God watches over you. And just remember that you are like a tree planted by God's own hands. And what about those hands? They're nail scarred hands, aren't they? Hands the eternal God of this universe, the God of the universe, who is so glorious and so powerful that even this great universe cannot contain him, cannot contain his glory.

And he has that kind of commitment to you. And do you see that when Jeremiah begins to complain against God because he doesn't understand, he's not thinking correctly. And not thinking correctly, then if you go back with me to Jeremiah 12, you can understand then why he goes on to our third keyword, which now is call as in 12:3, he says, drag them off like sheep to be butchered, set them apart for the day of slaughter. And what in the world here is this Prophet of God complaining about these wicked people who seem to be prospering and saying, If I were you God, I'd just zap them. I'd just wipe them out. I'd obliterate them from the face of the Earth.

You know, some of you young people have the joy, the heritage of having grown up in a Godly Christian home. One of the joys of being pastor of the Wheaton Bible Church is just that Wheaton was sort of an old bastion. I think things are changing. Christian organizations are moving out of Wheaton today, but just sort of a bastion of old Christianity. And, you know, I had

a college Bible study in my living room. And very often I would have present a young man who was the great great-great grandson of the founder of one of the greatest Christian missionary organizations in the world. And I had young people like that who had a Godly heritage who were out of Christian homes. But I wasn't like that. I didn't grow up in a Christian home. I came to know Jesus Christ as my Savior when I was a junior in high school and I wasn't into a lot of wild stuff.

But I was ungodly. I was living my life as if God did not matter, as if God doesn't have to be taken into account. I'm so thankful. Aren't some of you who did not have that beautiful Christian heritage, who did not have the opportunity to grow up in a Christian home, aren't you so thankful that God didn't just wipe you out? God didn't just zap you? God didn't just obliterate you off the face of the Earth? Hey, what's the task of a prophet? Not to be calling out and saying God zap them, wipe them out. What's the task of a prophet? Why the task of a prophet is to be sharing the faith, calling a person to come to know God in the New Testament through Jesus Christ.

One of my best friends as a pastor in New York City today, Madison Avenue Baptist Church in New York City who was my youth pastor for a number of years. But when he was a high school student in Texas. He was on the basketball team at his high school that won the state championship. And there were a couple of Christian businessmen in Dallas who grouped together to send these young champions off to Young Life Camp in Colorado. None of them were Christian. Mike didn't know anything about what Young Life Camp was in Colorado, but he knew that here was some Christian businessman who were willing to send him off for a two week all expenses paid vacation to a ranch in the mountains. And he and his team members were

willing to go. When they got to Colorado and found out it was a Christian camp, some of the guys went home immediately. They didn't want to stay. But Mike stayed. And Mike came to know Jesus Christ that week as his savior.

And he was told, when you go back home to Dallas, make sure that you share this fact with somebody. And Mike didn't have a friend in the world who could care less, would he perhaps not even understand that he had become a Christian at a camp in Colorado. So when he went back home, he was trying to think of, who can I share this with? And then he thought of this little lady who every time he came home from school, seemed to be out on her front yard taking care of the roses and taking care of the lawn. And she always spoke to him. She always said Hello, she knew his name. And so he decided to share with Mary the fact that he had come to know Christ. And one afternoon, coming home from high school, he shared that fact. And she got tears in her eyes.

And she said, Mike, do you think I care about these roses? Do you think I'm out here caring about the lawn? For two years, I've been out here praying for you every day as you've come home from school, praying that you would come to know Jesus Christ as your Savior. And you see, our task isn't say, oh, God, those wicked people, those sinners, those lousy no goods wipe them out. No, that's not our task. Your task and mine. God's called us to be his witnesses. God has called you and me to be light in this world, salt in this world. And why is it some of us are so embarrassed to witness for Jesus Christ. I remember the story.

It's a true story. It's strange to hear what's happened in Europe in this last year. But, you know, just after World War II, and I'm old enough to remember some of those days. Just after World War II, there really was a question as to how many of the European Nations were going to go communists. Italy looked like it was a goner. And so was France. One of the largest communist parties in all of Europe. And there was this young man who loved his wife and his little daughter. But he really was committed to the communist cause. He wanted to see France go into the communist camp. And every night when he got home from work, he'd go out into the streets of Paris and he was working for the overthrow of the government.

One night he kissed his wife and little daughter goodnight and went out into the streets, and he had only been gone about an hour when suddenly the little girl was taken sick, violently ill. So very quickly that the mother had to send for a doctor. She was concerned. The doctor came and diagnosed the situation as appendicitis. Appendix about to burst. There wasn't time to get her to the hospital. Besides, the war had just ended and the hospitals were in disarray anyway, and he decided that they would operate right there on the dining room table.

And they made the preparations and the operation began. And they were just in the most strategic moment of the operation. When suddenly, without any warning, without even a flicker, the lights went out. The doctor had made preparations for this kind of an emergency. They ran around trying to get candles and trying to get lanterns, and by the time they had enough light for the doctor to get back working in the situation, it was already too late and the little girl had died. The mother was just devastated with grief. Some of the neighbors came in to try to help her, but

she felt badly. She felt terrible for herself. But she knew of her husband's commitment to the little girl. And she thought, what will I ever tell my husband when he comes home?

He loves her so very much. When suddenly the door burst open and this young father came running into the room saying, We've won. We've won a tremendous victory for the communist cause. Tonight we've persuaded the power and light company to go out on strike. And I myself pulled the master switch. Friends, why are we embarrassed to be the light of the world? Why are we afraid to be the salt of the Earth in a world that is constantly attempting to turn the lights out on itself? So do you see? And I promise you've been very patient. You see why I come finally to our question of the night and the challenge that we find in this verse.

Jeremiah, you're complaining about all the injustices in the world. You're complaining about people who are devastating the world, who are ripping up the rainforests and killing off the animals. You're complaining about the wicked all around you. You wonder where I am, what I'm doing, whether I have any plan at all, Jeremiah, don't you understand I have a plan? And my plan is you. I'm preparing you. You're my answer to the poverty. You're my answer to the racial injustices. You're my answer to the rape of the Earth. You're my answer to people who are ungodly who don't know me. Jeremiah, do you understand why I have you in a training program to run against the footmen? The day is going to come, Jeremiah in your lifetime, where I'm going to use you to race against the chariots.

Jeremiah, do you understand why I'm training you to walk on the level ground? In your lifetime, there is going to be the mighty overflow of the Jordan. And I'm training you to stand when no

one else will. Do you see why I say it's one of the greatest verses of all the Bible, one of the greatest questions of all of Scripture? Why you ought to put it up over your study desk and to take it seriously?

You know, do you think it doesn't matter whether or not you are obedient in these days? Haven't you seen with me some champion, you know, on the parallel bars and he seems as if he were born there. He seems as if he's at home just flipping around in the air when somehow or other you're just struggling to do some kind of chin up. And maybe you can do one or ten. But what? Do it. You know, the old story of the tourist in New York City who said, how do I get to Carnegie Hall? And the taxi driver said, practice practice. Again, I thought that was funny too.

Do you think whether or not you're obedient matters? Do you see that God has you in a training program? And if you are content to stumble on the level ground, how in the world will you ever stand in the days when the flood comes? Do you see that this is a verse for those of you in the congregation tonight who just sense what your potential is, who just sense what you want to do in the world, who just sense what contribution you want to make in life? You have a dream that you want to be different from everyone else. You want to be able to soar you want the S-O-A-R, you want to be able to fly with the Eagles. Well, you know, everybody else seems to content to perch with the parakeets and complain about the bird seed. And you know, you know that there is not a chariot you could not outrace if only you'd get serious with God and let God work in your life.

You know that you could stand against the mighty onslaughts if you get serious and let God teach you to stand on the level ground. And you know, as I speak to Christian college students, I find so many of them who are bored to death, bored just right out of their gourd with a Christian life. And you know why? They've spent their life just stumbling around. They've spent their life just falling down, never getting serious. And what is this? You know, you talk about the mighty acts of God. You talk about the mighty miracles of Scripture. You talk about people who really do make a difference in the world for God. Ho, Ho. Let's go and have a hamburger.

Let's all get it over with. And how many people are bored? Why? Because they've never seen God use them in mighty ways. They've never seen the mighty power of God in their life. They've never seen God turned loose through their words or through their thinking or through their writing or through their influence on another person. Oh, do you see why I challenge you with this verse? To me, it's one of the most challenging verses of Scripture. God has you in a training program. Your obedience does make a difference. And he's training you now to stand on the level ground because before your life is over.

Oh, I think we're living in one of the most exciting times history has ever known. What a generation in which you people are alive before your life is over. There are going to be mighty onslaughts. Can God count on you tonight? Let's pray. I know this isn't an evangelistic crusade, young people, but I wonder, with our heads bowed and with our eyes closed, I promise I'm not going to embarrass anyone. This is really personal. It's only between you and God. And if God has been speaking to you tonight, and if you want to make some kind of response to God, whether it's you know, hey, will you stand for me? Will you stand for me on level ground? Will

you make a commitment in your generation to soar like the eagles when everybody else is content to perch with the parakeets, whatever it is. I wonder if with our heads bowed and our eyes closed, if before God, you just raise your hand to God and say, God, I want to be your man. I want to be your woman. Pastor. Chris, would you be my witness? All right? Yes.

I see the hands of many young people, primarily God sees your hand. You're saying something to God right now. I don't know what God is saying to you, but just by lifting up that hand, you're saying yes to God. Oh, God, our Father. I thank you for these young people, golden young people in the golden state. I thank you, Father, for the gifts, for the talent that you've given them, for the ability. And I thank you, Father, that the world is going to hear from them. They're going to stand for you in the midst of mighty onslaughts. They're not ashamed to be light in a world that's constantly turning the lights out on itself in Jesus name. Amen. God bless you all.