

ETERNITY IS NOW IN SESSION

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PARTICIPANT'S
GUIDE

JOHN
ORTBERG
& GARY MOON

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Eternity Is Now in Session Participant's Guide: A Radical Rediscovery of What Jesus Really Taught about Salvation, Eternity, and Getting to the Good Place

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for choosing to use *Eternity Is Now in Session* for your group. This participant's guide is designed to accompany the *Eternity Is Now in Session DVD Experience* and the book *Eternity Is Now in Session* by John Ortberg. This study guide is five sessions long and will help participants grow closer to God as they rediscover “what Jesus really taught about salvation, eternity, and getting to the good place.” The sessions will show participants what it means to follow Jesus in discipleship through the stages of awakening, purgation, illumination, and union.

Each session follows a similar format: there is a video with teaching from John Ortberg, discussion questions for group reflection, and a key activity that invites participants to go deeper into the topic studied. There are also suggestions for ways that participants can engage this study throughout the week (including reading corresponding chapters in the book *Eternity Is Now in Session*) and Scripture passages that follow the theme of the session.

Your group should have a leader who is responsible for

starting the video, prompting participants with the discussion questions, and directing the key activity. The leader should also monitor the time and can adjust the session's activities and discussion accordingly. (See "Leader Tips" on page xi.)

John writes, "God is not waiting for eternity to begin. God lives in it right now. It is the interactive fellowship and joy that exists between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Eternity is rolling right along, and we are invited to be part of it—*now*." Are you ready to join in?

Eternity is now in session!

MATERIALS NEEDED

This *Eternity Is Now in Session Participant's Guide* is intended to accompany the *Eternity Is Now in Session DVD Experience* and the *Eternity Is Now in Session* book. Each session of this curriculum is intended to last sixty to ninety minutes. In order to get the most out of this study, we recommend that you have the following materials present at your meetings:

- One copy of the *Eternity Is Now in Session DVD Experience* for the group
- A copy of the *Eternity Is Now in Session* book and this participant's guide for each person
- A DVD player and TV or a computer (to watch the video component for each session)
- A clock (to monitor time)
- A pen or pencil for each person (to take notes during the video and for use in each session's key activity)
- A Bible for each person

LEADER TIPS

The following are some tips that will help you as you lead your group through the *Eternity Is Now in Session* study:

BEFORE THE SESSION

- Watch the video (if possible) and look over the study notes, discussion questions, and activities in the participant's guide in advance of the meeting.
- Pray by name for each person who will be at the session and ask that God would open new avenues for intimacy with this person through the study.
- Consider preparing (or appointing someone to prepare) a snack for the session. Snacks can loosen an atmosphere and make people more comfortable with sharing.
- Make sure the materials needed (page ix) are present at every session. It's a good idea to arrive early in case of problems.
- Encourage study participants to read the chapters in *Eternity Is Now in Session* in advance of your meetings. While reading the chapters isn't necessary to use the

participant's guide or DVD, participants will get the most out of the experience by following along in the book.

AT THE SESSION

- Be sure to welcome each person to the group when they arrive, and carry that spirit of welcome throughout the session.
- Try to encourage each person to speak during the discussion.
- Don't be afraid to adapt the material provided in this study—cutting questions or lingering on a topic—to provide the best experience for your group.
- Be mindful of participants' time, and do your best to keep the study within the parameters you've set for the group. That being said, if the Holy Spirit is moving, do what you can to allow extra time and space to minister.
- Remind participants of the homework activities that accompany each session, which can be accomplished throughout the week. Highlight one or more of these activities and request reports at your next session.
- Consider taking prayer requests at the close of your session or breaking into smaller groups for prayer.

Session 1

ARE WE THERE YET?

WELCOME

Welcome to session 1 of the *Eternity Is Now in Session DVD Experience*. Each of the five sessions in this study is designed to be completed in 60 to 90 minutes, with additional activities that you can do at home.

This session accompanies chapters 1–3 of the *Eternity Is Now in Session* book (pages 11–63). Watch the video, discuss the questions, and complete the key activity as a group as time allows.

VIDEO NOTES

As you watch the video, use the space below to take notes. We've included some key points to get you started.

Jesus—and the entire New Testament, for that matter—defines eternal life only once, with great precision, and in a way that has been largely lost in our day.

This is eternal life, that they may know you,
the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom
you have sent.

JOHN 17:3, NRSV

SESSION 1: ARE WE THERE YET?

To know God means to know what Paul called “the power of his resurrection” (Philippians 3:10) in the details and tasks and challenges of my daily, ordinary life.

God is not waiting for eternity to begin. God lives in it right now. Eternity is now in session.

The New Testament is a book about disciples,
by disciples, and for disciples of Jesus Christ.

DALLAS WILLARD

Discipleship is a journey—a lifelong journey in which we learn to live the life that Jesus offers. For many centuries, that journey was described using certain stages:

- **Awakening:** I become aware of God's extraordinary presence in my ordinary days. I wake up to love, gratitude, wonder, and responsibility.
- **Purgation:** I confess my character defects. I humbly ask God to remove them. I engage in practices that can help free me from them.
- **Illumination:** I begin to change at the level of my automatic perceptions and beliefs. My "mental map" of how things are begins to look like Jesus' mental map.
- **Union:** I begin to experience the life that Jesus invited us into when he said, "Abide in me, and I will abide in you" (see John 15:4).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In John 17:3 Jesus defines eternal life as *knowing* God. What does it mean to know God? How does this differ from knowing *about* God?
2. What is the significance of eternity being in session right now?
3. What are any barriers you may have to experiencing Jesus as your “shepherd” or “your very good friend” as you go through each day? Why are these things in the way?

KEY ACTIVITY: KNOWING GOD

BELIEF VS. KNOWLEDGE

Belief and *knowledge* are two very different words. We can believe something even if it is false. We can believe, for example, that the moon is made of cheese or that the universe sprang from nothingness without assistance. Jesus knew that even the demons in hell believed he was the Son of God. But, as Dallas Willard has written, “We have knowledge of something when we are representing it (thinking about it, speaking of it, treating it) as it actually is, on an appropriate basis of thought and experience.”¹ Knowledge is truth based on adequate evidence.

So when John states that “eternal life = knowing God,” he is talking about stepping into a belief. We can believe that a chair can support our bodies. We know this is true when we trust the chair with our weight. Eternal living means trusting our lives to what is real, present, and right here. Knowledge takes belief to a new and experiential level.

- If knowing God through living *with* the Trinity is the key to understanding who we are, and why we are here, what are some practical ways you can live more moments of your life “with” God?

¹ Dallas Willard. *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 15.

DISCERNING GOD'S VOICE

As you live in more active conversation with your good friend Jesus, you may want to consider the following questions to help you recognize the voice of God.

1. **Does it sound like God?** Does what you heard sound like something God would say? Is it consistent with God as you know him through Scripture?
2. **Does it sound like Jesus Christ?** Does it sound like something Jesus would say? Is it consistent with Jesus as you see him revealed in the pages of the New Testament?
3. **Does it help you be conformed to the image of Christ?** The glory of God is our transformation into Christlikeness (see 2 Corinthians 3:18).
4. **Is it consistent with a previous experience you have had that you now know was from God?** We can take advantage of the 20/20 vision of hindsight.
5. **Is it consistent with the fruit of the Spirit, and does it promote the growth of Christ's character in us?** The fruit of the Spirit is the character of Christ.

SESSION 1: ARE WE THERE YET?

6. **Is it consistent with the witness of what the saints and devotion masters have had to say about God?** Do I get a witness from those who have won the race?

7. **Do my closest friends and spiritual mentors believe it was from God?** Do I get a witness from those I trust?

8. **Is it consistent with the overarching themes of Scripture?** God’s spoken word will not contradict his written Word.

What questions would you add to this list?

HOMEWORK: RECOGNIZE AND RESPOND

Before the next session, read chapter 4, “Awakening” (pages 75–98), in the *Eternity Is Now in Session* book. Consider also completing the following activity:

FRANK LAUBACH AND THE “GAME WITH MINUTES”

Frank Laubach is a great example of a person who got to know God and lived his life very differently based on that knowledge.²

² This discussion of Frank Laubach is adapted from Gary Moon, *Falling for God: Saying Yes to His Extravagant Proposal* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2004), 89–92. Used by permission of the publisher.

On March 23, 1930, Laubach wrote in his diary, “Can we have contact with God all the time? All the time awake, fall asleep in his arms, and awaken in His presence, can we attain that? Can we do His will all the time? Can we think His thoughts all the time?”

When he posed these questions, forty-five-year-old Laubach was laboring under a cloud of profound dissatisfaction, despite his academic achievements—a BA from Princeton, a graduate degree from Union Theological Seminary, and an MA and PhD in sociology from Columbia University—and his success as a missionary to the Philippines. For fifteen years he had won praise as a teacher, writer, and administrator.

Laubach’s sterling achievements make it doubly puzzling when we read the self-assessment he made at the halftime of his life: “As for me, I never lived, I was half dead; I was a rotting tree.”

Even as his churches filled with converts, his heart was becoming crowded with loneliness, discouragement, and mild depression. Even after planting a seminary in the Philippines to train missionaries, he confessed that he had learned nothing of surrender and joy in Christ.

How can that be? Frank Laubach spoke of God daily. He had a devoted wife and family and all the trappings of success. Why was he so weighed down with doubt and despair?

Like Augustine’s, Laubach’s soul would forever feel restless and alone until nestled into the arms of God; it would forever feel lonely until awake to constant companionship with God. He was waiting for something more.

Laubach determined to do something about his miserable

condition and decided to make the rest of his life a continuous inner conversation with God, in perfect responsiveness to God's will so that his own life could become rich with God's presence.

All he could do was throw himself open to God. All he could do was raise the windows and unlock the doors of his soul. But he also knew that these simple acts of the will were very important and so he resolved to spend as many moments as possible in listening and determined sensitivity to God's presence.

He invented something he called a "game with minutes." Laubach's "game" is a method of calling God to mind at least one second of each minute for the purpose of awareness and conversation.

As he began to live moment by moment in attentiveness to God's presence, Laubach experienced a remarkable change. By the end of the first month of his experiment with the game, he had gained a sense of being carried along by God through the hours of cooperation with him in little things.

When Laubach began his experiment he was living among the fierce Moros, an anti-Christian, Islamic tribe on Mindanao. Not long after he began to keep constant company with God, the Moros began to notice the difference. Two of the leading Muslim leaders began telling people that Laubach could help them know God. And even though he never pretended to be anything other than a follower of Jesus, the Moros began to take Laubach into their hearts and lives, loving, trusting, and helping him without regard to their cultural and religious differences.

Laubach lived the second half of his life as God's constant companion. His life is a picture of the path of real change. He took the *time* to be with God, was *honest* about the condition

of his heart, and trusted that God *desired* the same intimate relationship that he craved.

GAME WITH MINUTES IDEAS

Make a list of some ways you might become more aware of God's presence as you go through your day. We'll start you with a few ideas from Laubach's "game with minutes."

1. Wake up and greet God with a warm "good morning" and listen for his response.
2. Read favorite portions of Scripture as faded love letters—listening for the voice of the Author as you read.
3. Recognize the long line at the grocery store as an opportunity for a few deep breaths and a time to listen for the voice of God.
4. Make sure your day planner has at least one appointment with God that is written in indelible ink. Close the door. Offer him an empty chair. Then be quiet, be patient, and lean in.
5. See each person you meet as a new opportunity to show love to the *imago dei* (the image of God inside them). God's reflection is on every face.
6. Make hugging your close family or friends a sacrament of communicating love to God.
7. When you turn the light out, ask God if he enjoyed spending the day together and listen for his response.

SCRIPTURE FOR REFLECTION

The following passages of Scripture focus on *knowing* God.

This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

JOHN 17:3, NRSV

We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.

This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all.

1 JOHN 1:1-5, NLT

We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands.

1 JOHN 2:3

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. . . . This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.

1 JOHN 4:7-8, 13

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

PHILIPPIANS 3:10

That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

2 TIMOTHY 1:12

His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature.

2 PETER 1:3-4, NRSV