

**Riverview Baptist Church**  
**Sunday School Lesson Guide**  
**April 5, 2015**  
**“What is Eternal Life?”**

**Memory Verse:**

*“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)*

**Introduction:**

We know that eternal life in heaven is one of the greatest gifts associated with God’s Salvation plan through Jesus Christ. However, the state of “living eternally” is not all there is to “Eternal Life.” There’s a lot more to Eternal Life than just “Not Dying” and “going to heaven.” Sometimes we think about Eternal Life beginning after the physical resurrection and Judgement Day, when Jesus makes all things new (Rev. 21:5) and restores all things (Acts 3:21). While this will be the beginning of a brand new phase of life for believers in Christ, Jesus’ definition of Eternal Life shows us that it doesn’t just start there...

Ask the class some of the following questions, and follow where they go for a short discussion about their notions about Eternal Life. Then ask them if/where the Bible specifically gives the definition of Eternal Life and proceed with the lesson.

What is Eternal Life? (When does it start? What does it mean?)

- Is it sitting on a cloud and playing a harp with a halo around your head?
- Is it living in heaven with God after we die?
- Is it one forever-long church service in heaven?
- Is it meeting our dead family and friends and spending unlimited time with them?

**What does the Bible say, specifically, about what “Eternal Life” is? (John 17:3)**

*“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”*

Jesus is here praying to God the Father (talking about himself in 3<sup>rd</sup> person, which is a sign of respect for the Father) about His disciples. “They” in verse 3 is referencing “those you have given him” in verse 2, which is Jesus’ description for the disciples who are following him. He continues to pray for them to be protected and unified in his absence because he knows that he is about to be betrayed, captured and crucified.

In this moment, considering his own imminent death, Jesus is praying about eternal life, true life. He doesn’t feel compelled to pray about God preparing a place for the disciples or any other details about the state of Life in the eternity after his second coming. Jesus wasn’t even done with his FIRST coming, and yet here he is saying that he’s already given them eternal life.

(v.2). Now we could spiritualize that and say that's a sign of their eternal security; Jesus had saved them through the faith God the Father had given them already and all that remained was for Jesus to actually go ahead and die for their sins and be resurrected to seal the deal. We could say that Jesus was looking forward to being back at home, in Heaven with the Father, and having his disciples there too. These may be true, but Jesus didn't choose to say anything specifically about that.

Jesus' definition didn't lapse into how many miles high and wide the New Jerusalem was. Jesus didn't care to mention flowing streams, or streets of gold or walls of jasper, or angels with feathery wings, or ANY description of the world to come. Jesus didn't even describe emotional, divine family reunions (except to say that Jesus was soon to return to the Father) or the joy of reunited friends or meeting the saints and prophets of God. As enjoyable as it may be for us to think on these things, to fantasize about the Eternal State of the universe and our place in it once sin and death are gone... Jesus didn't find them compelling enough or essential enough to be included in HIS definition of Eternal Life.

### Eternal Life is Knowing God.

What Jesus chose to say in this prayer to the Father, was that Eternal Life is knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom God sent. If we're not careful, we might be tempted to think "that's it? What about triumphing over death and getting a new body? What about my mansion and my streets of gold? What about angels and harps and such? I mean, I know a relationship with God is what grows us spiritually and gives us the fruits of the spirit and the graces of the beatitudes and conforms us to be like Christ, but surely that's not ALL eternal life is about?!" Let's leave these questions for a minute and do a little thought experiment.

Let's take a trip back in time to before indoor plumbing, before water treatment centers and the public utilities we enjoy today. Imagine that your family's only water supply is a creek that runs behind your house. The water is murky, but drinkable. It stinks a little, but it's all you've got. Sometimes it makes you sick, so you only drink the bare minimum to survive. You have no idea what's up river from you, but your family has lived here all your life and it's all you've ever known. As far as you know, this is as good as it gets.

Then one day, a man comes down out of the mountains and tells you that there is a powerful artesian spring up in the hills that produces this creek. There, the water is pure, clear and it flows all hours of the day, never stopping. The water is also cool, refreshing and filled with healthy minerals from filtering through the rock from higher ground. By the time it reaches you, though, it has received run-off from several pastures and a swamp. No wonder it's barely suitable to keep you alive, much less healthy! Now, how could you get that good, clean water that you need? You need to get closer to the source. That would take some sacrifice: moving, changing your lifestyle, etc. but once you'd experienced the purity of that spring, all the sacrifices would seem like nothing to living near that water supply!

## God is the only source of Life.

Now let's go back to what Jesus said: Knowing God IS eternal life. Period. Just like that well in the story was the source of the pure water, God is the source of Life itself. He is THE Spirit of Life and Creation. There is no other source of Life anywhere else. Jesus came to give us eternal life by removing the barrier that our sins had put up between us and God. Once that was removed through Jesus' sacrifice, Eternal Life, living water, was man's for the taking... but only through Jesus Christ, whom God the Father sent. (v.3).

## Jesus' sacrifice makes Eternal Life possible for us.

In John 10, (the Good Shepherd scripture we studied), Jesus said "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."(v.9) He is the gate for the sheep to come into the fold and be saved (10:9). He is the Way, the Truth and the Life! (John 14:6) Jesus has supplied us with means to reconnect with God Almighty, the source of Life! The closer we stay to him, the more alive we become and the more spiritually alive we will feel and act. We will be more spiritually healthy and productive as we grow and work. This is Life as it should be: strong, vibrant, growing and continuing forever without interruption.

As we've studied before, we can grow closer to God through spiritual discipline. Bible study and meditation, prayer, fasting, giving, service and worship are some of the examples we studied. Of course, these aren't ways that we "earn" a seat at God's table. They don't make God love us more, and God doesn't withhold anything from us until we perform a certain task or give a certain amount or pray a certain number of times. Disciplines train us to bring our minds and hearts more into tune with God's will and the more we come to see things God's way, the more we align ourselves with the Life-giving attitudes, emotions, thoughts and graces of God and the less we associate with the poisonous, sickening, deadly attributes of our natural, "fleshly" and worldly tendencies.

## Our relationship with God enhances our lives

1. NOW – in spite of all the pain in life

Jesus summarizes Eternal Life by its source and by his goal. His work was to make God's grace available to all by disarming Sin and Death of their power to separate us from a Holy God of Life and Abundance, and Jesus has done just that. He has made it possible that we may have peace and joy and fulfillment and all the things that matter in Life right now and not just in the Sweet By and By. Intimacy with God, that deep knowledge, IS Eternal Life because it gives us a source of meaning, peace, joy, and love despite all the depression, poverty, strife, rejection, pain and separation that occur in this world. The Peace of God that Passes Understanding (Philippians 4:7) (in other words, "the Peace that don't make sense") is available to us today, because of Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus, God can speak that peace to His children despite war, famine, cancer, murder and violence, natural disasters... any situation. This benefit transcends and also amplifies any other detail we may want to associate with Eternal Life.

B) In Eternity – where we will experience life without sin

- Will we see our saved loved-ones again? Absolutely. (1 Thes. 4:13-18)
- Will we dwell physically with God and He with us eternally? Absolutely. (Rev. 21:3)
- Will we live forever with incorruptible bodies in an incorruptible world? Absolutely. (2 Cor 15:51-54)

But we can and will consider these glories of the eternal state just common graces (gravy on the biscuit, icing on the cake) compared to the supreme glory and joy of seeing and knowing God, our Creator, the embodiment of Love and Life, forever.

As 1 John 5:11-12 says, *“And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”*

So for those of us who are saved: We have the Son and so Eternal Life is NOW... not just in the future.

### Take Home

- The deep, intimate, personal knowledge of God is the true benefit of eternal life.
- If you are saved, know that Eternal Life is available to you through God’s graces this very minute. Seek His will through service and discipline and demonstrating your faith through loving others.
- If you are not saved, you can have the Peace and Joy of the knowledge of God by a simple act of faith in Jesus Christ. Admit to God that you have sinned against Him and need His forgiveness. Believe in Jesus’ sacrifice on your behalf and His resurrection, Confess Jesus to be your Savior from Sin and Death and make a commitment to love Him as you Lord by following His commandments and serving others in love.