STUDY GUIDE · 27 JULY 2026

Grounded in Hope: How the Promise of Eternal Life Shapes the Disciple's Life

Discipleship, Eternal Life & Heaven, Generosity & Stewardship

The Bible's promise of eternal life is not merely a comfort for the dying — it is also a motivating reality that reshapes how disciples of Jesus live, serve, endure, and invest right now. One preacher put it plainly: 'Do you want a deep joy that cannot be extinguished by suffering and death? You can have that joy, but you need to look to Jesus.' This five-session guide traces that conviction across Luke's Gospel, the Psalms of Ascent, and the letters of Paul. We begin with the nature of eternal life itself — what it actually is — and then follow its power outward: reordering our priorities away from passing things, awakening a watchful and other-centred readiness, sustaining us through suffering, and finally directing every resource we hold toward an investment that outlasts this world. The arc is deliberate. You cannot wisely steward what you do not deeply want, and you cannot deeply want what you have not clearly seen. So we start by looking hard at the gift itself.

Eternal life is not merely endless existence but a present and future reality of knowing God through Jesus Christ — a joy rooted in God's own eternal being that nothing in this world can extinguish.

Jesus defines eternal life with striking precision in John 17:3: 'This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.' Eternal life, then, is not first about duration but about relationship — specifically, entry into the joy that already exists within the

triune God. One sermon puts it this way: 'God himself is joy. He's existed forever, eternally, even before the creation of the world as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a relationship of love and eternal happiness and joy.' Through Jesus, that inner life of God is opened to human beings caught in sin, suffering, and death. This is why John 10:10 sounds the way it does: 'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they might have life and have it abundantly.' The contrast is not between a little life and a lot of life, but between a counterfeit and the real thing.

The Easter sermon draws this contrast in the starkest possible terms. Nobody doubts death, but many of us despair of life — in the face of sin, grief, disease, and endless conflict. Into that despair walks 'the living one,' Jesus himself, who has authority to lay down his life and take it up again (John 10:17–18). He is not merely a teacher about life; he is, as John puts it, the Word in whom was life, the light of the world, the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). When the risen Jesus calls Mary's name outside the empty tomb, 'joy explodes, replacing the sorrow in her heart' — and that same voice still calls.

Understanding what we are hoping for matters, because not all joy is the same. There is a 'joy of sense' — fragile, fleeting, dependent on circumstances going well — and a 'joy of faith' — a deeper, lasting joy rooted in who God is and what he has promised, even when we cannot yet see it. The Psalmist knows this distinction, and so does the World Happiness Report: Canada ranks among the biggest losers in happiness over the past decade, with respondents citing loss of affordability, lower mental health, and diminished quality of life. But Jesus offers something the report cannot measure — a joy so rooted in the eternal being of God that suffering cannot extinguish it. That is the foundation on which everything else in this guide is built.

- How does Jesus define eternal life in John 17:3, and why does that definition change the way we think about heaven?

- Where do you most feel the weight of the death-and-life contrast that the Easter sermon describes — the reality that Jesus, 'the living one,' has entered a world of sin and death?
- What is the difference between the 'joy of sense' that depends on circumstances and the 'joy of faith' rooted in God's promises, and which one tends to govern your emotional life?
- How does the picture of God as eternally joyful within himself — Father, Son, and Spirit — change the way you picture the eternal life Jesus offers you?

The parable of the Rich Fool exposes four false assumptions that tempt us to build our lives on possessions rather than on God. When we grasp the staggering shortness of earthly life against the backdrop of eternity, the invitation to be 'rich toward God' becomes urgent.

In Luke 12:13–21 Jesus refuses to adjudicate a family inheritance dispute and instead tells a parable designed to expose the absurdity of building your life on possessions. The Rich Fool makes four false assumptions: that his wealth could secure his future, that it could give him lasting satisfaction, that it ultimately belonged to him, and — most fatally — that this life was all there was. He forgot the judgment of God. He forgot eternal life to come. And so God confronts him: 'Fool, this night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' The genre of parable is deliberate here — it is designed to heighten contrast and make the absurdity of the man's logic plain for everyone to see.

To feel the weight of that absurdity, consider one illustration: if you compress four billion years into a single calendar year, all of recorded human history — roughly 6,000 years — fits into the last 41 seconds of December 31st. And your life, if you live to 70, occupies half of one of those seconds. Against that backdrop, Paul can write without exaggeration that 'this light momentary affliction is producing a weight of glory far beyond all comparison' (2 Corinthians 4:17–18), because 'the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.' Jesus claims to be the

Messiah of a kingdom that will never end. That claim reframes everything.

The passage ends with two options: lay up treasure for yourself and miss out on true life, or be 'rich toward God' by living for him and his kingdom and receive eternal life — 'capital L life for forever.' What possessions cannot give, Jesus can: a future inheritance that is 'imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven' (1 Peter 1:3–5); a lasting joy that earthly wealth cannot buy; co-heirship with Christ in which all that Jesus has is freely given to his people (Romans 8:16–17; 1 Corinthians 3:21–23); and a righteousness before God that money can never purchase but that Jesus supplies freely through his death and resurrection (John 3:16).

- What are the four false assumptions the Rich Fool makes, and which one do you find most personally tempting?
- The sermon illustrates the shortness of human life by fitting all 6,000 years of recorded history into the last 41 seconds of December 31st on a cosmic calendar — how does that kind of perspective actually change or fail to change your daily decisions?
- Jesus contrasts 'laying up treasure for yourself' with being 'rich toward God' — what does being rich toward God look like concretely in your current season of life?
- Paul says 'this light momentary affliction is producing a weight of glory far beyond all comparison' — when is that promise easiest or hardest for you to believe?

Jesus connects the blessed life directly with readiness for his return. Waiting faithfully for Jesus looks like serving others generously with everything he has entrusted to us — his word, his resources, his love.

Session 2 established that earthly life is brief and its treasures pass away. Session 3 asks the natural next question: so how should we live in the time we have? Jesus answers in Luke 12:35–48 with a portrait of the ready servant, and the portrait is surprising. Readiness does not look like anxious

watching of the sky or a stripped-down asceticism. Jesus repeats the word makarios — blessed, flourishing, the good life — three times in quick succession to describe the servant found faithfully at work when the master returns. 'Jesus isn't looking for you to live a life of asceticism that is dry and dull and boring. He wants your blessing.' The blessed life and the ready life turn out to be the same life.

When Peter tries to narrow the audience — 'Is this for us or for everyone?' — Jesus declines to draw that line. Instead, he describes what a ready person looks like: a manager who, while the master is away, faithfully gives the other servants their portion of food at the proper time. The sermon unpacks this image as 'taking the master's resources that he's given to us and just liberally pouring them out on other people from what we've received from him.' That includes the truth of God's word, material resources, mercy, compassion — everything entrusted to us. Faithfulness while waiting for Jesus is simply love, made practical and habitual.

The contrast sharpens the point. The unfaithful servant does not dramatically renounce his faith; he simply says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to live for himself. Self-indulgence shrivels the soul. It leads to neglecting others, and eventually to oppressing them. Jesus makes clear that those who use their entrusted positions for themselves rather than to serve others will face a severe reckoning at his return. The question the passage leaves with every listener is not 'Am I in the in-group?' but 'How am I using what the master has given me — his time, his possessions, his truth, his love — to care for those around me while I wait?'

- Jesus uses the word 'blessed' (makarios) three times in Luke 12:35–43 to describe the ready servant — how does connecting blessedness with readiness challenge the way you normally think about the good life?
- Peter's question — 'Is this parable for us or for everyone?' — reveals a desire to be in the in-group; how does Jesus' response shift the weight of responsibility rather than relieving it?

- The sermon describes faithful waiting as 'liberally pouring out the love of the master on those around us' — what specific resources has Jesus entrusted to you that you could be distributing more freely?
- What is the connection between the unfaithful servant's descent into self-indulgence and the gradual hardening of a heart that forgets Jesus is coming?

The Psalms of Ascent and Colossians 1 together teach that the Christian life is a pilgrimage through real suffering — sustained by memory of God's past faithfulness and confident expectation of his future restoration. Perseverance is not gritting your teeth; it is staying planted on the gospel while sowing seeds of faithfulness that God promises to harvest.

The Psalms of Ascent were road songs — sung by weary pilgrims ascending toward Jerusalem, people who needed to be reminded of where they were headed. Psalm 120 begins the journey in an unresolved place, surrounded by conflict and longing for deliverance. Psalm 121 lifts the eyes: 'My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.' The God who keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. He is continuously faithful — not even a single millisecond off the clock. He is intimately faithful — 'your shade on your right hand,' not a distant figure in the sky. He is thoroughly faithful — keeping every going out and coming in. And he is eternally faithful — 'from this time forth and forevermore.' The sermon on Psalm 121 offers a bifocal lens: God keeps not just our present physical life, but the life beyond. Pains and sufferings and even death are 'pale in comparison to meeting the Lord face to face and being with him forever.'

Psalm 126 then models the interior life of the persevering pilgrim. It begins with joyful remembrance: 'When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.' The psalmist does not merely recount facts about past deliverance — he remembers the emotions, the

laughter, the shouts of joy, the nations noticing. That remembered joy becomes fuel for a bold, expectant prayer: 'Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev.' The image is of bone-dry desert wadis that fill almost overnight when the rains come — sudden, miraculous, life-giving transformation where there was nothing. And the psalm closes with a farmer sowing in tears in a field that looks hopeless: 'He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.' This is the joy of faith — rejoicing in future grace, choosing even through tears to keep sowing the seed of prayer, obedience, and faithfulness, because God is not done.

Colossians 1:21–23 gives the theological spine to what the psalms embody emotionally. Paul calls believers to remain 'stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel.' Stable here means founded on a sure foundation — the firm ground of the gospel of Jesus, like the wise builder in Matthew 7. Hard times come: persecution, sickness, despondency, doubt, sin, suffering. And in all of them, the temptation is to take the house of your life and move it to an easier-looking foundation — a new path to renewal, a different source of wholeness. Paul's answer is blunt: 'To leave Jesus is to leave life.' Hard times are not the time to pull back from community, leave the Bible on the shelf, or stop going to church. They are precisely the times to press in, keeping the house of your life firmly on the gospel of Jesus.

- Psalm 126 moves from joyful remembrance to a cry for future restoration — how does remembering what God has already done fuel your faith for what you are still waiting for?
- The image of a farmer sowing seed in a near-waterless field captures something real about costly obedience — where in your life does faithful sowing feel most futile right now?
- Colossians 1:23 calls believers to be 'stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel' — what are the alternative foundations that hard seasons most tempt you to move the house of your life onto?

- Psalm 121 describes God as continuously, intimately, thoroughly, and eternally faithful — which of those four dimensions is most difficult for you to hold onto when suffering comes?

The parable of the Shrewd Manager and Jesus' sending of the seventy-two converge on a single truth: our time on earth is not a waiting room but a training ground. Money, time, gifts, and opportunities are God's resources entrusted to us for his mission — to make friends for eternity and to advance a kingdom that will never end.

The parable of the Shrewd Manager in Luke 16:1–13 is one of Jesus' most puzzling stories, but its punch line is clear: 'The sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.' The dishonest manager, facing imminent unemployment, uses his last moments of authority to make friends who will receive him after he loses his job. Jesus commends not the dishonesty but the shrewdness — the forward-looking wisdom of using present resources to secure a future. His application is direct: 'Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.' Worldly wealth will fail; the kingdom of God will not. The children of light are called to be at least as forward-thinking as the children of this age — to use what will not last in order to bring people into what will last forever.

Verse 10 adds a second layer: 'One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much.' The money, time, and opportunity God has entrusted to each of us is not filler in a waiting room — it is a personalized training program in faithfulness. Many of us live as though our earthly circumstances are like Sudoku puzzles in a doctor's waiting room, there to help us pass the time until we finally get to heaven. But Jesus' teaching insists otherwise: 'We're not in a waiting room, we're in a training ground.' How we handle the small things now reveals and shapes what we will be entrusted with forever. The question is not the size of the bank account, but what is going on in

the heart. You can be poor and greedy; you can be rich and generous. The training is always already underway.

Luke 10 ties the thread together from the other end. Jesus sends out the seventy-two as lambs among wolves — dangerous work, requiring simple and unencumbered lives wholly dependent on God. He warns them plainly: in this world you will have tribulation. But he also tells them that not even death can undo the mission, because he has overcome the world and is coming again to raise his people from death. When the seventy-two return rejoicing that even the demons submit to them in his name, Jesus gently reorders their joy: 'Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you. But rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' Of all the gifts, that is the gift of gifts — to be a citizen of his kingdom forever. That primary joy, cultivated daily in prayer and in his word, is what keeps the disciple from being encumbered by lesser things and free to invest everything for the kingdom.

- Jesus says to 'use unrighteous wealth to make friends for yourselves so that when it fails they may receive you into eternal dwellings' — how does framing generosity as eternal investment change your motivation for giving?
- The sermon distinguishes between a 'waiting room' view of earthly life and a 'training ground' view — which framing better describes how you have been living, and what would change if you adopted the training-ground view more fully?
- Luke 10 warns that the kingdom mission is dangerous work and calls disciples to live simply and unencumbered — what encumbrances most distract you from kingdom focus in your current life?
- Luke 10:20 closes with the exhortation to rejoice above all that your names are written in heaven — how does that primary joy reorder the other sources of meaning and identity in

your life?

Conclusion

These five sessions trace a single arc. Eternal life is real and glorious — it is nothing less than entry into the joy that the Father, Son, and Spirit have shared from before time began (Session 1). Earthly life is brief beyond imagining, and its treasures cannot secure, satisfy, or save us (Session 2). That contrast calls us to a watchful, other-centred readiness today — faithfully distributing the master's resources to those around us while we wait for his return (Session 3). And when the journey grows hard — and it will — the same hope that motivates us also sustains us through tears and barren seasons, because the God who kept Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps, and the harvest he has promised will come (Session 4). Every resource we hold — money, time, gifts, relationships — is therefore not a waiting room distraction but a training ground investment in a kingdom that will never end (Session 5). The guide closes where it must: with the invitation of Luke 10:20 and John 10:10. The greatest gift is not power over spiritual forces, not fruitful ministry, not even the remarkable things Jesus does through his people. The greatest gift is that your name is written in heaven, and that the risen Jesus has come — and keeps coming — to give you life, and life abundantly.

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