Eternity in Our Hearts

--Teacher’s Guide--

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**Introduction**

Solomon wrote that God has “set eternity in the hearts of men” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). The following studies are written with that truth in mind. Even though people might reject God’s existence, they still have a residual longing for eternity in their hearts. What I have tried to do is to awaken the international to their longing for eternity, and then to show that only the infinite and personal God of the Bible is able to meet that longing.

In Lesson 1 (The Context of Our Lives), we learn about the importance of context and about how God is the ultimate context in which we should live our lives. We learn about how fearing God, in fact, means trusting the God, and we saw how Jesus could have peace in the face the storm because he had complete faith and trust in the God who is above the storm. The aim of this lesson is to give us a desire to live in the context of the God who is to be feared so we may experience peace in the midst of our “storms.”

In Lesson 2 (Our Longing for Eternity), we think about what the verse means that says God has “set eternity in the hearts of men [and women].” Then we look at where God told Moses, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." Even though these words sound like a moth being drawn toward its annihilation, in fact they refer to a God who would fulfill us. The aim of this lesson is to draw us toward wanting a relationship with this eternal, infinite God who alone would fulfill our longing for eternity.

In Lesson 3 (God Longs to be in a Relationship with Us), we consider the truth that this God who says, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live,” wants to be in a relationship with us. We look at the story in Luke 15 where the father longs for the relationship with his rebellious son to be restored. The aim of this lesson is to help us see that we were made to be in a relationship with God and that we will be most fulfilled being in such a relationship.

In Lesson 4 (The Dilemma), we see that we have broken God’s law and have decided to go our own way. God’s justice demands that we be punished with death, which is separation from him. At the same time, God loves us and wants us to be in a relationship with him. How do you reconcile God’s justice with his love? That’s the dilemma.

In the appendices that appear at the end of these studies, I give some approaches for how to address those who deny God’s existence. I also provide a lengthier approach that addresses what it means to say we have sinned and to help bring internationals to the conviction that sin is a problem for them.

Thank you for being willing to go through these studies with your international friends. As you do so, I would appreciate your feedback—both positive and constructive. If you appreciate the approach I have developed here, please let me know. An encouraging word is always welcome. If you see some way in which I could improve this approach, I would appreciate you emailing me your suggestions to dhalverson@isionline.org.

I pray that God will richly bless both you and your international friends as you go through these studies together!

**Key:**

The green type indicates what appears in the Student’s Guide.

The black type indicates what appears only in the Teacher’s Guide. The Teacher’s Guide also includes the Student’s Guide.

**Lesson 1:**

**The Context of Our Lives**

Read **Appendix A: “The Importance of Context.”**

After having read “The Importance of Context”, please answer this question: What is the *ultimate* context in which you live your life?

Read Mark 4:35-41:

35That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." 36Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. 37A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 38Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

39He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

40He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

41They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

The disciples decided to follow Jesus for at least two reasons:

1. Through his miracles, they sensed there was something very special about him.
2. Through his teachings, he gave meaning to their lives.

The situation in this passage, though, is that everyone in the boat is about to die what seems to be a meaningless death. They’re in the middle of a large body of water, it’s night time, and they’re about to die. To the disciples, dying such a death didn’t make sense.

Have you ever had something happen to you that just didn’t make sense? Tell me about it.

How did the disciples react? They asked Jesus, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” (v. 38).

Can you relate to their reaction? When something bad happens to you, what are your thoughts about God? Are they positive or negative? Do you blame God? Do you feel God is distant and doesn’t care? Are they similar to the way in which the disciples spoke to Jesus?

Jesus got up from His sleep, rebuked the wind, and calmed the waves. And then He turned to His disciples and asked these two questions: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

Jesus’ words to His disciples seem to indicate that He was upset with, or at least disappointed in, them even to the point of being exasperated: Why are you *so* afraid? Do you *still* have no faith? But why? The storm was swamping their boat! Was Jesus not able to empathize with how the disciples were afraid they were going to die? Did He really expect them to think He would have the kind of power needed to calm the storm? Was Jesus being unreasonable?

To us, the disciples’ reaction to the storm was completely understandable. Any one of us would have reacted in the same way.

Why do you think Jesus was upset with or disappointed in them?

Answer:

Jesus was upset with His disciples because they had forgotten what the true context of their lives was. They had made the storm their ultimate context. To the disciples, the storm was in control. They had forgotten that God is the true ultimate context and that God is above the storm. God is the One in control.

Remember the story of the *Challenger* tragedy and the words of Jay Green: "*When you have that much power you have to respect it. If you get complacent about the launch phase, you don't understand what's going on.”* The disciples had forgotten about the almighty God being above the storm. They had forgotten about God being the ultimate context. As a result, they didn’t understand what was going on.

We all face various “storms” in our lives. What are some “storms” you are facing right now?

Jesus asked the disciples the following two questions: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” What do you think is the relationship between being “afraid” and having “faith”?

Why did Jesus experience peace in the face of the storm when the disciples didn’t?

Answer: Because Jesus had faith in the God above the storm, He could have peace in the face of the storm.

How can we apply the way in which Jesus faced the storm to our lives?

“Fearing God” is a concept taught in the Bible. When I mention the idea of “fearing God,” what comes to your mind? What do you think of when you hear that phrase?

The idea of fearing God is easily misunderstood. Most people think “fearing God” means we should be afraid of God. But “fearing God” and “being afraid of God” are very different from each other. In fact, they’re opposites.

“Fearing God” is a matter of trusting God, and “being afraid of God” is a matter of distrusting Him. When we are afraid of something, including God, we don’t trust it because we are afraid it will harm us. Fearing God, though, means an intense form of faith or trust in God. It means we can have complete trust in the God who is sovereign over all things. The reason Jesus could experience such peace of mind in the midst of the storm was because He trusted in the God who was above the storm. To experience such peace is the result of an extreme form of faith or trust. Such an extreme form of faith in God is what the Bible means by “fearing God.”

Notice how the following verse takes an unexpected turn toward the end:

Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary (Isaiah 8:12-14, NASB).

What is a “sanctuary”?

Answer: A sanctuary is a place of safety, a place where one can find peace and rest.

The very reasons we are to fear God—that He has unlimited power, that He has existence within Himself, that He is sovereign over all—are also the very same reasons we can find our ultimate safety and refuge in Him.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10).

What does this verse indicate is the relationship between wisdom and the fear of the Lord?

Since wisdom is a good thing and something to be desired, what does that say about “the fear of the Lord”?

One way to define wisdom is as having a correct view of reality, which means understanding who God is in all his fullness and how He is related to the rest of reality. Jesus certainly had a correct view of God and of His relationship to the rest of reality. That’s why He could experience such peace in the face of the storm. Perhaps this God who is to be feared would be worth getting to know.

**Appendix A:**

**The Importance of Context**

The space shuttle was an amazing machine in that it had an unbelievable amount of power packed into it. The shuttle consisted of three main components: the orbiter (the winged structure in which the astronauts ride), the external tank (the orange, silo-like structure), and the two solid rocket boosters (the two, rocket-like cylinders attached to the external tank). The fuel used to propel the shuttle away from the pull of the earth’s gravity was contained in the external tank and the solid rocket boosters. Combined, they held 3,405,640 pounds of fuel.

Once the solid fuel in the rocket boosters was ignited, the engines went from producing zero to 3.3 million pounds of thrust in less than a second. It took the boosters only two minutes to expend their entire load of fuel.

The engines on the shuttle were so powerful that the noise alone from the blast could reverberate back from the platform and damage the superstructure of the shuttle. To prevent that from happening, 300,000 gallons of water were poured in only 30 seconds through 7-foot diameter pipes onto the platform as soon as the engines were ignited. The water served to soften the damaging noise of the engines.

On January 28, 1986, tragedy struck the shuttle program. As the *Challenger* lifted off, everything appeared to be normal. But then, 73 seconds into its flight, the *Challenger* exploded into a fireball, killing all seven crew members on board.

Concerning the *Challenger* tragedy, Jay Green, one of NASA's controllers at Houston, said, *"When you have that much power you have to respect it. If you get complacent about the launch phase, you don't understand what's going on.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

Mr. Green's comment had to do with context. He was saying that, when the kind of power contained in the shuttle's rockets was being harnessed, one should always be mindful of it: it should be a part of one's thinking constantly, and it should never be taken lightly. When one loses the context of the power contained in the 3.5 million pounds of fuel, then, as Mr. Green says, *"you don't understand what's going on."*

1. Ed Magnuson, “They slipped the surly bonds of earth to touch the face of God,” *Time*, February 10, 1986, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)