
THE

INTERVAL

The Brief Window That Shapes Your Eternal Soul

8-WEEK STUDY GUIDE

A Companion to the Book



For Small Groups and Church Studies

Jarred Fenlason, D.Min.

www.intervalbook.com

How to Use This Guide

This study guide is designed for an 8-week journey through *The Interval*. Each week covers approximately three chapters, organized around the book's natural structure. The guide works for:

- Small groups (6–12 people)
- Sunday school classes
- Church-wide studies
- Personal reflection (adapted for individual use)

Suggested Session Format (60–75 minutes)

- Opening Prayer & Check-in (5 minutes)
- Review of Key Concepts (5–10 minutes)
- Discussion Questions (35–45 minutes)
- Weekly Practice Assignment (5 minutes)
- Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Tips for Leaders

- Read the assigned chapters before leading each session.
- You don't need to cover every question—choose the ones that resonate with your group.
- Create space for silence. Some questions require reflection before response.
- Balance theological discussion with personal application.
- End each session with clear next steps—the "Weekly Practice" assignments help apply what's learned.

A Word About Tone

This book addresses weighty topics—death, judgment, eternal capacity. Some participants may feel anxious. Remind your group regularly: this is not about earning salvation (that is settled by grace), but about responding to the invitation to become who God is making us to be. The goal is urgency without anxiety, seriousness without despair.

Week 1: The Awakening

Reading: *Introduction + Chapters 1–3*

Theme: This life is not a waiting room—it's a forming room.

Key Concepts

- **The Waiting Room Fallacy:** Most Christians treat earthly life as something to endure until heaven arrives—but Scripture presents it as a forming room where eternal selves are shaped.
- **The Interval of Grace:** The unrepeatable span between conversion and death when formation is still possible.
- **The Mathematics of Forever:** Brevity amplifies significance—the brief window carries infinite weight because what we do and who we become here carries into eternity.
- **The Two Pillars:** What we do (stewardship, treasure) and who we become (formation, character) are inseparable movements of a single life.

Key Quotes

"You are becoming someone. Not in the vague, inspirational sense that adorns graduation cards and motivational posters. In the most literal, consequential sense possible."

"The years you spend on this earth are not a waiting room. They are a forming room, limited and closing."

"Nothing is wasted. Nothing is merely temporal. Everything translates."

"Every day of faithful service is forming a faithful servant. Every act of generous giving is expanding a generous soul. Every discipline of patience is building an eternal patience."

Opening Reflection

Before we begin, sit with this question in silence for one minute: If you knew your life was shaping the person you would be forever—not just determining where you go, but who you'll be when you get there—what would you do differently?

Discussion Questions

1. Before these chapters, how did you think about the relationship between this life and eternity? Has anything shifted?
2. The book argues the church has often treated this life as a 'waiting room' rather than a 'forming room.' Does this match your experience? If so, where have you seen it—in teaching, in attitudes, in your own assumptions?
3. If you really believed eternal life had already begun, what would you do differently today?
4. The book introduces "the interval of grace" as the window between conversion and death—the only time formation is still possible. What does it stir in you?
5. Chapter 2 argues that brevity amplifies significance—the brief window carries infinite weight. Does this create pressure or purpose for you—or both? Why?
6. How do the "two pillars"—doing and becoming—work together in your own experience?
7. What struck you most in these opening chapters? What question do you most want answered as we continue?

Going Deeper

1. Read 2 Corinthians 5:10 and 1 Corinthians 3:10–15. What do these passages suggest about the relationship between this life and eternity?
2. If the self being formed here is the self that continues forever, what is the relationship between sanctification and glorification? Are they continuous or discontinuous?

Weekly Practice

This week, identify one area of your life where you've been "waiting" rather than "forming." Perhaps it's a relationship you've neglected, a discipline you've postponed, or a calling you've deferred. Ask yourself: What would change if I treated this as eternally significant? Be prepared to share your insights with the group in the next session.

Write down one concrete action you will take this week to begin treating that area as a forming room rather than a waiting room.

Closing Prayer

Lord, we confess that we have often lived as though this life were merely a waiting room. Awaken us to the reality that eternal life has already begun—that what we do and who we become in this brief window matters forever. Give us eyes to see the weight of ordinary days. Send us into this week as those who are forming, not waiting. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week 2: The Theology of Becoming (Part 1)

Reading: Chapters 4–6

Theme: The self you are forming now is the self that continues forever.

Key Concepts

- **The Continuity Principle:** The person who dies is the person who rises—not replaced, not reset, but transformed. Identity persists through death.
- **The Kiln of Death:** Death fires the clay. What has been forming becomes fixed—not frozen, but foundationally established.
- **Fixed Starting Point vs. Eternal Growth:** The kiln sets the floor, not the ceiling. Eternal growth (*epektasis*) continues forever from wherever the interval left each soul.
- **The Patristic Witness:** Irenaeus, Augustine, and Gregory of Nyssa all affirmed that formation in this life shapes capacity for eternity.

Key Quotes

"We will not arrive in the new creation as blank slates. We will arrive as the people we have become."

"Death is the kiln. What has been forming in secret enters the fire—the thousand small choices, the habits of attention and neglect, the shape the will has taken through decades of bending toward God or away from him."

"Formation is not the obstacle to God's purpose. Formation is God's purpose."

Opening Reflection

Take a moment to consider: If the kiln fired tonight—if death came before morning—what "posture" would be fixed? Not your circumstances, but your character. The direction of your will. The habits of your heart.

Discussion Questions

1. The "continuity principle" teaches that you persist through death—the same person, transformed. What does that stir in you?
2. Chapter 5 argues that death sets your starting point for eternal growth—not a ceiling, but a foundation. Does that feel like relief, urgency, or something else?
3. The early church fathers saw formation as the point of earthly life, not an obstacle to it. How does that challenge or confirm how you've thought about the Christian life?

- 4.** Augustine taught that the blessed in heaven "rejoice in others' greater glory without any diminishment of their own joy." How is this different from earthly comparison?
- 5.** Gregory of Nyssa's concept of *epektasis* suggests we will grow into God forever. How does this reshape your picture of heaven?
- 6.** The kiln is coming. Where do you sense the Spirit pressing on your formation right now?
- 7.** What question are you carrying into next week's reading?

Going Deeper

- 1.** Read Hebrews 9:27 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. How do these verses support the idea that death concludes the evaluation period?
- 2.** Thomas Aquinas argued that after death, the soul can no longer change its basic orientation toward God. Do you find this theologically compelling? Troubling?

Weekly Practice

Choose one character trait you want to develop more fully—patience, generosity, courage, gentleness, or another. Identify one concrete, repeatable action this week that would press that trait deeper into who you are.

Example: If you chose patience, you might commit to pausing for three breaths before responding to any frustrating situation. If you chose generosity, you might give something away each day this week.

Closing Prayer

Father, we acknowledge that our lives are brief and the kiln is coming. We cannot stop time, but we can steward it. Shape us now, while the clay is soft. Form in us the character we will carry forever. May we not waste the interval. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week 3: The Theology of Becoming (Part 2)

Reading: Chapters 7–9

Theme: The interval is irreplaceable—certain formations require conditions that will never exist again.

Key Concepts

- **The Mystical Vision:** Maximus, Eckhart, John of the Cross, and Böhme explored the interior landscape of becoming—the soul's transformation through union with God.
- **The Modern Recovery:** Edwards (thimble and ocean—both 100% full, neither lacking), Lewis, Willard, and Wright recovered the vision the church had forgotten.
- **The Threefold Framework:** Salvation by *grace through faith*. Formation by *Spirit-enabled cooperation*. Reward by *grace-enabled faithfulness*. Each is distinct; all are real.
- **The Irreplaceable Interval:** Certain capacities can only be forged here. Certain rewards can only be earned here. The window is closing.

Key Quotes

"The darkness is the operating room where the Great Physician cuts away what would prevent the soul from bearing more of him."

"Heaven is not merely a place but a capacity—the capacity to receive infinite love, to delight in absolute beauty, to participate in eternal joy. That capacity is being formed now."

"Certain capacities can only be forged here. Certain rewards can only be earned here. Certain formations can only occur under conditions that will never exist again."

"The formation is entirely grace-enabled—but it is also real. The capacities developed are real capacities. The character formed is real character."

Opening Reflection

Consider the thimble and the ocean. Both are 100% full. Both overflow with the same joy. Neither lacks anything. Yet they do not hold the same volume. How does this image reshape your understanding of heavenly differentiation?

Discussion Questions

1. John of the Cross called suffering "the dark night"—not abandonment, but surgery. How does this reframe difficulty in your life?
2. Edwards taught that in heaven, "those that are lowest in glory will be most happy in seeing others above them." How is this possible?
3. The 'threefold framework' distinguishes salvation, formation, and reward. Does this help clarify the relationship between grace and effort—or does it raise new questions?
4. Chapter 9 addresses objections: works-righteousness, unbearable pressure, wasted years. Which have you wrestled with?
5. The book says the teaching should produce "urgency without despair." How can we experience that balance?
6. The book argues that the interval is "irreplaceable"—certain rewards and formation are only possible under earthly conditions. What can you do now that you won't be able to do in heaven?
7. After three weeks, what is the single biggest shift in how you think about your daily life?

Going Deeper

1. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as "the conviction of things not seen." But in glory, we will see face to face. If faith itself becomes impossible in heaven, what does that say about the unique theological weight of the interval?
2. Böhme taught that the soul is essentially will—and as the will shapes itself in this life, so it remains shaped after death. What does it mean that we are, at our core, what we choose?

Weekly Practice

Practice the "threefold awareness" this week. Each morning, remind yourself: (1) I am saved by grace—nothing I do earns my standing before God. (2) I am being formed by the Spirit—my cooperation matters. (3) I am investing toward reward—my faithfulness deposits treasure. Notice how this triple awareness affects your daily choices.

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank You that salvation is settled—we rest in what Christ has done. And thank You that formation continues—we partner with Your Spirit. Help us hold grace and effort together without collapsing either. Expand our capacity for You. Make us larger vessels, ready to be filled forever. Amen.

Week 4: The Theology of Doing

Reading: Chapters 10–13

Theme: Heaven is not a great equalizer—faithfulness matters.

Key Concepts

- **The Differentiated Kingdom:** Scripture teaches proportional reward: ten cities for one servant, five for another. Levels as capacity, not location.
- **The Stewardship Test:** Life is a proving ground. The master entrusts, departs, and returns for an accounting. Faithfulness is evaluated proportionally.
- **The Fire That Tests:** Every believer's work will be tested—gold, silver, precious stones survive; wood, hay, stubble burn. Most lives contain both. What survives is rewarded; what burns is lost.
- **The Treasure Transfer:** Generosity is the alchemy that converts temporal wealth into eternal currency. What is given away is kept forever.

Key Quotes

"Formation shapes the soul. Faithful action earns the assignment."

"The Bema Seat is not merely a courtroom. It is a commissioning ceremony."

"What we hoard, we leave behind. What we release in faith, we find waiting."

Opening Reflection

Imagine standing before the Bema Seat. Not the Great White Throne (which is reserved for those outside of Christ), but the judgment seat where works are evaluated. What would you want to hear? What do you fear might be said?

Discussion Questions

1. The book describes heaven as 'ecology, not hierarchy'—a symphony where each saint adds a note no one else can add. What does that image open for you?
2. The parable of the minas (Luke 19) shows proportional reward—ten cities, five cities. What does this suggest about God's evaluation?
3. The Sunday school teacher isn't competing against the evangelist—she's evaluated against her own gifts. Both can hear "Well done." What does that free you from? What does it require?

4. Paul describes works of gold versus wood and hay. The book admits our motives are rarely pure. How do we build toward gold while acknowledging mixed motives?
5. The "treasure transfer" chapter argues that generosity converts temporal wealth into eternal currency. How does this reshape how we think about giving?
6. We're not just storing treasure in heaven—we're becoming the person who will steward it. What does that add to how you think about faithfulness?
7. Where is God inviting you to greater faithfulness right now—in time, money, relationships, or calling?

Going Deeper

1. Matthew 25:15 says the master distributed "to each according to his ability." What are the theological implications of customized entrustment?
2. The one-talent servant wasn't punished for doing evil—he was punished for doing nothing. What does this suggest about the danger of passivity?

Weekly Practice

Conduct a brief "eternal audit" this week. Look at your calendar and your bank statement from the past month. Ask:

- Where is my time actually going? Where is my money actually going?
- How much of this is "gold and silver"? How much might be "wood and hay"?
- Why am I doing these things—for God's glory or for human recognition?

Then take one action: **identify something to release this week**—time, money, or possession—that you would otherwise hold onto. Let it be practice for the treasure transfer.

Closing Prayer

Lord, we want to hear "Well done." Not because we are earning salvation—that is Yours to give. But because we want to honor the investment You've made in us. Show us where we are burying talents. Purify our motives—help us build for Your glory, not human applause. Give us courage to release what we would otherwise hold. Help us build with gold, not stubble. Amen.

Week 5: Heaven's Economy

Reading: Chapters 14–17

Theme: Heaven calculates value differently than we expect.

Key Concepts

- **The Great Inversion:** First becomes last; last becomes first. What looks insignificant on earth often proves most valuable in heaven.
- **The Currency of Souls:** People—not possessions—are the only treasure that transfers directly into eternity.
- **The Hidden Ledger:** God records what no human eye sees. The Father who sees in secret rewards openly.
- **The Compound Effect:** Small faithfulness sustained across time produces exponential return. Consistency matters more than intensity.

Key Quotes

"In heaven's kingdom, what you release, you keep. What you cling to, you lose. The way up is down."

"The treasure that has faces and names."

"The hidden ledger records not just what we do for God but what we are with Him—and that communion is itself the treasure."

"Who you are becoming through the small repeated choices is who you will be forever."

Opening Reflection

Think of something you've done faithfully for years without recognition—a quiet discipline, a hidden service, a private prayer. Heaven has noticed. How does it feel to know the hidden ledger is real?

Discussion Questions

1. The book calls heaven's physics "inverted"—first becomes last, losing is finding, emptying is filling. Where have you experienced this?
2. The book argues that people—not possessions—are the only treasure that directly transfers. What do we do with that?

3. The book says the same act can be gold or hay depending on the audience it seeks to please. How do we navigate this when much of life is necessarily visible?
4. Brother Lawrence said he possessed God "in as great tranquility" amid pots and pans as on his knees. What would it look like to practice that kind of hidden communion?
5. The compound effect suggests small, sustained faithfulness produces greater return than sporadic intensity. Where is God calling you to consistency rather than heroics?
6. Think of someone who invested in your soul—a parent, mentor, teacher, friend. What did their investment cost them? What has it produced in you?
7. "Earth says: acquire, ascend, assert. Heaven says: release, descend, surrender." Where does that press on you?

Going Deeper

1. Philippians 2:9 says "therefore" God exalted Christ after his emptying. The book argues the emptying was the mechanism, not the price. The emptying doesn't pay for the filling—it makes room for it. How does this pattern apply to our own lives?
2. Paul told the Thessalonians, "You are our crown"—not a reward for souls won, but the souls themselves as the reward. What does this suggest about the nature of heavenly treasure?

Weekly Practice

Identify one person God has placed in your life as an eternal investment—someone whose soul you can water this week. Do something specific: a conversation, an encouragement, a prayer, a practical help. Don't announce it. Let it be recorded only in the hidden ledger.

As you do, reflect: This is the treasure that transfers. This is the currency heaven counts.

Closing Prayer

Father, You see what is hidden. You record what is secret. You value what earth dismisses. Teach us to invest in what lasts—in people, in character, in the currencies that heaven counts. Free us from performing for human applause. Teach us to release what we would cling to—for what we renounce, we keep. Grant us not a single act of faithfulness but a long obedience in the same direction. Let us live for Your "Well done." Amen.

Week 6: The Hidden Currencies + The Weight of Now

Reading: Chapters 18–19 + Interlude: *The Weight of Now*

Theme: Suffering and time are currencies that purchase what comfort cannot.

Key Concepts

- **The Crucible of Character:** Suffering produces what ease cannot. The crown of life is only earnable under conditions that will not exist in heaven.
- **The Unrepeatable Resource:** Time moves in one direction. Once spent, it cannot be recovered. The interval is closing.
- **Urgency Without Anxiety:** Godly urgency is God-driven, love-based, energizing. Worldly panic is self-driven, fear-based, exhausting.
- **The Now That Contains Forever:** This moment is an intersection where temporal touches eternal. What you do with it can carry weight into forever.

Key Quotes

"Suffering is not the interruption of formation. It is formation's most potent crucible—producing what ease cannot produce, qualifying us for what comfort could never qualify."

"There is no later—not really. There is only this moment touching eternity, and then the next, and then the next, until the interval closes and what remains is what was formed."

"The weight settles. But underneath the weight are everlasting arms."

Opening Reflection

Think of a season of suffering you have endured—or are enduring now. What has it produced in you that ease could never have formed? What capacity has the crucible been building?

Discussion Questions

1. Chapter 18 argues that suffering produces what comfort cannot. How has suffering shaped you in ways ease never could?
2. The "crown of life" is promised to those who endure trials (James 1:12). In heaven, there will be no more mourning or pain. What does that mean for this crown?
3. Kierkegaard called each moment "where time and eternity touch." How does that change what an ordinary hour can hold?

4. Paul urges us to 'buy up' the *kairos*—the opportune moments—before the market closes. Where do you sense that urgency?
5. Joni Eareckson Tada calls this "my limited window of opportunity—the only time in history when I get to fight for God." What does that stir in you?
6. The Interlude says: "The clay is still soft. The kiln has not fired. What remains can still be redeemed." What do you do with that?
7. If the kiln fired tonight, what would emerge?

Going Deeper

1. Hebrews 5:8 says Jesus "learned obedience through what he suffered"—though he was sinless. Hebrews 2:10 adds he was "made perfect through suffering." If even Christ required this, what does it reveal about the nature of formation?
2. The eternal Son submitted to sequence—to growth, to the passing of days. What does that reveal about time's capacity to hold eternal weight?

Weekly Practice

Spend 10 minutes in silence with the Interlude. Before you begin, ask: What is suffering producing in me? Where am I wasting time that won't return:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. See if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Journal what surfaces. Bring it to the next session if you're willing.

Closing Prayer

Lord, the weight of now is heavy—but it is the weight of glory. Help us feel it without being crushed by it. Teach us to number our days. Redeem our time. Use even our suffering to shape us for eternity. We trust You with the interval. Amen.

Week 7: The Practice

Reading: Chapters 20–21 + Interlude: The Offering

Theme: Stand in the light now. Offer what you have.

Key Concepts

- **The Eternal Audit:** Not morbid introspection but consented examination—asking the Surgeon to show what needs healing before the window closes.
- **Standing as the Single Individual:** Before God, comparisons fall away. It is just you and the One who sees.
- **Your Eternal Vocation:** Gifting, longing, need, formation, and prompting converge to reveal what God is making you for.
- **The Offering:** Like the boy with loaves and fish, we offer what we have—not because it's sufficient, but because it's ours to give. God multiplies.

Key Quotes

"The light does not reveal merely what you have done. It reveals what you love. And what you love is who you are becoming."

"God does not waste formation. The wilderness years are not filler. The wounds are not accidents. The desires that keep you awake are not distractions."

"You are the one who offers. He is the one who multiplies."

Opening Reflection

"No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). This exposure is coming. The question is whether that Day will be your first experience of the light—or whether you've practiced standing in it. How does it feel to consider practicing the Bema now?

Discussion Questions

1. The book calls the eternal audit "consented examination"—not self-examination but inviting God to search. What's the difference?
2. Kierkegaard said "the crowd is untruth"—before God, comparisons fall away. What does it mean to stand as "the single individual"?
3. Eternal vocation emerges where gifting, longing, perceived need, and formation converge. Where do you sense that convergence?

4. The book says "God does not waste formation. The wilderness years are not filler. The wounds are not accidents." What has your wilderness been preparing you for?
5. The boy with loaves and fish didn't feed the multitude—he just offered what he had. What does that mean for how you approach your vocation?
6. The Offering ends with a prayer of release. What would it look like for you to "open your hands"?
7. As we near the end of this book, what is becoming clearer about who you are becoming and what you are being prepared for?

Going Deeper

1. The book says "the desire that won't die may be the arrow pointing toward assignment." If God plants desires as part of calling, what does that reveal about how the Spirit guides?
2. Hebrews 4:13 says we are "naked and exposed" before God—the Greek refers to a throat bent back for sacrifice. What does it mean to practice that posture now, voluntarily, before the Bema?

Weekly Practice

Pray the prayer from The Offering daily this week:

Here I am, Lord. Here is what I am becoming—Incomplete, still being shaped. Here is the time I have left—unknown, uncounted. Here is what I think you may be making me for—held loosely, offered freely. I do not know how you will multiply it. But it is yours. I open my hands.

Journal what shifts as you pray this prayer each day. Come prepared to share next week.

Closing Prayer

Lord, we step into the light—not to be condemned, but to be healed. Search us. Know us. Show us what we love and who we are becoming. We offer what we have—Incomplete, insufficient, ours to give. Multiply it for Your glory. We open our hands. Amen.

Week 8: The Vision

Reading: Chapters 22–24

Theme: The Bema is coming. So is the "Well done."

Key Concepts

- **The Bema Seat:** Every believer will appear before Christ's judgment seat—not for salvation (that is settled), but for evaluation and reward.
- **The Great Reunion:** What death stole, resurrection returns. Relationships severed by death will be restored—and deepened.
- **The New Creation Unveiled:** Heaven is not clouds and harps—it is embodied vocation on the renewed creation. Work without futility. Worship without distraction.
- **The Everlasting Morning:** The day without end. The life for which we were made. The question is who we will be when it dawns.

Key Quotes

"For those who have been practicing—the Bema is not threat. It is vindication."

"We are the glory. We are what enters."

"The journey does not end at the gates of the New Jerusalem. It begins there. Eternity is not arrival at a destination but embarkation on an endless voyage."

Opening Reflection

This is our final session. Take a moment to consider: What has shifted in you over these eight weeks? Who are you becoming that you weren't becoming before?

Discussion Questions

1. The book says for those who have practiced standing in the light, "the Bema is not threat. It is vindication." What does that shift?
2. Edwards believed heaven is not where joy plateaus but where it perpetually increases—"a fountain that rises higher with each passing moment." What does that open up?
3. Chapter 23 describes the Great Reunion—relationships restored and deepened. What does it stir in you to know the saints who have gone before are watching, waiting, anticipating your arrival?
4. The new creation involves embodied vocation—real work, real purpose. How does that reshape your picture of "heaven"?

5. "Well done" is the verdict we long to hear. What stirs in you when you imagine hearing it?
6. The two pillars of this book are doing and becoming. What is one commitment for your doing—stewardship, generosity, faithfulness—you want to carry forward?
7. And what is one commitment for your becoming—a character trait, a discipline, a posture of soul—you want to cultivate?

Going Deeper

1. The book says "the journey does not end at the gates of the New Jerusalem. It begins there. Eternity is not arrival but embarkation." If an infinite God can never be fully known, what does endless exploration of him reveal about the nature of eternal life?
2. The book ends: "The everlasting morning is coming." What does readiness look like for you now?

Final Practice: A Personal Covenant

Write a personal covenant with two commitments:

- **One commitment for your "doing":** A specific area of stewardship, generosity, or faithfulness you will pursue.
- **One commitment for your "becoming":** A specific character trait or spiritual discipline you will cultivate.

Share your covenant with the group or with an accountability partner. Keep it somewhere you'll see it regularly.

Closing Prayer

Lord, we have traveled far these eight weeks. We have seen what is at stake. We have felt the weight of the interval. Now we ask for the grace to live accordingly. Shape us for eternity. Prepare us for the Bema. Make us ready for the "Well done." The everlasting morning is coming. May we be ready when it dawns. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Continue the Journey

Thank you for completing this 8-week study. The interval continues. The becoming continues. May what you have learned shape the person you are becoming—for eternity.

Share the Message

If this study has impacted you, consider sharing *The Interval* with others and reviewing it on Amazon. Every soul is in the interval. Every life is forming. The church needs to recover what it has largely forgotten.

Visit www.intervalbook.com for additional resources.

~

*The clay is still soft.
The wheel is still turning.
The hands of grace are still at work.*

Begin.