

Desiring God Group Study
with an Explanation of the Resource
and an Introduction for Leaders

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Introduction

If God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him, then we must make it our aim to be as happy as we possibly can be in God. In other words: to be a Christian is to be a hedonist. For nearly three decades John Piper has labored to show the biblical foundation for a vision of God and the Christian life which he calls Christian Hedonism and to call people to pursue it with all their might. One of his earliest formulations of this vision came in a sermon series in the early 80s, which later was turned into the book *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*. As our name suggests, one of the chief reasons *Desiring God* exists is to spread the message of this book. That is, our desire and great joy is to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, we have developed study resources to use in conjunction with *Desiring God*. Our hope is that churches will use the book and its study resources to foster group study of Scripture and encourage group reflection on a God-centered vision of life, and that through this discussion God would ignite a passion in churches and individuals to seek after the deepest pleasure available, that which is found in seeing and savoring Jesus. This could happen in a number of ways, whether these resources are used at leadership retreats or gatherings, or in small group studies, or in personal study, or in some other fresh, creative, and Christ-exalting way that the Spirit of God may lead.

We want you to see from Scripture that God is uppermost in his affections. We want you to know that a Christian is one who savors God's glory in Jesus Christ above all competing treasures. We long for you to pursue worship as an end in itself. And we pray that you discover (perhaps for the first time) that love is the overflow of joy in God that gladly meets the needs of others; that Scripture and prayer sustain our pursuit of ultimate and lasting joy in God; that money and marriage and all material reality are means to our exaltation of and exultation in God; and that costly, risk-taking missions of love are also efforts to double our joy in God. May God bless churches and communities such that they learn more and more that the chief end of man is to glorify God *by* enjoying him forever.

Explanation of the Study Guide

In an effort to encourage discussion and deeper engagement with *Desiring God*, we have developed a ten-week study of the book. Each week consists of reading a chapter of the book, meditation upon concepts and Scriptures, and answering/discussing correlating study questions found in the study guide. The study guide is divided into the various sections explained below.

Note: We feel that these study resources would work best in a group setting. Not only do we believe in the biblical principle that iron sharpens iron, we also long to see church communities strengthened together in the foundations of the gospel. Nevertheless, we hope that these study resources can also be of benefit for individual study and reflection. We would strongly encourage any individuals who choose to use these resources for their own study to find other believers with whom to discuss the themes and Scriptures encountered in the material.

- **Reading and Reflection**

Each week the reader will work through a chapter of *Desiring God* (typically around 20–30 pages; week 6 covers two chapters). Ten core study questions are provided in the study guide to stimulate the learner to interact with *Desiring God* and with Scripture. The focus of these questions ranges from comprehension of the reading, to personal examination, to group discussion. It may be most convenient to break these questions down into five daily portions of two questions each (with a sixth day devoted to “Going Deeper”; see below). These questions are intended to help the reader locate the key concepts within the text of *Desiring God* itself, and to challenge the reader to dig further into Scripture. For this reason, we have included the page number(s), usually in parentheses, where the ideas these questions cover can be found in *Desiring God* (3rd ed.; Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003). The questions are listed in order of appearance within *Desiring God*. Readers should feel free to answer these questions as they read, but if it is preferred, these questions could be answered after reading the chapter(s). If used in this way, the questions would serve as a good way to review the reading. We recommend obtaining a separate notepad to write out answers as well as other thoughts, reflections, and resolutions that may develop during reading and study. Group participants are expected to bring both the study guide (with their answers) and *Desiring God* (if owned) to the group meetings.

The underlined questions are those which we feel would be particularly germane to group discussion. Group participants should familiarize themselves with these questions prior to the group meeting (see “For Leaders” below for more details). Participants should also be mindful during their personal study of any other questions that would stir meaningful discussion, noting them in the guide and bringing them up in the group discussion. Such questions may be felt to be particularly suited to the group’s context, or they may be questions with which the participant is particularly wrestling and struggling to answer.

Throughout the study guide the learner will repeatedly be challenged to utilize their biblical knowledge by thinking of or locating relevant Scriptures. These may either add support to the concepts discussed or seem to conflict with them, and should be discussed with the group. Learners should, therefore, always have a Bible when working through the reading and study guide (a concordance would also be quite helpful). Regardless of how deep one considers their biblical understanding, everyone should bring what they know to bear on their study and discussion and strive to discover more of Scripture in the process.

- **Going Deeper**

A short section appears at the conclusion of every week containing two or three questions aimed at internalization of the truths being studied. The questions here will often be pointed toward personal examination and application. In this section learners are also presented with opportunities to further study especially difficult concepts arising in the reading. Optional further readings are noted in an effort to aid the learner’s meditation on such concepts. These optional readings include the Epilogue and each of the appendices in *Desiring God*, as well as a few articles which can be found on the Desiring God web site (www.desiringGod.org).

- **Praying the Psalms**

We believe that times of group prayer are essential in the fight for joy in God. Furthermore, we have found the Psalms to be filled with the language and experience of Christian Hedonism. Therefore, to foster a spirit of group prayer, and as a way of reinforcing the truths encountered during each week, we have selected a psalm for the group (or individual) to pray through in conclusion to each time of discussion. This way of concluding each time of discussion ultimately stems from the convictions that Scripture is “kindling for Christian Hedonism” and prayer is the “power of Christian Hedonism” and that they always work in conjunction. We want you to experience the mingling of Scripture and prayer by praying together praises to God and supplications for yourselves and your communities being guided by what the psalmists prayed under divine inspiration. We trust that using a different psalm each week will be a fitting and fruitful way to conclude your time of study, discussion, and mutual encouragement. For direction on how to “pray a psalm” see “For Leaders” below.

For Leaders

As the group facilitator, you are expected to familiarize yourself with the layout of the study guide and have an idea of how to structure group discussions from the outset of the study. Read thoroughly the “Explanation of the Study Guide” above, as well as the rest of this section *before the first meeting*. Also, skim each week’s study, with an eye to key themes being introduced or further developed in each week’s reading and study.

Before class each week you will want to review the chapter and each of the corresponding study questions. We strongly recommend that you read all the optional readings found in the “Going Deeper” sections of the study guide (note: it would also be helpful to direct the group each week to where the additional readings for the coming week may be found, whether in *Desiring God* or on our web site).

At every stage of preparation immerse yourself in prayer for your own soul and for your group. Only by the Spirit’s power and guidance will the concepts covered, the biblical texts discussed, and the resolutions made prove to be of lasting value in each other’s lives.

Finally, you should develop a basic blueprint of the group meetings. A suggested blueprint for a one-hour meeting is below, which includes advice for how to conduct each portion of the meeting. This blueprint can and should be adapted to your particular group’s needs and context. Plan to set aside *at least two hours for preparation each week*.

- **Introduction (10 min)**

Open each class with prayer to set the tone of the meeting as one of humble expectation for the

Spirit's movement in minds and hearts, and to direct everyone to God as the supreme treasure of our pursuit. One way to introduce the group discussion would be to have the group explain the meaning of the subtitle of the chapter read during the week. For example, you might open the discussion of chapter 1 with the question, "Why is the happiness of God considered the foundation of Christian Hedonism?" Such discussion will inevitably recall the main points encountered in the chapter and key definitions. It may also be appropriate (in weeks 2–10) to review the previous week's reading and discussion and to ask how the current week's reading and study build upon that.

Note: It may be appropriate to use the introductory time differently in the first meeting. Specifically, you will want to use this time to introduce the book and the study guide. Be sure to inform the class of the approximate number of pages to read each week (typically 20–30) and how the study questions relate to the reading. Encourage the class to use the study questions as launching points for their own study of Scripture. It may also be helpful to talk about strategies for reading and working through the study guide during the week. For example, they may find it works best to read only a few pages and answer two study questions a day, using the sixth day for answering the "Going Deeper" questions and for further reflection. Most importantly for the first meeting, you will want to introduce the members of the group to one another and think of creative ways to help the class become comfortable with one another and in the group environment.

- **Discussion (40 min)**

Throughout the study guide, the underlined questions are those which we feel would be fruitful and engaging in group discussion. Group participants are especially encouraged to familiarize themselves with these questions before the group meeting. These highlighted questions are only suggestions. In your own study, you should note any other questions that are particularly suited to your group's context and would stir meaningful discussion during the group meeting. Furthermore, we encourage you to develop your own questions for discussion. Questions tailor-made for a group's context, situation, level of understanding, etc., are often the most helpful and have the deepest impact. Our hope is that the study guide will be a resource that gets you started and that launches other creative and worthwhile efforts to deepen knowledge, faith, and love.

You may facilitate group discussion by introducing questions (from the study guide or from your own preparation) and encouraging members to respond. How did they answer the questions in the study guide? What new concepts did they encounter? What new understandings of Scripture were they introduced to and which Scriptures did they study and meditate upon? What new insights on the Christian life and mission did they discover and how might those insights impact our lives today? What, if anything, did they disagree with and why? What confused them? It is OK if there is initial silence after a question is raised. As the discussion advances and as the weeks go by, the participants of the group will become more comfortable with sharing their answers and expressing their thoughts. Try to curb the temptation to always break silence with "the answer," and throughout the study beware of dominating the discussion. Also, seek to affirm each individual's input as much as possible to encourage them to continue contributing to the discussions. When you need to address false ideas, do so with love and gentleness.

Do not be afraid to linger on a particular question or topic if the Spirit seems to be moving in a special way during discussion, however as the leader you must also be sensitive to whether the discussion needs to move forward. Also, you should try to include all members in the discussion, being mindful of those who may have something to contribute to the discussion but remain silent. Pray for such Spirit-led sensitivity to the needs and flow of your time together both before and during the meeting.

It might be beneficial to use the final five or ten minutes of the discussion time to address any practical effects the themes considered have on our daily lives. In particular, review the questions in the "Going Deeper" section of the study guide. Ask what resolutions were made by the members of the group, and what practical strategies were thought up to implement the biblical truths encountered.

- **Prayer (10 min)**

We also want to encourage extended times of group prayer during your group meetings. We suggest using at least the final ten minutes of the group time for prayer. You may choose to pray as a large group, or to break into smaller groups. You could break into small groups that change from week to week, or maintain the same smaller prayer groups throughout the study. Whatever you may choose,

we hope that prayer for one another will be an integral part of your time together, both during the group meetings and throughout the week as you progress through this study.

To encourage a commitment to group prayer, and to help the group learn by practice and experience the crucial role the Word plays in prayer, we have suggested a psalm to pray through together at the end of the discussion (see “Praying the Psalms” in the study guide). Some individuals in the group may not be familiar with the concept of “praying the Psalms” and may be unsure of how to do it. Encourage them that it is taking the words of the psalmists (divinely inspired) and using them to inform the spirit, manner, goals, and content of our prayers. To give you an idea of how the Psalms can inspire and inform our own prayers, we will conclude this introduction to this study of *Desiring God* with a prayer for you and your group derived from Psalm 84.

Lord of Hosts, your dwelling places are altogether lovely.
May it be that as people read and study and discuss your Word together that they
might long and yearn to be in your courts where they might see and savor you.
Cause the hearts, and even the bodies, of your people to be filled with rejoicing in
you, the living God.
Even the birds of the air rest in your presence and find comfort and security and joy
in your altars, O Lord of Hosts, our King and our God.
So too are all who dwell in your house; their joy is as unceasing as their praise.
May the peoples and the churches and the groups who join together in this study
be blessed, finding their strength in you.
May there be in their hearts a highway leading straight to your throne.
Cause them to be immeasurably strengthened, and to appear before you without
fear and with great happiness.
Hear our prayer, Father God, and listen to our supplication, God of Israel.
You are a shield; shed your light and your gracious blessing on the faces of
churches and groups and individuals who join together in this study, so that
they might see you.
For a day in your courts, in your presence, is better than a thousand anywhere else.
Transform hearts to see this and believe it; give all of us affections such that we
would rather stand at the doorway of your house, than live a life of comfort and
material prosperity and prestige in houses established on wickedness.
You are a sun filled with warmth and life, and a shield to protect us from every
attack.
Grant your people grace and glory.
You withhold nothing good from those who walk in your ways; so cause your people
to walk in your ways and lavish them with good.
O Lord of hosts, how blessed are those who trust in you! Bless your people, we pray.
Amen.

Introduction – How I Became a Christian Hedonist

Reading and Reflection

1. The first answer in the Westminster Shorter Catechism states: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” According to the author, how does the clause about glorifying God relate to the clause about enjoying God forever (pp. 17–18)?
2. What initial discovery did Blaise Pascal help the author to make on his way to becoming a Christian Hedonist (p. 19)?
3. What insight did C. S. Lewis add to Pascal’s (p. 19–20)? This was shocking to the author; is it for you? Why or why not?
4. What was the third insight that the author says “seems so patently obvious” in retrospect (p. 21)?
5. What is the relationship between praise and joy that the author discovered with the help of C. S. Lewis and Jonathan Edwards (pp. 21–22)? How does this help clarify the meaning of hypocrisy (p. 23)?
6. What does it mean that God “is the end of our search [for pleasure], not the means to some further end” (p. 24)? What other ends besides God himself might we tend to view him as a means to acquiring?
7. According to the author, why doesn’t Christian Hedonism “make a god out of pleasure” (p. 24)?
8. In your own words explain what is meant by a “general theory of moral justification” (p. 24)? How does the author respond to the criticism that Christian Hedonism is such a theory (pp. 24–25)?
9. How does the author describe the relationship between love and happiness? Why does the author consider the phrase, “Let’s all be good because it will make us happy,” over-simplistic? What essential, radically life-changing, defining point about virtue is missed in such an oversimplification? (pp. 25–26)
10. Rewrite each of the five convictions that Christian Hedonism is built on in your own words (p. 28).

Going Deeper

- Select five to ten psalms to read and meditate upon. Write down any “language of Hedonism” that you encounter. How do the psalmists view the goodness and grace and character and worth of God?
- In these psalms, what does God command with respect to your heart and emotions? How these demands over your heart/emotions land on you individually, personally? Are they freeing? Frightening? Imprisoning? Why?
- Read the Epilogue, “Why I Have Written This Book: Seven Reasons” (pp. 289–307), to orient yourself to the author’s motivations and purposes in writing this book. Write down any uncertainties, questions, or objections you might have concerning the author’s conception of the Christian life. Refer to these throughout the study.

Praying the Psalms – Psalm 100

Chapter 1 – The Happiness of God: Foundation for Christian Hedonism

Reading and Reflection

1. Why does the author think it might sound strange to say, “The chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy Himself forever” (p. 31)? What are some reasons why we might be more accustomed to think about our duty rather than God’s design? Are these all good reasons or they all bad reasons, or are they mixed? Evaluate them.
2. Why does the author say that God’s happiness is the foundation for Christian Hedonism (pp. 32–33)?
3. According to the author, what does it mean to say that God is sovereign (p. 32)? Why is God’s sovereignty the foundation for God’s happiness (p. 33)? In light of this, what must the author do before he can explain why the happiness of God is the foundation for Christian Hedonism?
4. How much of what occurs in the universe is owing ultimately to God’s sovereign purpose? What is the clearest example in history that even the morally wicked decisions and actions of human beings are part of God’s sovereign design? (pp. 33–36)
5. Describe what the author means by looking at a wicked event “through a narrow lens or through a wide-angle lens” (p. 39–40). What is the difference between God’s “will of command” and his “will of decree” and what light does this shed on our understanding of God’s sovereign purposes even over evil (see n. 5 on p. 39)?
6. What is the important transition in the author’s argument that happens on page 41; what question will he now try to answer? What is the answer he suggests (pp. 41–42)?
7. Why would God be unrighteous if he himself were not uppermost in his affections (pp. 42–43)? How does Jesus Christ relate to God’s supreme delight in himself (p. 43)?
8. What does the author mean when he says that God’s works are the “spillover” of his joy in himself (p. 44)? To what does the author liken this expansive quality of God’s joy? How should we understand the relationship of God’s activity in creation and redemption to what God delights in most of all?
9. On pages 44–45 a crucial transition occurs in the author’s argument. What question arises from the truth that God is uppermost in his affections, which the author will spend the remainder of the chapter trying to answer? Restate the question in your own words.
10. What is meant by a “second-hander”? Why should we not consider God to be a second-hander? What biblical texts show that the similarity between God’s purpose to display his own glory and the vanity of second-handers is only superficial? What other biblical texts can you think of besides the ones that are mentioned by the author? (pp. 46–47)

Going Deeper

- On page 47 the author makes a very important statement: “Because God is unique as an all-glorious, totally self-sufficient Being, He must be for Himself if He is to be for us.” Restate each part of this sentence in your own words in a way that both makes sense to you and genuinely reflects the author’s intended meaning. What must God give to us if he is to love us infinitely? How does his demand to praise him relate to his granting us this supremely valuable gift? (pp. 48–49)
- Many people are not convinced that God’s ultimate goal in all that he does is to uphold and to display his glory, and that God is uppermost in God’s affections. It simply sounds contradictory to one understanding of love that is prevalent. Read Appendix 1, “The Goal of God in Redemptive History” (pp. 308–321). Can you think of other examples in biblical history where God tells us he was acting for the sake of his name? Describe in your own words how God’s pursuit of his own glory is the foundation of his love for us and the foundation of our hope for grace.

Praying the Psalms – Psalm 135

Chapter 2 – Conversion: The Creation of a Christian Hedonist

Reading and Reflection

1. What is the twofold aim of this chapter (p. 54)?
2. Why does the author want to introduce terminology like “Christian Hedonism” and “becoming a Christian Hedonist” and “treasuring Jesus above all other things” (p. 54–55)?
3. In your own words, define conversion. What two human acts are involved in conversion (pp. 63–64)? Why does the author say that these two acts “are really two sides of the same coin” (p. 64)?
4. Why should we view conversion as a gift of God? What are some biblical texts that lead us to this conclusion? (pp. 64–70)
5. Write down all the reasons you think the raising of Lazarus is a good picture of God’s work of regeneration (pp. 66–67).
6. What does the author mean when he says that conversion is a condition for salvation? Why is this not “a way of earning salvation”? How does a lack of clarity in the definition of “salvation” lead to confusion over this matter? (pp. 67–70)
7. Describe the relationship between joy and faith. How is joy the fruit of faith? How is joy the root of faith? How is joy part of the essence of what faith is? (pp. 70–74)
8. What things, besides love for the light, might motivate a person to “come to the light”? Why would any such motives be dishonoring to the light? (p. 72)
9. According to the author, what is “saving faith” (cf. pp. 72–73)? Explain why this definition leads the author to say that conversion is the creation of a Christian Hedonist.
10. What is the ultimate good that Christ died to secure for those who trust wholly in him (pp. 72–73)? Examine your own heart. Is this ultimate good the supreme treasure of your heart? Why or why not? According to Scripture, what are some ways in which we can evaluate our own hearts?

Going Deeper

- On page 73 the author asks, “Would you want to go to heaven if God were not there, only His gifts?” Answer this question and explain why you answer the way you do. What gifts tend to compete for your supreme affections? Pray for deeper delight in God himself as the supreme delight of your heart.
- Read the second paragraph on p. 65 and footnote 13. What is the difference between a “physical inability” and a “moral inability”? For help, read “A Response to J. I. Packer on the So-Called Antinomy Between the Sovereignty of God and Human Responsibility” (it can be found by performing a title search on the Desiring God web site: www.desiringGod.org). What Scriptures can you think of that tell us of our moral inability?
- Many people stumble over the term “Christian Hedonism.” However, as was seen in this chapter, the author thinks that the term is both harmonious with biblical teaching and extremely helpful in our contemporary culture. Do you have any reservations about or objections to the term “Christian Hedonism”? If so, what are they? Read Appendix 5, “Why Call It Christian Hedonism” (pp. 365–369). Write down any remaining questions or concerns you have after reading this appendix and discuss them with the group.

Praying the Psalms – Psalm 130

Chapter 3 – Worship: The Feast of Christian Hedonism

Reading and Reflection

1. Why are the *how* and *whom* of worship more important than the *where*? What two words in John 4:23 correspond to “how” and “whom”? Explain the correspondence. What happens when one or the other is missing from one’s effort at worship? (pp. 81–82)
2. In the author’s analogy of “fuel, furnace, and heat” on p. 82, what is the fuel, what is the furnace, and what is the heat of worship? What part does the Holy Spirit play?
3. Even though worship involves some kind of outward act, why should we consider worship to be “a way of *gladly* reflecting back to God the radiance of His worth” (p. 84)? What possible misunderstanding could the word *gladly* cause? What possible worse misunderstanding could be caused by not using the word *gladly*? (pp. 84–85)
4. What makes an act of worship vain? What are some motivations besides genuine affection for God that might lead a person to perform an act of worship? (pp. 85–86)
5. Explain what is meant by the phrase “Worship is an end in itself.” How does this phrase relate to “spontaneous affections”? If worship is an end itself, does it ever lead to anything else? If so, how is this possible, and what might it lead to? (pp. 90–92)
6. In the author’s illustration of buying roses for his wife on their anniversary (pp. 93–94), why would saying “It’s my duty” be dishonoring to his wife? In what ways would saying “It’s my joy” be honoring to her? What, then, is the real duty of worship? How is it a “duty”?
7. Respond to the following objection: “In making the joy of worship an end in itself, we make God a means to our end rather than our being a means to His end. Christian Hedonism, therefore, is man-centered.” (Cf. pp. 94–96.)
8. In your own words, list the three stages of worship (pp. 96–97). How might knowing about these three stages be an encouragement for us?
9. How does the notion that the pursuit of joy is submoral or immoral destroy the possibility of true worship (pp. 98–102)? Read the quote from Carl Zylstra in footnote 14 on page 100. Why does the author say, “When the question is put like this, it cannot be answered truthfully”?
10. What must genuine affection for God be rooted in and shaped by and why (pp. 102–104)? This chapter discusses the reality “that true worship always combines heart and head, emotion and thought, affection and reflection, doxology and theology” (p. 102). The majority of the chapter focuses on the first halves of these pairs (i.e., heart, emotion, affection, doxology). Why do you think this is so?

Going Deeper

- Reflect upon the statement, “*Where feelings for God are dead, worship is dead*” (p. 88). Choose two of the affections the author talks about on pages 86–87 and contemplate what it is about God that should cause these affections or feelings to arise in our hearts. Examine your own self to see whether these qualities of God cause such emotions to swell in your heart. Now do the same thing for two other “inward feelings that reflect the worth of God’s glory,” which are not mentioned by the author.
- Reflect upon pages 104–108. What implications does this chapter have on forms of worship?
- Read footnote 6 on page 93. Explain what E. J. Carnell means by “moral fulfillment.” How is worship a fruit not a work? Now read Matt 25:31–40. In what ways do Carnell’s insights relate to this passage? Have the sheep addressed by Jesus committed good and loving deeds for others? Why are they surprised at Jesus’ words? Why should we consider a heart that truly loves both God and others to be a miracle? What implications does this have on our understanding of prayer?

Praying the Psalms – Psalm 63

Chapter 4 – Love: The Labor of Christian Hedonism

Reading and Reflection

1. The author makes an important shift in chapter 4 from *vertical Christian Hedonism* to what (pp. 112–113)? In your own words, describe what this means? How will this chapter differ from chapters 1–3? What similarities will this chapter share with chapters 1–3?
2. What is the essential argument of this chapter (p. 112, cf. 115)?
3. What two clues in the immediate context of 1 Cor 13:5 show us that it is not wrong to intentionally pursue our own gain in our love of others? List any other biblical texts that you can think of which support this. What, according to Edwards, is the “gain” we are to be motivated by? What kind of “gain” would it be wrong to be motivated by? (pp. 112–116)
4. What is good about the common motto: “Love is not what you feel, but what you do”? Why is this an insufficient and possibly misleading way of describing love? Why can’t love be equated merely with action? How is it possible to give away all your possessions to the poor and yet not be truly loving? (pp. 116–117)
5. What four observations from 2 Cor 8:1–4, 8, does the author make in coming to an understanding of genuine love? What is the author’s definition of biblical love? (pp. 118–120) What is the connection between *vertical* Christian Hedonism, that is, joy in God, and love for other people on the *horizontal* plane?
6. According to 2 Cor 2:2 what gives Paul great joy? According to 2:3 what does Paul expect to be the joy of the Corinthians? What do these observations tell us about love? How does this perspective of what love is relate to the perspective found in 2 Cor 8? (pp. 121–124)
7. What is the great obstacle to both true worship of God and genuine love for neighbor (pp. 128–129)? How do we overcome this obstacle? Why is this good news?
8. Explain what the author means by “dissatisfied contentment” (pp. 124–125). How is the weeping of compassion related to joy? Why does the author say that the joy of love is costly (pp. 129–136)? How can grief and anguish and tears coexist in a loving heart which overflows with joy?
9. Why might some think that loving acts which are motivated by reward are not truly loving but are simply mercenary efforts? Based upon your reading of this chapter, why is the Christian Hedonist view of love not mercenary (see pp. 125–128 for help)? Explain the relationship between joy in the actual deed of love and joy in the promised reward (pp. 137–139). How does this relationship guard love from becoming a mercenary affair?
10. Describe the “psychological process that moves us from joy in God to the actual deed of love” (p. 139, cf. pp. 139–141). How does the “doubling” of our joy relate to true love for our neighbor?

Going Deeper

- Interact with the author’s assertion that without the pursuit of pleasure it is impossible to truly love others or please God. Why does he assert this? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- Explain the difference between happiness as a “goal” or a “motive” on the one hand, and merely a “consequence” or “unexpected surprise” on the other. Based upon your reading of this chapter, respond to the objections raised by the philosophy professor which are quoted on page 112. Cite other biblical texts not mentioned in the chapter in your response.

Praying the Psalms – Psalm 15

Chapter 5 – Scripture: Kindling for Christian Hedonism; and Chapter 6 – Prayer: The Power of Christian Hedonism

Reading and Reflection

1. What is meant by the title of this chapter when it calls Scripture “Kindling for Christian Hedonism”? What is the goal of this chapter and what three steps are necessary to reach this end? (pp. 143–144)
2. Choose three of the blessings of the Word of God, discussed on pages 145–152, which are most meaningful to you. How does the Word of God produce these benefits? How do these benefits “kindle” our joy? Think of two other benefits of the Word not mentioned by the author. How does the Word of God produce these and how do they kindle our joy?
3. Why does the author use the image of “wielding” God’s Word? What does he mean when he says that we must *wear* the Word if we are to wield it? What steps should we take to *wear* the Word (consider George Müller’s testimony on pages 155–156 for practical outworking)? (Cf. pp. 144, 151, 154.)
4. How does a proper understanding of prayer help show that the pursuit of our joy and the pursuit of God’s glory are one and the same pursuit (pp. 159–161)?
5. How does prayer glorify God? What does a poor prayer life indicate about one’s understanding of who God is? Why? (pp. 160–162)
6. What does “self-centered” mean? Should prayer be considered self-centered? Why or why not? According to James 4:3–5 how might we turn God into a cuckold with our prayers? (pp. 163–165)
7. What keeps our prayers from being a sinfully self-centered and adulterous instrument of idolatry? Is it possible to desire and enjoy creation without being an idolater? Why or why not? (pp. 165–168)
8. Why must we “*beware of serving God*” (p. 168)? In what way are we not to serve God? How does the meaning of prayer demand the avoidance of serving God in this way? How do these answers point to the uniqueness of God among all the other so-called gods of the world? (pp. 168–172)
9. Why is prayer equated with “waiting for God” and why is it “the antidote for the disease of self-confidence” (pp. 170–171)? In light of this, in what way shall we serve God? How does our effort and our obedience relate to this kind of service? (pp. 172–174)
10. What two reasons can be drawn from the context of John 16:24 for why a deep prayer life leads to fullness of joy? (pp. 174–179)

Going Deeper

- What does the author believe is one of the main reasons many in the church do not have a deep and vibrant prayer life (pp. 182–183)? Resolve to take some practical steps this week in response to the author’s closing exhortation on page 183. Write out your resolutions.
- One common objection raised against Christianity concerns the Bible; namely, that it is untrustworthy, filled with errors, founded on ancient myths and the naïve superstition of unenlightened ancient peoples. Read Appendix 2, “Is the Bible a Reliable Guide to Lasting Joy?” (pp. 322–334). How does the author argue that the Bible is a trustworthy guide to ultimate truth and everlasting joy? In what ways does this differ from other common approaches to answering the question in the title of the Appendix? Why is the author’s form of arguing not simply arguing in a circle?
- In this study guide, chapters 5 and 6 are the only chapters that are combined into a single lesson. Why do you think these two chapters are combined? What is the relationship of Scripture and prayer? Why ought we always to think of these two things as going hand-in-hand in the fight for joy?

Praying the Psalms – Psalm 19

Chapter 7 – Money: The Currency of Christian Hedonism

Reading and Reflection

1. How does the teaching on money in 1 Tim 6 confirm the central argument of *Desiring God* (pp. 185–186)?
2. Why is it significant that Paul does *not* respond to people “selling” godliness for monetary gain by saying, “Don’t live for gain”? How does he respond instead? (pp. 186–187)
3. What is the point of the section entitled: “Getting Raises Is Not the Same as Getting Rich”? Why is this important to realize? What is and isn’t Paul warning against in 1 Tim 6? (pp. 187–188)
4. What three reasons does Paul give in 1 Tim 6:7–10 for why we should not aspire to be rich? (pp. 188–191)
5. What kind of “treasure” should we pursue and how should we pursue it (pp. 192–195)?
6. On page 195 the author mentions that there are over forty places in Luke where “there are promises of reward and threats of punishment connected with the commands of Jesus.” Find five of these instances and examine them. Do they commend the type of treasure-pursuing that the author commends? Why or why not?
7. How do we know that what Paul talks about at the end of 1 Tim 6:19 is *eternal life*? How can the author assert that eternal life is at stake in the use of our money while maintaining that we cannot earn eternal life in any way? In light of this, what three directions does Paul give to those who are rich in 1 Tim 6? (pp. 196–197, 201)
8. What is a “health-wealth-and-prosperity” gospel? What is the true half of such teaching? What is the false half of it? How is 1 Tim 6:17 different from it? (pp. 197–99)
9. What does the author mean by “wartime lifestyle”? What is the war? Why does he not simply commend a “simple lifestyle”? (pp. 199–203)
10. On pages 201–202 the author gives advice to pastors concerning how to commend a wartime lifestyle to congregations and says, “He will not make it easy by creating a law” (p. 202). What does the author mean by this, that is, “making a law”? Why would this make it “easy”? Why is this not living by faith, that is, treasuring all that God is for us in Jesus?

Going Deeper

- Consider the three levels of how we live with things that are mentioned Eph 4:28 (p. 202). Ask yourself to which level you belong. Why has God prospered you? Try to think of specific reasons or areas to where you are being led to channel your abundance.
- One of the weightiest exhortations of this chapter is to live a “wartime lifestyle.” Reread pages 199–201. What strategies have you set in place to maximize the effectiveness of your gifts and resources for the good of those in need and for the spread of the gospel? What strategies could you add to these?

Praying the Psalms – Psalm 4

Chapter 8 – Marriage: A Matrix for Christian Hedonism

Reading and Reflection

1. Why does the author say of Eph 5:25–30, “There is scarcely a more hedonistic passage in the Bible” (p. 205)? List all the “hedonistic” elements in this passage that you can find.
2. What is the difference between self-interest and selfishness? Why can’t self-interest be excluded from love? (pp. 206–207)
3. What kind of “hating of life” does Jesus command in John 12:25? How does this “hating of life” not contradict Paul’s assertion that “no one ever hated his own flesh”? What is the relationship between the self-love that Paul assumes and the love of husbands for wives and vice versa? (pp. 207–210)
4. Why might we assume that *marriage* isn’t the mystery to be explained, but Christ’s relationship to the church is the mystery which Paul uses marriage to explain and describe? Why is marriage considered by Paul a mystery to be uncovered and explained? (pp. 210–213)
5. Why does the author take time to explain the Old Testament context of Gen 2:24 and the reason marriage is a great mystery? See, in particular, pages 210 and 213. What is the foundation for the pattern of love in marriage that is described in the rest of the chapter?
6. What is the most fundamental reason the author gives for believing that a wife “should be disposed to yield to [her] husband’s authority and should be inclined to follow [his] leadership” (p. 216)? How does he support this (pp. 214–217)? Why does he say it should be a *disposition* and an *inclination*?
7. What kind of leadership are husbands to take in marriage, if it is modeled on Christ’s leadership? According to the author, what does the responsibility of leadership given to husbands entail and what doesn’t it entail? (pp. 217–218)
8. Why is it important that the forms of submission (and headship) necessarily vary, according to pages 218–219? What other reasons can you think of for why this is important to realize (cf. pp. 201–202)?
9. What did the Fall do to the roles of headship and submission in marriage (p. 220)?
10. How does marriage “display Christian Hedonism”?

Going Deeper

- Read an online article entitled “What Does It Mean to Love Your Neighbor as Yourself?” (available at http://www.desiringgod.org/dg/id227_m.htm). What is one of the most common contemporary misuses of Luke 10:27? Why does the author believe this use of the second greatest commandment to be mistaken? How does the author suggest we must love our neighbor as ourselves? How might this type of love manifest itself in your own marriage, friendships, and other relationships?
- Read the definitions of masculinity and femininity given in chapter 2, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (available in the Online Books section of the Desiring God website [pp. 28–43 in the online version]). Write down all the things that the author states masculinity and femininity, respectively, are *not*. How might knowing that marriage is a matrix for Christian Hedonism guard us from these misunderstandings of what manhood and womanhood are? How does a right understanding of Christian Hedonism shape the way we pursue the biblical pattern of marriage?
- The last two chapters on Money and Marriage take elements of our everyday lives and show how they relate to our pursuit of joy in God. Read Appendix 4, “How Then Shall We Fight for Joy? An Outline” (pp. 352–364). Why does the author describe our pursuit of joy in God as a fight? What other things in the world around us, besides money and marriage, does the author say can help us to deepen our satisfaction in God? How?

Praying the Psalms – Psalm 45

Chapter 9 – Missions: The Battle Cry of Christian Hedonism

Reading and Reflection

1. Outside of Scripture, where has the author found the greatest confirmation for his vision of Christian Hedonism (p. 224)?
2. What does the term “frontier missions” mean (pp. 223–226)? Try to use your own words, and give scriptural illustrations and support.
3. Why is missions essential for the church, without which their love will be fundamentally lacking? What is at stake in bringing the gospel to those who have not heard it? How do we know this (i.e., what biblical texts help us to see that this, indeed, is at stake)? (pp. 226–227)
4. What is a “people group” (pp. 229–230)? What biblical text does the author cite to help in coming to this definition? What other texts can you think of which show this understanding of “people group” to be true?
5. What is the first incentive found in Mark 10:25–27 for devoting ourselves to frontier missions (pp. 234–239)? List other biblical texts that support this truth. Why is this particularly good news for the Christian Hedonist (see p. 239)?
6. What three incentives for missions are found in John 10:16 (pp. 236–239)?
7. What is the second great incentive found in Mark 10:25–27 for devoting ourselves to frontier missions (pp. 239–242)?
8. Respond to the objection that a Christian Hedonist approach to missions ignores or denies the biblical call to self-denial.
9. What is the fundamental reason that Jesus “rebukes us for a self-pitying spirit of sacrifice” (p. 246)?
10. Why do “invalids make the best missionaries” (pp. 247–250)?

Going Deeper

- One error that the church has had to combat in its mission to fulfill the Great Commission is universalism. Read the quotes in page 226 to get an idea of how it might sound today. What does universalism mean? Why is universalism unbiblical? For help, see chapter 4, “The Supremacy of Christ as the Conscious Focus of All Saving Faith,” in John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), and listen to the audio excerpt entitled, “What happens to those who have never heard the gospel?” (available at http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TopicIndex/4_Missions/1751_What_happens_to_those_who_have_never_heard_the_gospel/).
- On pages 229–230 the author cites statistics on unreached people groups but acknowledges that these statistics quickly get out-dated. Find current stats on unreached people groups from websites like uscwm.org and record them. Using these statistics, describe the need for frontier missions. What areas are particularly in need? What areas might be strategic to reach? Are current efforts being made to reach those areas? If so, what are they?
- What is meant by the term “World Christian” (pp. 232–233)? What are some practical steps you can begin taking right now to become more of a World Christian?

Praying the Psalms – Psalm 67

Chapter 10 – Suffering: The Sacrifice of Christian Hedonism

Reading and Reflection

1. What does Paul mean in 1 Cor 15:19 when he says, “If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied”? Why does he say this? (pp. 254–256)
2. What are the similarities between persecution for Christ’s name and sickness? What are the differences? (pp. 256–260)
3. How can Christians view all suffering as suffering for Christ and with Christ? What does it mean that the suffering of Christians is *for* Christ? What does it mean that it is *with* Christ? What makes suffering this way for Christians? (pp. 256–260)
4. Why does the author call Christianity a life of *chosen* suffering? For what reasons might Paul have chosen a life of suffering? (pp. 261–267)
5. How does the author interpret Col 1:24, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (pp. 267–270)? Do you agree with his understanding of this verse and his understanding of the function of suffering in the Christian life? Why or why not? Cite other Scriptures in support.
6. What does the author mean when he says, “embracing of suffering is not just an accompaniment of our witness to Christ; it is the visible expression of it” (p. 279)? How do the stories of suffering and persecution on pages 274–279 illustrate this reality?
7. Why is it not a contradiction to call suffering the sacrifice of Christian Hedonism and yet, like David Livingston, to say, “I never made a sacrifice”? Why are the sufferings of Christians to be understood as sacrifices? Why are they to be considered as no sacrifices? (pp. 280–281)
8. Why does Paul’s pursuit of joy lead him to a life of chosen suffering? Why is Paul’s pursuit of his own deepest joy in Christ in perfect harmony with his deep and pure love for others? That is, how can seeking our own joy and seeking the joy of others be one? (pp. 281–283)
9. In what ways can we rejoice in suffering as Christians (pp. 283–286)? List any other ways of and reasons for rejoicing in suffering as Christians along with supporting biblical texts.
10. Why should we not view joy in suffering merely as a good gift from God, but also a good goal to pursue? Why might some not believe this to be so? What is the fundamental goal and ground of our joy in suffering? (pp. 283–288)

Going Deeper

- One of the most difficult attributes of God for us to understand and to submit to is his absolute sovereignty over all things, including evil and our suffering. Read Appendix 3, “Is God Less Glorious Because He Ordained That Evil Be?” (pp. 335–351). What questions has this appendix helped answer for you? How has this appendix shocked or troubled you? What questions concerning God’s control over evil in the world still remain in your mind and heart? Discuss these with the group.
- Reflect upon some significant trials and times of suffering in your own life, whether explicit persecution for the name of Jesus or suffering from sickness or loss. What have you learned of God in those times? Of his goodness, love, sovereignty, mercy, and wisdom? In what ways can you discern that God has used and is using those times for his good and wise and loving purposes in your life and the lives of those around you? In what ways have those times caused you to doubt God’s goodness and love and sovereign wisdom? Perhaps they still are causing you to doubt God. Share these concerns with other trusted believers and seek to strengthen each other’s faith in God as our only hope and joy in all circumstances.

Praying the Psalms – Psalm 43