

A GODWARD HEART

Treasuring the God Who Loves You



50 MEDITATIONS FOR YOUR JOURNEY

JOHN PIPER

Author of DESIRING GOD

Praise for
A Godward Heart

“As a longtime admirer of John Piper’s powerful proclamation of the ‘supreme-ness’ of Christ in all things, I found this collection of short devotions to be comforting, thought provoking, and disturbing—all at the same time. Applying your understanding of the gospel to the real world has inescapable consequences. What you believe about the gospel determines the world you build. Here are, in a sense, John Piper’s blueprints.”

—KIRK CAMERON, actor, writer, producer

“Pastor John Piper has a way, through these devotions, of waking me up from spiritual slumber. God has used these meditations to open my eyes to truth that sets me free.”

—SHANE BARNARD, recording artist

“My thirsty heart has often been directed to streams of living water through the devotional writings of Pastor John Piper. *A Godward Heart* is a fresh invitation to seek the Lord, to sit at the feet of the Savior, to savor Him as your greatest treasure, and to find deep satisfaction for your soul as you drink from His well that never runs dry.”

—NANCY LEIGH DEMOSS, author, *Revive Our Hearts*
teacher/host

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A
G O D W A R D
H E A R T

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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------|
| A Word to the Reader | xiii |
| 1 The Morning I Heard the Voice of God <i>When God's Word Gets Personal</i> | 1 |
| 2 What Does It Mean to Seek the Lord? <i>A Meditation on Psalm 105:4</i> | 6 |
| 3 Glorifying the Grace of God <i>Why Everything Exists</i> | 10 |
| 4 How Is God's Passion for His Glory Not Selfishness? <i>God's Glory as the Source and Sum of Our Joy</i> | 13 |
| 5 Galatians 4:18 and "Being Made Much Of" <i>Our Satisfaction in God's Supremacy</i> | 19 |
| 6 "I Love Jesus Christ" <i>An Unforgettable Moment in Seminary</i> | 22 |
| 7 Every Step on the Calvary Road Was Love <i>The Intensity of Christ's Love and the Intentionality of His Death</i> | 25 |
| 8 Be Careful, Lest the Light in You Be Darkness <i>Pondering a Puzzling Text</i> | 29 |
| 9 Covering the Chasm. <i>The Rebellion of Nudity and the Meaning of Clothing</i> | 32 |

-
- 10 Discerning Idolatry in Desire 37
Twelve Ways to Recognize the Rise of Covetousness
- 11 The Precious Gift of Baby Talk 41
Human Language as the Precious Path to Knowing God
- 12 Let Christians Vote as Though Not Voting. 45
Political Engagement When the World Is Passing Away
- 13 Does God Lie?. 51
*Reflections on God's Truthfulness and Sovereignty
over Falsehood*
- 14 When Satan Hurts Christ's People 54
Reflections on Why Christians Suffer Losses
- 15 Apostle of Jesus and Abolitionist with the Gospel 58
How Paul Worked to Overcome Slavery
- 16 The Sorrows of Fathers and Sons 62
*Thoughts from the Lives of C. S. Lewis and
Robert Louis Stevenson*
- 17 If You Can Be Godly and Wrong, Does Truth
Matter?. 66
Reflections on Right Doctrine and Right Doing
- 18 When Does God Become 100 Percent for Us? 70
Were the Elect Ever Children of Wrath?
- 19 Feeding My Soul in Four Parts of the Bible. 74
A Glimpse of My Morning Strolls in God's Garden
- 20 Gleaning Truth from G. K. Chesterton 79
How a Roman Catholic Can Serve Today's Happy Calvinists

-
- 21 What's the Place of Confrontation in Marriage? 83
Guidance from Ephesians 5:25–27
- 22 Changed Lives in Jesus' New Life 87
Radical Effects of the Resurrection
- 23 How God Teaches the Deep Things of His Word 91
A Meditation on Psalm 119:65–72
- 24 How Shall We Love Our Muslim Neighbor? 96
Winning Them to Jesus by Echoing His Love
- 25 What Love Does and Does Not Do. 102
An Anniversary Meditation on 1 Corinthians 13:4–7
- 26 Putting My Daughter to Bed After the Bridge
Collapsed. 107
What Do Tragedies Like This Mean for Us?
- 27 How the Cross Conquers Satan's Work 112
*God's Deliverance from God as the Foundation
of God's Deliverance from Satan*
- 28 How Do You "Give" God Strength? 117
A Meditation on Psalm 96:7
- 29 "He Will Rejoice over You with Gladness" 120
Why God Tells His Children That He Delights in Them
- 30 Caring Enough to Take the Risk 126
*What to Say to the Depressed, Doubting, Skeptical,
Confused, Angry*
- 31 Hero Worship and Holy Emulation. 130
Navigating the New World of Media-Driven Celebrity

-
- 32 Bless the Mother of Jesus—but Mainly Be the Mother
of Jesus. 134
Admiring the Imitable Mary
- 33 How the Lord of Life Gives Life. 138
A Meditation on Acts 16:14
- 34 Awakened by Suffering and Pain 141
Abraham Lincoln’s Path to Divine Providence
- 35 The Strange Task of Witnessing About Light. 144
A Meditation on John 1:7
- 36 Submission and Headship in the Home Where
I Grew Up 148
Female Competency and Biblical Complementarity
- 37 When Signs and Wonders Go Bad 152
Reflections on Heresy, Deception, and Love for God
- 38 Coed Combat and Cultural Cowardice. 156
Why Women Suffer as Chivalry Collapses
- 39 Why Require Unregenerate Children to Act Like
They’re Good? 159
Three Reasons for Parenting by God’s Revealed Will
- 40 “Do Good to Everyone” 164
If God Wills Disease, Why Should We Try to Eradicate It?
- 41 Does Anyone Standing by the Lake of Fire Jump In?. . . 167
Reflections on How Willingly Sinners Enter Hell
- 42 Stereotypes and Racism 172
Checking Ethnocentrism in Our Statistical Generalizations

| | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 43 | The Unbelieving Poet Catches a Glimpse of Truth. . . . | 177 |
| | <i>When Beauty Becomes Irresistible</i> | |
| 44 | The Deceitful and Deadly Health-and-Wealth Teaching | 180 |
| | <i>Seven Pleas to Prosperity Preachers</i> | |
| 45 | Sheep, Wolves, Snakes, and Doves | 185 |
| | <i>Thoughts on Matthew 10:16</i> | |
| 46 | Abolition and the Roots of Public Justice | 189 |
| | <i>The Public Power of Protestant Justification</i> | |
| 47 | Topple Every Idol | 192 |
| | <i>Fighting Covetousness by Looking at Others</i> | |
| 48 | Creating Pointers to the Greatness of Christ | 195 |
| | <i>Why and How I Tweet</i> | |
| 49 | What Will the Final Judgment Mean for You? | 198 |
| | <i>Thoughts on the Book of Life and Union with Christ</i> | |
| 50 | Let's Make Some Resolutions | 203 |
| | <i>Endeavoring Fresh Good for the Glory of God</i> | |
| | A Note on Resources: Desiring God | 206 |

A WORD TO THE READER

One of the reasons I put together collections of short meditations is that my life has been changed as much by paragraphs as by books. Books on one topic are valuable. They let the author explore all the angles of an insight. But where do the insights themselves come from? Usually they come from paragraphs. Even sentences. For reasons not entirely explainable, God can make a single paragraph life changing.

Perhaps some evening your soul is hungry. Not for anything in particular, just a soul-hunger. A longing. Something is needed beyond what television is going to give. Something about God, or about the meaning of your life, or about eternity. You're tired and you know you probably can't stay awake to read twenty pages. So you pick up a book that you know focuses on eternal things, a Godward book. And three minutes later you have seen something, and you will never be the same again.

It may take a lifetime to sound the depths of what you just saw. But the seeing happens in an instant. It's as if God takes the paragraph in his fingers and uses it to adjust the lens on the eye of your soul, and something wonderful comes into focus that you had never seen before.

Isn't it amazing to think about the relationship between God's focusing fingers and the human activity of writing and reading? You may have read that same paragraph before, perhaps just the other

evening. But this time God put his fingers on it and turned the lens just one more focusing notch. What this means is that I should pray as a writer and you should pray as a reader. We should ask God to do this focusing.

I think of your reading and my writing as a kind of partnership in the pursuit of a Godward miracle. I write, you read, but God gives the sight. What we both want is this miracle of seeing—seeing life-changing things about God and life and eternity.

In one of his letters the apostle Paul said, “*By reading* you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ” (Ephesians 3:4, author’s translation). But was reading enough? A few sentences later he prayed that they “may have strength to . . . know the love of Christ” (Ephesians 3:18–19). Something more was needed than reading. Something from God—he called it “strength to know.” Earlier he had prayed that the eyes of his readers’ hearts would be “enlightened, that you may know” (Ephesians 1:18). Something from God is needed—in answer to prayer. This is what I meant when I said that God takes a human paragraph and puts his fingers on the lens of the eye of your soul. The slightest turn and we are made strong with sight. We are never the same again.

So I have written. And you are reading. And God is ready to act. My words are not Scripture. They are not infallible like God’s words. But my earnest aim in all I write is to be faithful to God’s written Word in the Bible. To point to God and his Son and his works and his ways. My aim is a Godward book in the hope that God will put his fingers on its paragraphs and turn the lens of the eye of your soul, ever so delicately, and bring glories into focus.

This is how God forms us into his image. “Beholding the glory of

the Lord, [we] are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18). This is our aim: From a Godward paragraph, to a sight of glory, to a *Godward heart*.



A very special word of thanks is due to David Mathis, executive editor at Desiring God. David helped me assemble these meditations from all the different places and times where I had written them. After I reworked them for this book, he provided his sharp theological, stylistic, and formatting eye to help me refine them for final release. I admire David's gifts and love his friendship. Thank you, David, for your partnership.

I have enjoyed a long and happy relationship with Multnomah Books, especially in bringing my shorter writings to publication. *A Godward Heart* is a continuation of what we began in *A Godward Life, Book One* (2001), continued in *A Godward Life, Book Two* (2003), *Pierced by the Word* (2003), *Life as a Vapor* (2004), and *Taste and See* (2005). I am thankful for this publishing partnership for the sake of spreading what I pray will prove to be life-changing, Christ-exalting paragraphs.



The Morning I Heard the Voice of God

When God's Word Gets Personal

Let me tell you about a most wonderful experience I had early Monday morning, March 19, 2007, a little after six o'clock. God actually spoke to me. There is no doubt that it was God. I heard the words in my head just as clearly as when a memory of a conversation passes across your consciousness. The words were in English, but they had about them an absolutely self-authenticating ring of truth. I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that God still speaks today.

I couldn't sleep for some reason. I was at Shalom House in northern Minnesota on a staff couples' retreat. It was about 5:30 in the morning. I lay there, wondering if I should get up or wait till I got sleepy again. In his mercy, God moved me out of bed. It was mostly dark, but I managed to find my clothing, get dressed, grab my briefcase, and slip out of the room without waking up Noël. In the main room below, it was totally quiet. No one else seemed to be up. So I sat down on a couch in the corner to pray.

As I prayed and mused, suddenly it happened. God said, “*Come and see what I have done.*” There was not the slightest doubt in my mind that these were the very words of God, in this very moment. At this very place in the twenty-first century, 2007, God was speaking to me with absolute authority and self-evidencing reality. I paused to let this sink in. There was a sweetness about it. Time seemed to matter little. God was near. He had me in his sights. He had something to say to me. When God draws near, hurry ceases. Time slows down.

I wondered what he meant by “come and see.” Would he take me somewhere, as he did Paul into heaven to see what can’t be spoken? Did “see” mean that I would have a vision of some great deed of God that no one has seen? I am not sure how much time elapsed between God’s initial word, “*Come and see what I have done,*” and his next words. It doesn’t matter. I was being enveloped in the love of his personal communication. The God of the universe was speaking to me.

Then he said, as clearly as any words have ever come into my mind, “*I am awesome in my deeds toward the children of man.*” My heart leaped up, “Yes, Lord! You are awesome in your deeds. Yes, to all men whether they see it or not. Yes! Now what will you show me?”

The words came again. Just as clear as before, but increasingly specific: “*I turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There they rejoiced in me, who rules by my might forever.*” Suddenly I realized God was taking me back several thousand years to the time when he dried up the Red Sea and the Jordan River. I was being transported by his word back into history to those great deeds. This is what he meant by “come and see.” He was transporting me back by his words to those two glorious deeds before the children of men. These were the “awesome deeds” he referred to. God himself was narrating

the mighty works of God. He was doing it for me. He was doing it with words that were resounding in my own mind.

There settled over me a wonderful reverence. A palpable peace came down. This was a holy moment and a holy corner of the world in northern Minnesota. God Almighty had come down and was giving me the stillness and the openness and the willingness to hear his very voice. As I marveled at his power to dry the sea and the river, he spoke again. *“I keep watch over the nations—let not the rebellious exalt themselves.”*

This was breathtaking. It was very serious. It was almost a rebuke, at least a warning. He may as well have taken me by the collar of my shirt, lifted me off the ground with one hand, and said with an incomparable mixture of fierceness and love, “Never, never, never exalt yourself. Never rebel against me.”

I sat staring at nothing. My mind was full of the global glory of God. *“I keep watch over the nations.”* He had said this to me. It was not just that he had said it. Yes, that is glorious. But he had said this to me. The very words of God were in my head. They were there in my head just as much as the words I am writing at this moment are in my head. They were heard as clearly as if at this moment I recalled that my wife said, “Come down for supper whenever you are ready.” I know those are the words of my wife. And I know these are the words of God.

Think of it. Marvel at this. Stand in awe of this. The God who keeps watch over the nations, like some people keep watch over cattle or stock markets or construction sites—this God still speaks in the twenty-first century. I heard his very words. He spoke personally to me.

What effect did this have on me? It filled me with a fresh sense of God’s reality. It assured me more deeply that he acts in history and in

our time. It strengthened my faith that he is for me and cares about me and will use his global power to watch over me. Why else would he come and tell me these things?

It has increased my love for the Bible as God's very Word, because it was through the Bible that I heard these divine words, and through the Bible I have experiences like this almost every day. The very God of the universe speaks on every page into my mind—and your mind. We hear his very words. God himself has multiplied his wondrous deeds and thoughts toward us; none can compare with him! “I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told” (Psalm 40:5).

And best of all, they are available to all. If you would like to hear the very same words I heard on the couch in northern Minnesota, read Psalm 66:5–7. That is where I heard them. O how precious is the Bible. It is the very Word of God. In it God speaks in the twenty-first century. This is the very voice of God. By this voice, he speaks with absolute truth and personal force. By this voice, he reveals his all-surpassing beauty. By this voice, he reveals the deepest secrets of our hearts. No voice anywhere anytime can reach as deep or lift as high or carry as far as the voice of God that we hear in the Bible.

It is a great wonder that God still speaks today through the Bible with greater force and greater glory and greater assurance and greater sweetness and greater hope and greater guidance and greater transforming power and greater Christ-exalting truth than can be heard through any voice in any human soul on the planet from outside the Bible.

The great need of our time is for people to experience the living reality of God by hearing his word personally and “transformingly” in

Scripture. Something is incredibly wrong when words that claim to be from God from outside Scripture are more powerful and more affecting to us than the inspired Word of God.

Let us cry with the psalmist, “Incline my heart to your testimonies” (Psalm 119:36). “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law” (Psalm 119:18). Grant that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened to know our hope and our inheritance and the love of Christ that passes knowledge and be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 1:18; 3:19). *O God, don't let us be so deaf to your Word and so unaffected with its ineffable, evidential excellency that we celebrate lesser things.*