

# The Pleasures of God God's Delight in Being God

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

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## The Pleasures of God

# God's Delight in Being God

### INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

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# Instructor's Introduction

It is our hope and prayer that God would be pleased to use this curriculum for *his* glory. Thus, the intention of this curriculum is to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ. This curriculum is guided by the vision and values of Bethlehem College & Seminary, which are more fully explained at bcsmn.edu. At our website, you will find the God-centered philosophy that undergirds and motivates everything we do. May God be glorified in us as we are satisfied in him alone!

#### S COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Pleasures of God is a course that considers the worth and excellency of God through the lens of God's pleasures. The curriculum simply investigates the biblical teaching on one pleasure of God in each lesson. Students will carefully examine the biblical text, thoughtfully interact with John Piper's book, *The Pleasures of God*, and think through certain aspects of the doctrine of God. The aim of the course is to expand students' vision of God so that they might come to share in the very joys of God himself.

#### OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to accomplish specific objectives. A student successfully completing this course should be able to:

Magnify the worth of God in a more meaningful and personal way by treasuring him in their heart above all else. We recognize that this, the ultimate objective of the course, is impossible apart from the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, who exalts the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

- Understand the overarching narrative of the Scriptures more fully as a result of studying it diligently throughout the course. Every lesson will compel the student to read and meditate on the Word. Our desire is to encourage students to be Bereans (cf. Acts 17:11).
- Comprehend and thoughtfully interact with one of John Piper's most fundamental books, *The Pleasures of God*. To this end the student will answer comprehension questions for every section they are assigned to read.
- Set forth a basic doctrine of God that emphasizes the joy and sovereignty of
- Discuss this biblical vision of God with others and make appropriate application.
- Synthesize and summarize what they have learned through the course. This last objective will be accomplished by the completion of the course's final project.

#### **♦** IMPLEMENTATION

As the instructor of this course, it is imperative that you are completely familiar with the curriculum. We therefore recommend that you read this entire section carefully and then skim through the rest of what is contained in this binder.

This course is designed to be taught in 12 lessons, ideally in 2 hours of inclass instruction and with approximately 2.5 hours homework each week. To achieve the kind of undistracted focus and academic rigor that maximizes learning, we recommend that this course be taught as a weeknight class. We anticipate, however, that this curriculum might be adapted for a Sunday school, small group, or discipleship setting. If this is necessary or most appropriate, we urge you to establish an expectation among your students that this course will require more concentration and commitment than a typical Sunday school class would. A tone of serious and earnest study should be set by the instructor before the course even begins.

First Lesson

Before the first class session, you will need to decide when and where this course will be offered. Record this information on the syllabus in the box labeled: "Course Information." You may also want to include your contact information in this box. The schedule incorporated in the syllabus does not have assigned dates. Please write the intended dates for each lesson in the corresponding box. Once you have completed filling out the syllabus, photocopy it so that you may distribute one copy to each student enrolled in the course. The *Student's Workbook* does not include a syllabus, so your students will not have a syllabus until you distribute one. Photocopying the syllabus is the only photocopying that is required of you by this curriculum.

During the first lesson, we recommend the following outline to structure your time:

- ▶ **Welcome / Prayer (5 min):** Greet the students as they arrive. Open the lesson by exalting God in prayer.
- Personal Introductions (20 min): Ask each student in the room to introduce themselves briefly by answering the following questions (and answer these questions yourself): What is your name? Can you tell the class a little about yourself? Why are you enrolled in this course and what are you hoping to gain from it?
- Initial Thoughts About God (25 min): Before reviewing the syllabus and working through Lesson 1, facilitate an initial discussion about God among your students. Try to involve everyone in the discussion. You may choose to ask questions such as: Do you think of God as happy? Why or why not? In what things might God take pleasure? Is seeking the biblical teaching on God's pleasures a worthwhile endeavor? Would knowing the pleasures of God change your life? The purpose of this initial discussion is to generate a few leading questions and ideas which will be addressed during the course. The discussion also provides an opportunity for you, the instructor, to discern how your class is approaching this issue.
- Syllabus Review (10 min): Distribute your customized course syllabus and then guide the class through it, reading each item and answering any questions that the students might have.

- ▶ Break (5 min)
- What Are the Pleasures of God? (50 min): Guide the class through *Lesson* 1, reading each section together until a question is reached. After allowing a few minutes for the students to answer each question, pause to discuss their answers. You may also choose to discuss each question immediately with the class (and not allow time for individual reflection) in the interest of time.

Lesson 1 is the only lesson you will take your students through without their prior preparation. For all subsequent lessons, students will work through the lesson on their own before coming to class. To prepare for Lesson 1 as the instructor, you should attempt to answer the questions yourself before consulting the suggested answers in the *Instructor's Guide* (where answers are suggested). Reading the preface and introduction to *The Pleasures of God* would also be beneficial preparation. (The students will read the introduction of *The Pleasures of God* as a part of their assigned reading for Lesson 12.)

Overview of the Next Lesson / Closing (5 min): Encourage the students to purchase the required textbooks if they don't have them already. Ensure that they understand what is required of them in preparation for the next class session. Then thank them for coming to the class and dismiss in prayer.

Subsequent Lessons

As the instructor, you will be expected to do all the preparation for each lesson that is required of the students and more. We strongly recommend that you obtain a *Student's Workbook* and attempt to complete the homework on your own before consulting this *Instructor's Guide*. The *Instructor's Guide* provides our suggested answers. Some questions in this curriculum are open-ended and could be answered in different ways. You may find that the answers contained in this manual may not be the clearest or most accurate answers possible. Therefore, we encourage you to improve upon our answers if you can. It is essential to understand that this *Instructor's Guide* is meant to be a resource; the real authority is God's Word.

Furthermore, we have deliberately omitted lesson outlines for Lessons 2-12. Our recommendation is for you to open the class in prayer and then immediately start to discuss the integrative assignment the students have done. The discussion could then proceed through each day's study. We consider it unnecessary to lecture through the material the students will have read in the textbook—discussing student questions on the reading should adequately

cover the material. You will notice that the material in each lesson should provide you with much more material than you can cover in two hours of thoughtful interaction. This is not an oversight in design and you should not feel obligated to provide the students with answers for every question. Rather, as the instructor, your responsibility should be to focus on areas where students have questions or interest.

You will also notice that the *Instructor's Guide* has material that is not included in the *Student's Workbook* in the form of Teaching Notes at the beginning of the lesson and throughout the course, in the side margins. Consult these notes after thoroughly reviewing the lesson.

It is our conviction that the best teachers foster an environment in the classroom which engages students. Adults learn by solving problems or by working through things that provoke curiosity or concern. Therefore, we discourage you from lecturing for the entire lesson. Although an instructor will constantly shape conversation, clarifying and correcting as needed, they will probably not talk for the majority of the lesson. This curriculum is meant to facilitate an investigation into biblical truth—an investigation that is shared by the instructor and the students. Therefore, we encourage you to adopt the posture of a "fellow-learner" who invites participation from everyone in the class.

It might surprise you how eager adults can be to share what they have learned in preparing for each lesson. Therefore, you should invite participation by asking your students to share their discoveries. Here are some of our "tips" on facilitating discussion that is engaging and helpful:

- Don't be uncomfortable with silence initially. Once the first student shares their response, others will be likely to join in. If you cut the silence short by prompting the students, they are more likely to wait for you to prompt them every time.
- Affirm answers whenever possible and draw out the students by asking for clarification. Your aim is to make them feel comfortable sharing their ideas and learning, so be extremely hesitant to "shut down" a student's contribution or "trump" it with your own. This does not mean, however, that you shouldn't correct false ideas—just do it in a spirit of gentleness and love.
- Don't allow a single student or several students to dominate the discussion. Involve everyone and intentionally invite participation from those who are more reserved or hesitant.
- Labor to show the significance of their study. Emphasize the things that the

Teaching Style

- students could not have learned without doing the homework.
- Avoid talking too much. The instructor should not monopolize the discussion, but rather guide and shape it. If the instructor does the majority of the talking, the students will be less likely to interact and engage, and will therefore not learn as much. Avoid constantly adding the "definitive last word."
- The instructor should feel the freedom to linger on a topic or question if the group demonstrates interest. The instructor should also pursue digressions that are helpful and at least somewhat relevant. The instructor, however, *should* attempt to cover the material. So avoid the extreme of constantly wandering off topic, but also avoid the extreme of limiting the conversation in a way that squelches curiosity or learning.
- The instructor's passion, or lack of it, is infectious. Therefore, if you demonstrate little enthusiasm for the material, it is almost inevitable that your students will likewise be bored. But if you have a genuine excitement for what you are studying, your class will be impacted positively. Therefore, it is our recommendation that, before you come to class, you spend adequate time working through the homework and praying so that you can overflow with genuine enthusiasm for the Bible and for God in class. This point cannot be stressed enough. Delight yourself in God and in his Word!

#### **Questions or Comments?**

It may be necessary to again stress that **this curriculum is a resource**. As the instructor, you should feel the freedom to structure the class time and to discuss through the material in a way that promotes the maximum learning and enjoyment of your students. Lingering on certain questions, pursuing *helpful* digressions, examining relevant portions of Scripture, adding other supplemental material, and customizing the curriculum to fit your situation are all heartily approved.

If you still have questions after reading this introduction and surveying the curriculum, you may contact Bethlehem College & Seminary at info@bcsmn.edu. We are also eager for your comments and suggestions! Thanks!



#### The Pleasures of God

### God's Delight in Being God

#### **SYLLABUS**

#### S COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Pleasures of God is a course that considers the worth and excellency of God through the lens of God's pleasures. The curriculum simply investigates the biblical teaching on one pleasure of God in each lesson. Students will carefully examine the biblical text, thoughtfully interact with John Piper's book, *The Pleasures of God*, and think through certain aspects of the doctrine of God. The aim of the course is to expand students' vision of God so that they might come to share in the very joys of God himself.

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- Magnify the worth of God in a more meaningful and personal way by treasuring him in their heart above all else. We recognize that this, the ultimate objective of the course, is impossible apart from the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, who exalts the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.
- ▶ Understand the overarching narrative of the Scriptures more fully as a result of studying it diligently throughout the course. Every lesson will compel the student to read and meditate on the Word. Our desire is to encourage students to be Bereans (cf. Acts 17:11).
- Comprehend and thoughtfully interact with one of John Piper's most fundamental books, *The Pleasures of God*. To this end the student will answer comprehension questions for every section they are assigned to read.
- Set forth a basic doctrine of God that emphasizes the joy and sovereignty of God.
- Discuss this biblical vision of God with others and make appropriate application.
- Synthesize and summarize what they have learned through the course. This last objective will be accomplished by the completion of the course's final project.

#### REQUIRED BOOKS (TEXTBOOKS)

- An English version of the Bible, preferably the *English Standard Version* (ESV) or *New American Standard Bible* (NASB).
- ▶ John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, rev. ed. (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2000).

#### S REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to prepare for Lessons 2-12 by completing the lesson pages in a sequential order. Therefore, for each lesson a student should read the Introduction and the Lesson Objectives. Then the student should read the remainder of the lesson, answer the 20 questions contained therein, and complete all the required reading and the integrative assignment. The student may then review the discussion questions and record their own discussion question. Each lesson's workload has been divided into five daily assignments for the convenience of the student. Students will compose a brief reflection paper at the end of the course.

Students will pass this course if they attend at least 10 class sessions, complete all the assignments, and complete an adequate reflection paper. Please contact the instructor with any problems or concerns.

#### S REFLECTION PAPER

Students will be required to write a reflection paper (2-3 pages double-spaced), due one week after the last class session. This paper may be emailed as an attachment to the instructor or mailed to their address. The reflection paper should consist of the student's answers to the following three questions:

- Incorporating what you have learned from this curriculum and the textbook, how would you describe the pleasures of God to someone who had little or no familiarity with them?
- 2. How has your vision of God and the Christian life been expanded and enriched by participating in this course?
- 3. In what concrete and specific ways will you strive, by God's grace, to live as a man or woman who is shaped by the biblical vision of the infinitely happy God?

#### SCHEDULE

Lesson	Date	Lesson Title
1		What Are the Pleasures of God?
2		The Pleasure of God in His Son
3		The Pleasure of God in All He Does
4		The Pleasure of God in His Creation
5		The Pleasure of God in His Fame
6		The Pleasure of God in Election
7		The Pleasure of God in Bruising the Son
8		The Pleasure of God in Doing Good to All Who Hope in Him
9		The Pleasure of God in the Prayers of the Upright
10		The Pleasure of God in Personal Obedience and Public Justice
11		The Pleasure of God in Concealing and Revealing Himself
12		Infinite Satisfaction in God

# What Are the Pleasures of God?

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#### INTRODUCTION

As Christians we would do well not to be prejudiced against old books. Certainly the Bible itself is one such "old book." There are many other old books, however, from which we can learn and grow. In the introduction to *The Pleasures of God*, John Piper describes an experience of "grazing" in Henry Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (originally written in 1677). He then says,

I have to admit that most of my soul's food comes from very old books. I find the atmosphere of my own century far too dense with man and distant from the sweet sovereignty of God.<sup>1</sup>

The sermon series which eventually led to Piper's book *The Pleasures of God* was conceived one Monday morning as Piper meditated on a single sentence in Scougal's little book. It was his second time reading through the book.

This course will start with that single sentence in Scougal and the original question that John Piper asked. We will then plunge into the text of Scripture, eagerly seeking to know the object(s) of God's love.

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#### S LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- > state the leading question which this course will seek to answer.
- ▶ defend biblically the idea that God is infinitely happy.
- suggest ways in which this course will be of immense practical benefit to the Christian.

#### TEACHING NOTES



The purpose of this first lesson is simply to *introduce* the students to the main contentions of the course. Each of the points made in this first lesson will receive support and elaboration in subsequent lessons. Therefore, you should not feel obligated to prove these contentions definitively at this point. The detailed textual work will be done later. It is likely that many student questions will need to be deferred.

When Piper preached his sermon series on this topic in his church in 1987, this is what he had to say about its foundational assumptions (as cited from "The Pleasure of God in All That He Does," an online sermon at the desiringGod website):

Two assumptions lie at the foundation of this new series of messages on the pleasures of God. The first assumption is that "The worth and excellency of a soul is measured by the object of its love" (Henry Scougal). If we apply that to God, then one way of beholding the worth and excellency of God is to meditate on what he loves. . . . The second assumption is that when we fix our mind's attention on the worth and excellency of God, that is, when we meditate on his glory, we are changed little by little into his likeness.

Make sure that your students understand these two foundational assumptions through the classroom discussion. Much of the course is built upon these assumptions.

The sequence of lessons in this course is very intentional and mirrors the intentional sequence of the chapters in *The Pleasures of God*. We must start with God's pleasures in himself before we speak about God's pleasures in us. Piper, in a conference message entitled, "The Pleasures of God, Part 1" (which can be found at the desiringGod website) explains why we must begin with God's delights that are directed toward himself and only then talk about the delights he finds on earth and in us:

If we had turned that order around, it would have fit perfectly in America and destroyed the meaning of his delight in us. If you start with people today that God likes them, you'll never make the gospel plain. God is angry with us—that's the starting place. Something amazing happens that he actually can not only have mercy upon the likes of me but actually begin to delight in the likes of me. If you start [the gospel] there [with "God likes you"], it'll never make sense. It will be so distorted into our self-centered, American worldview that people will never get the wonder of it. So I'm not going to start there, that's coming last. And it does become

spectacularly good news, breathtaking in what God says about his joy over us.

Again, the course is organized according to the order of the chapters in *The Pleasures of God*. The series of messages that Piper gave during a 2007 CA conference presents the material in a slightly different order and numbering. Piper's sermon series at Bethlehem Baptist Church in 1987 does as well. So if you make use these resources, please be aware of that fact.

One aspect of the doctrine of God will not receive much attention in this course—the doctrine of God's so-called impassibility. This doctrine is sometimes invoked to deny the reality of God's emotional life. Other times this doctrine is used as a safeguard against implying that God is vulnerable to the same whims and passions as are fallible human beings. Though this discussion will not be directly covered in this course, please address it with your students if it is a concern for them. The following two quotations might serve the discussion.

Donald Macleod, in *Behold Your God*, rev. ed. (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1995), says on page 236:

The idea that God is a passionless, emotionally immobile Being is totally unscriptural. The Bible reveals Him as a God of wrath and jealousy. It also reveals Him as One who has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11) and therefore, by implication, as One who is grieved when human beings destroy themselves. The New Testament even describes the Holy Spirit specifically as capable of grief (Ephesians 4:30). Similarly, God is revealed as One who is passionate in His love, loving the church as a husband loves his wife, extravagant in His devotion and tormented by her infidelities. These are all fundamentally important parts of the biblical portrait of God and quite irreconcilable with the view that He is emotionally inert.

Likewise D. A. Carson offers the following statement in his book *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000) on page 59:

It is no answer to espouse a form of impassibility that denies that God has an emotional life and that insists that all of the biblical evidence to the contrary is nothing more than anthropopathism. The price is too heavy. You may then rest in God's sovereignty, but you can no longer rejoice in his love. You may rejoice only in a linguistic expression that is an accommodation of some reality of which we cannot conceive, couched in the anthropopathism of love. Give me a break. Paul did not pray that his readers might be able to grasp the height and depth and length and breath of an anthropopathism and know this anthropopathism that surpasses knowledge (Ephesians 3:14-21).

#### STUDY GUIDE



#### THE HEART IS KNOWN BY ITS DELIGHTS

Think about a particular person whom you admire. What makes that person admirable? If you were to describe their greatness to someone else, what would you say about them? How is it that we "measure" the value of a person's soul?

- 1. What is the most reliable way in which to evaluate a person's excellency and worth? Defend your answer in the space provided below.
  - a. through what they think; the clear and accurate thoughts of a person
  - b. through what they will; the actual outward accomplishments of a person
  - c. through what they want; the things that bring pleasure or delight to a person
  - d. none of the above; a person's excellency is measured by something else
- ANSWER. Student responses will vary. Piper and Scougal will argue, however, that a person's affections, or the object(s) of their love, are the most reliable measure of a person's worth and excellency. As Piper says, "thought is beautiful only in the service of right affections" (18). Even the devil is a clear thinker. And a person who wills great acts of charity with half-heartedness or impure motives is not as excellent as one who delights in doing good (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:3).

The question asked above is one with which Henry Scougal also wrestled Here is his answer:

Love is that powerful and prevalent passion by which all the faculties and inclinations of the soul are determined and on which both its perfection and happiness depend. The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love. He who loveth mean and sordid things doth thereby become base and vile, but a noble and well-placed affection doth advance and improve the spirit into a conformity with the perfections which it loves. The images of these do frequently present themselves unto the mind, and, by a secret force and energy,

insinuate into the very constitution of the soul and mould and fashion it unto their own likeness.<sup>2</sup>

- 2. Put Scougal's argument into your own words:
- ANSWER. Scougal is making at least two points in this paragraph: 1) The object of a (human) person's love determines not only their worth and excellence, but also their happiness and "constitution." This is so because 2) a person is inevitably conformed to that which he or she loves.

The single sentence which so captivated John Piper is the sentence above in italics: "The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love." Piper thought this to be true for humans, but then he bent the question toward God. Could *God's* worth and excellency be measured by the object of *God's* love?

- 3. What is your initial reaction to this question? Can we glimpse something of the glory of God by investigating what God takes pleasure in?
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

When theologians present the doctrine of God, they often list the attributes of God and then describe each attribute in great detail—the power of God, the wisdom of God, God's omnipresence, God's immutability, etc. Very rarely, however, will you find an extended discussion of the pleasures of God in a theologian's doctrine of God. The joy of God is typically neglected.

This is unfortunate—even tragic—since as we have asserted above, examining the pleasures of God affords us a unique vantage point from which we may survey the worth and excellency of God. This course will attempt to present a vision of God through the lens of his happiness. Without this lens, we may not see God as clearly as we ought.

Read the following quotations, which urge us to see God clearly:

A.W. Tozer famously said that whatever comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. When you hear the mention of "God," what would you say? What image fills your heart and head when you think about

<sup>2</sup> Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, ed. Winthrop S. Hudson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1948), 49. Italics added.

#### who God is?

The question is important because we all have some kind of answer. Everybody has a go-to thought when they think of God. And we want that picture to be true, that is, formed by what God says about himself, not the dictates of our experience.<sup>3</sup>

#### And again:

Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued, investigation of the great subject of the Deity.<sup>4</sup>

And as Stephen Charnock has said, "It is impossible to honour God as we ought, unless we know him as he is."

- 4. According to the quotations reproduced above, why is it important to study the doctrine of God and gain a clear understanding of who God is?
- ANSWER. As the above quotations plainly state, it is critical to have a clear vision of God for two reasons: his glory and our good. Charnock's assertion supports the former: we cannot honor or glorify God as we should unless we know him as he is. Spurgeon's assertion support the latter: we will be conformed to the image of God that we see and savor.

#### THE HEART IS FILLED BY ITS DELIGHTS

Let's probe a bit deeper into why we ought to ponder God's pleasures. Piper justifies this biblical investigation with two rationales. He says, "I want to be happy and I want God to be glorified." His contention is that looking at the excellency of God through the lens of his pleasures accomplishes both of these.

Someone might object to the first of these motives: "Isn't it selfish to pursue our happiness?" Here is Piper's response:

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Parnell, "Three Things We Should Know About God," an online article at the desiring God website.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Spurgeon as quoted by Arthur Pink, *Gleanings in the Godhead* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 81.

Among those who know the Bible best and who have experienced it most deeply, it has never diverted people from the quest for happiness and pleasure. Instead, it has caused people to get really serious about the quest. It has caused them to ask, 'Do I really want to be happy? Do I want the fullest happiness possible? Do I want my happiness to last forever?' In other words, the Bible makes us stop playing games with our happiness. It makes us serious, even desperate, in our pursuit.<sup>5</sup>

Henry Scougal agrees with Piper's response. Here is Scougal's discussion of the pursuit of our happiness in God:

Again, as divine love [that is, love for God] doth advance and elevate the soul, so it is that alone which can make it happy. The highest and most ravishing pleasures, the most solid and substantial delights that human nature is capable of, are those which arise from the endearments of a well-placed and successful affection. That which imbitters love, and makes it ordinarily a very troublesome and hurtful passion, is the placing it on those who have not worth enough to deserve it, or affection and gratitude to require it, or whose absence may deprive us of the pleasure of their converse, or their miseries occasion our trouble. To all these evils are they exposed whose chief and supreme affection is placed on creatures like themselves, but the love of God delivers us from them all.<sup>6</sup>

- 5. Again, put Scougal's claims into your own words.
- ANSWER. Scougal is arguing here that when our foremost love is placed on fellow human beings, it eventually and inevitably embitters that love since humans are not ultimately worthy of that love. They will always disappoint us because of their deficiencies and weaknesses. When our foremost love is placed on God, however, we enjoy the "highest and most ravishing pleasures," because God is totally worthy, sovereign, and self-sufficient. The implication of this paragraph is that we ought to place our love on that which will bring us the greatest happiness—God.

To cultivate this love for God, Scougal urges us to see God for who he is.

<sup>5</sup> John Piper, "The Gladness of the Risen God," an online sermon at the desiring God website.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Scougal, The Life of God in the Soul of Man, 51.

And, first, to inflame our souls with the love of God, let us consider the excellency of his nature and his love and kindness towards us. It is little we know of the divine perfection, and yet that little may suffice to fill our souls with admiration and love, to ravish our affections as well as to raise our wonder . . .?

Of course, the assumption behind all of this reasoning is that God is, in fact, happy. Is this a legitimate assumption to make? Although this entire course will explore the happiness of God, let's start with three passages which assert or imply the happiness of God.

#### 1 Timothy 1:8-11

<sup>8</sup> Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, <sup>9</sup> understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, <sup>10</sup> the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, <sup>11</sup> in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

The key word in this passage is the word "blessed" (underlined above). The Greek word which is being translated as "blessed" is *makarios*. This word also occurs in the following passages:

#### Matthew 5:3-6

<sup>3</sup> <u>Blessed</u> are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> <u>Blessed</u> are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. <sup>5</sup> <u>Blessed</u> are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup> <u>Blessed</u> are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

#### Acts 26:2

<sup>2</sup> I consider myself <u>fortunate</u> that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews . . .

#### 1 Corinthians 7:39-40

<sup>39</sup> A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. <sup>40</sup> Yet in my judgment she is <u>happier</u> if she remains as she is.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Scougal, The Life of God in the Soul of Man, 83.

As you can see, this word can also be translated as "happy" or "fortunate."

- 6. What does it mean when Paul describes God as the "blessed God" (1 Timothy 1:11)?
- ANSWER. Piper would paraphrase the clause in 1 Timothy 1:11 as, "the gospel of the glory of the infinitely satisfied God." Here are some additional comments from his book God Is the Gospel (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005): "It is astonishing that only here and in 1 Timothy 6:15 in the entire Old Testament and New Testament does the word refer to God. Paul has clearly done something unusual, calling God makarios, happy" (100). For more discussion of this point, see The Pleasures of God, 25-26, which the students will read for the next lesson.

This next passage in the Gospel of Matthew clearly implies the happiness of God.

#### Matthew 25:19-21

<sup>19</sup> Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, "Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more." <sup>21</sup> His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."

- 7. How is the happiness of God implied in these verses? Or, to ask a related question, what if the master were not happy?
- · ANSWER. In the context of Jesus' teaching, entering into the joy of the master is clearly set forth as motivation for being faithful. If the master were not happy, the faithfulness of the servant would not be motivated by anything. So in order for Jesus' reasoning to work, the kind of radical, lay-down-your-life and put-away-all-of-your-earthly-treasures obedience which he demands must be motivated by a joy far exceeding anything this earth has to offer. The master must be abundantly joyful indeed!

John Frame asserts that God is happy in his book, *The Doctrine of God*:

It is refreshing to know that joy is a divine attribute and that when the Spirit plants joy in us (Galatians 5:22), we are becoming more like God. We should not think of

God, or the ideal Christian, as constantly disapproving or dour8.

But perhaps we must go further. It is not only refreshing to know that God is happy, it is *critical* to know this. As a way of life, Christian Hedonism (the deliberate pursuit of pleasure in God) depends on God's happiness.

If God is not a happy God, Christian Hedonism has no foundation. For the aim of the Christian Hedonist is to be happy in God, to delight in God, to cherish and enjoy His fellowship and favor. But children cannot enjoy the fellowship of their Father if He is unhappy. Therefore the foundation of Christian Hedonism is the happiness of God.<sup>9</sup>

This course, therefore, will seek to provide a strong foundation for a life of pursuing joy in God by demonstrating that God is infinitely joyful in himself.

Let's consider one final text, which anticipates the concluding lesson of this course.

#### John 15:9-11

<sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

This text suggests that Jesus intends his own joy to be the joy that fills his disciples. Piper meditates on this stunning promise:

But what will it be like when the very joy of the perfect Son of God, capable of infinite energy and joy, puts his joy in me and grows it up to its fullness? That will

<sup>8</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2002), 443.

<sup>9</sup> Excerpt(s) from *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* by John Piper, copyright © 1986, 1996, 2003, 2011 by Desiring God Foundation. Used by permission of WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved. Pages 32-33. Any third party use of this material, outside of this publication, is prohibited. Interested parties must apply directly to Penguin Random House LLC for permission.

be exploding. I will have to have a new body. This one will blow apart! And I do believe that. I don't think that's a sermonic flourish.

... It's called a "spiritual body," which I think means it will be capable of spiritual experiences way beyond this body, which I am very thankful for, because I've tried to maximize my experiences in this body and they don't get very far.<sup>10</sup>

- 8. According to Piper, what is one reason why we will need new bodies?
- ANSWER. Piper believes that our current, decaying bodies cannot sustain the fullness of joy which Jesus intends to pour into us. Our physical bodies are simply unable to experience the pleasures of God which will be ours. Therefore, we will need new incorruptible, pure, enduring, and "spiritual" bodies to enjoy the new heavens and new earth. This truth gives great hope and joy to the believer.

#### THE HEART IS MOLDED BY ITS DELIGHTS

Thus far we've laid out the approach which this course will adopt. Our aim is to understand something of the greatness and glory of God by considering what his pleasures are. In so doing, we will seek our own pleasure in his pleasures.

We will also seek to become more like God, to be conformed to his excellent character. John Piper describes the dynamics of this process, illustrated in everyday life:

We hum the music we listen to. We speak with the accent of our vicinity. We pick up the courtesies of our parents. And we naturally tend to imitate the people we admire most. So it is with God. If we fix our attention on him and hold his glory in our view, we will be changed from one degree of glory to another into his likeness. If teenagers tend to fix their hair like the stars they admire, so Christians will tend to fix their character like the God they admire. In this spiritual transaction seeing is not only believing; seeing is becoming.

... This is no artificial or merely intellectual construction. It is precisely what I know to be true from my own experience (as do many of you!): seeing God for who

<sup>10</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 1," an online conference message at the desiringGod website

he really is has proven again and again to be the most powerful and compelling force in motivating my quest for holiness and joy in him."

The process which Piper describes can also be seen in the following biblical passages:

#### 2 Corinthians 3:14-18

<sup>14</sup> But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. <sup>15</sup> Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. <sup>16</sup> But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. <sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

#### 1 John 3:2-3

- <sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.
  - 9. According to these passages, how are we changed? Is the change described in these passages only for the future when we see God face to face?
  - · ANSWER. These two passages can be summarized by the phrase "beholding is becoming." As we see the glory of God, we will be transformed into its likeness. This process of transformation begins now in the life of faith. For the glory of God can be seen in Scripture (2 Corinthians 3:14), and even those who hope to see God as he is are being purified in this life. Obviously, though, our transformation will only be completed when we receive new bodies and see him in his unmediated glory.

It is in becoming like God that we will experience the happiness of God.

<sup>11</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in His Son," an online sermon at the desiring God website.

God's blessedness shows us that the greatest possible happiness is to be found only by imaging the blessedness of God himself.<sup>12</sup>

So here is Piper's aim in teaching us about the pleasures of God:

So I'm on a mission here to so lift up the pleasures of God that through that lens you will see his excellencies in fresh new ways and in seeing them be transformed into their likeness so that your body and your mind and your heart radiate with the glory of God.<sup>13</sup>

And here is a prayer that Henry Scougal composed, which could serve as a prayer to fly as a banner over this course:

Oh, that the holy life of the blessed Jesus may be always in my thoughts and before mine eyes, till I receive a deep sense and impression of those excellent graces that shined so eminently in him; and let me never cease my endeavors, till that new and divine nature prevail in my soul and Christ be formed within me.<sup>14</sup>

- 10. Compose your own prayer for this course. Ask God to reveal himself to you in a new and fresh way so that you may be changed, filled with his joy.
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

#### S ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, Preface and Introduction
- ▶ Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*

<sup>12</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 445.

<sup>13</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 1," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Scougal, The Life of God in the Soul of Man, 47. Italics removed.

# The Pleasure of God in His Son

#### S INTRODUCTION

Before the foundation of the world, God existed in three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. Before there were any other beings in the universe with which to interact, the members of the Triune God related to one another. What was their relationship like? Can we know anything about the intimacy which they enjoyed?

This lesson will investigate the pleasure that God the Father has, has had, and will always have in God the Son. We are on the brink of the ineffable here. And yet, Scripture does provide some whispers of this holy, intra-Trinitarian love.

#### S LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▶ defend from Scripture the idea that God has pleasure in his Son.
- ▶ explain why God has pleasure in his Son.
- defend the assertion that God's foremost and fundamental pleasure is in his Son.



#### S

#### TEACHING NOTES

Since this lesson is the bedrock for the following lessons, it is imperative that your students have a clear understanding of the material. Take the time to answer student questions or to address student concerns, even if this prevents you from reviewing all of the biblical texts in the lesson.

It is hopefully clear why Jesus' deity must be addressed in this lesson and in Piper's chapter. As Piper says, this extra step is necessary "to guard against misunderstanding and to enlarge the vista of the glory of God's gladness in the Son" (36). If idolatry were at the core of God's pleasures, there would be no gospel. But if the Son is fully God, then the Father's delight in the Son is God's delight in himself. This is not a systematic theology course, so it is probably unnecessary to go into a detailed defense of the Son's divine nature. But it must be asserted and understood so that this foundational point is made: God's chief pleasure is in beholding and emanating his own glory.

Question 4 is an important one to answer in this lesson. In addition to the suggested answer, you might point your students to the following important paragraph in *The Pleasures of God* in which Piper makes the connection between love and pleasure explicit:

So when we say that God loves his Son, we are not talking about a love that is self-denying, sacrificial, or merciful. We are talking about a love of delight and pleasure. God is not stooping to pity the undeserving when he loves his Son. That is how God loves us. It is not how he loves his Son. He is well-pleased with his Son. His soul delights in the Son! When he looks at his Son he enjoys and admires and cherishes and prizes and relishes what he sees. The first great pleasure of God is his pleasure in the Son. (34)

It might be helpful for you, as the instructor, to consult Piper's original sermon on this topic "The Pleasure of God in His Son" (an online sermon at the desiringGod website). You may choose to read it or listen to it. The sermon was unfolded in five affirmations, which may help structure your own discussion of the material:

- 1. God has pleasure in his Son.
- 2. The Son of God has the fullness of deity.
- 3. The Son in whom God delights is the eternal image and reflection of God and is thus God himself.

- 4. The pleasure of God in his Son is pleasure in himself.
- 5. God is the most excellent and worthy of all beings.

And you may also choose to employ, in some way, this concluding prayer to the sermon:

Let us stand in awe of this great God! And let us turn from all the trivial resentments and fleeting pleasures and petty pursuits of life, and join in with the gladness that God has in the image of his own perfections, namely, his Son. Let us pray:

Infinite, eternal, and righteous God, we confess that we have often belittled you and exalted ourselves to the center of your affections where you alone belong in the person of your Son. We repent and turn from our presumption and gladly stand in awe of your eternal, self-sufficient happiness in the fellowship of the Trinity. And our prayer, in the words of your Son (John 17:26), is that the love with which you have loved him may be in us and he in us, that we might be taken up into that fellowship of joy and that ocean of love forever and ever. Amen.

Our being swept up into God's very pleasure in himself will be explored again in the last lesson of this course.

# Day 1

#### 1 AM WELL PLEASED WITH HIM

There are three direct statements in the first book of the New Testament that tell us what God delights in. Here is the first:

#### Matthew 3:13-17

- <sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.
  <sup>14</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. <sup>16</sup> And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; <sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."
  - 1. According to this passage, in whom does God delight? Why might God express his delight on this particular occasion?
  - ANSWER. God delights in his "beloved Son," Jesus. The broader context makes it clear that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. It was meant to prepare God's people for the coming judgment. By being baptized even though he was sinless, Jesus identified himself with sinners and foreshadowed his baptism of death when he would take God's judgment upon himself. Therefore, it is likely that God is here expressing his delight in his Son's sacrificial servitude on behalf of God's people. God delights in the Son's meekness.

The second passage in Matthew which describes God's delight is in Matthew 12.

#### Matthew 12:15-21

<sup>15</sup> Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he

healed them all <sup>16</sup> and ordered them not to make him known. <sup>17</sup> This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: <sup>18</sup> "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup> He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; <sup>20</sup> a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; <sup>21</sup> and in his name the Gentiles will hope."

God takes pleasure in his Spirit-anointed servant, whom Matthew identifies as Jesus. And then here is the third passage which uses the language of God's pleasure:

#### Matthew 17:1-5

<sup>1</sup> And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup> And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup> He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

- 2. According to this passage, in whom does God delight? Why might God express his delight on *this* particular occasion?
- · ANSWER. Again, the text informs us that God takes pleasure in his Son. Jesus' baptism revealed his sin-bearing humility (at least) and this episode—the Transfiguration—reveals Jesus in his divine glory. So God delights not only in the meekness of his Son, but also in his majesty. If Jesus' baptism foreshadowed his death, does the Transfiguration foreshadow the glory of his resurrection or second coming (cf. Matthew 16:28)? If so, God takes pleasure in both.

The following passages are the words of Jesus. In John 15 Jesus is directing his words to the disciples while in John 17 he is praying to the Father.

#### John 15:9-11

<sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you

keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

#### John 17:12-13

<sup>12</sup> While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup> But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

#### John 17:24-26

<sup>24</sup> Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. <sup>25</sup> O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup> I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

- 3. According to these passages, what is the incredible hope of the believer regarding the love and joy that is shared between the Father and Son?
- ANSWER. These passages describe the love that the Father has for the Son. The three passages which we have already examined (Matthew 3, 12, and 17) describe the joy that the Father has in beholding the Son. Jesus desires that believers see his glory and know the Father so that they might experience the love and joy that exists within the Trinity. The incredible hope that emerges from these passages is that the very love and joy of God might be in us—that we might be swept up into the pleasure God has in himself.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 25-30.

Stop at "Loved as Happy Co-Creator"

In the last full paragraph on page 26, Piper speaks of the happiness and *pleasure* of the Father, cites John 17:26 which refers to the *love* of the Father, and then

offers the following interpretive comment: "He made God known so that God's *pleasure* in his Son might be in us and become our *pleasure*" (italics added).

- 4. Is it legitimate to make this shift from God's love to his pleasure? Explain your answer.
- ANSWER. Piper uses God's love and his pleasure almost interchangeably and for good reason. First, it has been Piper's task elsewhere to show that loving another person has delight at its essence (cf. Desiring God, 111-141). If we are to love Jesus as the Father does, we must delight in Jesus as the Father does. Second, it is significant that Matthew 3:17 and 17:5 connect God's love and his pleasure: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (italics added). God's love and joy are ultimately inseparable, and one is not possible without the other.
- 5. List some of the pairs of "diverse excellencies" that the Son of God has which make him a most glorious being in whom the Father takes infinite pleasure.<sup>15</sup>
- · ANSWER. [Students may cite any or all of the pairs listed on page 30. In your discussion of this question, you may ask your students to explain how Jesus exhibits each of the characteristics listed here, pressing them to cite Scripture which supports their answer.]

<sup>15</sup> This question is reproduced from the Study Guide (page 345, Question 9) of the revised edition of *The Pleasures of God*. We thought it appropriate to include some reading questions which Piper himself crafted. In the lessons that follow, we will simply include a footnote with a page number when Piper's study questions are being reproduced.

# Day 2

#### THE FATHER LOVES HIS ONLY SON

Having studied the Gospel of Matthew, now we will look more carefully at the Gospel of John.

#### John 3:34-35

<sup>34</sup> For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. <sup>35</sup> The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.

#### John 5:19-20

<sup>19</sup> So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. <sup>20</sup> For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel."

#### John 10:17

 $^{17}$  For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

#### John 14:21, 23

<sup>21</sup> "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." . . . <sup>23</sup> Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

#### John 16:26-27

 $^{26}$  In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf;  $^{27}$  for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

- 6. Does God *love* the Son in a unique way? What might this suggest about the *pleasure* that God has in the Son? (See your answer to Question 4.)
- ANSWER. The passages from the Gospel of John cited above witness to the unique love that the Father has for God the Son. This unique love manifests itself in the Father giving all things to the Son, showing the Son all he is doing, loving the Son for his atoning death, and loving others for his Son's sake when they love, obey, and believe in the Son. Since God's love for the Son is unique, his joy in the Son must likewise be unique. (See the suggested answer to Question 4 and the Teaching Notes at the end of this lesson.)

The relationship that is testified to in the Gospel of John is also present in Paul's writings.

#### Romans 8:31-32

<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

- 7. What does the logic of Romans 8:32 imply about the Father's pleasure in the Son?
- ANSWER. The argument in Romans 8:32 is one from greater to lesser: if God has done the hard thing in giving up his Son, then he will certainly do the easy thing in giving us all things. But we may ask why giving up the Son was a hard thing for the Father to do—why is it that Paul can assume that God's giving of all things to us is easy by comparison? It must be that God had infinite regard for and pleasure in his Son. If he did not have such pleasure in his Son, then Paul could not have constructed the argument in the way he did.

... God the Father loves the Son, not with any self-denying, sacrificial mercy, but with the love of delight and pleasure. He is well-pleased with his Son. His soul delights in the Son! When he looks at his Son, he enjoys and admires and cherishes and prizes and relishes what he sees.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in His Son," an online sermon at the desiring God website.

Let's look at another passage in the writings of Paul. Notice the variety of translations for Colossians 1:19. The three translations following the English Standard Version alert us to slight differences that are possible in the translation.

#### Colossians 1:18-20 (English Standard Version)

<sup>18</sup> And [the beloved Son] is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

#### Colossians 1:19 (King James Version)

<sup>19</sup> For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell . . .

#### Colossians 1:19 (New American Standard, Updated)

<sup>19</sup> For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him . . .

#### Colossians 1:19 (New International Version)

<sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him . . .

- 8. What might Colossians 1:18-20 teach us about God's pleasure?
- ANSWER. If we are to understand that God the Father is the subject of the verb "pleased" in v. 19, then this verse is a clear statement that the incarnation brings God pleasure. God was pleased to have his fullness of deity dwell in his Son when the Son was made flesh (cf. Colossians 2:9, "in [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily"). The pleasure in having the fullness of God dwell in the Son also provides the reason why it is God's design to make the Son preeminent in everything.

Therefore, the pleasure that God has in his Son is seen throughout the New Testament—from Matthew to John to Paul.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 30-36.

- Start at "Loved as Happy Co-Creator"
- Stop at "Begotten Not Made"

In this section, Piper offers two illustrations of creative camaraderie: Joseph working with Jesus, and Piper's own relationship to his sons. Piper suggests that these illustrations might be a faint echo of the joy that God the Father and God the Son had in creating the universe.

- 9. Come up with your own illustration which shows the joy between happy "co-creators." Record it below. Might this illustration lend any insight into the pleasure God has in his Son as co-creator?
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

#### Piper makes the following observation:

Jesus often referred to God as 'my Father' and 'the Father,' but he never referred to God as 'our Father' except once, when teaching the disciples how they should pray.<sup>17</sup>

- 10. What does this observation suggest? How does it relate to the pleasures of God?
- ANSWER. This observation is one piece of evidence that Piper offers in support for his claim that "the relationship between God the Father and his eternal Son is utterly unique" (32). Jesus is the Son of God in a way that believers—who are sons of God—are not. The intimacy of the Father's and Son's relationship demonstrates that "the Son is absolutely unique in the affections of the Father" (32).

<sup>17</sup> John Piper, The Pleasures of God, 32.

# Day 3

#### JESUS - CREATURE OR CREATOR?

God's complete pleasure in his Son is indirect evidence that should be considered in the debate about Jesus' deity. If Jesus is a mere creature, would God's pleasure in the Son be idolatry? Does God put a created thing above the Creator in his own affections? These are important questions that must be addressed in our study of God's pleasures.

#### Colossians 1:13-20

<sup>13</sup> [The Father] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. <sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

- 11. Does this passage offer us any clues as to whether the Son shares in the divine nature?
- ANSWER. Yes, it does. First, as we have seen above, "all the fullness of God" dwells in the Son. How could this not imply his divinity? Secondly, this passage attributes many things to the Son which are properly attributed to God alone: we are transferred into the Son's kingdom, all things were created by the Son, all things were created for him, he is before all things, and he is preeminent in all things. If the Son is not God, then he would be a rival for God's glory.

A verse that is often twisted and distorted as "proof" that Jesus is not God is Colossians 1:15, in which the Son is called "the firstborn of all creation." At first blush, this can seem to suggest that Jesus was the first created thing. When we carefully examine how the Bible uses this word "firstborn," however, another possibility emerges.

#### Exodus 4:22-23

<sup>22</sup> Then you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, Israel is my <u>firstborn</u> son, <sup>23</sup> and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve me."...

#### Psalm 89:20-29

<sup>20</sup> I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him, <sup>21</sup> so that my hand shall be established with him; my arm also shall strengthen him. <sup>22</sup> The enemy shall not outwit him; the wicked shall not humble him. <sup>23</sup> I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him. <sup>24</sup> My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him, and in my name shall his horn be exalted. <sup>25</sup> I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers. <sup>26</sup> He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.' <sup>27</sup> And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. <sup>28</sup> My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him. <sup>29</sup> I will establish his offspring forever and his throne as the days of the heavens.

#### Romans 8:28-29

<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

#### Hebrews 12:22-23

- <sup>22</sup> But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, <sup>23</sup> and to the assembly of the <u>firstborn</u> who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect . . .
  - 12. Underline all the uses of the term "firstborn" in the passages above. Do these occurrences of the word indicate that Jesus is being called the first created thing in Colossians 1:15?
  - · ANSWER. The occurrences of the word "firstborn" in the passages above suggest the opposite—that Jesus is the preeminent one over all creation. (Please note that the Greek is ambiguous, but is probably better translated

as "over" rather than "of.") These occurrences show us that the term is often used to connote superiority or preeminence. It does not always carry a biological or chronological sense (e.g., King David, Psalm 89:27). Therefore, given the context of Colossians 1:13-20, the term firstborn is used to assert Christ's lordship rather than to question his deity.

In addition to Colossians 1:13-20, review again some of the strongest passages supporting the full deity of Jesus Christ.

#### John 1:1-3

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

#### Philippians 2:5-7

<sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

#### Hebrews 1:1-3

- <sup>1</sup> Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. <sup>3</sup> He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. . . .
  - 13. How do these passages affirm the deity of the Son? Do these passages give any indication as to why God might delight in the Son?
  - · ANSWER. John 1 describes the Word of God as the eternally co-existent co-creator. It suggests that the Father delights in the intimate fellowship he enjoyed with the Son before anything was made. Philippians 2 describes the meekness and humility of Christ in taking on flesh even though he was equal to God. God delights in the servant heart of his Son. Finally, Hebrews 1 suggests that the Father enjoys the perfect radiance of his glory which is seen in his Son, who is also fully God.

I find this very, very moving, stabilizing—namely that God has at his essence, joy. The Father and the Son as they contemplate each other's infinite excellencies, enjoy what they see infinitely. And this enjoyment is what is the self-sufficiency of the Trinity which becomes the explosive origin of the creation of the world as a display of the glory of God.<sup>18</sup>

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 36-42

- Start at "Begotten Not Made"
- Stop at "God's Delight in Being God"
  - 14. List Piper's four reasons for why Arius and Jehovah's Witnesses wrongly interpret Colossians 1:15.
  - ANSWER. Arius and Jehovah's Witnesses wrongly interpret Colossians
    1:15 to mean that Christ was part of God's creation for the following four
    reasons, according to Piper: 1) the term "firstborn" can naturally mean
    "preeminent one"; 2) Colossians 1:16 implies that Christ was the creator of
    all things and not part of creation; 3) Paul avoided a word that would have
    clearly indicated that Christ was the first creation; and 4) Paul's language
    corresponds to the apostle John's, who teaches clearly that Christ is God and
    not a creature.
  - 15. What is your reaction to Piper's and Edwards' attempt to explain something of the mystery of the Trinity (page 42, footnote 22)?
  - · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

<sup>18</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 1," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

# Day 4

#### THE JOY OF GOD IN GOD

We have already considered 1 Timothy 1:11 in the first lesson of this course. We asserted that this verse not only testifies to the happiness of God, but also makes that happiness an essential part of the gospel. Notice, now, the interesting parallel between 1 Timothy 1:11 and 2 Corinthians 4:4. The gospel is a gospel of the glory of whom?

#### 1 Timothy 1:10-11

<sup>10</sup> . . . and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, <sup>11</sup> in accordance with <u>the</u> <u>gospel of the glory of the blessed God</u> with which I have been entrusted.

#### 2 Corinthians 4:4-6

<sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of <u>the gospel of the glory of Christ</u>, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

#### 16. What is the deepest reason for why God the Father delights in his Son?

ANSWER. The gospel is a gospel of the glory of the blessed God and the glory of his Son, the Christ. This parallel does not represent a contradiction because Jesus is "the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4) and the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God" shines in his face (2 Corinthians 4:6). The deepest reason for why God the Father delights in his Son is because he sees a perfect reflection and the purest radiance of his own glory in the Son. The Father's delight in the Son is God's joy in being God.

Although this lesson has mainly stressed the delight that God the Father has in the Son, we must also forcefully state that the Son has great delight in his Father. Henry Scougal draws our attention to two pieces of evidence in Jesus' earthly ministry. Here is the first piece of evidence:

#### John 4:31-34

<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." <sup>32</sup> But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." <sup>33</sup> So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."

[Jesus] spared no travail or pains while he was about his Father's business, but took such infinite content and satisfaction in the performance of it that when, being faint and weary with his journey, he rested himself on Jacob's well and entreated water of the Samaritan woman, the success of his conference with her and the accession that was made to the kingdom of God filled his mind with such delight as seemed to have redounded to his very body, refreshing his spirits and making him forget the thirst whereof he complained before and refuse the meat which he had sent his disciples to buy.<sup>19</sup>

#### And here is Scougal's second observation:

#### Luke 6:12

<sup>12</sup> In these days [Jesus] went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.

Another instance of his love to God was his delight in conversing with him by prayer, which made him frequently retire from the world and with the greatest devotion and pleasure spend whole nights in that heavenly exercise, though he had no sins to confess and but few secular interests to pray for, which alas! are almost the only things that are wont to drive us to our devotions.<sup>20</sup>

- 17. Can you think of any other biblical evidence for the Son's delight in the Father?
- ANSWER. Student answers to this question will vary. Certainly the incarnation and crucifixion in themselves are strong evidence that the Son delights in the Father and in doing the Father's work. Here are a couple specific verses to that effect: John 14:31, "I do as the Father has commanded

<sup>19</sup> Henry Scougal, The Life of God in the Soul of Man, 40-41.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 42.

me, so that the world may know that I love the Father," and John 17:4, "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do."

We have seen that the Father and Son have shared a mutual delight in each other before the world began and during Jesus' earthly ministry. What about after the Son's ascension to heaven? John Piper makes some provocative comments on Psalm 16 and Acts 2:

#### Psalm 16:8-11

<sup>8</sup> I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. <sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. <sup>10</sup> For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. <sup>11</sup> You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

#### Acts 2:24-33

<sup>24</sup> God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. <sup>25</sup> For David says concerning him, "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; <sup>26</sup> therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. <sup>27</sup> For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. <sup>28</sup> You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.' <sup>29</sup> "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. <sup>30</sup> Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, <sup>31</sup> he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. <sup>32</sup> This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. <sup>33</sup> Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

In Acts 2:28 Peter goes on to quote from the last verse of Psalm 16. But now we know that it is really Jesus, the Son of David, speaking through the voice of the prophet David:

Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence.

And the psalm ends (though Peter doesn't finish it), 'In thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.'

In other words, what we see from this text is that God's goal for Jesus Christ beyond the grave was that he might fill him with gladness. So he didn't abandon his soul to Hades or let his flesh see corruption. He raised him from the dead to make him full of happiness forever and ever.<sup>21</sup>

#### 18. Restate Piper's argument in your own words.

ANSWER. Piper believes that God raised Jesus from the dead in order to fill him with happiness—in other words, that the intra-Trinitarian joy which existed before the incarnation will continue forever. He supports this assertion with Peter's reading of Psalm 16 in Acts 2. In Acts 2, Peter argues that Psalm 16 was written in reference to Jesus, and not David. If this is true, then Piper argues that it is legitimate to read all of Psalm 16:11 as the testimony of Jesus himself.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 42-45

• Start at "God's Delight in Being God"

19.	Fill-in-	the-blank: "Th	e original, the prima	ıl, the de $\epsilon$	epest, the foundat	tional
	joy of G	od is the joy h	e has in his own	perfectio	as he sees	
	them _	reflected	in the glory of his	Son	" (42).	

What we have, then, is a picture of God whose love, even in eternity past, even before the creation of anything, is other-oriented. This cannot be said (for instance) of Allah. Yet because the God of the Bible is one, this plurality-in-unity does not destroy his entirely appropriate self-focus as God. . . . To concede he is something other than the center of all, and rightly to be worshipped and adored, would debase his very Godhood. He is the God who, entirely rightly, does not give his glory to

<sup>21</sup> John Piper, "The Gladness of the Risen God," an online sermon at the desiring God website.

another (Isa. 42:8).22

- 20. According to Piper, what is the relation of this first chapter to the rest of this book? Why is this so?
- · ANSWER. Piper asserts that the fountain of God's gladness in himself (or in his Son), described in this first chapter, is the spring from which the rest of the book flows. In other words, the deepest pleasure of God is the joy he has in his own glory. That glory is most perfectly reflected in the glory of his Son, since his Son is "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Hebrews 1:3). The other pleasures of God described in this book are reflections of his glory that are not as direct or immediate as the reflection of his glory in his Son.

D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000), 39.

## Day 5

#### **S** INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

As we've mentioned in Lesson 1, God's joy in himself is not often presented in a Christian doctrine of God. References to God's joy or happiness are typically rare or brief, if they are included at all. For this assignment, reflect on this neglected aspect of the doctrine of God. Here are a few questions which may guide your reflections:

- Is it important to describe God as joyful? Why?
- Is God's joy at the essence of who he is?
- Why might God's happiness be left out of so many treatments of God's nature and character?
- How does God's happiness relate to other aspects of his being?



#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. After you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. In what ways is Jesus' sonship unique? In what ways is it similar to our own sonship?

2. Why is it necessary to discuss Jesus' deity in this lesson?

3. Has the joy of God been an emphasis in the teaching you've heard or the reading you've done before this course? Why might that be?

4. Your own question(s):

#### S ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ${\,\vartriangleright\,} \quad \text{D. A. Carson, } \textit{The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God}$
- ▶ Robert Letham, *Holy Trinity* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2005).
- ▶ Jonathan Edwards, *An Unpublished Essay on the Trinity* (available at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/trinity/files/trinity.html)
- Donald MacLeod, *Shared Life* (Waynesboro, Georgia: Christian Focus, 2005).

# The Pleasure of God in All He Does

#### **S** INTRODUCTION

Have you ever noticed that God's "will" or "purpose" and his "good pleasure" are often used interchangeably? Why might this be and what might it tell us about the pleasures of God? John Frame reflects on this issue:

We often read about what does and does not "delight" (hafets) [God]. We will look again at this concept under the category of God's will, with which his "pleasure" is partly synonymous.<sup>23</sup>

And later, John Frame writes the following:

Although God's will has many dimensions, as we shall see, a simple but accurate definition would be this: God's will is anything he wants to happen.

Old Testament English translations rarely use the term will in reference to God . . . However, the concept is often expressed by the term pleasure (or good pleasure), which usually translates the Hebrew root hafets (as in Isaiah 44:28; 46:10) and the Greek eudokeō (as in Ephesians 1:5, 9; Philippians 2:13). God's will is what pleases him.<sup>24</sup>

Here are two of the texts to which John Frame referred. Notice the way in which each version has translated the words that are underlined:

#### Isaiah 46:10 (English Standard Version)

... <sup>10</sup> declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not

24 Ibid, 443

<sup>23</sup> John Frame, The Doctrine of God, 443

yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my <u>purpose</u> . . ."

#### Isaiah 46:10 (New American Standard—Updated Version)

... <sup>10</sup> Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, "My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure . . ."

#### Ephesians 1:9 (English Standard Version)

... <sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his <u>purpose</u>, which he set forth in Christ . . .

#### Ephesians 1:9 (New Revised Standard Version)

... <sup>9</sup> he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his <u>good</u> <u>pleasure</u> that he set forth in Christ ...

This lesson will explore the relationship between God's sovereign decree and his joy. This issue should be of utmost interest and concern for those who believe that God is in control of all things.

#### S LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▶ explain why God's self-sufficiency is an important and relevant doctrine.
- > relate the sovereignty of God to the joy of God.

#### TEACHING NOTES



This lesson presupposes the absolute sovereignty of God or "Calvinism." We believe that Calvinism is what the biblical teaches. If you are interested in this topic, please see the additional resources listed in this lesson, the article "What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism" at the desiringGod website, or the Bethlehem College & Seminary curricula *TULIP* and *Theological Foundations 1 & 2*. You might also consult the 2003 edition of *Desiring God*, pages 37-40. These pages contain a helpful discussion of God's view of an event through his "narrow" and "wide-angle" lens.

We understand that many of your students might have questions about this topic. Ideally, your students will already affirm God's sovereignty, and this lesson will only confirm that conviction and enrich their understanding of God's joy in his sovereignty. For those who may not affirm God's sovereignty or whose views are still unformed, we urge you to adapt this lesson to fit your students' needs. Perhaps you could invest the first half of the class discussion in presenting and defending God's sovereignty and then invest the second half in covering this lesson's material. We would recommend, however, that you do not attempt to be exhaustive in your presentation of God's sovereignty or the doctrines of grace. That is the focus of another course.

As you teach this lesson, ensure that your students feel the practical significance of God's sovereign pleasure. Affirming that God is in control of all things and delights in what he does means that nothing in the believer's life is meaningless. Nothing that comes into their life—no matter how horrible—is without divine significance and purpose. Rom 8:28 has rightly been a bedrock of hope for countless millions. Another related implication of this lesson is that God is merciful in his severity. Nothing a believer suffers in this life will be in vain. Jesus' disciples left everything to follow Jesus, but he promised them a far greater reward in this life and in the life to come.

In regard to the third discussion question, your students might find it helpful to think about the mix of emotions loving parents feel when they discipline their children. In the moment when they are disciplining their child, they are obviously grieved and upset at what their child has done. And yet, they deeply love their child at the same time. As far as the act of discipline itself, loving parents take no pleasure in spanking or "grounding" their children when that act is considered in and of itself. But when they consider the fruit which godly discipline produces and what would happen if they abandoned all discipline, parents will certainly feel pleased in some sense to train their children through

discipline. The mix of emotions and attitudes in parents who discipline their children is evidence of the emotional complexity with which humans are created. If humans are capable of simultaneous and conflicting emotions, how much more could that be possible for an infinite God!

The following is the prayer with which Piper ends his sermon "The Pleasure of God in All That He Does" (an online sermon at the desiringGod website). Again, employ it as you will:

So let us stand in awe and wonder this morning: "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever he pleases." Amen.

Almighty God and Merciful Father, we praise you for your everlasting happiness in the fellowship of the Trinity; that you are an infinitely exuberant God; satisfied with the panorama of your own perfections reflected in the radiance of your Son. And we praise you that you are free and sovereign in your own self-sufficiency and cannot be bribed or coerced because of some deficiency or craving in your heart. We praise you that your plan and counsel is governed not by our will but by your good pleasure.

#### STUDY GUIDE



## Day 1

#### THE EVER-FLOWING FOUNTAIN OF ALL THINGS

Before considering the pleasure that God has in *all* that he does, we must draw an important implication from what we studied in the last lesson. The everlasting fellowship within the Triune God is a fullness that has no deficiencies. In other words, God was and is perfectly happy in himself. He does not do anything that he does out of need or any lack in himself. Notice the following outburst of praise:

#### Romans 11:33-36

<sup>33</sup> Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! <sup>34</sup> "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" <sup>35</sup> "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" <sup>36</sup> For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Here are John Piper's thoughts on how "To him be glory forever" (verse 36) relates to what precedes it:

And the point of that last phrase is, it is glorious to be God. It is glorious to be unbeholden to anybody. We're all totally beholden to a lot of people, especially God. God is beholden to nobody. He owes nobody anything. He is constrained by nobody, but his own sovereign will.<sup>25</sup>

- 1. According to this passage, is anything that God does an attempt to meet some need of his own?
- · Answer. No, the point of Paul's doxology is that all things originate in God, come about through his agency, and are designed with him as their

<sup>25</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 2," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

ultimate point of reference. Therefore, if all things are his, what could he possibly gain from anything outside of himself? As Piper says, it is his glory not to be constrained or completed by something outside himself. Positing that God has needs to meet detracts from this glory.

Consider also the following two passages which bear witness to God's fullness in himself:

#### Acts 17:24-25

<sup>24</sup> The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, <sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

#### Psalm 50:9-13

<sup>9</sup> I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. <sup>10</sup> For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. <sup>11</sup> I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. <sup>12</sup> "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. <sup>13</sup> Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?

- 2. How do these passages indirectly witness to God's own self-sufficiency?
- Answer. Acts 17 declares that God is the creator and ruler of all things. According to his very nature he cannot subject himself to humans (or anything else in creation), since he is the source of all things. He needs nothing from creation. Psalm 50 makes the same point. God does not need the gifts of man because all of the world and everything in it is already God's. And he is not sustained by anything that he has made (Psalm 50:13). If God has no needs, then he must be sufficient within himself.

Jonathan Edwards deeply meditated on the truth of God's self-sufficiency. He wrote an entire treatise on the subject, entitled *The End for Which God Created the World*, to address the question of why God created anything at all if not from a deficiency within himself. Here are just two paragraphs in his reflections:

From this view, it appears that nothing which has been said is in the least inconsistent with those expressions in Scripture that signify, 'man cannot be profitable to God,' For these expressions plainly mean no more than that God is

absolutely independent of us, that we have nothing of our own, no stock from whence we can give to God, and that no part of his happiness originates from man.

From what has been said, it appears that the pleasure God hath in those things which have been mentioned is rather a pleasure in diffusing and communicating to, than in receiving from, the creature. Surely, it is no argument of indigence [i.e., deprivation, poverty] in God that he is inclined to communicate of his infinite fullness. It is no argument of the emptiness or deficiency of a fountain that it is inclined to overflow.<sup>26</sup>

- 3. Summarize these two paragraphs in your own words.
- ANSWER. Edwards is asserting that God is in no way dependent on what he has created. None of his happiness ultimately originates from us. Rather, God's pleasure in all he does owes to the fact that he acts from his own fullness. Like a fountain that continually overflows, God communicates his fullness to us in what he does rather than receiving things from us.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 47-51

- Stop at "All That the LORD Pleases"
  - 4. Summarize the two lessons that Piper wants us to remember from chapter 1.
  - ANSWER. The first lesson is that "God is and always has been an exuberantly happy God" (48). Piper reminds us of the intense delight God has had, from eternity past, in beholding his own perfections as they are reflected in his Son. The second lesson is that God, unlike us humans, has no inner deficiency or unhappiness in himself. Therefore, his actions are not constrained by something lacking in himself. We cannot offer anything to God that satisfies a need in his person. Therefore, these two lessons from chapter 1 pertain to God's nature.

Jonathan Edwards as reproduced in John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998), 165. The italics are Edwards's.

- 5. Explain the meaning of this phrase in your own words: "God's glory [is] the heart of all true religious experience" (50).
- · ANSWER. Though Piper does not elaborate on what he means by this phrase, footnote 2 may explain it. Brainerd believed that "the essence of religion consisted in the soul's conformity to God." He believed that when a person had a clear view of God's excellence and worthiness in himself, that person would be drawn to love God, become like God, and act like God, in that God's glory would be the controlling desire of that person's heart as it is the desire of God's heart. Therefore, if one is to be truly religious, then one must apprehend the glory of God, delight in it, and act in such a way that God's glory is ultimate.

### Day 2

#### THERE IS NONE LIKE GOD

Having argued that God is never constrained to do anything by any inner deficiency, we now come to the central assertion of this lesson: God has pleasure in all that he does.

#### Psalm 135:1-6

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD! Praise the name of the LORD, give praise, O servants of the LORD, <sup>2</sup> who stand in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God! <sup>3</sup> Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing to his name, for it is pleasant! <sup>4</sup> For the LORD has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel as his own possession. <sup>5</sup> For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. <sup>6</sup> Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.

- 6. Is there any logical connection between verses 5 and 6? What do these verses teach us about the pleasures of God?
- ANSWER. What separates the LORD from all the false "gods" of the nations is that the LORD always "gets his way," so to speak. He is never thwarted; his rule is never challenged. His absolute sovereignty stands over and against whatever power the so-called gods may possess. Since this sovereignty is what distinguishes him as the one and only true God, his exercise of it is an expression of his pleasure in his own greatness and uniqueness.

The contrast between the LORD and the gods of the nations is further developed in another psalm.

#### Psalm 115:1-8

<sup>1</sup> Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness! <sup>2</sup> Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" <sup>3</sup> Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. <sup>4</sup> Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. <sup>5</sup> They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. <sup>6</sup> They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do

not smell. <sup>7</sup> They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. <sup>8</sup> Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.

- 7. What is the contrast made in this psalm between the idols of the nations and the LORD?
- ANSWER. Again, this psalm contrasts the absolute sovereignty of the God of Israel with the impotence of the gods of the nations. The gods of the nations are represented as idols which are crafted by humans hands and unable to do anything. They are utterly powerless and dependent on humans. The God who is in heaven, by contrast, is a God who "does all that he pleases" (115:3). The LORD's desires are always satisfied and fulfilled; the false gods cannot bring about all of their desires.

We see this same, foundational note struck in the book of Isaiah. Notice how the last phrase is translated in each version.

#### Isaiah 46:9-10 (English Standard Version)

<sup>9</sup>... I am God, and there is none like me, <sup>10</sup> declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose..."

#### Isaiah 46:9-10 (King James Version)

<sup>9</sup>...I am God, and there is none like me, <sup>10</sup> Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure...

#### Isaiah 46:9-10 (New American Standard—Updated Version)

<sup>9</sup> . . . I am God, and there is no one like Me, <sup>10</sup> Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, "My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure ..."

#### Isaiah 46:9-10 (New International Version)

<sup>9</sup>...I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. <sup>10</sup> I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please...

Here is a New Testament passage that connects God's sovereignty to his happiness.

#### 1 Timothy 6:13-16

<sup>13</sup> I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, <sup>14</sup> to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>15</sup> which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup> who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

- 8. What is the relationship (if any) between God's blessedness (6:15) and his sovereignty, kingship, and lordship (6:15)?
- ANSWER. Unless Paul's pairing of God's blessedness and his sovereignty is unintentional (which we think is unlikely), then 1 Timothy 6:15 is more support for the idea that God's happiness flows from his own self-sufficiency and his ability to do anything he desires. If God were not the only Sovereign, and he could not do all that he pleased, then he would not be the blessed God.

[God] has been complete and overflowing with satisfaction from all eternity. He needs no education. No one can offer anything to him that doesn't already come from him. And so no one can bribe him or coerce him in any way. You can't bribe a mountain spring with bucketfuls of water from the valley. Therefore God does what he does not begrudgingly or under external constraint as though he were boxed in or trapped by some unforeseen or unplanned situation.

On the contrary, because he is complete and exuberantly happy and overflowing with satisfaction in the fellowship of the Trinity, all he does is free and uncoerced. His deeds are the overflow of his joy. This is what it means when the Scripture says that God does something according to the 'good pleasure' of his will. It means that nothing outside God's own pleasure—the pleasure he has in what he is, nothing but that pleasure—has constrained his choices and his deeds.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in All That He Does," an online sermon at the desiring God website.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 51-54

- Start at "All That the LORD Pleases"
- Stop at "Is God Our Model Risk-Taker?"

In this section, Piper provides biblical texts to support the idea that God has pleasure in all he does. Before doing this, however, he arrives at the idea by way of theological inference.

- Explain how Piper concludes that God has pleasure in all he does by way of theological inference.
- ANSWER. Piper's logical argument is found on page 51 and can be expressed by the following points:
  - A1. "God is not under constraint by forces outside himself to act contrary to his good pleasure."
  - A2. God rather acts "only out of the overflow of the joy of his boundless self-sufficiency."
  - A3. Therefore, "all his acts are the expression of joy."
  - A4. Therefore, "God has pleasure in all that he does."

In a similar discussion in *Desiring God* Piper writes,

The foundation of the happiness of God is the sovereignty of God . . .

Just as our joy is based on the promise that God is strong enough and wise enough to make all things work together for our good, so God's joy is based on that same sovereign control: He makes all things work together for His glory.<sup>28</sup>

10. Find assertions in this section of *The Pleasures of God* that are equivalent to the assertions above. Then record them below.

<sup>28</sup> John Piper, Desiring God, 33.

#### · ANSWER.

- A1. "It is this immeasurable power that guarantees the freedom of God's delight in all that he does" (53).
- A2. "And the unique function of his power is to make way for the overflow of his joy in the work of creation and redemption. It is his power that removes (in God's time and God's way) any obstacles to the accomplishment of his good pleasure" (53).
- A3. "... God's power always makes way for his perfections to be expressed according to his good pleasure" (53).
- A4. "All of this teaches that the happiness of God is rooted in his utterly unique power and authority in the universe. He is the 'only Sovereign,' and therefore he is the happy Sovereign, because there is none that can frustrate what he aims to do according to his good pleasure" (54).

In the further reading Piper addresses the question of whether God takes risks. He also presents a vision of the free and sovereign God that William Carey believed in—a vision which also lies behind the book *Operation World*.

#### **S** FURTHER READING

The Pleasures of God, 54-66

- Start at "Is God Our Model Risk-Taker?"
- Stop at "Does God Have Pleasure in the Death of the Wicked?"

# Day 3

#### IS GOD REALLY PLEASED BY ALL HE DOES?

You may be troubled by what has been asserted thus far in this lesson. Or, you may anticipate an objection to the idea that God is pleased by all he does. Do we have a problem in the following biblical passages?

#### Ezekiel 18:30-32

<sup>30</sup> Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. <sup>31</sup> Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? <sup>32</sup> For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.

#### Ezekiel 33:10-11

Our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?" Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

- 11. What do these verses teach us about the pleasures of God? Underline any words or phrases that might represent an apparent inconsistency with what we've studied thus far.
- ANSWER. These verses teach us that God desires for his people to repent of their wicked ways. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, or in anyone. These explicit statements (underlined above) raise a question, however. We've seen that God has pleasure in all he does, and yet these verses tell us that he does not have pleasure in the death of the wicked. How do we reconcile these statements?

Before attempting to relieve this biblical tension, notice how Psalm 135 (which we've already studied) continues in the verses that follow verse 6.

#### Psalm 135:6-12

- <sup>6</sup> Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. <sup>7</sup> He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses. <sup>8</sup> He it was who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and of beast; <sup>9</sup> who in your midst, O Egypt, sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants; <sup>10</sup> who struck down many nations and killed mighty kings, <sup>11</sup> Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan, <sup>12</sup> and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to his people Israel.
  - 12. What problem might verses 8-12 create for your answer to Question 11?
  - ANSWER. Someone might attempt to relieve the tension introduced by Ezekiel 18:32 and 33:11 by positing that God does not directly cause the death of the wicked. Psalm 135:8-12 clearly rule out this potential solution since the psalm describes God's role in striking down the wicked in Egypt and killing pagan nations and kings. These verses magnify the problem since vv. 8-12 are in such close proximity to v. 6. Does God delight in the death of the wicked or not?!

There is no easy way to slip out of this problem. Notice that the word for God's pleasure in each passage is the same word in the original Hebrew.

#### Ezekiel 18:32

<sup>32</sup> For I have no pleasure [Hebrew: haphētz] in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.

#### Psalm 135:6

<sup>6</sup> Whatever the LORD pleases [Hebrew: haphētz], he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.

Look at one more troubling text, which couldn't present this problem in starker terms.

#### Ezekiel 18:32

<sup>32</sup> For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.

#### Deuteronomy 28:62-63

<sup>62</sup> Whereas you were as numerous as the stars of heaven, you shall be left few in number, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God. <sup>63</sup> And as the LORD took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the LORD will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

#### 13. What problem is created here?

ANSWER. There appears to be a contradiction between Ezekiel 18:32 and Deuteronomy 28:63. Not only does Deuteronomy 28:63 directly state that the LORD will take delight in destroying his wicked people, but the delight he takes in destroying them is compared to the delight he takes in doing good to them! The juxtaposition of these texts might threaten the integrity of Scripture as well as the coherence of God's own character. An answer must be attempted.

You either have to throw your Bible out or deal with the complexity of the divine emotional life.<sup>29</sup>

When faced with this dilemma, a common response is to limit the sovereignty of God. All things cannot mean *all* things, some say. This option, however, is not entertained by Scripture. The Bible clearly teaches that God is in control of all things.

#### Ephesians 1:11

<sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will...

#### Daniel 4:34-35

<sup>34</sup> At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; <sup>35</sup> all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his

<sup>29</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 2," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

#### hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

#### Lamentations 3:37-38

<sup>37</sup> Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? <sup>38</sup> Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?

- 14. Do the above passages (among many, many others) leave us the option of saying that God does not cause the death of the wicked?
- ANSWER. No, they do not. These passages (in unison with many other texts in both the Old and New Testament) clearly affirm that God is sovereign over all things (see the underlined phrases above). Although it may appear to be a satisfying solution to say that God does not cause the death of the wicked, this solution cannot be maintained without silencing the major theme of God's absolute sovereignty, found throughout Scripture.

On the basis of these texts and many others we should bow before God and praise his sovereign freedom—that in some sense at least he always acts in freedom, according to his own 'good pleasure,' following the dictates of his own delights. He never becomes the victim of circumstance. He is never forced into a situation where he must do something in which he cannot rejoice.<sup>30</sup>

To further complicate the picture, notice the complexity of God's emotions that are on display in the following verses.

#### Psalm 7:11

<sup>11</sup> God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day.

#### Ephesians 4:30

<sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

#### Psalm 149:4

<sup>4</sup> For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation.

<sup>30</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in All That He Does," an online sermon at the desiringGod website.

#### Luke 15:7

<sup>7</sup> Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

- 15. Assuming that Christians sin every day and that sinners around the world repent every day, what can we infer from this collection of biblical texts?
- ANSWER. God feels indignation every day, but also is pleased with his people. God grieves over the sin of his people, but rejoices over their repentance. Since all of these emotions must be occurring constantly as God looks out over the world, we are forced to say that God genuinely experiences conflicting emotions at the same time constantly. However we conceive of the divine emotional life, it must be sufficiently complex in order to incorporate the synthesis of these passages.

John Piper colorfully describes the emotional complexity of God in this way:

Every moment of every day God is running around heaven, leaping and jumping, for joy. And he is angry as he can be.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 2," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

## Day 4

#### INFINITE EMOTIONAL COMPLEXITY

In today's lesson we will attempt to resolve (within our human limitations) the tension which was depicted and developed in the previous day's study.

- 16. After reviewing your study from the previous day, how should we reconcile the idea that God has pleasure in all he does with the idea that God does not have pleasure in some things he does (for example, in the death of the wicked)?
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

#### **S** FURTHER READING

The Pleasures of God, 66-75

- Start at "Does God Have Pleasure in the Death of the Wicked?"
  - 17. What is Piper's answer to Question 16? Is it different from your own?
  - ANSWER. Piper's answer is that there is a sense in which God does delight in the death of the wicked and there is a sense in which he does not. God delights in the triumph of his justice in the death of the wicked, but is grieved by their misery and hard-heartedness. He does not delight in the death considered in itself, but rejoices to see his broader purposes accomplished. The fact that God can be simultaneously filled with grief and joy is possible because of his infinite emotional complexity. (Student responses to the second half of this question will vary.)

Consider the following biblical text which, though not mentioned in this section, may help support Piper's claim that God can be pleased to will something that does not please him in and of itself.

#### Lamentations 3:27-33

<sup>27</sup> It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. <sup>28</sup> Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him; <sup>29</sup> let him put his mouth in the dust—there may

yet be hope; <sup>30</sup> let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be filled with insults. <sup>31</sup> For the Lord will not cast off forever, <sup>32</sup> but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; <sup>33</sup> for he does not willingly [literally, "from his heart"] afflict or grieve the children of men.

- 18. How might Lamentations 3:33 provide language to flesh out Piper's answer to Question 16?
- ANSWER. Lamentations 3:33 states that the Lord does not afflict the children of men "willingly," or "from his heart." But it is clear from this passage that he does cause grief (v. 32). So there must be a sense in which God can be pleased to will something that nevertheless does not arise "from his heart." Therefore, we might be permitted to say that God's actions, while all coming from his soul, come from different parts of his soul—and doing good comes from a deeper part in his soul.

Henry Scougal insightfully points out that our own happiness is tied to God's pleasure in all he does. Read the following paragraphs carefully and slowly:

A lover is miserable if the person whom he loveth be so. They who have made an exchange of hearts by love get thereby an interest in one another's happiness and misery, and this makes love a troublesome passion when placed on earth. The most fortunate person hath grief enough to mar the tranquility of his friend; and it is hard to hold out when we are attacked on all hands, and suffer not only in our own person but in another's. But if God were the object of our love, we should share in an infinite happiness without any mixture or possibility of diminution; we should rejoice to behold the glory of God and receive comfort and pleasure from all the praises wherewith men and angels do extol him. It should delight us beyond all expression to consider that the beloved of our souls is infinitely happy in himself, and that all his enemies cannot shake or unsettle his throne, that our God is in the heavens and doth whatsoever he pleaseth.

Behold, on what sure foundations his happiness is built whose soul is possessed with divine love [that is, love for God] whose will is transformed into the will of God, and whose greatest desire is that his Maker should be pleased. Oh, the peace, the rest, the satisfaction that attendeth such a temper of mind!<sup>52</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, 54. The italics are Scougal's.

- 19. Based on Scougal's discussion here, what personal application might we draw from this lesson on God's pleasures?
- · ANSWER. Scougal rightly maintains that God's pleasure cannot be polluted or diminished, because his sovereign rule cannot be unsettled and he does whatever he pleases. When God becomes the object of our love we thereby "get an interest" in God's happiness. Therefore, the application to this lesson would be to contemplate and rejoice in the fact of God's absolute sovereignty and his pleasure in all that he does. By setting our affection upon him, we will never be disappointed, though our earthly circumstances might be troubling.
- 20. At the end of this section, John Piper shares a very personal experience of God's sovereignty in tragedy. Can you think of a difficult time in which you were comforted by God's power and goodness and wisdom? If so, record your experience below.
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

# Day 5

# **S** INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Write a brief, persuasive essay to someone who would rather believe that God does *not* delight in all he does. Try to persuade them that God *does* delight in all he does, set forth biblical arguments to that end, and communicate to them the consequences that would follow if God did not delight in all he does.

# S DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. After you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. Meditate on the metaphor of God being a fountain (cf. Jeremiah 2:13). Can you think of any other metaphor that communicates God's self-sufficiency?

2. Would it be logically consistent for a person to affirm that God takes pleasure in all he does if that person also affirmed that humans have an autonomous free will? (For humans to have an "autonomous free will" means that they would be capable of making moral decisions that are totally independent from God's sovereign will.)

3. Are humans able to be grieved and pleased by a thing simultaneously? Explain and give examples. What might this teach us about the emotional complexity of God?

4. Your own question(s):

# S ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ Jonathan Edwards, *The Freedom of the Will* (Orlando, Florida: Ligonier Publishing House, 2004).
- > Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001).
- ➤ Tom Schreiner and Bruce Ware, ed. *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).
- ▶ John Piper, "Is God Less Glorious Because He Ordains that Evil Be?", an online article at the desiringGod website.

# The Pleasure of God in His Creation

# S INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of the church, there have been those who have denied—whether explicitly or implicitly—the goodness of God's creation. This impulse may arise in part from a distorted view of God's own disposition toward what he has created. It may also arise from a deficient understanding of God's design in creation. John Piper accounts for some of the strange language in the Bible concerning creational praise:

The heavens are telling what? The glory of God! That's because they exploded out of, as it were, the overflowing delight that God has in himself. Have you ever wondered why the Bible talks about trees clapping their hands, deeps giving joy, all that is in them rejoicing, animals rejoicing? It's because joy is at the center of reality. And when God creates physical reality, there's going to be echoes of that all over the place. Why, he describes the rising of the sun like a bridegroom coming forth from his chamber, dressed to get married! Why would he say things like that? It's because he wants to look at a sunrise and think of how happy he is. That's why. It's about God.<sup>33</sup>

It is the aim of this lesson to present a biblical understanding of the goodness of creation. But more than that, we hope to present a biblical portrait of the God who created the world and delights in it.

<sup>33</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 1," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

# S LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- > explain why God created the "natural" world.
- ▶ explain why God takes pleasure in what he has created.
- □ connect God's pleasure in creation with what should be our pleasure in creation.

# TEACHING NOTES



We consider this lesson to be rather straightforward. It is probable that your students will quickly grasp why God delights in creation. As believers who delight in creation for God's sake, we should take pleasure in creation for the same reasons God does.

Notice the additional resources that are listed for this lesson. The first book is a compilation of stunning photographs paired with texts of Scripture. John Piper has written the foreword. Using this book as a prompt for meditation on God's glory would be an excellent application of this lesson.

The DVD series which follows is one which John Piper has recommended in his 2007 regional conference on *The Pleasures of God*. Piper recommends both the *Planet Earth* and *The Blue Planet* DVD series. He said at that conference, "I just know that my wife and I and little girl have worshipped for eight hours watching these unbelievable works of God. And it's all these pagans producing this worship DVD!" Piper claims that talking about what God has done in creation is much more pleasurable than talking about movies.

Although not in focus in this lesson at all, it might me worth mentioning in passing the devastating effects of the theory of macroevolution. If God is not actively involved in creating and sustaining his creation, then we lose not only his pleasure in creation, but also our legitimate Godward pleasure in it. At the regional conference mentioned above, John Piper said, "I hate evolution. It is so worship-destroying!"

We will conclude the teaching notes for this lesson with two excerpts, which you may use in the class discussion, if appropriate. The first is a good summary of how we can use the created world to bring us joy in God. John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God*, 206:

Joy in God is not the same as joy in sex or a sizzling steak or deep ravines or powerful music. But God's will is that all these—and every part of his good creation—declare the glory of God. All the world, and even the imperfect representations of it in human art, is a witness to the glory of God. That glory is the ultimate ground of all human gladness. Therefore, the created world is a holy weapon in the fight for joy. But it must be "made holy by the word of God and prayer" (1 Timothy. 4:5).

In the eleventh chapter of *When I Don't Desire God* (listed in the additional resources), Piper invests a few pages in the discussion of human art and music

as part of God's creation. You may choose to read this discussion and raise it in class, though human art is not a point of conversation in *The Pleasures of God*. The second excerpt is from C. H. Spurgeon, "The Minister's Fainting Fits" in *Lectures to My Students* (Rossshire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1998). Though his advice is specifically directed to ministers, it is equally applicable to all believers.

He who forgets the humming of the bees among the heather, the cooing of the wood-pigeons in the forest, the song of birds in the woods, the rippling of rills among the rushes, and the sighing of the wind among the pines, need not wonder if his heart forgets to sing and his soul grows heavy. A day's breathing of fresh air upon the hills, or a few hours' ramble in the beech woods' umbrageous calm, would sweep the cobwebs out of the brain of scores of our toiling ministers who are now but half alive. A mouthful of sea air, or a stiff walk in the wind's face, would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is next best. (182)

### STUDY GUIDE



# Day 1

### GOD IS PLEASED WITH THE MESSAGE OF CREATION

By way of recap, read the following citation:

In creation, God "went public" with the glory that reverberates joyfully between the Father and the Son. There is something about the fullness of God's joy that inclines it to overflow. There is an expansive quality to His joy. It wants to share itself. The impulse to create the world was not from weakness, as though God were lacking in some perfection that creation could supply. "It is no argument of the emptiness of deficiency of a fountain, that it is inclined to overflow." <sup>34</sup>

As we work through this lesson, we must remember that God was not compelled by some lack in himself to create the world. Rather, the universe exists because, as Edwards wrote, God was "inclined to communicate his infinite fullness." Now let's look at Psalm 104:

# Psalm 104:25-32

<sup>25</sup> Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great. <sup>26</sup> There go the ships, and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it. <sup>27</sup> These all look to you, to give them their food in due season. <sup>28</sup> When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. <sup>29</sup> When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. <sup>30</sup> When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. <sup>31</sup> May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works, <sup>32</sup> who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke!

John Piper, Desiring God, 44. The quotation about the fountain is from Jonathan Edwards, *The End For Which God Created the World*, which is printed in full in John Piper, God's Passion for His Glory (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998), 165.

- 1. In Psalm 104:32 the psalmist cries out, "May the LORD rejoice in his works!" To what "works" is the psalmist referring? By writing "May the LORD rejoice . . . ," is the psalmist expressing doubt over whether the LORD in fact does rejoice in his works?
- ANSWER. The works which the psalmist has been describing for the entire psalm are God's acts of making, sustaining, and ruling creation. So the psalmist is calling on God to rejoice in creation. It is highly unlikely that God's rejoicing is in doubt, since the phrase in v. 31 is parallel to the phrase "May the glory of the LORD endure forever." Both phrases, then, in v. 31 are probably expressed with the utmost confidence.

We also find a clue to God's disposition toward creation back in the creation account.

### Genesis 1:31

<sup>31</sup> And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

- 2. How does Moses know that God looked upon his own creation with approval? Does this suggest anything about the pleasures of God?
- ANSWER. Moses would not know about God's approval of his creation unless God specifically revealed that to him. Therefore, God apparently wanted the humans whom he created in his image to know that he approved of their design, as well as the design and functionality of the entire creation. By communicating his approval of creation, we can reasonably infer that God took pleasure in creation and still does take pleasure in it as it fulfills what it was designed to do.

This next passage is a well-known commentary on creation and its purpose.

# Psalm 19:1-6

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. <sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. <sup>2</sup> Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. <sup>3</sup> There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. <sup>4</sup> Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, <sup>5</sup> which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs

its course with joy. <sup>6</sup> Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

- 3. What message is the creation expressing and in what manner is that message being declared?
- · ANSWER. It is plain from this psalm that the message of creation is "God is glorious! God is glorious!" What is also plain, however, is that this message is being communicated with delight and energy. The sun in this psalm is described as a "bridegroom leaving his chamber" and a runner who runs "with joy." These two metaphors communicate something of the excitement with which creation proclaims the glory of God.

When surveying the vast expanse of the heavens, as described in Psalm 19, we should think of the delight that God has in himself. As Piper says,

[The Father's love for the eternal Son] is an energy of love that surpasses all the galaxies in the universe. I do believe that the galaxies in the universe were created to give us a slight echo of what the intra-Trinitarian joy is like. I think that's why they're there.<sup>35</sup>

Let's now consider the words of Jesus, who often used observations from the natural world to communicate spiritual truths to his disciples.

# Matthew 6:25-30

<sup>25</sup> Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

<sup>35</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 1," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

- 4. According to Jesus, what specific message about God are the birds of the air communicating? What are the lilies of the field telling us about God?
  - answer. The birds of the air teach us that God is constant and merciful in his provision. Though these birds do nothing to ensure that they will eat tomorrow (as humans do when they store grain in barns), God nevertheless meets their needs. The lilies of the field illustrate the lavishness of God's faithfulness. One might be tempted to think that such beauty is wasted on flowers that fade so quickly, and yet God does not hold back in decorating these flowers, though they expend no energy on themselves as humans do.

As we look around us, the world is full of lessons about God for those who have eyes to see or ears to hear. Arthur Pink writes,

The goodness of God is seen in the variety of natural pleasures which He has provided for His creatures. God might have been pleased to satisfy your hunger without the food being pleasing to our palates—how His benevolence appears in the varied flavors He has given to meats, vegetables, and fruits! God has not only given us senses, but also that which gratifies them; this too reveals His goodness. The earth might have been as fertile as it is without being so delightfully variegated. Our physical lives could have been sustained without beautiful flowers to regale our eyes, and exhale sweet perfumes. We might have walked the fields without our ears being saluted by the music of the birds. Whence then, this loveliness, this charm, so freely diffused over the face of nature? Verily, 'His tender mercies are over all his works' (Psalm 145:9).<sup>36</sup>

How, then, should believers use the created world to see something of the glory of God and to comprehend his pleasures? The following two quotations point us in the right direction.

I remember when my children were one.... For my children I'd say, 'Look at the bird,' pointing out the window, and they would look at my finger.... And that's the way all human beings do with the universe. The universe is not about itself. It's not about us. It's about the Maker. The heavens are telling the glory of God. Watch it! Listen! Get through it!<sup>137</sup> Shall we not be infinitely more transported with that

<sup>36</sup> Arthur Pink, Gleanings in the Godhead (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 56.

<sup>37</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 2," an online conference message at the

almighty wisdom and goodness which fills the universe and displays itself in all the parts of creation, which establisheth the frame of nature and turneth the mighty wheels of providence and keepeth the world from disorder and ruin, than with the faint rays of the same perfections which we meet with in our fellow-creatures? Shall we doat on the scattered pieces of a rude and imperfect picture and never be affected with the original beauty? This were an unaccountable stupidity and blindness. Whatever we find lovely in a friend or in a saint ought not to engross but to elevate our affection. We should conclude with ourselves that if there be so much sweetness in a drop, there must be infinitely more in the fountain; if there be so much splendor in a ray, what must the sun be in its glory?

- 5. According to the two quotations above, what should we do when we observe something glorious in creation?
- ANSWER. We rightly understand the purpose of creation when we do not allow our admiration to terminate on the created thing, but rather let the creation become a pointer to the God who created it. As Scougal comments, we should not allow the loveliness of created things to engross us, but we ought to use these things to elevate our affections for God. We should often think about how far superior God is to his creation and how far his glory transcends what we can observe with our physical senses.

desiringGod website.

<sup>38</sup> Henry Scougal, The Life of God in the Soul of Man, 84.

# Day 2

# CREATION'S MESSAGE: GOD IS GLORIOUS!

Before getting to the assigned reading, consider the proper role for creation from another angle.

Jonathan Edwards describes this kind of joy (through creation) in God as he ponders what heaven will be like. Will we enjoy only God there, or will we enjoy other things as well? . . . Edwards answers:

The redeemed will indeed enjoy other things; they will enjoy the angels, and will enjoy one another: but that which they shall enjoy in the angels, or each other, or in anything else whatsoever, that will yield them delight and happiness, will be what will be seen of God in them.

This is what we pray toward even now—that all our joy in the things of this world would be because, in and through them, we see more of the glory of God. Spiritual beauty is perceived in and through physical beauty but is not identical with it.<sup>39</sup>

- 6. Why might it be helpful to learn about the present creation's proper role by thinking about the new creation (or heaven)?
- ANSWER. Sin has certainly impaired—to some degree—creation's ability to function as it should (or our ability to interact with creation as we should). By thinking about how the redeemed will interact with a sanctified creation, we may gain some insight into the way creation is intended to function. Edwards' vision of our heavenly enjoyment of creation should inform how we enjoy it now, as Piper notes.

# S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 77-88

• Stop at "No Humans Hear the Praise of the Deeps"

<sup>39</sup> John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God*, 199-200. See Piper's footnote for the bibliographic information.

At the beginning of this chapter, Piper includes an extended description of a cottage in Georgia where he went to write.

- 7. Compose your own (much briefer) description of a place you enjoy visiting for its natural beauty.
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

In this section, Piper alludes to a discussion in Desiring God (pages 165-168 in the 2003 edition). Here is one of his key quotations.

You never Enjoy the World aright, till you see how a Sand Exhibiteth the Wisdom and Power of God: And Prize in every Thing the Service which they do you, by Manifesting His Glory and Goodness to your soul, far more than the Visible Beauty on their Surface, or the Material Services, they can do your Body.<sup>40</sup>

- 8. Put the main idea of this excerpt into your own words. How can we enjoy the material world without becoming idolaters?
- · ANSWER. We enjoy the material world rightly when we recognize the way in which the natural world displays the glory of God. In other words, we do not appreciate the natural world for its sake alone, or merely for what pleasures it affords our own physical bodies, but we allow the natural world to become a window to the attributes of God. In this way we can delight in what God has made without worshipping it.
- 9. After remarking on Genesis 1 and Psalm 104, Piper comments on Job 38:4-7. Do you agree with the inference that Piper draws from this text? Explain.
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.
- 10. Why might Piper include the section "Creation and Christ" (pages 86-88) within his first of five statements? When Piper asserts that creation expresses "his" glory, whose glory does he mean?

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Traherne, as quoted by John Piper, *Desiring God*, 166. See Piper's footnote for the bibliographic information.

ANSWER. Piper's first answer to why God has pleasure in creation is because creation expresses "his" glory. If the pronoun "his" were limited to the Father alone, then God's pleasure in his creation might be in competition with his pleasure in the Son. The discussion of "Creation and Christ," however, makes it clear that creation is the expression of the Father and Son's mutual glory and delight. Therefore, as the Father delights in creation, he is ultimately delighting in his Son.

# Day 3

### PRAISE HIM, SUN AND MOON

Today we will continue our meditation on God's delight in creation and creation's praise of God.

### Psalm 148:1-14

¹ Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights! ² Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts! ³ Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! ⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! ⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD! For he commanded and they were created. ⁶ And he established them forever and ever; he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away. ⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all deeps, ፆ fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word! ໑ Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! ¹ Beasts and all livestock, creeping things and flying birds! ¹ Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! ¹ Young men and maidens together, old men and children! ¹ Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his majesty is above earth and heaven. ¹ He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his saints, for the people of Israel who are near to him. Praise the LORD!

- 11. Why is the psalmist calling on creation to praise God? What exactly is it that the psalmist wants creation to do?
- · ANSWER. It is difficult to understand the psalmist's rather curious language. We should probably not understand the praise of the sun, moon, and stars to be like the praise of intelligent beings created in God's image. Rather, their creation and continued existence itself is most likely their form of praise (cf. vv. 5-6). As John Piper writes in The Pleasures of God, "Creation praises God by simply being what it was created to be in all its incredible variety" (89).

Thus far we have mostly looked at the teaching of the Old Testament. Is there any teaching in the New Testament about the purpose of creation?

# 1 Timothy 4:1-5

¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

# 12. According to this passage, what purpose does creation serve?

• ANSWER. This passage teaches us that not only does creation praise God (as we saw in the previous passage), but creation also provides an occasion for human praise. Those who believe the truth are to receive the things which God has created (including sex and food) and praise him from thankful hearts. In addition, this passage tells is that creation is to be sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

Notice in the previous passage that it is *demons* who are forbidding food and sex! On the other hand, *God* created these things and wants his people to enjoy them.

We now return to Psalm 104.

What is this universe but the lavish demonstration of the incredible, incomparable, unimaginable exuberance and wisdom and power and greatness of God! And what a God he must be! God means for us to be stunned and awed by his work of creation. But not for its own sake. He means for us always to look at his creation and say: If the work of his hands is so full of wisdom and power and grandeur and majesty and beauty, what must this God be like in himself?<sup>41</sup>

# Psalm 104:16-24

<sup>16</sup> The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. <sup>17</sup> In them the birds build their nests; the stork has her home in the fir trees. <sup>18</sup> The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the rock badgers. <sup>19</sup> He made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting. <sup>20</sup> You make darkness, and it is night, when all the beasts of

<sup>41</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in His Creation", an online message at the desiringGod website.

the forest creep about. <sup>21</sup> The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God. <sup>22</sup> When the sun rises, they steal away and lie down in their dens. <sup>23</sup> Man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening. <sup>24</sup> O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

- 13. Describe the relationship between verses 16-23 and verse 24.
- ANSWER. Verses 16-23 describe the wonderful order that the psalmist observes in nature: the watering of trees, the habitats for different animals, and the rhythm of day and night for men and beasts. From numerous references to God (vv. 16, 19, 20, 21), it is clear that in the psalmist's mind, God is presiding over what he has made. V. 24 is the culmination of the psalmist's observations, as he attributes sovereignty and wisdom to God for the manifold works he has observed.

# S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 88-92

- Start at "No Humans Hear the Praise of the Deeps"
- Stop at "Power Without Equal"
  - 14. According to Piper, *how* does creation praise God? Think over his answer and record your reflections below.
  - · ANSWER. Piper most directly answers this question when he writes, "Creation praises God by simply being what it was created to be in all its incredible variety" (89). In the context of this statement, it is clear that creation's praise is not limited to what man can see of God's glory in it. Since so much of the natural world is as of yet outside our observation, creation must praise God as a reflection of the glory of God that God sees in it. And even as Genesis 1 may suggest, God may find pleasure in the workings of the created order apart (and before) the creation of a sentient and conscious being created in his own image.
  - 15. Piper mentions European water spiders and the ten thousand known (!) species of diatoms in this section. Can you think of a specific animal

or natural phenomenon which inspires you to worship? What does that created thing reveal about God? Record your reflections below.

· Answer. Answers will vary.

# Day 4

### REJOICING IN THE LORD

In this day's study, we come back to our original theme: to rejoice in creation as God does is to rejoice in how creation expresses the glory of God. Consider the interesting wording in the following quotation:

God created us because He felt good in His heart and He redeemed us for the same reason.<sup>42</sup>

- 16. Describe the difference between the following two statements. Is each statement biblically true or false?
  - a) God created the world because he felt good in his heart.
  - b) God created the world and then he felt good in his heart.
- ANSWER. The first statement expresses the truth that creation is an overflow of the happiness of God. God did not create the world because he was lonely, or sad, or bored. The second statement could be true if it meant that God took pleasure in what he made. It would not be true, however, if it expressed the idea that God felt "good in his heart" only after he created the world.

Let's consider another biblical meditation involving the created world.

### Isaiah 40:21-26

<sup>21</sup> Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? <sup>22</sup> It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; <sup>23</sup> who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. <sup>24</sup> Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. <sup>25</sup> To whom then will you compare me,

<sup>42</sup> A. W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy, 82.

that I should be like him? says the Holy One. <sup>26</sup> Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing.

- 17. According to this passage, what pleasure might God take in the natural world?
- ANSWER. This passage exults over another aspect of the glory of God that is revealed in his creation. When considering the significance and power of humans relative to God's heavenly power, even the greatest of men look puny. The heavens and the multitude of stars thereby testify to God's greatness. Therefore, this passage would suggest that God takes pleasure in the natural world because it reveals his incomparable power.

We've already looked at two sections of Psalm 104 in this lesson. Now we will examine the conclusion to this psalm.

# Psalm 104:31-35

- <sup>31</sup> May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works, <sup>32</sup> who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke! <sup>33</sup> I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. <sup>34</sup> May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the LORD. <sup>35</sup> Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more! Bless the LORD, O my soul! Praise the LORD!
  - 18. What is significant about the way in which this psalm ends? Is the psalmist ultimately rejoicing in creation?
  - ANSWER. It is significant that in v. 33 the psalmist's song and praise is directed toward God and not toward what he has seen in nature. In other words, Psalm 104 is not an exaltation of nature. Then, in v. 34, the psalmist expresses his desire that his meditation on nature be pleasing to God. He says that he rejoices in God. Therefore, it is clear that creation is merely the channel through which his reflections and affections run as they flow upward toward God.

The reason he loves his world is because he designed his world to show him. This is

# S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 92-96

- Start at "Power Without Equal"
  - 19. What is the overarching question that Piper is trying to answer on pages 84-95? What are his five statements by way of response?
  - ANSWER. The overarching question that Piper is trying to answer is why God has pleasure in his creation. His five answers are as follows:
    - A1. God rejoices in his works of creation because "his works express his glory" (85).
    - A2. God rejoices in his works of creation because "[his works] praise him" (88).
    - A3. God rejoices in his works of creation because "[his works] reveal his incomparable wisdom" (91).
    - A4. God rejoices in his works of creation because "[his works] reveal his incomparable power" (92).
    - A5. God rejoices in his works of creation because "[his works] point us beyond themselves to God himself" (94).

It may be possible to subsume the third and fourth reason under the first reason since God's wisdom and power are aspects of his glory. The other two reasons, however, seem distinct.

20. How will you cultivate a pleasure in God's creation that corresponds to the pleasure that God himself takes in his creation? Consider the following remarks by John Piper in composing your answer.

Life with regard to material things should be a rhythm of feasting and fasting.

<sup>43</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 2," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

Nobody can tell you how much to feast and how much to fast. The Bible doesn't specify how much to fast and how much to feast.

It endorses both because both say true things. Feasting says, 'Creation is a gift of God and it's good and we should thank him for it and enjoy it for his sake.' Fasting says, 'It is not my God.'44

· ANSWER. Answers will vary.

<sup>44</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 2," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

# Day 5

# **S** INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Compose your own nature psalm, praising God for what he has created and expressing the pleasure God takes in creation. Model your psalm after Psalm 104 or another nature psalm of your choosing. Be sure to incorporate in your composition what you have learned in this lesson.



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. After you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. Have you been trying to be more spiritual than God (see *The Pleasures of God*, 80-81)?

2. What might our resurrection bodies and the new earth imply about God's pleasure in creation?

3. After reading through Kilby's eleven resolutions (*The Pleasures of God*, 95-96; footnote 11), which resolution in particular would you like to adopt? Why?

4. Your own question(s):

# § ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ Ric Ergenbright, *Think About These Things* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003)
- ▶ Planet Earth, The Complete BBC Series (2007), 5 DVDs
- ▶ John Piper, "How to Wield the World in the Fight for Joy," chapter 11 in When I Don't Desire God (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004)

# The Pleasure of God in His Fame

# **S** INTRODUCTION

The true gospel of Jesus Christ has been expanding in its reach for almost two thousand years. During that time, the church has grown from a small, Jewish band of believers to a worldwide phenomenon incorporating thousands of people groups and millions of believers. Patrick Johnstone describes the church's recent growth in historical perspective:

There is much cause for rejoicing. The growth of the Church today is on a scale that is unique in the history of the world. The outpouring of the Spirit at the birth of the Church was world wide in its scope and outworkings, but the numbers involved were not on the scale we have seen in increasing numbers over the past 200 years. . . . During the last 10 years, more were added to the evangelical community, through new-birth conversions and birth into evangelical families, than the population on earth in that Pentecost year. 45

When we consider the phenomenal triumph of the gospel and the growth of the Christian church, what should we say is the engine that is inexorably driving this movement? And how is the building of his church viewed by God?

This lesson will seek to answer the above questions and more as we investigate the central commitment that God upholds in all he does.

<sup>45</sup> Patrick Johnstone, "The Church is Bigger Than You Think" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd ed., eds. Ralph Winter and Steven Hawthorne (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1999), 215.

# S LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- > explain the relationship between God's commitment to his own fame and his commitment to his people.
- ▶ relate the pleasure of God studied in this lesson to the topic of frontier missions.

# TEACHING NOTES



The material in this lesson is covered in many of the other writings and teachings of John Piper. In fact, it is a central tenet of John Piper's ministry to declare that the chief end of God is to glorify *himself*. The unique emphasis of this lesson, then, should be on God's *pleasure* in his fame. Stress to your students again and again that God has taken Israel and then the church to himself for the sake of his name because he *delights* in his name. Show your students that God takes intense pleasure in the work of frontier missions when new tribes and peoples begin to call upon his name. Reiterate the *joy* God experiences in blessing the spread of his gospel. This pleasure of God reveals his great worth. What could it mean if God were *unexcited* about the magnification of his glory? Would he then be a truly glorious God?

The objection implicit in Question 15, though not a major focus in this lesson, is nevertheless a common objection. John Piper has dealt with this objection thoroughly in a number of other places. If this is an issue for your students, we recommend that you consult *Desiring God*, 44-49. Hopefully reviewing this discussion will prepare you to answer this objection. Remember, however, to invest the majority of the class discussion in the things that are emphasized in this lesson and its corresponding chapter in The Pleasures of God.

If you would like to see other texts which make it clear that God's ultimate goal in redemptive history is to glorify his own name, see appendix 1 of *Desiring God*, entitled, "The Goal of God in Redemptive History."

Finally, since frontier missions and unreached people groups is discussed in chapter 4 of *The Pleasures of God*, don't hesitate to "plug" missions during the class discussion. Hopefully, your students will already be familiar with some of the terms and concepts in missions that are used in this chapter. If not, it would be worthwhile to introduce these things to your students. Just make clear that it is the zeal of God for his own name that drives the missionary efforts of his people.

**WARNING:** The integrative assignment for the next lesson (Lesson 6) is unspecified for the students. As the instructor, you will need to read the instructions in the Lesson 6 teaching notes and give detailed instructions *at the end of Lesson 5's class discussion*. If you do not read ahead, your students will not be able to complete the integrative assignment for Lesson 6. So please consult the Lesson 6 teaching notes now before concluding your preparation for Lesson 5.

# STUDY GUIDE



# Day 1

# A PEOPLE FOR HIMSELF

The prophet Samuel was ministering during a time of momentous change in Israel. Israel, as a people, had never had a human king before. When they cried out for a king God granted their request, though the request was an implicit rejection of the LORD's kingship (1 Samuel 8:4-9).

Samuel later recounts to the people all that the LORD has done for them:

# 1 Samuel 12:12-19

12 "And when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' when the LORD your God was your king. 13 And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the LORD has set a king over you. 14 If you will fear the LORD and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well. 15 But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king. 16 Now therefore stand still and see this great thing that the LORD will do before your eyes. <sup>17</sup> Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the LORD, that he may send thunder and rain. And you shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking for yourselves a king." 18 So Samuel called upon the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day, and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel. 19 And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king."

In today's study, we will primarily focus on the important passage of 1 Samuel 12:20-25. The passage above serves as the backdrop to the following response by Samuel.

# 1 Samuel 12:20-25

<sup>20</sup> And Samuel said to the people, "Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. <sup>21</sup> And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. <sup>22</sup> For the LORD will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself. <sup>23</sup> Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way. <sup>24</sup> Only fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. <sup>25</sup> But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."

- 1. Identify two pleasures of God which are described in this passage.
- · ANSWER. The first pleasure of God is obvious: God was pleased to make Israel a people for himself (v. 22). In other words, God takes pleasure in election. The second pleasure of God may not be so obvious, but is also present in v. 22. Since God made Israel a people for himself, and since he will not forsake his people for the sake of his great name, it is evident that God delights in his own name and reputation. If God did not delight in his fame, he would not defend it so jealously in judging his wicked people when they turn aside from him to go after empty things.
- 2. According to the passage above, what is the logical relationship between the following realities? Record your answer below.
  - a. Samuel's command to the people not to be afraid, but to serve the LORD. (verse 20)
  - b. The LORD's commitment not to forsake his people, but to provide them with profit and deliverance. (verses 21-22a)
  - c. The value and greatness of the LORD's name. (verse 22b)
  - d. The LORD's pleasure in making Israel a people "for himself." (verse 22c)
  - ANSWER. The bedrock reality in this passage is the value and greatness of the LORD's name (c). Since the LORD wanted his name to be known and worshipped, he chose Israel to bear his name and took pleasure in making them a people for himself (d). The LORD's election of his people—binding his glory to their fate—is what supports his commitment not to forsake them, but to provide for them (b). Since the LORD is committed to Israel

in this way, they should not be afraid of the LORD, but serve him with all their heart (a).

From beginning to end, the driving impulse of God's heart is to be praised for his glory. From creation to consummation his ultimate allegiance is to himself. His unwavering purpose in all he does is to exalt the honor of his name and to be marveled at for his grace and power. He is infinitely jealous for his reputation. For my own sake, for my own sake I act,' says the Lord. 'My glory I will not give to another!'

My experience in preaching and teaching is that American evangelicals receive this truth with some skepticism if they receive it at all. None of my sons has ever brought home a Sunday school paper with the lesson title: 'God loves himself more than he loves you.' But it is profoundly true, and so generation after generation of evangelicals grow up picturing themselves at the center of God's universe.<sup>46</sup>

Let's also consider another passage about the election of Israel that may shed light on the passage in 1 Samuel that we've been studying.

# Jeremiah 13:7-11

<sup>7</sup> Then I went to the Euphrates, and dug, and I took the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it. And behold, the loincloth was spoiled; it was good for nothing. <sup>8</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>9</sup> "Thus says the LORD: Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup> This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own heart and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing. <sup>11</sup> For as the loincloth clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the LORD, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory, but they would not listen."

3. How might Jeremiah 13:11 clarify the meaning of 1 Samuel 12:22?

<sup>46</sup> John Piper, "Is God for Us or for Himself?" an online sermon at the desiringGod website.

ANSWER. 1 Samuel 12:22 states that the LORD was pleased make Israel a people for himself. This last phrase, "for himself," might not be immediately clear. In what sense was Israel made for God? Jeremiah 13:11, which uses similar language to 1 Samuel 12:22, provides us with an explicit answer. After declaring that Israel was made that they might be a people for God, the prophecy of Jeremiah explicates this idea with an interpretive list. Being a people for God meant to be for his name, his praise, and his glory.

# S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 97-103

• Stop at "Why Didn't God Make Short Work of Pharaoh?"

# Matthew 6:9

- <sup>9</sup> Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."
  - 4. According to Piper, what is Jesus teaching his apostles to ask for in this request?
  - · ANSWER. According to Piper, this "first and most important prayer" is a request that God "would work to cause people to hallow his name" (98). "Hallow" is not a word that is often used or understood in modern English. It basically means to make holy. Since we cannot make God's name holy in the sense of purifying it as if it were unclean, Piper rightly contends that people make God's name holy (or "sanctify" it) by honoring and praising it. So Jesus is teaching his apostles to ask God to make his own name known and esteemed in the world. In this sense it is a missionary prayer.
  - 5. Record at least one thing that you have learned from Piper's interpretation of 1 Samuel 12.
  - · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

Be sure to read footnote 3 in the required reading as it provides a connection between the last lesson and this lesson.

#### A NAME DECLARED THROUGHOUT THE EARTH

In the previous day's study, we considered a moment in Israel's history in which the people deserved judgment for their wickedness but received mercy. In today's study we will begin by looking at an episode in which God did not withhold judgment. Is God's motivation in pouring out his wrath the same as his motivation in pouring out mercy? Notice Pharaoh's fateful response to the LORD's command.

#### Exodus 5:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'" <sup>2</sup> But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go."

In response to Pharaoh's ignorance, God judges Egypt with ten plagues. The following verses describe the reason why God is bringing this suffering to Pharaoh and Egypt.

#### Exodus 7:5

<sup>5</sup> The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.

#### Exodus 9:13-16

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh and say to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. 14 For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. 15 For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. 16 But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.""

#### Exodus 10:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, <sup>2</sup> and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD."

- According to these passages, what was God's purpose in sending the plagues? Underline phrases from the passages above that support your answer.
- Answer. In demonstrating his mighty power through the plagues, God wants to be known for who he is—there is no one like him in all the earth (Exodus 9:14). God wants to be known by the Egyptians (7:5), among all the peoples of the earth (9:16), and by future generations of Israelites (10:2). God sent the plagues for the sake of his great name, which is the same reason God showed mercy to Israel (1 Samuel 12:22).

Later in the book of Exodus, we see that Pharaoh gets the message and acknowledges the LORD and his power:

#### Exodus 10:16-17

<sup>16</sup> Then Pharaoh hastily called Moses and Aaron and said, "I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you. <sup>17</sup> Now therefore, forgive my sin, please, only this once, and plead with the LORD your God only to remove this death from me."

After the plagues upon Egypt, God brings his people out of the land by parting the Red Sea—a story familiar to all. What was God's motivation in doing this? Read a later canonical reflection on God's deliverance of his people:

#### Isaiah 63:11-14

"Then [God] remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit, 12 who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, 13 who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble. 14 Like livestock that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest. So you led your people, to make

for yourself a glorious name.

- 7. What was God's purpose in parting the sea during the exodus? What does this imply about the pleasures of God?
- ANSWER. God purpose in dividing the waters and leading his people was to make for himself an everlasting or glorious name (verses 12, 14). Let us stress again that this was God's explicit intention in delivering his people! He was not only thinking about their welfare, but also his own glory. That God is ultimately committed to his own reputation and glory implies that he takes the highest pleasure in these things. He delights to make his name known by doing good to his people.

Read some of John Piper's comments on Isaiah 63:14, made during a regional desiringGod conference:

And I thought, 'Yes! He makes himself a name by helping this old cow down in the valley to get some grass. Isn't that what it says? Don't you find that amazing? I find things like that amazing!'

... You see, here's what that does. It keeps me from thinking that I'm at the center of this mercy. He's showing me mercy—I'm just a cow! I'm hungry; I'm tired; I need some water; I need some grass; I need the protection of a valley. And he says, I got a valley; I got protection; I got water. C'mon, let's go'. And all around are the enemies. And he's saying, 'Don't touch him. Don't touch him.' He's making himself a name! Protecting me, caring for me, loving me—but I'm not the main point! His name is the main point! And you find it over and over again.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, let's consider one more significant stage in Israel's history: their exile and ingathering.

#### Ezekiel 36:19-24

<sup>19</sup> I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. In accordance with their ways and their deeds I judged them. <sup>20</sup> But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, "These are the people of the LORD, and yet

<sup>47</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 1," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

they had to go out of his land." <sup>21</sup> But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came. <sup>22</sup> Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. <sup>23</sup> And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. <sup>24</sup> I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.

- 8. Why will God bring his people back from exile? What does this imply about the pleasures of God?
- ANSWER. The answers to these questions could not be stated more plainly in the text. God unequivocally states that he is about the act in gathering his people not for their sake, but "for the sake of my holy name" (Ezekiel 36:22). He brings back his people because he does not want his name to be profaned. He desires to vindicate his own holiness. This implies, as we asserted in the previous answer, that God takes pleasure in the holiness of his great name. He takes pleasure in the nations truly knowing him for the holy God he is.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 103-109

- Start at "Why Didn't God Make Short Work of Pharaoh?"
- Stop at "The Fame of God as the Goal of Missions"
  - Piper lists many texts to demonstrate God's pleasure in his fame. Choose one text that Piper lists and then make your own comments on it, showing how it indicates God's pleasure in his fame.
  - · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

- 10. Why is God's pleasure in his fame (or name) such good news for us?
- Answer. God's pleasure in and commitment to his own name is the basis for our hope of mercy. If God's pleasure was tied only to our worth or goodness, then we would have no hope of salvation, because all of us have fallen short of the glory of God. Our sinful acts deserve condemnation, not mercy. At best, we are unreliable and inconsistent creatures. The worth of God's name, by contrast, never changes. It can therefore become the solid rock of our hope when God chooses to exalt his name by showing mercy and grace to sinners like us.

#### FOR THE SAKE OF HIS NAME

Thus far we've looked mostly at Old Testament texts and have seen the pleasure and passion God has in his own fame. In this day's study, we will consider mostly New Testament texts to see whether God's passion for his fame finds any expression in the New Testament as well. We begin with a sweeping description of Paul's apostleship.

#### Romans 1:1-5

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup> which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh <sup>4</sup> and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, <sup>5</sup> through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations...

- 11. What is the *ultimate* aim of Paul's apostleship? Explain your answer below.
  - a. to proclaim the gospel of God
  - b. to testify to the resurrection of Jesus
  - c. to bring about the obedience of faith
  - d. to make Jesus' name great among the nations
- ANSWER. The reason why Paul exists and the ultimate aim of his life and ministry is to glorify the God who saved him. Proclaiming the gospel, testifying to the resurrection, and bringing about obedience are all means to that one end. This is indicated by the word "for" in v. 5 and it is the only reason that makes theological sense.

Perhaps one might object to applying the above description of Paul's apostleship to believers in general: "Well, that may have been true for Paul and his ministry," one might say, "but it gives no indication of why I exist." Though we would reject this line of reasoning, nevertheless 1 Peter 2:9-12 is a more general description of

all believers. It shows that the ultimate aim of all of our lives is to magnify God's name.

#### 1 Peter 2:9-12

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Returning to the example of Paul, let's now consider descriptions of his apostleship from the book of Acts.

#### Acts 9:15-16

<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to [Ananias], "Go, for [Paul] is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

#### Acts 21:13

- <sup>13</sup> Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."
  - 12. According to these verses, why did Paul suffer? Does your answer to this question support your answer to Question 11?
  - · ANSWER. These verses plainly state that Paul suffered for the sake of the Lord's name or glory. Moreover, Paul is described as a "chosen instrument" whose sole stated purpose is to carry the Lord's name before all people (9:15). While it would be right to say that Paul was suffering for the gospel or for Gentile obedience, it may be significant that these pithy formulations describing Paul's ministry reveal the deeper, underlying reason Paul must suffer—for the sake of the Lord's name.

If you recall, in 1 Samuel 12:22 Samuel tells the people of Israel that God has

made them a people for himself. Keeping that in mind, read about new covenant realities:

#### Acts 15:13-14

<sup>13</sup> After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. <sup>14</sup> Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name."

God's intention for Israel and the church is the same—he wants a people who will glorify him in the world.

Why has God chosen us and made us a possession for himself?... to make a name for himself. The way Peter says it is that you were chosen to declare God's excellencies, his wonders, specifically his saving work in bringing you from darkness into light.

God has given us the joy of spiritual sight so that we might spread the reputation of our eye doctor. Or you could say that we were caught in a deep mine shaft and it was caving in on us, and Jesus came down into the collapsing shaft of our sin and guilt and fear, and he put us on his back, and at the cost of his own life got us out. Why? So that we would spread the reputation of his courage and strength and kindness.48

If this is so, then we ought to send out missionaries to carry the Lord's name to the most distant lands.

#### 3 John 1:5-8

<sup>5</sup> Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, <sup>6</sup> who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. <sup>7</sup> For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. <sup>8</sup> Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

<sup>48</sup> John Piper, "Good Deeds and the Glory of God," an online sermon at the desiringGod website.

- 13. According to this passage, why should we support pioneer missionaries? Underline your answer.
  - a. because we want to be found as faithful and loving, fellow workers for the truth
  - b. because we want to honor God in the way we send them
  - c. because pioneer missionaries go out for the sake of the name
  - d. all of the above

The role of pioneer, or frontier, missionaries is anticipated in the following Old Testament text:

#### Isaiah 66:17-19

<sup>17</sup> Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one in the midst, eating pig's flesh and the abomination and mice, shall come to an end together, declares the LORD. <sup>18</sup> For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, <sup>19</sup> and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations.

- 14. What is the *message* and *motivation* of missions according to this passage?
- ANSWER. The message of missions is simple: "God is glorious!" The above passage describes missionaries as those who declare God's glory to those who have not heard of it or seen it yet. The motivation of missions is for God to be praised among all peoples. Missionaries desire for others to come and join them in praising the only true God.

Throughout this lesson, you may have been plagued with the thought that God is self-centered and egotistical in pursuing his own fame and reputation in the world. Though not a major focus of this lesson, it is worth considering the following argument against such a thought:

God is the one Being in the entire universe for whom self-centeredness, or the pursuit of his own glory, is the ultimately loving act. For him, self-exaltation is the highest virtue. When he does all things 'for the praise of his glory,' he preserves for us and offers to us, the only thing in the entire world, which can satisfy our longings. God is for us, and therefore has been, is now and always will be, first, for himself. I urge you not to resent the centrality of God in his own affections, but to experience it as the fountain of your everlasting joy.<sup>49</sup>

- 15. Do you struggle with the idea that God's foremost pleasure is in himself rather than in us? Do you believe that the paragraph above adequately answers the objection? Explain your answers.
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

<sup>49</sup> John Piper, "Is God for Us or for Himself?" an online sermon at the desiring God website.

#### THE FAME OF GOD

In some ways, God's pleasure in his fame lies underneath his pleasure in creation and in all he does since creation makes God known, and all he does works toward the display of his glory. This day's study will end our concentrated look at the fame of God, though God's pleasure in his name being known will continue to surface throughout the course.

- 16. After reviewing the previous day's study, summarize what you learned about the connection between God's pleasure in his fame and world missions.
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

The ultimate foundation for our passion to see God glorified is his own passion to be glorified. God is central and supreme in his own affections. There are no rivals for the supremacy of God's glory in his own heart. God is not an idolater. He does not disobey the first and great commandment. With all his heart and soul and strength and mind he delights in the glory of his manifold perfections. The most passionate heart for God in all the universe is God's heart.

This truth, more than any other I know, seals the conviction that worship is the fuel and goal of missions. The deepest reason why our passion for God should fuel missions is that God's passion for God fuels missions. Missions is the overflow of our delight in God because missions is the overflow of God's delight in being God. And the deepest reason why worship is the goal in missions is that worship is God's goal.<sup>50</sup>

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 109-119

• Start at "The Fame of God as the Goal of Missions"

<sup>50</sup> John Piper, Let the Nations Be Glad, 21.

#### Romans 15:20-21

- <sup>20</sup> . . . and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, <sup>21</sup> but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."
  - 17. What is the difference between a Paul-type missionary and a Timothytype missionary? Why might Piper stress this distinction in this chapter?
  - ANSWER. The distinction Piper draws between Paul-type missionaries and Timothy-type missionaries is that Timothy-type missionaries work in cross-cultural contexts in which there is already an established church while Paul-type missionaries work in areas where there is no church—where Christ has not been "named" (Romans 15:20). Piper probably draws this distinction to highlight the lack of Paul-type missionaries and to draw attention to the remaining task of reaching the unreached people groups. This kind of frontier missions is at the heart of God's desire to spread his fame throughout the earth.
  - 18. What might Piper's purpose be in discussing the four waves of Protestant expansion and in reproducing the two statistical tables?
  - ANSWER. In this section, Piper aims to stir up interest in frontier missions and, more importantly, to instill a feeling of "the force of God's passion for his fame among all the unreached peoples of the world" (115). For those who are unfamiliar with the history of missions or the current state of missions in the world, Piper's discussion and the accompanying tables might inform and excite such a feeling.
  - 19. What is our main reason for confidence that God's fame will spread among all nations? Why is it important to focus on this reason rather than statistics?
  - · ANSWER. As Piper says, our main reason for confidence is "the indomitable delight God has in his fame among the nations" (116). We ought to focus on God's passion rather than human progress and statistics because progress may speed up or slow down. If Piper and Johnstone are right, then the church will become a minority in the world before the Lord's coming. But God's passion is always constant. We are not assured of the

- gospel's success by statistical inevitability, but by the delight and dominion of the holy God.
- 20. What's the connection between God's pleasure in his fame and our task of worldwide evangelization? Is this a book about God's delight or our duty?
- ANSWER. As we have already read in Lesson 3, one of Piper's goals in writing this book is to draw attention to the glory of God so that people are transformed to the likeness of his Son (47). Therefore, as readers see God's glory in his pleasures, the hope is that they will adopt the same pleasures and passions that God has. As they bring their affections in line with his, they will find the power to "renounce the quest for worldly comforts and join his global purpose" (119). Therefore, this book is primarily about God's delight, but it is also about our sharing in God's delight and the loving actions that flow from that participation.

#### **§** INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Write a letter to a missionary (real or fictitious) who is struggling with frustration over an apparent lack of progress among an unreached people group. Incorporate what you have learned in this lesson, and maybe even some of the Scripture we have studied, as you encourage them.

#### S DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. After you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. Do you pray to God for grace and mercy on the basis of God's love for his own name? (See *The Pleasures of God*, 107-109)

2. What would you say to someone who was offended by the idea that God delights in his own fame?

3. What are some practical ways in which you can cultivate a delight in the fame of God?

4. Your own question(s):

#### **\$** ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ⊳ John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998).
- ▶ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

# The Pleasure of God in Election

#### S INTRODUCTION

There are many doctrines covered in this course which are covered elsewhere also. The subject of this lesson is a good example. The doctrine of God's unconditional election is one of the doctrines of grace and is found within the so-called five points of Calvinism. It is a controversial doctrine, debated almost endlessly. Wayne Grudem offers the following definition:

Election is an act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of his sovereign good pleasure.<sup>51</sup>

This curriculum, however, aims to look at things through the lens of God's pleasures. Therefore, though we will argue for unconditional election in this lesson and will look at several texts which teach this important doctrine, our primary aim will be to consider the last word in Wayne Grudem's definition—God's election of some is only because of his sovereign good *pleasure*.

Though you may have considered the doctrine of election before, we hope that this lesson will open you up to consider in a fresh, new way the God who elects his people.

#### S LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▶ demonstrate that God does delight in his unconditional choice of some.
- ▶ explain why God takes pleasure in unconditional election.
- explain why believers should also take pleasure in this controversial doctrine.

<sup>51</sup> Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 670.



#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE LESSON 6 INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

The integrative assignment for this lesson is a bit unusual. Since we consider the appendix to *The Pleasures of God* to be an important one, we wanted to include its contents in this course somehow. Therefore, we decided to include the appendix as part of this integrative assignment.

The appendix in the revised edition of *The Pleasures of God* is 28 pages long. This is too long, in our opinion, for every student to read it in its entirety. Therefore, we suggest that you divide your class into small groups, each group having the responsibility to present a different section of the appendix to the others in the class. Depending on your class size, you should divide your students into 3-5 groups. The reading could be assigned in any number of ways, but here is one possibility:

All Groups: Section 1, pages 314-317 Group #1: Sections 2A and 2B, pages 317-321 Group #2: Sections 2C, 2D, and 2E, pages 321-327 Group #3: Section 3, pages 327-331

Group #4: Section 4, pages 331-338 All Groups: Section 5, pages 338-340

Please note that you will need to assign the groups and section assignments *at the end of your discussion of Lesson 5*. As you give the assignments, also inform your students of your expectations for their presentations. We think 5-10 minute summaries of each section are reasonable. The students should not feel pressure to do extensive group coordination; rather, they should each feel comfortable contributing in a less formal way to the group's presentation of Piper's material.

From time to time during this course it may be helpful to pause and summarize what has been established thus far. You may want to invest several minutes at the beginning of this lesson to review. To that end, here is Piper's attempt to summarize the first few sermons he preached on this topic, corresponding to the lessons we've completed thus far. (This excerpt is from "The Pleasure of God in Election," an online sermon at the desiringGod website.)

In our study of the pleasures of God we have seen that from all eternity God has been supremely happy in the fellowship of the Trinity. He has delighted in casting his eye, as it were, out over the endless panorama of his own perfections reflected in the face of his Son. Between God the Father and God the Son there has flowed a love and joy so full and complete, and carrying so much of the essence of God, that it has stood forth from all eternity as a Person in his own right—the Holy Spirit himself.

If you could take the energy of all the billions of galaxies in the universe and measure it, you would get a reading that is simply a faint reverberation of that energy of joy and love that swells and streams and surges in the triune heart of God. Before there was anything besides God at all, God was supremely happy in himself.

We saw secondly that God is, therefore, absolutely self-sufficient. He has no needs and so can't be bribed. He has no flaws and so can't be blackmailed. He has no weaknesses and so can't be coerced or forced. In other words, he is absolutely free and does what he does because of his own good pleasure. "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever he pleases" (Psalm 115:3).

Thirdly, we saw that the creation of this spectacular universe is the overflow of God's joyful bounty. He did not create the world to make up for some deficiency in himself. He created because it's the very nature of fullness to overflow. It's the nature of unbounded joy to spread itself around. And so God rejoiced to make the universe as a kind of spin-off of his overflowing delight in his own glory.

Then, last week we saw that in this world which God has created, the great passion of his heart is to spread his reputation. Again and again and again in Scripture we read that he acts for the sake of his name. His great goal is to magnify his fame and renown and the honor of his name in all that he does.

And when you stop and think about it this is the most loving thing that God could ever do; because the greatest benefit that human beings could ever receive is to know and share in the glory of God. So when God aims to make his glorious name known and admired and praised and enjoyed in every people and tongue and tribe and nation, he is acting in overflowing grace and love because this and this alone will satisfy the longings of the human heart.

Today we carry our study one step further and discover that the way God intends

to make a name for his glorious grace in all the world is to choose a people for himself. And as Jeremiah says, "He will make them cling to him that they might be for him a people, and a name, and a praise, and a glory" (Jeremiah 13:11). In other words, to extend the pleasure that God has in his own name, he calls out a people to enjoy and praise and proclaim that name. And the Bible calls these people "the elect." That is what we want to look at this morning: the pleasure of God in election.

The students' answers to Question 5 should raise an interesting discussion: What is the relationship between the different pleasures of God which Piper has identified and explained thus far? As the bottom of page 132 makes plain, Piper views God's pleasure in election as an extension of his pleasure in his fame. Likewise, in the previous chapter Piper wanted to make clear that God's pleasure in his fame is an extension of his pleasure in his own glory. The third chapter also makes the point that God's pleasure in creation is simply a form of his enjoyment in the Son. Therefore, it is crucial to notice that in Piper's understanding, the foundational pleasure for God, from which all his other pleasures flow, is the pleasure he has in beholding the perfect reflection of his glory in the Son. At the bottom of God's delight is a pleasure in himself.

The complexity in God we saw earlier is also manifest in 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9. God desires all to come to repentance and he effectually calls only some. John Piper offers one way in which to state the relationship between God's general invitation and sovereign call ("The Pleasures of God, Part 2," an online conference message):

My dad used to quote Moody, who said that on the gate of heaven there was a sign on the outside and a sign on the inside. And the sign on the outside said, "Whosoever will may come," which is absolutely true. And on the inside, you turn around and look, it says, "Elect before the foundation of the world." That's true, that's helpful.

Impress upon your students that the doctrine of election is spectacularly useful in both evangelism and prayer. We all pray as those who believe in God's sovereignty in salvation. Piper explains ("The Pleasures of God, Part 2," an online conference message):

How do you pray for your loved one who is not walking with Jesus? How do you pray? Do you really pray: "God, now I know you don't have absolute power; he's got free will and you can't make him believe. So, umm . . . make suggestions to him"? Or "Give him a little nudge, but don't push him all the way over because

then you wreck his free will"? Does anybody pray like that? No. We pray, "God, you're God. Take him! Save him!"

#### DELIGHTED IN THE CHOICE

This lesson will preserve the normal pattern of examining the Old Testament first. What does the Old Testament teach us about the pleasure of God in election?

#### Deuteronomy 7:6-8

<sup>6</sup> For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. <sup>7</sup> It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, <sup>8</sup> but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

#### Deuteronomy 14:1-3

<sup>1</sup> You are the sons of the LORD your God. You shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead. <sup>2</sup> For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. <sup>3</sup> You shall not eat any abomination.

#### Ezekiel 20:4-7

<sup>4</sup> Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Let them know the abominations of their fathers, <sup>5</sup> and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day when <u>I chose Israel</u>, I swore to the offspring of the house of Jacob, making myself known to them in the land of Egypt; I swore to them, saying, I am the LORD your God. <sup>6</sup> On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands. <sup>7</sup> And I said to them, <u>Cast away</u> the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and

#### do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.

- 1. Why did God choose Israel? Was there anything about Israel as a nation which prompted God to choose her? Underline support for your answer.
- ANSWER. In all of these texts the language of God choosing Israel is repeated; the order is never reversed. Israel is never said to choose God. Deuteronomy 7 makes it clear that it wasn't anything about Israel that prompted God to choose them. In fact, a section of vv. 7-8 can be summarized by saying that the LORD "set his love on you . . . because the LORD loves you." He chose to love them because he loves them. It is his own sovereign, free choice to love Israel. He chose Israel to be his own treasured possession in all the earth even though they were idolaters.

Perhaps you noticed the phrase "the oath that he swore to your fathers" (Deuteronomy 7:8) and argued that it was God's choice of Israel's forefathers that constrained him to choose Israel. Answering in this way, though, simply pushes back the question. Why did God choose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Was his choice of them influenced by something outside of himself?

#### Joshua 24:2-3

<sup>2</sup> And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. <sup>3</sup> Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac."

#### Nehemiah 9:6-7

<sup>6</sup> You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you. <sup>7</sup> You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham.

#### Isaiah 51:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. <sup>2</sup> Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him.

- 2. According to these passages, what should we say about God's choice of Abraham?
  - Answer. These three passages all discuss God's choice of Abraham. In none of these passages is Abraham described as one who would be worthy of God's election. In fact, it is evident that Abraham served other gods before the LORD chose him (Joshua 24:2). It was the LORD who chose Abram—again, not vice versa—and brought him up out of Ur. God's blessing of Abraham was on the basis of the call of God (Isaiah 51:2). Therefore, we have biblical warrant in saying that God's election of Abraham was unconditional.

Here is Paul's reflection on this very issue:

#### Romans 9:10-13

<sup>10</sup> And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, <sup>11</sup> though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— <sup>12</sup> she was told, "The older will serve the younger." <sup>13</sup> As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

All of these texts point to the unconditional nature of God's election—he chooses us not because of anything in ourselves, but by his free and sovereign will alone. What, though, does unconditional election have to do with the pleasures of God?

#### Deuteronomy 10:14-15 (English Standard Version)

<sup>14</sup> Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. <sup>15</sup> Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.

#### Deuteronomy 10:14-15 (King James Version)

<sup>14</sup> Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD'S thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. <sup>15</sup> Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day.

#### Deuteronomy 10:14-15 (New American Standard—Updated Version)

<sup>14</sup> Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the

earth and all that is in it. <sup>15</sup> Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day.

#### Deuteronomy 10:14-15 (New International Version)

<sup>14</sup> To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. <sup>15</sup> Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today.

#### Deuteronomy 10:14-15 (Piper's Suggested Translation)52

<sup>14</sup> Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. <sup>15</sup> Yet the LORD delighted in your fathers to love them and chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as at this day.

- 3. After comparing these versions, what might we say about the pleasures of God?
- ANSWER. The English Standard Version, New American Standard (Updated Version), and New International Version all stress the love and affection of God without making it explicit that God had joy in loving. Although we would contend that genuine love cannot lack joy in the beloved, the King James Version and Piper's suggested translation make it explicit that God takes pleasure in the election of Israel's forefathers and their descendants. God delights in unconditional election.

The further reading for today introduces the chapter as a whole and we recommend that you read it first if you have the time. In those opening four pages, Piper argues that though the doctrine of election is controversial, it is not beyond our ability to understand and that many saints have found it to be a "sweet" doctrine and nourishing to their faith.

As suggested in *The Pleasures of God*, 128-129. See especially footnote 7 on page 129.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 125-132

- Start at "Israel Elect from All the Peoples"
  - 4. What two images does the Bible use to describe Israel's election (127-128)? What is the significance of these metaphors?
  - ANSWER. Piper cites multiple texts which demonstrate that God's election of Israel is similar to a father begetting a son or a potter making a pot. The significance of these metaphors is that they both affirm God's sovereign freedom and unconstrained election of Israel. A child does not choose to be born—it happens at the father's initiative. Likewise, a pot doesn't choose to be formed—it's the free and creative act of the potter that brings the pot into existence.
  - 5. At the end of this section, Piper connects this chapter on God's pleasure in election with the previous chapter. Identify the sentences in which this connection is explicit, record it below, then put Piper's point in your own words.
  - ANSWER. The connection between chapters 5 and 6 of The Pleasures of God is made clear in the last two sentences of this section: "In other words, in order to extend the pleasure that God has in his own name he chooses a people to enjoy and praise and proclaim that name to all the peoples. And so God has pleasure in election" (132). Piper's point is that God's pleasure in election is an extension of God's pleasure in his fame.

#### S FURTHER READING

The Pleasures of God, 121-125

Stop at "Israel Elect from All the Peoples"

#### IN WHAT DOES JESUS REJOICE?

Henry Scougal reminds us that Jesus was a man of sorrows:

We many times hear of our Saviour's sighs and groans and tears; but never that he laughed, and but once that he rejoiced in spirit; so that through his whole life he did exactly answer that character, given of him by the prophet of old, that he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.<sup>53</sup>

Given that Jesus was the suffering Servant and a man of sorrows, the one instance in which he rejoiced in spirit should be of great interest to us. According to Piper, there are actually two explicit references in the Gospels to Jesus rejoicing (the second being John 11:15). We will study the first of these texts now.

#### Luke 10:21-22

<sup>21</sup> In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>22</sup> All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

Other translations handle the last phrase of verse 21 in a different way from the English Standard Version (above).

Luke 10:21 (King James Version)

<sup>21</sup> . . . even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.

Luke 10:21 (New American Standard—Updated Version)

<sup>21</sup> . . . Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.

Luke 10:21 (New International Version)

<sup>21</sup> . . . Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

<sup>53</sup> Henry Scougal, The Life of God in the Soul of Man, 44.

- 6. What does Luke 10:21-22 teach us about the pleasures of God?
- ANSWER. As Piper points out in the required reading, we have Trinitarian rejoicing in this passage: the Son is rejoicing, he is rejoicing in the Holy Spirit, and it was the pleasure of the Father too. Their rejoicing is centering around the reality that the Father has freely chosen to hide things from the wise and reveal them to the "little children." In other words, all three members of the Trinity are taking pleasure in God's free and unconstrained election, which contravenes human expectations.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians mirrors the teaching of the gospel of Luke.

#### 1 Corinthians 1:17-18, 22-29

<sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. <sup>18</sup> For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . <sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. <sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

- 7. According to this passage, why are some Jews and Greeks saved while others are not? Do certain people believe because they have greater spiritual insight or humility than others?
- ANSWER. The power of God working through the gospel is not dependent on the choice of men but rather the calling of God (1:24, 26). Paul leaves no doubt that human wisdom, nobility, strength, and earthly honor and position are not the basis of the Corinthians' salvation. Rather, Paul says repeatedly that "God chose . . . God chose . . . . God chose . . . . The purpose of God's unconditional election is that no human being might boast in God's presence. In other words, unconditional election preserves God's glory.

Let's examine one more New Testament passage that includes a reference to God's choice of those who would believe.

#### Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. . . . <sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

- 8. Why might God take pleasure in election? Underline the key phrase above.
- ANSWER. These verses assert that choice of us and predestination of us was done according to the purpose of his will. What was the purpose of his will? The next clause gives the answer: God's purpose was to bring about praise of his glorious grace (1:6). Then after another statement of God's sovereign working it talks about Christian hope being "to the praise of his glory" (1:12; cf. 1:14). As we have seen, God takes infinite pleasure in the display and praise of his own glory and therefore, since unconditional election magnifies his glory, it would only make sense for him to take pleasure in it.

Some might respond that God chose us in Christ because we accepted his universal offer of salvation. A later passage in Ephesians invalidates this interpretation. Rather than considering and accepting God's offer, Ephesians 2 makes it clear that we were spiritually dead in our sin.

#### Ephesians 2:4-7

<sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Grace is the power of God to do the humanly impossible: dead men live. And dead men like Lazarus, who are in the grave, do not make themselves live. What makes Lazarus live? 'Lazarus come forth!' The sovereign word of Christ creates what it commands. And when God chooses us before the foundation of the world, he comes to us with a sovereign, effectual call.<sup>54</sup>

#### REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 133-140

- Stop at "Is Election Based on Foreknown Faith?"
  - 9. According to Piper, why does Jesus respond to skeptics with Statement A (below) instead of Statement B?

Statement A: "You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep." Statement B: "You do not belong to my sheep because you do not believe."

- · ANSWER. The contrast between these two statements indicates that Jesus was asserting that being chosen as a sheep is what results in belief—that is, election is the basis of belief rather than human "free will." It was appropriate for Jesus to declare this to skeptics because these skeptics were demanding more and more proof that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus undercuts any of their self-assured questioning and boasting by saying that they don't believe because the Father has not given them to his Son.
- 10. Do you share God's pleasure in the doctrine of election? Explain.
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

In the further reading Piper argues against an interpretation of Romans 8:29 that asserts that God elects us based upon foreknown (or foreseen) faith.

#### **S** FURTHER READING

The Pleasures of God, 140-143

- Start at "Is Election Based on Foreknown Faith?"
- Stop at "From Start to Finish, God"

John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 2," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

#### THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION — SWEET TO GOD AND TO US

In this day's study we will continue our focused look on election, considering why it should bring joy to us and answering some of the potential objections that could be raised against this doctrine. We first return to Paul's teaching on election in 1 Corinthians.

#### 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

<sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

- 11. What is it about God's purpose in election that should cause *us* to delight in it?
- ANSWER. There are two answers that could be given to this question. First, we should find God's purpose of preserving his free and sovereign choice in election to be sweet because then his choice of us is sheer mercy. If God were compelled to elect us because of something within us, it would diminish our delight. No one rejoices over what is owed to them more than they rejoice over a free and undeserved gift. Second, in God's election of us he preserves and magnifies his own glory, which for us to behold is the only thing that can truly satisfy our souls. So that should make us happy.

Can someone rejoice in election and still rejoice in verses such as John 3:16?

#### John 3:16

<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

12. Can John 3:16 still be true if God has chosen only certain people for salvation? Explain your response.

- ANSWER. Yes, one can rejoice in John 3:16 and rejoice in unconditional election simultaneously. That is so because the following three statements are all taught in Scripture and do not contradict each other:
  - A1. God has freely and unconditionally chosen only certain people for salvation.
  - A2. God has genuine compassion on the whole world and in some sense wants all to come to repentance.
  - A3. The offer of eternal life through believing in Jesus is real.

Attempts to use one of the above statements to invalidate another ought to be rejected as unbiblical.

Remember that the apostle who lifted up God's unconditional election in chapter 9 of Romans is the same apostle who only a little while later wrote these words:

#### Romans 10:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. <sup>2</sup> For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

- 13. Do you think that Paul would want all people to be saved? Would it be inconsistent for Paul to desire everyone's salvation and yet want the justice and holiness of God to be demonstrated also?
- · ANSWER. It would not be inconsistent for Paul to weep over the condemnation of his fellow Jews (Romans 9:1-5) while upholding and even rejoicing in God's glorious purposes to prepare some for destruction and others for glory (Romans 9:22-24). We know that the breadth of the human heart can hold these things in tension. How much more, then, would God be able to desire all men to be saved even while he only chooses to show mercy to some!

#### REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 143-150 (reading footnote 32 is optional)

- Start at "From Start to Finish, God"
- Stop at "Fifth, this truth enables us..." (toward the top of the page)

- 14. Piper states that he is closing this chapter with "seven reasons why this teaching is precious to me and why I believe God has pleasure in it" (143). Examine the first four reasons and explain why God would have pleasure in each reason.
- ANSWER. God would have pleasure in the truth of election being biblical because he delights in the truthfulness and reliability of his Word. The fact that this doctrine would humble sinners and exalt the glory of God would bring God pleasure because, as we have already seen, God delights in his glory and in its exaltation. Since God delights in his church and desires its purity, he would delight in the preserving effect of this doctrine. Finally, a salvation that is effected and not just offered is more praiseworthy and therefore God would delight in being the author and giver of such a salvation, and would delight in any truth that highlighted this salvation's greatness.
- 15. In footnote 24 on page 145, Spurgeon argues that it is not possible to preach the gospel without the preaching of sovereign and free election (and all of Calvinism). Do you agree with Spurgeon's "private opinion"? Why or why not?
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

#### MORE REASONS FOR REJOICING

We conclude our study of this controversial doctrine by examining a few additional reasons why God takes pleasure in election and why this doctrine ought to be precious to us.

#### 2 Peter 1:5-11

<sup>5</sup> For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, <sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. <sup>8</sup> For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. <sup>11</sup> For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

- 16. Is our assurance rooted in our election or in our obedience? Explain.
- ANSWER. Our assurance is ultimately rooted in our election and calling. We can know that we are destined for salvation if we have been called by God. Obedience, which flows from God's choice of us, simply confirms the reality of our calling. It is also worth noting that the dynamic of obedience confirming our election is the way in which an entrance into the kingdom is provided for us (1:11). So neither our election nor our obedience ultimately originate with us.

Therefore Peter says, 'Confirm your election! Make sure of it!' How? By standing in your faith and pressing on to virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. John said (in

1 John 3:14), 'We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we

love the brethren' (cf. 2:3). The confirmation of your election is your progress in sanctification. God predestined all the elect to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). Therefore, the reassuring evidence of our election is Christ-likeness.

So verses 10 and 11 conclude: If you do these things (referring back to vv. 5–7), you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.' Virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly affection, love—these are not the wages that we pay to earn entrance into the eternal kingdom, but they are the necessary evidence that our trust in God's promise is genuine, and in that way they are the confirmation of our call and election.<sup>55</sup>

Some may struggle with the doctrine of election because it feels impersonal or mechanistic to them. This, however, is not how the Bible portrays election.

#### 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5

<sup>4</sup> For we know, brothers <u>loved by God</u>, that <u>he has chosen</u> you, <sup>5</sup> because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

#### 2 Thessalonians 2:13

<sup>13</sup> But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers <u>beloved by</u> <u>the Lord</u>, because <u>God chose you</u> as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

#### Colossians 3:12-13

<sup>12</sup> Put on then, as <u>God's chosen ones</u>, holy and <u>beloved</u>, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

- 17. Underline the references to love and to election. What is the connection?
- · ANSWER. Although the relationship between God's election and his love is not clearly delineated in these passages, we do note that they appear in conjunction. The passage in Colossians, especially, may suggest that God's

<sup>55</sup> John Piper, "Confirm Your Election," an online sermon at the desiring God website

choice of us is an expression of his love. We probably should not draw a clear line between the two, however, because as we have seen in Deut 7:7 and 10:15, the Bible can use the language of God setting his love upon people to describe his choice of them.

By contrast to the mechanistic picture, the New Testament presents the entire outworking of our salvation as something brought about by a personal God in relationship with personal creatures. God 'destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ' (Eph. 1:5). God's act of election was neither impersonal nor mechanistic, but was permeated with personal love for those whom he chose.<sup>56</sup>

Others struggle with the doctrine of election because they believe that it undercuts missions and evangelism. Again, however, we will see that the Bible presents a much different view.

#### John 10:14-16

<sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know <u>my own</u> and <u>my own</u> know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> And <u>I have other sheep</u> that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

#### Acts 18:9-11

- <sup>9</sup> And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." <sup>11</sup> And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.
  - 18. Underline phrases in these passages which indicate a doctrine of election. Does the doctrine of election encourage or discourage the work of evangelism and missions?
  - ANSWER. The doctrine of election encourages the work of evangelism and missions. Jesus' motivation for bringing others into the one flock is that they are already his. They are his own and they will listen to his voice. The doctrine also motivates Paul to continue preaching in Corinth. Paul knows that his labor can't possibly be in vain because God has already chosen

<sup>56</sup> Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 674.

others to believe who simply need to hear the message in order to be saved. The doctrine of election encourages the believer that our work cannot fail to accomplish what God has intended to do through it.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 150-155

- Start at "Fifth, this truth enables us..." (toward the top of the page)
  - 19. Explain how the truth of election preserves both the urgency and the freedom of biblical obedience.<sup>57</sup>
  - · ANSWER. Biblical obedience is urgent because it is necessary for eternal life. Understanding that God's election of us secures his sanctifying grace preserves this urgency. God will not choose us and then leave us to languish in our old way of life. We must also realize, though, that God's favor toward us is not earned by our works of obedience. Election teaches that God set his favor upon us before we had done anything and this teaching thereby preserves the freedom of obedience. It is not a legalistic burden.
  - 20. Piper lists seven reasons why the doctrine of election is precious to him (143-155). Of these seven, which is the most precious to you? Why?
  - · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

<sup>57</sup> John Piper, The Pleasures of God, Question 36, 361.

# Day 5

#### S INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

The integrative assignment for this lesson will be a number of group presentations on sections of the appendix of *The Pleasures of God*. Your instructor will assign the groups, portion the appendix, and set the parameters for the presentations. These instructions will be given at the conclusion to Lesson 5. Record your specific assignment below.

#### S DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. After you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

Can controversy over the doctrine of election kill the believer's joy in it?
 If so, how?

2. How does God's pleasure in election relate to the pleasure he may take in other aspects of our salvation (e.g., justification, adoption, etc.)?

3. What objections to the doctrine of election have you encountered? How might you respond to such objections?

4. Your own question(s):

#### § ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- $\,\,\rhd\,\,\,$  C. Samuel Storms, Chosen for Life (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007).
- ➤ Tom Schreiner and Bruce Ware, eds. Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).
- ▶ John Piper, "The Elect Obtained It, the Rest Were Hardened," an online sermon at the desiringGod website.

# The Pleasure of God in Bruising the Son

#### S INTRODUCTION

We saw in an earlier lesson that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. We may reasonably conclude, then, that if God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, he must abhor the slaughter of the righteous. If that is true, then how must God feel about the murder of his totally sinless Son?

The most outrageous pleasure in the universe is in the murder of the Son of God....

It just makes me shake when I talk about it because the murder of the Son of God is the greatest sin that ever was committed and God took infinite delight in it.58

Could this be? Could almighty God actually delight in the abandonment, degradation, humiliation, and crucifixion of his own Son? As those who have become comfortably numb to the shocking death of Jesus Christ, we seldom feel the mystery and weight of glory at the cross. John Piper says again,

How could he delight in the taking of his Son's life? I mean, that he would do it is enough of a mystery, that he would put him forward, that he would bruise him—that's mystery enough. But that it says, "it pleased the LORD to bruise him," and that it was a "fragrant offering"—this is part of the Trinitarian overflow of joy, to send the Son.<sup>59</sup>

In this lesson we hope to set forth the brilliance and sheer profundity of the death of Jesus.

<sup>58</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 1," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

<sup>59</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3" an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

#### S LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- articulate the fundamental problem that is resolved by the death of Jesus.
- > explain why God takes pleasure in the butchering of his innocent Son.
- present a doctrine of the atonement which is sensitive to potential distortions.

#### TEACHING NOTES



This lesson may be the most important lesson in the course since it lays bear the heart of the gospel. As you discuss this lesson in class, make sure that every student has an understanding of what the true gospel message is and has an ability to communicate it to others.

Parables and illustrations regarding the death of Jesus sometimes do more harm than good. For example, it is our belief that the commonly known illustration involving God as train conductor is a poor one. According to this illustration, a train conductor sees that an oncoming train, full of passengers, is about to wreck unless the tracks are changed. Tragically, the young son of the train conductor is playing on the tracks where the train needs to go. Without having the time to save his son, the train conductor saves the passengers on the train by sacrificing his own son.

What this illustration does communicate is the compassion of God and the great, personal loss it was to sacrifice his own Son. The illustration, however, is misleading because it does not communicate the Son's voluntary sacrifice or the intentionality of God's plan in sending the Son. Equally misleading, however, are images of a compassionate Son standing between an angry, wrathful Father and a helpless sinner. Again, though it is true that Jesus does rescue sinners from the wrath of God, any such images fail to communicate that the cross was the loving plan of the Father. During this lesson you may choose to discuss illustrations such as the ones above and analyze whether they accurately convey the truth of the gospel. If you think it helpful, you might read to your class the extended (biblical) parable listed as the final resource in the list of additional resources.

Here are some related comments by D. A. Carson, in his book *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000), 72:

Thus, when we use the language of propitiation, we are not to think that the Son, full of love, offered himself and thereby placated (i.e., rendered propitious) the Father, full of wrath. The picture is more complex. It is that the Father, full of righteous wrath against us, nevertheless loved us so much that he sent his Son. Perfectly mirroring his Father's words and deeds, the Son stood over against us in wrath—it is not for nothing that the Scriptures portray sinners wanting to hide from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb—yet, obedient to his Father's commission, offered himself on the cross. He did this out of love both for his Father, whom he obeys, and for us, whom he redeems. Thus God is necessarily both the subject and the object of propitiation. He provides the

propitiating sacrifice (he is the subject), and he himself is propitiated (he is the object). That is the glory of the cross.

And here is an answer that John Piper gave to a question concerning whether it is biblical to speak of the Father "turning his back" on his Son during the crucifixion. This is from the question and answer session of the 2007 conference on *The Pleasures of God* (transcribed from the online conference audio):

So [God] counts the sins of all the elect as being on Jesus. Now God hates sin. And so, metaphorically speaking, he turns away to symbolize in forsaking, "I hate that and I let my Son die. I don't rescue him. I'm turning away and I'm letting him die. And my back is to those sins and to his suffering and I let him die." Now that's one picture. The other picture is, he's watching the incredible obedience of the Son. And he's loving him. He's smelling it as precious. He's seeing his name be glorified. So there I am again at the complexity of God's mind. And I'm just going to retreat there over and over again because he's God. I would expect him to be complex and me to have a difficult time putting these pieces together.

In this lesson we have repeatedly stressed that God, his glory, and his pleasures must be kept at the center of the gospel. How, then, is the God-centered gospel different from the man-centered gospel? We would refer you to Piper's tract *Quest for Joy* or his longer online book *For Your Joy* (both of which can be found at the desiringGod website) as a good examples of a God-centered presentation of the gospel. And here are at least four contrasts that could be made between the God-centered gospel and the man-centered one:

- The God-centered gospel starts with God as the reference point, not ourselves. We must make it clear that God is self-sufficient and that we do not meet any of his "needs." We were created to reflect the glory of God. Any presentation of the gospel which (even subtly) suggests that man is at the center of the universe is a distorted gospel. Likewise, presenting God as lonely or as pleading for our fellowship denies the supremacy of God.
- 2. The God-centered gospel states our problem with respect to God.

  The deepest problem of humankind is that we have slandered the glory of God by our sins, thus incurring the wrath of a holy God. The God-centered gospel frames our deepest problem in relation to God and his glory. The gospel is not fundamentally a message concerning broken human relationships, a damaged self-image, or a failure to realize our

full potential.

- 3. The God-centered gospel focuses on God's solution to the problem. Although a complete gospel presentation must include an invitation to repent and believe, the focus of the gospel is on what God has done through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to reconcile sinners to God. The God-centered gospel magnifies the work of Christ and emphasizes that we cannot contribute anything to that finished work. Salvation is from God and him alone.
- 4. The God-centered gospel focuses on God as the ultimate goal of the gospel. Any suggestion that salvation is the means to greater wealth, earthly success, or self-esteem is a perversion of the gospel. The hope of heaven even can be made into an idol if we do not conceive of our chief and most fundamental joy there as an enjoyment of the glory of God. God will not be used to gain pleasures that do not originate and terminate in him.

Casting the gospel through the lens of God's pleasures is one way to preserve the God-centeredness of the gospel. Where God's pleasure in himself and pleasure in Jesus' death are cherished, people will naturally understand their slanderous sin against the glory of God and the hope of being swept up into the pleasure that God has in himself. (See also *The Pleasures of God*, 195-196.)

#### STUDY GUIDE



## Day 1

#### GOD WAS PLEASED TO CRUSH HIM

In order to understand this lesson (and understand the gospel itself) we must keep in mind what we have learned thus far in the course. God has infinite delight in his Son and infinite delight in his own glory. Everything he does, he does with a view to upholding his glory. He is passionate about his fame and jealous for his name. How, then, must this glorious God regard sin?

#### Romans 1:21-23

<sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

#### Romans 3:9-12

<sup>9</sup> What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, <sup>10</sup> as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

#### Romans 3:23

- $^{23}$  . . . all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .
  - 1. Using these passages as your starting point, what would you say is the central tension of the Bible: Statement A or Statement B (below)? Explain your answer.

Statement A: The central tension of the Bible is how a loving God can send people to hell.

Statement B: The central tension of the Bible is how a just God can send

#### people to heaven.

ANSWER. If God has infinite regard for his own glory and has a passion for displaying it, then sin, as a slander against the glory of God, must be an infinite offense to him. Once put in these terms, the central tension of the Bible immediately becomes how a righteous God who loves his own glory can allow those who belittle his glory to enter his presence and enjoy his glory forever.

Understanding the real nature of the clash between God's glory and our sin is so crucial!

The reason the death of Christ is necessary is because in all that we've seen so far, God has created and he has sustained and he has governed and he has chosen for his own sinners. Now why is that a problem? The world doesn't think it's a problem. The world thinks God should get his act together and do it more quickly and stop hurting so many people with collapsed bridges and tsunamis and cancer and we deserve better. But it is a problem. And the reason it's a problem is because of what sin is.<sup>60</sup>

We will return to this problem in the next day's study, but for now let's look at another text which articulates a pleasure of God.

#### Isaiah 53:6-10

<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. <sup>7</sup> He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. <sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? <sup>9</sup> And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. <sup>10</sup> Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

<sup>60</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

The key verse for our purposes is verse 10. Here are several different translations of this verse:

#### Isaiah 53:10 (English Standard Version)

<sup>10</sup> Yet <u>it was the will of the LORD</u> to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

#### Isaiah 53:10 (King James Version)

<sup>10</sup> Yet it <u>pleased the LORD</u> to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

#### Isaiah 53:10 (New American Standard—Updated Version)

\*\*But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

#### Isaiah 53:10 (New International Version)

<sup>10</sup> Yet <u>it was the LORD's will</u> to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

- 2. Underline significant differences in the translations above. Does Isaiah 53:10 describe a pleasure of God?
- ANSWER. As we will see below, it is probably best to translate the phrase at the beginning and end of the verse as the "pleasure" of the LORD rather than the "will" of the LORD. If this is true, then Isaiah 53:10 does describe a pleasure of God—the pleasure God has in the atoning death of his innocent servant. Even if the word in question is translated as "will," however, we could still say that God has pleasure in his servant's death because God delights in all that he does.

Without a knowledge of the original languages, it is difficult to discern what the translation of Isaiah 53:10 should be. The three verses which follow Isaiah 53:10 below employ the same crucial word as Isaiah 53:10. Perhaps this will allow us to make a more informed decision.

#### Isaiah 53:10 (English Standard Version)

<sup>10</sup> Yet it was the will [Hebrew: haphētz] of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief . . .

#### Isaiah 1:11

"What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight [Hebrew: haphētz] in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

#### Isaiah 62:4

<sup>4</sup> You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight [Hebrew: the noun form of haphētz] Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married.

#### Isaiah 66:3

- <sup>3</sup> He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights [Hebrew: haphētz] in their abominations . . .
  - 3. Should the second, third, and fourth passage affect the way we translate and understand Isaiah 53:10?
  - ANSWER. Yes, the second, third, and fourth passage should inform our translation and understanding of Isaiah 53:10, especially since all four verses were written by the same author. Certainly authors can use a particular word in different ways in different contexts, but the fact that the connotation of delight is clearly intended in the second, third, and fourth passage, should give us pause. Is there any indication that the author of Isaiah would not intend the same connotation in Isaiah 53:10? We think not.

#### REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 157-162

Stop at "The Most Important Paragraph in the Bible"

- 4. Piper states, "I really don't believe it is possible to grasp the central drama of the Bible until we begin to feel this tension" (158). Explain what Piper means by this statement and why he might believe this.
- · ANSWER. According to Piper, the central drama of the Bible consists in the interplay of two great themes: the "theme of God's passion to promote his glory" (158) and the "theme of God's inscrutable electing love for sinners who have scorned that very glory" (159). These themes are held in tension throughout the Old Testament. The central question of the Bible then becomes how a righteous God could ever forgive unrighteous sinners. Piper believes that it is so important to understand this tension because its resolution is the very message of the gospel.
- 5. According to Piper, who killed Jesus? Explain your answer.
  - a. the Jewish leaders
  - b. the Roman soldiers
  - c. Judas
  - d. Satan
  - e. the entire human race and its sins
  - f. God
- Answer. Though Piper doesn't answer this particular question in the chapter, he would probably say "all of the above." The contention of this chapter is that though wicked humans, Satan, and the sins of his people were all causes of Jesus' death, the ultimate cause was the will of God. God's plan was not thwarted by those involved in Jesus' death; rather, it was fulfilled by their very sinfulness.

# Day 2

#### A PARAGRAPH ABOVE ALL OTHERS?

The Bible contains thousands of paragraphs. So to single out just one paragraph and label it as the most important of all biblical paragraphs is a remarkable claim. That's precisely what John Piper has done with Romans 3:21-26. In his mind, this is the most important paragraph in the Bible:

#### Romans 3:21-26

<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

- 6. If Jesus had not been "put forward" to die, then *why* would God have been unrighteous? Would God have been just to justify the one who has faith in Jesus if Jesus had not shed his blood?
- ANSWER. God would have been unrighteous to pass over sins indefinitely, because sin, by nature, obscures and denounces the glory of God. God cannot maintain an infinite passion for the display of his glory and a proper estimation of his own worth if he tolerates sin. There must be an appropriate basis for forgiven sin. Therefore, God would not be just to justify those who trusted in Jesus if Jesus never offered proper satisfaction for the wrath, holiness, and justice of God.

Let's consider a concrete illustration of the abstract problem of God passing over former sins. The sin of David is well known. Here are a few verses which outline his utter wickedness with regard to Bathsheba and Uriah:

#### 2 Samuel 11:3-5, 14-15, 26-27

- <sup>3</sup> And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" <sup>4</sup> So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. <sup>5</sup> And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."
- <sup>14</sup> In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah.
  <sup>15</sup> In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die."
- <sup>26</sup> When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. <sup>27</sup> And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.

#### 2 Samuel 12:9, 14

<sup>9</sup> Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? . . .  $^{14}$  . . . by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD . . .

And then this, in part, is God's response to David's sin:

#### 2 Samuel 12:13

- <sup>13</sup> David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.
  - 7. Does the LORD's "putting away" of David's sin create a theological problem? If so, describe that problem.
  - ANSWER. We know that David's sin displeased the LORD (2 Samuel 11:27) because by it David despised the word of the LORD (12:9) and utterly scorned the LORD (12:14). As God's appointed king, David was expected to model the holiness and kingship of God. David's sin was therefore a great offense to God's glory and to the grace which he had shown David. How then could the LORD simply put away David's sin? By so doing, wouldn't it appear as if the LORD had little regard for the holiness of his name? And what about the injustice which had been committed against Bathsheba and Uriah? Would this simply be forgotten?

#### John Piper comments on this issue:

Do you feel the problem God is dealing with with all of us? Judges who are worth their salt on the bench of justice don't do that. No judge in Hennepin County, where I live, can look a rapist and a murderer in the face and say, 'Uh, we'll let it go this time.' This is a justice issue that God is dealing with here and you and I don't deserve to be acquitted. And that's what this paragraph [Romans 3:21-26] is solving. This is the most important paragraph in the Bible because it solves the most important problem in the Bible—namely, that God has elected and he's chosen sinners like us and promises us everlasting joy for simply trusting Jesus. That's absolutely unjust! It is unrighteous!<sup>61</sup>

In the quotation above, Piper compares God's forgiveness of sinners to a judge "overlooking" rape and murder. This analogy is helpful in many respects. There are some points, however, at which the analogy breaks down.

- 8. Record some ways in which God's forgiveness of sins is *not* like a judge's acquittal of the guilty in Hennepin County.
- ANSWER. First, we might say that our sin is ultimately directed against the judge. God is the "injured party," whereas the judge in Hennepin County probably has no personal involvement in the case. Second, God as the divine judge is of infinite glory and the offense against him is likewise infinite. So our sin is much worse than rape and murder when considered relative to what God is worthy of. Third, whereas a human judge upholds the law—a standard outside himself—God is upholding his own righteousness in the courtroom. And fourth, when forgiving us, God does not simply let us go. Rather he showers us with blessings, pronounces us righteous, and promises us eternal life with him. This only heightens the sense of apparent injustice in God's merciful and lavish dealings with us.

#### REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 162-166

- Start at "The Most Important Paragraph in the Bible"
- Stop at "Tragic Rejection"

<sup>61</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

- 9. In what way do the "contrasting themes of justice and mercy" come together in Romans 3:23-26?
- ANSWER. The theme of justice is evident in Romans 3:23-26 because Jesus died to vindicate the righteousness of God. Sin is an offense to the glory of God and it must be punished. God's wrath against sin must be appeased. The theme of mercy is present in that forgiveness is extended to those who don't deserve it. Justification is offered as a free gift. These twin themes come together in Jesus' death, which expresses both the justice and mercy of God simultaneously.
- 10. Explain what Piper means when he says, "The God-centeredness of God is the foundation of his grace to the ungodly" (166).<sup>62</sup>
- ANSWER. When Piper speaks of the foundation of grace, he is driving at the question of what motivates God to extend grace. Is grace shown to sinners because of human worth? Is grace given on some sort of divine whim? This question is critical because all our hope rests on the grace of God. By asserting that the God-centeredness of God is the foundation of grace, Piper is claiming that the infinite pleasure that God has in himself is what motivates him both to satisfy his justice and to overflow in grace at the cross. This will be sweet only to those who have an accurate perception of how committed God is to his own glory.

<sup>62</sup> This question modifies Question 13 on page 362 of The Pleasures of God.

# Day 3

#### ROMANS 3 UNDER ATTACK

What we have asserted thus far is morally repugnant to some professing Christians. They cannot comprehend a gospel in which the Son dies to satisfy the Father's wrath and justice. They find the blood and gore of it all to be repulsive. John Piper admits that the cross was violent:

The cross was violent—horribly violent. And it was planned by God that way according to Acts 4:28. And it was God's pleasure to have it so.<sup>65</sup>

Since we believe that the gospel itself is at stake, we will linger on this issue and address some of the distortions of it. In so doing, our aim is to understand better the pleasure of God in the death of his Son.

#### Philippians 2:5-11

<sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- 11. According to this passage, what was it about the cross that caused God to highly exalt Jesus? Did God delight in his Son's pain or suffering on the cross?
- · ANSWER. It is a serious distortion of the atonement to think that God took sadistic pleasure in the pain of his Son. Rather, God delighted in the humility and obedience of the Son (Phil 2:8). By dying on the cross, Jesus

<sup>63</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

was demonstrating the holiness, justice, and love of God. His obedience perfectly glorified the Father. Therefore the Father exalted him. What is pleasing to God in Christ's death is that it was the fitting climax to an entire life of obedience.

One of the main deficiencies of many distortions of Christ's substitutionary death and God's pleasure in it is that the voluntary nature of Christ's sacrifice is not emphasized.

#### John 10:11-18

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.

- 12. Underline all the evidence in the passage above which indicates the voluntary nature of Jesus' death. Why might this be an important aspect of his death to emphasize?
- Answer. When strongly asserting that the LORD was pleased to bruise his Son (Isa 53:10), we must also strongly assert that it was the Son's pleasure to offer up his life. If this is not emphasized, then the understanding of God's pleasure in the Son's death could be distorted and rejected. It is clear from the passage above that Jesus willingly and voluntarily lays down his life as an expression of his love for and knowledge of his own sheep. The Father likewise delights in the Son's free and voluntary giving of his life (John 10:17).

John Piper characterizes the nature of Jesus' satisfaction of his Father's wrath in his death:

That's not child abuse—that's love! Love between each other and love for you. The greatest love that was ever performed. And if this group, scattered all throughout America and Britain and around the world, that are trying to nullify the violence of the cross succeed, there will be no gospel. And there will be no love. And we will sink into hell with all of our sins still upon us, because they weren't laid on Jesus.<sup>64</sup>

Notice the nature of the heavenly praise described in Revelation 5.

#### Revelation 5:9-12

<sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, <sup>10</sup> and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." <sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, <sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

- 13. Do the redeemed saints in heaven take pleasure in the sin-bearing death of Jesus? Explain your answer.
- · ANSWER. Yes, they do, and they praise him for it. Notice the language in v. 9: Jesus ransomed people for God by his blood. The atoning and substitutionary aspects of Jesus' death are being praised. But also notice that the saints delight in the good effects of Jesus' death. By his death Jesus secured the priesthood and kingship of all believers. To doubt and disparage the pleasure of God in the death of his Son is to undermine the praise of Jesus and the heavenly and everlasting pleasure of the saints.

#### 🗳 REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 166-174 (reading footnote 9 is optional)

- Start at "Tragic Rejection"
- Stop at "I Return to Edwards"

<sup>64</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

- 14. The required reading for today is something of an excursus or detour in the chapter. Identify the reason why Piper includes this excursus. Did reading this section accomplish in you Piper's intended effect?
- ANSWER. To use Piper's own words: "I think our understanding will be deeper and our convictions stronger and our passion for God's glory warmer if we take note of this rejection and know why it is wrong" (166). In other words, the excursus is meant to strength our grasp on the doctrine of God's atoning work in the death of his Son. (Student answers will vary as to whether this section accomplished Piper's aim.)
- 15. This section concludes with an important citation from William Childs Robinson. Read this citation carefully and use your English Bible to look up every Scripture reference that is included in the citation. Do you think that the verses Robinson cites support his points? Why or why not?
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

(Though we are in general agreement with Robinson's discussion, there are errors in Robinson's cross-references. You may choose to use these errors to make the point to your students that they shouldn't blindly accept biblical cross-references whenever they are given. Cross-references are an invitation to investigation.)

# Day 4

#### THE PLEASURE OF THE LORD SHALL PROSPER IN HIS HAND

The key verse for this lesson, to which we will now return, is Isaiah 53:10. Here is the context for the verse:

#### Isaiah 53:9-12

<sup>9</sup> And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. <sup>10</sup> Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. <sup>11</sup> Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. <sup>12</sup> Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Notice the dual pleasures in verse 10: the LORD was pleased to bruise him and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

#### Isaiah 53:10 (Piper's Translation)65

<sup>10</sup> The LORD was pleased to bruise him; he has put him to grief [or: caused his pain]; when he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days; the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

- 16. Working from the broader context, what is the relationship between the two pleasures articulated in verse 10?
- ANSWER. Isaiah 53:10 is found within an extended description of the LORD's servant. This servant would die an atoning death, bearing the sins of many (Isaiah 53:11, 12). Through this death this servant would "see his offspring" (53:10), and "make many to be accounted righteous"

<sup>65</sup> Cited from The Pleasures of God, 160.

(53:11) who had formerly been transgressors. Therefore, it is likely that the pleasure of the LORD prospering in his hand refers to God's pleasure in the justification of the ungodly that is accomplished by Jesus' death and resurrection (53:10). The latter pleasure is brought about by the former pleasure.

The pleasure of God expressed in Isaiah 53:10 is also expressed in the following verses in the New Testament:

#### Ephesians 5:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

- 17. How do these two verses above reveal to us a pleasure of God?
- ANSWER. The Old Testament Law is replete with references to fragrant incense and offerings, and aromas that are pleasing to the LORD. It is clear that God took pleasure in these offerings when they were offered as he had proscribed and in a spirit of worship. Therefore, to call Christ's death a "fragrant offering" to God is to communicate God's pleasure in it. This idea also finds support in similar language that is used in Philippians 4:18 (below) to describe a gift that is acceptable and pleasing to God.

#### Philippians 4:18

<sup>18</sup> I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

So to whom is the self-sacrifice of Jesus a fragrance? To God. God stooped down at Calvary to smell what was going on and he said, 'That is sweet.' Now that is incredible because Calvary was horrible. You would've thrown up if you'd been at Calvary.<sup>66</sup>

We will now read a parable that Jesus himself told about his death.

<sup>66</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

#### Matthew 21:33-44

<sup>33</sup> "Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. 34 When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. 35 And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup> Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. <sup>37</sup> Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' <sup>38</sup> But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' 39 And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" 41 They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons." 42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? <sup>43</sup> Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. 44 And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

- 18. How does this parable communicate the Father's pleasure in the death of his Son?
- ANSWER. This parable indicates the strong affection that the Father has for his Son. When the wicked tenants kill the Son, the Father is furious because the Son is so precious to him. But in the biblical interpretation that Jesus offers, the rejection of the Son is called "the Lord's doing." Other passages of Scripture also confirm that the Father sent the Son knowing that the tenants would kill him. Therefore the Father must have had a higher pleasure in view if he was willing to send his Son to death. For a powerful expansion of this parable, which communicates the Father's pleasure in the death of his Son, see the sermon "The Donkey, the Stallion, and the Strategy of the Hills" which concludes the list of additional resources.

The reason that his death vindicates the righteousness of God is that his death calls attention to the value of the glory of God.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3," an online conference message at the

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 174-178

- Start at "I Return to Edwards"
  - 19. List the reasons why the Father delights in the death of his Son.
  - ANSWER. The Father delights in the death of his Son for what the Son accomplishes in his death. The Father also delights in the death of his Son because the Son's suffering and death expressed the great love Jesus had for the Father's glory. Finally, the death of his Son provided the reconciliation between the Father's delight in the honor of his name and the delight he has in the election of those who have scorned that name. So how could God not delight in it?
  - 20. What is the point of Piper's closing parable?
  - ANSWER. The closing parable illustrates certain aspects of Jesus' death for sinners. First, as the parable makes clear, the death of the son is voluntary. He goes to his death willingly and out of love for the people and his father. Second, though the father is involved in the plan to destroy his son, he nevertheless loves him. He can consider the death of his son with joy because he knows what it will accomplish and that his son is going willingly and in love. By revealing the relationship of the father and son at the end of the parable, the parable emphasizes the fact that the deadly plan doesn't negate the father-son relationship but expresses it.

desiringGod website.

# Day 5

#### S INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Compose a brief gospel tract that communicates the reasons why Jesus needed to die and the pleasure of the Father in the death of his Son. Be creative in your presentation, though be sure to incorporate what you have learned in this lesson. You may include a parable about Jesus' death in the tract if you choose to do so. Write this tract in such a way that it could actually be used as an evangelistic tool.

#### S DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. After you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. Has your understanding of Jesus' atoning work on the cross changed through your study in this lesson? If so, how?

2. Do you agree with Piper that Romans 3:23-26 is the most important paragraph in the Bible? If so, why? If not, what would you offer as the single most important biblical paragraph?

3. Piper presents George MacDonald's view of the atonement as an example of a modern rejection of the biblical vision of Christ's death. Have you encountered other modern rejections of the vision presented in Piper's chapter?

4. Your own question(s):

#### S ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Steve Jeffery et al., Pierced for Our Transgressions (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007).
- ▶ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984).
- ▶ John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1991).
- ▶ Charles Hill et al., eds., *The Glory of the Atonement* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004).
- ▶ John Piper, *The Passion of Jesus Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004).
- ▶ C. J. Mahaney, *Living the Cross Centered Life* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2006).
- ▶ John Piper, "The Donkey, the Stallion, and the Strategy of the Hills," an online sermon at the desiringGod website.

# The Pleasure of God in Doing Good to All Who Hope in Him

#### INTRODUCTION

God's goodness is a theme which we will sing for eternity. Most Christians would rightly say that pondering the goodness of God in their life and the lives of others is an occasion for joy. The verses of the following hymn express it well:

Regard me with the favor, Lord, which thou dost bear to thine. O visit thou my soul in love; make thy salvation mine: That I may see thy people's good and in their joy rejoice, and may with thine inheritance exult with cheerful voice.<sup>68</sup>

Few would doubt that seeing the good of the people of God and rejoicing in their joy is something that should come naturally to one who is great in soul. But perhaps few have thought deeply about whether God sees his people's good and in their joy *rejoices*.

This lesson will explore this theme—a theme that is not often expressed in hymns or Christian writing. Does God *rejoice* in his people's good? And would knowing the joy of God in our good increase our own rejoicing and praise?

<sup>68</sup> From the hymn, "O Praise the Lord! O Thank the Lord!" written by Henry L. Mason (1923).

#### S LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- > expound upon the idea that God delights in doing good to his people.
- ▷ explain why God's delight in us is not idolatry.
- identify the turning point in this lesson and explain the importance of the order of this course's lessons (and the order of chapters in Piper's book).

#### TEACHING NOTES



The importance of communicating that God's delight in God must be understood before we attempt to understand God's delight in us can hardly be emphasized too strongly. Therefore, it may be helpful to review the section in the teaching notes to Lesson 1 in which John Piper asserts that our starting point should be "God is angry with us" rather than "God likes you."

The "self-esteem gospel" is rampant in our society, and sadly it can be found in some churches which profess to be evangelical. During the class discussion, then, you will want to confront this mentality. Two of the discussion questions get at this issue. It is our conviction that a teaching is man-centered if it rejoices in people without magnifying the grace or glory of God. This kind of teaching is often couched in language such as "You must believe in yourself," "God wants you to know how special you are," or "Don't doubt your own potential." A question that cuts to the heart of the issue is whether those who claim to be children of God love the centrality of God in the gospel. (See the discussion in *The Pleasures of God*, 196-197.)

This lesson contains two questions in which students must create their own metaphors or illustrations. The point of these exercises is to force students to understand the point of the illustration and then think creatively about how to express it in their own words. We have found that students often grasp an idea more thoroughly if they are forced to communicate that idea in a new and creative way.

Finally, it is our hope that this lesson would not create despair in any true believers. Those with an inclination to doubt will often obsess about whether they are ever pleasing to God. In addition to the two resources listed in the additional resources section, we recommend Piper's book *When I Don't Desire God* for those who want to pursue (and fight for!) joy in God. Although Hebrews 11:6 will be addressed in Lesson 10, you might want to insert it into the discussion here as well. God is pleased when we come to him as receivers, looking for a reward. And God is the final reward!

#### STUDY GUIDE



## Day 1

#### GOD DOES GOOD TO HIS PEOPLE

This lesson begins with the simple assertion that God does good to his people. In fact, God has promised not to turn away from doing good to them—his steadfast love toward them never ceases.

#### Jeremiah 32:39-40

<sup>39</sup> I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. <sup>40</sup> I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.

- Underline all the promises made in the passage above. To whom were these promises originally given? (Search the broader context, if necessary.)
- ANSWER. Although nearly every phrase could be underlined in the passage above, the comprehensive promise is that God will make a new covenant with his people. This new covenant will provide a definitive forgiveness for sins and a new power for obedience (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34). God will be committed to bless his people. As far as the original recipients, it is clear from the broader context that these promises were made to the Jewish people (cf. Jeremiah 32:30, 32).

Your answer to the previous question may have raised an issue for 21st-century Gentile believers. If so, the following passages may address that problem.

#### Galatians 3:29

<sup>29</sup> And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

#### Ephesians 2:12-13

<sup>12</sup>... remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

#### Ephesians 3:6

- <sup>6</sup> This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.
  - 2. Can Gentile believers claim Jeremiah 32:39-40 as promises which are their own?
  - ANSWER. Yes, Gentile believers, by virtue of their union with Christ, can claim all the promises of the new covenant even though the promises weren't originally made to them. This Gentile participation is a mystery that has been revealed. Though once strangers to the covenant, they are now considered offspring of Abraham since they belong to Christ.

Most Christians would probably quickly and happily assert that God does good to them. It is in times of hardship and suffering, however, when it becomes easy to question God's goodness. It is in these times of trouble, though, that we need to know that God will continue to do good to us and *is* doing good to us.

#### Romans 8:28

<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

#### Lamentations 3:19-25

<sup>19</sup> Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! <sup>20</sup> My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. <sup>21</sup> But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: <sup>22</sup> The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; <sup>23</sup> they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. <sup>24</sup> "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." <sup>25</sup> The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.

#### Genesis 50:15, 18-20

<sup>15</sup> When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be

that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him."...

18 His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

- 3. Does the Bible teach that God is good to his people even in the midst of suffering or tragedy? Explain.
- ANSWER. The Bible teaches that God is good to his people all of the time, even in the midst of suffering. Rom 8:28 clearly states that God works all things (including difficult circumstances) together for our good. Lam 3 is remarkable given the context in which it was written. Even after the devastation of Jerusalem and being fully aware of his affliction, the author is able to assert that God's mercies are new every morning. Finally, Gen 50:20 is perhaps the most stark declaration that God means evil for good.

There flows from the cross a disposition toward you as a sinner that is spectacularly, totally, 100% for you. God is for you 100% if, by faith, you are united to Jesus.<sup>69</sup>

#### REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 179-184

- Stop at "He Rejoices to Do You Good"
  - 4. What might Piper be trying to communicate in describing what he imagines when he hears the voice of God singing?
  - · ANSWER. Piper is communicating the terrible majesty of God mingled with his tender intimacy. His images mix the transcendent with the immanent. His description is probably meant to stir our imaginations and affections with the promise that God sings over us. We may sometimes breeze over

<sup>69</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

- a verse like Zephaniah 3:17, but Piper is trying to help us feel the awesome weight of the promise.
- 5. As you read this account of George Mueller, what do you find to be most striking or surprising about the way he dealt with suffering?
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

#### GOD DELIGHTS IN DOING GOOD

As a course which focuses on the pleasures of God, we cannot stop with the wonderful declaration that God does good to his people. We must ask about the manner in which God does good to his people. So let's look at Jeremiah 32 again, this time adding one more verse.

#### Jeremiah 32:39-41

<sup>39</sup> I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. <sup>40</sup> I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. <sup>41</sup> I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

- 6. What is God's disposition when he does his people good? What is the measure or strength of that disposition?
- ANSWER. God not only does good to his people, but he rejoices in doing them good. His disposition or inner state as he blesses his people is one of joy. Furthermore, he rejoices with all his heart and all his soul. The breadth of the heart of God and the depth of his soul is the measure of the delight that he takes in doing good to his people! Jeremiah could hardly have written a more stupendous or staggering promise.

The following passages also give expression to the delight God has in doing good to his people.

#### Deuteronomy 30:9-10

<sup>9</sup> The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, <sup>10</sup> when you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that are written in this Book of the Law, when you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

#### Psalm 35:27

- <sup>27</sup> Let those who delight in my righteousness shout for joy and be glad and say evermore, "Great is the LORD, who delights in the welfare of his servant!"
  - 7. What does the teaching of these two passages add to what we've learned from Jeremiah 32:39-41?
  - ANSWER. Deuteronomy 30:9-10 makes it clear that certain delights that God has in prospering his people are conditioned upon their obedience. We have already seen that God's pleasure in electing us and sending his Son to die for us are in no way dependent on our obedience. So while not all the pleasures of God are in response to our obedience, some are. Psalm 35:27 suggests that part of God's greatness is in his delight of the welfare of his servant. This verse also suggests that we ought to shout for joy in considering God's delight in our welfare.

There are many more passages which we could consider along this theme. Some of them are too precious to pass over. Look at the following passages from Isaiah:

#### Isaiah 62:1-5

<sup>1</sup> For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. <sup>2</sup> The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. <sup>3</sup> You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. <sup>4</sup> You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. <sup>5</sup> For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

#### Isaiah 65:18-19

- <sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. <sup>19</sup> I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.
  - 8. What do these passages teach us about the pleasures of God?

ANSWER. Isaiah 62:5 draws the comparison between a bridegroom's joy in his bride and God's joy in his people. The comparison is made to reassure the people of the intensity and fervency of God's passion and joy. Isaiah 65:18-19 promise that God will rejoice and be glad in his people and create them to be a joy and gladness. We should not be indifferent to the delight God has in us! Considering his passion for us ought to make us rejoice and praise him.

Sometimes the most well-known verses hide even greater theological riches. Compare the following translations of Psalm 23:6.

#### Psalm 23:6 (English Standard Version)

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and <u>mercy</u> shall <u>follow</u> me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

#### Psalm 23:6 (King James Version)

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and <u>mercy</u> shall <u>follow</u> me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

#### Psalm 23:6 (New American Standard—Updated Version)

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and <u>lovingkindness</u> will <u>follow</u> me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

#### Psalm 23:6 (New International Version)

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and <u>love</u> will <u>follow</u> me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

#### Psalm 23:6 (New Jerusalem Bible)

<sup>6</sup> Kindness and <u>faithful love</u> <u>pursue</u> me every day of my life. I make my home in the house of Yahweh for all time to come.

#### Psalm 23:6 (New Living Translation)

- <sup>6</sup> Surely your goodness and <u>unfailing love</u> will <u>pursue</u> me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.
  - 9. Underline all the significant differences between these translations (above). Why might these differences influence our interpretation of the verse? Might this verse teach us anything about the pleasures of God?

ANSWER. The differences in the first set of underlined words might cause us to wonder how much emotion is connoted in the word "mercy" or "love." The second set of underlined words causes us to ask whether these personified attributes are following one who leads (like a dog with his master) or whether they are chasing after him (like a hound with a fox). Especially if the last two translations are the most accurate (and we believe they are), these verses teach us that God pursues us with his love, which would imply his eagerness and joy in blessing us.

And now let us consider, once again, the amazing words of comfort spoken through the prophet Zephaniah, which were mentioned earlier.

#### Zephaniah 3:14-17

- <sup>14</sup> Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! <sup>15</sup> The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. <sup>16</sup> On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. <sup>17</sup> The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."
  - 10. Why might God reveal to his people through his prophet that he will rejoice over them with singing?
  - Answer. God's words to his people are meant for their comfort and encouragement (v. 16). His people need to know that God is not only in their midst and not only does he intend to save them. God communicates to them that he rejoices over them with gladness and will exult over them with loud singing. The repetition of words describing God's joy in doing good to his people should remove any doubt that they may have about whether God is really for them. Knowing of God's delight in them will only add to their comfort and encouragement and praise.

#### SING FOR JOY!

Before coming to the assigned reading, examine just one more passage which speaks of God's pleasure in his people.

#### Psalm 149:3-5

<sup>3</sup> Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre! <sup>4</sup> For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation. <sup>5</sup> Let the godly exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their beds.

- 11. What is the logical relationship between verses 3, 4, and 5?
- ANSWER. The presence of the word "for" at the beginning of v. 4 indicates that the fact of God's pleasure in his people ought to serve as the basis of their praise. And with v. 5 immediately following, though there is no word such as "therefore," it is most likely that the exultation and singing of the godly is prompted by their consideration of the LORD's pleasure. Thus, we can say again that our knowledge of God's pleasure in us ought to strengthen our pleasure in him.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 184-194

- Start at "He Rejoices to Do You Good"
- Stop at the end of page 194
  - 12. Piper compares our joy to "little geysers that gurgle and sputter and pop erratically," while God's delight is like the inexhaustible Niagara Falls (185). Think of your own comparative metaphor that illustrates the same point and record it below.
  - · ANSWER. Answers will vary.
  - 13. Using Piper's discussion of Luke 15, respond to the following statement: "There are relatively few statements, especially in the New Testament,

that explicitly state that God takes delight in doing good to his people. Therefore, even if this is true, it cannot be a significant aspect of biblical teaching."

- ANSWER. Piper's discussion of Luke 15 demonstrates that the concept of the Father rejoicing over us with all his heart may be present in a parable or teaching without the explicit language. In many of the metaphors used for God in the Gospels the presence of divine joy is assumed. Furthermore, the New Testament has many more statements about the love of God for us, and we would contend that a necessary element in that love is a rejoicing to do us good.

The main thing in Christian love is benevolence, or goodwill to others. Benevolence is that disposition which leads us to have a desire for or to take delight in the good of another. That is the main thing in Christian love—yes, the most essential thing in it. Our love is to be an imitation of the eternal love and grace of God and of the dying love of Christ, which consists of benevolence or goodwill to men, as was sung by the angels at his birth (Luke 2:14). Christian love is goodwill—a spirit to delight in and seek the good of those who are the objects of that love.<sup>70</sup>

- 14. Under the section "What If You Can't Believe Such Goodness" Piper raises a number of hypothetical objections to the truth of Zephaniah 3:17. Which objection is the one which you would be most likely to raise? Does Piper's response satisfactorily address that objection?
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.
- 15. Summarize the objection Piper addresses at the bottom of page 192. Then summarize his response.
- ANSWER. The objection that Piper raises is whether God can take the foremost pleasure in his own fame and yet still genuinely delight in a sinner who has dishonored him. His answer is that it is possible for God to delight in us when we seek refuge in his name. That is because seeking refuge in God honors God, so his delight in us is still, at its foundation, a delight in himself.

<sup>70</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *His Redeeming Love*, compiled by Judith Couchman and Lisa Marzano (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Vine Books, 2001), 95.

#### DOING GOOD TO THOSE WHO DO NOT TURN FROM HIM

This day's study marks a transition in the course. Thus far we have considered the delight that God has quite apart from our own feeble responses of faith. But as we've asserted repeatedly that God takes pleasure in us, we are forced to ask what it is about us that brings God pleasure.

#### Psalm 147:10-11

<sup>10</sup> His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, <sup>11</sup> but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

- 16. How is it possible for a person to "fear" God and "hope" in him simultaneously?
- · ANSWER. As will be argued in the required reading, it is possible to fear God and hope in him simultaneously. For godly fear is not so dark as to drive out hope completely. And godly hope is not so boastful as to drive out a fearful reverence for God. As Piper says, "Hope turns fear into a trembling and peaceful wonder; and fear takes everything trivial out of hope and makes it earnest and profound" (199).

Psalm 147:10 may be confusing to some. Why doesn't God take pleasure in these things? Doesn't God delight in all that he has made? The following verses may bring the needed clarification.

#### Proverbs 21:31

<sup>31</sup> The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD.

#### Psalm 20:7

<sup>7</sup> Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.

#### Psalm 33:16-19

<sup>16</sup> The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. <sup>17</sup> The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue. <sup>18</sup> Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, <sup>19</sup> that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine.

- 17. According to these verses, why might God not delight in the strength of a horse (Psalm 147:10)? Didn't God create a horse's strength and didn't we already learn that God delights in his creation?
- ANSWER. A contrast is drawn in Psalm 147:10-11: God does not delight in the strength of a horse but in those who fear him. This contrast would suggest that a horse's strength can sometimes be substituted for the fear of God, which is exactly what we see in the verses above. God does not delight in the strength of a horse when a horse is trusted for military success instead of God. The meaning of Psalm 147:10 could probably be extended legitimately to anything we can trust in as a substitute for the living God. God takes no pleasure in idols.

God is good to *all* people. And certainly we must say that God takes some pleasure in doing good even to the wicked, since God delights in all he does (Lesson 3). Read the following passages with a view toward the common grace of God.

#### Matthew 5:44-45

<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

#### Acts 17:24-25

<sup>24</sup> The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, <sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

#### Romans 2:4

<sup>4</sup> Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

#### 2 Peter 3:7-9

- <sup>7</sup> But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. <sup>8</sup> But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.
  - 18. What is the difference in God's pleasure in doing good to all people and God's pleasure in doing good to all who hope in him?
  - ANSWER. The passages listed above bear witness to the common grace of God, which he bestows on all men. God takes pleasure in giving and sustaining human life and in showing kindness and patience that is meant to lead to repentance. The difference for those who hope in him is that with them, God has the additional pleasure of electing them for salvation, showing them saving grace, and being glorified in their lives by their trust and satisfaction in him.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 195-202

- Start at "How Do We Please God?"
  - 19. Meditate on Piper's definition of the grace of God: "Grace is the pleasure of God to magnify the worth of God by giving sinners the right and power to delight in God without obscuring the glory of God" (196). Rewrite this definition of grace in your own words. How does this definition fit into the transition that Piper describes in this section?
  - · ANSWER. "Grace is the overflow of delight that God has in himself whereby God makes much of his own worth by giving sinners the blood-bought capacity to delight in him. In other words, when sinners are satisfied in God, God is glorified. This only happens by grace and it is purchased by the blood of Jesus in such a way that God's righteousness is not compromised." This definition includes the idea of sinners delighting in the glory of God, which is precisely the kind of human response which pleases God.

- 20. Piper's illustration of an explorer in a Greenland glacier demonstrates how fear and hope can mingle in the same experience. Create your own illustration that demonstrates the same point and record it below.
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

Fear does not rob us of our joy for two reasons. One is that it drives us to Christ where there is safety. The other is that even when we get there the part of fear that Christ relieves is the hope-destroying part. But he leaves another part—the part we want to feel forever. There is an awe or wonder or trembling in the presence of grandeur that we want to feel as long as we are sure it will not destroy us. This trembling does not compete with joy; it is part of joy. People go to terrifying movies because they know the monster cannot get into the theater. They want to be scared as long as they are safe. For some reason it feels good. This is an echo of the truth that they were made for God. There is something profoundly satisfying about being 'frightened' when we cannot be hurt. It is the best when the trembling comes from the grandeur of holiness.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71</sup> John Piper, "Rejoice with Trembling," an online article at the desiringGod website.

#### ♦ INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

For this lesson's integrative assignment, imagine that you are in a counseling situation. The person to whom you are ministering is struggling with depression and shame. Even though they profess to believe in Jesus and in his work on their behalf, they do not sense that God has any delight in them. Record below the approach you might adopt in counseling such a person. Include in your counsel what you have learned in this lesson. Compose your counsel in such a way that God's glory, and not the person's intrinsic worth, is the basis for their hope.



#### **S** DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. After you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. Would God be good to us if he didn't delight in his merciful acts on our behalf?

2. Is there a way of presenting God's delight in us that is decidedly "mancentered"? If so, how?

3. Should knowing that God delights in us boost our "self-esteem"? What should Christians think of the concept of "self-esteem"?

4. Your own question(s):

#### § ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ⊳ John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1995).
- ▶ John Piper, When the Darkness Does Not Lift (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006).

# The Pleasure of God in the Prayers of the Upright

#### S INTRODUCTION

There is a truly beautiful prayer in the ninth chapter of the book of Daniel. It begins with praise to God: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love . . ." (Daniel 9:4). It continues in confession: "we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. . . . To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame . . ." (Daniel 9:5, 7). Daniel then pleads for mercy: "O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill" (Daniel 9:16). And Daniel's pleas are based on the glory of God: "for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary . . . Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name" (Daniel 9:17, 19).

To invest an entire lesson in studying this weighty prayer from a great man of God would be worthwhile. For our purposes, however, the response from heaven is equally interesting:

#### Daniel 9:22-23

O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved.

Daniel is greatly loved. God has delighted in his prayer and is quick to answer. This lesson will investigate the precious truth that God is delighted when his children call upon his name.

#### S LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- > explain why the self-sufficiency of God is vital to prayer.
- > relate our hope in God to the prayers we offer up to him.
- ▶ provide examples of prayer that are pleasing in God's sight.

#### TEACHING NOTES



This lesson is the outworking of chapters 4, 5, and 7 in *The Pleasure of God*. During the class discussion, ensure that your students see the connections. Since God has pleasure in his fame, he would naturally delight in prayers that give expression to our pleasure in his fame or our desire to see his fame spread throughout the earth. Likewise, since God has pleasure in election, he would naturally delight in prayers that acknowledge his sovereignty in salvation and pray for his work of conversion. And since God is pleased to do good to those who hope in him, he would naturally delight in prayers which convey our hope in him and which ask him for blessings for his name's sake. Showing your students these kinds of connections will keep God's pleasure in his glory central.

Notice the following statements in the eighth chapter of *The Pleasures of God*. Each statement shares a similar construction:

Thus the intensity of God's delight in his glory is the measure of his pleasure in the prayers of his people. (216)

Therefore the intensity of God's pleasure in prayer is proportionate to the intensity of his passion that all his purposes be complete. (226)

God's pleasure in the prayers of his people is proportionate to his passion for world evangelization. (227)

The idea that is expressed by these three statements is a powerful one. Hopefully the students will think deeply about it as they complete the integrative assignment.

As with other lessons, it might be tempting to broaden the scope of what you cover in class. You might be tempted to communicate everything you know about prayer. Remember, however, that the focus of this lesson is on God's pleasure in prayer and why our prayers please him. Though there is undoubtedly much more to say about prayer in the Christian life, keep the conversation focused on the main points.

#### STUDY GUIDE



## Day 1

#### PLEASING THE GOD WHO HAS NO NEEDS

The transition that was made in the last lesson has set a new trajectory for the remainder of the course. This lesson and most of the ones which follow will consider the question of how we can bring pleasure to God. What is it *in us* that brings God delight?

The very assertion that we can please God is a bold one that needs biblical support.

#### Romans 2:28-29

<sup>28</sup> For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. <sup>29</sup> But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

#### 1 Corinthians 4:5

<sup>5</sup> Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

#### 2 Corinthians 5:6-9

- <sup>6</sup> So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, <sup>7</sup> for we walk by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup> Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup> So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.
  - 1. What deduction, common to each of these texts, is so striking?
  - ANSWER. The deduction that can be drawn from each of these texts is that it is possible for believers to please God, even though we still struggle with sin. Romans 2:29 speaks of God praising the one who is a Jew inwardly; 1 Corinthians 4:5 looks forward to the final judgment when each will receive

commendation from God; and 2 Corinthians 5:9 implies that aiming to please God is not a vain endeavor.

Paul was one who made it his aim to please God (2 Corinthians 5:9). He was not unique in this respect. The Pharisees, also, would have claimed the same aim as Paul. Yet here are some of Jesus' words to these religious leaders:

#### Luke 16:10-15

<sup>10</sup> "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. <sup>11</sup> If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? <sup>12</sup> And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? <sup>13</sup> No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." <sup>14</sup> The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed [Jesus]. <sup>15</sup> And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

- 2. Is God pleased by all human efforts to secure his praise? If not, what is needed in order to make our efforts to please him *actually pleasing* in his sight?
- ANSWER. The Pharisees had a reputation in the first century as those who were eager to please God with their devotion and piety. But as Jesus declares, they are only justifying themselves before men and are committing abominations in the sight of God (v. 15). Though it is possible to please God, it is also possible to displease him as one tries to please him. What is actually pleasing to God is one who serves God as his master (and not money or anything else). God is pleased by the one who loves him from the heart.

Jesus makes it clear that we ought to make it our aim to serve God alone. But how is it that we could serve the self-sufficient God? These verses from Isaiah provide a clue.

#### Isaiah 46:1-7

<sup>1</sup> Bel bows down; Nebo stoops; their idols are on beasts and livestock; these things you carry are borne as burdens on weary beasts. <sup>2</sup> They stoop; they bow

down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity.

<sup>3</sup> "Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; <sup>4</sup> even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save. <sup>5</sup> To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike? <sup>6</sup> Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales, hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! <sup>7</sup> They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble."

#### Isaiah 64:4

- <sup>4</sup> From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him.
  - 3. According to these passages, what is the difference between the false gods Bel and Nebo and the true and living God of Israel?
  - ANSWER. The false gods are powerless to save those who worship them. They must be crafted, carried, and served. The true God acts on behalf of those who wait for him. He has created Israel, carries Israel, and Israel is served by him. The true God possesses all the strength and help that Israel needs. He has no needs and thus is able to serve those who trust in him.

The Giver gets the glory. So all serving that honors God must be a receiving. Which means that all service must be performed by prayer.<sup>72</sup>

#### REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 203-210

• Stop at "More Pleasure in Meeting Needs Than Making Demands"

<sup>72</sup> John Piper, Desiring God, 173.

- 4. What were your first impressions as you read about the prayer lives of Mueller and Hyde? (And remember Piper's warning on page 207 about being thrilled by "radical devotion" rather than "divine beauty.")
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.
- Explain in your own words how Piper can focus on "what it is that God loves in us" (207) without leaving the subject of God's own worth and excellency.
- · ANSWER. One of the foundational premises of this book is that "the worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love." Therefore, when we examine the objects of God's love we thereby discover a window through which we may look upon his worth and excellency. A great man or woman will have strong affections for things that are noble and righteous, not base and degrading. And a great man or woman will maintain a proper balance in their affections, loving the most excellent things most. We may say the same of God.

#### PLEASING GOD THROUGH PRAYER

The study and reading in Day 1 reviewed key ideas which we will now build on. We come to the central verse of the lesson, translated by the various versions as follows:

#### Proverbs 15:8 (English Standard Version)

<sup>8</sup> The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.

#### Proverbs 15:8 (King James Version)

<sup>8</sup> The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

#### Proverbs 15:8 (New American Standard—Updated Version)

<sup>8</sup> The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.

#### Proverbs 15:8 (New International Version)

<sup>8</sup> The LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him.

In order to understand why the prayer of the upright pleases God, we will first look at the first half of Proverbs 15:8 and consider why the sacrifice of the wicked in an abomination to him. Certainly the proverb doesn't pair the two halves of Proverbs 15:8 verse accidentally.

#### Proverbs 15:8

 $^{8}$  The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD . . .

#### Deuteronomy 17:1

<sup>1</sup> You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep in which is a blemish, any defect whatever, for that is an abomination to the LORD your God.

#### Genesis 4:3-5

<sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, <sup>4</sup> and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

#### Hebrews 11:4, 6

- <sup>4</sup> By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. . . . <sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
  - 6. According to these passages, why might God not delight in—and, in fact, hate—the sacrifices of the wicked?
  - ANSWER. Why does God consider a blemished sacrifice an abomination? Because God is dishonored when we hold back what we think we need for ourselves and offer him that which we don't really want. The wicked offer lame sacrifices because they don't believe that God will really meet their needs. This dishonors God (cf. Malachi 1:6-14). Deeper than this, though, is that any sacrifice of the wicked is not offered from a heart of faith which looks to God for reward. Without faith, all sacrifices of the wicked dishonor God. And God hates for his glory to be mocked.

Let's now consider the second half of Proverbs 15:8 by looking at another passage from Scripture which mirrors both halves of the proverb.

#### Proverbs 15:8 (New American Standard—Updated Version)

<sup>8</sup> The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.

#### Isaiah 66:1-4

<sup>1</sup> Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? <sup>2</sup> All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. <sup>3</sup> "He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's

neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations; <sup>4</sup> I also will choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight."

- 7. What is it about the prayers of the upright that make them pleasing to God?
- ANSWER. Isaiah 66:3-4 again asserts that the sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination because their souls do not delight in God but in things in which God does not delight. This would suggest that the one whom God commends would be one who delights in God. This is confirmed in v. 2 which asserts that those who are humble, contrite, and who tremble at God's word are those to whom God will look. God does not have needs (66:1-2a), so we can reasonably infer that prayers that will be pleasing to God are lowly and humble prayers which acknowledge the fact that we have needs which only God can meet.

The teaching of Isaiah 66:2 is also seen clearly in this prayer of David:

#### Psalm 51:15-17

<sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. <sup>16</sup> For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. <sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Finally, let's compare the key passage from last lesson to the key passage from this one:

#### Psalm 147:10-11

<sup>10</sup> His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, <sup>11</sup> but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

#### Proverbs 15:8 (New American Standard—Updated Version)

<sup>8</sup> The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.

- 8. What is the relationship between the pleasure of God described in the first passage and the pleasure of God described in the second passage?
- ANSWER. The kind of fear and hope that pleases God inevitably expresses itself in prayer. The upright will not call upon a horse or the "legs of a man" to help him in his time of need; the upright will call upon God. So the prayers of the upright are God's delight because they are manifestations of our hope in him. Therefore, our prayers to God glorify God when they are expressions of hope in God which, as we have seen, glorifies God.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 210-216

- Start at "More Pleasure in Meeting Needs Than Making Demands"
- Stop at the end of page 216
  - 9. In this section, Piper asserts that "when a wicked person comes to God and makes a sacrifice with a heart of penitence, his sacrifice is accepted" (212). Think of biblical passages which could be used to support this assertion and record them below. How is this assertion being used in Piper's argument?
  - ANSWER. Multiple verses could be used to support the idea that a sacrifice offered with a penitent heart is accepted. After great wickedness, David says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:17; cf. 51:19). Another example would be the tax collector of Luke 18:9-14. See also Ezekiel 18:25-29. Piper's assertion is used in his argument to answer a potential objection. It is not just the hypocrisy of the wicked that God hates, but also their lack of brokenness over their sin
  - 10. What practical difference does it make to know that "upright does not mean perfect" (214)?
  - ANSWER. When some believers read "the prayer of the upright pleases him," they may despair because they have an unbiblical view of what it

means to be upright. Those who struggle with depression, especially, may think that nothing they can do pleases the LORD. When they understand, however, that the upright are simply those who recognize their need of God and cry out to him for help, they may be encouraged to pray to God and realize that God's delight is in meeting us in our weakness and frailty.

#### PRAYERS TO THE GOD OF CONVERSION

We've established that God delights in the prayers of the upright. But what kind of prayers do the upright pray? What kind of prayers does God delight in and delight in answering? Consider two prayers, written by the apostle Paul and inspired by the Holy Spirit:

#### Romans 10:1

<sup>1</sup> Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

#### 2 Thessalonians 3:1

<sup>1</sup> Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you.

#### 11. Why would God take delight in this type of prayers?

ANSWER. God would be pleased by these prayers for a several (related) reasons. First, these prayers flow from a heart that delights in God and wants others to share in that delight. Second, these prayers are prayers for God to be glorified. Third, if answered, these prayers would result in more people praying and more people delighting in God. Fourth, these prayers acknowledge the sovereignty of God in salvation. Fifth, one of these prayers (2 Thessalonians 3:1) acknowledges the primacy of God's word in salvation. And sixth, these prayers recognize that God often works in response to the prayers of his people.

Now mull over several biblical passages which describe conversion.

#### Ezekiel 11:19

<sup>19</sup> And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh . . .

#### Deuteronomy 30:6

<sup>6</sup> And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your

offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

#### 2 Timothy 2:24-26

<sup>24</sup> And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, <sup>25</sup> correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup> and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

#### Acts 16:14-15

<sup>14</sup> One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. <sup>15</sup> And after she was baptized..

#### Ephesians 2:4-5

- <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved . . .
  - 12. Choose two or three of the above passages to turn into prayers for the salvation of the lost. Record your prayers below.
  - ANSWER. Student answers will vary. See The Pleasures of God, 218 and 220, for examples.
  - 13. Is it possible to pray such prayers for conversion (as you just composed) if you don't believe in the sovereignty of God in election and salvation?
  - ANSWER. If the prayers that were composed in response to Question 12 echoed the sovereignty of God that is evident in the passages above, then it would not be possible to pray such prayers with a lack of belief in the sovereignty of God in election and salvation. If such prayers were prayed by those who believed in ultimate human self-determination, these prayers would be inconsistent with their theology. Our Spirit-prompted desire to pray such prayers is itself evidence that God is sovereign and that we want him to be so.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 217-220

- Start at "Prayer and Election"
- Stop at "Prayer in His Name to Spread His Fame"

After completing the required reading, review the following statements from The *Pleasures of God* concerning prayer:

Prayer is one of God's appointed means of bringing the elect to faith. Thus God loves [prayers for the salvation of the lost] with the very passion that moved him to choose a people for his glory. (217)

Thus God has pleasure in [prayers that assume the sovereignty of God in election] because it ascribes to him the right and honor to be the free and sovereign God that he is in election and salvation. (220)

Prayer is one of God's appointed ways of bringing the elect to faith. Therefore, God's delight in prayer will be the echo of his delight in election and its saving goals. (367)

- 14. In the quotations above, Piper is explaining why God delights in prayers for the salvation of the lost. Summarize his explanation below using your own words.
- ANSWER. We have already seen that God delights in the unconditional election of sinners because such an election highlights his mercy, sovereignty, and wisdom. If prayer is one of the God-ordained means by which God brings the elect to salvation, then God will delight in prayers for salvation for the same reasons he delights in election. Prayers made for the conversion of the lost highlight the mercy, sovereignty, and wisdom of God.
- 15. Compose a prayer for someone you know who is lost. Your prayer should reflect God's sovereignty and God's delight in your prayer.
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

If someone now says, 'O.K., granted that a person's conversion is ultimately determined by God, I still don't see the point of your prayer. If God chose before the

foundation of the world who would be converted, what function does your prayer have?' My answer is that it has a function like that of preaching: How shall the lost believe in whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach unless they are sent (Romans 10:14f.)? Belief in Christ is a gift of God (John 6:65; II Timothy 2:25; Ephesians 2:8), but God has ordained that the means by which men believe on Jesus is through the preaching of men. It is simply naive to say that if no one spread the gospel all those predestined to be sons of God (Ephesians 1:5) would be converted anyway. The reason this is naive is because it overlooks the fact that the <u>preaching</u> of the gospel is just as predestined as is the believing of the gospel: Paul was set apart for his preaching ministry before he was born (Galatians 1:15), as was Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5). Therefore, to ask, 'If we don't evangelize, will the elect be saved?' is like asking, 'If there is no predestination, will the predestined be saved?' God knows those who are his and he will raise up messengers to win them. If someone refuses to be a part of that plan, because he dislikes the idea of being tampered with before he was born, then he will be the loser, not God and not the elect. 'You will certainly carry out God's purpose however you act but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or like John.' (Problem of Pain chapter 7, Anthology, p 910, cf. p 80)

Prayer is like preaching in that it is a human act also. It is a human act that God has ordained and which he delights in because it reflects the dependence of his creatures upon Him. He has promised to respond to prayer, and his response is just as contingent upon our prayer as our prayer is in accordance with his will. 'And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us' (I John 5:14). When we don't know how to pray according to God's will but desire it earnestly, 'the Spirit of God intercedes for us according to the will of God' (Romans 8:27).

In other words, just as God will see to it that His Word is proclaimed as a means to saving the elect, so He will see to it that all those prayers are prayed which He has promised to respond to. I think Paul's words in Romans 15:18 would apply equally well to his preaching and his praying ministry: 'I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles.' Even our prayers are a gift from the one who 'works in us that which is pleasing in his sight' (Hebrews 13:21). Oh, how grateful we should be that He has chosen us to be employed in this high service! How eager we should be to spend much time in prayer!"

<sup>73</sup> John Piper, "The Sovereignty of God and Prayer," an online article at the

#### PRAYERS TO THE MISSIONARY GOD

If prayer is a means to the salvation of the lost and the spread of the gospel, then the preaching of the word is also a means to those same ends. How, then, does prayer relate to preaching?

#### 2 Thessalonians 3:1

<sup>1</sup> Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you ..

#### Romans 1:15-16

<sup>15</sup> So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. <sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

#### 1 Peter 1:23

<sup>23</sup> . . . you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God . . .

#### Ephesians 6:18-20

<sup>18</sup>... To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, <sup>19</sup> and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

#### Colossians 4:3-4

<sup>3</sup> At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— <sup>4</sup> that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

16. What is the relationship between prayer and the word of God (or the gospel)?

desiringGod website.

• ANSWER. The passages above demonstrate that God uses the preaching of the word as the direct instrument in creating faith. As Rom 10:17 says, "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." God will often use the prayers of his people, however, as that which releases the power of the word. In other words, conversion is a gracious work of the Holy Spirit brought about in response to the preached word and often granted by God as an answer to prayer.

The most God-honoring and effective prayers are often prayers that claim the promises of God. Look at the following promises and definite declarations regarding God's glory among the nations.

#### Genesis 12:3

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

#### Psalm 22:27-28

<sup>27</sup> All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. <sup>28</sup> For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.

#### Psalm 86:8-10

- <sup>8</sup> There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours. <sup>9</sup> All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. <sup>10</sup> For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.
  - 17. Turn the above passages into prayers for the worldwide triumph of God's mission. Record your prayers below.
  - ANSWER. Student answers will vary. Here are some examples:
    - A1. "God, bless all the families of the earth as you have promised."
    - A2. "O LORD, we desire that all the nations of the earth would worship you for your great kingship. Let them recognize that you and you alone rule over them."
    - A3. "There is none like you, O Lord. You certainly do great and wondrous things. Cause all the nations you have made to bow down before you."

- 18. Why would God be pleased with such prayers (as you just composed)?
- ANSWER. If the prayers that were composed in response to Question 17 echoed what is evident in the passages above—namely, the global kingship of God and a desire for his glory to spread among all nations—then God would be pleased with such prayers because they acknowledge his glory and express God's own desires. Since God has pleasure in his fame, he will certainly have pleasure in prayers which exult his fame and yearn for it to spread.

The further reading for today is Piper's closing appeal to put churches and prayer on a "wartime footing." We recommend that you read this section if you have time.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 220-227

- Start at "Prayer in His Name to Spread His Fame"
- Stop at the end of page 227

In a similar section in another of Piper's books, *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, Piper writes the following:

Now we can say again, safely and stunningly, what the awesome place of prayer is in the purpose of God to fill the earth with his glory. Not only has God made the accomplishment of his purposes hang on the preaching of the word, but he has also made the success of that preaching hang on prayer. God's goal to be glorified will not succeed without the powerful proclamation of the gospel. And that gospel will not be proclaimed in power to all the nations without the prevailing, earnest, faithfilled prayers of God's people. This is the awesome place of prayer in the purpose of God for the world. That purpose won't happen without prayer.<sup>74</sup>

- 19. What does the quotation above have to do with the pleasure of God?
- ANSWER. As we have seen, the foremost pleasure of God is his pleasure in beholding the reflection of his own glory. God's delight is to "fill the earth with his glory," as it says above. If this is true, then God would take pleasure

<sup>74</sup> John Piper, Let the Nations Be Glad, 66.

in the primary means ordained to accomplish that end: the preaching of the word. And if God has established prayer as the power behind preaching, then he would necessarily delight in prayers for the spread of his word and his glory.

- 20. Explain why God does not have pleasure in "materialistic evangelical praying" (227).
- ANSWER. As Piper explains, there exists the temptation for evangelicals to ask God to add to their own earthly comfort, whether it be prayers for a better house, a better family, or better health. Though these prayers may not be wrong in themselves, the crucial question is whether these prayers are flowing from a heart that has God as its foundational joy and are directed toward the advance of his kingdom. If not, then God is being used a means to what is regarded as a greater end. God is not honored thereby and thus he has no pleasure in such prayers (cf. James 4:3-4).

# S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 228-231

Start at "A Closing Appeal for Wartime Praying"

# Day 5

# S INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Suppose that you were assigned to teach a lesson to children in junior high (grades 7 and 8). The thesis of your lesson is that "the intensity of God's delight in his glory is the measure of his pleasure in the prayers of his people" (*The Pleasures of God*, 216). Design a way in which to communicate this truth in a clear and engaging way. Record your lesson plan or outline below.



# **S** DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. After you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. In the past, have you viewed God as having more pleasure in meeting needs or making demands?

2. Read Daniel 9:15-19 aloud. How does Daniel's prayer relate to what we've studied in this course thus far?

3. What are the most common things you pray for? Do any of your prayers fall under the category of "materialistic evangelical praying"?

4. Your own question(s):

# **\$** ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992).
- ▶ John Piper, *A Hunger for God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997).
- ▶ John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God*, chapters 9 and 10.
- ▶ Richard Pratt Jr., Pray with Your Eyes Open (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 1999).
- ► Teach Us To Pray, ed. D. A. Carson (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002).
- ► Charles Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Sermons on Prayer* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007).

# The Pleasure of God in Personal Obedience and Public Justice

# **♦** INTRODUCTION

Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). Therefore, he rightfully demands obedience from all people. There is not a single person among the billions of people who now live on this earth who can legitimately say, "Jesus has no claim on my life." He does. And he demands that everyone bow the knee.

John Piper has written a book entitled *What Jesus Demands from the World*. In the introduction to this book he writes the following:

A few words about the title What Jesus Demands from the World. I am aware that the word demands is jarring to many modern ears. It feels harsh, severe, strict, stark, austere, abrasive. The reason I choose that word is to confront some of the underlying causes for why it would feel offensive to portray Jesus as demanding. My conviction is that if we rightly understand Jesus' demands, and if we are willing to find in him our supreme joy, his demands will not feel severe but sweet.<sup>75</sup>

That is one of the secondary goals of this lesson—for the demand of obedience to feel sweet and not severe. We will accomplish that secondary goal through our primary goal of examining the biblical truth that God not only demands our obedience, but also delights in it. This is good news indeed, as we shall see.

<sup>75</sup> John Piper, What Jesus Demands from the World (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 24.

# S LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- > articulate reasons why God delights in obedience.
- ▶ explain why God's pleasure in obedience is, in fact, good news.
- > explain in what sense public justice is pleasing to God.

# TEACHING NOTES



By this point in the course, we hope that your students are beginning to grasp Piper's arguments more easily and maybe even are anticipating his conclusions. If that is the case, you may decide that the lesson material can be covered more quickly and more class time can be invested in application. This decision is obviously up to your own discretion. If your students struggled during the earlier lessons in this course, perhaps you will have time in these later lessons to review some of the confusing or troubling points Piper has made. If necessary, it is best to do this by connecting the older material to what the students are currently studying.

There are two additional reasons why God's pleasure in obedience is good news that Piper mentions in his sermon, but not in the book. Mention them if you think they might be helpful to your students. They are as follows (taken from "The Pleasure of God in Obedience," an online sermon at the desiringGod website):

# It Guarantees the Spread of God's Glory

God's delight in obedience is good news because it guarantees the promise that someday the glory of God will indeed fill the earth the way the waters cover the sea. If God were indifferent to disobedience, there would be no certainty that the age to come would be rid of all God-dishonoring behavior. But because he hates disobedience and loves obedience we can be sure that our longing for a world full of God's glory will surely come to pass.

### It Shows That God's Grace Is a Glorious Power

God's delight in obedience is good news because it shows that God's grace is a glorious power and not just a flimsy tolerance of sin. The glory of God's grace is seen not just in the fact that God overlooks the sins of believers but also in the fact that it gradually and finally and victoriously eradicates those sins. If God did not delight in obedience, the glory of sovereign grace might never be seen in its sin-conquering power.

The integrative assignment is a meditation on the Christian's final and ultimate hope. Our joy and God's joy in heaven will be discussed in greater detail in Lesson 12.

# STUDY GUIDE



# Day 1

### TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE

Most of the lessons thus far have had a key passage, which has been an explicit statement concerning the pleasure of God to be studied. Since the book *The Pleasures of God* had its origin in a sermon series, it makes sense that one text would be the focal point for each chapter. The key passage for this lesson is 1 Samuel 15:22.

# 1 Samuel 15:22

<sup>22</sup> And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams."

Before studying the verse itself, let's set the context by looking at the sins of Saul which provoke Samuel's rebuke of him.

# 1 Samuel 15:1-9

<sup>1</sup> And Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the LORD. <sup>2</sup> Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. <sup>3</sup> Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." <sup>4</sup> So Saul summoned the people and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand men on foot, and ten thousand men of Judah. <sup>5</sup> And Saul came to the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the valley. <sup>6</sup> Then Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart; go down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. <sup>7</sup> And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. <sup>8</sup> And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction

all the people with the edge of the sword. <sup>9</sup> But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.

# 1. What was Saul's sin?

ANSWER. Saul's sin was to ignore the direct command of God, even though God had anointed him king over God's people, Israel (v. 1). God commanded him to destroy Amalek completely, leaving nothing behind, as a judgment upon the Amalekites for what they had done to Israel. Though Saul destroyed what was despised and worthless, he and the people left what was good (v. 9).

After Saul's blatant sin, here is the LORD's response and Saul's pathetic excuse.

# 1 Samuel 15:10-21

<sup>10</sup> The word of the LORD came to Samuel: <sup>11</sup> "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments." And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night. <sup>12</sup> And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, "Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal." 13 And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD." 14 And Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?" 15 Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction." 16 Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me this night." And he said to him, "Speak." 17 And Samuel said, "Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. 18 And the LORD sent you on a mission and said, 'Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' 19 Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?" 20 And Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. <sup>21</sup> But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen,

the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal."

- 2. How does Saul defend himself against Samuel's questioning?
- · ANSWER. Saul's first response is to shift the blame, Adam-like, to those with him. He claims that the people spared some of the sheep and oxen to sacrifice to the LORD (v. 15). When questioned, he repeats his defense in stronger terms, insisting that he has, in fact, obeyed the LORD. Though he claims responsibility for devoting the Amalekites to destruction, he blames the people for taking of the spoil (vv. 20-21). Notice that Saul uses the phrase "the LORD your God" twice (vv. 15, 21) when speaking to Samuel.

Now we come again to the pivotal verse:

### 1 Samuel 15:22

<sup>22</sup> And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams."

- 3. Rewrite this verse, using your own words to paraphrase Samuel's message.
- ANSWER. The verse obviously could be paraphrased in many ways. Here is one possibility: "The LORD certainly does not have as much pleasure in outward ritual acts as he does in total obedience to his own commands. You have misunderstood what God desires, Saul. To him, obedience is better than sacrifice when sacrifice is offered with a heart that does not listen to him and trust in him. Don't hide behind your excuses, Saul."

Samuel negates sacrifice not absolutely but relatively; he is saying that formal worship cannot be substituted for obedient life, external devotions for internal submission. Your Gloria Patri, Apostles' Creed, Christian luncheons, and allstar Bible conferences—none of these matter unless you are keeping Christ's commandments (1 John 2:3-4).<sup>76</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, 1 Samuel (Rossshire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000), 158.

Here is how the dialogue continues after the key verse in the chapter:

# 1 Samuel 15:22-31

<sup>22</sup> And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. <sup>23</sup> For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king." 24 Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. <sup>25</sup> Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may worship the LORD." <sup>26</sup> And Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel." <sup>27</sup> As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore. <sup>28</sup> And Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. 29 And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret." 30 Then he said, "I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before the LORD your God." 31 So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul bowed before the LORD.

- 4. Do verses 23-31 add anything to our understanding of verse 22? If so, what?
- · ANSWER. In the very next verse, v. 23, Samuel compares Saul's sins of rebellion and presumption to the sins of divination, iniquity, and idolatry. This comparison reveals the true heinousness of Saul's sins. The remainder of the passage again emphasizes the gravity of Saul's sin by describing God's judgment on Saul—God will take away the kingdom from him. Saul recognizes his sin and confesses that he did not obey God's voice, but the voice of the people (v. 24).

The primacy of obedience above outward ritual acts is stressed throughout the prophetic literature. Here is a passage in Micah which echoes Samuel's instruction to Saul:

# Micah 6:6-8

<sup>6</sup> "With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on

high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? <sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" <sup>8</sup> He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

- 5. Summarize the teaching of this passage.
- · ANSWER. The passage asks what acceptable worship to the LORD is or what is pleasing to him. The answer is not outward rituals or sacrifice, even of the most extravagant kinds. Rather, as God has revealed, the LORD requires us to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly. Obedience rather than sacrifice is what pleases the LORD.

Consider one final text which states that the Lord takes pleasure in obedience—in this instance, the obedience children offer to their parents.

# Colossians 3:20

<sup>20</sup> Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

If God is pleased with a child's submission to the authority of their parents, whom God has set over them, then certainly God would be pleased when we submit to *his* authority—an authority far greater and more worthy of our submission.

# Day 2

# GOD'S PLEASURE IN OBEDIENCE

In the previous day's study, we examined 1 Samuel 15 for clues about why obedience might please God and why disobedience displeases him. Now it is time to ask a different question.

- 6. Does the fact that God takes pleasure in obedience sound like good news to you or bad news? Explain.
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary

# S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 233-243

- Stop at "Fourth, God's pleasure in obedience is good news . . ."
  - 7. Explain what Piper means when he writes, "Obedience is the irrepressible public relations project of those who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good (Matthew 5:16)" (234). Be sure to comment on each significant word. How does this chapter on obedience tie into the previous chapters of Piper's book?
  - ANSWER. To call obedience a public relations project draws attention to how obedience is intended to make God known in the world: others are to see our good works and give glory to God (Matt 5:16). Our obedience is designed, from the moment of election, to bring God fame. Piper calls it "irrepressible" because he believes that obedience will naturally and inevitably flow from a heart that has experienced God's saving goodness. Tasting and seeing God's goodness highlights the fact that faith is a beholding and savoring of the glory of God.

# Matthew 5:16

<sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Be so content in who God is for you now and promises to be for you later. Be so content, be so satisfied in him and not circumstances, that you can return good for evil, love your enemy, do good deeds, and the world will look and say, 'Where's that coming from? . . . These Christians are crazy. They seem to have their treasure elsewhere than in the things I treasure.'77

- 8. Do you agree with Piper's ranking of the five reasons from "least to most serious" (236)? Why might Piper have ranked them in this way?
- ANSWER. Student answers to the first question will vary. Piper most probably organized his list of reasons from the least serious to the most serious so that his list would end with the two explicit statements of 1 Samuel 15:23. Divination and idolatry are perhaps the most overt attacks on God's glory. Piper may also have wanted to end the list with the idol of our own selves so that a clear contrast could be made between mancentered disobedience and God-centered obedience. The most important thing, however, is that we see the pleasure of God in obedience through Piper's five reasons.
- 9. Record one of Piper's insights into 1 Samuel 15 that you did not see when you studied this passage. Why is this particular insight helpful in understanding the passage?
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.
- 10. Of the first three reasons that God's pleasure in obedience is good news, which reason is the most encouraging to you? Why?
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

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<sup>77</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

# Day 3

### THE GOD-PLEASING OBEDIENCE OF FAITH

Notice the relationship between grace, faith, and obedience in the following passages.

# 1 Corinthians 15:10

<sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

# 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

<sup>11</sup> To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, <sup>12</sup> so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

# James 2:14-17, 26

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has <u>faith</u> but does not have works? Can that <u>faith</u> save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup> So also <u>faith</u> by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. . . . <sup>26</sup> For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

# Ephesians 2:8-10

<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through <u>faith</u>. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which <u>God</u> prepared beforehand, that we should <u>walk</u> in them.

- 11. Underline every reference to grace and faith in the passages above. Then double-underline, or otherwise mark, every reference to obedience. According to these passages, which of the following is the best description of God's grace? Underline your answer.
  - a. Grace is God's unmerited favor toward us that forgives our sins. Grace, however, is not connected to Christian obedience.
  - b. Grace is simply the power that God gives to us that enables our obedience. It is not related to our initial salvation.
  - c. Grace is God's gift to the entire human race. It creates an opportunity to repent and believe, though does not force that decision.
  - d. Grace is both God's pardon of our sins and the power that enables a life of obedience.

The Gospel of John is rich in its description of faith. Remember, we are trying to discern the relationship between faith and obedience.

# John 6:32-35

<sup>32</sup> Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." <sup>34</sup> They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." <sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

# John 6:51-56

<sup>51</sup> "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." <sup>52</sup> The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" <sup>53</sup> So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. <sup>54</sup> Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. <sup>55</sup> For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. <sup>56</sup> Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."

# John 7:37-38

<sup>37</sup> On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup> Whoever believes in me, as the

Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

- 12. In these passages, Jesus uses a central metaphor to describe faith. What metaphor is he using? What might his use of this metaphor teach us about faith?
- ANSWER. The central metaphor Jesus uses in these passages is to call faith or believing a form of spiritual hunger or thirst. This indicates that faith is more than intellectual assent to certain facts. Faith is more like a quenching of the soul's deepest cravings. The metaphor may also suggest that everyone has "faith" in something, since hunger and thirst is a universal human reality. The question is what a person will seek to satisfy their soul. Yet another possibility is that the metaphor teaches that faith is a continual trust in Jesus for satisfaction. Just as we must drink and eat daily, we must continually come to Jesus for our needs.

In order to understand the relationship between faith and obedience, we must understand the dynamics of how faith produces obedience. Two example of faith in action, taken from the book of Hebrews, will reveal that dynamic.

# Hebrews 10:32-36

<sup>32</sup> But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, <sup>33</sup> sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. <sup>34</sup> For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. <sup>35</sup> Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. <sup>36</sup> For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

# Hebrews 11:24-27

<sup>24</sup> By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, <sup>25</sup> choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. <sup>26</sup> He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. <sup>27</sup> By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.

- 13. How is faith described and exemplified in these two passages? Why might such faith be pleasing to God?
- ANSWER. In Hebrews 10:34-36 faith is described as a confidence in God's promise for future reward. This confidence allowed these believers to endure suffering with joy, knowing that better things awaited them if they were faithful. The same dynamic is at work in Moses' obedience. He chose, by faith, the lasting and greater pleasures of Christ rather than the fleeting pleasures of sin. A faith that looks to God for satisfaction, even in the midst of suffering, would be pleasing to God because it magnifies his own worth. Such faith proclaims that God is better than anything this world has to offer.

Here are some additional passages from the book of Hebrews which reveal how faith works:

# Hebrews 11:6

<sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

# Hebrews 12:1-3

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against him-self, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

# S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 243-250

- Start at "Fourth, God's pleasure in obedience..."
- Stop at "The Pleasure of God in Public Justice"

- 14. At the beginning of this section, Piper describes some ways in which the relationship between faith and obedience is misunderstood today. Have you heard of or interacted with any of the misunderstandings he mentions? Explain.
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.
- 15. Summarize this entire section in a brief paragraph, using your own words.
- ANSWER. Piper argues that "the essence of faith is being satisfied with all that God is for us in Christ" (247). Our satisfaction in God breaks the appeal of sin and inevitably results in works that manifest our delight in God. It is thus impossible to sever obedience and faith, though they do remain distinct. God delights in this kind of obedience because it magnifies his greatness. And this is good news for us because "the command to obey is the command to be happy in God" (250).

# Day 4

# THE GOD-PLEASING OBEDIENCE OF COMMON GRACE

If there is an obedience that is produced by faith, then there is also an "obedience" produced by common grace. We hesitate to label this right behavior as "obedience" because those who do just things on occasion by God's common grace are still in open rebellion against God. Nevertheless, God is pleased by the partial reflections of his character that are sometimes seen in the lives of unbelievers. Let's look at some biblical texts which flesh out this idea:

# Proverbs 11:1

<sup>1</sup> A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight.

- 16. What is a "false balance"? Why might this be an abomination to the LORD? What general truth does this verse teach about the pleasure of God?
- ANSWER. In a society that measured things to buy and sell in balances, a false balance would have been a device that somehow undermined fair business practices. This is an abomination to the LORD because it manifests greed, deception, and malice, which are antithetical to his nature. Love for money slanders the glory and worth of God. God's delight in a just weight, by contrast, teaches us that God is pleased with public manifestations of integrity because they reflect more accurately who he is.

God is pleased with justice wherever he sees it. Faithfulness and honesty are also his delight.

# Proverbs 12:22

<sup>22</sup> Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are his delight.

Consider the following passage from Leviticus and some of Piper's comments on it, which shows what should motivate the believer to be just and honest.

# Leviticus 19:35-37

<sup>35</sup> You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. <sup>36</sup> You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. <sup>37</sup> And you shall observe all my statutes and all my rules, and do them: I am the LORD.

How is God motivating honesty and justice here? Notice three things in verse 36:

- First, he says, 'I am the LORD!' That is, 'I am Yahweh!' He uses his personal
  name that he used with Moses just before he brought the people out of Egypt.
  And you remember he explained the meaning of that name by saying, 'I am
  who I am.' The name implies absoluteness and independence and freedom and
  sovereignty.
- 2. Second, he says, 'I am your God!' In other words, I am for you. I am on your side. My absoluteness and independence and freedom and sovereignty are yours. That is what it means if we can truly say, 'Yahweh is my God!'
- 3. Third, he says, I brought you out of the land of Egypt.' This is the specific illustration that demonstrates once and for all for Israel that God is for them. He is their God. He is absolute and free and sovereign—not to destroy but to save his people. For Christians today the death and resurrection of Jesus—the second Exodus—has surpassed the first in value.

Now what does all that have to do with the way you fill out your tax forms in the next two weeks? What does it have to do with just balances and honest weights?

Verse 36 says, 'You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and just hin: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.' Surely the point is this:

- if you really know that God is the LORD—Yahweh, the absolute, independent, free and sovereign God of the universe;
- and if you trust him as YOUR GOD—that he is for you with all his power;
- and if your faith is established and encouraged by the great demonstration
  of God's love in the Exodus (and the substitutionary death and victorious
  resurrection of Jesus!),
- then you will not need to fudge on your tax returns in order to make sure that you get the most happiness.

You will believe that your omnipotent God has committed himself with all his absolute freedom and sovereign power to rescue you from Egypt and bring you to a land flowing with milk and honey and care for you every step of the way.<sup>78</sup>

Here is an appeal from God to his stubborn and unjust people, who have not been just or honest:

# Isaiah 58:1-7

<sup>1</sup> Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins. 2 Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God. 3 "Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?" Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. 4 Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD? <sup>6</sup> Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

# 17. What does this passage teach us about the pleasure of God?

• ANSWER. This passage teaches us that God takes pleasure in public acts of justice and compassion. Such acts are much more precious to him than empty displays of religious piety (in this case, fasting). We have seen that God delights in the prayers and behavior of those who delight themselves in him. Likewise, God desires that public justice also flow from a pursuit of pleasure in God (Isa 58:3). Reading this passage in concert with the previous passages, though, would suggest that God still has some delight in any public act of justice and compassion.

<sup>78</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in Public Justice," an online sermon at the desiringGod website.

Someone might object that our situation in a secular society is different from the situation addressed in Isaiah 58. Perhaps God's desire for public justice only applies to the Israelite context? As you read the following passage, keep in mind that Babylon was a wicked, pagan city.

# Jeremiah 29:4-7

- <sup>4</sup> "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup> Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. <sup>6</sup> Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. <sup>7</sup> But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."
  - 18. How could God command the Jewish exiles to seek the welfare of such an evil, God-dishonoring city?
  - ANSWER. God's command to the Jewish exiles only makes sense if there is some sense in which God delights in the welfare and stability of any city. Though the Babylonians would likely credit their false gods for any prosperity they had (as Americans are likely to credit their own hard work for their prosperity), the Jews were commanded to pray for and be good citizens of Babylon. This would undoubtedly have extended to the pursuit of public acts of justice and compassion. Therefore, this passage suggests that God delights in public justice even in secular or pagan contexts.

As we labor to uphold justice and righteousness in our society, let us not forget that the God we serve is not dependent on our work. He would not be in a desperate state without us. Heed the following words of wisdom, which connect what we're considering now to what we have already learned:

God calls us to do something in this world: to be active, even abounding, in good works (1 Corinthians 15:58). But even as we abound in activity, we're to recognize that we're never doing as much as God does. It's true that "unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." But it's not true to say, "Unless those who labor build the house, the Lord builds in vain." That's heresy. We need God, but he never needs us. He is sovereign. (...) God does everything and we do something. Or, in the words of the apostle Paul, "I worked harder than any of them, though it

was not I, but the grace of God that is with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10).79

We will read and interact with the conclusion to this ninth chapter as a part of this lesson's integrative assignment.

# S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 250-257

- Start at "The Pleasure of God in Public Justice"
- Stop at "Where All the Pleasures of God Are Leading"
  - 19. What does Piper mean by the statement, "[God] is much more secular than we often think" (253)?
  - ANSWER. Piper interjects this statement in his discussion of God's pleasure in public justice. He is making the argument that God is pleased in some sense with justice and righteousness wherever he sees it, and whether believers or unbelievers are the ones performing it. In this context, Piper adopts the common distinction between the "religious" and the "nonreligious," or secular, dimension of life. The point of the above statement is that God is concerned with all of life—even the everyday, mundane things of life.
  - 20. Consider the example Piper raises in this section: the abolition of the English slave trade in 1807. In what ways was God pleased with this event? Are there any aspects of this event with which God was not pleased?
  - ANSWER. God was pleased with this event because it was largely brought about through the efforts of a man who believed in Jesus Christ and labored against slavery for biblical reasons. God was also pleased because English society would be more conformed (at least externally) to God's just and righteous rule. God was not pleased, though, that many were supporting this bill for merely humanistic reasons. Likewise, the slave traders who stopped their evil did not do it out of submission and reverence for God.

<sup>79</sup> Stephen Witmer, "Unless God Works, We Work in Vain", an online article at the desiring God website.

# Day 5

# **S** INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Read pages 257-258 of *The Pleasures of God* (starting with the heading "Where All the Pleasures of God Are Leading") and reflect on the pleasures that God will experience in the new heavens and new earth. Record those reflections below. Describe God's delight in the final and consummate kingdom. Is this good news for those who trust in him for salvation?

# S DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. After you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. What modern-day application can you make of the truth that the LORD does not have as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD (1 Samuel 15:22)?

2. Does God have delight in "half-hearted obedience"? Why or why not?

3. What social causes for justice and compassion are you involved in? Do you reflect on God's pleasure in these things as you participate in them?

4. Your own question(s):

# § ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ John Piper, "Abolition and the Roots of Public Justice," an online article at the desiringGod website.
- ▶ John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2011).
- ▶ John Piper, *Amazing Grace in the Life of William Wilberforce* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007).

# The Pleasure of God in Concealing and Revealing Himself

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### INTRODUCTION

Job 28 is an interesting chapter about ancient mining techniques. It describes the shafts that miners would cut in remote valleys—shafts that would descend into gloom and deep darkness, far away from travelers and where no animal would venture. In these shafts, the miners would put their hand to the rock, cutting out channels, swinging on ropes, stopping the flow of water with dams, casting light into the far reaches, and scouring everywhere with eager eyes for the precious jewels hidden in the earth.

After describing this elaborate process and all the effort invested in these mining projects, the author abruptly claims,

# Job 28:12-14

But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know its worth, and it is not found in the land of the living. The deep says, "It is not in me," and the sea says, "It is not with me."

After asserting that man cannot discover wisdom, despite his most prodigious efforts, the text delivers another blow:

# Job 28:15

It cannot be bought for gold, and silver cannot be weighed as its price.

So wisdom cannot be gained through hard work or wealth. Is there no way to get wisdom?

This lesson revels in the pleasure God has in concealing his wisdom from man. Without God's grace we are literally in the dark. And yet God has pleasure also in revealing his wisdom. We will consider God's pleasure in both concealing and revealing, and will ask whether God's gift of wisdom makes our efforts to obtain it useless. Does God delight in a course like this and all the effort that has been invested in its assignments if he simply conceals and reveals himself at his own pleasure?

# S LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- > articulate the difference between God's wisdom and man's wisdom.
- > explain why God takes pleasure in concealing and revealing himself.
- defend the legitimacy and necessity of rigorous mental effort in the Christian life.

# TEACHING NOTES



This final chapter of *The Pleasures of God* is by far the longest. In order for the reading assignments in this lesson to conform to our expectation of 2.5 hours of homework for the lesson, we needed to exclude several sections of the chapter from the required reading.

Ideally, students would read the entire chapter. Those who simply do the required reading, however, may be confused about the main points Piper is trying to make in this chapter. For that reason, we've included a bulleted list of major points made in this chapter. During your discussion of this chapter and this lesson, you might find it helpful to explain the chapter to the students using these points:

- The Bible's message about the life of the mind is sometimes positive and sometimes negative.
- Therefore, the leading question of the chapter is, "In what uses of the mind does God delight and in what uses of the mind does God not delight?"
- Piper's basic answer is that God delights in revealing himself to those
  who magnify the grace of God by acknowledging their need of him and
  receiving the wisdom he alone imparts. (This is in itself an effect of God's
  gracious calling.) God does not delight in uses of the mind which boast in
  human self-sufficiency.
- God's sovereignty in revealing himself to whomever he wills, however, does
  not negate our thinking and education since God works through natural
  means to deliver his supernatural revelation.
- Therefore, there is great incentive in pursuing knowledge with the aim of displaying the glory of God.

This lesson affords an opportunity, then, to confront both anti-intellectualism and an over-reliance on human, mental abilities apart from the grace of God. It might be helpful if you, as the instructor, shared some of your own testimony as to how God has rewarded your humble, intellectual efforts in probing the greatness of God.

# Day 1

# HIDDEN FROM THE WISE, REVEALED TO CHILDREN

As was asserted in an earlier lesson there is one and maybe two passages in which Jesus is portrayed as rejoicing. The clear instance of Jesus rejoicing in the Holy Spirit is reproduced, again, below.

# Luke 10:17-24

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" <sup>18</sup> And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. <sup>19</sup> Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. <sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." <sup>21</sup> In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>22</sup> All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." <sup>23</sup> Then turning to the disciples he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! <sup>24</sup> For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

- 1. What are "these things" (verse 21) which the Father has hidden from the wise but revealed to little children?
- ANSWER. As we will see in the required reading and the answer to Question 4, the Father has hidden the presence of the kingdom of God in Jesus' ministry from the wise and understanding. They do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, though his disciples do, by the revelation of God. More significantly, however, the disciples will understand the true identity of the Father and Son (v. 21) through revelation. Again, the "wise and understanding" don't see the true but hidden divine identity.

- 2. When Jesus says that the Father has revealed these things to "little children" (verse 21), to whom is he referring? Is he speaking literally? Why might Jesus choose to employ this particular phrase?
- ANSWER. Jesus is almost certainly referring to his disciples as the recipients of God's revelation (cf. vv. 23-24). He would therefore not be speaking of actual infants. Jesus probably employs this phrase in order to emphasize God's sovereignty in his revelation. The "little children" are those who are totally helpless and needy in contrast to the "wise and understanding" who may boast in the knowledge they think they have. While the "little children" may have little stature in the world, their dependency makes them fitting recipients of God's self-glorifying (and man-humbling) revelation.

It may bother you that the wise and understanding are depicted in Luke 10:21 as those from whom things are hidden. Isn't wisdom something to be pursued? Is there no value in understanding? Look at the following texts, which may clarify the issue:

# Matthew 7:24-25

<sup>24</sup> Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

# Matthew 10:16

<sup>16</sup> Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

# Matthew 25:1-4

<sup>1</sup> Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, <sup>4</sup> but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

### 1 Corinthians 13:11

" When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

# Ephesians 4:11-14

<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

- 3. Are the "wise" always portrayed in the Bible in a negative light? Are children always portrayed in a positive light? What contrast is Jesus drawing in Luke 10:21?
- ANSWER. As the passages above demonstrate, the wise are often commended. Wisdom is often praised and lifted up as worthy of pursuit in the Bible. Likewise, there are many biblical passages which treat childlikeness as inferior to maturity. Therefore, the contrast drawn by Jesus in Luke 10:21 is not a contrast between godly wisdom and naïve or immature childlikeness. Rather, it is between those who boast in their own earthly wisdom as opposed to those who humbly accept a heavenly wisdom.

The final chapter of *The Pleasures of God* is 43 pages long—much longer than any of the chapters we've studied thus far. In order to cover the main points of this chapter, it is necessary to divide it into a number of small sections, some of which will be required reading and some of which will be for further reading.

The chapter begins by setting up the subject of inquiry. Since the Bible sometimes portrays the life of the mind positively and sometimes negatively, what use of the mind does God delight in?

# S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 264-267

- Start at "Two Places Where Jesus Expresses Gladness"
- Stop at "But Is the Son or the Father Revealing and Concealing?"
  - 4. How would Piper answer Question 1? What is his answer from the wider context and what is his answer from the immediate context?

• ANSWER. Piper would argue that the wider context of Luke 10 (especially the message with which the disciples were entrusted) shows that "the presence of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus" (265) is what was being hidden and revealed. The kingdom was being established by the Messiah, though in two stages. The more immediate context (v. 22) specifies that at the heart of this revelation was the "true identity of the Father and the Son" (267).

# S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 271-273

- Start at "Here Is Our Answer: The Glory of God in Christ Is Hidden and Revealed"
- Stop at "Parallel Concerns in Paul"

# Mark 10:15

<sup>15</sup> Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

# Matthew 19:13-14

<sup>13</sup> Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, <sup>14</sup> but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."

# Matthew 18:2-4

- <sup>2</sup> And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them <sup>3</sup> and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."
  - 5. How does Piper interpret these passages (above)?
  - ANSWER. According to Piper, Jesus puts little children forward as objects of
    his teaching in order to commend the childlike quality of total dependence.
    Children realize that they have needs that they can't meet themselves;
    children must constantly look to their parents or caretakers. Therefore,
    in commending children, Jesus is telling those who would follow him and

enter the kingdom that they must acknowledge their helplessness and trust in God to meet all their needs.

The second section of further reading addresses the issue of how the Father's revelation of the Son and the Son's revelation of the Father are related.

# **S** FURTHER READING

The Pleasures of God, 259-264, 267-270

- Stop at "Two Places Where Jesus Expresses Gladness"
- Start at "But Is the Son or the Father Revealing and Concealing?"
- Stop at the bottom of page 270

#### THE FOLLY THAT PLEASES GOD

Since God has sovereignly orchestrated that the entire canon of Scripture come together as it has for the good of his people, it is God's intention that we would read biblical passages in harmony with one another. In the case of Luke 10:21-22, there is a very helpful parallel in the writing of Paul which promises us additional insight.

#### Luke 10:21-22

<sup>21</sup> In that same hour <u>he rejoiced</u> in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have <u>hidden</u> these things from <u>the wise and understanding</u> and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>22</sup> All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

#### 1 Corinthians 1:17-21, 27-29; 2:3-8

<sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. <sup>18</sup> For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." 20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. . . . <sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. . . . <sup>2</sup>:<sup>3</sup> And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. 6 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. 7

But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. <sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

- 6. Underline parallels between these two passages. Why might we want to investigate 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 in our study of the pleasures of God?
- ANSWER. Luke 10:21 explicitly says that Jesus rejoiced; he took pleasure in something. The passage is obviously relevant to our study of the pleasures of God. Since 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 is so closely related to the theme of Luke 10:21-22 (as shown by the parallels underlined above), it should be considered as relevant also. Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 1:21 contains the phrase, "it pleased God." This is another explicit reference to the pleasures of God which would bear out investigation.
- 7. What are the differences between the wisdom which Paul extols and the wisdom which Paul denounces? Read the broader context (1 Corinthians 1:17–2:16) if necessary.
- ANSWER. The wisdom Paul extols has the cross of Christ at its core (1:17-18, 23; 2:2). It is a wisdom of God that accomplishes his purposes (1:21). This wisdom negates all human boasting (1:29), is not dependent on eloquence (2:1-4), is secret and hidden from the rulers of this age (2:7-8), but revealed through the Spirit (2:10). In contrast, the wisdom Paul denounces is tied to human eloquence (1:17), considers the gospel to be foolishness (1:18), is possessed by those of worldly stature (1:20), is far inferior to God's wisdom (1:25), is doomed to pass away (2:6), and lacks spiritual discernment (2:14).

If the true identity of the crucified Jesus is at the heart of God's wisdom, then how do we arrive at an understanding of who Jesus is? How do we arrive at the wisdom of God?

#### Matthew 16:13-17

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" <sup>14</sup> And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." <sup>15</sup> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

#### 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

- <sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
  - 8. Is the ability to confess Jesus as the Son of God or believe the gospel something that lies within human free choice?
  - ANSWER. No, one cannot confess Jesus as the Son of God unless God, by his grace, intervenes. The true of identity of Jesus is something revealed by God and not "flesh and blood" (Matthew 13:17). One cannot know Jesus through "natural" means. Moreover, 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 states that unbelievers are blinded to the truth. God must act by shining knowledge of his glory into the heart in a way akin to the creation of light. That being said, God's work enables us to make a willing choice. We may call it "free" in that sense—it is not forced against our will.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 273-275

- Start at "Parallel Concerns in Paul"
- Stop at "God's Wisdom Versus Man's Wisdom: What's the Difference?"
  - 9. Why does Piper draw attention to the Greek words for "the wise" and "the intelligent" (273)?
  - ANSWER. Piper draws attention to the Greek words for "the wise" and "the intelligent" in order to establish a parallel between Luke 10 and 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. Since 1 Corinthians 1:19 uses the same terminology employed by Luke 10:21, it is likely that the passages are mutually interpretive. Note that Piper doesn't rest his case on this argument alone. He shows a number of other similarities between the two passages in order to confirm the parallel.

The section which we will now skip (pages 275-277, covered in the further reading) is well summarized in the first paragraph of page 278.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 278-282

- Start at "The Ultimate Difference Between God's and Man's Wisdom"
- Stop at "Is One Natural Condition More Acceptable Than Another?"
  - 10. Respond to the following objection: "God's pleasure in frustrating the wise and revealing things to the simple is so egotistical. How can you believe in a God who is so unloving and arbitrary in his choice of revealing himself only to some so that he might magnify his own glory?"
  - ANSWER. There are so many things which could be said in response to this objection. First, God is not like us. It is not egotistical for him to magnify his own glory because he, unlike us, is infinitely worthy of glory. Second, this objection implies that the highest good in the universe is human self-determination and not God's glory. Third, his choice is not arbitrary in an unreasonable, cool, or detached way. Rather, he chose the elect in love. And fourth, it is loving of God to preserve and magnify his own glory because his glory is the one thing that will truly satisfy our souls for all eternity.

In the second section of further reading, Piper makes the point that the "the terms 'wise and intelligent' and 'infants' in Luke 10:21 do not correspond simply to 'educated' and 'uneducated.' Jesus is not saying that the uneducated get the grace of revelation and the educated don't" (284).

#### S FURTHER READING

The Pleasures of God, 275-277, 282-284

- Start at "God's Wisdom Versus Man's Wisdom: What's the Difference?"
- Stop at the bottom of page 277
- Start at "Is One Natural Condition More Acceptable Than Another?"
- Stop at "If God Gives Natural Revelation, Why Should We Pursue Natural Research?"

#### SEEK AND SEARCH

What we have looked at thus far might seem to discourage the entire enterprise of biblical study. And some have indeed concluded that formal training and serious research are a waste of time. There is evidence in the Bible itself, however, which encourages us to think, study, meditate, and pursue spiritual understanding. Examine the following short verse carefully:

#### 2 Timothy 2:7

- <sup>7</sup> Think over what I [Paul] say, for the Lord will give you [Timothy] understanding in everything.
  - 11. What is the logical relationship between the first part of the verse and the second part? What is the relationship between God's gift of understanding and our effort?
  - ANSWER. The word which indicates the logical relationship between the two halves of 2 Timothy 2:7 is the word "for." The motivation for Timothy to meditate on Paul's words is that God will give him understanding. Therefore, we might say that God's gift of understanding is granted through our study. God chooses to work in conjunction with our effort (which effort is also produced by his grace).

The Bible's validation of study is especially seen in the book of Proverbs, in which wisdom is so highly extolled.

#### Proverbs 2:1-8

¹ My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, ² making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; ³ yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, ⁴ if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, ⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. ⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; ¬ he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, <sup>8</sup> guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints.

- 12. Could Proverbs 2:1-8 be offered as an extended paraphrase of 2 Timothy 2:7? Defend your answer.
- ANSWER. Proverbs 2:1-8 could be seen as an extended paraphrase of 2
  Timothy 2:7 because both halves of 2 Timothy 2:7 are expressed in Proverbs
  2:1-8. Paul's command to Timothy to think is paralleled in Proverbs by the
  repeated call for human effort: make your ear attentive (v. 2), incline your
  heart (v. 2), call out (v. 3), raise your voice (v. 3), seek (v. 4), and search
  (v. 4). Paul's promise for God's gift of understanding is paralleled by the
  assertion that the LORD gives wisdom (v. 6) and the assurance that proper
  human effort will not be in vain (v. 5).

We must assert something more, however. Not only does the Bible legitimate our study, it offers careful reading and thought as the normal means God uses to grant understanding.

#### Ephesians 3:2-5

- <sup>2</sup> . . . assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. <sup>4</sup> When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.
  - 13. What was the means that God ordained through which the Ephesians were to understand the mystery of Christ? Underline it in the passage above.
  - · ANSWER. The Ephesians are assured by Paul that they will perceive his insight into the mystery of Christ by reading his letter (v. 4). Therefore, God ordained that the Ephesians would gain understanding through reading. Certainly this is not the only means by which God grants spiritual insight. Reading needs to be accompanied by right thinking and God's work through the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, reading is an essential part of a Christian's life and growth.

Here are some related comments and a provocative question on this topic:

The implications are huge that God has made a book so crucial in the preservation

and declaration of saving truth. These implications become more remarkable because the book has some parts that are really difficult to understand. What does it mean for life and culture and history and worship that God has given Christianity a book with some mind-straining texts and then built the church on it?80

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 284-286

- Start at "If God Gives Natural Revelation, Why Should We Pursue Natural Research?"
- Stop at "Well, Can We or Can't We Know God by Natural Means?"
  - 14. Respond to the following statement: "Christian pastors do not need to go to seminary. In seminary pastors learn information about God, but only the Spirit is necessary for truly knowing God."
  - ANSWER. A true knowledge of God through the Holy Spirit is not attained apart from means. God has ordained that the Holy Spirit work through the teaching and preaching of the Word. And pastors need to be trained, need to learn to think and write, need to study the Word diligently, and need to pray for illumination. This kind of rigorous mental effort and training often happens in the context of seminaries, though seminaries are not the only avenue through which pastors are well trained.

The section between the first and second required readings is covered in the further reading for today. In this section Piper argues that even though there is a sense in which all men know God through natural means (cf. Romans 1:19-21), men cannot appreciate the glory of God without God's grace of revelation. Then Piper goes on to assert the importance of *both* utter dependence on God *and* diligent study. The section ends with the truth that we must despair of our own industry and ability so that we may rely on the Holy Spirit.

<sup>80</sup> John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 97-98.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 292-294

- Start at "A Compelling Reason for Rigorous Training of the Mind"
- Stop at "The Necessity of Cultivating the Life of the Mind"
  - 15. According to Piper, what does the fact of the incarnation add to this debate?
  - · ANSWER. Piper compares the incarnation of the Son of God to the inspiration of Scripture in that both are expressions of God accommodating himself to ordinary, human means. He argues that the arrogant presumption which may lead us to scorn grammar and syntax could also cause us to despise the humble circumstances of Jesus' birth. Therefore, as we appreciate Piper's comparison, we are meant to humbly receive the means of revelation which God has chosen.

#### **S** FURTHER READING

The Pleasures of God, 286-291

- Start at "Well, Can We or Can't We Know God by Natural Means?"
- Stop at the bottom of page 291

#### CHRIST AND SCHOLARSHIP

In the previous day's study we read that, in Piper's opinion, some parts in the Bible are really difficult to understand. Is he alone in this opinion?

#### 2 Peter 3:15-18

<sup>15</sup> And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, <sup>16</sup> as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. <sup>17</sup> You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. <sup>18</sup> But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

- 16. What implications does this passage have for the Christian's life of the
- ANSWER. This passage ought to comfort and motivate us in our pursuit of spiritual knowledge. It is a comfort because even someone of Peter's abilities and insight found certain sections of Paul "hard to understand" (v. 16). Since Paul was an inspired author of Scripture, this must mean that God intended certain things in the Bible to be mentally challenging. The passage also motivates us, though, because distorting the meaning of Scripture is a distinct possibility. Knowing this, we ought to "take care" (v. 17) that we are not deceived, but rather grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior (v. 18).

In the passage above Peter warned those who would be reading his letter not to be "carried away with the error of lawless people" (2 Peter 3:17). Does this imply that everyone has an identical responsibility in discerning error and guarding true knowledge?

#### James 3:1

<sup>1</sup> Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

#### Titus 1:7-9

- <sup>7</sup> For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, <sup>8</sup> but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. <sup>9</sup> He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.
  - 17. Should all Christians pursue education and learning to the same degree? Why or why not?
  - ANSWER. It is not necessary for Christians to pursue education and learning to the same degree because God has given us different gifts and roles to play in the church. The two texts above make it clear that the function of teaching and the office of overseer (or elder) are not open to all within the body. As a teacher or overseer, however, one has a responsibility for instruction that would require greater education and learning than is necessary for those who are being instructed.

The life of the mind ought to be a concern for every believer, though Christ does give different mental abilities and callings to his people according to the roles he has assigned for them.

#### Ephesians 4:7, 11-12

<sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. . . . <sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ . . .

Nevertheless, different roles within the church do not negate the pursuit of understanding that is required of all believers.

#### Colossians 2:1-4

<sup>1</sup> For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, <sup>2</sup> that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full

assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. <sup>4</sup> I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.

- 18. Though everyone need not pursue the same level of education, do all believers still have a responsibility to think and learn? Defend your answer from the text above.
- ANSWER. Paul's prayer for all believers whom he had not yet met is that they would "reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding" and the "knowledge of God's mystery" (v. 2). These treasures are available to all believers because they are hidden in Christ (v. 3). Notice that Paul's prayer is not directed to the leadership of these churches but to "all who have not seen me face to face" (v. 1). Everyone has a responsibility to discover the wisdom and knowledge of Christ and guard the church from seemingly plausible arguments (v. 4).

God is no fonder of intellectual slackers than of any other slackers. If you are thinking of becoming a Christian, I warn you that you are embarking on something which is going to take the whole of you, brains and all. But fortunately, it works the other way around. Anyone who is honestly trying to be a Christian will soon find his intelligence being sharpened: one of the reasons why it needs no special education to be a Christian is that Christianity is an education itself.<sup>81</sup>

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 294-301

- Start at "The Necessity of Cultivating the Life of the Mind"
  - 19. Why are spiritual affections essential to Christian scholarship?
  - · ANSWER. Spiritual affections are essential to Christian scholarship because without them God's aim for Christian scholarship will not be achieved. God's aim is not only that his truth or glory will be seen, but that it will be savored. Spiritual affections are the fitting response of emotional creatures who have truly tasted the goodness of God. Furthermore, as Piper asserts,

<sup>81</sup> C. S. Lewis, as quoted by John Piper, Brothers, We Are Not Professionals, 97.

- "without the awakening of true spiritual affections, seeing the fullness of truth in all things is impossible" (298). In other words, thoughts and affections are "mutual causes of each other" (296).
- 20. Would you consider yourself to be in the category of "the wise and intelligent" or in the category of "infants"? Explain. Do you share the pleasure of God in revealing and concealing that we have studied in this lesson?
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

#### S INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

This lesson has stressed the importance of cultivating the life of the mind and of pursuing the wisdom that God gives as a gift. For the integrative assignment in this lesson, reflect on how you have sought after intellectual growth in the past. Record the efforts you have put forth in the past. Then think about how you might strive to cultivate the Christian life of the mind in the future. How will you apply what you have learned from this lesson?

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#### S DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. After you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. Do you have a tendency to overestimate or underestimate the importance of the intellect?

2. What are the most common intellectual barriers that people claim as reasons to reject the gospel? What does God do to remove these barriers for those who believe?

3. Why might God be pleased with the effort you've put into a course like this one?

4. Your own question(s):

#### § ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ John Piper, "Brothers, Let Us Query the Text," an online article at the desiringGod website.
- > John Piper, Biblical Exegesis, an online booklet at the desiringGod website.
- ▶ John Piper, "Books That Have Influenced Me Most," an online article at the desiringGod website.

# Infinite Satisfaction in God

#### **S** INTRODUCTION

There is an astonishing and wonderful verse in 2 Peter which is, at the same time, a little unsettling. The language seems to come to the brink of denying perhaps the most fundamental, biblical distinction of all—that of Creatorcreature.

#### 2 Peter 1:4

... he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature ...

How is it that we become *partakers* of the *divine* nature? Something deep and mysterious and profound is being proclaimed here. It appears as if in some sense we are being wrapped up with God himself. Here is Athanasius's wrestling with similar language in the Gospel of John:

Hereby know we that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit. . . . And the Son is in the Father, as His own Word and Radiance; but we, apart from the Spirit, are strange and distant from God, and by the participation of the Spirit we are knit into the Godhead; so that our being in the Father is not ours, but is the Spirit's which is in us and abides in us. . . . What then is our likeness and equality to the Son? . . . The Son is in the Father in one way, and we become in Him in another, and that neither we shall ever be as He, nor is the Word as we.82

Though we will never be in the Father exactly as the Son is, nevertheless we will be "knit into the Godhead." For those who know the infinite joy that God has in

<sup>82</sup> Athanasius as quoted by John Piper, *Contending for Our All* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 71.

himself, this is extremely good news. Not only will we observe the joy of God, we will experience the joy of God in God.

#### S LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▶ expound upon the precious promise in Luke 12:32 word by word.
- ▶ recall the major points in all the preceding lessons.
- b depict the final hope of the believer in heaven and the joy we will experience there.

#### TEACHING NOTES



Since this is the last lesson of *The Pleasures of God*, it might be appropriate to spend about 30 minutes at the end of class either discussing any remaining questions or discussing ways in which the students' view of God has changed over the semester. Either of these options might help draw things together in their minds and give them a sense of closure.

Ensure that your students are prepared for the final paper and know what's expected of them. If you haven't made arrangements yet for how you want students to submit these papers, do that at this time.

In teaching about God as our Father, Piper says this in his sermon, "It Is Your Father's Pleasure to Give You the Kingdom" (an online sermon at the desiringGod website):

Now, not all of us have had fathers who patterned their lives after God. And so the word "father" may not be full of peace the way Jesus means it to be. So let me try to fill the word "Father" with some of the meaning Jesus intended it to carry for you this morning. Two things:

First, if the King is our Father, then we are heirs of his kingdom. There is something natural about our receiving it—it's our inheritance. In Matthew 25:34 it says that in the last day King Jesus will say, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit [note the word!] the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

From before the world God prepared a kingdom for his children. It is theirs by the right of inheritance. And God does not begrudge his children coming into their inheritance. It is his good pleasure to give them the kingdom.

Second, if the King is our Father, then we are free from being taxed. In Matthew 17:25 Peter wondered if the disciples had to pay the temple tax. Jesus says, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their sons or from others?" And when he said, "From others," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free."

God does not levy taxes against his children. It is those outside the palace who feel the burden of law, not the children within. The children are free! The Fatherhood of God means freedom.

The list of implications of what it means to have God as our Father could go on—and all of them would serve to overcome the fear that God is begrudging in his kindness to us. Just the opposite is the case. He is our Father, and if we who are evil know how to give good things to our children, how much more will our Father in heaven give the kingdom to those who ask him.

The integrative assignment is really a way to get at how the students profited from their study and reading in this course. As such, it should prepare them well to write the final paper. If your students have been deeply affected by the course, then perhaps you could encourage them to teach the material to someone else in some way. Learning is deepened and strengthened through teaching. And study should not end in private celebration; truth is meant to be shared and proclaimed!

#### STUDY GUIDE



# Day 1

#### **EVERY WORD COUNTS**

The epilogue consists mainly in an extended meditation on Luke 12:32. This verse articulates the last pleasure of God that we will consider in this course:

#### Luke 12:32

<sup>32</sup> Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Jesus' command to his disciples not to fear is explained by the preceding context in Luke 12. John Piper offers some reflections on this context.

Why does the flock of God struggle with fear? Luke 12 implies clearly that we do, and that we don't need to. It points to at least four things that we are prone to fear.

First, in verse 4 Jesus says, 'I tell you, friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.' So it implies that we are prone to fear death—especially death by persecution.

Second, in verse 11 Jesus says, 'And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious how or what you are to answer or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.' So Jesus implies that we are prone to fear public shame. We are prone to be anxious about what others will think of us if we don't have the right thing to say.

Third, in verse 22 Jesus says, 'Therefore do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat nor about your body, what you shall put on.' So he implies that we are prone to worry about whether our basic physical needs will be met—food and drink and clothing and shelter.

In every case Jesus' purpose is to give reasons why his 'friends' (verse 4) and his 'disciples' (verse 22)—his flock—do not need to fear these things. He wants us to be free from fear. So he says . . .

First, death is not the worst thing, hell is. And God will keep you out of hell and care for you with detailed tenderness—the hairs of your head are all numbered. Second, he says that the Holy Spirit will teach you what to say in an hour of public testing. You will not be left alone. And third, he says your Father knows your daily needs and is far more inclined to give you what you need than he is to feed the ravens and clothe the lilies, but look how he takes care of them!

So Jesus does not want us to fear—no fear of death, no fear of public shame, no fear of poverty and want. He wants us to see that God is the kind of God whose people do not need to fear.

But there is another thing we are prone to fear that goes right to the heart of God. It is perhaps the deepest fear of all and the one that may lie behind all the others. Perhaps that's why Jesus keeps it for last. We see it in verse 32: 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.'83

Here, again, is the verse that will be our focus for the first two days of our study in this lesson:

#### Luke 12:32

<sup>32</sup> Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

- 1. What are your initial impressions of and observations about this verse?
- · ANSWER. Answers will vary.

Every word in this verse is significant, so we will examine the verse word by word. What is the significance of Jesus' phrase "little flock"? In addition to Psalm 23, examine the following passages. Think about Jesus' use of this metaphor.

<sup>83</sup> John Piper, "It Is Your Father's Pleasure to Give You the Kingdom," an online sermon at the desiringGod website.

#### Luke 12:32

<sup>32</sup> Fear not, <u>little flock</u> . . .

#### John 10:11-16

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

#### Acts 20:29-30

<sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

#### Psalm 95:6-7

- <sup>6</sup> Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! <sup>7</sup> For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. . . .
  - 2. What might be the significance of the phrase "little flock" in Luke 12:32?
  - ANSWER. By calling his disciples a little flock, Jesus is at once expressing his affection for them and communicating spiritual truth about them. The people of God are often called sheep in the Bible to communicate their vulnerability, need for provision, and need for protection. Sheep are helpless and are totally dependent on a shepherd to watch over them and care for them. So by calling the disciples his own little flock, Jesus is expressing his own tender and affectionate disposition toward them. He is willing to lay his life down for the sheep (John 10:11).

Let's now examine another significant word in the verse. Again, think about the metaphors Jesus is employing in this theologically-loaded little verse.

#### Luke 12:32

<sup>32</sup> Fear not, little flock, for it is your <u>Father's</u> good pleasure . . .

#### Luke 11:11-13

"What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; 12 or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

#### Romans 8:14-17

<sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

#### Hebrews 12:7-11

<sup>7</sup> It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup> If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup> Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? <sup>10</sup> For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. <sup>11</sup> For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

- 3. What might be the significance of the term "Father" in Luke 12:32?
- ANSWER. Throughout Scripture God is called our Father to indicate his kind provision for us, his intimacy with us, his wisdom, his love for us (though he doesn't spare us corrective discipline), and his creation of us. By connoting all these things in Luke 12:32, Jesus again wants to emphasize the kindness and tenderness of God in giving the kingdom to his people. The Father's gentleness, kindness, and willingness to give us this most precious gift should banish any fear or anxiety that we have.

We will now compare Luke 12:32 with another passage. Notice the related Greek words that are underlined below. (The second underlined word is the noun form of the first underlined word.)

#### Luke 12:32

<sup>32</sup> Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure [Greek: eudokeo]...

#### Philippians 1:15-17

- <sup>15</sup> Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will [Greek: eudokia]. <sup>16</sup> The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. <sup>17</sup> The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.
  - 4. What does it mean to preach the gospel from "good will"? How might our interpretation of Philippians 1:15 inform our understanding of Luke 12:32?
  - ANSWER. In Philippians 1:15-17, preaching the gospel from good will is contrasted with preaching from envy and rivalry. There are those who are preaching the gospel, not for the sake of the gospel, but merely to afflict Paul. We might say that their heart is not in the message. Those preaching from good will, however, preach the gospel out of love for Paul and God. When they preach the good news they do it out of sincerity and with pleasure. When we observe how these Greek words are related, our convictions are confirmed that in Luke 12:32, the giving of the kingdom is not something that the Father is at all constrained to do or that he does begrudgingly or half-heartedly. He does it out of good will, or from his own delight.

Finally, let's contemplate one more word in this marvelous, little verse.

#### Luke 12:32

- <sup>32</sup> Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the <u>kingdom</u>.
  - 5. What do you think is meant by the term "kingdom" in this verse?
  - ANSWER. From the book of Luke we know that Jesus is called the Son of the Most High, who will reign on David's throne, and whose kingdom is everlasting (1:32-33). Therefore, the reign and rule of God is exercised through his Son, the Messiah. To be in the kingdom is to enjoy the blessings of God's rule, manifest now in the healing of the sick and the casting out of demons. In the immediate context, the emphasis is on the surpassing value of God's kingdom. Receiving the kingdom from God means that we don't have to be anxious about earthly treasures or necessities. We have something far greater awaiting us in heaven.

#### ALMOST TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

Once more, let's meditate on Luke 12:32.

#### Luke 12:32

- <sup>32</sup> Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.
  - 6. Rewrite Luke 12:32 in ten different ways in which Luke did not write it. To do this, substitute a plausible word for an actual word.

**EXAMPLE**: Fear not, my disciples, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (In this example, the phrase "my disciples" was substituted for "little flock.")

- ANSWER. Student answers will obviously vary, but here are some possibilities:
  - **A1.** *Do not be anxious, little flock* . . .
  - A2. Rejoice, little flock . . .
  - A3. Fear not, O ye of little faith . . .
  - A4. Fear not, all you who keep my words . . .
  - A5. Fear not, little flock, for it is God's good pleasure . . .
  - A6. Fear not, little flock, for it is the master's good pleasure . . .
  - A7. ... it is your Father's good pleasure to sell you the kingdom.
  - A8. . . . it is your Father's good pleasure to show you the kingdom.
  - A9. . . . it is your Father's good pleasure to give you what you need.
  - A10... it is your Father's good pleasure to give you food and drink.

What does he promise to give to his little flock—to prove once and for all that it is not only his good pleasure to give, but that it is his good pleasure to give big? He promises to give them the kingdom of God.

And what does it mean to be given the sovereign reign and rule of God?

It means simply and staggeringly and unspeakably that the omnipotent rule and authority of the King of the universe will be engaged forever and ever on behalf of the little flock of God. What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, God has prepared for those who love him (1 Corinthians 2:9). And it is the Father's good pleasure to give it to his little flock.<sup>84</sup>

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 303-312

- 7. Why might Piper begin the epilogue by sharing with us the final words of Mary Ann Paton? How does his discussion of her fit into this epilogue?
- ANSWER. The epilogue is an extended meditation on Luke 12:32, which begins "Do not fear . . . ." Piper probably wanted to explain why believers are inclined to fear that God will not give them the kingdom with pleasure. His answer is that this incredible promise, when fully understood, is almost too good to be true. We can comprehend and admire when a human (like Mary Ann Paton) ardently desires light and life and everlasting joy to be given to others, but when God reveals this same ardent desire we "hesitate" (304). Piper's meditation on Luke 12:32, then, is intended to inspire confidence in and admiration for the God who gives the kingdom with joy.
- 8. According to Piper, of what significance is Jesus' choice of the word "give" in Luke 12:32?
- ANSWER. Jesus' choice of this word reveals to us the true nature of God: it is his pleasure to "give and give and give" (308)! God is like a mountain spring, not a watering trough. It is God's pleasure and to his glory that he freely gives the kingdom, rather than selling it to us, allowing us to trade for it, or requiring us to earn it. In fact, we cannot have the kingdom in any other way; it must be humbly received.
- 9. Look back at your answer to Question 1. Now that you've studied and read about Luke 12:32, how do your current thoughts compare to your initial impressions? What have you learned from this verse?

<sup>84</sup> John Piper, "It Is Your Father's Pleasure to Give You the Kingdom," an online sermon at the desiringGod website.

#### ANSWER. Answers will vary.

Jonathan Edwards knows heaven perhaps even better than hell. Which is saying a lot in view of his reputation as one who knows hell well. I have believed this for some time because of reading his sermons on heaven (for example, 'The Portion of the Righteous,' 'The Pure in Heart Blessed,' 'Praise, One of the Chief Employments of Heaven'). In addition, reading Edwards' Miscellanies on heaven and reading John Gerstner's book, 'Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell' (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980) show how Edwards soared in his meditations on heaven.

But only when I took up Edwards' book, The End for Which God Created the World, did I see the remarkable insight that heaven will be a never-ending, ever-increasing discovery of more and more of God's glory with greater and ever-greater joy in him.

As a child I feared heaven. Never-endingness seemed to me like frozenness. Doesn't 1 Corinthians 13:12 say, 'Then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known'? And wouldn't that mean that the moment we get to heaven we will know all we are going to know, and that the rest of eternity will be never-ending sameness? Which strikes the fear of boredom into our hearts.

Edward says no. All this text must mean is that our knowledge will be accurate in heaven and no longer 'through a glass darkly.' It does not have to mean that we know immediately all that can be known. Rather, he reasons, God is infinite and wills to reveal himself to us for our enjoyment of his fullness forever. Yet we are finite and cannot at any time, or in any finite duration of time, comprehend the limitless, infinite fullness of God's glory. Yet God wills to lavish this fullness on us for our joy (Ephesians 2:7).

Therefore the implication is that our union with God, in the all-satisfying experience of his glory, can never be complete, but must be increasing with intimacy and intensity forever and ever. The perfection of heaven is not static. Nor do we see at once all there is to see—for the finite cannot take in all of the infinite. Our destiny is not to become God. Therefore, there will always be more for a finite creature to know and enjoy of God. The end of increasing pleasure in God will never come.

Here is the way Edwards puts it:

I suppose it will not be denied by any, that God, in glorifying the saints in heaven with eternal felicity, aims to satisfy his infinite grace or benevolence, by the bestowment of a good [which is] infinitely valuable, because eternal: and yet there never will come the moment, when it can be said, that now this infinitely valuable good has been actually bestowed (The End for Which God Created the World, § 285, in God's Passion for His Glory, [Wheaton: Crossway, 1998]).

Moreover, he says, our eternal rising into more and more of God will be a

rising higher and higher through that infinite duration, and ... not with constantly diminishing (but perhaps an increasing) [velocity] ... [to an] infinite height; though there never will be any particular time when it can be said already to have come to such a height ( $\P$  279).

It will take an infinite number of ages for God to be done glorifying the wealth of his grace to us—which is to say he will never be done. And our joy will increase forever and ever. Boredom is absolutely excluded in the presence of an infinitely glorious God.85

- 10. How do these reflections above relate to the final section of the epilogue (311-312)?
- · ANSWER. These reflections from Edwards and Piper stress that our joy in heaven will be ever-increasing because we will be satisfied with an infinitely glorious God. Because his glory knows no limit, there will always be more to experience and savor. The epilogue to The Pleasures of God stresses that our pleasure in God will be the very pleasure of God in God. Therefore, to synthesize these two points we might say that in heaven we will be granted an ever-increasing capacity to enjoy the glory of God with the very pleasure of God. What a hope this is!

There, in heaven, this infinite fountain of love flows forever. There this glorious God is manifested, and shines forth in full glory, in beams of love. And there this glorious fountain forever flows forth in streams and rivers of love and delight. These

<sup>85</sup> John Piper, "Can Joy Increase Forever?" an online article at the desiringGod website.

rivers swell to an ocean of love, in which the souls of the ransomed may bathe with the sweetest enjoyment, and their hearts are deluged with love!<sup>86</sup>

We start to realize—oh my goodness—this has to do with being folded into the intra-Trinitarian affection that exploded in the creation of the universe. Heaven is going to be a very remarkable place.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Jonathan Edwards, His Redeeming Love, 139-140.

<sup>87</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 1," an online conference message at the desiring God website.

#### LOOKING FORWARD AND LOOKING BACK

Today's study and the next day's study review some of the major points that have been put forth in this course. We will first consider two texts which look forward to this Christian's final hope. Then we will cast a glance backward over the work we've done in the earlier lessons.

The book of Isaiah contains many beautiful passages about the LORD's restoration of his people in his land. Here is one such passage:

#### Isaiah 55:12-13

<sup>12</sup> For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. <sup>13</sup> Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and <u>it</u> shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

- 11. To what does the word "it" (verse 13, underlined above) refer? In other words, what shall make a name for the LORD according to this passage?
- ANSWER. The word "it" refers to everything that comes before it in vv. 12-13. This includes the joy and peace of the redeemed and the entire new and redeemed earth. It is this—all of the blessings that bring us satisfaction in the age to come—that will make a name for the LORD. In other words, God will be most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

Here's the way the chapter [Isaiah 55] ends. It's about joy being God's signal sign over us in the age to come. . . . The best news in all the world, and I discovered it about 35 years ago, is that God's passion to make a name for himself and his passion to make me happy are the same passion! Is that not amazing?<sup>88</sup>

Of all the blessings we will enjoy in the new earth, what is the greatest blessing? Psalm 43 provides the answer:

<sup>88</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 1," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

#### Psalm 43:1-5

¹ Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me! ² For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you rejected me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? ³ Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! ⁴ Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God. ⁵ Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

[Psalm 43:4]: 'Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy.' The final goal of life is not forgiveness or any of God's good gifts. The final goal of life is God himself, experienced as your exceeding joy. Or very literally from the Hebrew, 'God, the gladness of my rejoicing.' That is, God, who in all my rejoicing over all the good things that he had made, is himself, in all my rejoicing, the heart of my joy, the gladness of my joy. Every joy that does not have God as the central gladness of the joy is a hollow joy and in the end will burse like a bubble.<sup>89</sup>

We have already read that the "main reward of the kingdom, the reward *above* all others and *in* all others, is that in the kingdom we will behold the glory of God and enjoy that glory with the very pleasure of God" (311).

- 12. How does the truth that the "final goal of life is God himself" fit with the main thrust of *The Pleasures of God*?
- ANSWER. We have seen that God's chief and fundamental pleasure is a pleasure in himself. Since he is the most glorious and worthy being in the universe, it is necessary and right for God to delight in God above all else. Furthermore, to give us the most precious gift and our greatest good, God must give himself to us. God's supreme act of love is to invite us into the very enjoyment he has in himself. Therefore, not only is God the final goal for God, but God is the final goal for us.

The final paper will draw together what we've been studying throughout thecourse. Therefore, it is appropriate at this time to begin looking over the doctrine of God that we've been building lesson by lesson.

<sup>89</sup> John Piper, "I Will Go to God, My Exceeding Joy," an online sermon at the desiring God website.

- 13. Quickly glance through the lesson pages for Lessons 1-4. As you recall what you studied in these lessons, how would you summarize their content in a few brief sentences?
- Answer. God is infinitely glorious and infinitely happy. God has always been happy in the fellowship of the Trinity because the Son is the radiance of the Father's glory, and we might say that the Spirit is the love which flows between them. Therefore, God is completely self-sufficient and is not constrained to do anything to fill any deficiency in himself—he has no deficiencies. Therefore, since God is absolutely sovereign in the world, he does whatever he pleases. And it was his sovereign pleasure to create the world and everything in it to express his glory and offer him praise.
- 14. Now turn to Lessons 5-7. Summarize these lessons briefly.
- · ANSWER. God not only takes pleasure in his glory that is reflected in the "natural" world, but he also takes pleasure in having his glory known, savored, and reflected among people, whom he has made in his image. All that God does among the nations is done with the aim of making his name known. He has chosen to make his name known primarily through a people whom he has freely chosen for himself. Though formerly among those who slandered his glory, God has redeemed his elect while preserving his glory through the death of his Son. This brings him joy.
- 15. Finally, look through Lessons 8-11 and what you have studied thus far in Lesson 12. Think of a few brief sentences that summarize these lessons and write them below.
- ANSWER. God's delights in his people and delights in doing good to them because they hope in him. This hope magnifies God's grace and glory. It expresses itself in prayers for more of his grace and glory. This hope also expresses itself in obedience. So God's delight in his people, their prayers, and their obedience is, at the bottom, God's delight in his own glory. God is pleased when his people search for understanding of these things because spiritual insight too is a gift of God. Even public justice from an unbelieving world is a delight to God when his own righteousness and glory is reflected in it. But the great hope of believers is for total justice to be established on earth and for the pleasure of God in God to become our pleasure.

#### CONCLUDING WITH THE INTRODUCTIONN

Other than a few verses that we examined in Lesson 1 (1 Timothy 1:11; 6:15), we have not encountered any biblical texts that explicitly state that God is infinitely happy. A critic might think, therefore, that God's happiness is not a concept that is clear or important in the Bible's teaching.

- 16. Given everything you've learned in this course, respond to a critic who claims that the Bible does not teach us that God is infinitely happy.
- ANSWER. It is curious that the Bible doesn't contain a greater number of assertions regarding God's happiness. Perhaps this is because God's infinite happiness is a truth so lofty and inexpressible that it must be everywhere hinted at but seldom stated outright (similar to the ineffable doctrine of the Trinity?). A scarcity of explicit references should not, however, cause us to doubt this great truth. The previous lessons have shown that God's happiness is implied by his absolute sovereignty, his intra-Trinitarian self-sufficiency, and his ultimate gift of himself to those who believe. These things (sovereignty, self-sufficiency, self-gift) are truths that are abundantly clear and which are directly taught on almost every page of the Bible.

You may think it odd, but we are going to read the introduction to *The Pleasures* of *God* as the last reading assignment for the course. Since we didn't read the introduction before and since the introduction overviews Piper's entire book, we thought it would be a helpful summary of the content of the course.

#### S REQUIRED READING

The Pleasures of God, 15-23

Piper writes the following about the key sentence in Scougal which prompted the meditations that lead to Piper's sermon series and then to this book:

One sentence riveted my attention. It took hold of my thought life in early 1987 and became the center of my meditation for about three months. What Scougal said in

this sentence was the key that opened for me the treasure house of the pleasures of God.<sup>90</sup>

- 17. How did that single sentence in Scougal open for John Piper the "treasure house of the pleasures of God"?
- ANSWER. The sentence "The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love" opened the treasure house of the pleasures of God not by describing those pleasures, but rather by prompting Piper's inquiry. What Piper saw in that sentence was that "one way to meditate on the excellency of God is to meditate on his pleasures" (20). Once Piper understood that, he knew what he had to do: he used his Bible and concordance to survey where God's pleasures were mentioned. So Scougal's insight impelled Piper's quest to know what are the pleasures of God.
- 18. As you know, Scougal asserted that "the worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its *love*." Why did Piper write a book, then, about the *pleasures* of God rather than the *loves* of God?
- ANSWER. The excerpt that Piper quotes from Scougal on page 19 makes it clear that Piper and Scougal both believe that delight in the beloved is at the essence of love. It is therefore legitimate to use the pleasures of God in place of the loves of God. Furthermore, while the loves of God might be ambiguous to readers who have many different ideas about what love is, the pleasures of God is more readily understandable and provocative.

Piper summarizes the goal of *The Pleasures of God* in two places—once in the introduction and once at the beginning of the second chapter.

My hope and prayer in writing this book is that more and more people would meditate with me on the pleasures of God; and that in doing so we would focus our attention on his excellency and glory. In this way our souls would be increasingly satisfied with God and changed gradually into his likeness. Thus, more and more, would God's glory be manifest in the world through the mission of his church.

The basic goal of my life and the reason for writing this book is to direct the

<sup>90</sup> John Piper, The Pleasures of God, 17-18.

attention of more and more people to the pleasures of God revealed in Scripture; that we might see in the pleasures of God some of the infinite measure of his worth and excellency; and, in seeing this glory, be transformed to the likeness of his Son; and give ourselves so passionately to the work of mercy and missions, that all the nations will see and give glory to our Father in heaven.<sup>91</sup>

- 19. In each of the quotations above there is a marked progression in Piper's goal. Identify and record below the different "stages" articulated in Piper's purpose for writing the book.
- · ANSWER. The stages in Piper's goal could be delineated as follows:
  - A1. To set forth the pleasures of God as revealed in Scripture.
  - A2. To see in those pleasures something of God's glory (his worth and excellency).
  - A3. In seeing God's glory, for our souls to be satisfied and conformed to the likeness of God's Son.
  - A4. As we are transformed to his likeness, we will engage more passionately in the work of mercy and missions.
  - A5. Our good works in the world will manifest God's glory and cause the nations to praise God.
- 20. According to Piper, why is the order of the chapters so important?
- ANSWER. The order of the chapters is so important because by focusing on the pleasure that God has in himself we will let God be God and keep God at the center of the gospel. Then and only then will we rightly understand how God can take pleasure in us. If we started with God's pleasure in us we would pervert the gospel message and distort a true understanding of God's pleasure in us. So for God's glory and our joy we need to begin with God and see that he is himself at the core of all his pleasures.

<sup>91</sup> Piper, The Pleasures of God, 21, 47.

#### S INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Suppose that someone approaches you three months from now and inquires about this course and about the book *The Pleasures of God*. They want to know if it would be worthwhile to take this course, read the book, or listen to the sermon series. Compose your response to this inquiry below. Would you recommend that they study the pleasures of God either through this course, the book, or the sermon series? If so, why? Persuade them with reasons. And if not, why not?



#### S DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. After you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. Were you surprised by how much insight could be taken from one short verse (Luke 12:32)?

2. Is there any aspect of this course or argument in the book that is still a bit unclear or confusing to you?

3. Have you, in the past, meditated much on the joys of heaven? If so, what were your thoughts about why we would be happy there?

4. Your own question(s):

#### § ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

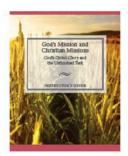
- John Piper, God is the Gospel (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005).
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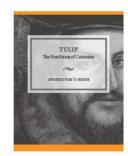
# The Pleasures of God God's Delight in Being God

The Pleasures of God is a course that considers the worth and excellency of God through the lens of God's pleasures. The curriculum simply investigates the biblical teaching on one pleasure of God in each lesson. Students will carefully examine the biblical text, thoughtfully interact with John Piper's book, *The Pleasures of God*, and think through certain aspects of the doctrine of God. The aim of the course is to expand students' vision of God so that they might come to share in the very joys of God himself.

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