The background of the entire page is a vibrant, multi-colored marbled paper. The colors include deep reds, purples, blues, and yellows, creating a complex, organic pattern. A central rectangular area is framed by a thin, light-colored border, containing the text and a decorative flourish.

The Pleasures of God  
God's Delight in Being God



STUDENT'S WORKBOOK



# § The Pleasures of God

## *God's Delight in Being God*

STUDENT'S WORKBOOK

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

STUDENT'S WORKBOOK

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# The Pleasures of God

## *God's Delight in Being God*

### SYLLABUS

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#### 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 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 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).

## 🔗 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.

## 🔗 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:

1. 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?

# 1

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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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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt(s) from *The Pleasures of God: Meditating on God’s Delight in Being God* by John Piper, copyright © 1991, 2000 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. 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.

## § 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.



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

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:

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?

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.

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<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.

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 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?

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Parnell, “Three Things We Should Know About God,” an online article at the [desiringGod](#) website.

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

## 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:

*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.

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5 John Piper, "The Gladness of the Risen God," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

6 Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, 51.

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

*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 . . .<sup>7</sup>*

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

Acts 26:2

*<sup>2</sup> I consider myself fortunate 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,*

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

*she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. <sup>40</sup> Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is.*

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)?

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?

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 dour<sup>8</sup>.*

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

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<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.

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 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?

#### 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*

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<sup>10</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 1," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website

*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 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?

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<sup>11</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in His Son," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

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

*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.

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12 John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 445.

13 John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 1," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

14 Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, 47. Italics removed.

🔗 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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



# The Pleasure of God in His Son

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# 2

## § 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.

## § 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.



## Day 1

### 1 AM WELL PLEASSED 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?

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?

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?

#### 🔗 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).



## 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

*<sup>17</sup> 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

*<sup>26</sup> 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; <sup>27</sup> 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.)

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?

*... 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>*

Let's look at another passage in the writings of Paul. Notice the variety of

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<sup>16</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in His Son," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

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?

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

#### 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?

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?

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

## Day 3

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### 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?

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 firstborn 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 firstborn 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?

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?

*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>*

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18 John Piper, “The Pleasures of God, Part 1,” an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

§ 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.

15. What is your reaction to Piper’s and Edwards’ attempt to explain something of the mystery of the Trinity (page 42, footnote 22)?

## Day 4

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### 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 the gospel of the glory of the blessed God 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 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.*

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

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?

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

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

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.

## REQUIRED READING

*The Pleasures of God*, 42-45

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

19. Fill-in-the-blank: "The original, the primal, the deepest, the foundational joy of God is the joy he has in his own \_\_\_\_\_ as he sees them \_\_\_\_\_ in the glory of his \_\_\_\_\_" (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 another (Isa. 42:8).<sup>22</sup>*

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21 John Piper, "The Gladness of the Risen God," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

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

20. According to Piper, what is the relation of this first chapter to the rest of this book? Why is this so?

## Day 5

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### § 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):

 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ D. A. Carson, *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

# 3

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## § 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

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

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 443

yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose . . .”

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 purpose, 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 good pleasure 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.

## 🔗 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.
- ▷ articulate a potential problem with God’s pleasure in all he does and respond to it.



## 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 un-beholden 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?

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<sup>25</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 2," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

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?

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.

## 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.
  5. Explain the meaning of this phrase in your own words: “God’s glory [is] the heart of all true religious experience” (50).

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<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Edwards as reproduced in John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998), 165. The italics are Edwards’s.

## Day 2

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### 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?

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?

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)?

*[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>*

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<sup>27</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in All That He Does," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

§ 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.

9. Explain how Piper concludes that God has pleasure in all he does by way of theological inference.

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.

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28 John Piper, *Desiring God*, 33.

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*.

 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

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### 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

*<sup>10</sup> And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: "Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?" <sup>11</sup> 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.

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?

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?

*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

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<sup>29</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 2," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

*host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his 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?

*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.*

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<sup>30</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in All That He Does," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

Luke 15:7

*7 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?

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>*

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<sup>31</sup> John Piper, “The Pleasures of God, Part 2,” an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

## Day 4

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### 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)?

### § 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?

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?

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>32</sup>

19. Based on Scougal's discussion here, what personal application might we draw from this lesson on God's pleasures?

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..

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

## Day 5

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### § 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.



## 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):

- ▷ 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](http://www.desiringGod.com) website.



# The Pleasure of God in His Creation

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# 4

## 🔗 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, deers 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.

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<sup>33</sup> John Piper, “The Pleasures of God, Part 1,” an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

## § 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.



## 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!

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<sup>34</sup> 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?

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?

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?

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

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<sup>35</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 1," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

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?

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?

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*

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36 Arthur Pink, *Gleanings in the Godhead* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 56.

*not about us. It's about the Maker. The heavens are telling the glory of God. Watch it! Listen! Get through it!<sup>37</sup> Shall we not be infinitely more transported with that 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?<sup>38</sup>*

5. According to the two quotations above, what should we do when we observe something glorious in creation?

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37 John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 2," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

38 Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, 84.

## Day 2

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### 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)?

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

## § REQUIRED READING

*The Pleasures of God*, 77-88

- Stop at “No Humans Hear the Praise of the Deeps”

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.

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?

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

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.

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?

## Day 3

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### 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

*<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights! <sup>2</sup> Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts! <sup>3</sup> Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! <sup>4</sup> Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! <sup>5</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD! For he commanded and they were created. <sup>6</sup> And he established them forever and ever; he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away. <sup>7</sup> Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all deeps, <sup>8</sup> fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word! <sup>9</sup> Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! <sup>10</sup> Beasts and all livestock, creeping things and flying birds! <sup>11</sup> Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! <sup>12</sup> Young men and maidens together, old men and children! <sup>13</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his majesty is above earth and heaven. <sup>14</sup> 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?

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

<sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, <sup>3</sup> who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. <sup>4</sup> For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, <sup>5</sup> for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

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

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

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

*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 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.

#### 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.

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.

## Day 4

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### 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.

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*

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

*tempest carries them off like stubble.* <sup>25</sup> *To whom then will you compare me, 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?

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?

*The reason he loves his world is because he designed his world to show him. This is an echo of God's own self-love.*<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 2," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

§ 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?

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. 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.’<sup>44</sup>*

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44 John Piper, “The Pleasures of God, Part 2,” an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

## Day 5

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### § 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

# 5

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## § 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.<sup>45</sup>*

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.

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<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.

## § LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

- ▷ cite particular biblical passages which testify to God's commitment to spread his fame.
- ▷ 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.



## 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

*<sup>12</sup> "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. <sup>13</sup> And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the LORD has set a king over you. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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." <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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.



*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?

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<sup>46</sup> John Piper, "Is God for Us or for Himself?" an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringGod.com) website.

§ 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?

5. Record at least one thing that you have learned from Piper’s interpretation of 1 Samuel 12.

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

## Day 2

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### 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

*<sup>13</sup> 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." <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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."

6. According to these passages, what was God's purpose in sending the plagues? Underline phrases from the passages above that support your answer.

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

<sup>11</sup> 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, <sup>12</sup> 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, <sup>13</sup> who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble. <sup>14</sup> 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?

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 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>*

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

*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?

#### 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”

9. 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.

10. Why is God’s pleasure in his fame (or name) such good news for us?

## Day 3

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### 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

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?

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.<sup>48</sup>*

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.*

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<sup>48</sup> John Piper, "Good Deeds and the Glory of God," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) 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?

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.

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49 John Piper, "Is God for Us or for Himself?" an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringGod.com) website.

## Day 4

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### 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.

*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>*

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50 John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 21.



## REQUIRED READING

*The Pleasures of God*, 109-119

- Start at “The Fame of God as the Goal of Missions”

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 Timothy-type missionary? Why might Piper stress this distinction in this chapter?

18. What might Piper's purpose be in discussing the four waves of Protestant expansion and in reproducing the two statistical tables?

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?

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?

## Day 5

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### § 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.



## § 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

# 6

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## § 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.

## § 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.

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



## Day 1

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### 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 I chose Israel, 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, Cast away 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.

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?

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)<sup>52</sup>

<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?

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.

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<sup>52</sup> As suggested in *The Pleasures of God*, 128-129. See especially footnote 7 on page 129.

§ 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?

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.

§ FURTHER READING

*The Pleasures of God*, 121-125

- Stop at “Israel Elect from All the Peoples”

## Day 2

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### 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.*

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<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?

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?

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.

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>*

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<sup>54</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 2," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

§ 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.”

10. Do you share God’s pleasure in the doctrine of election? Explain.

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.

§ FURTHER READING

*The Pleasures of God*, 140-143

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

## Day 3

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### 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?

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.

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?

#### 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.

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?

## Day 4

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### 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.

*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 loved by God, that he has chosen 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 beloved by the Lord, because God chose you 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 God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, 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?

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<sup>55</sup> John Piper, "Confirm Your Election," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringGod.com) website

*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 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 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?

## REQUIRED READING

*The Pleasures of God*, 150-155

- Start at "Fifth, this truth enables us..." (toward the top of the page)

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

19. Explain how the truth of election preserves both the urgency and the freedom of biblical obedience.<sup>57</sup>

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?

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57 John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, Question 36, 361.

## Day 5

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### § 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.





§ ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ 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](http://desiringGod.com) website.

# The Pleasure of God in Bruising the Son

# 7

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## § 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.<sup>58</sup>*

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.

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58 John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 1," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

59 John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3" an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

## § 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.



## 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

*<sup>23</sup> . . . 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.

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.*

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 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.*

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<sup>60</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

Isaiah 53:10 (King James Version)

<sup>10</sup> *Yet it pleased the LORD 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)

<sup>10</sup> *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 it was the LORD's will 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?

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: haphêtz] of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief. . .*

Isaiah 1:11

<sup>11</sup> *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: haphêtz] 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?

#### 🔗 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.

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

## Day 2

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### 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?

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? . . . <sup>14</sup> . . . 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.

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.

#### REQUIRED READING

*The Pleasures of God*, 162-166

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

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<sup>61</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

9. In what way do the “contrasting themes of justice and mercy” come together in Romans 3:23-26?

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>

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

## Day 3

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### 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>63</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?

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<sup>63</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

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

*<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup> 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?

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>*

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64 John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

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.

#### REQUIRED READING

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

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

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?

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?

## Day 4

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### 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)<sup>65</sup>

<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?

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

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?

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.

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.* <sup>34</sup> *When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit.* <sup>35</sup> *And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.*

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66 John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

<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." <sup>39</sup> And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. <sup>40</sup> When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" <sup>41</sup> 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." <sup>42</sup> 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. <sup>44</sup> 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?

*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>*

#### REQUIRED READING

*The Pleasures of God*, 174-178

- Start at "I Return to Edwards"

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<sup>67</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

19. List the reasons why the Father delights in the death of his Son.

20. What is the point of Piper's closing parable?

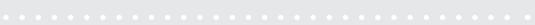
## Day 5

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### § 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.



  
 **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](http://desiringGod.com) website.

# The Pleasure of God in Doing Good to All Who Hope in Him

# 8

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## § 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?

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<sup>68</sup> From the hymn, "O Praise the Lord! O Thank the Lord!" written by Henry L. Mason (1923).

## § 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).



## Day 1

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### 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.*

1. Underline all the promises made in the passage above. To whom were these promises originally given? (Search the broader context, if necessary.)

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?

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." . .

.<sup>18</sup> His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."<sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?<sup>20</sup> 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.

*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?

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<sup>69</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 3," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

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?

## Day 2

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### 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?

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?

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?

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 mercy shall follow 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 mercy shall follow 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 lovingkindness will follow 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 love will follow 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 faithful love pursue 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 unfailing love will pursue 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?

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?

## Day 3

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### 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?

### § 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.

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.”

*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?
15. Summarize the objection Piper addresses at the bottom of page 192. Then summarize his response.

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<sup>70</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *His Redeeming Love*, compiled by Judith Couchman and Lisa Marzano (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Vine Books, 2001), 95.

## Day 4

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### 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?

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?

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?

#### 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?

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.

*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>*

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71 John Piper, “Rejoice with Trembling,” an online article at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringGod.com) website.

## Day 5

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### § 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.



§ 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 "man-centered"? 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

# 9

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## 🔗 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.

## § 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.



## Day 1

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### 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?

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?

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?

*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”

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<sup>72</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God*, 173.



## Day 2

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### 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

<sup>8</sup> *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?

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?

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?

§ 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?

10. What practical difference does it make to know that “upright does not mean perfect” (214)?

## Day 3

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### 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?

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.

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?



*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 preaching 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>*

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73 John Piper, "The Sovereignty of God and Prayer," an online article at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

## Day 4

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### 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)?

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.

18. Why would God be pleased with such prayers (as you just composed)?

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.

## 🔗 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, faith-filled 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?

20. Explain why God does not have pleasure in “materialistic evangelical praying” (227).

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74 John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 66.

§ REQUIRED READING

*The Pleasures of God*, 228-231

- Start at “A Closing Appeal for Wartime Praying”

## Day 5

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§ 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.

## 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

# 10

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## 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.

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<sup>75</sup> John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 24.

## § 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.



## 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?

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." <sup>13</sup> And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD." <sup>14</sup> And Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?" <sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me this night." And he said to him, "Speak." <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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.' <sup>19</sup> 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?" <sup>20</sup> 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?

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.

*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 all-star Bible conferences—none of these matter unless you are keeping Christ's commandments (1 John 2:3-4).<sup>76</sup>*

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*

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<sup>76</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel* (Rossshire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000), 158.

*rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king." <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret." <sup>30</sup> 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." <sup>31</sup> 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?

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.

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

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### 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.

### 🔗 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?



## Day 3

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### 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 faith but does not have works? Can that faith 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 faith 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 faith. 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 God prepared beforehand, that we should walk 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.
- Grace is God's unmerited favor toward us that forgives our sins. Grace, however, is not connected to Christian obedience.
  - Grace is simply the power that God gives to us that enables our obedience. It is not related to our initial salvation.
  - Grace is God's gift to the entire human race. It creates an opportunity to repent and believe, though does not force that decision.
  - 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?

In order to understand the relationship between faith and obedience, we must understand the dynamics of how faith produces obedience. Two examples 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?

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 himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.*

#### 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.

15. Summarize this entire section in a brief paragraph, using your own words.

## Day 4

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### 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?

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:

1. 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> “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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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? <sup>7</sup> 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?

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<sup>78</sup> John Piper, “The Pleasure of God in Public Justice,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) 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?

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).<sup>79</sup>*

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<sup>79</sup> Stephen Witmer, "Unless God Works, We Work in Vain", an online article at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

We will read and interact with the conclusion to this ninth chapter as a part of this lesson's integrative assignment.

 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)?

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?

## Day 5

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### § 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?



## 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):

- ▷ 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

# 11

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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?

#### 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.



## 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

*<sup>17</sup> 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?

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?

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

*<sup>11</sup> 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?

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?



#### 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?



## 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)?

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.



## 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

## Day 2

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### 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 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."*

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. <sup>19</sup> For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." <sup>20</sup> 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? <sup>21</sup> 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, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. . . . <sup>3</sup> And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, <sup>4</sup> and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup>*

*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?

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.

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?



#### 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)?

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.

## 🔗 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?”

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).

## 🔗 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?”

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## Day 3

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### 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:

<sup>2</sup> 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?

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

<sup>1</sup> *My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, <sup>2</sup> making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; <sup>3</sup> yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, <sup>4</sup> if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, <sup>5</sup> then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. <sup>6</sup> For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; <sup>7</sup> 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.

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.

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?*<sup>80</sup>

#### 🔗 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.”

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.

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80 John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 97-98.

## § 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?

## § 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

## Day 4

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### 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 mind?

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?

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.

*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>*

#### 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?

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?

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81 C. S. Lewis, as quoted by John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*, 97.

## Day 5

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### § 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?



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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- ▷ 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

# 12

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## § 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 Creator-creature.

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.<sup>82</sup>*

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

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<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.

#### 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.
- ▷ depict the final hope of the believer in heaven and the joy we will experience there.



## Day 1

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### 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.'<sup>83</sup>*

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?

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83 John Piper, "It Is Your Father's Pleasure to Give You the Kingdom," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

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.

Luke 12:32

<sup>32</sup> Fear not, *little flock* . . .

John 10:11-16

<sup>11</sup> *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?

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 Father's good pleasure . . .*

Luke 11:11-13

<sup>11</sup> *What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; <sup>12</sup> or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> 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?

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: eudokeō]...*

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?

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 kingdom.*

5. What do you think is meant by the term “kingdom” in this verse?

## Day 2

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### 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.")

*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>*

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84 John Piper, "It Is Your Father's Pleasure to Give You the Kingdom," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.



*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 (¶ 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.<sup>85</sup>*

10. How do these reflections above relate to the final section of the epilogue (311-312)?

*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 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>*

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85 John Piper, “Can Joy Increase Forever?” an online article at the [desiringGod](#) website.

86 Jonathan Edwards, *His Redeeming Love*, 139-140.

87 John Piper, “The Pleasures of God, Part 1,” an online conference message at the [desiringGod](#) website.

## Day 3

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### 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 it 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?

*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?

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88 John Piper, "The Pleasures of God, Part 1," an online conference message at the desiringGod website.

Psalm 43 provides the answer:

Psalm 43:1-5

*<sup>1</sup> Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me! <sup>2</sup> 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? <sup>3</sup> Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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 burst 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*?

The final paper will draw together what we’ve been studying throughout the course. Therefore, it is appropriate at this time to begin looking over the doctrine of God that we’ve been building lesson by lesson.

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<sup>89</sup> John Piper, “I Will Go to God, My Exceeding Joy,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) 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?

14. Now turn to Lessons 5-7. Summarize these lessons briefly.

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.

## Day 4

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### 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.

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.

#### 🔗 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>*

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<sup>90</sup> John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, 17-18.

17. How did that single sentence in Scougal open for John Piper the “treasure house of 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?

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 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>*

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91 Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, 21, 47.

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.

20. According to Piper, why is the order of the chapters so important?

## Day 5

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### § 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?

## 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):

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§ ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ John Piper, *God is the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005).
- ▷ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004).
- ▷ John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Orlando: Soli Deo Gloria Ministries, 1999).

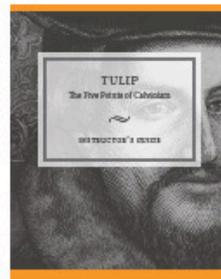
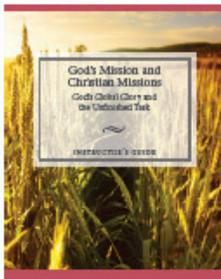


# The Pleasures of God

## 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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Spreading a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ by equipping local churches with God-centered, theologically sound resources.