

Desiring God - Lesson 2

by John Piper

John Piper explores the relationship between glorifying God and finding true joy in Him through Christian hedonism.

Duration: 44:17

Scripture: Nehemiah 8:10, Psalm 16:11, Psalm 34:8, Psalm 37:4, Psalm 100:2, Psalm 119:14, Isaiah 61:10, John 15:11, Romans 15:13, Philippians 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:16, 1 Peter 1:8

Topics: "Christian Joy", "Godly Pleasure"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of pursuing joy in God. He believes that God desires for us to have a worldview that centers around His glory and our joy. The preacher mentions that there are twelve points that support the biblical basis for pursuing joy in God, but only briefly touches on them. He also mentions that the first point is the existence of biblical commands to pursue joy in God. The sermon encourages listeners to embrace the offer of infinite joy in God rather than settling for temporary pleasures.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.DesiringGod.org Section number five in our outline. The essence of Christian hedonism is this.

Man's chief end is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever. Now that's going to be my answer to the question how God's pursuit of His glory fits together with His being a loving God who would certainly in His love want to do me good and bring me into ultimate eternal satisfaction. Now the pivotal quote here came from C.S. Lewis.

This one comes from his book Reflections on the Psalms and it links the meaning of praise with the meaning of joy and therefore helps me to forge this answer to how God's pursuit of glory relates to my pursuit of happiness. The most obvious fact about praise, whether of God or anything, strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honor.

I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows in praise unless, sometimes if, shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it. Now let me stop here and explain the background here. I may be jumping in and not making sense.

When Lewis read in the Psalms that God kept on commanding people to praise Him like those texts we've all looked at. He's doing everything for His glory and He wants people to live for His glory. He said it really bothered him.

He said it sounded to him like an old woman craving compliments. That's the way God sounded to him. Until this insight came to him.

It says, the world, what I hadn't noticed is that the world rings with praise. Lovers praising their mistresses. Readers, their favorite poet.

Walkers praising the countryside. Players praising their favorite game. Praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles.

Even sometimes politicians or scholars. I had not noticed how the humblest and at the same time the most balanced and capacious minds praised most while the cranks and misfits and malcontents praised least. I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it.

In other words, what God was doing in urging us to join Him in praising God might not have been so strange after all. So they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it. Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent? The psalmist in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about.

In other words, God cares infinitely about His praise and glory. My whole more general difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us as regards the supremely valuable what we delight to do and indeed we can't help doing about everything else we value. So everything that you truly value, you praise and you try to get others to join you in praising it.

Nobody wants to watch the Super Bowl alone. Nobody wants to be standing alone when they're looking at the most magnificent sunrise. They want to turn to somebody and at least say, Wow! That's kind of a California way of saying something poetic.

Oh wow, look at the moon. I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes. This is absolutely crucial for understanding Christian hedonism.

The praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment. It is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment the lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are.

The delight is incomplete until it is expressed. Therefore, here's the big therefore, God's constantly demanding that you see in Him the most praiseworthy thing and say so, if He's right, He's demanding that your joy not only find its repose in Him, but that it find its consummation in Him when it is expressed in praise and lived out for His glory. Here are the inferences.

Number one, the greatest favor God can do for us is to seek His praise in us as the consummation of our joy in Him. Oh, that the world would believe that. I told the Desiring God staff that I really want to invest a few thousand dollars in a newspaper ad, in the Tribune, half a page or whatever, that poses this question to the city.

Do you feel more loved when God makes much of you, or maybe I should put it in a hypothetical way, would you feel more loved if God were to make much of you, or would you feel more loved if God were to give you the ability to enjoy making much of Him forever? And the way that question is answered is a great watershed between idolatry and worship. And there are many counselors today leading people straight into idolatry as the healing of their wounds. And it works in this life in measure.

Constantly telling us that our problem is lack of self-esteem, and that what it means to be loved is to be valued and to be made much of. When in fact, the greatest favor and the most loving thing God can do for you is to seek that you would praise Him, delight in knowing Him, delight in making much of Him. And then the next week, after we spend \$3,000 on that half page, we would run this question.

Does anybody visit the Grand Canyon to enhance his or her self-esteem? And maybe in little print, if not, why do they go? And the answer is, because the deepest longing of our heart is not that we be made much of, but that we stand on the brink of something big enough to get our heart around in the God-shaped vacuum that there is inside of us. We were made to see and know and enjoy and be caught up into the glory of the Grand Canyon God and forget about our little self-esteem. Here's second implication.

God is the one being in the universe, therefore, for whom self-exaltation is the highest virtue and the most loving act. Well, I hope you're following me. If God is the most glorious of all beings, and if knowing Him is the highest pleasure, or if the expressing and the expansion of that delight in knowing Him through praises and drawing other people into those praises is the consummation of that joy, then God's self-exaltation, that is, His constantly asserting His supremacy in my life, is His highest virtue and most loving act.

If He were to reverse roles with me or anybody else, He would be cruel, calling my attention to that which is less than ultimately satisfying. You see, it's so simple when you stop to think about it. It makes you wonder why it took me 20 years or so to figure this out.

If God is great, the greatest, then the best thing He can give to us is Himself, and if in giving us Himself He brings our hearts into union with what's most satisfying, and if praising is the consummation of delighting, then He must seek our praise for Himself if it would be loving to us. Inference number two, three. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

That's my main way of saying Christian hedonism now. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. Or, to say it another way, the chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever.

Now, all of this is meant to answer the question, is God loving to be self-exalting, to do everything for His own glory? Or, it's the answer to the question, how does God's passion to be glorified and my passion to be satisfied, how do these relate to each other? And I'm answering those two questions now by saying, God is not vain and selfish in seeking His own glory. In doing that, He is preserving for me and holding out to me and exalting before me the one thing that will satisfy me, and that is the most loving thing He can do. And, in doing it, He satisfies my heart, and therefore, if I will pursue this satisfaction in Him, then He will be most glorified in me.

Now, I added an explicit biblical support for this, and I don't want to... I have preached a half an hour sermon on this. Let me see if I can put it in about three minutes. Paul says, I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers, that is, my bondage, my imprisonment here in Rome, and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus, according to my earnest expectation and hope, and this is what we should

all have, the same hope and expectation Paul has, that I will not at all be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness Christ will even now, as always, be magnified in my body.

That's his expectation and hope, that Christ would be magnified in his body. He wants to live for the glory of God, whether by life or by death. And now he gives a support for this, some kind of explanatory warrant for saying that Christ will be magnified in his body in life and in death.

And how does he do it? How does he undergird that hope and that expectation that Christ will be magnified in his body? For, to me, to live, and that live joins with that life, is Christ, and to die, and that die joins with that death. So you can see he's undergirding, magnifying Christ in life and magnifying Christ in death by saying, to live is Christ and to die is gain. So let's just take one of these pairs to show you how it works.

Take the death pair. Here's the way he argues. He says, my hope and my expectation is that Christ might be magnified in my death.

How so? Because, to me, to die is gain. Now when you read that, you should write that sentence down, close your Bible, and spend about an hour thinking. Think, think, think, think, and glory will open up to your eyes if you pray for God's illumination of your biblically saturated mental processes.

That's what happened to me, I believe, as I was meditating on this several years ago, preparing this message for an annual meeting for the Baptist General Conference. And here's what I saw. He says, to die is gain is the reason why Christ is magnified in his death.

If, when you come to die, you count it gain because of Christ, Christ is magnified in that. But not to get it so that it really makes sense, you have to figure out why it's gain to die because of Christ. And the answer is given right here, verse 23.

I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better. Better for whom, Paul? It is very much better to die and go to be with Jesus than to live for Paul. It's not necessarily better for the churches, which is why he thought he would probably stay alone for a while, because there's some other good things that he has to do, but if it was just him and Jesus, it would be vastly better to die than to go on living here in this veil of tears and conveyor belt of corpses.

So, now we can put it together. To die is gain because gain is better because it will mean with Christ, more intimacy with Christ. So how then is Christ magnified? What is the essence that constitutes the magnifying of Christ in dying? Answer, when you prize Him so fully that you can let everything go in order to have Him, He's magnified.

He is most magnified in you when in your dying you are most satisfied in Him. When I saw that, I just leaped out of my chair, because I want my theology to be biblical. I don't want to just spin out logical implications of this or that.

And if that's not what this means, I want you right now to raise your hand and tell me what else you see here. So we'll just pause here and let you ask questions about this or any of these last few inferences we've been talking about. Just pause and clarification questions or anything else right at this point that you want to ask about.

Don't feel pressured. Go ahead, Ty. How does the doctrine of reprobation fit in? Now that, that's big.

I'm going to try to think if this is the best place to try to answer that. I will answer it in Nugget, just to see whether I want to linger over it a minute. Let me give you a short answer, and then maybe when we get to the love section, down at 6.8, we might linger over it a little longer.

The doctrine of reprobation says that God, as a reflex of his electing some to salvation, passes over others and thus consigns them to judgment. He does not rescue all from their condition of fallenness. According to Romans 9, the reason God does that is because the exercise of wrath and power he means to make known so that the full orbit of his manifold perfections would be made known for the infinite enjoyment of the vessels of mercy.

And if God did not judge blameworthy sinners in hell, then the full scope of his wrath and the full scope of his justice and the full scope of his hatred for sin and the full scope of his power and indignation would barely be perceived, and he would not be known for all that he truly is. The mosaic of God for all eternity would not be fully appreciated because the darker parts which highlight the whole thing with glory would not be known. So, the answer is, God is most glorified when the maximum number of people are most satisfied.

And only God knows what that number is. Should more be lost? Should more be saved? So that the saved exult fully in mercy over against the backdrop of judgment? Who can know such awesome proportions but God? Which is why Romans 11 ends the way it ends. Who has been his counselor or given to him a gift that he should be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things to him be glory forever.

That's a short answer. I probably can't make it too much longer. That's heavy.

I mean, that's the biggest and hardest theological question anybody can ask me. Maybe there's one other like where'd sin come from. But yeah, is there a way of reconciling this with the biblical teaching that the way is narrow and few there be that find it.

I think I can only answer the proportion of the narrow way and the broad way by saying God knows how best to bring himself most glory and to intensify most fully the joy of those who believe and are saved over against the lostness of others. Let me speculate a moment here about that text. This is a very troubling text.

That the way is broad and easy that leads to destruction and many there are that walk along it. And the way is narrow, hard that leads to life and few there be that find it. Does that mean hell is going to be huge and heaven is going to be small? I don't know how many will be in hell and how many will be in heaven.

And that text alone by itself might lead one to believe that kind of proportion exists. But there's another way of looking at it. Namely, that is just one little thing.

If you believe that the vast number of babies who die will be saved. In other words, if your understanding is that there's an age of accountability. The mortality rate in the history of the world has been absolutely huge for infants and babies.

And therefore, far more people are going to be saved than we think by looking around at the world right now and how many are genuinely born again Christians. But ultimately, I have to plead ignorance that I don't know how many and what the proportion will be. I would just say given my conviction about the wisdom of God and the love of God and the justice of God.

Those proportions will be perfect for a universe at the consummation of redemptive history. Being the best universe for displaying all that God truly is for the enjoyment of his people to the fullness of their enjoyment. And we should tremble, we should tremble that we might not be in the same number.

OK, the question is, how do you relate God's pursuit of his own glory and Jesus pursuit of the glory of the father with the practical deeds of compassion that Jesus performed? He he saw a mother bereaved of her only son and moved with compassion. He raised the widow of Nain's son from the dead. The text, the text says he was moved with compassion and it does in numerous places.

And so it's a legitimate and very helpful questions. The kind of question that that I have been thinking about and working with and will be working with, I suppose, till the day I die. As to how all of scripture fits together to make a coherent whole.

I do believe Jesus feels genuine compassion for hurting people. I think if he had seen that old man whose joints were so brittle that he could barely walk, Jesus heart would have gone out to him as a man in the midst of pain. I think he wept over Jerusalem.

Oh, today you knew the visitation that the Lord was giving you and the signs of peace over you. If you ask now how those two relate, I would say it's a glorious thing in God to be compassionate to the hurting. Very glorious thing.

A king is not glorious if he only responds positively to those who have strength and can impress themselves upon him. A king's glory is often shown in the kind of clemency he shows by pardoning sinners and helping the outcasts, especially if he will clothe himself with an incarnate dirty robe and go out among them and hobnob with them and present himself as a father looking for a prodigal, which is what God did in Jesus Christ. That's a glorious thing in God, that he is so full that he does not need to count equality with God a thing to be grasped and held on to, but can lay it aside in measure and come and penetrate this world in the pursuit of lost sinners like us.

It is a faithful and true saying that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. So none of what I'm saying here should minimize the reality of compassion for lostness or hurting people. But now let's ask, what is compassion? Is it compassion to put band-aid over a cancerous sore with tears in your eyes? It is not.

So, anybody that would say it is a beautiful thing merely that he made lepers whole, lame people walk, blind see, deaf hear, with no design in it that they might recognize the larger mercy that they need in the forgiveness of sins, they would be commending to us a cruel Christ, I believe. I just read with the family John 6 where he feeds the 5,000. He did that because they were hungry.

And so that they might recognize, and the apostles who got 12 basketfuls left over, that's no accident, that they might recognize his all-sufficiency to be for them and to meet their needs no matter what. So trust me, as a Messiah who's about to act in a way that you will never understand. And the text says, they wanted to come and make him king and he ran away from them and said later on, you just wanted your bellies filled.

That's why you want me to be king. In other words, you can take the compassion of Jesus and strip it of its saving purposes, or you can commend compassion to Christians and say, doesn't matter whether people get saved, just feed them. Doesn't matter whether they know about eternity and God and the cross, just

build hospitals and weep over them.

If we are not driven by a long-term desire that they be saved, then compassion is less than compassion. Now, you can hear behind that a real problem, I'm sure. If Jesus knows that some people are not going to believe, according to Romans 2.4 it says, When God shows his kindness to you, do you, by your hard and impenitent hearts, store up wrath for yourselves on the day of wrath? God is making the sun to rise on the just and the unjust.

He is not slaying every herod who preaches the wrong. That compassion has in it a genuine extension of mercy. But at another level, here's a very complex God here.

At another level, God knows whether or not they're going to receive this as an ultimate redeeming work that leads them to trust him. And so he knows whether they are storing up wrath for himself. And so ultimately, at another level, the compassion works judgment.

It multiplies their guilt. Now, we are at number six in your outline. The grand obligation, the pursuit of joy.

Arguments that this is biblical. Now, here's that other quote from C.S. Lewis. I have not yet drawn the most central inference yet, so I want to let Lewis say it for us.

Here's the quote that I read standing in the Romans bookstore on a fall afternoon in 1968 that turned my theological life on its head, along with some other influences in those days. The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial. But not about self-denial as an end in itself.

We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ. And nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find, if we do so, contains an appeal to desire. When I read that, I thought, you said it.

Somebody said it. What I've been seeing all over the Gospels these years as a teenager in the early twenties, if there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Immanuel Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. The breath, I would just, can you imagine anybody saying this? Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward, oh, I have considered them, and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak.

Do you see the analysis of the human condition emerging here? As I stood there in that bookstore, I stopped, as I recall, something like this and said, everybody I look at in this store, and as I walk back down Colorado Avenue and up Walnut to sit down at my desk and process this, everybody I see has a problem, and the problem is not what everybody says it is. The problem is not that they're all pursuing their own pleasure, it's that they're not pursuing it with the kind of radicalness that they should. I tell you, that's a life-changing discovery.

It changes everything. Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what he's meant by an offer of a holiday at the sea.

We are far too easily pleased. That was a life-changing page. Certain pages go down in literary history for me as powerful, and this has got to be among the top two or three.

I wonder if you see it. That is an awesome insight. Why does it take a Lewis to see it? I got a letter from a guy the other day that says, how can you call Lewis one of your heroes? He wasn't even evangelical.

He had a defective view of Scripture, and he believed in purgatory, and he probably was a partial universalist. I said, all I know is once I was blind, but now I see with the help of C.S. Lewis. Of course he was not an evangelical.

His view of Scripture was defective. His view of purgatory was abominable. His view of in the last battle that people squeak into heaven other ways than through Jesus is a wretched insight, but you got to make distinctions.

So you will find C.S. Lewis in our bookstore. It's okay, Rick. And we'll teach our people to read with discernment.

Now, here's the inference that I said we should draw, which he just made explicit. If everything I've said for the last one hour and fifty-four minutes, we have six minutes to go, is true or even close to the truth, it is your duty to devote all of your energy, unrelenting morning, noon, and night, to pursuing your pleasure in God. That's why I call it hedonism.

Let me clarify something here about this term hedonism. Philosopher types who don't like what I say, like there's a philosophy professor over at Augsburg, and in the early days, we sent letters back and forth. His name is Bruce Reichenbach.

You can go meet him. Good guy, but dead wrong on this, I think, just like he thinks I'm dead wrong. Or Richard Mao, who gave me ten pages in his book on the God who commands, critiquing this view, and to which I've written response and dialogue for three hours in front of a group of people about it with him.

He's the president of Fuller Seminary today. What philosophical hedonists tend to think of when they think of precise hedonism is, hedonism is a philosophy which says, that which makes you happy is the good. That is not what I mean by hedonism.

I do not define the good as that which makes me happy. I'm not starting there. I'm not ending there.

That's not my sphere of thinking. Rather, I say, for the good to be pursued goodly, you must pursue it with delight. Delight is a necessary component of the pursuit of the good.

And the good is defined by God Almighty, not John Piper and his corrupt desires. If I were to stand in the mirror, and the mirror functioned only to reflect my passions, and I were to read off the mirror a guide for my life, I would be a very disobedient person. I am a fallen, sinful, corrupt human being, who every day of my life must be killing sin, lest it kill me, as John Owen said.

If you are not killing sin, it will be killing you. Or, as Romans 8.13 says, if we live according to the flesh we will die, but if we put to death the deeds of the body, we will live. What are the deeds of the body? The deeds of the body are those natural desires that creep up from unregenerate, or, for the regenerate person, the not fully sanctified heart.

So no way do I make my own desires the measure of the good. I simply say, virtue, the pursuit of the good, is not virtue if the good is not delighted in. You cannot excise pleasure, and delight, and longing, and happiness from virtue.

And everything in number six, you see there are twelve points on which we could spend an hour each, but we won't. There are twelve points. All of them are arguments that this is biblical.

They are arguments that this is biblical in various ways. Some of them overcome objections, and others are just positive expositions of how this is taught in Scripture. So, probably half of our time tomorrow morning, we'll take about an hour and a half on those twelve things, and then we'll take probably about an hour and a half, or maybe an hour, on point number seven.

And the first one is going to be, there are biblical commands to pursue our joy in God. Let's pray. O God, we have touched on some very weighty, weighty matters.

And my heart's desire is that it might shape our minds and our hearts, so that a world view emerges, a mental framework for understanding reality, and a way of holding the Bible together in your great passion for your glory, and your pursuit of our joy and your great love for us. And I pray that the effect here would be to commend you to everybody we know with courage and boldness, that you are a God who has sent your Son into the world, Jesus Christ, to die for sinners, so that we might be granted the privilege and the ability to know you and enjoy making much of you forever. Lord, help us to love this and to feel loved in this.

I ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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