



A 12-part study of *The Pleasures of God*
by JOHN PIPER

THE
PLEASURES
OF GOD
DVD STUDY GUIDE

Meditations on God's Delight in Being God

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MULTNOMAH
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THE PLEASURES OF GOD DVD STUDY GUIDE

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Italics in Scripture quotations reflect the author's added emphasis.

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INTRODUCTION TO THIS STUDY GUIDE

The world is filled with admiration. People are constantly admiring celebrities, politicians, athletes, lovers, friends, relatives, and natural wonders. Rarely in this sea of admiration do we find people enthralled with that which is truly captivating. Instead, individuals spend their time chasing the latest fad, hoping to derive some small satisfaction from enjoying the rotten crumbs of this world. And the world seems increasingly unable to determine what things are truly worthy of admiration and reflection. Paul's exhortation to the church at Philippi is rarely heeded: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8).

In the introduction to the book *The Pleasures of God*, John Piper exposes the crying need of the hour: "What the church and the world need today, more than anything else, is to know and love God—the great, glorious, sovereign, happy God of the Bible. Very few people think of God as supremely happy in the fellowship of the Trinity and in the work of creation and redemption. The volcanic exuberance of God over the worth of his Son and the work of his hands and the welfare of his people is not well-known. God's delight in being God is not sung the way

it should be, with wonder and passion, in the worship places of the world. And we are the poorer and weaker for it.”¹

The aim of this study guide is to consider the worth and excellency of God through the lens of his happiness. The central question that we will address is this: “What are the things that bring the greatest joy and delight to God?” In answering this question, our hope is that thousands would be awakened to the excellency and glory of the supremely happy God, who is worthy of all of our worship and admiration. In unfolding God’s delight in being God, we hope that many will become increasingly satisfied in God and more fully transformed into his likeness, all to the praise of his glory.

This study guide is designed to be used in a twelve-session² guided group study that focuses on *The Pleasures of God* DVD set.³ After an introductory lesson, each subsequent lesson examines one thirty-minute session⁴ from *The Pleasures of God* DVD set. You, the learner, are encouraged to prepare for the viewing of each session by reading and reflecting upon Scripture, by considering key quotations, and by asking yourself penetrating questions. Your preparatory work for each lesson is marked with the heading “Before You Watch the DVD, Study and Prepare” in Lessons 2–11.

The workload is conveniently divided into five daily, manageable assignments. There is also a section suggesting further study. This work is to be completed individually before the group convenes to view the DVD and discuss the material.

Throughout this study guide, paragraphs printed in this typeface are excerpts from a book written by John Piper or excerpts from the Desiring God website. They are included to supplement the study questions and to summarize key or provocative points.

The second section in Lessons 2–11, titled “Further Up and Further In,” is designed for the learner who wants to explore the concepts and ideas introduced in the lesson in greater detail. This section is not

required, but it will deepen your understanding of the material. This section requires that you read online sermons or articles from the Desiring God website (www.desiringgod.org) and answer relevant questions. These sermons can be found by performing a title search at the Desiring God website.

The third section in Lessons 2–11, titled “While You Watch the DVD, Take Notes,” is to be completed while the DVD is playing. This section includes fill-in-the-blanks and leaves space for note taking. You are encouraged to engage with the DVD by filling in the appropriate blanks and writing down other notes that will aid you in the group discussion.

The fourth section in each normal lesson is “After You Watch the DVD, Discuss What You’ve Learned.” Three discussion questions are provided to guide and focus the conversation. You may record, in the spaces provided, notes that will help you contribute to the conversation. Or you may use this space to record things from the discussion that you want to remember.

The fifth and final section is an application section: “After You Discuss, Make Application.” You will be challenged to record a takeaway point and to engage in a certain activity that is a fitting response to the content presented in the lesson.

Group leaders will want to peruse the Leaders Guide, which is included at the end of this study guide.

Life transformation will only occur by the grace of God. Therefore, we highly encourage you to seek the Lord in prayer throughout the learning process. Pray that God would open your eyes to see wonderful things in his Word. Pray that he would grant you the insight and concentration you need in order to get the most from this resource. Pray that God would cause you not merely to understand the truth but also to rejoice in it. And pray that the discussion in your group would be mutually encouraging and edifying. We’ve included objectives at the beginning of each lesson. These objectives won’t be realized without the gracious work of God through prayer.

LESSON 1

INTRODUCTION TO *THE PLEASURES OF GOD*

LESSON OBJECTIVES

It is our prayer that after you have finished this lesson...

- You will have a better sense of how you and others view God's emotional life.
- Your curiosity will be roused, and questions will come to mind.
- You will be eager to explore what things God delights in.

ABOUT YOURSELF

1. What is your name?
2. Tell the group members something about yourself that they probably don't already know.
3. What are you hoping to learn from this study?

A PREVIEW OF *THE PLEASURES OF GOD*

1. When you think about God, what emotions come to mind? Do you think God is primarily happy? sad? frustrated? rejoicing? angry? Explain your answer.

2. What comes into your mind when you think about the pleasures of God? Make a list of things that you think God takes pleasure and delight in. What do you think God delights in above all else?

LESSON 2

THE WORTH AND EXCELLENCY OF GOD'S SOUL

A Companion Study to The Pleasures of God DVD, Session 2

LESSON OBJECTIVES

It is our prayer that after you have finished this lesson...

- You will reflect on what makes a soul worthy and excellent.
- You will begin to ask what brings God pleasure.
- You will grow in your desire to find your satisfaction in God.

→» *Before You Watch the DVD, Study and Prepare* «←

DAY 1—THE EXCELLENCY OF THE SOUL

As we begin this study, we invite you to reflect upon someone whom you admire and respect.

* **Question 1:** Why do you admire this person? What makes him or her admirable? How do we assess a person's worthiness and

excellence? Is a person excellent because of his thoughts? his desires? his actions? something else? Record your reflections in the space below.⁵

Question 2: What makes God excellent? What should we admire about God?

DAY 2—THE THIRST OF A SOUL

Many times in the Bible we come across verses that describe a person or a soul as thirsting or hungering after something that will bring satisfaction. “Like cold water to a *thirsty* soul, so is good news from a far country” (Proverbs 25:25). “Come, everyone who *thirsts*, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!” (Isaiah 55:1). “Blessed are those who *hunger and thirst* for righteousness” (Matthew 5:6). What is the deepest thirst or longing of the human soul?

Study Psalm 63:1–4.

¹O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. ²So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. ³Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. ⁴So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.

Question 3: According to these verses, what is David's deepest desire? Why does he desire this?

* **Question 4:** John Piper explains that in Psalm 63 David does not primarily thirst after God's gifts but after God *himself*. "It is a thirst for God. David has a heart for God. He has a taste for fellowship with God."⁶ Would you say that you personally have a "taste for fellowship with God"? Do you believe that God is able to give you this sort of renewed "taste" for him?

DAY 3—THE POWER OF A SENTENCE

Consider the following quotation from John Piper's message "Quantitative Hopelessness and the Immeasurable Moment" on the life-changing power of sentences:

What I have learned from about twenty years of serious reading is this. It is sentences that change my life, not books. What changes my life is some new glimpse of truth, some powerful challenge, some resolution to a long-standing dilemma, and these usually come concentrated in a sentence or two. I do not remember 99% of what I read, but if the 1% of each book or article I do remember is a life-changing insight, then I don't begrudge the 99%. And that life-changing insight usually comes in a moment, a moment whose value is all out of proportion to its little size. That's why I call it an "immeasurable moment."

Question 5: Think of a time in your life when you were significantly affected by a sentence that you read. What was that sentence? How did it impact you?

In 1986, John Piper read a single sentence written by Henry Scougal that prompted him to preach a series of sermons and write a book on “the pleasures of God.” Scougal wrote this in his book *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*:

The worth and excellency of the soul is to be measured by the object of its love.⁷

* **Question 6:** Rewrite this quotation in your own words. Do you agree with Scougal?

DAY 4—DOES GOD HAVE A SOUL?

* **Question 7:** When Henry Scougal wrote, “The worth and excellency of the soul is to be measured by the object of its love,” he was speaking of *human* souls. Do you think that the same principle could be applied to measure the excellency and worth of *God’s* “soul”? Why or why not?

There are several passages in Scripture that speak of God doing something from his heart or soul, as in Jeremiah 32:41.

Study Jeremiah 32:36–41.

³⁶Now therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city of which you say, “It is given into the hand of the king of Babylon by sword, by famine, and by pestilence”:

³⁷Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. ³⁸And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

³⁹I 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. ⁴⁰I 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. ⁴¹I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

Question 8: What do these verses tell us about God’s “soul” and what brings him joy?

DAY 5—SATISFY US, LORD!

In the Psalms we are often confronted by expressions of both intense pain and pleasure, very often in the same psalm. These writers felt deeply about God, with both feet in the real world marked by sin and suffering. Moses, the writer of Psalm 90, and believers throughout the ages have prayed, “Return, O LORD! How long?” in the face of life’s brevity and difficulty while also praying, “Satisfy us . . . with your steadfast love,” trusting in the joy-giving goodness of God.

Study Psalm 90:9–17.

⁹For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh. ¹⁰The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. ¹¹Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you? ¹²So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. ¹³Return, O LORD! How long? Have pity on your servants! ¹⁴Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. ¹⁵Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil. ¹⁶Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. ¹⁷Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!

Question 9: What do these verses teach us about the shortness and difficulty of life in this fallen world?

* **Question 10:** What things in life often “satisfy us” and “make us glad”? What does Moses in this psalm want to be satisfied with and gladdened by? What personal response is God calling us to make to this portion of his Word?

FURTHER UP AND FURTHER IN

Note: The “Further Up and Further In” section is for those who want to study more. It is a section for further reference and going deeper. The phrase “further up and further in” is borrowed from C. S. Lewis.

As noted in the introduction, each lesson in this study guide provides the opportunity for you to do further study. In this section, you will have the opportunity to read a sermon or article and answer some questions about what you have read.

Read “The Life of God in the Soul of Man,” an online sermon at the Desiring God website.

Question 11: What is the central truth that Henry Scougal and John Piper make about “true religion”?

Question 12: Describe three results of the life of God in the soul of man.

Question 13: According to this sermon, why might God be considered schizophrenic? How does Paul address this misconception? Describe the harmony that John Piper sees in the Trinitarian work of redemption.

Study Romans 8:9–11.

⁹You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Question 14: What different ways is the Spirit referred to in this passage? How might this give us insight into the unified work of the Father, Son, and Spirit in redemption? What do you think Paul means when he says that the Spirit “dwells in you” (three times in these verses)?

Read “Christian, Know Whose You Are,” an online sermon at the Desiring God website.

Question 15: What are at least five things that make believers different from unbelievers?

→❖ *While You Watch the DVD, Take Notes* ❖←

In Psalm 90:14, the psalmist is saying to God, “I’m not, and I _____ to be, and you’re my only _____ that I _____ be.”

Who was Henry Scougal? How did his life and writing influence Piper's *The Pleasures of God*?

What is one reason from Isaiah 57:1–2 that the righteous may have their lives cut short at an early age (like Henry Scougal did)?

Henry Scougal wrote: “The worth and excellency of a _____ is to be measured by the _____ of its _____.”

John Piper concludes by saying that when love is _____ - _____ (that is, love has the right _____), the soul's *pleasures* are unsurpassed.

→» *After You Watch the DVD, Discuss What You've Learned* «←

1. Discuss John Piper's explanation of Psalm 90:14, which he paraphrases as “I'm not, and I need to be, and you're my only hope that I could be.” Do you think that God is able and willing to satisfy your soul?
2. Do you agree with John Piper when he says, “With his unusual blessing we can do more in five minutes than we can in five years without him.” Have you experienced God's unusual blessing at some time in your life?

3. When Henry Scougal wrote that “the worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love,” what did he mean by the word *love*? Do you agree with this understanding of love?

→» *After You Discuss, Make Application* «←

1. What was the most meaningful part of this lesson for you? Was there a sentence, concept, or idea that really struck you? Why? Record your thoughts in the space below.

2. Compose a short prayer for yourself based on what you have learned in this lesson. Incorporate insights from Psalm 90:14 and Scougal’s sentence about the worth of a soul. Pray this prayer each day before you use this study guide.