

## Preface

- When have you seen a sight in creation that inspired awe or wonder in you? How did it make you feel?
  
- Read Ps 27:4
  - What's significant about the fact that the psalmist says "one thing," and not "one of the things" or "the main thing"?
  
  - What's significant about the fact that the psalmist asks the Lord for this? That he says he will seek it?
  
  - The psalmist says he wants "to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." Do you think this means we can experience God during our lifetimes? How much?
  
  - Has there been a time in your life when you felt like you "beheld the beauty of the Lord"? How did it make you feel?
  
- Piper says that people can try to find satisfaction in vacations, creativity, movies, sex, sports, drugs, asceticism, work, but a greater longing remains. Have you ever tried to find satisfaction in something like this? Did it eventually fall short? How did that make you feel?
  
- Do you find Lewis' argument about being made for another world convincing? Why or why not?

- What does it mean that creation is an echo of God? Have you ever experienced this?
  
- Read Ps 63:3
  - Is the psalmist speaking in hyperbole, or is this literally true? Why is or isn't it literally true?
  
  - How would your life be different if you acted as though you really believed this?
  
- Have you ever had a time when you felt like you were delighting in God? What do you think helped you get there?

## Chapter 1

- Think of the people who love you the most. When it comes to your happiness, are they for it, against it, or indifferent to it? Do you think this is a good thing?
- If the name "Christian hedonism" is controversial, why would someone want to refer to it by that name? When is "controversial" necessary?
- As you read through the verses, group them according to what they say about joy/happiness in God. For example, one category seems to be descriptions of joy in God.
- Which of those categories seem reasonable to you? Do any of them seem unfamiliar, controversial, unreasonable, or difficult to accept? Why? What about in particular the idea of being commanded to be happy?
- Do the quotes from other theologians generally seem Biblical or unbiblical to you? Which concern you?
- Look at the story about the husband and wife. What are the two kinds of "must" the wife refers to? Does it seem reasonable that the husband just kissing the wife is not enough? Does it seem reasonable that just doing actions God commands is not enough?
- Have you ever had an experience when, like the husband in the story, you thought you were doing your duty, but someone told you duty was not enough? Describe it.

- What's the difference between the way a regular "hedonist" seeks pleasure and the way this book is proposing for Christian hedonists to do so?
  
- Read Psalm 16:11.
  - What does "fullness of joy" mean? Does your experience suggest that fullness of joy is found in God, or in other things, or in both put together?
  
  - In what sense can pleasures other than God not be pleasures forever?
  
- What do you think it means to be in God's presence? Can we experience that to some extent before we die? What are some things you do to help you be in God's presence?

## Chapter 2

- Have you ever had a time or experience where you sensed God's greatness? How is this different than just sensing his love?
- What would you say is the main question this chapter addresses?
- What does "God's glory" mean?
- Why does it matter if we think God is magnifying his glory like a telescope instead of like a microscope? Which do you feel like you tend to do?
- Piper lists several parts of salvation and cites verses supporting the idea God does each of them is done for his own glory. Are any of these new, surprising, or difficult for you to accept?
- Edwards says that something is more glorified when we delight in it than when we only understand it. Share some examples of things you delight in, and things you don't delight in but still understand are great.
- Piper suggests that when the Westminster confession says "glorify God and enjoy him forever," it means that they are one thing. If they really were two things that were in conflict, how might it be challenging to do both?

- Piper says "if glorifying God is ultimately important, then pursuing the satisfaction that displays His glory is ultimately important." Based on what we've studied so far, do you find this convincing?
- What does Lewis mean when he says that Jesus finds our desires not too strong, but rather too weak?
- Read Lewis' quote about praise. What does this have to do with the idea of glorifying God by enjoying God?
- Paul's argument from Philippians can take some thinking to wrap your mind around. Read what 1:20,21, and 23 say about death, and write in your own words what Paul is arguing. Then do the same for what 1:20,21, and 3:8 say about life. How do these relate to Christian hedonism?
- Do you know anyone who you would say really enjoys God? What makes you say that about them? How would your life be different if you could enjoy God like that?
- Does anything make you nervous about the idea of enjoying God?
- Some people have more restrained emotions than others. Do you think they can and should seek to delight in God as well?

## Chapter 3

- What's your reaction to this quotation? "I've finally reached the point in my marriage where I can love my wife without feeling anything for her."
- Can you recall hearing pastors or theologians teaching that Christianity is mainly about decisions, not emotions? What are some statements commonly made to this effect?
- Review the verses on pages 28-29 and in endnote 19. Do you agree that they command emotions and intensity? If not, what do they refer to?
- Do you find the idea that the scripture might command emotions to be troubling? Why or why not?
- How are Piper's three steps when you don't feel different from just doing actions without emotion?
- Piper says that we can't just decide to be glad about God, and that it takes a miracle of grace. Does that seem to fit with the gospel, or go against it?
- Have you ever had an experience where God helped you to feel something you wouldn't otherwise have been able to feel on your own? Describe it.

- What's a situation in your life right now where, if you were honest, you would say you don't feel what Jesus would feel about it? How do you react to the idea of asking God to change your heart about it?

## Chapter 4

- Think of the people you admire most in the faith. Do they seem to be marked by self-pity in their faith, or not? Why do you think this is?
- Have you heard the idea that pride is the main evil in the universe? What Biblical support are you aware of for this idea?
- How would you explain in your own words the way Christian hedonism undercuts boasting?
- Do you agree that self-pity is a form of pride? Why or why not? Would you at least agree that it's not fitting for a believer?
- Piper states that people don't feel self-pity when they suffer for the sake of a reward. How would you explain in your own words why this is the case?
- If it's a virtue to seek joy in God, why should we admire God more than we admire the person who seeks joy in God?
- What areas of your spiritual walk, if any, are you tempted to feel self-pity in? What areas are difficult, or feel like a sacrifice? What gains does God promise you for going through these difficulties?

## Chapter 5

- Think of some of the most caring people you know. Do they seem to care for people out of a sense of duty only, or do they seem to enjoy it?
- Have you heard the idea that happiness isn't the goal of obedience but the side effect? Why do you think this is popular?
- Read 1 Cor 13:3 and 5. Do you agree that verse 3 means that there is a kind of gain that it is right for love to seek? Why or why not?
- Read Edwards' quotation on page 41. How does this explain how love can seek its own, yet not seek its own?
- Read 2 Cor 8:1-4. What does this passage say about the relationship between joy in God and loving people? What does it say about the attitude one should have toward loving people?
- What are some reasons Piper gives that a Christian hedonist might still have sorrow?
- Read the following passages mentioned in this chapter: Acts 20:35, Luke 14:14, John 12:25, Heb 10:34, 11:24-26, and 12:2. Why does Piper argue that these verses must support Christian hedonism? Do you agree? Why or why not?

- If Hebrews 12:2 teaches that Jesus was motivated by seeking joy, what does that say about our resistance to that motivation?
  
- Share a time when you derived happiness from seeing the well-being of someone else.
  
- When Jesus was on the cross and prayed for his enemies to be forgiven, do you get the sense that he was begrudging about it, or that he genuinely desired their good? What does this say about the kind of love we should have for our enemies? Would you be willing to ask God for that kind of heart?

## Chapter 6

- How would you define "worship?" Share a time when you had a particularly meaningful experience of worship.
- Do you agree that worship is the highest moral act a human can perform? On that basis, do you naturally think it needs to be duty, or delight, or both?
- Do you think "delight yourself in the Lord" is a command to feel? Why or why not?
- Does it sound strange to call worship the most hedonistic affair of life? Does your definition of worship preclude that? What do you think is the most hedonistic affair of life?
- In what sense should we come to church to give and not to get? In what sense should we come to get and not to give?
- What kinds of things do you tend to say to evaluate a worship service? What would it look like to evaluate it more in terms of finding satisfaction in God?
- Do you think our hearts tend to be focused on seeking satisfaction in God when we go to a worship service? What kinds of things could we do to help focus?

- Do you tend to think of worship as a means to an end, or as an end in itself? What kinds of reasons do people give for why they worship?
  
- Which of Piper's three implications are you most likely to struggle with? Why?
  
- What are some practical steps you can take to orient your mind to worship God the way this chapter describes?

## Chapter 7

- Think of a couple you admire for having a great marriage. What are some of the things you see them do that contribute to making it great?
- Do you think many people think the problem in marriage is husbands and wives seeking pleasure?
- Read Ephesians 5:25-30. What does the text say is Christ's ultimate goal?
- Read Hebrews 12:2. What does this text say about how Christ felt about this goal?
- What passages do you know of to back up Piper's claim that the church's ultimate joy is in having Christ?
- In light of this, explain Piper's point about what we should learn about marital love from Christ's model.
- Read Ephesians 5:28-30. Explain in your own words the significance of the metaphor of loving your wife as you love your body.
- Is there any way to make the idea "love must be free from self-interest" fit with this passage?

- What is Piper's definition of love, as contrasted with selfishness? Is it susceptible to the accusation of being selfish?
- Think about some of the activities that make you happy. What kind of effort is involved in them?
- When you think about the idea of finding your happiness in the happiness of your spouse, what is your reaction?
- What are some practical ways you can begin to find your happiness in the happiness of your spouse?

## Chapter 8

- Think of someone you know who you think honors God with their finances particularly well. What are some benefits they gain from this?
  
- If 1 Tim 6:9 is a warning to avoid ruin, does that mean it's a command to seek happiness?
  
- Why do you think Paul pointed out that there is gain in godliness, rather than saying that Christians shouldn't be concerned with godliness?
  
- What are some of the gains that come from godliness?
  
- Verse 7 says we shouldn't pursue money because it's no gain for eternal life. But if it's still gain here, why should that deter me?
  
- Verse 8 and Heb 13:5-6 say that Christians should be content with basic necessities. What are some reasons why?
  
- Verses 9-10 say that pursuing money can destroy your life. What are some reasons why?
  
- What do you think the Bible means in Matt 6:20 and Luke 12:32-34 when it commands believers to store up treasure in heaven by giving to those in need? What could this treasure in heaven mean?

- How might the idea of a "wartime lifestyle" be more helpful than the idea of a "simple lifestyle?"
- Does the prospect of surrendering your finances to God feel like loss, or gain? Why? What fears do you have about it?
- Do you know of an aspect of your use of money that may be outside God's will? What is God's will for that area? Would you be willing to ask God to help you make a change?

## Chapter 9

- Do you know or support any missionaries? What are some of the challenges they've faced on the missions field? How have they responded to these challenges?
- Can you think of times in life that have been difficult, yet you had greater peace or joy in them than other times? Why does this sometimes happen?
- How do Jesus' words in Mark 10:29-30 undercut self-pity?
- Think of a time when you suffered from discouragement, loneliness, fear, etc. Looking back, what truths about God might have comforted you in that situation?
- Read Mark 8:34-35. If this is true, does anyone who suffers or gives up things for Christ really miss out? Why or why not?
- Livingstone says he never made a sacrifice. Do you think you could speak of someone going through "anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger" and genuinely mean that they never made a sacrifice? Why or why not?
- Read Phil 3:7-10. In what sense is it true that everything is a loss compared to Christ? What did Paul say he had to do to gain Christ? What might that look like practically?

- Does it seem offensive that Zwemer referred to the period of life when he lost both of his daughters, and refers to "the sheer joy of it all?" Why or why not?
  
- Rephrase Jim Elliot's "creed" in your own words. Do you believe it was true of him?

## Epilogue

- Think of someone you know who has made it through suffering well. How did they do it?
- Why is it important to remember not just that Christ suffered, but also that he chose to suffer?
- What's your reaction to the idea that suffering is the path to everlasting joy? Does that seem to trivialize it? Water down the moral value of enduring it? Does it seem like it could help people through suffering?
- How is God's worth more visible to us when we suffer? To those who see us suffer?
- If you really believed that there is joy to be found in suffering for Christ, how might your daily life be different? Can you think of anything God might be calling you to, that you're shrinking back from out of fear of suffering?
- What is one small "suffering" you've been shying away from that you can choose to embrace this week for the sake of Christ?