

# Dangerous Duty of Delight

## Study Guide Introduction

This document serves as a study guide for John Piper's book, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight*. It consists of points summarizing each chapter, along with questions for discussion or reflection.

Whereas some study guides emphasize subjective opinion, rote repetition, or mere information, this guide is designed with the following goals:

1. Emphasize the scriptural texts cited, encouraging readers to interact with them.
2. Emphasize the logical arguments of the author, encouraging readers to grasp the logic and decide whether they agree.
3. Lead the reader to practical application, both in terms of large-scale prayers and immediate action steps.

This guide can be used by an individual reading the book, or by a small group going through the book together. In the latter case, the questions are suitable either for the members to answer on their own before the group meeting, or to discuss in the group together. A separate "Dangerous Duty Questions" document is available with only the questions, laid out to provide space for writing in answers.

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*The Dangerous Duty of Delight* can be purchased in paper format at Desiring God's web site <<http://www.desiringgod.org/store/books/dangerous-duty-of-delight>> or for the Kindle at Amazon <<http://amzn.com/1576738833>>. A free preview of the book, consisting of the first three chapters, is also available in PDF format <<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/online-books/the-dangerous-duty-of-delight>>.

Many other online books and sermons about Christian hedonism are available for free at Desiring God's Resource Library <<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library>>. In particular, readers who were impacted by *The Dangerous Duty of Delight* should consider the longer book from which it was condensed, *Desiring God* <<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/online-books/desiring-god>>.

## Preface

### Main Points

- Ps 27:4
- Humanity craves awe and wonder
- Christ is the most awesome and wonderful
- We aren't satisfied until we find him
  - Vacations, creativity, movies, sex, sports, drugs, asceticism, work—but the longing remains
  - Creation is an echo of God, but we treat it as though it's all there is
  - Lewis
    - Longing nothing can satisfy
    - Not the thing itself, only a hint of it
- John 1:13—God has visited us
- Ps 63:3
- Infinite delight in God—Christian hedonism

### Discussion Questions

- 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

## Main Points

- Christian hedonism (CH) - a controversial name for an old-fashioned way of life
- CH has its backing in many Biblical and church figures:
  - Moses - Deut 28:47-48
  - David - Ps 43:4, 100:2, 37:4, 90:14, 16:11
  - Jesus - Mat 5:11-12, Jn 15:11, Heb 12:2, Mat 25:21
  - James - Jas 1:2
  - Paul - 2 Cor 6:10, 1:24, Phil 4:4, 5:3
  - Peter - 1 Pet 4:13
  - Augustine - God is the true joy
  - Pascal - all men seek happiness
  - Puritans - delighting in God the work of our lives
  - Jonathan Edwards - rejoicing in God glorifies God
  - Lewis - we are too easily pleased
  - missionaries
- Why controversial? Joy not just a result of obedience, but part of it, so bound to pursue it
  - Ps 32:11, 67:4, 37:4, Luk 10:20, Phil 4:4
  - Lewis: Christian duty to be happy
  - "Must I kiss you goodnight?"
- Joy in God
  - Joy in doing good is ultimately joy in God
  - Ps 16:11—full joy forever

## Discussion Questions

- 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.
  - Happiness experienced
    - Descriptions of happiness in God: Ps 43:4, 16:11, 2 Co 6:10
  - Seeking happiness
    - God seeking happiness: Heb 12:2
    - Prayers requesting happiness in God: Ps 90:14
    - Ministers seeking others' happiness: 2 Co 1:24
  - Commands to be happy in God: Ps 100:2, 37:4, Jas 1:2, Phil 4:4, Rom 5:3, 1 Pe 4:13 (p. 14: Ps 32:11, Ps 67:4, Ps 37:4, Lk 10:20)
  - Threats for not seeking happiness: Dt 28:47-48
  - Promises of happiness
    - As a comfort: Jn 15:11
    - As a motivation: Mt 5:11-12, Mt 25:21

- 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

### Main Points

- Is it a conflict to seek God's glory vs our joy?
- God's goal in everything is to magnify his glory
  - Magnify like a telescope, not a microscope
  - Steps in salvation stated to be for God's glory
    - Predestination: Eph 1:5-6
    - Creation: Isa 43:6-7
    - Incarnation: Rom 15:8-9
    - Propitiation: Rom 3:25
    - Sanctification: Phil 1:9, 11
    - Consummation: 2 Ths 1:9-10
- Edwards: God is more glorified when his glory is delighted in, not just understood
- Westminster Confession: one "chief end," so it's "glorify God BY enjoying him"
- Why does Christian hedonism matter? Because God will not be glorified as much without it
- Lewis: Jesus finds our desires too weak, and tries to motivate us by reward; and worship (glorifying God) is the overflow of joy (happiness) in God
- Paul: Phil 1:20-21,23,3:8
  - Christ is exalted in my death if death is gain, (v.23:) because I gain Christ
  - Christ is exalted in my life if life is Christ, (3:8:) because I treasure Christ above everything else in life

### Discussion Questions

- 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

### Main Points

- Many teach that Christianity is about decisions, not emotions
- Edwards: 1 Pet 1:8—Christianity consists in a large part in affections
- Ex 20:17, do not covet; Heb 13:5—be content
- Lev 19:18, bear no grudge; Matt 18:35, forgive
- The Bible commands not just heart change but intensity: 1 Pet 1:22, Rom 12:10
- Seems troubling, because emotions aren't under our immediate control like actions seem to be
- When you don't feel what you should, don't just decide that emotions don't matter. Confess the sin of the coldness of heart, pray for a change, then do the action hoping it will kindle the heart
- You can't delight in something you find boring; dependent upon God

### Discussion Questions

- 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

### Main Points

- Pride is the main evil in the universe
- CH combats pride by making man the recipient of undeserved riches—you can't boast
- Self-pity is a form of pride: "I deserve admiration because I have suffered so much." Sense of unrecognized worthiness.
- Not suffering for the sake of recognition of the sacrifice, but suffering for the sake of reward
- We don't pity those who are simply doing what will make them the most happy
- We see that as a virtue, but our admiration goes to the Treasure, not to the experience of it

### Discussion Questions

- 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

### Main Points

- The pursuit of pleasure is an essential part of every good deed, including love for people
- Common opinion is that happiness isn't the goal to be pursued, but the unexpected reward of doing good for its own sake
- 1 Cor 13:5—love seeks not its own
- Micah 6:8—love kindness
- 1 Cor 13:3—if I have not love, I gain nothing—so gain should be sought
- There is a kind of gain that it is wrong to be motivated by, and a kind that is right
- Love doesn't seek its own benefit at the expense of others, but rather seeks it in the benefit of others
- 2 Cor 8: true love starts in grace, fills with joy, overflows in generosity, and desires to give
- Love is the overflow and expansion of joy in God, which gladly meets the needs of others
- There is still pain and sorrow for the suffering of others
- Constantly hungry for more of God's grace, and to expand to others
- The reason we feel pain when good is impeded to others, is because we take pleasure in the good of others
- Acts 20:35—not just that it is more blessed to give than to receive, but we should remember it, I.e. let it have its motivating effect
- The cost of love is high: you can't do it unless there's recompense beyond the grave
- Luke 14:14, John 12:25—Jesus motivated by reward
- Heb 10:34—Christians visited brothers/sisters in prison even though they might lose their property or life, and did it joyfully; they knew (were motivated by) a better reward
- Heb 11:24-26—Moses accepted persecution because he was looking to (motivated by) the reward
- Heb 12:2—Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before him. We should not presume to have higher motivations than him

### Discussion Questions

- 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

### Main Points

- Many people think worship has to be duty—but then it ceases to be worship
- Ps 37:4—worship is obedience to the command "delight yourself in the Lord"
- Worship is the most hedonistic affair of life
- Heb 11:6—you don't please God unless you come to him for reward
- Three implications:
  - The problem is not "coming to get instead of to give;" they should come panting for God like water (Ps 42:1)
  - Makes worship God-centered; not mainly about whether our singing, preaching, giving are worthy of the Lord (or attractive enough for nonbelievers) but rather whether we are gaining God
  - Worship as an end in itself, not as a means to any other good thing, even though they do come about as a result of it

### Discussion Questions

- 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

### Main Points

- The problem in marriage isn't that spouses seek pleasure, but that they don't seek it in the pleasure of their spouses
- Eph 5:25-30
  - Christ gave himself up for the church -> sanctify and cleanse her -> present her to himself in all her glory (the goal)
  - This is the joy set before him—he did it for joy (Heb 12:2)
  - The church's greatest joy is in being presented to Christ
  - So Christ finds his joy in the church's joy
  - One flesh: any good done to her is done to him
- Some say love must be free from self-interest, but this text disagrees
- Selfishness is happiness at the expense of others, godly self-interest is happiness in the happiness of the beloved
- Husbands should devote the same time and energy to making their wives happy as they naturally do to making themselves happy

### Discussion Questions

- 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

### Main Points

- 1 Tim 6:9—warning against ruin and destruction, so therefore for happiness
- 1 Tim 6:5-10
  - Watch out for people who take advantage of people's interest in godliness to sell them things
  - Paul's response wasn't "Christians do what's right for its own sake, not motivated by profit;" but instead, there is a kind of gain from godliness, if you don't want material gain
  - If your godliness has freed you from desire for material gain, that is great spiritual gain
- Gaining capital for a business or personally in order to help others isn't bad, but doing it for power or luxury is bad
- Three reasons not to pursue riches
  - v. 7—money is no benefit in eternal life
  - v. 8—need to be content with the necessities of life (Heb 13:5-6)
  - vv. 9-10—pursuing money destroys your life
    - Way to gain instead is to invest in treasure in heaven (Matt 6:20, Luke 12:32-34)
    - Treasure in heaven isn't the unexpected result, it's the intentional goal; make it for yourself!
- God doesn't prosper Christians so they can buy more and bigger and fancier, but so they can give it away
- Not just a simple lifestyle, but a wartime lifestyle (creates urgency, allows for sophisticated things if strategic)

### Discussion Questions

- 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

### Main Points

- In world missions, the sacrifices are greatest, and the joys are deepest
- Mark 10:29-30, in response to Peter's self-pity—giving things up to follow Jesus means 100 times as much in this life, persecutions, and eternal life
- Giving up comforts of home and family made up for 100 times in the church, or in Christ himself
- Mark 8:34-35—self-denial for the goal of greater gain; denying lesser pleasures for greater
- David Livingstone—I never made a sacrifice
- Paul, Phil 3:7-10—everything a loss, Christ gain
- Samuel Zwemer—daughters died, but joy—would do it again
- Jim Elliot—give what you cannot keep to gain what you cannot lose
- Imitate these saints

### Discussion Questions

- 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

### Main Points

- Christ didn't just experience suffering but chose it, and he calls us to do the same
- We do it not just because it's right but because it's the path to everlasting joy
- It is more clear in suffering just how worthy God is

### Discussion Questions

- 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?