

For Your JOY

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Introduction

TWO thousand years ago, Jesus and his friends were having a conversation about the rumor mill of popular opinion. "Who do people say the Son of

Man is?" he asked them. They responded by listing some common answers they had heard. But then Jesus changed the stakes. Turning from the informational to the personal, he looked them in the eye and asked: "But who do you say that I am?"

It's easy to answer the what-are-others-saying question. But there comes a point when we must face Jesus' question ourselves. Who do we say that he is?The most common answer is that Jesus was a great moral teacher—an exemplary teacher and compassionate sage. But C. S. Lewis—the British author who wrote *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*—insisted that such reductions be off the table:I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready

to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God."

That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

This question—who do you say that he is?—is the most important question you can ask and answer. In this book John Piper answers some of the

most common and important questions about Jesus:

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who he is, why he came, what he accomplished—

and why we should care.

If you've asked some of these same questions

and you're looking for some answers—based not

on our own thoughts and theories but upon God's

Word—we invite you to join us. For your joy.

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Why Did Jesus Have to Die?

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Why Did Jesus Have to Die?

God put [Christ] 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.

Romans 3:25

In this is love, not that we have loved God but

that he loved us and sent his Son to be the

propitiation for our sins.

I John 4:10

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law

by becoming a curse for us.

Galatians 3:13

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IF God were not *just*, there would be no *demand* for his Son to suffer and die. And if God were not *loving*, there would be no *willingness* for his Son to suffer and die. But God is just and loving. Therefore his love is willing to meet the demands of his justice.

His law demanded, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). But we have all loved other things more. This is what sin is—dishonoring God by preferring other things over him, and acting on those preferences. There-

fore, the Bible says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). We glorify what we enjoy most. And it isn’t God.

Therefore sin is not small, because it is not against a small Sovereign. The seriousness of an insult rises with the dignity of the one insulted. The Creator of the universe is infinitely worthy of respect and admiration and loyalty. Therefore, failure to love him is not trivial—it is treason. It defames God and destroys human happiness.

Since God is just, he does not sweep these crimes under the rug of the universe. He feels a

holy wrath against them. They deserve to be punished, and he has made this clear: “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4).

There is a holy curse hanging over all sin. Not to punish would be unjust. The demeaning of God

would be upheld. A lie would reign at the core of reality. Therefore, God says, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them" (Galatians 3:10; Deuteronomy 27:26).

But the love of God does not rest with the curse that hangs over all sinful humanity. He is not content to show wrath, no matter how holy it is. Therefore he sends his own Son to absorb his wrath and bear the curse for all who trust him. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13).

This is the meaning of the word "propitiation" in the texts quoted on page 10. It refers to the removal of God's wrath by providing a substitute. The substitute is provided by God himself. The substitute, Jesus Christ, does not just cancel the wrath; he absorbs it and diverts it from us to himself. God's

wrath is just, and it was spent, not withdrawn.

Let us not trifle with God or trivialize his love.

We will never stand in awe of being loved by God until we reckon with the seriousness of our sin and the justice of his wrath against us. But when, by grace, we waken to our unworthiness, then we may look at the suffering and death of Christ and say, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the [wrath-absorbing] *propitiation* for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

How Can God Love Me?

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How Can God Love Me?

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.

Ephesians 1:7

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

One will scarcely die for a righteous person—
though perhaps for a good person one would
dare even to die—but God shows his love for us
in that while we were still sinners, Christ died
for us.

Romans 5:7-8

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THE measure of God's love for us is shown by two things. One is the degree of his sacrifice in saving us from the penalty of our sin. The other is the degree of unworthiness that we had when he saved us.

We can hear the measure of his sacrifice in the words, "He gave his only son" (John 3:16). We also hear it in the word "Christ." This is a name based on the Greek title *Christos*, or "Anointed One," or "Messiah." It is a term of great dignity. The Messiah was to be the king of Israel. He would conquer the Romans and bring peace and security to Israel.

In sum, then, the person that God sent to save sinners was his own divine Son, his only Son, and the Anointed king of Israel—indeed the king of the world (Isaiah 9:6-7).

When we add to this consideration the horrific death by crucifixion that Christ endured, it becomes clear that the sacrifice the Father and the Son made was indescribably great—even infinite, when you consider the distance between the divine and the human. But God chose to make this sacrifice to save us.

The measure of his love for us increases still more when we consider our unworthiness. “Perhaps

for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:7-8). We deserved divine punishment, not divine sacrifice.

I have heard it said, “God didn’t die for frogs.

So he was responding to our value as humans."

This turns grace on its head. We are worse off than frogs. They have not sinned. They have not rebelled and treated God with the contempt of being inconsequential in our lives. God did not have to die for frogs. They aren't bad enough. We are. Our debt is so great only divine sacrifice can pay it.

There is only one explanation for God's sacrifice for us. It is not us. It is "the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7). It is all free. It is not a response to our worth. It is the overflow of his infinite worth.

In fact, that is what divine love is in the end: a passion to enthrall undeserving sinners, at great cost, with what will make us supremely happy forever, namely, his infinite beauty.

What If I Don't Love God?

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life;

whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life,

but the wrath of God remains on him.

John 3:36

These will go away into eternal punishment, but

the righteous into eternal life.

Matthew 25:46

They will suffer the punishment of eternal

destruction, away from the presence of the Lord

and from the glory of his might.

II Thessalonians 1:9

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IN our happiest times we do not want to die. The wish for death rises only when our suffering seems unbearable. What we really want in those times is not death, but relief. We would love for the good times to come again. We would like the pain to go away. We would like to have our loved one back from the grave. We want life and happiness.

We are kidding ourselves when we romanticize death as the climax of a life well lived. It is an enemy. It cuts us off from all the wonderful pleasures of this world. We call death sweet names only as the lesser of evils. The executioner that delivers the *coup de grace* in our suffering is not the fulfillment of longing, but the end of hope. The longing of the human heart is to live and to be happy.

God made us that way. "He has put eternity into man's heart" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We are created in God's image, and God loves life and lives forever. We were made to live forever. And we will.

The opposite of eternal life is not annihilation. It is hell. Jesus spoke of it more than anybody, and he made plain that rejecting the eternal life he offered would result not in obliteration, but in the misery of God's wrath: "Whoever believes in the Son has

eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall

not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (John 3:36).

And it remains forever. Jesus said, "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:46). It is an unspeakable reality that shows the infinite evil of treating God with indifference or contempt. So Jesus warns, "If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched'" (Mark 9:47-48).

So eternal life is not merely the extension of this life with its mix of pain and pleasure. As hell is the worst outcome of this life, so "eternal life" is the best. It is supreme and ever-increasing happiness where all sin and all sadness will be gone. All that is evil and harmful in this fallen creation will be removed. All that is good—all that will bring true and lasting happiness—will be preserved and

purified and intensified.

We will be changed so that we are capable of dimensions of happiness that were inconceivable to

us in this life. “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined . . . God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). It is true every moment of life, now and always: for those who trust Christ the best is yet to come. We will see the all-satisfying glory of God. “This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). For this Christ suffered and died. How shall we not embrace him as our treasure and live?

How Can I Love a God Who Allows so Much Evil?

How Can I Love a God Who Allows so Much Evil?

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God

meant it for good.

Genesis 50:20

In this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus . . .both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Acts 4:27-28

The secret things belong to the Lord our God.

Deuteronomy 29:29

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THE most profound thing we can say about suffering and evil is that, in Jesus Christ, God entered into it and turned it for good. The origin of evil is shrouded in mystery. “Free will” is just a name for the mystery. It doesn’t explain why a perfect creature chose to sin. Another name for the mystery is “the sovereignty of God.” As true and biblical as it is, this too leaves questions unanswered. The Bible

does not take us as far as we might like to go. Rather it says, "The secret things belong to . . . God" (Deuteronomy 29:29).

The heart of the Bible and the heart of Christianity is not an explanation of where evil came from, but a demonstration of how God enters into it and turns it for the very opposite—everlasting righteousness and joy. There were pointers in the Scriptures all along the way that it would be like this for the Messiah. Joseph, the son of Jacob, was sold into slavery in Egypt. He seemed abandoned for 17 years. But God was in it and made him ruler in Egypt, so that in a great famine he could save the very ones who sold him. The story is summed up in a word from Joseph to his brothers: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for

good" (Genesis 50:20). A foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, forsaken in order to save.

Or consider Christ's ancestry. Once God was the only king in Israel. But the people rebelled and asked for a human king: "No! But there shall be a king over us" (1 Samuel 8:19). Later they confessed, "We have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king" (1 Samuel 12:19). But God was in it. From the line of these kings he brought Christ into the world. The sinless Savior had his origin in sin as he came to save sinners.

But the most astonishing thing is that evil and suffering were Christ's appointed way of victory over evil and suffering. Every act of treachery and brutality against Jesus was sinful and evil. But God was in it. The Bible says, "Jesus [was] delivered up [to death] according to the definite plan and fore-knowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). The lash on his back, the thorns on his head, the spit on his cheek, the bruises on his face, the nails in his hands, the spear in his side, the scorn of rulers, the betrayal of his friend, the desertion by his disciples—these

were all the result of sin, and all designed by God to destroy the power of sin. “Herod and Pontius Pilate,

along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, [did] whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:27-28).

There is no greater sin than to hate and kill the Son of God. There was no greater suffering nor any greater innocence than the suffering and innocence of Christ. Yet God was in it all. “It was the will of the Lord to crush him” (Isaiah 53:10). His aim, through evil and suffering, was to destroy evil and suffering. “With his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). Is not then the suffering of Jesus Christ meant by God to show the world that there is no sin and no evil too great that God, in Christ, cannot bring from it everlasting righteousness and joy? The very suffering that we caused became the hope of our salvation. “Father, forgive them, for they know not

what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Why Is It All About God?

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Why Is It All About God?

Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

I Peter 3:18

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Ephesians 2:13

I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy.

Psalm 43:4

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WHEN all is said and done, God is the gospel. Gospel means "good news." Christianity is not first theology, but news. It is like the prisoners of war

hearing by hidden radio that the allies have landed and rescue is only a matter of time. The guards wonder why all the rejoicing.

But what is the ultimate good in the good news? It all ends in one thing: God himself. All the words of the gospel lead to him, or they are not gospel. For example, "salvation" is not good news if it only saves from hell and not for God. "Forgiveness" is not good news if it only gives relief from guilt and doesn't open the way to God. "Justification" is not good news if it only makes us legally acceptable to God, but doesn't bring fellowship with God. "Redemption" is not good news if it only liberates us from bondage, but doesn't bring us to God. "Adoption" is not good news if it only puts us in the Father's family but not in his arms.

This is crucial. Many people seem to embrace the good news without embracing God. There is no sure evidence that we have a new heart just because we want to escape hell. That's a perfectly

natural desire, not a supernatural one. It doesn't

take a new heart to want the psychological relief of forgiveness, or the removal of God's wrath, or the inheritance of God's world. All these things are understandable without any spiritual change. You don't need to be born again to want these things. The devils want them.

It is not wrong to want them. Indeed it is folly not to. But the evidence that we have been changed is that we want these things because they bring us to the enjoyment of God. This is the greatest thing Christ died for. "Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

Why is this the essence of the good news? Because we were made to experience full and lasting happiness from seeing and savoring the glory of God. If our best joy comes from something less, we

are idolaters and God is dishonored. He created us in such a way that his glory is displayed through our joy in it. The gospel of Christ is the good news that at the cost of his Son's life, God has done everything necessary to enthrall us with what will make us eternally and ever-increasingly happy, namely, himself.

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Long before Christ came, God revealed himself as the source of full and lasting pleasure. "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11). Then he sent Christ to suffer "that he might bring us to God." This means he sent Christ to bring us to the deepest, longest joy a human can have. Hear then the invitation: Turn from "the fleeting pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:25) and come to "pleasures forevermore." Come to Christ.

What Does All This Mean for Me?

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

I John 5:13

Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

John 5:24

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.

Acts 3:19

Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

Jude 1:21

God created us for his glory.

Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth,...whom I created for my glory.

Isaiah 43:6-7

God made us to magnify his greatness—the way telescopes magnify stars. He created us to put his goodness and truth and beauty and wisdom and justice on display. The greatest display of God's glory comes from deep delight in all that he is. This means that God gets the praise and we get the pleasure. God created us so that he is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

Every human should live for God's glory.

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

If God made us for his glory, it is clear that we should live for his glory. Our duty comes from his design. So our first obligation is to show God's value by being satisfied with all that he is for us. This

is the essence of loving God (Matthew 22:37) and trusting him (1 John 5:3-4) and being thankful to him (Psalm 100:2-4) It is the root of all true obedience, especially loving others (Colossians 1:4-5).

What Does All This Mean for Me?

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All of us have failed to glorify God as we should.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 3:23

What does it mean to "fall short of the glory of God"? It means that none of us has trusted and treasured God the way we should. We have not been satisfied with his greatness and walked in his ways. We have sought our satisfaction in other things, and treated them as more valuable than God, which is the essence of idolatry (Romans 1:21-23). Since sin came into the world we have all been deeply resistant to having God as our all-satisfying treasure (Ephesians 2:3). This is an appalling offense to

the greatness of God (Jeremiah 2:12-13).

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All of us are subject to God's just condemnation.

The wages of sin is death...

Romans 6:23

We have all belittled the glory of God. How? By preferring other things above him. By our ingratitude, distrust and disobedience. So God is just in shutting us out from the enjoyment of his glory forever. "They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

The word "hell" is used in the New Testament twelve times—eleven times by Jesus himself. It is not a myth created by dismal and angry preachers. It is a solemn warning from the Son of God who died to deliver sinners from its curse. We ignore it

at great risk.

If the Bible stopped here in its analysis of the human condition, we would be doomed to a hopeless future. However, this is not where it stops...

What Does All This Mean for Me?

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God sent his only son Jesus to provide eternal life and joy.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...

1 Timothy 1:15

The good news is that Christ died for sinners like us. And he rose physically from the dead to validate the saving power of his death and to open the gates of eternal life and joy (1 Corinthians 15:20). This means God can acquit guilty sinners and still be just (Romans 3:25-26). "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). Coming home to God is where all deep and lasting satisfaction is found.

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The benefits purchased by the death of Christ belong to those who repent and trust him.

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

Acts 16:31

"Repent" means to turn from all the deceitful promises of sin. "Faith" means being satisfied with all that God promises to be for us in Jesus. "He who believes in me," Jesus says, "shall never thirst" (John 6:35). We do not earn our salvation. We cannot merit it (Romans 4:4-5). It is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is a free gift (Romans 3:24). We will have it if we cherish it above all things (Matthew 13:44). When we do that, God's aim in creation is accomplished: He is glorified in us and we are satisfied in him—forever.

What Should I Do?

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What Should I Do?

A man ran up and knelt before [Jesus] and

asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Mark 10:17

Trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas . . . and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

Acts 16:29-30

For Your Joy

• Turn from the deceitful promises of sin.

• Call upon Jesus to save you from guilt and punishment and bondage. "All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13).

• Start banking your hope on all that God is for you in Jesus.

• Break the power of sin's promises by faith in the superior satisfaction of God's promises.

• Begin reading the Bible to find his precious and very great promises, which can set you free (2 Peter

1:3-4).

• Find a Bible-believing church and begin to worship and grow together with other people who treasure Christ above all things (Philippians 3:7).

What Should I Do?

Did you know that God commands you to be happy?

Serve the LORD with gladness!

Psalm 100:2

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalm 37:4

The best news in the world is that there is no conflict between your greatest possible happiness and God's perfect holiness. Being satisfied with all that God is for you in Jesus magnifies him as the greatest treasure and brings you more joy—eternal, infinite joy—than any other delight ever could.

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You make known to me the path of life; in

your presence there is fullness of joy; at your

right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 16:11

Recommended Reading from John Piper

The Passion of Jesus Christ

Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ

Don't Waste Your Life

Desiring God

When I Don't Desire God

Taste and See

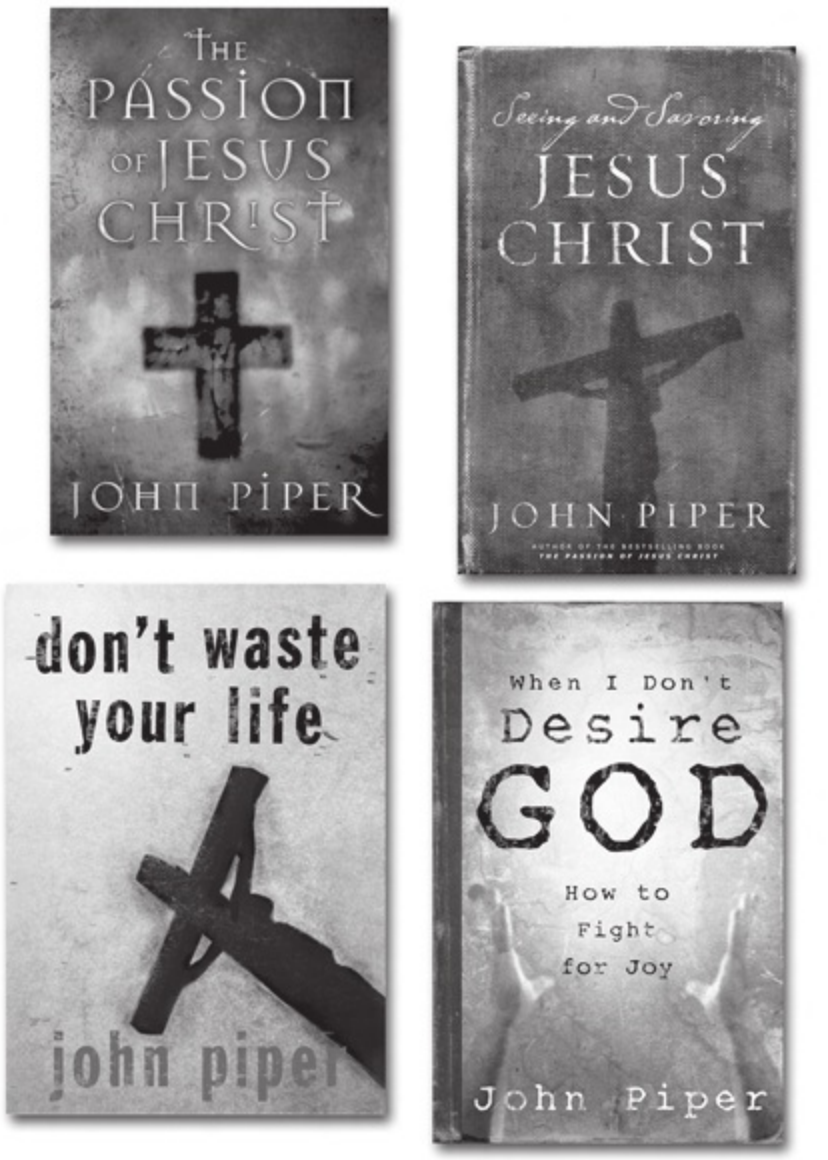
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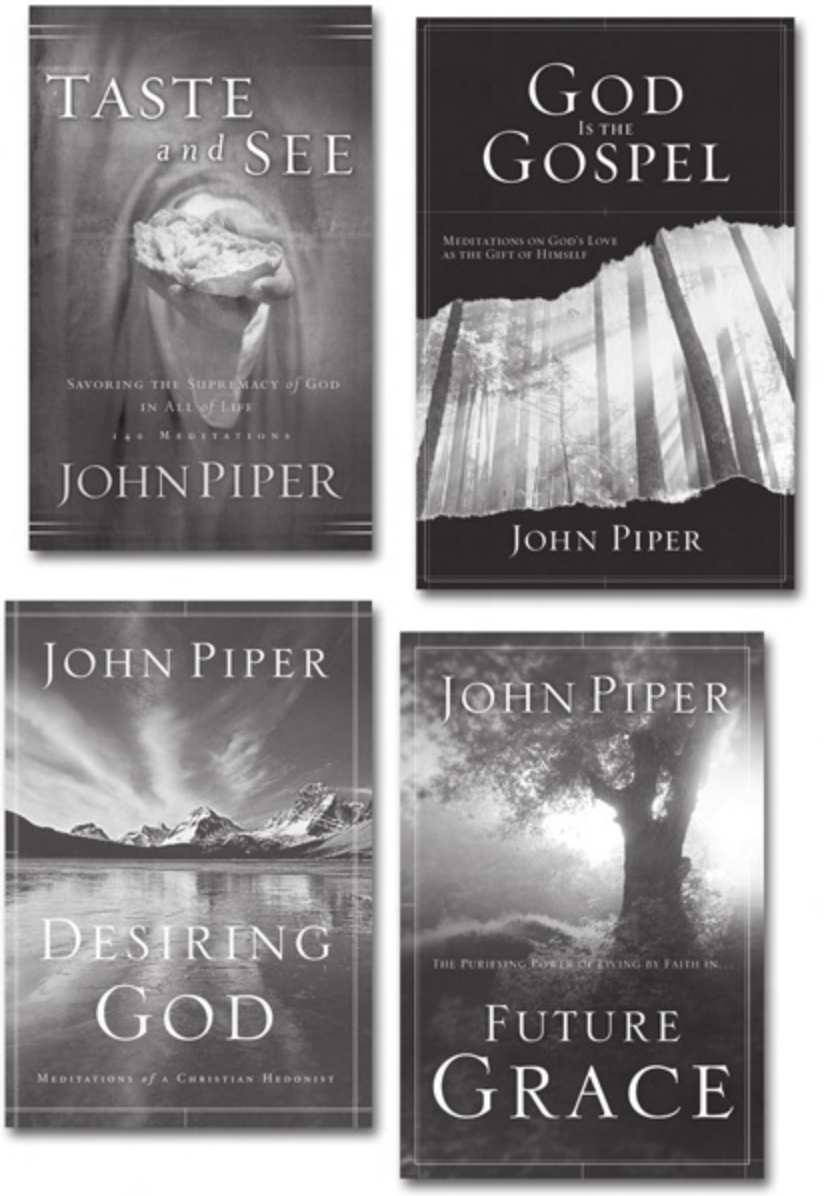
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Recommendations



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Recommendations

desiringGod

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For Your Joy

Desiring God exists to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ. We exist for your joy, because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. Please visit our website for hundreds of free and discounted God-centered resources from Pastor John Piper. These resources include books, CDs, DVDs, sermons, articles, children's Sunday school curricula and more.

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Whatever-You-Can-Afford

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given to us (Matthew 10:8). And we never want to make cost "an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ" (I Corinthians 9:12). So if you would like a copy of a book or audio resource we offer, but your limited cash-flow prevents it, don't be ashamed! Just contact us and let us know what you would like, and it will be our pleasure to fill your request.

The Author

John Piper is the Pastor for Preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He grew up in Greenville, South Carolina, and studied at Wheaton College, where he first sensed God's call to enter the ministry. He went on to earn degrees from Fuller Theological Seminary (B.D.) and the University of Munich (D.theol.). For six years he taught Biblical Studies at Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota, and in 1980 accepted the call to serve as pastor at Bethlehem. He is the author of numerous books and his preaching is featured on the daily radio program Desiring God. He and his wife Noël have four sons, one daughter, and an increasing number of grandchildren.

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