

PERSPECTIVE

MAY 2016

**12 MEN
WHO
CHANGED
THE WORLD**

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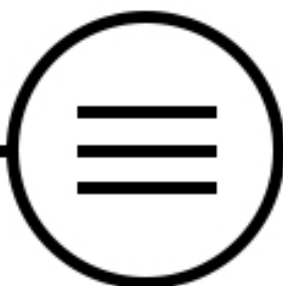
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12 Men Who Changed The World

Never in history has a band of brothers done so much to turn the world upside down. You know their names: Peter, Andrew, James the son of Zebedee, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon, Judas, and Judas Iscariot. Some of these men may feel like dear friends.

Perhaps you've grown up with the words of Peter or John since you were a child. Others you don't know at all. How much could you tell someone about Bartholomew? Judas Iscariot serves as a warning—it's possible to be close to Christ but not actually know him! This Judas was eventually replaced by Matthias (Acts 1:26).

God picked these men to bear witness to what they had seen—the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For that reason they remain, to this day, evidence of God's love for his glory and for his church. But who are they? How much do you know about them? How important are they for our lives today? These are important questions. Let's begin with a re-introduction to the twelve apostles.

Peter

It is fitting Luke lists Peter's name first (Luke 6:14) since he may be the most famous of the twelve. Peter was fishing on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus came up to him and said, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). A fisherman by trade, Peter also had a family. We know this because Jesus healed his mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31).

The Gospels often refer to Peter as Simon because this was his given name. Jesus decided to call him Peter, which in Aramaic (the language Jesus spoke) means "rock." Later in his ministry, Jesus commended Peter for calling him "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16). The Spirit had revealed Christ's identity to Peter which led the Savior to declare, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18). Christians have tussled over what exactly Peter meant by "rock" in this verse, but the general point seems clear enough: God used Peter to proclaim the divinity and lordship of Jesus Christ just as he would one day use him to declare the full gospel.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, Peter was known as a leader. He acted as the spokesman for the other disciples

(Matthew 16:16; Mark 8:29). He held a hallowed spot as a witness of the transfiguration (Mark 9:2). Not only that, when Paul recounts the way Jesus appeared after his death to the apostles, Peter is singled out because Jesus especially made himself known to him (Acts 15:5).

Of course, we know Peter as a coward, too. He's the one who famously promised to lay down his life for Jesus (John 13:37) only to deny him three times (John 18:15-18; 25-27). This has led many Christians through the ages to describe Peter as bold, impetuous, and brash. Even after Pentecost, Peter struggled. He felt the full force of Paul's rebuke when Peter decided to act one way with the Jewish Christians and another way with the Gentile believers (Galatians 2:11-14). Paul rightly reminded Peter that the gospel broke down such racial barriers.

Nonetheless, for all of his history and his faults, Peter was a changed man. Both the book of Acts and the letters of 1 and 2 Peter serve as a testimony of Peter's courage, grace, and sanctification. In Acts, before Paul comes on the scene, it is Peter who preached the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, "Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). He knew the cold stone of a prison cell (Acts 12:5) but never recanted his faith. The Spirit used him to write the New Testament letter that may call us to perseverance more clearly and forcefully than any other: "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy" (1 Pet 2:17). And when someone wondered why the Lord Jesus had not yet returned, it is Peter who offers perspective:

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (2 Pet 3:9-10).

God used Peter to bring Gentiles into the church (Acts 10-11), and there can be no doubt he preached widely throughout the ancient world. But he did more than merely preach. Peter heeded Jesus' words to "feed my sheep" (John 21:17). His sharp and tender words to elders in 1 Peter 5 shows us that Peter cared for more than the gospel being preached widely, he longed to see

pastors bury the gospel deeply into the hearts of Christians.

The New Testament is silent on the details surrounding Peter's death. The Lord predicted he would die by crucifixion (John 21:18-19). Historical evidence suggests he met such an end in Rome under the horrific reign of Emperor Nero around AD 64. The man who once denied Jesus three times would deny him no more.

Andrew

Andrew was Peter's less-famous brother. However, we can give thanks that it is Andrew who first esteemed Jesus and brought Peter to meet him (John 1:40-44). A fisherman like his brother, Andrew seems to have been led to Jesus after being a follower of John the Baptist.

Andrew received the call to ministry while fishing on the Sea of Galilee (Matt 4:18). Along with a small group of other apostles, Andrew wonders aloud about the signs of

Furthermore, it is thought that Andrew spent time in the Greek city of Patras where he shared the gospel with the wife of a Roman official, saw her converted, and for his efforts received martyrdom by crucifixion. By the seventh century, the church regarded him as the founder of the church in Constantinople.

The details outside the gospels are sketchy, but it is clear that Andrew spent his remaining days bearing witness to the Lord.

James the son of Zebedee

There are several men named James mentioned in the gospels. This James is not the brother of Jesus who led the church in Jerusalem and authored the letter of James. Nonetheless, this James is still of great importance. Jesus called him to be one of his first disciples. The same day Jesus called Peter and Andrew, he ran across "James the son of Zebedee and John his brother" (Matt 5:21). Hearing the call, we are told, "immediately they left the

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the end of the age (Mark 13:4). He no doubt sat with eyes transfixed as Jesus spoke of nations rising against nations and other birth pains that would usher in the last days.

We remember the day a huge crowd gathered around Jesus because he performed such amazing signs and wonders. However, we probably forgot that it was Andrew who gave Jesus the idea of multiplying a little boy's lunch: "One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" (John 6:8-9). Jesus didn't rebuke Andrew, but he ate his words before eating a full meal of bread and fish provided by the Lord himself.

The New Testament has little more to add, except to make clear that Andrew served as an eyewitness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:13).

According to the early church, Andrew went on to minister throughout Asia Minor, what is now southeast Europe, and Greece. The early church father, Origen, even reported that Andrew preached in southern Russia.

boat and their father and followed him" (Matt 5:22; Mark 1:20).

That this James became one of the first apostles is clear from Mark 3:17. Together, James and his brother, John, are referred to as Sons of Thunder. James and John were both present the day Jesus appeared to a handful of disciples on the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-14).

Though there are few other references to this James in the Bible, what we do have is telling. When the people of a village in Samaria didn't receive Jesus, it is James and John who ask him, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9:54). Such a rash judgment earned them a rebuke from the Savior. They did not yet understand the nature of Christ's reign. Though that village deserved judgment, now was the time for the gospel to be preached. Judgment would wait.

Sadly, James would not wait long to meet judgment himself. In Acts we discover King Herod captured James and put him to death with a sword, making James one of the earliest martyrs of the church (Acts 12:1-2).

John

After Peter, John may be the most famous of the apostles first called by Jesus. John authored both the Gospel of John, three letters, and the book of Revelation. Though not all the letters make this clear, Christians dating back to at least the second-century church father, Irenaeus, have affirmed his authorship.

Like Peter, John was clearly a leading figure among the first disciples. When nearly everyone thought that the daughter of Jairus was beyond help, Jesus invites only three men to witness her salvation: Peter, James, and John (Mark 5:37). The same trio are with Jesus on the mountain when Jesus' appearance is transfigured into "dazzling white" and he appears with Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:28-36).

Throughout the gospel of John, there is no explicit reference to the author; he simply referred to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." This may be a mark of authorial humility, seeking to draw attention away from himself and toward the subject of his book. In any event, John was in the upper room when Judas betrayed the Lord (John 13:23), at the cross when Jesus told him to care for his mother (John 19:26), at the tomb after Mary found it empty (John 20:2), on the boat when the Lord called from the bank (John 21:27), and following Peter and Jesus when the Savior told Peter, "feed my sheep" (John 21:20).

It is from the letter of 1 John that we find the contours of the Christian life defined most fully. To be a Christian is to acknowledge Christ, love his people, and obey his commandments. For centuries now, believers have been sitting at John's feet, reflecting upon what it looks like to be a child of God. Though salvation is a work of the Lord (John 1:13; 3:8), those who are saved bear marks of right thinking about Christ (1 John 1:3), right holiness in Christ (1 John 1:6), and right love for the body of Christ (1 John 3:11). The tiny letters of 2 and 3 John affirm similar truths, urging us to "walk according to his commandments" (2 John 6) and oppose those who would lead us away from the truth (3 John 11).

Finally, Revelation stands on its own as a message of the ultimate victory of Jesus Christ. For the first time John describes himself as the author (Rev 1:1) and he announces this lengthy book to be a prophecy of the trials to come (Rev 1:3) that will end with the Savior's triumphant return. The message of Revelation is that the

Christian can live in confidence that suffering is as temporary as it is inevitable.

Beyond his writings, John faithfully served the early church. Luke reports how John was at Peter's side, faithfully preaching the gospel after Pentecost (Acts 4:13). He traveled with Peter when the gospel took root in Samaria (Acts 8:14). Furthermore, his ministry was substantial enough that by the time Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians he could describe John (as well as James and Peter) as a pillar of the church in Jerusalem. His work led to his banishment to the island of Patmos, where he received the prophecy recorded in Revelation (Rev 1:9).

Historians largely agree that John spent the last years of his life in Ephesus where he continued to fight heresy and encouraged Christians to love each other to the very end.

Phillip

Philip hailed from Bethsaida, the hometown of Peter and Andrew. He received a similar call from the Lord who simply said to him, "Follow me" (John 1:43). From early on Philip saw Jesus as the one the Old Testament predicted, and he therefore urged Nathanael to follow Jesus, too (John 1:44-45). Perhaps we could therefore say Philip is one the first evangelists!

Unfortunately, Philip went down in history as the man who showed little faith that Jesus could feed 5,000. Jesus asked Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" John tells us that Jesus's answer was a test, a test that Philip seems to have failed for he replied, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little" (John 6:5-7).

Somehow, Philip was seen as a gatekeeper to the Messiah. When some Greeks came to Jerusalem looking for Jesus, they came to Philip first (John 12:21). Philip must have made himself known as a follower of the Lord.

But Philip still did not understand. When Jesus said to know him is to know the Father, Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father. Jesus rebuked him again, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me Philip?" (John 14:9)

Bartholomew

What we know about Philip is largely unflattering. What we know about Bartholomew is largely unenlightening. His name is found in the lists of apostles (Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13).

That's all we know.

Matthew

Matthew collected taxes from the Jews for the Romans. He was sitting at a tax booth when Jesus passed by to utter those irresistible words, "Follow me" (Matt 9:9). Matthew did just that. Eventually he authored the Gospel of Matthew where he paid special notice to the way Jesus exercised compassion towards society's wretches. Matthew records Jesus's famous saying, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Matt 9:9).

In Mark 2 and Luke 5, it is Levi, the son of Alphaeus, who is sitting in the tax booth when Jesus called. Levi is Matthew. He had two names, which was not unusual in Jewish culture. Furthermore, if Matthew was a Levite, this would explain the familiarity with Jewish tradition evident in the Gospel of Matthew.

Luke tells us that Matthew left everything to follow Christ. Everything. This witness of the resurrection knew what it meant to take up his cross and follow him.

Thomas

When we hear the name Thomas one word quickly comes to mind: "doubting." But there is more to him than that. When Jesus leaves for Bethany to visit the tomb of Lazarus, it is Thomas who boldly exclaims, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). Thomas appears willing to give his life in service to Christ.

Later on, when Jesus announced he was going to prepare a place for his disciples, it is Thomas who said what the others must have been thinking, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (John 14:5). Jesus does not rebuke Thomas, he simply answers with one of the most important sentences in the Bible, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Perhaps Thomas mulled over those words when the other disciples told them they'd seen the risen Christ.

Thomas didn't believe it. Furthermore, he unwisely said, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (John 20:25). Jesus appeared to Thomas, gave him the opportunity to test this hypothesis, and to eat his words. Finally, Thomas was a doubter no more as he cried out, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus's reply serves as a warning to us all, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29) This last statement led one early church father to comment, "Thomas's lack of faith did more for our faith than did the faith of the disciples who believed." In other words, his doubt was the occasion for Jesus to say something we desperately need to hear: though proof is possible, faith does not depend on it.

It is widely believed that Thomas eventually took the gospel to India.

James the son of Alphaeus

As with Bartholomew, the New Testament is remarkably silent about this particular James. He may be the one referred to as "James the younger," the son of Mary (Mark 15:40). All we know for sure is he is one of the first twelve apostles.

Simon

Matthew refers to him as Simon the Cananean (Matt 10:3). This doesn't mean that he was from Cana. Rather, this is an Aramaic word for a zealot—those staunchly committed to upholding Jewish religious and political traditions. Thus, one of Jesus's first disciples was a Jewish patriot, a man eager to see the Romans kicked out, the nation restored, and the pure religion of Israel reinstated.

Judas/Thaddaeus

Matthew refers to him as Thaddaeus, probably to avoid any confusion with the traitor, Judas Iscariot. Luke calls him "Judas, the son of James" (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13).

Judas Iscariot

In each of the lists of the apostles, this Judas is listed last. The Gospels leave no room for confusion as to his infamy. He is the disciple who betrayed Jesus (Mark 3:19; Mat 10:4; Luke 6:16; John 18:2). "Iscariot" probably designates Judas as hailing from Kerioth in Moab.

Judas served as the treasurer of the apostolic band (John 13:29). But he was also a thief who would take freely from the money that was supposed to be used to support the ministry (John 12:6). Judas resented the way Mary poured a pound of perfume on Jesus's feet. Her act of worship cost Judas precious resources he intended to spend on himself.

We remember Judas as a man ruled by love of money. For thirty pieces of silver he handed Jesus over to the Jewish authorities who led him to the Romans who had the Lord crucified. And though he was overcome by grief and brought the money back to the Jews, it was too late. The damage had been done (Matt 27:3-10). Judas had plotted against Jesus, effectively inviting Satan into his heart (John 12:27).

Though God ordained the cross for the good of his people, Judas willingly fed Christ to the wolves. We can say with Joseph that while Judas meant it for evil, "God meant it for good" (Gen 50:20).

Matthias

After Jesus ascended to the right hand of God the Father (Acts 1:9), Peter determined that Judas Iscariot needed to be replaced. The disciples concluded it needed to be someone who had been with them from the time of Jesus's baptism until his ascension. They identified two candidates, Joseph and Matthias. They cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias. Other than this, we know nothing about Matthias.

I've taken the time to work through the first twelve apostles (remember, Matthias replaced Judas). We should recognize Paul as an apostle, too, for this is how he describes himself in 1 Corinthians 15:8-9, "Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

We don't have apostles today. The apostolic office was a unique and temporary office established by God for the building of his church (Eph 2:20-21). The apostles preached the Word of God, many of them wrote the Word of God, and the Spirit used their words and writings to plant the gospel deep into the souls of men and women. Today we can carry out an apostolic ministry

to the extent that we faithfully teach and preach what they taught, but we cannot be apostles.

What can we learn from this brief synopsis of these twelve men?

God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

Peter and John, the most famous of the first apostles, are described by Luke as "uneducated, common men." That's not to say they were simple-minded, not at all! It is simply to say that they lacked the academic or political or even religious credentials that would have been expected to lead such a tremendous religious movement. We live in a very status-conscious society. People put a lot of stock in where you grew up, what school you went to, how many letters you have after your name, and how much money you have in your savings account. Certainly the Lord can use the elite of society to his good purposes. Nonetheless, let us remember that's not how Jesus began his movement. He picked a fairly nondescript group of men to change the world.

God is not taken aback by our sinful past

Matthew stands out here, doesn't he? After all, Matthew was a tax collector. In Jewish society, not only were the tax collectors seen as traitors for working for Rome, but often as unclean for handling Gentile money. They epitomized the type of men who didn't care about God or God's people. And yet what does Jesus do? He calls Matthew while he is at his tax booth! The apostles were not a group of goody-two-shoes who didn't have anything better to do than begin an evangelistic mission. They were real people, in love with the world, but called to a mission they came to love even more. This is a good reminder that your sinful past is no surprise to Christ. After all, "even when we were dead in our trespasses," God "made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved" (Eph 2:5).

A faithful life is no guarantee of notoriety

In the digital age, an increasing number of young people confess they want to be famous. From a very early age, they are clamoring for Facebook "friends" and Twitter "followers." Sadly, for many of them the fame of life is more important than the substance. What do we do with the fact that so many of the men who God used to turn the world upside down are completely unknown to us? Are we to think less of Bartholomew, Matthias, and James the Son of Alphaeus because we know nothing of their work? Of course not! They served recognizing their reward is in heaven.

You can be in the church but not in the Lord.

That's the warning the life of Judas Iscariot presents to us. It's not enough to be among God's people; we must be hungering and thirsting for God himself. If you are reading this you are probably pretty involved with a local church. That's not enough, is it? We are called to a personal, living, robust relationship with the Lord. This means spending time meditating on his Word, going to him in prayer, wrestling with the truths of Scripture, and showing genuine love for God's people.

Jesus is worth dying for.

Most of us will never choose between life and Christ. But what would you do if you had to? Every apostle would have resonated with Paul's words, "It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death" (Phil 1:20). It's easy to say those words, but Paul lived them. So did Peter. So did James. These are real men who truly concluded Christ was worth giving their lives for. I'd like to think I would do the same. I know that kind of commitment is only possible if the Holy Spirit is at work in and through me.

God uses the imperfect.

At some point in history, the church came to call the apostles and other leading Christian figures saints. They used this word to distinguish them from rank-and-file Christians. But by giving them this title, they erred in two ways. First, they wrongly elevated normal men to a superspiritual status. Second, they wrongly denigrated faithful Christians to a somehow less-than-saintly status. The truth is, every Christian is a saint—justified and sanctified by the gospel of God. Every Christian leader—whether he be an apostle in the first century or a pastor in the twenty-first—is a sinner. We are all saints and sinners. God is pleased to use the imperfect because, as Paul noted, Christ's "power is made perfect in weakness."

The gospel binds the church together.

What is it these men had in common? Some were fishermen, one was a tax collector, we don't know the vocation of most. They came from different towns, they had different personalities, strengths, and weaknesses. So what did they share? Luke gives us a clue in Acts 1:22. Each of these men witnessed the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other words, they didn't just see Jesus die on the cross for sinners, they saw him raised from the dead for sinners. They were bound by their faith in the risen Lord. The same tie that bound the first apostles binds the

church today. We may not be those who have seen the risen Christ but, as Jesus told Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." We may not have seen the risen Lord, but we have had the eyes of our hearts enlightened (Eph 1:18). Like them, the gospel of a Savior who died and rose for us is all we have in common.

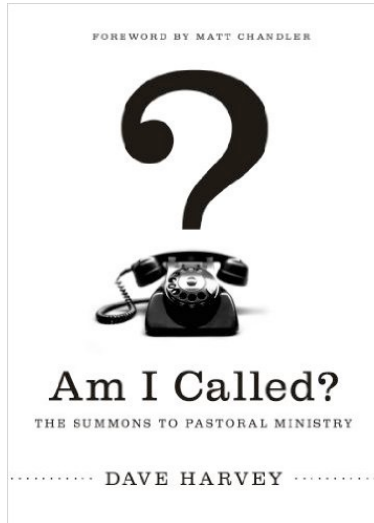
We are not on the lookout for any more apostles. But we should be thankful for their work. We have the Bible because of them. Those twelve apostles changed the world in a special way, preaching the gospel and writing the Scriptures we still read. None of us are apostles, but God is still at work wherever we "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

~Aaron Menikoff

Am I Called? The Summons to Pastoral Ministry

Written by Dave Harvey

Bookstall Price \$12



If you are a Christian, you have been called: called out of darkness and into light; called as a child of God; called to a life of service. If all Christians are called, what does it mean for a pastor to be “called” into pastoral ministry? What should we look for in a man who claims to be called? What should I do if I think God is calling me? These questions are the heart of Dave Harvey’s short, practical book *Am I Called?*

Harvey divides his book into three parts: Approaching the Call, Diagnosing the Call, and Waiting. In

each part he combines practical and biblical wisdom in an effort to help potential pastors discern God’s work in their lives. In particular, part two (Diagnosing the Call) is made up of six questions based closely on Paul’s qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. *Are You Godly? How’s Your Home? Can You Preach? Can You Shepherd? Do You Love the Lost? Who Agrees?* These chapters are chock full of advice and experience about why each of these areas of a man’s life provide critical insight into his ability to pastor and God’s call on his life.

Some of you may be asking what insights Harvey can provide to church members who will never enter vocational pastoral ministry? First, I would remind you that our entire body of elders shares the load of pastoral ministry—and the majority of elders are not in vocational ministry. Men who aspire to be elders (and their wives) would benefit greatly from the self-reflection required when reading this book. Second, as a congregational church, we as members bear the responsibility of selecting our leaders and then following them. Right now the elders are soliciting recommendations for new elders from the congregation, and this book is a helpful guide when you consider the men you recommend. Finally, this book provides a guide for how to pray for your pastors. Pray that they would be men who, by God’s grace, live up to the standards of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Pray that God would protect them from their sin and the works of the devil. Pray that God will continue raising up new leaders who will lead the church to love Christ.

– RECOMMENDED BY B.J. KING

Excerpts from the Book

1

“God isn’t haphazard in whom he calls or what he calls a man to do. He doesn’t appoint bureaucrats over his church; he appoints men—flesh and blood, boneheaded mistake factories like you and me. He takes an ordinary guy, carves out his character, grants some grace, trains him with trials, zaps him with zeal, and corners him in his circumstances. Then you’ve got a pastor.”

–The Summons As I See It, p. 20

2

“In an infinitely more profound way, our call to ministry, just like our call to salvation, ultimately says little about us and a great deal about the Caller. If we’re truly to understand the importance of calling in ministry, we need to grasp that the impetus for it originates with a wise, loving, and sovereign God. And before he calls us to ministry, he calls us to himself.”

–Summoned to the Savior, p. 35-36

3

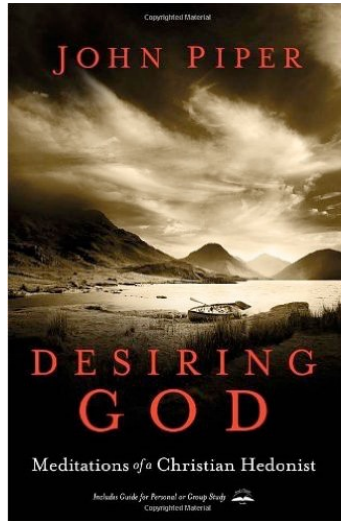
“It’s a common mistake among those who feel called to plant and pastor churches; some men are willing to lead the church before they lead their families. In fact, some guys seem willing to lead the church to the detriment of their families! Both options are unacceptable to God. He poses a question that offers no multiple choice answers: “For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s Church? (1 Tim. 3:5)”

–How’s Your Home? p. 93

Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist

Written by John Piper

Bookstall Price \$14



Desiring God puts into words the focus of John Piper's life and ministry; God is most glorified when man is most satisfied in him. This is a mind-altering book, as Piper argues that Christians should be the most "hedonistic" creatures in all creation. However, the pleasures of the Christian hedonist are found not in the things of this world, but in the richness of knowing God.

Piper uses both Scripture and powerful testimonies to convince readers that they should be Christian hedonists. He begins by laying the

foundation for Christian hedonism: God is a happy God who takes great delight in his own glory. Those who are born-again Christians should take great delight in pursuing the pleasures of God; thus, they are, in essence, Christian hedonists. Piper uses the rest of the book to explain how Christian hedonism impacts the Christian life in various areas such as worship, finances, missions, and suffering. In all of these, we are to pursue our supreme joy, which is ultimately found in following God.

Reading *Desiring God* has created in me a greater distaste for the fleeting pleasures of sin and the comforts of Christian nominalism. There is a far greater and more satisfying life that counts all things in this world as loss and knowing Christ alone as gain. It is a life that feasts on the Word of God and prayer, a life that joyfully endures suffering and continually pursues the pleasures of personal holiness. This is the life that *Desiring God* challenges its readers to pursue.

I would highly encourage you to read this book if you find God and the Christian lifestyle dissatisfying at times or if you feel your spiritual life weakening. This book will revive the heart to enjoy the pleasures of God in all circumstances through motivating the Christian to fully surrender to God, for in the end, don't we all just want to be satisfied.

– RECOMMENDED BY MATT TILLMAN

Excerpts from the Book

1

"The climax of His (God's) happiness is the delight He takes in the echoes of His excellence in the praise of the saints."

–The Happiness of God: Foundation for Christian Hedonism, p. 45

2

"We do not believe Jesus when He says there is more blessedness, more joy, more lasting pleasure in a life devoted to helping others than there is in a life devoted to our material comfort. And therefore, the very longing for contentment that ought to drive us to simplicity of life and labors of love contents itself instead with the broken cisterns of prosperity and comfort."

–Love: The Labor of Christian Hedonism, p. 129

3

"Christ promises to work for us and to be for us so much that when our missionary life is over, we will not be able to say we've sacrificed anything (Mark 10:29-30). When we follow His missionary prescription, we discover that even the painful side effects worked to improve our condition. Our spiritual health, our joy, improves a hundredfold. And when we die, we do not die. We gain eternal life."

–Missions: The Battle Cry of Christian Hedonism, p. 250-51

HAS HE
SAID,
AND
WILL HE NOT
DO IT?
OR HAS HE
SPOKEN,
AND
WILL HE NOT
FULFILL IT?

God is not man, that he should lie,
or a son of man, that he should change his
mind
Has he said, and will he not do it?
Or has he spoken and will he not fulfill it?

– Numbers 23:19

Your willingness to trust someone's word depends on their character. Think about the implications of that for a second. None of us have a perfect character. At some point we all have lied, deceived, told a half-truth, embellished, and turned back on or acted contrary to our promise. It's a wonder that we can trust anyone's word and that they can trust ours. We are told in Numbers 23:19 that we are like this – we lie and change our mind. Our sinful hearts inherently make human relationships, as one author said, "a garden of distrust."

But what stands out to us in Balaam's words is the hope found in the character of God. The surest foundation is unmovable. Some of the worst news a homeowner can hear is "You have a problem with your foundation." You will never hear such words applied to your relationship with God.

Part of what gives us hope is that God is not like us. All that makes our relationships a "garden of distrust" is absent from the character of God. He does not lie nor change his mind. Christian, there is not a single promise in God's Word that leaves you questioning, "Is God really telling me the truth?" He cannot lie because it is not in his character. He is the source of all truth.

The other thing that gives us hope is that God will do what he has promised. This should be particularly encouraging in our struggle with sin. It's been said that part of your growth in godliness is the increased realization of your sin. That should make you hate your sin more and long for heaven even more. Brother or sister, God has promised that the "good work" he began in you, he "will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

Nearly every day people you look to fail to deliver on their word—friends, your spouse and children, elders, politicians, and more. It is no surprise that you are naturally skeptical that anyone can or will ever keep their promise. But praise God that he is not like us. All of his promises are "yes" and "amen" in Jesus Christ!

– BRAD THAYER

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