



FOREWORD by **JOHN PIPER**



THE



THINGS



OF

EARTH



Treasuring God by Enjoying His Gifts



JOE RIGNEY



“We are probably familiar with the proverb about the overly pious fellow, the one who is so heavenly minded he is no earthly good. And we have seen the opposite so many times that we don’t even need a proverb for it—the carnal thinker who is so earthly minded he is no heavenly good. And no earthly good either, as it turns out. The hardest thing to achieve on this subject is *balance*, but it is a difficult feat that Rigney has accomplished. Buy this book. Make it one of your earthly possessions. Read it to find out what that is supposed to mean.”

Douglas Wilson, Senior Fellow of Theology, New St. Andrews College; Pastor, Christ Church, Moscow, Idaho

“Reading this will be a sweet moment of profound liberation for many. With wisdom and verve, Rigney shows how we can worship our Creator through the enjoyment of his creation. This is going to make a lot of Christians happier in Christ—and more attractively Christlike.”

Michael Reeves, Director of Union and Senior Lecturer, Wales Evangelical School of Theology; author, *Delighting in the Trinity*; *The Unquenchable Flame*; and *Rejoicing in Christ*

“This book makes me want to watch the Olympics while eating a pumpkin crunch cake, rejoicing in the God who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. But part of me is a little wary of the indulgent pecan crunchiness and astonishing athletic feats. What if my heart gets lost in these things? If you’re familiar with that hesitation, this book is for you. We were made to take in all the fullness of the intergalactic glory of the triune God. This book is a trustworthy guide to help your gaze follow along the scattered beams up to the sun.”

Gloria Furman, pastor’s wife, Redeemer Church of Dubai; mother of four; author, *Glimpses of Grace* and *Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full*

“It is not easy to understand how I can love God with all my heart, but also love the world he has made. God’s Word encourages us to love the creation (Psalm 19), but also to love not the world (1 John 2:15–17). Rigney is really helpful to those wrestling with this kind of question, and he helps us with a lively and engaging style. This book clarifies and builds upon John Piper’s Christian Hedonism. I heartily recommend it.”

John M. Frame, J. D. Trimble Chair of Systematic Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

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Treasuring God by Enjoying His Gifts

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FOREWORD BY JOHN PIPER

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To my wife, Jen
You are a constant reminder that
the things of earth grow strangely bright
in the light of his glory and grace.

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Foreword

If there is an evangelical Christian alive today who has thought and written more biblically, more deeply, more creatively, or more practically about the proper enjoyment of creation and culture, I don't know who it is. When I say "biblically," I mean that Joe thinks and writes under the authority of God's Word and with a view to answering all serious objections that arise from the Bible. I also mean that he writes as a persuaded Christian Hedonist—that is, with the pervasive conviction that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

But like all good students, he is not merely swallowing the teachings of Christian Hedonism; he is digesting them so that they turn into energies and insights beyond his teacher's. The fact that he asked me to write this foreword, and that I agreed to do it, is a sign that those insights are not contradictory, but complementary, to the teacher's efforts.

Joe has discerned that a strength of Christian Hedonism can also turn into a weakness. The strength is that Christian Hedonism, as I have tried to develop it, has a strong ascetic tendency (as the Bible does!). For example, I often add these words: "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him, *especially in those times when we embrace suffering for his sake with joy.*" Joy in affliction is a clearer witness that we treasure Christ more than comfort, than joy in comfortable, sunny days.

I also stress that it is more blessed to give than to receive and that giving is often painful. I have tried to make the tone of my ministry "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Cor. 6:10). The very heart of Christian Hedonism, textually, is found in Philippians 1:19–23, where Christ is most magnified in our dying, because we treasure Christ so supremely that we call dying *gain*—because in it we get more of Christ. And we treasure Christ in our living by counting everything as loss because of

the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord (Phil. 3:8). The saltiness of the Christian life is tasted most keenly when, in the midst of being reviled and persecuted, we rejoice and are glad because our reward in heaven is great (Matt. 5:11–13).

The weakness of this emphasis is that little space is devoted to magnifying Christ in the right enjoyment of creation and culture. Little emphasis is given to Paul's words: "God created [foods] to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim. 4:3–4). Or his words that God "richly provides us with everything to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17).

The trees of biblical wisdom in regard to savoring God in the savoring of his creation are not full-grown in what I have written about Christian Hedonism. I sowed some seeds, but I never circled back to tend those saplings, let alone grow them into a book. That's what Joe Rigney has done. And I am so pleased with what he has written that I feel no need to write that book. It needed to be written, and he has done it.

We are all shaped and motivated by our personal experiences. I have seen a side of biblical truth, and written about it the way I have, in large measure because of my experience of life and what I see as the needs around me in the church, in America, and in the world. I will probably keep my focus and my emphasis as long as I live. It's the way I see the Bible and the world at this time.

But my emphasis is not the whole truth. Joe has lived a different life and has faced different challenges and has felt the force of different needs in people's lives. This has given him a sensitivity to other dimensions of biblical truth and has enabled him to see them and write about them with depth, creativity, and intensely practical application.

This book has been very helpful to me. I mean that personally. I think I will be a better father and husband and friend and leader because of it. One reason is that Joe is undaunted by possible objections to what he emphasizes from the Bible. Does this emphasis fit with the biblical teaching on self-denial? Will it help when the child dies? Will it help us complete the Great Commission? Will it help us say, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you"

(Ps. 73:25)? There are good answers to these questions—biblical answers. Joe is so devoted to Scripture that he is unafraid to face whatever it says without rejecting it in favor of his system or twisting it to make it fit. This is the kind of writer that gives me great help.

We are both aware that what we have written can be distorted and misused. But that puts us in good company, since all Christian heresies and sects distort and misuse the Bible. God evidently thought that the gift of the Bible was worth the distortions people would make of it. Joe has written a book that should have been written. It is a gift to the church and the world, not because it *is* the Bible but because it is pervaded by a passion to be *faithful* to the Bible. It is worth the distortions people will make of it. May they be few. He has not been careless.

My prayer for this book is the same as Joe's:

May the Father of Lights, who knows how to give good gifts to his children, teach you the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need, being brought low or being raised up. May he grant you the grace to do all good things, receive all good things, lose all good things, and endure all hard things through Christ who gives you strength. Amen.

John Piper

Acknowledgments

Much in this book focuses on the early chapters of Genesis. However, the passage about the four rivers flowing down to water the garden (2:10) receives short shrift (I don't think I mention it once). To rectify that omission, imagine that this book is the garden, and that there are four rivers flowing down to water it. The name of the first river is Jonathan Edwards, the second is C. S. Lewis, the third is John Piper, and the fourth is Doug Wilson (the latter two, like the Tigris and Euphrates, still being alive and well in our own day). These four rivers all have their distinctive characters, but they flow from one source. And, at least for me, they have all swelled together to produce this book.

Edwards has been a close friend ever since I plunged into his depths in seminary, and in many ways this book was hatched in a class on *The End for which God Created the World*. He helped me to see that we cannot speak of the glory of God without reference to God's triune being and that the world is crowded with images of divine things. I'm not sure how to describe Lewis's impact on me, other than to say that it's pervasive, as a quick skim through these pages will confirm. The clarity of his thought and the poetry of his prose have helped me to see that there is more in heaven and earth than is dreamt of in most books of theology.

I describe some of John Piper's influence on me in the introduction, so I won't rehearse it here. But it's no understatement to say that this book would not have been written without him. From the beginning, my hope has been that this book would be a little extension of the God-centered vision that he has faithfully preached and proclaimed for over thirty-five years. I'm profoundly grateful for his ministry, his mentorship, and his love and care for me and my family. From the moment that the book began to take shape, I knew there was no one else that I would want to

Acknowledgments

write the foreword. His willingness to do so is a tremendous honor, and I still find myself stunned and humbled by his commendation.

If Edwards, Lewis, and Piper set the stage for this project, Doug Wilson was the catalyst. A handful of blog posts in 2010 led to a public conversation with Pastor John in 2011, which I had the privilege of moderating. It was that public conversation that finally convinced me of the need for this book, and Doug has encouraged me in the project along the way. Doug has indelibly shaped the way that I approach these questions, so much so that I find it impossible to remember all the things he has taught me. I have no doubt that there are many insights here that could be traced directly back to him, and I know I've not cataloged them all. Thankfully, Doug knows as well as anyone that a failure of memory does not signal a failure of gratitude. After all, that's what acknowledgments are for. So let me just say I am deeply thankful for Doug's ministry and friendship. The seeds he has sown have proven fruitful in my life, and I can only hope that my attempts at sowing will be as faithful and fruitful as his.

Beyond these four, there are a number of other authors that lurk in the pages that follow. Nate Wilson, in both his fiction and his prose, has regularly kindled in me a desire to soak up every ounce of reality that God throws my way and then to pour out what I have for the good of others. I like to think that this book is a kind of exegetical defense for the way that Nate sees and names the world. Andrew Peterson's songs have long ministered to my soul and awakened me to the freshness of the world God has made. If you want to understand what this book is all about, pick up one of his albums and listen to a song or two; that'll likely give you a deeper experiential knowledge of what I'm getting at than any number of expository paragraphs. Time would fail me to describe the impact that Augustine, Tolkien, Chesterton, and Leithart have had on this book; I've tried to detail some of that influence in the notes.

While writing this book I had the opportunity to teach and preach through the content a handful of times at Bethlehem Baptist Church. Shane Barnard and Shane Everett also invited me to teach a course on the material for the Worship Initiative. The questions and comments I

received each time I worked through it only increased my desire to write it, and I hope have made the book substantially better.

A number of students at Bethlehem College and Seminary read various portions and marked up the manuscript with probing questions, critical reactions, and encouraging remarks. I'd like to particularly thank Justin Woyak, Scott McQuinn, Lance Kramer, Chris Powers, Dan and Emily Weller, Chris Robbins, Aaron Jameson, Jeff Lacine, and Brandon Bellomo. Other friends who encouraged me through the writing process include Clayton Luskie, Curt Steinhorst, Marshall Segal, Jonathan Parnell, Tony Reinke, and James Carr. My colleagues at Bethlehem College and Seminary regularly challenge and provoke my thinking, spurring me to new insights, many of which found their way into the book. I'm grateful to God for the partnership in ministry I have with Ryan Griffith, Johnathon Bowers, Josh Maloney, Ben Collins, Matt Crutchmer, Jason Abell, Jason DeRouchie, Andy Naselli, Travis Myers, and the rest of the faculty and staff at Bethlehem College and Seminary.

My good friend Alex Kirk carefully read the book and made some important connections that I was able to include in the final product. David Mathis read key portions and helped me navigate the world of evangelical publishing. My teaching assistant Zach Howard was invaluable in tracking down citations and helping me with formatting. Justin Taylor and the team at Crossway have proved that the back end of their publishing house is as Christ-exalting as the books they produce. Jill Carter, Amy Kruis, Erik Maldre, and the rest of the folks there have made this project a joy to work on. My editor, Lydia Brownback, caught my errors, cleaned up my prose, and clarified my thinking at a number of points.

My family has been a tremendous encouragement in this project. In particular, my grandfather Jim Reese; my father-in-law, Pete Smith; and my youngest brother, Daniel, all read drafts and made very perceptive comments, especially about how to make it accessible to nontheologians. Over the course of writing this book, my father, Bill Rigney, finished his earthly course after a long and painful fight with Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Losing my dad over eight years helped me to realize just how significant the things of earth can be in revealing the character of God.

Acknowledgments

I acutely feel my dad's earthly absence, and yet the love and gratitude I bear to him and for him have only served to increase my sense of God's fatherly presence. In losing my dad, I found the substance to which he was but a shadow. And finding the substance—God the Father—only made me more grateful for my dad, who imaged him to me so well.

The chief arena where I apply everything I say in this book is my own immediate family. I have two wonderful sons, Sam and Peter, and I have learned more from them about the strange brightness of the things of earth than any book could possibly communicate. The kindling of this book may have been gathered in a seminary classroom, but the spark that ignited it and has sustained the flames was birthed in tickle fights in my living room.

Finally, my wife, Jenny, has supported, encouraged, and inspired me, long before this project was a twinkle in my eye. She has been a sounding board for my ideas for as long as we've been together, offering perceptive insights and helping me to practice what I preach. In highs and lows, in darkness and in light, she has been my constant companion for the last nine years. Grace has abounded to me through her, and words cannot express how privileged I feel to have her as my bride.

Introduction

What Are We to Do with the Things of Earth?

God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him.

John Piper

He loves Thee too little, who loves anything together with Thee,
which he loves not for Thy sake.

Augustine

Katherine is a college student who works twenty-five hours a week in order to pay her way through school. Though she tries to devote time to prayer and Scripture reading, she worries that she doesn't read her Bible enough. No matter how long her devotions are, the low-grade guilt seems to stay. After all, doesn't the Bible say to meditate on it day and night and to pray without ceasing?

Bob is in his late sixties and loves fishing, softball, and the Chicago Cubs. Last year, God used colon cancer to shake Bob loose and draw him to himself. Bob now wonders whether he can still enjoy his hobbies like he once did. After all, he doesn't want to waste his life.

Abby is a young woman who is engaged to be married. Two weeks ago her pastor preached a sermon on the danger of idolatry. Since then, she's been worried that she loves her fiancé, Dan, too much. She doesn't quite know what "too much" means, but whenever she's with him, her heart leaps, and then she immediately feels a sense of guilt.

Tim is a sophomore in college, and he is sold out for Jesus. He's tired of comfortable Christianity and wants to live a radically God-centered

lifestyle. He thinks that so-called Christians who read fiction or watch movies or play sports are wasting their time because they're not finding their true satisfaction in God. Deep down, he struggles with whether he himself is fully satisfied in God in the way he should be. He lives with a constant sense of guilt because he knows he's too distracted by the things of earth.

Beth and Jake were recently married. Money is tight, and they find themselves regularly fighting over it. They are both sincere Christians, but they have different views of how to spend their limited budget. Jake insists that they live a "wartime" lifestyle, and while Beth agrees in principle, she's not so sure about the details. She's half-afraid that she'll come home one day and find that Jake has sold their bed and replaced it with sleeping bags and cots.

Sarah and her mom are best friends. Or at least they were until her mom died in a car accident two years ago. Sarah knows that her mom is in heaven with Jesus, and she trusts that God had good purposes for taking her from the family, but Sarah still cries almost every night. What's worse, she's started to feel guilty for her grief because she wonders whether God disapproves of the depth of her pain.



If you recognize yourself in any of these snapshots, then this book was written for you. It was written for people who sincerely want to glorify God in all they do but find themselves wrestling with what the God-centered life actually looks like in practice. It was written for people who struggle with whether they love God's gifts too much and whether they love God enough. It was written for people who find themselves frustrated that the world seems designed to distract them from a single-minded pursuit of Christ alone. It was written for those who embrace a passion for the supremacy of God in all things but feel the tension between the supremacy of God and the "all things."

This book was written to answer a simple question: What are we to do with the things of earth? Embrace them? Reject them? Use them? Forget about them? Set our affections on them? Look at them with suspicious eyes? Enjoy them with a twinge or two of guilt?

Then again, perhaps this isn't a simple question. After all, the Bible itself seems conflicted on the issue. For example, Paul in his letter to the Colossians says the following:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:1–4)

Where should you set your mind, your heart, “your affection” (KJV)? On things that are above—high things, holy things, spiritual things—not on earthly things. Why? Because you've been raised with Christ, and he is seated in heaven, and his worth far surpasses all earthly goods. Indeed, compared to him, the things of earth are so much trash and rubbish (Phil. 3:8).

Seems clear enough. But then in 1 Timothy, Paul seems to strike a different note about earthly things:

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. (1 Tim. 4:4–5)

So everything God made is good, including the things on earth. Therefore, we must not reject them, despise them, or keep them at arms' length. We must embrace them with thanksgiving. So which is it? Should we count everything as loss or receive everything with holy gratitude?

Or again, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul warns of the offense of setting one's mind on the things of earth:

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. (Phil. 3:17–19)

Be like Paul. Imitate him and those like him. Don't be an enemy of Christ's cross, one who turns his appetite into a god and who sets his affections on the things of earth.

Contrast that sentiment with Paul's charge to the wealthy at the end of his letter to Timothy. At first, it sounds similar, but Paul ends with a surprising twist:

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. (1 Tim. 6:17)

Don't set your hope on uncertain riches. Don't set your mind on the things of earth. But don't forget that God richly provides you with everything to enjoy. How do we do this? How can we *enjoy* all that God richly provides without setting our *affections* on the things of earth?

The Battle of the Hymns

These two biblical threads have made their way into our songs and hymns. For instance, most evangelicals have sung Helen Lemmel's hymn "Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus." The chorus captures one half of the tension:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in his wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace.

What happens to the things of earth when Jesus shows up? They grow dim. They fade. Compared to him, they are as nothing and less than nothing. So when we set our minds on things above, the things below lose their power and beauty.

But Hemmel's hymn isn't the only song we sing. In "This Is My Father's World," Maltbie Babcock gives voice to the other side of the tension, celebrating the goodness of God's creation:

This is my Father's world:
He shines in all that's fair;

In the rustling grass I hear Him pass;
He speaks to me everywhere.

So again, which is it? In the light of his face, do earthly goods grow *dim*? Or does he *shine* in all that's fair? Does the rustling grass disappear when Christ arrives? Or do we hear him speaking in it?

As I said before, what exactly are we to do with the things of earth?

Resolving the Tension by Fostering Greed or Guilt

One way of resolving the tension is essentially to choose one side and land there. Health, wealth, and prosperity preachers ostensibly celebrate the goodness of the things of earth, urging their congregations to “name it and claim it.” Earthly blessings are the necessary sign of God’s favor toward us, so we seek them above all and seek him for their sake. Such false teachers effectively encourage their people to set their minds on things below and to turn their eyes upon Jesus only when they want some earthly good from him. They imagine that godliness is a means of earthly gain, stoking the desire to be rich, which plunges people into ruin and destruction (1 Tim. 6:5, 9). This is the ditch of greed and sinful indulgence, and God hates it.¹

On the other hand, we can so emphasize the necessity of setting our minds above that we effectively deny the goodness of God’s creation, thereby falling into the other ditch. Isaac Watts, the author of “Joy to the World” and “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” once wrote a hymn based on Colossians 3:2 entitled “How Vain Are All Things Here Below.” The lyrics powerfully express the danger of rejecting the goodness of the things of earth. A brief walk through the hymn will highlight the sorts of impulses that I’m seeking to correct in this book.

How vain are all things here below;
How false, and yet how fair!
Each pleasure has its poison too,
And every sweet a snare.

Notice that *all* things below are vain. The things of earth are both false and fair. Husband, wife, children, food, hobbies, work—all of these are

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pleasures laced with poison. The sweetness of earthly joys are a snare and a trap, catching us in their destructive embrace.

The brightest things below the sky
Give but a flattering light;
We should suspect some danger nigh,
When we possess delight.

Given the falseness of earthly pleasures, we ought to be suspicious of them. When we savor a sirloin steak or delight in the playfulness of a child or marvel at a prairie thunderstorm, red lights ought to begin flashing in our minds: “Danger! Danger! Danger!”

Our dearest joys, and dearest friends,
The partners of our blood,
How they divide our wavering minds,
And leave but half for God!

Watts makes clear that even good gifts (such as friends and family) are at best distractions from a single-minded devotion to God. Delight in the giver and delight in his gifts are viewed as a zero-sum game in which the more love we give to the things of earth, the less love we have left for God himself (and vice versa). The implication is clear: if we are to be faithful to God and love him with *all* our heart, soul, mind, and strength, we must suppress and resist our delight in our dearest joys and friends.

The fondness of a creature’s love,
How strong it strikes the sense!
Thither the warm affections move,
Nor can we call them thence.

Our feelings of delight in creatures are potent. They grab our attention and lead our affections away so that we can’t call them back. Watts presumably wishes us to be on guard against growing fond of our family and friends, lest the strength of our joy pull us from God.

Dear Saviour, let thy beauties be
My soul’s eternal food;

And grace command my heart away
From all created good.

Note again the dichotomy between the beauty of Christ and the beauty he created. Grace delivers us from created good. It mercifully draws us away from earthly pleasures. The grace of Christ makes the things of earth grow strangely dim.

To me, the theology in this hymn is sincere but misguided. When embraced, it produces a constant, joy-killing guilt, because try as we might, we still live in the world and enjoy earthly pleasures. If we adopt Watts's view, we erect an impossible standard and then constantly fall short of it. Is there another way? A better way? I believe there is.

Why Did God Make *This* World?

To ask our (not so) simple question in another way: Why did God make this world? Why did he make a world for his own glory in Christ and then fill it to the brim with pleasures—physical pleasures, sensible pleasures, emotional pleasures, and relational pleasures? Why did God make a world full of good friends, sizzling bacon, the laughter of children, West Texas sunsets, Dr. Pepper, college football, marital love, and the warmth of wool socks? This is the tension we experience, and I hope that this book can go some of the way in resolving it.

My aim is simple—I want to work with you for your joy. Your joy in your family. Your joy in your friends. Your joy in your pancakes and eggs, your steak and potatoes, your chips and your salsa. Your joy in your camping trips, workouts, and iPod playlist. Your joy in the Bible, in worship services, and in the quiet moments before you fall asleep. Your joy in your job, your hobbies, and your daily routine.

And in and through all these things, I want to work with you for your joy in the living and personal God who gave you all these things and delivered you from sin and death through the work of his Son and Holy Spirit that you might enjoy him and them, and him in them, forever. But before I explain how I'm going to do that, let me tell you a little about myself.

Christian Hedonism 101

I've been a Christian Hedonist for over a decade. *Christian Hedonism* is a term coined by a pastor and theologian from Minneapolis named John Piper. At its root, Christian Hedonism means embracing the biblical truth that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. It means seeking to pursue your highest and deepest joy in Christ and Christ alone.²

In my case, I was a Christian Hedonist before I'd ever heard of John Piper. Of course, I wouldn't have used that term, but I was one nonetheless. You can check my journals from late high school. (On second thought, you can't; there's a lot of embarrassing stuff in there that should never see the light of day).

So I was a Christian Hedonist without the labels. I think it was the Psalms that did it. "Delight yourself in the LORD" (Ps. 37:4). "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you" (Ps. 42:1). "My soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you" (Ps. 63:1). Those were the prayers that I returned to again and again during my teenage years.

At any rate, when I encountered Christian Hedonism as a freshman in college, it found an eager home in my heart. I was primed for it. I still remember the first Piper sermon that I ever listened to. A friend had suggested it to me. The sermon was called "Boasting Only in the Cross," and, boy, did it throw me for a loop.³ A good half of the sermon was over my head. I had never heard the word "exultation" before (I was convinced that Piper was mispronouncing "exaltation"). But there was something in what he said that resonated with me, way down deep where joint and marrow grow together. So I listened to it again. And again. And again.

And then I listened to other sermons. I read some articles. And I discovered that I am a Christian Hedonist and hadn't known it. Piper put deeper biblical foundations underneath my experience of the Christian life. More importantly, he fixed God at the center of my pursuit of pleasure.

I came to embrace Christian Hedonism in both experience and name. I had new categories for engaging with God, a new vocabulary in which words such as *affections* and *satisfaction* and, yes, *exultation* figured prominently. Here are some of the things that sank deep in those days:

- 1) All men seek happiness. Always.
- 2) God does not find our desires too strong, but too weak.
- 3) A passion for God's glory and a passion for my happiness are not at odds; in fact, they are the same passion.
- 4) Praise consummates our enjoyment of God.
- 5) Head and heart are both necessary to rightly worship God.
- 6) God is uppermost in his own affections.
- 7) And, of course, God is most glorified in me when I am most satisfied in him.

So I signed up. I went all in—God-centered, Christ-exalting, Bible-saturated, missions-mobilizing, prayer-driven, and a dozen more hyphenated words besides. I wanted to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things. The Bible broke open in ways that were unprecedented in my experience. I had never read the Scriptures so carefully or with that much enjoyment before. Connections were made between texts. The train of thought in key passages fell into place. I remember spending hours in the study room at the end of my hall with my Bible and a journal (and maybe an article or two). I devoured the Scriptures and was hungry for more. It felt like spiritual growth on steroids.

A Sovereign God and an Insufferable Student

This isn't to say that there weren't struggles. I distinctly remember feeling back-doored by the sovereignty of God in salvation. When it came to discussions of predestination, I had always been somewhere between hostile and aloof. The word *predestine* was in the Bible, so I was stuck with it, but that didn't mean I was all that happy about it or that I really understood what it meant.

But once I embraced the reality of a big God revealed in the authoritative Scriptures, it was only a matter of time before I had to really grapple with some of those hard texts. When I saw it coming, I geared up for a true battle royale in my head and heart. I expected a fight. But when I actually got into the Scriptures, the tension didn't feel nearly as intense. It was like I woke up one day and said, "T? Yep. U? Yep. L? A little tricky, but yep. I? Yep. P? Yep. Huh. Well, there you have it. I guess I'm a Calvinist."

Don't misunderstand me. I know there are tensions. I know there are challenging passages, more than I even realized at the time. But in those days, I was primed and ready to go wherever the Scriptures were going. I was in no mood to dispute with God about his power, authority, grace, and goodness. Who was I to talk back?

Like most freshly Reformed eighteen-year-olds, I was not always pleasant to be around. In fact, most of the time my zeal substantially outstripped my knowledge and maturity. Arguments fell like manna in the wilderness (or locusts in Egypt, depending on your point of view). The word *insufferable* comes to mind (and I'm not sure I was all that likable to begin with).

In my defense, it was enthusiasm for the things of God that drove most of it. I know there was pride and immaturity and downright stupidity mixed up in all of it. But I was genuinely and sincerely thrilled with God as he was revealed in the Scriptures. I wanted others to see what I saw, and I wanted it so badly that I was willing to push them just a little bit more.

You'd think that embracing our total helplessness in sin and the absolute sovereign goodness of God in salvation would make one humble. But no; in my case, the high-on-my-horse days initially outnumbered the humbled-to-the-dust days.

Years later, after the insufferability and wretched zeal was largely exorcised by the grace of God in the school of hard knocks, my friends and I dubbed the affliction "New Calvinist Syndrome." Symptoms include:

- 1) A strange fire in the eyes accompanied by a propensity to float three feet off the ground;
- 2) A distorted sense of proportion ("Just watch me make mountains out of those molehills");
- 3) A fanatical commitment to swallow any *reductio*, so long as it makes God big and man small;
- 4) Acquisition of just enough Greek to have no clue what one is talking about.

The only known treatment for NCS is to lock the afflicted Calvinist in a room with nothing but the Bible and a picture of John Wesley. When he

stops throwing the Bible at Wesley's face, he's free to rejoin Christendom, but only under the close supervision of godly elders with the patience of Job and a sense of humor.

In any event, God's grace abounded to me, and my delight in him and my love and care for others grew with time and maturity. Suffering, doubts, and a season of depression tempered my zeal and turned it into something approaching "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Cor. 6:10).

Theology with Legs

After graduation, I moved to Minneapolis with my new wife to participate in the vocational eldership program at The Bethlehem Institute, the leadership development arm of Bethlehem Baptist Church, where John Piper was the pastor. I came to TBI to see what a Christian Hedonist church looked like. I wanted to encounter all of those hyphenated words in action. I'd read the books; now I wanted to see the theology with legs on it.

The classes focused heavily on biblical Greek and exegesis of the Scriptures. We diagrammed sentences and "arced" whole chapters of Romans.⁴ I loved my classes, the professors, and my fellow apprentices. The discussions were always lively, and the fellowship and camaraderie were sweet. But all was not sunshine and roses.

Though I didn't want to admit it, my spiritual vitality was languishing. Nothing dramatic. Just a low-grade dullness. Academically, I was flourishing, but actual engagement with God in prayer and worship was stunted. Mild spiritual apathy comes close to describing it. And then God surprised me with an eighteenth-century pastor and theologian.

When I first discovered that we would be devoting two full courses to the theology of Jonathan Edwards, I admit that I was a bit disappointed. I was eager for more biblical theology and Greek book studies. Edwards seemed distant and unimportant next to the Scriptures. What's more, I already knew what he was going to say. I'd read most of *The End for which God Created the World* in college and found it somewhat helpful. It sounded like an eighteenth-century version of Piper, and I'd been over that ground before. God is passionate about his glory. We should pursue

our joy in him. Christian Hedonism 101. Reading *End of Creation* and *Religious Affections* didn't sound like my idea of fun.

But as my professor began to slowly and carefully walk us through Edwards's treatises, I realized that I had been absolutely naïve to think that I'd understood half of what Edwards had to offer. Through Edwards's writings, the reality of the living God came crashing in on me again in fresh new ways. The Trinity became central to everything I thought and felt. I don't mean the doctrine of the Trinity. I mean *God-as-Trinity*, the actual three-in-one. He became powerfully and beautifully real in ways that I hadn't dreamed of. My understanding of what it means for God to glorify himself was torn apart and rebuilt. I came to see that there are layers and depths to reality beyond what I'd imagined. Things were interwoven in surprising and thrilling ways, and my heart went soaring again to new heights.

Providentially, after I completed the apprenticeship, I was offered a job as an instructor in a new experimental undergraduate program at Bethlehem. What's more, I was asked to assist in teaching the Edwards courses at the newly expanded Bethlehem College and Seminary. This allowed me to work through Edwards's theology again and again, strengthening those roots and discovering new and fresh applications of a passion for God's supremacy.

Along the way, two other authors began to exert a formative influence on my theology and practice of the Christian life. C. S. Lewis, who appears in almost every chapter of this book, became a reliable friend and guide, pressing home the goodness of materiality and finitude and ordinary life. Pastor Douglas Wilson regularly provoked and challenged me by underscoring the centrality of gratitude in the Christian life. What's more, I credit Doug with sparking the idea for this book through a series of blog posts a few years ago.⁵ Doug's musings prompted me to identify and wrestle with unstated questions I'd had for years as a Christian.

Questions such as, Given the very real danger of idolatry, how can we truly enjoy God's gifts in such a way that he is really honored as giver? Or, How can we integrate "spiritual" activities (like prayer, Scripture reading, and corporate worship) with our normal and mundane activities (like eating or working or playing with the family)? Or, How should we

think about our love for God and our love for everything else, given our finitude and limitations?

In short, the questions and issues raised have to do with what it means to live the faithful Christian (Hedonist) life, and in my experience, we have work to do.⁷ This, of course, is not surprising. As Wilson is fond of saying, “If you enroll in a math class, you’re going to have math problems.” If we enroll in a Christian Hedonist class, we’re going to have Christian Hedonist problems. The trick is to press forward and seek God’s help in solving them. That’s what this book aims to do.

The Layout

The first five chapters are foundational. In them, we will explore God, God’s relation to creation, creation itself, what it means to be a creature, and what it means to be a sinner saved by the gospel. Chapter 1 explores the doctrine of the Trinity through two theological models, drawing heavily upon the Gospel of John and Jonathan Edwards. We should labor to understand the glory of God in Trinitarian terms, as God’s Trinitarian fullness. Out of love for his glory, the triune God creates the world in order to communicate and extend his fullness outside of himself, or, to use another image, in order to invite creatures to participate in his own triune life.

Chapter 2 is an extended reflection on one analogy summarized in these three statements: God is an author. This is his story. We are his characters. This analogy allows us to conceive of God’s relationship to the world in a way that honors his exhaustive sovereignty as well as our responsibility for our actions. Reality is layered with intentionality, both divine and human. This analogy also provides a fruitful solution to the problem of evil and establishes another crucial Christian truth: in order to be faithful Christians, we must be willing to have our minds and hearts stretched by complementary biblical truths.

Bringing together the first two chapters, chapter 3 argues that creation should be understood as the constant and pervasive revelation of God. God communicates himself to us through creation. This is the glory of created reality, namely, that it is a fitting vehicle for communicating the divine life. As such, we can find “images of divine things” wherever

we look. God's revelation in creation highlights the importance of analogy and metaphor through which we compare one thing to another so that both are mutually illuminated. Finally, C. S. Lewis will help us to "look along" creation, to experience tiny theophanies in even the simplest pleasures.

Chapter 4 moves from creation as a whole to an exploration of what it means to be a creature—bodily, finite, temporal, and, according to Genesis, very good. Creaturely limitations are not defects to be overcome. In fact, God in his wisdom has chosen to meet many of our needs and desires through created things. God's gifts are given to us for our enjoyment and so we can fulfill God's mission as his priests, kings, and prophets. Additionally, this chapter wrestles with various questions of *value*: do creatures have intrinsic value? Should we value all things equally? Should we value God infinitely? In response to these questions, I commend the biblical witness that our love for God ought to be supreme, full, and expanding.

Chapter 5 addresses two fundamental challenges to the vision of gift enjoyment set forth thus far—passages in the Bible that teach that we should desire *only* God; and the deep and abiding reality of human sin, rebellion, and abuse of God's gifts. To the first, the chapter explores two complementary ways that we approach the giver-gift relationship in Scripture. To the second, the chapter explores the nature of idolatry and ingratitude, the false and deadly solution of asceticism (in all its forms), and the alternative solution to idolatry set forth in the gospel.

Chapter 6 transitions to a more practical vision of what it means to live a God-centered life by stressing the need for rhythms of direct godwardness (such as prayer and worship) and indirect godwardness (all the other things we do). We are embodied and en-storied creatures, designed by God to make use of anchor points in our pursuit of God. Direct and indirect godwardness are mutually fruitful and beneficial, as our direct godwardness orients our daily lives, and our daily lives provide concrete categories with which to engage God directly.

Chapter 7 addresses the issues of culture making and culture enjoyment. Culture is the product of God's creation and man's creativity, and it is God's appointed means of maturing and glorifying his very good

creation. Faithful naming provides a fruitful angle on culture making, and God's invitation to Adam to name the animals grounds our culture making and our culture enjoyment. Like creation, culture has the capacity to enlarge and expand our hearts and minds so that we can know God better. The presence of evil in culture and creation complicates the picture, so we must use wisdom and discernment in what and how we create and enjoy culture.

Chapter 8 continues the practical application of the earlier part of the book by providing concrete, personal examples from my own life that illustrate various dimensions of how we can genuinely enjoy all that God provides without committing idolatry. I certainly don't claim to have it all figured out, but I hope that my experience of solid joys in God and what he has given me can spur others on to love and good deeds.

Chapter 9 seeks to show how a robust emphasis on receiving all of God's gifts does not undermine the call to leave earthly comforts for the sake of the gospel among unreached peoples. Instead, it creates the kind of God-centered, creation-affirming, risk-taking missionaries that will lay a foundation for the completion of Jesus's command to disciple the nations. This chapter also explores the biblical call to self-denial against the backdrop of the goodness of those things that we leave and lose for the sake of Christ. This leads into a discussion of a right attitude toward wealth and, in particular, how gratefully receiving what God supplies ought to make us big-hearted and open-handed with it.

Chapter 10 continues the focus on wealth by exploring the nature and challenges of living a radical, "wartime" lifestyle. In particular, I try to highlight (from my own experience) the ways that wartime thinking in relation to wealth can go terribly wrong, harming relationships, squandering resources, and failing to be truly strategic in our use of time and treasure. I commend an expansive view of wartime, in which the "front" in the war is enlarged so that it begins at home and then emanates to the church, the local community (especially the poor), and the nations of the world.

Chapter 11 seeks to integrate suffering, pain, and the loss of good gifts into the picture. Suffering is a necessary check on our enjoyment of God's gifts, and the kind of integrated joy commended throughout

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the book is still possible, even in the absence of the good gifts. Most importantly, I seek to show how true, God-centered, integrated enjoyment of God's gifts faces the horrific loss of gifts and the ultimate loss of all gifts—death.

The book concludes in chapter 12 with an exhortation to revel in creaturely existence; to receive everything from God, good or bad, with gratitude; to reject false standards and expectations; and to marvel that we are being invited to participate in the triune life by receiving God's goodness in creation and beyond.

I won't lie to you. There will be some heavy theology in this book. And I can be a bit wordy at times (I'm a college professor, after all). But if you'll stick with me, I think that God might be pleased to do something wonderful in your life. The things of earth are all around you. What are you going to do with them?

The Glory of the Triune God

In the confession of the Trinity, we hear the heartbeat of the Christian religion.

Herman Bavinck

I should think that these things might incline us to suppose, that God has not forgot himself, in the ends which he proposed in the creation of the world.

Jonathan Edwards

Before getting to the practical and pastoral challenges, we need to get some things on the table. Some of it will be high theology, the kind that can make the head hurt and the eyes glaze over. Bear with me, and I'll try to keep it lively. The Scriptures provide us with tremendous resources to help us live the Christian life (everything we need for life and godliness, in fact), but drawing out those resources takes work. It's labor, but it's worth it.

My view is that we should begin with the Trinity. I'm tempted to say "always begin," but we'll leave that aside for now. I regularly tell my students that it's crucial that we be Trinitarian Christians, all the way down. The Trinity is the heart of the Christian religion, the great mystery that makes all other mysteries understandable. In fact, much of the content of this book might be viewed as an application of the Trinity to various aspects of practical theology and Christian living.

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Let's begin with a definition of the Trinity. Wayne Grudem in his *Systematic Theology* distills the Trinity into the following three statements:

- 1) God is three persons.
- 2) Each person is fully God.
- 3) There is one God.¹

In short, in the one God there are three separate, coequal persons.

Of course, the relative simplicity of this statement is actually a testament to the grand mystery of the Godhead. In what sense is God one and in what sense is God three? How does the three-ness and plurality of God relate to his absolute oneness and unity?

A Word about Models and Analogies of God

Theologians throughout church history have made use of models and analogies to better understand what it means that God is three and one. If creation is a reflection of the divine nature, and the divine nature is fundamentally triune, then we ought to be able to recognize aspects of the Trinity in what God has made. Of course, in making use of such analogies, we must never mistake our models for the reality. C. S. Lewis liked to say that our models are like maps—they can help us to understand the land, but they should never replace an actual visit to the countryside.² Put another way, the use of models and analogies ought never to become a way of “analyzing” God, as though we might actually be able to diagram him on the whiteboard.

Models of the Trinity can be roughly categorized into two types: oneness analogies and threeness analogies.³ Oneness analogies emphasize the unity of the Godhead, as though one God “unfolded” into three persons. For example, I am one human being, but as one human being, I am a father, a husband, and a professor. This analogy is a kind of three-in-one, but it is fundamentally misleading because Joe the father isn't a distinct person from Joe the husband. Thus, the analogy tends toward modalism, an ancient heresy in which the three persons of the Trinity are treated as distinct modes of existence rather than full and coequal persons.

On the other hand, threeness analogies emphasize the distinctions between the persons, as though three persons came together into one God.

Thus, one family made up of three persons—a father, a mother, and a child—can provide an analogy of the Trinity, but again it is misleading because the family itself isn't personal, and each member of the family is only a part of the whole. Thus, whereas oneness analogies tend toward modalism, threeness analogies tend toward tri-theism, three distinct gods.

Despite the dangers of each type of analogy, together they can help us understand how God can be one and three. Using multiple analogies keeps us from emphasizing God's oneness over his threeness or his threeness over his oneness. Theologians throughout church history have recognized these dangers and therefore have employed various analogies to illuminate the Trinity while acknowledging that no analogy is sufficient to explain the triunity of God.⁴

The Psychological Model

Bearing in mind the limitations of Trinitarian analogies, we can now explore one or two of them as a way of better understanding the God who is three in one. First up is the psychological model. Dating back to Augustine and finding considerable expression in the theology of Jonathan Edwards, it holds that in the Godhead, there is God in his direct existence (Father), God's self-reflection or contemplation of himself (Son), and God's love and delight for himself (Holy Spirit). Or again, there is God, God's idea of God, and God's love for his idea of himself.

Now, when confronted with the psychological model, many people have the same reaction: Where is *that* in the Bible? And I realize that on first glance, it sounds a bit odd. I certainly thought so the first time I heard it. (Incidentally, if you want to go further into this than I will, find Edwards's "Essay on the Trinity." Or read the first chapter in Piper's *The Pleasures of God*.⁵) Suffice it to say, I think that the Bible does provide hints and pointers that our own existence as creatures with minds and hearts, understanding and will, knowledge and love, is a reflection of who God is in his own divine life.

First, the Bible regularly describes the Son of God as God's "image" or "representation" (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4–6). The Son is the radiance of the Father's glory and the exact imprint of his nature (Heb. 1:3). The eternal Son of God is often connected to God's wisdom (1 Cor. 1:30; Prov. 8:30)

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and to his Word or self-expression (John 1:1). Jesus says that if you've seen him, you've seen the Father (John 14:7–11), as if he were simply an image, a replication of his Father's nature. What's more, the Son is the one who manifests and makes known the Father (John 17:24–26).

Drawing these biblical threads together, we can say that from all eternity God has had with him an image, a representation, a reflection of his own infinite perfection and beauty, and through this image has fully and completely known, understood, and expressed himself.

What, then, of the Holy Spirit? The Bible often connects the Holy Spirit to God's love and joy. It is striking that while the Father and the Son are repeatedly described as loving each other (John 3:35; 5:20; 14:31) and human beings (John 14:23; 16:27), the Spirit is never said to love the Son or the Father or us! Jonathan Edwards explains this strange omission by arguing that the Spirit *is* the very love of God, the love that flows between the Father and the Son and overflows to his creatures. He finds support for such a notion in the fact that God's love is poured into our hearts *by the Spirit* (Rom. 5:5) and that God's abiding, love's abiding, and the Spirit's abiding in us all seem to be different ways of describing the same reality (1 John 3:24; 4:12–13). What's more, when the biblical writers begin their epistles, they often say something like, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2). The absence of the Spirit in these passages is again striking, given the fact that the Holy Spirit is fully divine. Edwards argues that this absence is explained by the fact that the Spirit *is* the grace and peace of God that flows to us from the Father and the Son. Finally, Edwards notes that at Jesus's baptism, the *Spirit* descends upon him like a dove as the Father expresses pleasure in his beloved Son (Matt. 3:16–17). What at first glance appears speculative actually turns out to have a fair bit of biblical foundation.⁶

Thus the trajectory of these passages is that from all eternity God has beheld his beloved Son with perfect clarity, and there has arisen between Father and Son a love so pure and deep, so matchless and limitless, so boundless and infinite that the love stands forth as a full third person in the Godhead, the Holy Spirit.⁷

In light of these two streams of biblical thought, Edwards concludes

that one way for us to understand the Trinity is to see God existing in his direct existence as the Father, in his knowledge of himself in the Son, and in the mutual love flowing between the Father and the Son in the person of the Holy Spirit.⁸

Or to say it another way, the Father knows, loves, and delights in the Son by the Spirit.

The Family Model

The family model of the Trinity is in many ways more straightforward. In this model, the three persons of the Trinity are seen as members of a family or a society, bound together in a bond of love and overflowing with joy and delight in one another. The Bible explicitly endorses this model in that the first two persons of the Godhead are referred to as Father and Son, that is, as members of a family. The family model helps us to recognize the full equality of each person of the Godhead, because each member has a crucial and important role to play in the work of redemption. The Father *chooses* a people for himself and *sends* the Son. The Son *obeys* his Father and *accomplishes* the work that he is given to do, laying down his life in order to purchase God's people. The Spirit *is sent* by the Father and the Son (John 14:16; 16:7), is the *down payment* of our inheritance (Eph. 1:14), and indeed is *the sum of all the good things* that God has purchased for us (Matt. 7:11; Luke 11:13).

At this point, it is worth pausing to reflect on a key aspect of the Trinity that I'll come back to again and again. In the Gospel of John, when Philip asks to see the Father, Jesus responds:

Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. (John 14:9–11)

The Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father. Because of this, when we see the Son, we have also seen the Father. The Father dwells

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in the Son and does his works, works that testify to the reality that the Father and the Son are in each other. The theological term for this is *perichoresis*. It refers to the *mutual indwelling* of the members of the Godhead. This reality is what enables us to *distinguish* the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit from one another, without *separating* them from one another. The Father is not the Son, but he is *in* the Son. The Son is not the Spirit, but he is *in* the Spirit. The Spirit is not the Father, but he is *in* the Father. And this mutual indwelling is thorough and complete. All that the Father is, he is in the Son and the Spirit. All that the Son is, he is in the Father and the Spirit. All that the Spirit is, he is in the Father and the Son. There are no leftovers, no remainder, no excess divinity.

Perichoresis means that in the Trinity, the three persons exist as one God without crowding out the others. They overlap and indwell one another completely and totally without in any way compromising the personal distinctions among them. We'll return to perichoresis later in the book.

For His Glory

Pressing into the Trinity in this way will have huge implications for how we think about other fundamental truths of the Christian faith, such as God's goal in all that he does. Thanks to the recovery in recent years of a God-centered vision and theology, many Christians gladly affirm that God does all that he does *for his glory*. They embrace the biblical truth that God aims to glorify himself in the creation of the world and the redemption of his people. They love the truth that God is passionately committed to his glory, that God is uppermost in God's affections. However, many who embrace the truth would be hard-pressed to explain what exactly they mean by "the glory of God." Indeed, the phrase runs the great danger of becoming simply another buzzword, a slogan used to say something without meaning anything. One of the central aims of this book is to deepen and fill out our understanding of the glory of God by pressing into the Trinity, the Bible, and creation.

Put simply, because God is always triune, we must always conceive of his glory in Trinitarian terms. God's glory is his Trinitarian fullness, or the abundance of perfections and knowledge and love and joy and

life that he has within the Godhead. Or, to put it another way, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit knowing, loving, and rejoicing in each other from all eternity simply *is* the glory of God. It's why Jesus prays in John 17:5, "Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had *with you* before the world existed." This is the glory that the Father gave the Son because the Father loved him before the foundation of the world (John 17:24). So when you hear "the glory of God," think "Trinitarian fullness."

If God's glory is his Trinitarian fullness, then what does it mean to glorify God? Many define God's glorification of himself as the *display* or *manifestation* of his perfections. And while the display of God's attributes and perfections is certainly included in glorification, a Trinitarian vision of God pushes us to say more. Glorification includes not merely the display of God's attributes but also the knowledge of those attributes and love for and delight in those attributes. Remember the psychological model: God himself does not merely exist in his perfections as Father but also knows himself fully in the person of the Son and loves and delights in himself in the person of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, glorification must include more than mere display; it must also include the knowledge and love and joy that result from that display. In short, a triune God requires a triune understanding of glory and glorification.

Drawing together an understanding of the Trinity, the doctrine of perichoresis, and a fuller understanding of glory and glorification, we are now in a position to answer one of the pressing questions from the introduction: What does it mean to glorify God? Let's put it in terms of God's actions in seeking his glory.

God glorifies himself by inviting us to participate in his Trinitarian fullness. Put another way, God glorifies himself by extending his glory so that his divine life comes to exist in creaturely form.

Those two statements represent different pictures of what happens as the triune God glorifies himself. In the latter, God's glory is depicted as flowing out from himself, emanating and overflowing to creatures who exist solely by his will. The other picture moves in the opposite direction. Instead of glory flowing out to us, we are invited into God. We are

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drawn in so that we come to share in divine knowledge, love, and joy, or as Peter says, we become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). So the language of *display* is perfectly legitimate, provided that the display is always understood as an invitation to participate, to partake, to mingle. As Lewis writes in *The Weight of Glory*,

If we take the imagery of Scripture seriously, if we believe that God will one day *give* us the Morning Star and cause us to *put on* the splendour of the sun, then we may surmise that both the ancient myths and the modern poetry, so false as history, may be very near the truth as prophecy. At present, we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get *in*.⁹

The Upper Room Discourse in the Gospel of John (13–17) provides the fullest picture of the invitation to indwell, the promise of perichoretic participation in the Bible. Following the exit of Judas, Jesus launches into an extended reflection on his coming death, the tribulation to be faced by his disciples, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the life that his followers should live in the midst of a fallen and broken world. In the process he provides glimpses into the divine life and into God’s purposes for us (and I’d encourage you to have your Bible open to John 13–17 as we proceed).

In reading the passage, we can easily feel disoriented, like Jesus is taking us somewhere but doesn’t want to be followed. Jesus moves along in one direction, only to double back and repeat himself, often with a slight modification. The simplicity of the individual words masks the complexity of the tangents, paradoxes, and wanderings. However, even amidst the apparent meanderings and confusion, we can sense a deeper structure at work, an order and purpose that is holding all of the commands, promises, and cryptic statements together. Perhaps it’s akin to being in the midst of a tornado, a flurry of chaos and confusion governed by consistent laws of physics.

Fundamental to this entire passage is the reality that Jesus is about to leave his disciples. After his death, resurrection, and ascension, he will no longer be physically present with them. He says, “Where I am going you cannot come” (13:33). He is leaving them (14:18), going away to the Father, who sent him (14:25; 16:5, 28).

However, in leaving the world, he is not abandoning them (and us) as orphans (14:18). Because he is going to the Father, he will send the Holy Spirit (16:7), another Helper who will bear witness about the Son and give us peace (15:26; 14:26–27). The Father will send the Spirit to us (14:16), in the name of the Son (14:26), to be with us and in us forever (14:16–17). The presence of the Spirit with us means that we will see the Son (14:19).

What’s more, the Son himself will come to us (14:18); in fact, both the Father and the Son will come to us and make their home with us (14:23). The Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father (14:9–11), and the Son is in us and we are in the Son (14:20). This mutual indwelling is also a mutual abiding (15:4). The Son has loved us in the same way the Father loves the Son, and therefore we should abide in the love of the Son. The Son also promises that his joy will be in us, and our joy will be full (15:11; 17:13).

Celebrations of triune glory are scattered throughout the discourse. The Son of Man is glorified, and the Father is glorified in the Son, and the Father will glorify himself in the Son (13:31–32). The Son will answer our prayers so that the Father will be glorified (14:13) and our joy will be full (16:24). The Spirit will glorify the Son when he comes, by revealing all that the Father has given to the Son (16:14).

These various threads come together in Jesus’s final prayer. He prays that the Father will glorify him so that he can in turn glorify the Father through giving eternal life, which is knowledge of the Father and the Son, to all who have been given to the Son by the Father (17:1–3). The Son has glorified the Father on earth and now desires to be glorified with the Father with their original, precreation glory (17:4–5). We belong to both the Father and the Son, and the Son is glorified in us (17:10). Jesus’s fundamental prayer for his immediate disciples (14:9) and the rest of us who believe because of their word (14:20) is that we would be one as the Father and Son are one (17:13).

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However, this oneness transcends mere unity and agreement and is in actuality something more like union, as Jesus explains our oneness with God in terms of mutual indwelling: . . . “just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us” (17:21). Such oneness is possible because of the glory given to us by the Son, the same glory that was given to the Son by the Father (17:22).

The end of all of this is that we would be perfectly one in the Father and in the Son and that the world would know that the Father sent the Son and that the Father loves us in the same way that he loves the Son (17:21, 23). The Son’s great desire is that we would be with him, to see the glory that he has from the Father because of the Father’s eternal love for the Son (17:24). The Son will continue to manifest the name of the Father to us so that the love of the Father for the Son will be in us, and the Son will be in us (17:26).¹⁰

Sharing the Triune Glory

Again, this passage swirls, billows, and churns like a tempest on the high seas, and that’s part of the point. The triune glory of the Father, Son, and Spirit is being extended to us so that we participate in their knowledge, love, and joy. We are being invited into the fellowship of the Godhead so that we have the same union with God that the Father and Son have with each other. Of course, as finite creatures, we will never and can never achieve the exact same relationship as the Father and Son. We never cease to be creatures; we never become God. However, the great promise, if Jesus’s prayer is fulfilled, is that we will *approach* such a union of knowledge, love, and joy for all eternity, with ever-increasing speed. We finite beings are chasing the infinite, and therefore we’ll never catch it (him!). But the increase of our knowledge of God and love for God and joy in God will continue, world without end, amen.

These sorts of theological explorations can tend to feel somewhat academic and abstract. However, the picture that emerges is anything but detached. Indeed, the biblical portrait of the triune God is potent and vibrant, if we just have eyes to see. So allow me to run through the same material again, this time wearing camel hair and with the smell of locusts and honey on my breath.

The triune God of Scripture lives! He is not static. He is not lifeless. He is not bored. He is not boring. He is the living God!

He is the Father of lights, fount of divinity, origin of origins, begetting yet unbegotten, deity prime, the almighty maker of heaven and earth.

He is the beloved Son, Word of the Father, God's sermon and song, his image and wisdom, very God of very God, begotten before all worlds.

He is the Holy Spirit, breath of the living God, the river of his delights, the oil on his beard, the glad bond of loving union, proceeding from Father and Son.

This is God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, knowing each other, loving each other, delighting in each other, from all eternity, with no needs, no wants, no lack. Complete and total and infinite happiness. This is who God *is*.

This is no abstract deity, no impersonal divinity. God *is* love—dynamic, alive, abundant, and overflowing. Relationship is at the heart of reality. The original Word of this God is God over again. His love for himself is so potent that he's a person.

Absentee landlord? Hardly. Generic watchmaker? Not a chance. He is a jealous husband, a consuming fire, a cloud of glory that outshines the sun. He is a thundering tornado of knowledge and love and joy and life.

And the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit so love the fullness of their shared life that they think it fitting and right that such glorious knowledge and love and joy overflow. So they make a world to contain it. They create vessels to hold the fullness of their divine joy.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are like an indie rock band that loves their music so much that they decide to take the show on the road. Only this band creates an audience *from nothing*.

The triune God is like a husband and wife who love one another deeply and love their relationship and shared life so much that they decide to bring children into it. Only this triune couple creates children *from nothing*.

God created the world to get a bride for his Son.

And what this means is that when we think about the glory of God, we ought not think merely about the display of God's attributes, as

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though God were simply a big fireworks show, off in the distance. The glory and fullness of God includes the display of all of his perfections, but it also includes our *knowledge* of his perfections and our *love* for his perfections, and all the thoughts and affections and actions that flow out of that knowledge and love. In fact, our knowledge of God is simply God's knowledge of himself *in us*. God's love for God is simply God's love for God *in us*. Our delight in God is simply God's delight in God *in us*.¹¹ In a word, when God glorifies himself, he invites us to participate in his triune life. As Lewis said, "The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of the Tri-personal life is to be played out in each one of us: . . . each one of us has got to enter that pattern, take his place in that dance."¹² He invites us in, the Son welcoming us as his bride, the Father embracing us as his daughter-in-law, the Spirit as the bond that unites us all together in one big, happy, glorious family.

This is the origin and the finish line, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega. This is God, the supreme harmony of all.

THE WORLD IS FULL OF GOOD THINGS.

Ice-cold lemonade. The laughter of children. College football. Scrambled eggs and crispy bacon. But what happens to these earthly pleasures when Jesus shows up? Do the things of earth grow strangely dim? Or does he shine in all that's fair?

In this book, Joe Rigney offers a breath of fresh air to Christians who are burdened by false standards, impossible expectations, and misguided notions of holiness. Steering a middle course between idolatry on the one hand and ingratitude on the other, this much-needed book reminds us that every good gift comes from the Father's hand, that God's blessings should drive us to worship and generosity, and that a passion for God's glory is as wide as the world.

"This book has been very helpful to me. I mean that personally. I think I will be a better father and husband and friend and leader because of it."

JOHN PIPER, *Founder, desiringGod.org; Chancellor, Bethlehem College and Seminary*

"This book makes me want to watch the Olympics while eating a pumpkin crunch cake, rejoicing in the God who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. But there's a part of me that is a little bit wary. What if my heart gets lost in these things? If you're familiar with that hesitation, this book is for you."

GLORIA FURMAN, *Pastor's wife, Redeemer Church of Dubai; mother of four; author, Glimpses of Grace and Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full*

"Buy this book. Make it one of your earthly possessions. Read it to find out what that is supposed to mean."

DOUGLAS WILSON, *Senior Fellow of Theology, New St. Andrews College; Pastor, Christ Church, Moscow, Idaho*

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