



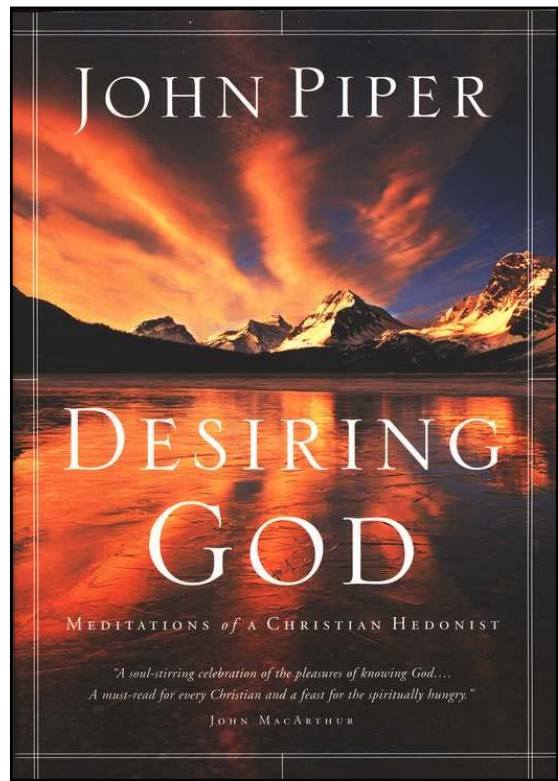
DEAN WELCH – TEACHER

← WHAT A
crazy love →

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

APRIL 25, 2010

LESSON #4 FROM THE *MASTERWORK* SERIES STUDY OF:



← WHAT A CRAZY LOVE →

Loving people isn't easy! The vow-breakers, truth-benders. The money-grubbers and back-stabbers we meet, work with, and marry. How do you love someone who is hard to love? Our typical strategy is to try harder. Conventional wisdom says that a lack of love implies a lack of effort, so we dig deeper, strain more. We're going to love if it kills us? And it may just do that.

This whole series of lessons from John Piper's book, *Desiring God*, emphasizes being a *Christian Hedonist*—that is, seeking to delight ourselves totally in God and Him alone. This series of lessons is really based on our memory verse from Week One from **PSALM 37:4 (NIV)**, which you should know by now: *"Delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart."* And that spills over into what we studied in Week Four on **LOVE** and how we can delight even when things don't quite *smell* right!

Along those lines, Dr. Charles Swindoll tells the story of Edith, a mother of eight, who came home from a neighbor's house one afternoon and noticed that things seemed a little too quiet. Curious, she peered through the screen door and saw five of her children huddled together. As she crept closer, trying to discover the center of their attention, she could not believe her eyes. Smack dab in the middle of the circle were five baby skunks. Edith screamed at the top of her voice, *"Quick, children ... run!"* Each kid grabbed a skunk and ran. Talk about joy and delight!

Let's begin as we did last week. **Can someone share a moment when you found JOY in God this week—true delight?** Now, let's reverse it: **What is the one thing that KEPT YOU FROM joy in God this week?**

In our study this week, we focused on love! We know that's what God wants us to do, don't we? We have songs about it—*"What the World Needs Now is Love,"* or *"All We Need is Love,"* or even *"Love*

Makes the World Go 'Round.' Listen to these words from **1 JOHN 3:23 (NCV)**: *"This is what God commands: that we believe in his Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love **EACH OTHER**, just as he commanded."*

Yet, why is this so hard for us today? How can we love as God loves? We want to. We long to. But how can we? Some people just are not loveable! But, as we learned in our earlier studies, first we must receive God's love, and only then can we love others and delight in it. Receive first, love second! It's what Max Lucado calls the **7:47 Principle**, taken from Luke 7:47 which says: *"A person who is forgiven little shows only little love."* In other words, we can't give what we've never received. If we've never received love, how can we love others—much less find joy in the pursuit of it? Only with God's help—no matter how hard we try. We must remember that God loves us no matter what and send His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us on the cross. Jesus Himself said, *"Greater love has no one that this, that someone lays down his life for his friends"* (**JOHN 15:13**).

This week we looked at something that John Piper calls *"horizontal" Christian Hedonism* as opposed to *"vertical" Christian Hedonism* that we studied last week in looking at worship. True or false? **The pursuit of pleasure is an essential motive for every good deed!** Ooh! Sounds wrong—especially in light of scriptures we know that seem to say just the opposite. Like **1 CORINTHIANS 13:5**—from the great *"love"* chapter: *"...love is not self-seeking."* Yet, what about the words of the prophet in **MICAH 6:8 (NASB)** where God commands us not simply to be kind, but to **"love kindness,"** saying: *"He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to **LOVE KINDNESS**, and to walk humbly with your God?"*

Does obedience to the command to "love kindness" mean you must then disobey the teaching of 1 Corinthians 13:5 that love should not "seek its own" when you show mercy or kindness? No. That is not what Paul is thinking. We know it isn't because in **1**

CORINTHIANS 13:3 (NASB) he actually motivates love by our longing for gain: *"If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."* If genuine love dare not set its sights on its own gain, isn't it strange that Paul should warn us that not having love will rob us of "gain"?

Some of you probably struggled earlier this week with the premise that the pursuit of pleasure is an essential motive for every good deed. My hope, however, is that the Holy Spirit opened your eyes to help you grasp the truths about love from God's Word as you continued working through your Bible study this week. The bottom-line is, I think, is this: *"Love is the OVERFLOW of joy in God that meets the needs of OTHERS."*

Why do you do the things you do for others? Duty or love? Remember my example last week about giving roses to my wife on our anniversary simply because it was my duty—my obligation—and for no other reason. If I tell her that, it ruins the act does it not? If you don't *delight* in loving others, what good is it? Isn't that exactly what Paul is saying in **1 Corinthians 13:3** that we just read? Think about what Paul says in **verse 3**. Is it really possible to give your body to be burned and yet not have love? Whew! **Evidently, an act does not qualify as love unless it involves the right motives!** But this is in fact what Paul says: "If you don't have real love, you won't have real gain."

There is another way of describing the psychological process that leads from delight in God to labors of love. When a person delights in the display of the glorious grace of God, that person will want to see as many displays of it as possible in other people. If I can be God's means of another person's miraculous conversion, I will count it all joy, because what would I rather see than another display of the beauty of God's grace in the joy of another person? My joy is doubled in his.

We all know the story of Mother Teresa, a Catholic nun, who appeared to most to have given up everything so she could

minister and care for the children in India. While teaching school in Calcutta, Mother Teresa saw the suffering and poverty outside the convent walls and it made such a deep impression on her that she received permission from her superiors to leave the convent school and devote herself to working among the poorest of the poor in the slums of Calcutta. Although she had no funds, she depended on Divine Providence, and started an open-air school for slum children. Soon she was joined by voluntary helpers, and financial support was also forthcoming. This made it possible for her to extend the scope of her work.

She later received permission to start her own order, "The Missionaries of Charity", whose primary task was to love and care for those persons nobody was prepared to look after. Today her Society of Missionaries has spread all over the world, including the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. They provide effective help to the poorest of the poor in a number of countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and they undertake relief work in the wake of natural catastrophes such as floods, epidemics, and famine, and for refugees. The order also has houses in North America, Europe and Australia, where they take care of the shut-ins, alcoholics, homeless, and AIDS sufferers.

The central dimension of Mother Teresa's acts of service was spiritual. For her, serving people was loving God and caring for spiritual needs was more important than caring for physical needs. Her focus was Jesus.

John Piper tells us that when the Christian Hedonist sees a person without hope or joy, that person's need becomes like a low-pressure zone approaching the high-pressure zone of joy in God's grace. In this spiritual atmosphere, a draft is created from the Christian Hedonist's high-pressure zone of joy to the low-pressure zone of need, as joy tends to expand to fill the need. That draft is called love.

Just like we saw in the life and ministry of Mother Theresa, love is the overflow of joy in God. But, think about this. **Can you have the emotion of love without action? What good is that?** Turn to **JAMES 2: 14-16 (NIV)** and follow along: ¹⁴*What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?* ¹⁵*Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.* ¹⁶*If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?*

On Day Three this past week, you read that Paul thinks of genuine love only in relation to God. Turn to **2 CORINTHIANS 8: 1-4, 8 (ESV)** and listen to what impressed Paul about the Corinthians: ¹*We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia,* ²*for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.* ³*For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord,* ⁴*begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—* ⁸*I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.*

Did you see what he said? Paul celebrated what happened to the Christians in Macedonia so that the Corinthians would seek the same thing—namely, the grace of God, which led to joy in God, which led to love. This is a pattern we see over and over again.

I've told the story of Catherine Lawes before but I believe it describes what Paul is saying about love overflowing into pure delight and joy in God. *When Catherine Lawes' husband, Lewis Lawes, became the warden on Sing Sing prison in 1921, she was a young mother of three daughters. Everybody warned her never to step foot inside the walls. But she didn't listen to them. When the first prison basketball game was held, in she went, three girls in tow, and took a seat in the bleachers with the inmates.*

When she heard that one convicted murderer was blind, she taught him Braille so he could read. Upon learning of inmates who were hearing impaired, she studied sign language so they could communicate. For sixteen years Catherine Lawes softened the hard hearts of the men of Sing Sing.

The prisoners knew something was wrong when Lewis Lawes didn't report to work. Quickly the word spread that Catherine had been killed in a car accident. The following day as the acting warden took his early morning walk, he noticed a large gathering at the main gate. Every prisoner pressed against the fence. Eyes awash with tears. Faces solemn. No one spoke or moved.

The warden made a remarkable decision. "All right, men, you can go. Just be sure to check in tonight." These were America's hardest criminals. But the warden unlocked the gate for them, and they walked without escort or guard to the home of Catherine Lawes to pay their last respects. And to a man, each one returned.

Real love changes people. Do you think Catherine Lawes responded out of duty or love? Didn't God's love change you? Weren't you, like the prisoner, blind? You couldn't see beyond the grave. You couldn't see your purpose in life until He showed you. And you couldn't hear either. You'd never heard of such love and kindness, and you never would have heard of it, but God spoke in your language. And, most of all, he set you free. You are free! Free to run away. Free to harden your heart. But you don't. Or if you do, you come back. Why? Because you've never been loved like this before and that love is shared with other just like it says in our underlying principle: **Love is the overflow of joy in God that meets the needs of others.**

How does it benefit you to be loving to others? The story is told of a church elder that showed what it means to follow Jesus. A terrible ice storm had hit Pittsburgh, making travel almost impossible. At the height of the storm, a church family called their pastor about an emergency. Their little boy had leukemia and he

had taken a turn for the worst. The hospital said to bring the boy in, but they could not send an ambulance, and the family did not own a car.

The pastor's car was in the shop, so he called a church elder. The elder immediately got in his car and began the treacherous journey. The brakes in his car were nearly useless. It was so slick that he could not stop for stop signs or stop lights. He had three minor accidents on the way to the family's house.

When he reached their home, the parents brought out the little boy wrapped in a blanket. His mother got in the front seat and held her son, and the father got in the back. Ever so slowly they drove to the hospital. Says Thielemann:

They came to the bottom of a hill and as they managed to skid to a stop, he tried to decide whether he should try to make the grade on the other side, or whether he should go to the right and down the valley to the hospital. And as he was thinking about this, he chanced to look to the right and he saw the face of the little boy. The youngster's face was flushed, and his eyes wide with fever and with fear. To comfort the child, he reached over and tousled his hair. Then it was that the little boy said to him, "Mister, are you Jesus?" Do you know in that moment he could have said yes? For him to live was Jesus Christ. People who piddle around with life never know moments like that.

Loving as Jesus loved requires courage. Tell me what does **not** being loving cost you? Listen to these words from Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of **1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 (MSG)**: *¹If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. ²If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing. ³If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no*

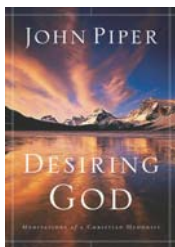
matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

So, if it benefits us to be loving and costs us to not be loving, why are we not loving all the time? Because we are stupid. Because the enemy has deceived us. My prayer today is that God through His Holy Spirit will persuade each of you of the truth that it is always in our best interest to be loving. Alfred Lord Tennyson said, "Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." Is that always true?

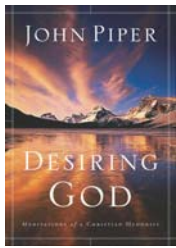
Even the examples of Jesus Christ show that love is the way of joy and is something to be chosen for that reason. The greatest labor of love that ever happened was possible because Jesus pursued the greatest imaginable joy, namely, the joy of being exalted to God's right hand in the assembly of redeemed people. Listen to these words from **HEBREWS 12:1-2 (ESV)**: ***1Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.***

We are to love others! We know the command—so now let's put it into action.

Let's Pray!



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APRIL 25, 2010



SESSION THREE
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1. **1 JOHN 3:23 (NCV)** says: “This is what God commands: that we believe in his Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love _____, just as he commanded.”

★ _____ first, _____ second! It’s what Max Lucado calls the **7:47 Principle**, taken from Luke 7:47 which says: “A person who is forgiven little shows only little love.”

2. True or False: The pursuit of _____ is an essential motive for every good deed!

3. Love is the _____ of joy in God that meets the needs of _____.

4. John Piper tells us that when the Christian Hedonist sees a person without hope or joy, that person’s _____ becomes like a low-pressure zone approaching the high-pressure zone of _____ in God’s grace. In this spiritual atmosphere, a draft is created from the Christian Hedonist’s high-pressure zone of joy to the low-pressure zone of need, as joy tends to expand to fill the need. That draft is called _____.

5. **JAMES 2: 14-16 (NIV):** “*What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has _____? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what _____ is it?*

6. Real love _____ people.

7. **HEBREWS 12:2 (ESV)** says: “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the _____ that was set before him _____ the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”