

God Is the Gospel

Group Study

Leader's Guide

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Introduction

Desiring God exists to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ. We believe that seeing this supremacy of God over all things and savoring it as it is displayed in the face of Jesus Christ is at the heart of both the meaning and the aims of the gospel. If our gospel preaching and teaching and serving and loving and living do not seek to make plain the stunning glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and do not attempt to woo others to cherish this beauty, then we preach, teach, serve, love, and live in vain. We are gripped by the truth John Piper once preached:

If you want your life to count, if you want the ripple effect of the pebbles you drop to become waves that reach the ends of the earth and roll on for centuries and into eternity, you don't have to have a high IQ or EQ; you don't have to have to have good looks or riches; you don't have to come from a fine family or a fine school. You have to know a few great, majestic, unchanging, obvious, simple, glorious things, and be set on fire by them.

We want to be mastered by the one truly important thing there is: the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We want to say with Paul that we are spreading what is “of first importance” (1 Cor. 15:3), and that we “determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2), and that we boast in nothing “except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14). We believe with all of our hearts in the truth of the gospel and the beauty of the gospel and the worth of the gospel and the power of the gospel.

This is why we are so excited about the book *God Is the Gospel*. All of our gospel efforts will be truncated if we miss the heart and goal of the gospel. God's glory is the heart and goal of the gospel. This book seeks to make that clear and compelling.

For all these reasons we have developed study resources to use in conjunction with the book. Our hope is that churches will use these books and study resources to foster group study and discussion and reflection on the foundational truths of the gospel, and that through this discussion God would ignite a passion in churches and individuals to display the glory of Jesus, the image of God, in everything they do. This could happen in a number of ways, whether it be used at leadership retreats or gatherings, or in small group studies, or in personal study, or in some other fresh, creative, and Christ-exalting way that the Spirit of God may lead.

We pray that God would bless this outreach richly with eternal fruit. We pray that these books would land in as many churches around the nation as possible. We pray that church leaders would see the glory of God at the center of the gospel and to preach it boldly from their pulpits. We pray that churchgoers would be awakened from the impotence of head-knowledge, to the power of gospel-knowledge, seeing God's glory in Christ crucified. We pray that whole congregations would be transformed into bodies which are “not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). And we pray that God's glory in Jesus Christ would be displayed for all the world to see thus creating the delight in that very majesty which glorifies him most.

Explanation of Study Resources

In an effort to encourage discussion and deeper engagement with *God Is the Gospel* we have developed a six-week study of the book. Each week consists of reading a portion of the book and answering/discussing correlating study questions.

We feel that these study resources would work best in a group setting. Not only do we believe in the biblical principle that iron sharpens iron, we also long to see church communities strengthened together in the foundations of the gospel. Nevertheless, we hope that these study resources can also be of benefit for individual study and reflection.

The two main components of the study resources are the Leader's Guide and the Study Guide. The various parts of each are explained below.

- **Leader's Guide**

The Leader's Guide will help an individual facilitate a six-week study of *God Is the Gospel*. It outlines weekly readings, objectives for each week, and synopses of the material.

- **Reading**

The Reading section lists the chapter(s) to be read during each week and the corresponding page numbers. The amount of reading required will vary from week to week, averaging around 30-40 pages per week. Included in this section is a different "Song of Response" for each week (see the explanation to the Study Guide below).

- **Alternative Tracks**

Each week the study guide provides around fifty study questions. Since we want the guide to be used by as many people as possible, we do not want the sheer amount of material to be covered to be an unnecessary hindrance to anybody who really desires to use this study. Therefore, we have broken down the Study Guide into two alternate tracks of descending time commitments. On the one hand, "The Essentials" will cover only the most basic and important elements of the reading, on the other hand "Beyond the Essentials" will extend to some of the implications of these foundational elements. Which track to take when working through this study is a decision that can be made by either the group as a whole or the individual. It would probably be beneficial to peruse the study question ahead of time to see what type of time commitment will be necessary for each track (many of the questions have fairly short answers).

- **Objectives**

Each week we have provided four to six goals to aim for in the reading and discussion. These objectives will aim for both the comprehension of main points in the weekly reading, and internal heart-transformation.

- **Synopsis**

This section provides a short description of the reading, highlighting the main points and the connections from chapter to chapter that Piper builds on in the book. These sections may be used by the entire group as aids to grasping the main ideas and flow of *God Is the Gospel*.

- **Study Guide**

The Study Guide's format is that of question and answer. Each week consists of around fifty total study questions, with focuses ranging from comprehension of the reading, to personal examination, to group discussion. (Shorter tracks with fewer questions from week to week are outlined in the Leader's Guide.) Most of the questions will have fairly short answers, so it may be possible to write down the answers within the study guide itself. It may, however, be helpful to have a separate notepad to write out answers as well as other thoughts and reflections that may develop during reading and study. Group participants are expected to bring both the Study Guide and *God Is the Gospel* to the group meetings. The questions in the Study Guide are grouped and organized each week into various sections explained below.

- **Before You Read...**

Each week contains a short number of preparatory questions which should be answered *prior to reading the chapter(s)*. These questions are aimed to stimulate thought about the main ideas that the chapter will cover and to determine the reader's understanding of those concepts ahead of time.

- **While You Read...**

The majority of study questions each week will usually be found in this section. These questions are primarily intended to help the reader locate the key concepts within the text of *God Is the Gospel* itself. For this reason, we have included the page number(s), usually in

parentheses, where the ideas these questions cover can be found in the book. The questions are listed out in order of appearance within *God Is the Gospel*, each chapter being marked off in the guide. Readers should feel free to answer these questions as they read, but if it is preferred, these questions could be answered after reading the chapter(s). If used in this way, the questions would serve as a good way to review the reading.

- **Putting It All Together**

At the end of each “While You Read...” section comes a group of questions enclosed in a box, entitled “Putting It All Together.” The goal of these questions is to help the reader understand the flow of John Piper’s argument from chapter to chapter. We believe that each chapter can be read individually and be of benefit. However, we also believe that more benefit can be gained as one recognizes how each chapter builds on what precedes and is interconnected with the rest. Thus, this short section, which should be read *after the reading*, is aimed to help individuals identify main points throughout the book, and follow argumentation in support of those main points.

- **Application and Discussion**

This final section of questions consists of questions aimed at internalization of the truths being studied. The questions here will often be pointed toward personal examination and application. These questions will also serve as the springboards for group discussion. Group leaders should feel free to develop their own discussion questions to be used in conjunction with or instead of these questions. In fact, questions tailor-made for each group are often the best and most helpful questions. Nevertheless, the questions provided in the “Application and Discussion” section can also serve as group questions, and the group participants should familiarize themselves with these questions before the meeting.

- **Song of Response**

In the conclusion of *God Is the Gospel*, John Piper shows how hymn writers throughout church history have exulted in the glory of God revealed in the gospel, including the full text to each hymn. Some of these songs will be well known, others not so well known. You may want to simply read the text of songs that the group isn’t familiar with, or you may want to encourage the group to learn songs these songs together (one place where the tunes to hymns can be learned is <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/>). We trust that using a different one of these songs each week will be a fitting and convenient way to conclude your study, discussion, encouragement, and prayer.

- **A Note on Week 6:**

Week 6 is different from the other five weeks in that the conclusion is set off from the regular sections of study questions. The questions covering the Conclusion are primarily review questions that the individual should answer. These may not be necessary to discuss in the group meeting, however questions 212-215 would be appropriate for discussion. Depending on the group’s time, needs, and discussion in the last meeting, the questions covering the Conclusion may be left for the individual to answer in their own personal time.

Week 1 – The Gospel: Toward a Biblical Definition

- Reading:
 - Introduction: What the World Needs Most—The Gospel’s Greatest Gift, God (pp. 11-18)
 - Chapter 1: The Gospel—Proclamation and Explanation (pp. 19-24)
 - Chapter 2: The Gospel—The Biblical Scope of Its Meaning (pp. 25-40)
 - Song of Response: “Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts” (pp. 171-172)

- Alternative Tracks:
 - The Essentials
 - Before You Read: 1-2
 - While You Read: 8, 10, 13, 17, 21, 29, 31-32
 - Putting It All Together: 33-36
 - Application and Discussion: 37, 39

 - Beyond the Essentials
 - Before You Read: 1-2, 4-5
 - While You Read: 8, 10-13, 15, 17-18, 21, 24-25, 28-29, 31-32
 - Putting It All Together: 33-36
 - Application and Discussion: 37-40

- Objectives:
 - To introduce the purpose and nature of the book, *God Is the Gospel*
 - To feel the importance and necessity of knowing and proclaiming the gospel
 - To examine our own understandings of important biblical concepts like the gospel, salvation, and love
 - To show why the cross must be central to the gospel
 - To understand the scope of what the Bible means by the term “gospel”

- Synopsis:
 - In Christian circles today, the term “gospel” probably gets used quite frequently. Indeed, it is acknowledged by most that the gospel is the most basic building block of the Christian religion. Why, then, do we need a book defining, explaining, and encouraging deeper proclamation of the gospel? The readings and study questions for Week 1 aim to provide an answer and, in doing so, set the stage for some biblical reflection on the nature and goal of the gospel and a call to its proclamation in our lives, in word and deed.

In the Introduction, John Piper exposes the shortcomings of some common assumptions about the gospel, salvation, and biblical love. He explains how easy it can be to miss the heart of the gospel, though it is the fundamental truth and conviction of Christianity. And he shows why it is so dangerous to simply assume we know all there is to know about it. We can never reflect upon our great salvation accomplished in the gospel of Jesus Christ enough. As our lungs never get bored of oxygen, and as our stomachs never outlive their need for food, so we can never contemplate, meditate upon, study, and rejoice in the gospel too much. It is what we were created for, and it is what will sustain our souls.

Chapters 1 and 2 then focus on what the Bible means when it says “the gospel.” Chapter 1 explains that the gospel is good news and, as such, it implies two things: it must be truly *good*; and it must be proclaimed, after all, news is meant to be reported. The news also has certain effects in those who hear it and believe it, which also must be understood in relation to the news itself. The many facets of this good news, both the news itself and the effects it causes, are described in further detail in Chapter 2. In the end, all of these aspects of the gospel are true and good news. But none of them are an end in themselves. They are all intended to bring us to the greatest good, God himself.

Week 2 –The Goal of the Gospel: Seeing God’s Glory in Jesus Christ

- Reading:
 - Chapter 3: The Gospel—“Behold Your God!” (pp. 41-58)
 - Chapter 4: The Gospel—The Glory of Christ, the Image of God (pp. 59-76)
 - Song of Response: “I Will Glory in My Redeemer” (pp. 178-179)

- Alternative Tracks:
 - The Essentials
 - Before You Read: 44
 - While You Read: 47-48, 53-54, 56-57, 59, 61-62, 68
 - Putting It All Together: 71-74
 - Application and Discussion: 77, 79, 82, 84

 - Beyond the Essentials
 - Before You Read: 43-44
 - While You Read: 47-51, 53-54, 56-59, 61-65, 67-68
 - Putting It All Together: 71-74
 - Application and Discussion: 75-77, 79, 82, 84-86

- Objectives:
 - To communicate the true heart and ultimate goal of the gospel: seeing and savoring the glory of God
 - To explain why gospel-gifts like justification are not the heart of the gospel but lead to the heart of the gospel
 - To show how the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are indispensably connected to the heart of the gospel
 - To introduce the difference between “spiritual seeing” and mere natural seeing
 - To come to a biblical definition of God’s glory
 - To examine our souls to see the authenticity of our conversion and faith

- Synopsis:
 - The gospel has many different and wonderful facets. However, none of them are ends in themselves. If we fail to allow these aspects of the gospel to lead us to the ultimate good of the gospel, we distort and misuse it. God is the ultimate goal of the gospel, that is, seeing the glory of God and finding the satisfaction of our souls in his infinite worth is what make the good news ultimately good. Any other aspect of the gospel is intended to remove every possible obstacle standing between sinners and this final purpose.

God’s glory, that is, his radiance or infinite beauty, is seen most fully and finally in his Son, Jesus Christ, whom he sent to live and die and be raised again on our behalf. The humility, suffering, and shame of Jesus Christ, who himself has all glory and power and is worthy of all praise, forms an infinitely complex beauty that only God possesses. The revelation of this glory, therefore, is rooted in the historical acts of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The light of God’s glory cannot be separated from history. And yet it shines in the hearts of Christians who see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. However, not everyone can see this glory in the gospel. That is, not everyone can see it in a way that births *savoring*. There is a “spiritual seeing” and a seeing without truly seeing.

The idea of a historically objective light shining experientially in the hearts of Christians is utterly unique to Christianity. And it confirms the idea that the heart and ultimate goal of the gospel is to enable us to see and savor the glory of God.

Week 3 – The Power and Proof of the Gospel: The Gospel

- Reading:
 - Chapter 5: The Gospel—Confirmed by Its Glory, the Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit (pp. 77-86)
 - Song of Response: “Fairest Lord Jesus” (pp.172-173)

- Alternative Tracks:
 - The Essentials
 - Before You Read: 90-92
 - While You Read: 93, 95, 98, 101
 - Putting It All Together: 104-105
 - Application and Discussion: 107, 111

 - Beyond the Essentials
 - Before You Read: 90-92
 - While You Read: 93-95, 98, 101-103
 - Putting It All Together: 104-105
 - Application and Discussion: 107-108, 110-111

- Objectives:
 - To provide some of the biblical grounds for assurance
 - To expose false grounds of assurance
 - To show how the Holy Spirit relates to the Word of God
 - To provide a fuller understanding of biblical saving faith
 - To help us become better evaluators of our own soul and also better counselors to those who struggle with doubt and lack of assurance

- Synopsis:
 - The gospel is unique in all the world in that it is itself the proof and validation of what it claims. While not undermining the validity or denying the benefits of apologetics, in the end, the gospel does not rest on the authority of any other witness. It possesses final authority. Ultimately, we do not need better arguments to submit to the gospel by savoring the glory of God. Ultimately, we need to see the gospel for what it really is, gloriously true.

The Holy Spirit enables us to see the truth and beauty of the gospel not by adding to the gospel or by telling us that the gospel is true, but by opening the eyes of our heart to see what is really there. The gospel is self-authenticating because when it is seen truly it irresistibly elicits adoration. Lazarus needed no arguments or additional testimony to believe that he was alive after Jesus raised him from the dead. The reality was overwhelming and irresistible. So we too, ultimately, rest our faith in the glory of God which reveals itself in the gospel of Jesus Christ not in argumentation but in the overwhelming and irresistible fact that we have seen it to be infinitely glorious.

The truths of the self-authenticating power of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to truly see are all over Scripture. And they are of deep importance for personal examination and practical, pastoral counsel. We must learn to cast our assurance and the assurance of those to whom we minister on none other than Jesus and his gospel.

Week 4 – The Glory of the Glad God as the Ground of Christian Living

- Reading:
 - Chapter 6: The Gospel—The Glory of Christ in Evangelism, Missions, and Sanctification (pp. 87-98)
 - Chapter 7: The Gospel—The Glory of the Gladness of God (pp. 99-104)
 - Chapter 8: The Gospel—The Glory of Christ as the Ground of Christ-Exalting Contrition (pp. 105-116)
 - Song of Response: “Jesus, Priceless Treasure” (pp. 175-176)

- Alternative Tracks:
 - The Essentials
 - Before You Read: 114-115
 - While You Read: 119-121, 125, 130, 134, 136-137
 - Putting It All Together: 142-146
 - Application and Discussion: 149-150, 158-159

 - Beyond the Essentials
 - Before You Read: 113-115
 - While You Read: 118-121, 123, 125, 126, 130, 132-134, 136-139, 141
 - Putting It All Together: 142-146
 - Application and Discussion: 148-151, 153, 156-159

- Objectives:
 - To show why the self-authenticating nature of the gospel enables it to be spread to everyone everywhere
 - To build an understanding of how conversion and sanctification are related to beholding the glory of God in the face of Christ and how they are inextricably linked
 - To develop Spirit-led, and Spirit-modeled counseling
 - To persuade that God is infinitely happy, explain why he is so, and feel the weight of why this is very good news
 - To reveal that true contrition is an echo of the glory of Jesus
 - To cultivate true, Christ-honoring contrition for sin

- Synopsis:
 - The gospel is not good news that can only be grasped by the intellectually elite. Saving faith in the glory of God seen in the face of Jesus Christ is not founded on long, complex, academic argumentation. Rather, saving faith is a true spiritual seeing of the glory of God in Jesus. This true spiritual seeing, not any argument, is what will strengthen us to take on the challenges and hardship of completing the Great Commission. And it occurs when we are enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit to see the glory of God that is revealed in the Scripture, specifically in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When our eyes are opened to see the light of the glory of God in the gospel about Jesus, what we discover is that one of the most fundamental elements of God’s glory is his infinite delight in Jesus, and vice versa. This is tremendously good news because it means that God needs nothing from us. He does not use us to meet his own needs, since he has all his needs met in himself. Instead, he is free to use his infinite power to meet all our needs. And he does so, most fundamentally, by enabling us to delight in him with the very delight he has in himself.

One surprising effect of seeing this gloriously glad God is that it creates in us deep contrition. Seeing God’s gladness, and hearing the call to partake in that gladness, begets contrition because we realize how much we fail to delight in God. This failure to delight is sin. Thus, feeling sorrow over sin is really just an echo of how glorious God is and how far we have fallen short of it in our affections.

Week 5 – The Glorious God and His Gracious Gifts

- Reading:
 - Chapter 9: The Gospel—The Gift of God Himself over and in All His Saving and Painful Gifts (pp. 117-132)
 - Chapter 10: The Gospel—The Gift of God Himself over and in All His Pleasant Gifts (pp. 133-146)
 - Song of Response: “Knowing You” (p. 177)

- Alternative Tracks:
 - The Essentials
 - Before You Read: 162-163
 - While You Read: 165, 168-169, 173-176
 - Putting It All Together: 181-184
 - Application and Discussion: 185, 189-190

 - Beyond the Essentials
 - Before You Read: 162-164
 - While You Read: 165, 167-170, 172-176, 179
 - Putting It All Together: 181-184
 - Application and Discussion: 185-187, 189-190

- Objectives:
 - To reveal the danger of glorifying the gift more than the giver, and to show how easy it is to do so
 - To explain and encourage God-honoring gratitude for all his gifts
 - To deepen understanding of why God created the physical world
 - To show that the ultimate reason God blesses us is so that we would see and savor his glory
 - To plant the seeds for a theology of suffering

- Synopsis:
 - All of the gifts of the gospel, such as justification and sanctification, should lead to the ultimate goal of seeing and savoring the glory of God in the face of Christ. The same can be said of all the gifts God graciously gives us. God does not give us good gifts such as food and friendship and healing from sickness and enjoyment of beauty and answers to prayer as temptations to idolatry. Rather, all these gifts are designed to deepen our enjoyment in the glory of God as they cause gratitude toward the giver and create categories of enjoyment to help us better see and savor God’s glory.

Furthermore, the same can be said, amazingly, of the suffering and pain that Christians experience. However dark the hardships may be, they are all made to serve the Christian’s ultimate good in that they wean us off of dependence on and satisfaction in anything other than God.

Therefore we must make it our aim to avoid being self-centered idolaters in our enjoyment of wonderful gifts like family, material provision, spiritual power, or even the very cross of Christ, all of which are so very easy to abuse and misuse. Rather, we must make it our aim to satisfy our souls in the glory of God revealed in the gospel of Jesus as the goal of all God’s saving, painful, and pleasant gifts, because God himself is the gospel.

Week 6 – God’s Glory Covering the Earth as the Waters Cover the Seas

- Reading:
 - Chapter 11: The Gospel—What Makes It Ultimately Good: Seeing Glory or Being Glorious? (pp. 147-164)
 - Conclusion: God Is the Gospel—Now Let Us Sacrifice and Sing (pp. 165-179)
 - Song of Response: “Be Thou My Vision” (p. 170)

- Alternative Tracks:
 - The Essentials
 - Before You Read: 191-192
 - While You Read: 194, 199, 202-203
 - Putting It All Together: 206-207
 - Application and Discussion: 210
 - Conclusion: 213-214

 - Beyond the Essentials
 - Before You Read: 191-192
 - While You Read: 194-195, 199-203
 - Putting It All Together: 206-207
 - Application and Discussion: 210-212
 - Conclusion: 213-217

- Objectives:
 - To come to a biblical definition of love
 - To deepen our joy in God by learning of our future hope of glorification
 - To understand the purpose of the book *God Is the Gospel*, and to be able to develop a definition of the gospel in your own words
 - To foster an appropriate attitude about one’s self in relation to God’s glory and his purposes
 - To have all our words, thoughts, and actions transformed so that magnifying and enjoying the glory of God becomes the goal of it all

- Synopsis:
 - Most people feel loved when they are made much of, that is when they are placed at the center of all that is valuable and worthy of honor and affection. This is why the love of God seems so foreign and strange to people. Since God is the ultimate good of the gospel, he doesn’t make much of us, per se, putting us at the center of all that is valuable and worthy of honor and affection. Rather, he enables us to see and savor him as that which is most valuable and worthy of honor and affection.

There is, however, a sense in which God does make much of us. The great Christian hope of glorification is that we will be glorified into Christ’s image. We are being transformed more and more into his image through sanctification, and one day we will be glorified fully into his image. Far from magnifying our value over and against God, what this great glorification will accomplish is the shining forth of the ultimate treasure, God himself, in all things. We will be like God, but more importantly, God himself will be reflected in all things including our own selves, undistracted and undistorted by sin and imperfection, for our everlasting enjoyment.

The end of all things is the eternal admiration and awe of the glory of God. All the gifts of the gospel lead to this end. All the gifts of sufferings and hardships turned into joys lead to this end. Every good and perfect gift coming down from the Father of Lights leads to this end. And the fitting response of seeing this glory is worship, the consummation of the satisfaction we find in it.