



PIERCED  
BY THE  
WORD

THIRTY-ONE  
MEDITATIONS *for* YOUR SOUL

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PIPER

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*To pastors  
who pierce the soul with truth  
like surgeons not slayers.*



For the word of God is living and active,  
sharper than any two-edged sword,  
piercing to the division of soul and of spirit,  
of joints and of marrow,  
and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

HEBREWS 4:12

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## A WORD TO THE READER

I LOVE THE WORD OF GOD. I DON'T SAY IT LIGHTLY. It is a terrible thing. "The voice of the LORD...strips the forest bare!" (Psalm 29:9). By His Word, God created the universe. And when His Son comes again, His Word will be like a "sharp sword with which to strike down the nations" (Revelation 19:15). So I tremble before the Word of God.

But this trembling is sweet. There is a promise attached to it. God says, "This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and *trembles* at my word" (Isaiah 66:2). Not every "look" of God is to be desired. But this one is. It is the look of blessing. And when God blesses the broken and contrite, His Word becomes Life. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

Yes, the Word pierces. And there is pain. But for those who trust in the living Word, Jesus Christ, all the piercing will be pleasant in the end. The boil will be lanced. The cancer cut out. The poison removed. For those who trust the severe mercy of Jesus, all piercing is healing.

I pray that these meditations will reveal and not conceal the Word of God. May they become in your life the living embodiment of that Word and penetrate to the deep places of your soul. God has a good work to do there.

*John Piper*

## HOW STRANGE AND WONDERFUL IS THE LOVE OF CHRIST!

FOR MANY YEARS I HAVE SOUGHT TO UNDERSTAND HOW the God-centeredness of God relates to His love for sinners like us. Most people do not immediately see God's passion for the glory of God as an act of love. One reason for this is that we have absorbed the world's definition of love. It says: You are loved when you are made much of.

The main problem with this definition of love is that when you try to apply it to God's love for us, it distorts reality. God's love for us is *not* mainly His making much of us, but His giving us the ability to enjoy making much of Him forever. In other words, God's love for us keeps God at the center. God's love for us exalts His value and our satisfaction in it. If God's love made us central and focused on our value, it would distract us from what is most precious; namely, Himself. Love labors and suffers to enthrall us with what is infinitely and eternally satisfying: God. Therefore God's love labors and suffers to break our bondage to the idol of self and focus our affections on the treasure of God.

In a surprising way we can see this in the story of Lazarus's sickness and death.

<sup>1</sup> Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." <sup>4</sup> But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." <sup>5</sup> Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. (John 11:1–6)

Notice three amazing things:

1. Jesus chose to let Lazarus die. Verse 6: "So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was." There was no hurry. His intention was not to spare the family grief, but to raise Lazarus from the dead. This is true even if Lazarus was already dead when the messengers reached Jesus. Jesus either let him die or remained longer to make plain that He was in no hurry to immediately relieve the grief. Something more was driving Him.
2. He was motivated by a passion for the glory of God displayed in His own glorious power. In verse 4 He says, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

3. Nevertheless both the decision to let Lazarus die and the motivation to magnify God were expressions of love for Mary and Martha and Lazarus. John shows this by the way he connected verses 5 and 6: “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. *So* [not “yet,” which the NIV wrongly inserts]...he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.”

Oh, how many people today—even Christians—would murmur at Jesus for callously letting Lazarus die and putting him and Mary and Martha and others through the pain and misery of those days. And if people today saw that this was motivated by Jesus’ desire to magnify the glory of God, how many would call this harsh or unloving! What this shows is how far above the glory of God most people value pain-free lives. For most people, love is whatever puts human value and human well-being at the center. So Jesus’ behavior is unintelligible to them.

But let us not tell Jesus what love is. Let us not instruct Him how He should love us and make us central. Let us learn from Jesus what love is and what our true well-being is. *Love is doing whatever you need to do to help people see and savor the glory of God in Christ forever and ever.* Love keeps God central. Because the soul was made for God.

Jesus confirms that we are on the right track here by praying for us in John 17:24, “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, *to see my glory* that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” I assume that this prayer is a loving act of Jesus. But what does He ask? He asks that, in the end, we might see His glory. His love for us makes Himself central. Jesus is the

one being for whom self-exaltation is the most loving act. This is because the most satisfying reality we could ever know is Jesus. So to give us this reality, He must give us Himself. The love of Jesus drives Him to pray for us, and then die for us, not that *our* value may be central, but that *His glory* may be central, and we may see it and savor it for all eternity. “Father, I desire that they...be with me...to see my glory.” That is what it means for Jesus to love us. Divine love labors and suffers to enthrall us with what is infinitely and eternally satisfying: God in Christ. That we might see His glory—for that He let Lazarus die, and for that He went to the cross.



*O Father, take us captive with this love.  
 Open the eyes of our hearts to see  
 and savor the glory of Christ.  
 And when we are enthralled with  
 being loved this way, make us lovers like Jesus.  
 Let us labor and suffer to lead as many  
 as we can into this all-satisfying love.  
 In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

## GOD IS THE GOSPEL

HAVE YOU EVER ASKED WHY GOD'S FORGIVENESS IS OF any value? Or what about eternal life? Have you ever asked why a person would want to have eternal life? Why should we want to live forever? These questions matter because it is possible to want forgiveness and eternal life for reasons that prove you don't have them.

Take forgiveness, for example. You might want God's forgiveness because you are so miserable with guilt feelings. You just want relief. If you can believe that He forgives you, then you will have some relief, but not necessarily salvation. If you only want forgiveness because of emotional relief, you won't have *God's* forgiveness. He does not give it to those who use it only to get His gifts and not Himself.

Or you might want to be healed from a disease or get a good job or find a spouse. Then you hear that God can help you get these things, but that first your sins would have to be forgiven. Someone tells you to believe that Christ died for your sins, and that if you believe this, your sins will be forgiven. So you believe it in order to remove the obstacle to health and job

and spouse. Is that gospel salvation? I don't think so.

In other words, it matters what you are hoping for through forgiveness. It matters why you want it. If you want forgiveness only for the sake of savoring the creation, then the Creator is not honored and you are not saved. Forgiveness is precious for one final reason: It enables you to enjoy fellowship with God. If you don't want forgiveness for that reason, you won't have it at all. God will not be used as currency for the purchase of idols.

Similarly, we ask: Why do we want eternal life? One might say: Because hell is the alternative and that's painful. Another might say: Because there will be no sadness there. Another might say: My loved ones have gone there and I want to be with them. Others might dream of endless sex or food. Or more noble fortunes. In all these aims one thing is missing: God.

The saving motive for wanting eternal life is given in John 17:3: "This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." If we do not want eternal life because it means joy in God, then we won't have eternal life. We simply kid ourselves that we are Christians if we use the glorious gospel of Christ to get what we love more than Christ. The "good news" will not prove good to any for whom God is not the chief good.

Here is the way Jonathan Edwards put it in a sermon to his people in 1731. Read this slowly and let it waken you to the true goodness of forgiveness and life.

The redeemed have all their objective good in God. God Himself is the great good which they are brought to the possession and enjoyment of by redemption. He is the highest good, and the sum of all that good which

Christ purchased. God is the inheritance of the saints; he is the portion of their souls. God is their wealth and treasure, their food, their life, their dwelling place, their ornament and diadem, and their everlasting honor and glory. They have none in heaven but God; he is the great good which the redeemed are received to at death, and which they are to rise to at the end of the world. The Lord God, he is the light of the heavenly Jerusalem; and is the “river of the water of life” that runs, and the tree of life that grows, “in the midst of the paradise of God.” The glorious excellencies and beauty of God will be what will forever entertain the minds of the saints, and the love of God will be their everlasting feast. The redeemed will indeed enjoy other things; they will enjoy the angels, and will enjoy one another: but that which they shall enjoy in the angels, or each other, or in anything else whatsoever, that will yield them delight and happiness, will be what will be seen of God in them.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney, ed., *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 74–75.





*All-satisfying God, forgive us for making  
Your good gifts a substitute for You.  
We are so prone to mistake the portrait for the person.  
Satisfy us with Yourself.  
You have promised in the New Covenant,  
“They shall all know me from the least to the greatest.”  
Let this be our portion now—a kind of knowing,  
O God, that treasures the One we know.  
Let us experience the gospel in its fullness,  
which is Christ crucified and risen  
for sinners to bring us home to You.  
In His name we pray. Amen.*