

# Scripture: Kindling for Christian Hedonism

from *Desiring God* by John Piper

*"I have found over the years that there is a correlation between people's willingness to get over the offensiveness of the term Christian Hedonism and their willingness to yield to the offensive biblical truth behind it."*

**C**hristian Hedonism is much aware that every day with Jesus is not "sweeter than the day before." Some days with Jesus our disposition is sour. Some days with Jesus we are so sad we feel our heart will break open. Some days with Jesus we are so depressed and discouraged that between the garage and the house we just want to sit down on the grass and cry.

Every day with Jesus is not sweeter than the day before. We know it from experience and we know it from Scripture. For David says in Psalm 19:7, "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul." If every day with Jesus



# BE Still.

T H O U G H T S   A N D   R E A D I N G S   F O R   M E D I T A T I O N



were sweeter than the day before, if life were a steady ascent with no dips in our affection for God, we wouldn't need to be re-lived.

In another place David extolled the Lord with similar words: "He leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul" (Psalm 23 :2-3). This means David must have had bad days.

There were days when his soul needed to be re-stored. It's the same phrase used in Psalm 19:7—"the law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul." Normal Christian life is a repeated process of restoration and renewal. Our joy is not static. It fluctuates with real life. It is vulnerable to Satan's attacks.

When Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:24, "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we are workers with you for your joy," we should emphasise it this way: "We are workers with you for **your joy**." **The preservation of our joy in God takes work. It is a fight.** Our adversary the devil prowls around

like a roaring lion, and he has an insatiable appetite to destroy one thing: the joy of faith. But the Holy Spirit has given us a sword called the Word of God for the defense of our joy.

Or, to change the image, when Satan huffs and puffs and tries to blow out the flame of your joy, **you have an endless supply of kindling in the Word of God.** Even on days when every cinder in our soul feels cold, if we crawl to the Word of God and cry out for ears to hear, the cold ashes will be lifted and the tiny spark of life will be fanned. For "the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul." ***The Bible is the kindling of Christian Hedonism.*** ♦

*"Lord, wean me from earth. Lord, take me within the veil."*

**"WHEN I AWAKE I AM STILL WITH THEE." PSALM 139:18**

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# Brothers, we are not professionals...

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The preacher ... is not a professional man; his ministry is not a profession; it is a divine institution, a divine devotion.

E. M. BOUNDS

**W**E PASTORS are being killed by the professionalising of the pastoral ministry. The mentality of the professional is not the mentality of the prophet. It is not the mentality of the slave of Christ. Professionalism has nothing to do with the essence and heart of the Christian ministry. The more professional we long to be, the more spiritual death we will leave in our wake. For there is no professional childlikeness (Matt. 18:3); there is no professional tenderheartedness (Eph. 4:32); there is no professional panting after God (Ps. 42:1).

But our first business is to pant after God in prayer. Our business is to weep over our sins (James 4:9). Is there professional weeping? Our business is to strain forward to the holiness of Christ and the prize of the upward call of God (Phil. 3:14); to pummel our bodies and subdue them lest we be cast away (1 Cor. 9:27); to deny ourselves and take up the blood-spattered cross daily (Luke 9:23). How do you carry a cross professionally? We have been crucified with Christ; yet now we live by faith in the one who loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20). What is professional faith?

We are to be filled not with wine but with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). We are God-besotted lovers of Christ. How can you be drunk with Jesus professionally? Then, wonder of wonders, we were given the gospel treasure to carry in clay pots to show that the transcendent power belongs to God (2 Cor. 4:7). Is there a way to be a professional clay pot?

We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair,

persecuted but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus (professionally?) so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested (professionally?) in our bodies (2 Cor. 4:9-11).

I think God has exhibited us preachers as last of all in the world. We are fools for Christ's sake, but professionals are wise. We are weak, but professionals are strong. Professionals are held in honour; we are in disrepute. We do not try to secure a professional lifestyle, but we are ready to hunger and thirst and be ill clad and homeless. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things (1 Cor. 4:9-13). Or have we?

Brothers, we are not professionals! We are outcasts. We are aliens and exiles in the world (1 Pet. 2:11). Our citizenship is in heaven, and we wait with eager expectation for the Lord (Phil. 3:20). You cannot professionalise the love for His appearing without killing it. And it is being killed.

The aims of our ministry are eternal and spiritual. They are not shared by any of the professions. It is precisely by the failure to see this that we are dying.

"The life-giving preacher is a man of God, whose heart is ever athirst for God, whose soul is ever following hard after God, whose eye is single to God, and in whom by the power of God's Spirit the flesh and the world have been crucified and his ministry is like the generous flood of a life-giving river."

We are most emphatically not part of a social team sharing goals with other professionals. Our goals are an offense; they are foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23). The professionalisation of the ministry is a constant threat to the offense of the gospel. It is a threat to the profoundly spiritual nature of our work. I have seen it often: the love of professionalism (parity

among the world's professionals) kills a man's belief that he is sent by God to save people from hell and to make them Christ-exalting, spiritual aliens in the world.

The world sets the agenda of the professional man; God sets the agenda of the spiritual man. The strong wine of Jesus Christ explodes the wineskins of professionalism. There is an infinite difference between the pastor whose heart is set on being a professional and the pastor whose heart is set on being the aroma of Christ, the fragrance of death to some and eternal life to others (2 Cor. 2:15-16).

God, deliver us from the professionalisers! Deliver us from the "low, managing, contriving, manoeuvring temper of mind among us." God, give us tears for our sins. Forgive us for being so shallow in prayer, so thin in our grasp of holy verities, so content amid perishing neighbours, so empty of passion and earnestness in all our conversation. Restore to us the childlike joy of our salvation. Frighten us with the awesome holiness and power of Him who can cast both soul and body into hell (Matt. 10:28). Cause us to hold to the cross with fear and trembling as our hope-filled and offensive tree of life. Grant us nothing, absolutely nothing, the way the world views it. May Christ be all in all (Col. 3:11).

Banish professionalism from our midst, Oh God, and in its place put passionate prayer, poverty of spirit, hunger for God, rigorous study of holy things, white-hot devotion to Jesus Christ, utter indifference to all material gain, and unremitting labour to rescue the perishing, perfect the saints, and glorify our sovereign Lord.

Humble us, O God, under Your mighty hand, and let us rise, not as professionals, but as witnesses and partakers of the sufferings of Christ. In His awesome name.

Amen.

—John Piper

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## Real Church

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**N**ot only the other person who is earnest and devout, who comes to me seeking brotherhood, must I deal with in fellowship. My brother is rather that other person who has been redeemed by Christ, delivered from sin, and called to faith and eternal life.

Not what a man is in himself as a Christian,

his spirituality and piety, constitutes the basis of our community. What determines our brotherhood is what that man is by reason of Christ. Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us. This is true not merely at the beginning, and though in the course of time something else were to be added to our community; it remains so for all the future and to all eternity.

I have community with others and I shall continue to have it only through Jesus Christ. The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is

vital between us. We have one another only through Christ, but through Christ we do have one another, and for all eternity.

That dismisses once and for all every clamorous desire for something more. **One who wants more than what Christ has established does not want Christian brotherhood.** He is looking for some extraordinary social experience which he has not found elsewhere; he is bringing muddled and impure desires into Christian brotherhood.

Christian brotherhood is not an ideal we must realise; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.

—DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

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# How I Learned to Pray for the Lost

**H**ere is a remarkable testimony which should be of real help to many readers. Since the nature of the testimony is personal, the writer requested that her name be withheld.

The letter accompanying this testimony says in part: "This is the result of my search for the right way of praying for the unsaved. I have found it to produce amazing results in a very short time. After more than 20 years of fruitless praying, it seemed that there was no possible chance for my loved ones to ever return to the faith. But after only a few weeks of the type of praying that I have outlined here, I have seen them studying the Bible by the hour and attending every church service possible. Also, their whole attitude towards Christianity has changed, and all resistance seems to be gone. I have taken my place of authority in Christ and am using it against the Enemy. I have not looked at myself to see if I am fit or not; I have just taken my place and have prayed that the Holy Spirit may do His convicting work. If each and every member of the Body of Christ would do this, what a change would be made in this world!"

Believers everywhere are burdened for unsaved or backsliding loved ones. However, many are praying in the spirit of fear and worry instead of in faith.

This has caused me to seek for definite light on how to pray, feeling the need of praying the right prayer and also the need for a definite promise or word from God on which to base my faith when praying for the unsaved. Praise God—He never fails to give such needed help. Perhaps because the salvation of some seemed to me to be an impossibility, the first verse of scripture that was given to me was Mark 10:27: "With God all things are possible."

The next scripture verse had occupied my attention for some time, but it took on a new meaning: "(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations [speculations] and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor.

10:4, 5). This shows the mighty power of our spiritual weapons. We must pray that all of this will be accomplished in the ones for whom we are concerned; that is, that the works of the Enemy will be torn down.

Finally, I was given the solid foundation for my prayers—the basis of redemption. In reality, Christ's redemption purchased all mankind, so that we may say that each one is actually God's purchased possession, although he is still held by the Enemy. We must, through the prayer of faith, claim and take for God in the name of the Lord Jesus that which is rightfully His. This can be done only on the basis of redemption. This is not meant to imply that, because all persons have been purchased by God through redemption, they are automatically saved. They must believe and receive the gospel for themselves; our intercession enables them to do this.

To pray in the name of the Lord Jesus is to ask for, or to claim, the things which the blood of Christ has secured. Therefore, each individual

*We must pray that their very thoughts will be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.*

for whom prayer is made should be claimed by name as God's purchased possession, in the name of the Lord Jesus and on the basis of His shed blood.

We should claim the tearing down of all the works of Satan, such as false doctrine, unbelief, atheistic teaching and hatred, which the Enemy may have built up in their thinking. We must pray that their very thoughts will be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

With the authority of the name of the Lord Jesus, we must claim their deliverance from the power and persuasion of the Evil One and from the love of the world and the lust of the flesh. We should also pray that their conscience may be convicted, that God may bring them to the point of repentance and that they may listen and believe as they hear or read the Word of God. Our prayer must be that God's will and purposes may be accomplished in and through them.

Intercession must be persistent—not to persuade God, for redemption is by God, but because of the Enemy. Our prayer and resistance are against the Enemy—the awful

powers and rulers of darkness. It is our duty before God to fight for the souls for whom Christ died. Just as some must preach to them the good news of redemption, others must fight the powers of darkness on their behalf through prayer.

Satan yields only what and when he must, and he renews his attacks in subtle ways. Therefore, prayer must be definite and persistent, even long after definite results are seen. And we must pray for the new Christian even after he begins to be established in the faith.

We will find that as we pray, the Holy Spirit will give new directions. At one time I was interceding for a soul and began to feel that my prayers were largely ineffective. Then the Holy Spirit inspired me to begin presenting that person to God in the name of the Lord Jesus. As I obeyed this leading, praying, "I present so-and-so to God in the name of the Lord Jesus," I felt that my prayers were gradually becoming more effective. It seemed that I was drawing that person from deep within the very camp of the Enemy. Then I was able to proceed as usual, claiming every detail of that life for God, using the power of the blood against the Enemy. This is true warfare in the spiritual realm. Thank God that our spiritual weapons are mighty and that our authority in Christ is far above all the authority of the rulers, powers and forces of darkness, so that the Enemy must yield. But it takes faith and patience and persistence.

Missionaries on foreign and home fields can resist the Enemy in their districts, communities and schools by using the power of the blood of Jesus against the powers of darkness, sin and unbelief. With the authority of the name of the Lord Jesus they can demand that the Enemy retreat.

Note that "it is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63) and that "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (II Cor. 3:6). Therefore, we must constantly seek the motivation of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, in our faith, in our prayer and in our testimony. It is most important also that we confess our own sins and have them forgiven. The Enemy will use every possible means to silence our intercession and to block our attack against him. We must not only understand our Enemy, our authority in Christ and how to use our spiritual weapons but also how to wear the spiritual armour that God has provided for our protection. Thus equipped and protected, we need not have any fear. But let us always remember that we have no power and no authority other than that of Christ.

"Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ" (II Cor. 2:14). "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (I John 4:4).

—from The Alliance Witness

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*"The only avenue the devil has into the physical world is the minds of men." —Eric Wise*

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# Meditations from Reaching for the Invisible God by Philip Yancey

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"[There are] three million Americans who identify themselves as evangelical Christians yet never attend church."	"A man should carry two stones in his pocket. On one should be inscribed, 'I am but dust and ashes.' On the other, 'For my sake was the world created.' And he should use each stone as he needs it." —A JEWISH RABBI	"A relationship with God does not switch on or off depending on my behaviour."
"The Christian life is not meant to be lived by a person sitting all day thinking about the Christian life."	"Love involves caring about people most of us would prefer not to care about."	"We dare not misrepresent ourselves to God, for by doing so, we close our hands to grace."
"The Bible poses blunt questions that have no answers."	"Everyone has an image of God distorted in some way."	"Spiritual passion erupts like a geyser in the early days following conversion, then settles into a lukewarm pool, and finally may evaporate of neglect or disillusionment."
"If you find God with great ease, perhaps it is not God that you have found." — THOMAS MERTON	"All human relationships rest on a platform of uncertainty that preserves the mysterious quality of otherness. In knowing one another, we always fall short."	"The depth of spirituality does not depend on changing things you do but rather in doing for God what you ordinarily do for yourself." —BROTHER LAWRENCE
"We yearn for visibility, hoping to bring the supernatural down to our level of materiality."	"We have as much evidence for believing in God as we do for believing in other people."	"Jesus himself did not hesitate to threaten dire punishment for the disobedient and promise rewards to the obedient."
"Nowhere in the Bible do I find a promise that we will touch God, or see his face, not in this life at least."	"We believe in other minds because... we relate to them."	"[The seductions of childish faith are:] unrealistic expectations, legalism, and unhealthy dependence."
"The only thing more difficult than having a relationship with an invisible God is having no such relationship."	"Communication between unequal creatures will inevitably cause confusion and disappointment on both sides."	"Legalism has its place in spiritual development, as surely it does in child development, but perpetual legalism impedes growth."
"Doubt always coexists with faith, for in the presence of certainty who would need faith at all?"	"All of us keep a part of ourselves, the inner self, hidden, and show the world only an outer self. In the Spirit, God overcomes that barrier."	"Indeed, children must sternly be taught not to trust strangers, for distrust goes against their instincts."
"God appears far less threatened by doubt than does his church."	"Many people who reject God are rejecting not God but a caricature of him presented by the church."	"On earth we are wayfarers, always on the go. This means that we have to keep on moving forward. Therefore, be always unhappy about where you are if you want to reach where you are not. If you are pleased with what you are, you have stopped already. If you say, 'It is enough,' you are lost. Keep on walking, moving forward, trying for the goal." —ST. AUGUSTINE
"I tremble to think what we would do if some of the ambiguous doctrines were less ambiguous."	"Like many others, I find myself something of a perfectionist, and if we don't watch ourselves this obsession for the perfect can make us arrogantly critical of other people, and in certain moods, desperately critical of ourselves." —J.B. PHILIPS	"I must add a caution that the church often misrepresents self-denial. It does not mean denying one's own value or worth: Jesus never did that. Nor does it mean discounting one's gifts or abilities: Paul seized on these as our main contributions to the body of Christ. And not every person is ready for the message of self-denial. We must first receive before we can give, must possess in order to give up, must have a place before leaving it. Many Christians, diminished by misguided theology, need a healing emphasis on self-possession before they can think about self-sacrifice. Wounded children must be healed before becoming capable parents."
"We will always, with Pascal, see 'too much to deny and too little to be sure...'"	"Can't you see that there is no way to move toward God without drawing closer to other people, and no way to approach other people without coming near to God?"	"Jesus' own life did not offer the answers most people are looking for. Not once did he use supernatural powers to improve his family, protect himself from harm, or increase his comfort and wealth."
"The opposite of faith is not doubt, but fear."	"Christians often communicate to each other one of these two solutions: 'Do what's right' or 'Fix what's wrong.' Instead, the New Testament holds up a better way: 'Release what is good.'"	"God's goodness does not mean that we will not get hurt, not in this fallen world at least...A relationship with God does not promise supernatural deliverance from hardship, but rather a supernatural use of it."
"Faith is reason gone courageous—not the opposite of reason, to be sure, but something more than reason and never satisfied by reason alone. A step always remains beyond the range of light."	"Ultimately I saw that a constant emphasis on God's power may lead to the fatalism of extreme Muslims or Hindus...far more impressive is the miracle of God's condescension, his humble willingness to share power and offer us full partnership in the mission of transforming the world."	
"Not once did Jesus counsel someone to accept suffering as God's will."	"Like a proud parent, God seems to take more delight as a spectator of the bumbling achievements of his stripling children than in any self-display of omnipotence."	
"Christians often read the Bible in such a way that exaggerates God's promises, setting themselves up for later disillusionment."	"Moses argued with God so fervently that several times he persuaded God to change His mind."	
"A paranoid person orients life around fear."		
"We must not assume that everything happens with God's approval... Many things happen in this world that are clearly against God's will."		
"Truth is not in the middle, and not in one extreme, but in both extremes." —CHARLES SIMEON		