DON'T WASTE YOUR LIFE

STUDY GUIDE

DEVELOPED BY: DESIRING GOD

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INTRODUCTION TO THIS STUDY GUIDE

A NEWLY RETIRED COUPLE moves to New Mexico to spend their twilight years on the golf course. A middle-aged man labors all day at the office to make enough money to provide his family with a nice house in a safe neighborhood and fun vacations in the summer. A young student enters college in hopes of gaining the education and skills needed to have a good career. Is this all there is to life? Or did God make us for something greater than the American Dream?

It is our conviction that God did indeed create us for more than the American Dream. Nevertheless, millions of people waste their lives in pursuit of the vain trappings of this world because they never discover the simple, obvious, glorious, biblical reality that “[God’s] steadfast love is better than life” (Psalm 63:3). They are never gripped by the truth that “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). The awesome biblical promise that “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14) has never landed on them by the power of the Holy Spirit and awakened them to a
Don’t Waste Your Life

passion for God’s supremacy in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.

Our prayer is that God would use this study guide to awaken in you a consuming desire to not throw your life away on “fatal success.” Our desire is that Jesus Christ would explode into your life, unite your fractured dreams and fragmented heart, and produce a single, holy, all-embracing passion for his name. And then our hope is that in this passion you would be set free from small dreams and weak visions, that you would lay down your life for the cause of Christ in the world. As Jesus said, “Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:35).

This study guide is designed to be used in a ten-session, guided group study that focuses on Don’t Waste Your Life by John Piper. Following an introductory lesson, each subsequent lesson examines one or two chapters in Don’t Waste Your Life. The final lesson aims to sum up and synthesize the material that you’ve learned during the study.

Lesson 1 should be completed during the first group study session when you receive the book and the study guide. Lessons 2-9 are divided into four distinct parts: (1) five daily assignments taking you through the entirety of Don’t Waste Your Life; (2) a section for further study entitled “Further Up and Further In” that allows you to probe more deeply into the material in each lesson; (3) a group activity that should be completed during the group study session; and (4) a homework activity that applies the lesson.

Throughout this study guide, paragraphs printed in a shaded box (like this one) are excerpts from Don’t Waste Your Life or other books written by John Piper or excerpts taken from
INTRODUCTION TO THIS STUDY GUIDE

The daily workload is divided into five manageable assignments. Day 1 is a preparatory day in which important Scripture passages are examined, key concepts are introduced, and provocative questions are raised. This section should be completed before reading the assigned chapter.

Days 2-4 divide the particular chapter(s) into three sections. You should read the assigned pages in Don’t Waste Your Life and then answer the questions. The questions will explore relevant Scripture passages, test your comprehension of the material, and encourage you to think critically about the truth being presented.

Day 5 is set aside for review and application. On this day you should review important parts of the chapter and highlight the truths, concepts, and ideas that were most meaningful to you. The questions on this day will also encourage you to apply what you have learned.

The section entitled “Further Up and Further In” provides you the opportunity to engage in further study of the material. You are encouraged to complete this section if you have time, as it will help you fully grasp the material. The next section in Lessons 2-9, entitled “Group Activity,” should be completed when your small group meets each week. The final section, “Getting Practical,” suggests one activity that you could begin to do the following week in order to live out the truth you’ve been learning.

Lesson 10 is designed to help you review, summarize, and synthesize what you have learned over the course of the study. Further instructions will be given when you reach that lesson.
Group leaders will want to read the Leader’s Guide at the end of this study immediately.

Igniting a passion to make your life count is only possible by the grace of God. Therefore, we highly encourage you to pray as you work your way through this study guide. As you engage with the material each day, make it a habit to seek the blessing of the Lord in prayer. Pray that God would open your mind and your heart to see wonderful things in his Word. Pray that he would grant you the understanding and insight you need in order to apply what you learn to your life. Pray that God would cause you to rejoice in the truth. And pray that the group discussion each week will be mutually encouraging and edifying for all who are involved.

May God our Father grant you, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to see and savor the all-satisfying supremacy of Jesus Christ so that no one would say in the end, “I’ve wasted it!”

NOTES
1. This phrase is taken from Don’t Waste Your Life, page 46.
2. While this study guide is ideally suited for a ten-session study, it is possible to complete it in five sessions. For instructions on how to use this study guide for a five-session group study, turn to Appendix A: A Five-Session Intensive Option.
3. This resource is designed to be used in a group setting. It can also be used, however, by an independent learner. Such a learner would have to determine for himself or herself how to use this resource in the most profitable way. If you can’t join a group, consider starting one of your own!
LESSON 1
INTRODUCTION TO DON’T WASTE YOUR LIFE

LESSON OBJECTIVES
It is our prayer that after you have finished this lesson . . .

› You will have an idea of how you and others in your group view a wasted life.
› Your curiosity will be excited, and questions will begin to form.
› You will be eager to learn more about how you can avoid wasting your life.

ABOUT YOURSELF
1) What is your name?
2) Tell the group something significant about yourself that you would like them to know.
3) Describe your personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
1) In your mind, what is the difference between a wasted life and an unwasted life? How could you discern whether or not you are wasting your life?

Turn to the Contents page in Don’t Waste Your Life and read the chapter titles.

2) Based on the titles of the chapters alone, which chapter(s) are you most looking forward to? Why does that chapter pique your interest?

Let one person read the Preface to Don’t Waste Your Life (pages 9-10) aloud to the group.

On page 9 John Piper says the following:

It was not always plain to me that pursuing God’s glory would be virtually the same as pursuing my joy. Now I see that millions of people waste their lives because they think these paths are two and not one.
LESSON 1

3) In your mind, is pursuing God’s glory “virtually the same” as pursuing your joy? How do you conceive of these two pursuits? What do they have to do with wasting or not wasting your life?
 LESSON 2
MY SEARCH FOR A SINGLE PASSION TO LIVE BY
A Companion Study to Don’t Waste Your Life, Chapter 1

LESSON OBJECTIVES
It is our prayer that after you have finished this lesson . . .
› You will have done some serious reflection on your life
to this point and will have begun to look ahead to what
God has for your future.
› You will have a better grasp of where true Meaning and
Purpose can be found.
› You will be eager to learn more about how you can
avoid wasting your life.

DAY 1: INITIAL QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU READ
No one sets out to waste his or her life. However, very few people
actually give thought to how they can avoid wasting it. It seems
that many people simply slide into whatever mold society and cul-
ture fashion for them. A person may start out seeking to “make life
count” in a vague, fuzzy sort of way, but because he or she never
gives any deep reflection to what exactly that means, the pains
LESSON 2

and pleasures of life squeeze out any aspirations to do something great and glorious with his or her life. The first two chapters of Don’t Waste Your Life chronicle John Piper’s early years in which he grappled greatly with what it would mean to not waste his life. In reading his story, our hope is that you would see the road he has traveled to arrive at his conclusions about the glory of God, the pursuit of joy, and the unwasted life.

+ QUESTION 1: Spend some time praying and reflecting on your life. How did you get to where you are today?¹
  › If you are in your teens or twenties, what dreams and plans do you have for your future?
  › If you are middle-aged, how do you think you’ve lived thus far? What dreams and plans do you have for your future?
  › If you are nearing retirement and beyond, how do you think you’ve lived your life? How do you hope to finish so that you can say in the end, “I didn’t waste it”? List three things you hope to accomplish by the end of your life. Be sure to include any Scripture verses that have been significant for you.

+ QUESTION 2: No matter how old we get, we always have questions about the deeper issues of life. What questions do you have about God, Purpose, Truth, Life, Death, or People? Record your “big” questions below.

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**DONT WASTE YOUR LIFE**

**DAY 2: ONLY WHAT’S DONE FOR CHRIST WILL LAST**

Read from page 11 to the middle of page 14 in *Don’t Waste Your Life* and answer the following questions.

**QUESTION 3:** On page 12 John Piper records one of his father’s sermon illustrations that had a huge impact on him as a boy. What is your reaction to this illustration? Do you feel the same fear that John Piper did?

The plaque that hangs near John Piper’s front door reads:

Only one life,
’Twill soon be past;
Only what’s done
for Christ will last.

Now read the words of the apostle Paul in Acts.

**ACTS 20:24**

*But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.*

**+ QUESTION 4:** In light of this verse, is it true that “only what’s done for Christ will last”? How important is the word “only”?
LESSON 2

On page 13 John Piper says the following:

What was the opposite of not wasting my life? “To be successful in a career”? Or “to be maximally happy”? Or “to accomplish something great”? Or “to find the deepest meaning and significance”? Or “to help as many people as possible”? Or “to serve Christ to the full”? Or “to glorify God in all I do”? Or was there a point, a focus, an essence to life that would fulfill every one of those dreams?

**QUESTION 5:** Give three answers to the question “What is the opposite of not wasting my life?” that a non-Christian might give. What, if anything, is defective about these answers?

DAY 3: BREATHING EXISTENTIALISM

Read from the middle of page 14 to the bottom of page 17 in *Don’t Waste Your Life* and answer the following questions.

Existentialism is a philosophy that states, “Existence precedes essence.” This means that there is no objective Essence, Meaning, Truth, or Purpose “out there” for us to seek and find. The only “essence” or “truth” that exists is the kind that *we* create. In other words, if we set out to pursue Meaning and Truth outside of ourselves, then, according to existentialism, we are like the two men in Samuel Beckett’s play (page 15) who wait for Godot, who never comes. Existentialism says, “It is foolish to go looking for something (Meaning, Essence, Purpose) ‘out there’ that doesn’t
exist. Instead you should just create your own Meaning, your own Essence, your own Purpose, your own Truth.”

Study Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1-3.

**GENESIS 1:1**

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*

**JOHN 1:1-3**

1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* 2 *He was in the beginning with God.* 3 *All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

**+ QUESTION 6:** According to these verses, who or what was “in the beginning,” before any human being existed? How do these verses answer the claim of existentialism that human beings create their own truth and essence?

**QUESTION 7:** John Piper contrasts the Beatles song “Nowhere Man” with Bob Dylan’s song “Blowin’ in the Wind” (pages 15-17). When you read the lyrics of these two songs, what is the main difference that you notice between the viewpoints represented in them?
LESSON 2

DAY 4: LEARNING THE OBVIOUS

Read from the top of page 18 through page 22 and answer the following questions.

**QUESTION 8:** In this chapter John Piper compares his years at college learning the obvious to a fish that goes to school to learn there is water (page 18). Reflect on your formative years in high school or college. Have you ever had to “learn the obvious”? Describe your journey in the space below.

**QUESTION 9:** Do you consider yourself to be

A) a more logical and rational person,

or

B) a more emotional and playful person?

In your experience are these mutually exclusive options? Should we *strive* to combine them? Defend your answer.

On page 19 John Piper says (regarding C.S. Lewis):

He demonstrated for me and convinced me that rigorous, precise, penetrating logic is not opposed to deep, soul-stir-
ring feeling and vivid, lively—even playful—imagination. He was a “romantic rationalist.” He combined things that almost everybody today assumes are mutually exclusive: rationalism and poetry, cool logic and warm feeling, disciplined prose and free imagination.

*QUESTION 10:* Compare your answer from Question 9 to the following verses from the Bible.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:6

[Love] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

JOHN 4:23-24

23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

MATTHEW 22:35-38

35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And he said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment.”

How do these verses portray the relationship between head and heart, thinking and feeling? Underline phrases in these verses that address this question, and record your reflections below.
LESSON 2

DAY 5: REVIEW AND APPLICATION

Review your answers from the previous four days and any parts of Don’t Waste Your Life that you want and then answer the following questions.

+ QUESTION 11: What was the most meaningful part of this chapter for you? Was there a sentence, concept, or idea that really struck you? Why? Record your thoughts in the space below.

+ QUESTION 12: What questions, if any, do you have about the material covered in this chapter? Write them below, and bring them up in your small group time.

FURTHER UP AND FURTHER IN

Study the following verses from Romans.

ROMANS 1:18-23

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the
world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

**QUESTION 13:** In this chapter John Piper recounted how he went to school to “learn the obvious.” According to these verses, why is it obvious that there is “Truth” (with a capital T) in the world? Are men ignorant of Truth, or do they suppress Truth?

**QUESTION 14:** In your own words, restate the main point of Romans 1:18-23. How does this passage offer an explanation for the existence of different philosophies, religions, and worldviews that deny the existence of “the God Who Is There”?

Study the following verses from Exodus.

**EXODUS 3:13-14**
Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?”
LESSON 2

14 God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

QUESTION 15: According to this passage, God’s name is “I AM WHO I AM.” How does this verse respond to those who say that there is no Reality (Meaning, Essence, Purpose) until we create it? Where is Ultimate Reality found?

It is blasphemy to say that there is a higher reality than God to which he must conform in order to be holy. God is the absolute reality beyond which is only more of God. When asked for his name in Exodus 3:14 he said, “I am who I am.” His being and his character are utterly undetermined by anything outside himself.³

GROUP ACTIVITY

Complete this section during the group time each week.

Break into small groups, and share a small portion of your story from Question 1.

GETTING PRACTICAL

A suggested activity to do in the future: Begin to pray for a coworker, friend, or family member who doesn’t know Jesus. Pray that God would make his or her heart soft and receptive to the Gospel. Make it a regular practice to pray for this person. If you have a family, invite them to pray with you for this person.
NOTES
1. Questions marked with a cross (⊕) are questions that we deem to be particularly significant for group discussion. See the Leader’s Guide for more information.
2. The phrase “further up and further in” is borrowed from C. S. Lewis.