

CHAPTER ONE

Specific Knowledge: A Missing Link Between Your Real Life, Empowering Joy, And God's Glory

enjoyment [en'joimənt]

noun

1. the state or process of taking pleasure in something: the enjoyment of a good play-off game.
 - a thing that gives pleasure: he greatly enjoys 1964 Padrons, 50th Anniversary Rocky Patels, or an English blend in a nice piece of briar.
2. the action of possessing and benefiting from something: after dinner, we enjoyed discussing Romans 6:17.

IN MY YOUNGER DAYS, I WENT TO A LOCAL GOLF COURSE with a couple of guys I was mentoring. It became apparent at the first hole that while I might be of some help to them spiritually, I was a golfing liability. After I launched a third ball off the tee into a fine cluster of trees, a gentleman from the party behind us kindly suggested, "If you took some lessons, you might enjoy the game more."

Well, my drives haven't improved much over the years, but that piece of advice stuck with me and is a fundamental premise of this book: **Enjoyment is radically increased when we acquire essential knowledge about and skill in anything**

and everything we approach, including our hobbies, careers, relationships, and especially our relationship with God.

Happily, one of the things regaining popularity in Christian culture is an emphasis on our breath-taking purpose as men: to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Preacher and author John Piper significantly fueled this return with his helpful clarification that, “We exist to glorify God *by* enjoying Him forever.” In other words, while a vast blue ocean, or an orange-hued sunrise, a heart-stirring song, a ninth inning rally, or the right slice of cheesecake displays something of God’s greatness and goodness, we as humans have a unique capacity for making God’s glory known. In addition to housing a measure of His glory as the rest of Creation does, you can also project His glory by the joy you openly express when you encounter and acknowledge Him and His activity.

Glory is one those overlooked and overused words like “hal-lelujah,” or “exult.” Many of us have stood up in a worship service singing these kinds of words without having a blessed clue what they mean. I remember early on in my Christian life, looking at all the people around me one Sunday morning and having a Spirit-inspired question come to mind: What the heck does “We Lift Your Name on High” mean? Fortunately that morning, the pastor connected that phrase to the image of a King, sitting in a chair, being lifted up and carried in a public processional so his subjects could see and honor him. You may have had similar questions run through your mind about the phrase, “glorify God.” Bringing a little focus to a term like “glory” helps us better understand our purpose.

The biblical words that translate into our English word glory can signify a few things. With a debt to 18th century preacher and theologian Jonathan Edwards, glory can mean: 1) an internal quality or attribute of something or someone; 2) a quality or attribute that has been manifested, displayed, or communicated; 3) the perception or experience of what has been manifested; 4) the enjoyment of what has been manifested and perceived or experienced; and 5) the acknowledgment or praise offered in response to our enjoyment of what has been manifested and perceived.¹ Here's how I put this all together: Glory can mean anything from the actual goodness or greatness of something or someone, to the joyful acknowledgement of that goodness or greatness as it is displayed, perceived, and enjoyed. So, when you encounter God's goodness or greatness in some way that brings you enough enjoyment to praise Him, you are glorifying Him.

Let me bring some clarity to these five uses of the word glory by comparing them to something that every real man undoubtedly relates to... pizza. I love biting into a slice of New York-style, loaded with pepperoni, mushrooms, onion, and extra cheese. I have never, in thousands of meal choices felt anything but raw joy whenever I use my incisors to separate the tip of a slice of pizza from its wedge—usually folded—and sending that delicious morsel on its way to my stomach! Now that's what I call glorious, and it illustrates point 1—the internal quality or attribute of something or someone.

So I have a question for you. Can you now imagine Ralph Cuomo, the purveyor of the iconic Ray's Pizza in New York

City's Little Italy—spinning one of those original Ray's pies into existence? The recipe has been executed to manifest a form that displays the goodness and greatness of pizza. A single Ray's Pizza illustrates Point 2, a quality or attribute that has in some way been exhibited or displayed or communicated.

Every time you see, smell, touch, or—God be lifted up—taste this highest form of food, you'll be illustrating point 3, which is the experience of what has been manifested.

Moving on to Point 4, the enjoyment of a quality of a pizza that has been manifested and experienced, will naturally follow as all of your senses are overwhelmed with palatable delight.

Finally, your enjoyment of a mouth-watering slice of your favorite pizza will not be complete until you utter some appropriate expression of praise to acknowledge it, such as, "Mmmmmm," or "Thank You Lord," or "Clark, you wanna load me up with a little more there? It is goooooooood." This spontaneous reflex to joy illustrates Point 5, which is the expression or praise offered in response to a quality or attribute that has been manifested, experienced, and enjoyed.

What do you glorify by your enjoyment of it? Who and what receives your praise for the joy you derive from experiencing their or its "glory?" Ultimately, God deserves the highest praise. And He receives it from anyone tuned in to the reality that He's a much better source for enjoyment than anything else we may try. Our highest joy is in Him and in connecting Him to all our experiences and acknowledging Him with praise.

It is this added capacity to praise Him for all the goodness and greatness He communicates to us that renders us

different from the rest of Creation. Psalm 19, which states that “the heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork,” reminds me that millions of miles above the fire pit on my back porch, the heavens are displaying God’s majesty. Yet, those stars are completely unaware that they do this.

Likewise, the Saint Lawrence River in upstate New York has no way of knowing how dependably it reminds me of the restorative power of God’s presence. You and I, however, are different from these created things. We have the unique ability to experience God-inspired wonder beneath a crisp night sky, and to receive a moment of God-given rest each morning as we pan the surface of a calm river. And there—in the enjoyment of peaceful sighs and widened-eyes—His glory may be made known.

The problem for most of us is that we do not enjoy God as fully as we might. We fail to make the connections between what we experience and the God behind it. We interpret life and try to approach it with inadequate knowledge and awareness of Him and, therefore, are not able to receive the abundant satisfaction that awaits us in His presence.

What I’m eager to highlight at this point is that we cannot enjoy God as fully as we might without specific knowledge about Him. Like weekend warriors strolling out of the clubhouse with little knowledge about how to make a golf swing, which club to use, and how properly to tee up the ball, many Christians seek contentment and meaning in life without having any essential knowledge about God and how they can have a joyful relationship with Him.

I want you to possess, believe, and act upon revealed facts about God in order to enjoy Him and the way of life to which He invites us. You cannot fully enjoy what you do not know.

Think about your favorite hobbies or sports. How much time have you invested into learning the basic jargon and necessary skills associated with those activities. Have you ever tried to skip that phase?

Over the years, I have helped young aspiring musicians record in the studio. It can get pretty frustrating in the control booth when young artists have very little experience singing with headphones on or are clueless about what it takes to make a record.

I'll never forget a young man who was certain he only needed three hours to demo his songs and became somewhat irritated when I strongly suggested budgeting more time to record his six songs. I was praising God that I charged by the hour when he sang his last line... eighteen hours later. He was sincere and polite with a lot of potential, but he lacked the skills necessary to finish his work without a lot of frustration on his part and mine. It takes essential specific knowledge to achieve enjoyment.

Here's another example. What would you think of a novice baseball player walking on during Spring Training seeking to make a minor league team by stepping into the box and simply claiming the name of Derek Jeter as he tries to put his bat on a 95 mile-an-hour pitch? Sound ludicrous? No more so than when I hear Christians talk about following Christ in obedience or seeking victory and peace even though they have never learned about or encountered Him in His Word.

You may be thinking: *There are a lot of people who know a lot about God, but aren't enjoying anything in life, and seem especially annoyed when they suspect anyone else might enjoying something.* True. There are many weekend warrior Christians whose countenances could advertise commentaries on the Book of Lamentations and inspire makeup designs for *The Walking Dead*. To that point, theologian R.C. Sproul observes that: "As oxygen is necessary but not sufficient for a fire to ignite, so doctrine is necessary but not sufficient to light a fire in our hearts" ²

Mere knowledge about golf, singing, the great American pastime of baseball, or the Triune God of Scripture won't guarantee any measure of joy in experiencing them. This reality is confirmed every day by people whose study has brought them more arrogance than humility, but at the end of the day, essential specific knowledge is still indispensable for real, lasting satisfaction. It won't be the last step toward joy, but it must be among the first steps.

If you are a Christian, you must recognize that moving into a deeper satisfying joy in God can, and absolutely will, begin the moment you determine to put specific knowledge about God into your mind.

Perhaps it has never occurred to you to link your mind to your faith. Or, perhaps you have already attempted a so-called devotional life, but rather than feelings of joy, it brought a playlist of guilt and frustration. Perhaps you do have a growing interest in learning more about God and your faith but are not sure even how to set the pieces up on the Monopoly board. For whatever reason, you may count yourself among

those who struggle to acquire the kind of specific knowledge I'm talking about—the kind of Bible knowledge that actually helps you live your real life and truly encounter Jesus as a counselor, friend, King, Shepherd, Savior, brother, redeemer, and teacher.

If so, be encouraged. This knowledge is there, and God is not hiding it. Take in a deep breath of fresh hope. What you're about to learn in *Minding Your Faith* can lead you to game-changing joy in God and His design for living.

Know this—you are a page turn away from a time-tested, clear and compelling, personal and comprehensive set of steps that will position you to enjoy God more fully than you ever suspected, and bring Him more glory than you ever dreamed possible.

Summary

You have been created to glorify God through enjoyment, which differs from the rest of God's creations. Glorifying God involves acknowledging our enjoyment of Him in the various ways He has made Himself known to us. However, you cannot fully enjoy Him and thereby glorify Him without essential specific knowledge about Him that is found only in the Bible. The effective life-changing process for gaining this knowledge is what this book calls minding your faith.

Questions for Discussion

1. In the beginning of Chapter One we read, “enjoyment is radically increased when we acquire essential knowledge about and skill in anything and everything we approach....” Describe an episode from your own life in which you experienced the truth of this claim.
2. After reading this chapter, how would you, in your own words, define “the glory of God,” and its significance for your life?
3. Chapter One poses the question of who or what receives your praises for the enjoyment you derive from them or it. Can you relate this question to any times when you have offered God this kind of “reflexive response” to experiencing Him in some way?
4. What do you think God is saying to you through this chapter, and how might you respond?