

Introduction

The FDFD Story

“He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” Jim Elliot, Missionary

While attending college at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, California, someone introduced me to missionary biographies. The result was a new and rich explosion of appreciation for the lives of those who had found their joy in giving their lives to fulfilling the purposes of God. People like Jim Elliot, John Paton, Bruce Olson, Hudson Taylor, and Isabel Khun challenged me in ways I never thought possible. These men and women were

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servants of Christ in extremely difficult situations, and they loved it. I saw—maybe for the first time—that extreme sacrifice for the sake of spreading Christ’s fame could be done with a sense of delight. In other words, it was their pleasure to leave home and friends and family because Christ was worth it.

There was obviously a sense of sadness in leaving behind those so dear to them, but that sadness was overwhelmed by delight in doing what would bring God the most possible glory.

It hit me: this is what God is looking for—devotion to Him, not out of duty, but delight. I was hooked. Actually, I was spoiled and I was ruined. From then on when I heard a pastor or missionary talk about their sacrifices for the gospel while claiming that they “had no other option but to obey God’s call,” it upset me. Couldn’t they see that if they were doing what they did for God out of a sense of duty or obligation that that would certainly diminish the greatness of the one calling them to serve? I vowed to be the kind of pastor that got this right. I wanted to make sure that whatever I did in efforts to expand God’s kingdom on earth, I would do it with a smile on my face. I would do what I did not because I had to, but because “I got to.”

While working for a church in Bakersfield, California, I was introduced to the writings of John Piper. His book, *Desiring God*, and his concept of Christian Hedonism became my foundation to a philosophy of ministry that has now been implemented at South Mountain Community Church in Utah. Our mission statement is: “We exist to help as many people as possible take their next step in becoming fully devoted and fully delighted followers of Jesus Christ.” If you are familiar with Piper’s writing or speaking, you might hear echoes of his phrase, “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”

Having moved to Draper, Utah, in 1998 to plant SMCC, my wife and I observed that Utah was a land of highly devoted people—the people comprising The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS). This group represented the overwhelming majority of people living in Draper at the time. Their devotion to the church could not be doubted: callings fulfilled, tithing a full 10% of their income, Temple work (baptisms for the dead), and for many, the fulfillment of a two-year mission. No religious group of people I ever knew in California worked so hard. But there is something else I noted. They had very little, if any, joy in their devotion—they seemed exhausted by it all. They were nice people, but everything they did was out of a sense of duty and obligation. The Mormon church is well known for requiring the good works of their people in order for them to be deemed worthy of blessing in this life and the next. For those that understand *soteriology*, it is clear that they have a “works-based righteousness” approach to salvation.

I’m now into my 22nd year (2020) of pastoring SMCC and have seen hundreds of people leave the LDS church and commit themselves to the God of the Bible—the God of Grace—and Jesus Christ, who has always existed as God. These brave people have left the familiar world of “religion” and have experienced the Gospel joy of devotion with delight for the first time. The SMCC mission has turned into a movement of Gospel joy for hundreds of former Mormons and for those that they invite to live FDFD.

The study on which you now embark was originally designed for SMCCers. I’m convinced that we will see it spread to other churches as we become more convinced of the superior value of living FDFD. If that doesn’t happen, it will probably be because I haven’t explained the life of FDFD as well as I should have or could have.

The Essence of Living FDFD

“Most people are not on a truth quest, they are on a happiness quest.” Andy Stanley

Unfortunately, there is a nasty rumor going around that God doesn’t care if we’re happy as long as we’re holy. The problem with this kind of thinking is that it pits our happiness against our holiness. Again quoting Dr. Piper, the reality is that “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”

Let me explain what I think Dr. Piper meant by that. When we are devoted to Christ out of a sense of obligation, duty, fear, or a desire to obligate Him to bless us, the joy we thought was to be found in Christ will elude us. How we pursue a relationship with God is all important when it comes to our experience of joy as a Christian. In other words, God’s desire for us to be holy and our desire to be happy are NOT opposing goals. Full Devotion to God and Full Delight in God are meant to be experienced in harmony. The philosophy of life, and

the basis for this approach to discipleship that has come to be known as *Christian Hedonism*, is built upon three convictions recorded in John Piper's book, *Desiring God*.

1) The longing to be happy is a universal human experience, and it is good, not sinful.

Blaise Pascal, a famous French philosopher, mathematician, and theologian, once wrote:

"All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never take the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even those who hang himself." (*Pensées*).

2) We should never try to deny or resist our longing to be happy, as though it were a bad impulse. Instead, we should seek to intensify this longing and nourish it with whatever will provide the deepest and most enduring satisfaction.

C.S. Lewis, a professor at Oxford and Cambridge and popular theologian wrote this:

"If there lurks in most minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures,

fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." (*The Weight of Glory*)

3) The deepest and most enduring happiness is found only IN GOD; not FROM God.

Rapper Shai Linne said it best: "Don't be deceived by this funny biz (The Prosperity Gospel) If you come to Jesus for money Then He's not your God, Money is" (lyrics from "False Teachers")

He understands something fundamental to living FDFD: we must find our joy IN CHRIST, not in the things that HE GIVES US. That is the only pathway to lasting joy and satisfaction. Jesus said something to his disciples that I believe is, unfortunately, missed by many Christians today. Look at John 15:9-11 with me and see if you agree:

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

For those of you on a happiness quest, WELCOME HOME. Here is the good news that you have been looking for: when we pursue our ultimate joy in God, He will be honored and people will be loved.

... we must find our joy IN CHRIST, not in the things that HE GIVES US."

The pursuit of delight is a necessary part of all worship and virtue. Again, Mr. Piper has helped me see that, “The chief end of man is to glorify God BY enjoying Him forever.”

In the pursuit of a life that glorifies

In the pursuit of a life that glorifies God, we don't have to sacrifice the experience of joy.

God, we don't have to sacrifice the experience of joy. Think about it, when is a loved one most glorified? When they are loved freely and gladly or when they are loved out of a sense of duty and obligation? When we serve God out of a sense of delight,

He is seen by others as good and glorious.

I hope that after you complete this study, you will look back and say, “I didn't expect that full devotion to Christ would also result in my own personal joy and delight, but it does.” I want you to be as surprised at this realization as I was years ago. I'm convinced that the more people experience this reality, the more the world will see Christ in us and

want a relationship with Him. There is something very attractive about joy—everyone wants in on it!

Participation Guide

Visit <https://smccutah.wixsite.com/mysite-1/living-fdfd> in order to access each week's background reading, and video or audio sermons.

There is **HOMEWORK** each week. The expectation is that each participant will complete four days of thoughtful interaction with the material. The goal of this course is not to simply get through the material, but to be transformed by what you are learning. This will happen only if you make this a priority for the next six weeks.

The material in this course is laid out as follows:

Day One | Listen to a message that introduces and explains the major concepts that will be studied that week (except for Week 3).

Days Two, Three and Four | Read the material and interact by practicing the SMCC Method of Journaling (outlined below):

S = Scripture (Bible reading)

Besides reading the material supplied to you, take time to read and contemplate the Bible passages that are used for that day.

M = Meditate (Contemplation)

Don't let the word meditate scare you. If you know how to worry, you know how to meditate. When a Christian meditates on Scripture, they look for the goodness, the

greatness, the wisdom, and the power of God. When a Christian meditates on Scripture they look for ways to make what they read personal to their own life and situation. Meditation is a way that we invite the Holy Spirit to use God's Word to convince us of something that is important.

Psalm 1:1-2 says *"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, 2 but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night."*

C = Conviction (Something I will believe or do)

When we meditate on Scripture, we naturally learn and appreciate something that we didn't know before about God, ourselves, or our world. The idea of a conviction is that we take what we learn and ask the question, "So what? What are we going to do about what we have become convinced of?" A conviction is different from a preference in that we are changed by our convictions. I like what Jesus said in Matthew 7:24-27 to anyone who will listen:

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain

came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

C = Connect (with God through prayer)

The most important person that we can connect with each day is God. The way we connect is through prayer. A good discipline is to write down a short prayer:

...something you appreciate about God (perhaps something you learned from meditating on Scripture that day). This is an opportunity to be in AWE of God.

...something for which you are grateful.

...something you learned about yourself.

...something that you want to ask God to do for you.

Beyond the homework assigned and the group discussions that will take place each week, extra material can be found in the Appendix.

When You Meet

Each week, when you come together as a group (even if it is just you and a friend), be ready to participate. This material is designed for you to develop your own thoughts and convictions—and then to share those with the group. The Leader is not there to teach you, but to encourage you to grow by engaging with the material.