

The Easy Burden of Pleasing God

Patty Kirk

Reading Guide

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Dear Reader,

We have developed this reading guide to help you get the most out of *The Easy Burden of Pleasing God*. As you contemplate the Scriptures, stories and thoughts in each chapter, this reading guide invites you to reflect on your own experiences in order to develop a deeper understanding of God's nature and the work he requires. The questions and prayers are designed to be a beginning, not an end; we hope that they serve as prompts to a wide range of personal reflection and prayer. After you read each chapter, reflect on its Scripture reference and the correlating questions in the reading guide. As you come to the end of each of the four parts of the book, take some time to reflect and pray about that section, using the prayer we have provided as a starting point.

While this reading guide is comprised of questions for individual reflection, feel free to engage in these questions in a group discussion. View each question and prayer as a conversation starter for authentic discussion with the Lord or with others as you continue in your spiritual journey.

In the words of the author, "Let my stories, struggles, and research inspire you to come up with your own ways of taking Jesus at his word, your own way of allowing him to pull the plow through your rocky soil, your own way of believing ever more deeply in the exhilarating reality of his presence there beside you, doing it all."

Preface

Have you, like the author, ever felt frustration at the tension between the works that seem to be expected of believers and Jesus' promise of an easy burden and a light yoke? How have you sought to reconcile that tension?

Part I: God's Great Promises of Ease

Chapter 1: Love versus Rules

Exodus 20:2-5

Do you tend to think of God more as a loving parent or a tyrannical rule-giver? Explain.

How has your view of God affected your relationship with him?

Think of an experience or encounter you've had with Scripture. How did it change or challenge your ideas about God's nature?

Chapter 2: God's Work

John 6:28-29

Think of your story of coming to faith. How does it affect your views on the work of faith?

What are some expectations that you may have associated with loving God? How do those expectations fit with what the author identifies as God's expectations of us?

Chapter 3: The One Command of the One God Sent

John 15:10-12

Do you ever (consciously or not) try to add additional requirements to salvation and make it an achievement to be earned? Why do you think Christians tend to do this?

Chapter 4: A Little-Studied Message of Much of Scripture

Proverbs 13:25

What are some boundaries or rules in your life that you have discovered are actually for your good?

Think of a command in Scripture that you struggle to accept. Looking at it through the lens of this chapter, how might God have intended it to protect you and others?

Chapter 5: The Limits of Godly Work

Exodus 23:12

Kirk stresses that some limitations, such as those on forgiveness, actually promote freedom. What are some limitations on your life—whether on your resources, time, or energy—that are actually freeing? What is so liberating about these limitations?

Chapter 6: Invitations to End All Commandments

Proverbs 19:22

Think of some people in your life who need love. How can you embrace the invitation to love them?

Chapter 7: And the Second Is Like It

Matthew 22:37-39

Kirk writes that the command to love your neighbor is an explanation of how to fulfill the command to love God. Does this link between the two commandments change your view on either loving God or loving your neighbor? Explain.

Chapter 8: Free Indeed

John 8:31-36

As believers, we commonly live by a set of principles that we think are how we should behave. What are some good things that you do out of obligation rather than enjoyment? In light of these obligations, what does it mean to you when Christ promises freedom?

God, help me see the true nature of yourself and your commands. Show me how to love you by loving others in my life.

Part II: What Ease Might Look Like

Chapter 9: Choosing What Is Better

Luke 10:41-42

What kind of work are you doing in your life right now? When was the last time you simply sat at Jesus's feet and listened, as Mary did? What was that experience like?

Chapter 10: Giving Cheerfully

2 Corinthians 9:7

Do you enjoy tithing? What would help you to be a more joyful giver?

Reflect on how you feel when dispensing your time or resources. In what ways are you glad to spend these things?

Chapter 11: Resting

Genesis 3:8

What are some activities that you find fulfilling, enlivening and restful that may not be enjoyable in the same way to others? What do you appreciate about these activities?

Chapter 12: Yoked to the One God Sent

Deuteronomy 22:10

Reflect on the difference between working *for* God and working *with* God. Are there some situations in your life where you feel that you are doing the Lord's work but are not enjoying the pleasure of his presence? Which of these situations could you invite him into?

How might a co-laborer change the situation?

Chapter 13: Loving Siblings and Other Family Members

Genesis 32:9-11

Is there a family member in your life whom you have lost touch with? What steps can you take to reconnect with that person? In what ways can you show love to them?

What can you do to strengthen the relationships you already have with your family?

Chapter 14: Getting to Remorse

Luke 15:17-20

Is there anything in your life for which you need to express remorse? Come up with a plan for doing so.

How can you identify your blameworthy actions and exhibit true remorse more readily?

Chapter 15: Looking after Widows and Orphans and Other Needy Neighbors

James 1:27

Who is near to you—either geographically or relationally—whom you could care for and enjoy getting to know? Ask the Lord for creative ideas of how to simultaneously enjoy and care for that person.

Chapter 16: “I’d Rather Do It Myself”

Matthew 15:25-28

Are you ever reluctant to ask for help? Why or why not?

When do you find yourself wanting to do things on your own?

God, help me to give cheerfully, rest willingly and love unconditionally. Remind me to rely on you in all circumstances.

Part III: Clutching the Curse of Toil

Chapter 17: Good Works

Romans 7:15

Is there any so-called holy work you do that fails to fulfill you? Why do you think that is? Why do you continue to do it?

Chapter 18: Saying No

Ecclesiastes 2:22-23

Why is it so hard for us to say no? How can you better trust God to take care of what needs done, even if that means he uses someone else?

Chapter 19: Sacrifice

Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13 and 12:7

How might viewing the Bible as a rulebook affect your perception of love? When does love feel like a duty rather than a pleasurable gift? How can you change this perception?

Chapter 20: The Work of the One God Sent

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13

What areas of your faith have become burdens? Why, do you think?

In contrast, what are some instances in your life when you have felt sincere joy, regardless of the monotony of the task?

Chapter 21: Woe to Us

Luke 11:46

Have you set any unrealistically sacrificial goals for yourself? Do your expectations of yourself and others lead to guilt and stress instead of joy and contentment? What can you do to increase your joy and contentment?

Chapter 22: Knock Yourself Out!

Matthew 19:21

Do you have any work that is being impeded by an aspiration to perfection? What is it?

How does this chapter's explanation of Jesus's response to the rich young man help you understand Jesus's call to perfection in the Sermon on the Mount?

Chapter 23: The Bible Says

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Are there any scriptural commands—literal or not—that you strive especially to follow? Have any of these become more of a priority in your life than God's work of believing in Jesus? Which ones?

God, reveal any areas of my life where I need to do less. Help me trust that you are in control.

Part IV: Getting to Ease

Chapter 24: Entering God's Rest

Hebrews 4:9-11

Kirk writes that she learned how to love God involuntarily and effortlessly when she reflected on people who loved her that way, such as her daughters. Is there anyone in your life who has loved you effortlessly and involuntarily? Reflect on this love: how can you apply it to your relationship with God?

Chapter 25: Enjoying God's Bounty

Psalm 37:4

What is something God has provided that you naturally enjoy? How might that enjoyment become, for you, a way of loving God?

Chapter 26: Helping Jesus Help Us

Mark 9:21-24

Have you ever found faith difficult? Why? How does the simplicity of the suggestion in this chapter—to merely cry out in prayer—challenge you?

Chapter 27: Loving the Poor in Spirit

John 5:14

Think of some small, strategic ways that you can practice “petting the cat” with a friend or relative. Think of a few, because, as Kirk reminds us, it may take a series of trials to find the right small thing that communicates love and care to that person.

Chapter 28: The Secret of Being Content

Philippians 4:12

Do you tend to live more in the past, the future or the present? Where do you want to be?

Why might the present be described as “the promised land”? What are some steps you could take to get there?

Chapter 29: What My Dogs Know: *The Gospel of Rest*

Galatians 3:3

What does ceaseless toil take from your life rather than contribute to it?

What might rest offer instead?

Chapter 30: Walking on Water

Matthew 14:25-29

What is keeping you from surrendering to the kind of faith that Peter had when he stepped out of the boat?

God, help me surrender; help me let go of anything that is keeping me from following you wholeheartedly. Continue to lead me in the easy burden of pleasing you.