

# Life Abundant

by George Verwer

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*George Verwer's sermon emphasizes the paradox of experiencing sorrow while rejoicing in the abundant life found in Christ, encouraging practical actions and community support.*

**Duration:** 27:48

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 6:1

**Topics:** "Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on verse 10 of the Bible, which talks about being sorrowful yet always rejoicing, poor yet making many rich, and having nothing yet possessing all things. The speaker shares their personal testimony of their family immigrating to America in search of a better life, but finding disappointment and sorrow instead. They also mention a recent experience of witnessing women visiting a cemetery to remember a loved one, which leads them to reflect on the encouraging message of the verse. The speaker emphasizes the importance of finding reasons to rejoice, even in the midst of struggles and challenges, and shares their own determination to maintain motivation and joy in life.

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## Transcript

2nd Corinthians chapter 6. We then, as workers together with him, beseech ye also that you receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, in the day of salvation have I helped thee. Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.

Give no offense in anything that the ministry be not blamed. Very strong. But in all things commending ourselves as the ministers of God in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings, by pureness and by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report, as deceivers and yet true, as unknown and yet well known, as dying and behold we live, as chastened and not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.

Our God and Father help us to receive what you have for us in the final moments of this meeting. And Lord we thank you that you know everything about us and you love us still. We thank you for your great mercy, your great acceptance and the great reality that is ours, not in the absence of struggle and heartache and questions and doubts and fears and tears, but in the midst of those things, this great faith.

Through Jesus Christ, amen. In our brief time together in this passage of scripture, I'd like to just focus on verse 10. As sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing all things.

Remember in Sunday has always been a very important thing for me, as someone who in a sense immigrated to Great Britain and wasn't originally my native country. I'm sure you can guess by the accent that I was born across the water in the United States. For those of you who may be new to to me or to Operation Mobilization, I thought I would just give in a few words, a few sentences, paragraphs of my own testimony that my grandfather and father went from the Netherlands over to America to find the good life, but they didn't find it.

And my grandfather died somewhat of a miserable person and a drunkard. Well, that was my grandfather from Glasgow. Well, he wasn't a total drunkard, he was a heavy drinker, but he died an atheist.

My own father seemed to be seeking God, but ended up in a very wishy-washy church where they did not proclaim the saving gospel of Jesus Christ in a very clear way. I also went to that church, had religion but not reality. And surely religion is often the greatest enemy to spiritual reality.

An elderly woman who believed the Bible was God's Word began to pray for me, sent me a Gospel of John through the post, which led me to seeking God. And then through a meeting of Billy Graham in Madison Square Garden, I came to understand that Jesus Christ died on the cross for me and took that step of faith when I was born again. God did some amazing things in my grammar school.

Many of my fellow students came to Christ. A movement was born that later was to be called Send the Light, and after that, when it exploded in Europe, was to be called Operation Mobilization. But first it was to be Mexico, Christmas, summer, whenever I could get off college.

And then later, after college and a short time at Bible College, God sent my wife to Mexico and on to Spain. After a fiasco in the Soviet Union, and what thrilling news is coming from there during these days, God gave me this burden, Operation Mobilization, to see thousands and tens of thousands of Europeans mobilize to make an impact on continental Europe and all of Europe with the gospel, with the hope that this would flow over into the Soviet bloc. I believe that what's happening in the Soviet countries right now is specific, clear-cut answer to prayer.

We have prayed for these things for years. We have walked on that wall. We have been ministering in almost all of these countries, praying for more freedom, praying for God's people, and many other prayers.

Sunday is a time, this Sunday, a time of remembrance. It's become somewhat of a controversy, as some in Britain no longer want this particular Remembrance Sunday. And I was listening to some discussion on radio and a little bit, perhaps it was even on television, about Remembrance Sunday.

And I must confess that I am in the camp of those who feel that this is a good thing. I don't think it's a triumphalistic thing that we're celebrating war. There may be a few people intoxicated with that.

But for most people it is a sad event. It's a remembrance of so many who have died, so many who have given their lives, even as Christians with higher aspirations and the things of the Holy Spirit. Surely our feet are on the ground enough to know what it is to be a war widow.

And there are many war widows alive from those two wars in Britain today. This is the first year that the older veterans from the Great War, the First World War, the war to end all wars, are not marching. There are so few of them.

As so many have died, they made the decision not to have that historic march. And they showed some footage on television of last year's march. Such things are very moving to me.

I know I'm a bit of an emotional case. But I'd rather be a bit of an emotional case than someone who's unable to express emotion. Someone who's professional at repressing fear and hurt.

And when I think of those two wars, I want to weep. And I may weep before I'm through here this morning. In almost every town in Britain you can find a little monument with lists of names of people who gave their lives.

I think not only of those two wars, but so many other wars. The Boer War, the Crimean War, the wars there in the Northwest Territories with Afghanistan and India, the 1947 partition. Truly, a country that once had an empire that extended to one-fourth of the world's population should stop every once in a while and remember what happened.

There is a sense that all who are involved in war feel a twinge of guilt. It's not just those who backed Mussolini and backed Hitler, perhaps carry tremendous guilt. But it's those who have engaged in other wars that perhaps were unnecessary.

As an American, I am completely convinced that Vietnam was an unnecessary war. It's been one of the greatest, most difficult things for me to accept as an American. The Ho Chi Minh Trail documentary given this week on television is enough to cause any American to weep.

It was complicated. I'm not mega-judgmental about those who made the mistake, because history is a story of mistakes. It's quite amazing how some of these wars ever got started in the first place.

We make a tremendous mistake right now. If we think the coming down of the Berlin Wall, the changes in the Soviet Union, if all of these things mean that no war can possibly be ahead of us, that would be naive, both in terms of biblical knowledge and knowledge of history. It can happen again.

It can happen at any time. It could happen with the Muslims instead of the Communists or the Fascists. We, as God's people, should be among those who are more discerning and more able to stay free from various forms of naive thinking.

It's good to stop, as we did a few moments ago, and remember, especially those who have given their lives. But when I do that, I remember those who are still alive, who have battled years of loneliness because they lost their husband or wife during that war, or maybe a child. I tend to be a mega-pragmatic practical person.

Even earlier this morning I called a widow in Melbourne, Australia, who lost her husband in such a sudden way a few weeks ago. I speak of Archbishop David Penman, who was one of the main speakers at the Lausanne Congress, returned to Australia on October 1st, had a sudden heart attack as a relatively young middle-aged man, and is now in the glory. As I received a letter from her and was praying through it this morning, I decided to try to take a chance on my little cellular phone and see if I could talk to her, and I did.

Maybe you're not into calling Australia, but I wonder if you'd call a war widow somewhere in Britain today, someone you know, someone you've almost forgotten, or maybe a man who lost his wife in the bombings. Maybe someone else who's suffering, who's bereaved, may have nothing to do with the war. But as remembrance comes to your mind, to pick up that phone at a cheap rate on Sunday and pass on a word of encouragement could do a lot.

Life is not mainly big things, my brothers and sisters. Life is mainly little things. And there's many a church in a mess because God's people don't have a vision for little things.

Some people will be visiting war cemeteries today. And I think that's something that is often very, very touching. Sometimes in the morning when I'm out running, I remember especially in Germany, it's just vague in my mind, no, it was Switzerland, some months ago I was running early in the morning and women in black were climbing up this hill and going into the cemetery, obviously to remember a loved one.

This leads me to this great verse that has been such an encouragement in my life. There have been times in my life when the news of what's going on in the world, my knowledge of history as I was a student at the University of History, my visits to some 60 different nations where I've ministered, the refugee camps I've seen, the suffering, the imprisoned, we have 500,000 prisoners in the United States, the drug addicts, the drunkards who I've worked among over the years, has been so overwhelming to me that I have almost completely given up, completely given up. I'm the kind of character that's lived at times for days on the precipice of agnosticism.

Reminds me of the rock climbing I used to do with my son, Benjamin, my older son. So we got the helmets and the ropes and the carabiners and all this equipment and we went out into the Welsh mountains and almost got ourselves killed. I gave that up.

I'm willing to take risks for the kingdom, but I'm not sure if I'm willing to take risks for that particular sport. Sorrowful, verse 10, yet always rejoicing. As I touched on last night, there is a legitimate place for sorrow.

If you feel led, as I know my father often does since my mother died a year ago, to go out to a cemetery and to weep a little over a loved one, provided it's kept within some degree of balance and does not lead you to some form of neurosis, there is certainly nothing wrong with that. For us to visit one of the war memorials in our town and to just pray a few prayers and perhaps with it a covenant that we believe in peace. We are against war.

That doesn't mean we're pacifists. That doesn't mean we're against a nation having unarmed forces. I happen to be a little bit in the camp that believes that history shows that armed forces are necessary.

Maybe you don't believe in the doctrine of the just war, and I will not get into that heavy subject this morning, especially as an American, I would get in deep water. I was preaching about being a soldier of Jesus Christ in one little sleepy Anglican church and got a very strong note, how dare I mention such things as war or being a soldier in the church. Of course, onward Christian soldiers in many churches is now anathema.

Such terminology is not acceptable by mega-pacifists who believe that all armies and all bombs should be banned. We of course should all believe in that, but how does that happen? How does that happen? Do you think the Ayatollah, now dead, and his followers are going to stop gathering armaments because somebody in Lancashire decides to be a pacifist? Come now, none of us are that naive. There is a

legitimate place for sorrow.

There's a legitimate place for grieving. When churches go through a heavy, difficult experience and there's crises, there are people that may lose their faith. There are people that may become casualties.

There is a process of grieving. It is normal. Some will grieve more than others, but we must never remain there.

We must leave the cemetery of grieving. We must leave the war memorials, speaking of dead people, and we must live our lives, and we must live our lives to the fullest. For the Word of God says that Jesus Christ, John 10.10, has come that we may have life and that we may have it in abundance.

This particular verse points out one of the greatest paradoxes in the whole of the Bible. And if any of your children know what paradox means, the older children are with us now, please explain it to them. It's an apparent contradiction.

It's something that looks like it is a total contradiction, but it's not. Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. And I think this is so important for those of us who are committed realists.

Some places I go, Christians seem to be committed to optimism at any cost. Don't talk about anything negative. Believe only the best no matter what's happening.

Never confront anyone about sin. Never have any discipline in the church, etc., etc. Surely that's not the road of reality or revival or spiritual victory.

We, as God's people, should be committed to honesty. Honesty is often the first step to revival. Honesty is often the first step to renewing our marriages, which so easily go through difficult times.

Honesty is often the key to renewing relationships with our own children. I have perhaps had the most touching moving letter from my second son, Daniel, that I have ever had just two days ago. As God gave him the grace to be honest, and God gave me at times also the grace to be honest.

Do not be surprised when problems, seemingly unsolvable problems, come into your home. I was with a Christian leader two days ago who was sharing with me that his older son has gone completely bananas. He's unable to communicate to him.

He's left the Lord and he, I believe this young man had been in OM for a time. OM is no guarantee you're going to go on for God. No movement, no church, no formula, no book, no conference, not even any one spiritual experience is a guarantee that you'll go on for God.

It's a daily walk we have. God doesn't have any grandchildren. I now have one.

I'm so proud of little Emily Ann. I'm just getting about 50 photographs made of Emily and I together. If you want one, you can write to me.

One quid a photo. No. Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.

Whatever sorrow may be on our hearts as we think over the past year and now over the past decade as it soon will be 1990. Just think of that. Just let that sink in.

1990. Doesn't that motivate you? Isn't that one of the most important parts of our Christian life to stay motivated? I may talk a little bit about that tonight. If Satan gets my motivation down, anything can happen to me.

Anything can happen. So I don't allow my motivation to go down. I fight.

I kick. I scream. I roll.

I sing. I jump. I go swimming.

I go on roller coasters. I've been on nine more roller coasters since I was last with you. Just happened to be that my meeting in Dallas, Texas was right behind the biggest amusement park in the city.

I mean, if anything was God's providence, it was that. Even though I finished the meeting at 11 o'clock at night, it was a banquet. The amusement park was still open.

I hit three of the world's biggest roller coasters before I got to bed last night. By the way, Manchester can never be classified as a super mega city until it gets a proper, really hair-raising, mind-bending, foot-shaking roller coaster. Maybe you have one.

I just missed it. Sorrowful yet always rejoicing. One of the reasons Christians often continue in discouragement and depression and ongoing sorrow that's hindering their behavior is because they have never gathered from the Word of God a strategy for staying motivated and a balance of strategy that will have the right mixture of the spiritual and the practical.

I don't know if any of you were at the Keswick Convention when I spoke on the Book of Kings. The spiritual factor when the fire came down in answer to Elijah's prayer and the human factor when Elijah is found under a tree wanting to commit suicide. There they are, right in the middle of that book.

And God didn't bring Elijah a great revival or a great exhortation or a new Christian manuscript. God brought Elijah some food and some rest and some more food and some more rest. One of my mechanisms for survival, especially when I was living in high-pressure days as the director of the ship Lagos on the maiden voyage around Africa with millions of Christians watching and quite a few sensing it would be a fiasco.

The pressure, the difficulties we had on the ship, I developed a mechanism that perhaps enabled me to survive those years. Whenever I felt too much pressure, I couldn't go any further, I'd go to sleep. Right after lunch I'd slip into my cabin, put a sign on the door, don't touch, danger, high explosives, handle with care, and I'd go to sleep.

Now not everybody has that gift. I inherited it maybe from my father. But it's a beautiful thing at night, and we all have to sleep eventually, to know that we can cast every care upon Him.

Surely worry is causing more difficulty among the people of God than immorality, or maybe even gossip, though the two are often linked together. And many people are in the grip of heartbreaking experiences. They're in the grip of their own problems because they've never developed a balanced strategy for survival.

Maybe they have the idea that the Christian life is always way up here, constantly rejoicing in Christ, some Concord laser beam 32,000 feet nonstop epistle of joy and happiness and wonderful experiences day by

day. Now maybe that's your situation. It's all getting more and more wonderful every day.

Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before, fine. You never have any setbacks, any heartbreaks, any difficulties. I'd like you to sign right here in the back of my Bible, right here.

Hypocrites, sign here. We all struggle. We all fail.

We all have a fluctuation in terms of our vitality, our motivation, our vision. Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. There are many reasons to rejoice, even on a practical level.

What God is doing in the world today, the lives that are being changed, the people that are being saved, those that were saved through the live link and are going on today, just as I was saved through Billy Graham 33 years ago and have been going on every single day ever since. What's happening in the communist countries is a cause for rejoicing, but the growth of the church in the Soviet Union, the growth of the church in China, the phenomenal growth of the church in other parts of the world is even a greater cause for rejoicing. The way God works in our lives, even failure can be the backdoor to success.

Men who have had enormous failure in their ministry and could only see a great black hole at that moment were restored and then later used in unique and unusual ways that they would have never gone into if somehow the bottom had not dropped out of what they were doing in the first place. As God's people, we get stuck. We've had people get stuck in Operation Mobilization and we could see they were lacking zip and vitality and God allowed their little world to cave in and after it caved in, a whole new ministry was born and a number of early OM leaders who wanted to stay long term with us.

It was only through their world sort of dropping from under them that they went through a time of crisis and struggle and difficulty and some failure and later were used to start whole new ministries. I think of one that now has 150 people alone working among Muslims and he was one of those who felt he must be in OM for life. I'm glad he didn't stay.

I'm glad he didn't stay. Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. Our, of course, bottom line rejoicing comes because of Jesus Christ living in us.

Even when we are feeling miserable, we can experience a degree of praise. Many young people feel guilty because they don't like to go to church and some parents are professionals at making them feel more guilty. It's quite normal, my friends, not to feel like going to church.

The Christian life is not mainly going to church. There may be a time when the Lord actually tells you to stay home and sleep in and get a little rest, maybe listen to the message later on, on cassette tape. If I were a pastor of church, I would close it down some Sunday mornings, that's why I'll never get to be a pastor, and send them all out in evangelism because we seem, as Christians, to be generally somewhat faithful in church attendance, but generally miserable in reaching out to raw, unconverted people who are all over the place, even Sunday morning these days, in the marketplaces and the golf courses and in the parks and everywhere else.

Sometimes it's good to just break out of our church mentality and spend more time with unconverted people, whether it's in a park or a bus or a train or in their homes or they in our homes, for without that kind of breaking out, we are destined to develop ghetto mentality that eventually will lead us to some kind of spiritual ostriches with our heads perpetually in the sand. That's another whole message. There's not time to give it this morning.

I thank God for this great paradox. We are sorrowful concerning those wars, concerning all of that death, concerning what's happening in the world right now, in Beirut, in Kampuchea, Cambodia, in Afghanistan, in South Africa, Nicaragua, there's so much suffering, and we feel that when we watch it on television. Our hearts are broken almost every day as news comes over the telephone and through letters to us.

Some of you know we have one of our own men who's been missing for eight years there, working among the Afghans who probably has been murdered. He's left a wife with two children and she's about to have another one next month. There is legitimate sorrow for all of us who live on this planet, but there is rejoicing.

We know there is an ultimate glorious plan by a sovereign almighty God that we can never fully grasp here. We see through the glass darkly. There is an ultimate plan.

There is an ultimate destiny for all of God's people, and we have to put the mystery factor of all that in God's hands, knowing he who created this great universe and created us knows what we need to know and what we don't need to know in order to live godly, Christ-like lives that glorify him. Let us pray. Our God and Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for the reality of your Son Jesus Christ living in us. You know those that are carrying special burdens this morning, those that may have special sorrows, struggling with particular emotions and difficulties, and we pray that each one from your holy word would develop a biblical strategy for maintaining their motivation, a biblical strategy for marathon running, that we may understand the paradox of this great scripture, that we as your people, as soldiers of your Son Jesus Christ in this great spiritual warfare, are sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. We thank you for this great truth, and we want to make ourselves available to you to be your witnesses here in Manchester and throughout the world, to be involved in this great spiritual revolution of justice and righteousness and truth and salvation, and to be a vital committed part of spreading the gospel to every part of this world, even where millions have never once heard, never held a Bible or read a gospel tract.

Grant us increased vision, increased spiritual dynamic, and great faith to do this task. In Jesus' name, amen.

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