

Beholding Glory and Becoming Whole

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God's pursuit of our praise for His glory, highlighting the need to feel loved by God in a way that aligns with praising His grace rather than seeking self-affirmation. It delves into the transformative power of beholding the glory of God and how it leads to mental health and wholeness. The implications discussed include the profound effect on understanding God's love, the significance of feeling loved by God, and the supernatural work required for this counterintuitive concept to take root.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:6, Ephesians 2:4, Ephesians 1:17, 2 Corinthians 3:18, John 1:14, Psalm 139:23, Matthew 11:28, Mark 9:24, John 14:1

Topics: "God's Pursuit of Praise", "Transformative Power of God's Glory"

Description

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Transcript

I feel honored and humbled and vulnerable and exposed to speak to the American Association of Christian Counselors. I don't think I could think of any other audience that would be more likely to see straight through a speaker than you would. And I take that to be a good thing.

It puts hypocrisy on the table immediately. It makes true horizontally what we all know is true vertically all the time, namely God knows totally all the time whether any speaker is a fraud or a hypocrite. So you may as well know as well if he knows.

It's a wake up call to speak to people like you. I've never done anything like this before. A wake up call to the realities of pretense in my life, suspecting that any attempt at schmoozing would be known right away.

So I thought I would spare you the analysis and just go ahead and tell you up front that I'm a sinner. And I'm a man who, to be more specific, must crucify the love of praise every day. A man who struggles with the same 15-year-old adolescent fears at age 63, namely the fear of looking foolish.

A man who is prone to self-pity and who feels it quickly when he doesn't get loved the way he wants to be loved. Who's almost never sure of the way he uses his time and therefore pretty regularly is all dealing with guilt feelings. A man who is short on compassion and long on critical analysis.

A man who is prone to freeze up emotionally when he's tired and then feels instinctively justified in blaming it on somebody else. A man who loves to praise God in the Great Assembly and feels a constraint on my spirit in my own living room. A man who has loved his wife for over 40 years imperfectly and spent three of those years with a Christian counselor trying to learn how to be Christ and the church to each other.

A man who never feels sure of his motives, including the ones I feel right now about why I'm doing this. And you're a very strange audience because I totally did not expect laughter. And I'm continually perplexed.

So I guess I'd better just get used to it. This is a serious talk in case you wonder. But this is strange.

So if you just kind of get it out of your system, I know that you've been set up for an hour and a half maybe a little differently, but I'm just not used to being laughed at, you know. So at one level, I thought maybe the reason I just did what I did was because I wanted you to be open to what I have to say and I thought if I'm open with you, you might be open to what I have to say. At a deeper level, which I hope is true also, I list those absolutely true, absolutely serious, and though they make you laugh, they make me cry.

And I mean that, so you've got to stop laughing like that. I just don't understand you folks. I mean, I'm going to stop telling you not to laugh because we're creating a real guilt situation here.

My other reason for telling you the list of the besetting sins that I could think of in my life is because I want you to know as I begin that I love grace. I love the grace of God. I desperately need the grace of God every day of my life.

And so I'm not talking hypothetically about grace. So since I'm so needy of grace, and we have a few minutes left to deal with this, let me pause and thank the Lord for it and pray for His help. Would you pray with me? Father, I do have an affection in my heart for these folks and long for them to be helped.

They are people helpers, and I would like to help some people, helpers help people better. And so God, would You come and fill me now with Your Holy Spirit. I so much need You.

I have given thought to what I should say, but I want so much to be tuned in to this people. So draw near, and we thank You for grace. Where would we be? There would be no laughter on our lips at all if there were no grace.

And so come and fill us with a sense of gratitude and fill us with a sense of expectancy and grant us hearts that can discern the glory of Your grace. I pray now in Jesus' name, Amen. Before I take you to Ephesians and fulfill some of the promises that I made in the schedule, I want to go with you to the text that Tim already looked at and just show you how the conference text in John 1.14 says what I intend to say from Ephesians 1. Sometimes it helps to have the same point made from different passages of Scripture.

I've shifted my focus from what was announced. I gave the title, The Immeasurable Power of Grace, and my focus has shifted onto the glory of grace because that's what's in my text, obviously the one I've chosen to focus on in Ephesians. But first, let me read the text again from John 1 and sum up all that I'm

going to say in about two minutes from this text and then go and do it again more lengthy from Ephesians 1. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And then dropping to verse 16, and from His fullness, and there's the connection, that's a really important connection, 16 up to 14, from His fullness, the fullness of grace and truth, from His fullness, we have all received grace upon grace. So, when Jesus showed up, when the Son of God came on the planet, those who had eyes to see saw divine glory. Not everybody saw it.

The Pharisees didn't see it, which is why Jesus said, seeing they do not see. Seeing they do not see. And why He said to Peter, flesh and blood hasn't revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven has revealed this to you.

In other words, the glory that you're seeing, My own, My sheep, hear My voice, they see My glory, the glory that you're seeing is a gift to you. God is opening the eyes of your heart. And what you're seeing is glory.

And then He adds, and from the fullness of the truth and the glory that you're seeing, the truth and the grace that you're seeing, which is glorious, divine glory, in this grace and truth, the fullness is being poured out in grace upon grace. Now the only thing I would add to that obvious truth from John is this. I want to make the connection explicit as I understand it.

That when He says we have seen His glory, we have beheld His glory, full of grace and truth, and then says from that fullness, we have received grace upon grace, transforming grace. The link between the receiving of life-changing grace and the seeing of divine glory is the seeing. The link is the seeing.

In other words, when by God's Holy Spirit, revelatory power, our heart's eyes are enabled to see in the Man, Jesus Christ, the glorious God of Heaven, when that happens, it's as though a beam of divine glory shines down into our hearts. And along that beam of seeing comes grace upon grace. There isn't another channel.

If you don't see it, the grace doesn't abound. Our great task as pastors and counselors is to help people see. Another place where this is spoken is 2 Corinthians 3.18. This is probably one of the most important verses in the New Testament.

From my understanding of how people change, beholding the glory of the Lord, we are being changed, transformed into His likeness from one degree of glory to the other. The participle beholding is the means by which being transformed happens. That's what I'm saying John meant in John 1.14-16. We beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth, and from that fullness, we have received grace upon grace.

How? Seeing. Seeing the glory. The people in your office and in my church that don't see it, don't taste grace yet.

So there it is from John 1.14. The title, if I were choosing the title for this message now instead of three months ago, which is always impossible for me, would be, Beholding Glory and Becoming Whole. That would be my title. Then the subtitle would be, Seeing and Savoring God is the Heart of Mental Health.

There's my title and subtitle. I'm just going to tell you now, to save you some note taking, if anything I say sounds like writing down, I'm going to post this at Desiring God by Friday morning with everything I have to say here and all the text. You can just relax now and just listen carefully and not think, oh, I should write anything down.

So there it'll be and I ask the guys to do it. DesiringGod.org It'll be up there for you to look at by Friday morning. So let's go to Ephesians now.

I don't know if you have Bibles or could see them if you did, but you don't need to have them. You can listen. I think I'll be able to help you along without your looking at a Bible.

I'm in Ephesians 1-2 and I want to say again everything I just said in the last few minutes. In Ephesians 1-4-6, Paul says the most ultimate thing he says anywhere. It carries us from eternity past to eternity future and it carries us from ultimate causes in the past to the ultimate goal in the future.

And I'm especially keen on the ultimate goal. I want to know why I exist. I want to know why history exists.

I want to know why Jesus came into the world. I want to know why the world is running the way it's running. I want to know why God's doing what He's doing.

And the ultimate answer is in verse 6 of Ephesians 1. So I'm going to read to you Ephesians 1-4-6. God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love. In love, He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of His will and here's the ultimate phrase, unto the praise of the glory of His grace.

And you can hear the two words coming down from John 1-14. Unto the praise of the glory of His grace. That's a better, more literal translation than unto the praise of His glorious grace.

Almost all versions translate it that way. It's not an adjective. And I think something is keenly lost when the word glory becomes an adjective here, so check out your Greek and if you can't, you'll have to take my word for it.

Unto the praise of the glory of Your grace is the ultimate goal of your existence and everybody who walks into your office. That's really important. God has done everything.

Election, holiness, blamelessness, predestination, adoption, bringing it all to pass through Jesus Christ unto the praise of the glory of His grace. You and everybody you will ever counsel was made for the praise of the glory of the grace of God according to Ephesians 1-6. And He says it twice again in chapter 1 lest we miss it.

Verse 12, so that we who first hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. Amazing! You are to the praise of His glory. You are for the praise of His glory.

Or verse 14, the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it unto the praise of His glory. Your inheritance is to spend eternity praising the glory of God. That's why you were created.

God is honored and you are made whole. I just presume that praising people, if the praise is rooted authentically in truth, are more whole than people who don't praise. So the beauty of the way God has set it up is that He is in existence to be glorious and we are in existence to glorify His gloriousness.

To praise His gloriousness so that His reason for being, if you could speak of such a thing, of one who never came into being, His reason for being and our reason for being happen in the same event. Namely, authentic, heartfelt praise of His grace. The glory of His grace.

The ultimate meaning of human wholeness is the praise of the glory of the grace of God. If praising God's glory is our final destiny, which 1.6 says it is, then savoring it, savoring God's glory, seeing God's glory, praising God's glory is at the heart of what it means to be human. What it means to be holy human.

What it means to be a healthy human. I can't imagine that God would say, your ultimate destiny is the praise of the glory of My grace and you'd be a really incomplete human if you did that for all eternity. That would make no sense at all.

Therefore, to be whole, to be complete as a human being is to live into this destiny. Now C.S. Lewis, one of my heroes, said that even among ordinary praising in the world, it points to this. Let me read you the key text.

This text made a huge impact on me, theologically, about 40 years ago. The most obvious fact about praise, whether of God or anything, strangely escaped me. I had never noticed how all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise.

Unless, sometimes even if, shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it. The world rings with praise. Lovers praising their mistresses.

Readers their favorite poet. Walkers praising the countryside. Players praising their favorite game.

Praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians and scholars. I had not noticed how the humblest... Here's the point. I had not noticed how the humblest and at the same time, the most balanced and capacious minds praised most, while the cranks and the misfits and the malcontents praised least.

Now, careful here. The point of this message, my message, is not that praise is a technique for becoming healthy. There are such things in the world.

That's not what I'm saying. Authentic, heartfelt, truth-based, God-centered praise can't be a technique. In its very nature, it cannot be performed as a means to anything.

Period. It is an end in itself. Men, say me, I cannot say to my wife, Noelle, I really delight in you so that you will make my favorite supper.

I cannot say to her, I praise you so that I can become a healthy person. Praise doesn't work like that. That's a performance.

That's not praise. Praise is either spontaneous, authentic, truth-based, or it's a charade. It cannot be a technique for becoming healthy.

My point is not to make praise into a technique for becoming a healthy person. My point is to say that praising the glory of the grace of God is the apex of human wholeness. Not the pursuit of it.

Praising the glory of God's grace is the all-satisfying goal of human life. Not how you get there. And seeing that glory in the person and the work of Jesus is the way that grace upon grace to change us comes into our lives.

Beholding the glory, we are becoming whole. Beholding, we are becoming whole. And as we become whole, praise becomes real.

You can't turn it around and make praise the technique of becoming whole. Being whole is from seeing glory, which is a wonderful miracle of God. We beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth, and from seeing it, grace has flowed into our lives.

Rising up is a life not of a malcontent or a misfit or a crank, but a whole and healthy and discerning and beautiful and wise and humble and sensitive and kind and gracious and outgoing and capacious human being called a Christian. The glory of the Lord, beholding, we are being changed from one degree of glory to the next. Okay, there's my main point.

Now I want to draw out three implications, two of them medium size and one short. Here's the first one. If all of that that I just said is true, if God's ultimate goal in history, in redemption, in the work of Christ, in the work of history, in your family, in your personality, in your genetic makeup, if His ultimate goal is that you be a praiser, one who praises the glory of His grace, and if mental health has its heart in seeing and savoring the glory of that grace which gives rise to that praise, then implication number one is that it has a profound effect on the way you understand God's love for you.

Now, just a little parenthesis here. Stay with me for 10 or 15 more minutes. This is where this message started.

Right here. Everything else I said, okay, I'm supposed to do this, so I need to get to here. This and the next point are the two places where I said, I've got a word for these people.

I want to say something to 6,000 counselors. Now I'm going to start exhorting. I'm going to start meddling.

So, I'm arguing that everything I just said, which I think is faithful to Ephesians 1, faithful to 2 Corinthians 3.18, faithful to John 1.14-16, and elsewhere, has some implications that will rock the counseling world, at least for many. I know many who are ahead of me on this, way ahead of me on this, and I don't consider myself a gifted counselor at all. My reputation is not warm and fuzzy.

People do not stream to my office for counsel. So you'll have to listen to this sinner still. Here is the implication for the love of God.

What is the love of God for you and those whom you counsel if what I've said is true? The love of God is His relentless pursuit of your praise. And He will do anything, including kill His Son to get it. He relentlessly is pursuing the praise of His people because their mental health consists in praising Him.

Their ultimate destiny in all joy is praising Him. And if He loves them, He must pursue with all that is within Him their praise of His glory. He labors to display Himself to us because seeing and savoring and praising God is the apex of our wholeness and the heart of our mental health.

Now, let's stay in Ephesians and let me show you this link between love of God and display of glory for His praise from chapter 2, verses 4-7. Here we go. I'll read it.

Ephesians 2-4 But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love... Now, get that. That phrase doesn't occur again in the Apostle Paul. The great love.

What's he going to say? What does the great love consist in here? But God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive. Why? Made us alive together with Christ by grace we've been saved and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places. Why? Why? We haven't gotten to the end.

We don't have a reason yet. We don't know what it's all about yet. Verse 7 So that, in the coming ages, He might show... pause... deignum me.

Deignum me doesn't mean show grace, show kindness, like do grace and do kindness. It means show, like prove and display and manifest. That's what endeignum me means.

Let me start over again. So that, in the coming ages, He might show, display, manifest the immeasurable riches of His grace. Forever.

More and more and more. Because He has designed you not to be static in the age to come. Like the moment He returns, we're changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye and we never grow anymore.

Our capacities for knowing Him and loving Him don't increase. I don't think so. A finite human heart cannot capture all that an infinite God is.

He'd explode. But there can be an infinite growth because a finite mind and heart cannot see and savor and praise all that God has to reveal, because He's infinite and we're finite. But we can grow and grow and grow forever and never be God.

That's crucial that we never be God. We will find new joy in His glorious grace every day forever. Like a mountain range of Himalayas, you work for 10,000 years to pull yourself up over the first magnificent range that's 10,000 miles tall, and as you pull yourself up over the edge looking back over 10,000 years of gratitude, another range, and then another range, and another range, forever and ever and ever.

And we will never, ever be bored in Heaven. There will be no slightest lack of enthusiasm for God in the age to come. We will praise the glory of His grace more and more, better and better, fuller and fuller, forever.

Now, that is what God is pursuing when Paul says, with a great love He loves us. So I'm arguing, implication number one, that if you want to mediate the love of God to your counselees, you will help them understand that God is ultimately at great cost to Himself pursuing their praise for His glory, especially the glory of His grace. That's implication number one.

Implication number two gets even more delicate. What does it mean, therefore, to feel loved by God? That's huge in counseling. I assume you would agree.

I want my people to feel loved by God. Feel loved by God. Thoughts about God don't change behavior.

But, they might direct you where awakened feelings could happen. But feeling loved by God, what is that? What is that? That may seem obvious to you. I think we, me, I, and you, we are always drifting away from the spiritually obvious to the naturally desirable.

Especially if in a counseling setting, the naturally desirable works. It works. They're staying married.

They're off drugs. It's working. We are spring-loaded.

I speak for myself. I assume you're human with me. We are spring-loaded in our sin to feel loved by God when He endorses my desire to be made much of.

I am spring-loaded to interpret God's love for me as an endorsement of my desire to be made much of. Now, here is Jonathan Edwards. I too love dead theologians.

And this is my favorite dead theologian outside the Bible. And he gave this horrifically devastating analysis of contemporary efforts to help people feel loved by God. True saints have their minds in the first place, inexpressibly pleased and delighted with the sweet ideas of the glorious and amiable nature of the things of God.

So, true saints delight in God. Joy is flowing from seeing and savoring the glory of the grace of God. And this is the spring of all their delights and the cream of all their pleasures.

But, the dependence of the affections of the hypocrite is in a contrary order. They first rejoice that they are made much of. And then, on that ground, God seems in a sort lovely to them.

That's my concern. Pervasively in America today, in preaching and counseling, are we helping people feel loved with the kind of love that's been emerging in this message? Or, are we helping them feel loved by interpreting the love of God as the endorsement of my passion to be made much of? Now, do we make clear, over and over again, yes, they should feel loved because Christ died for them. Yes, they should feel loved because they were undeserving when He died for them.

Yes, they should feel loved because their sins are forgiven and because the wrath of God has been taken away. Yes, yes, yes, yes. But, to what end? And here, that's my burden.

If you take anything away, to what end? Do they get that? Do they move? Or are they filling in the blanks right there with their old nature? Are they saying, He died for me to make much of me. He rescued me while undeserving so He could make much of me. He forgave me to make much of me.

He removed the wrath of God to make much of me. Oh, how glorious is such a Gospel! I feel so good when He loves me that way. And who doesn't? Who doesn't? There's just no supernatural whiff about it.

It's totally natural. No one has to be born again to believe in a God who simply endorses their passion to be made much of. That's not to the praise of the glory of His grace.

It's all to the praise of the glory of His affirmation of me. How I love God! Because I feel so affirmed in His presence. And here the question's rising.

So that's my second implication. And now we're on to a short one. Restate the second one.

Feeling loved by God means feeling glad not only that He crushed His Son so that I could be forgiven, but that He is crushing every single desire in my life that competes with the pleasure of praising the glory of His grace. Finally, very briefly, last implication. This is so unnatural.

This is so counterintuitive that the love of God would be the pursuit of His own praise, because my praising is my wholeness, and that being loved, feeling loved, is feeling that He is on the war path in my life to crush everything that would militate against my fullest seeing and savoring and praising of His grace. This is so counterintuitive to the natural man that there's only one hope for counselors, and that is the supernatural work of God in the hearts of your people. And to be very practical for Paul, and I'll take you to one more text and we'll be done.

For Paul, that meant prayer. Prayer. So read with me or listen to me.

Ephesians 1, verses 17-18. So right in the middle of this unbelievably weighty theology, starting in verse 3 and going down through verse 14 and then picking up again as he comes to the end of verses 17-18 and into chapter 2, right in the middle is a prayer. And listen to what he prays.

And who of us has not prayed this for the intractable problems we meet in our churches and in our offices? Here's the way he prays. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, don't miss that, that the Father of glory may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation. You pray that for your folks? A spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

That's why you want them to have this spirit to know the Father of glory. They can't know Him if this prayer isn't answered. God gives the ability to know God.

I'll keep reading. And having, I pray that you would have the eyes, this is verse 18 of chapter 1, the eyes of your hearts enlightened. It's not the eyes in your head.

They're going to sit there looking right through you and you feel so utterly helpless. Utterly helpless. So did Paul.

That the eyes of your hearts be enlightened. This is a supernatural light. It's not natural.

That you may know what is the hope to which He has called you. And what's that? That you may know the hope to which He has called you, namely, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance. So now we're back to the wealth and the riches of glory.

So, I close with this. If God would be pleased, in answer to my prayer now and your prayer, that for us and for those to whom we minister, if God would be pleased to open the eyes of our heart, give us the spirit of wisdom and a revelation in the knowledge of Him, would cause the beam of light to shine down from the Son of God into our hearts, along which would come grace upon grace. If God would do that for us, our obsession with self, and believe me, that's the worst issue.

Our obsession with ourselves. Me right now. You there.

Those who come into your office. Then, our obsession with self by that beam would be broken. And we would be freed to see and savor and praise the glory of God.

And we would say with Paul in 2 Corinthians 3.18, beholding the glory of the Lord, we are being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to the next. So, Father, I pray now that You would cancel out anything I've said amiss and confirm anything I've said faithful to Your Word. You know the difference perfectly.

We only know the difference partially. So be a spiritual power in the lives of these friends, I pray. Oh, give them the discernment to know what they're dealing with in You and in their people.

And would You open the eyes of their hearts in these five days, O God, and grant them to see You like they've never seen You before, so that beholding, they would become whole. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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