

# Christian Victory and Perservance

by John Piper

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*This sermon emphasizes the battle for joy in God as the key to overcoming bondage to sin, particularly focusing on the pursuit of sovereign joy that triumphs over sinful pleasures. It highlights the transformative power of God's grace to give a joy that severs the root of sinful desires, leading to true freedom and victory in the Christian life. The sermon draws insights from the life and theological reflections of Augustine, showcasing the importance of prayer, exposure to God's greatness, and the pursuit of joy in God as essential elements in the fight against bondage to sin.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 139:23, Jude 1:24, Micah 7:8, Romans 6:22, Psalm 16:11

**Topics:** "Joy in God", "Overcoming Sin"

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## Description

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## Transcript

11 days from now, it will have been 66 years since I was born in this city. I mention that because I've been now a believer for 60 years, and I want to encourage you at your stage that you can make it. At least I want to encourage you that you can make it to 66, because I don't presume upon the grace of God, I cling to it, I plead for it daily.

But I do want to bear witness that you can make it by God's grace. He who began a good work in you, if he's begun a good work in you, will complete it to the day of Christ. Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling, it's an awesome statement in Jude 25, now unto him who is able to keep 18 year olds for the next 15 years from falling, and to present you without blemish and with great joy before the presence of his glory, and now unto him be glory and majesty, dominion and authority, before all time now and forevermore.

That's the kind of exaltation Jude feels when he contemplates, he keeps me, he holds on to me, he didn't let me fall away. Rejoice not over me, O my enemy, when I fall, I will rise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light for me.

He will bring me out to the light, and I will look upon his vindication when he works justice for me and not against me. Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, where is your God? I love Micah chapter 7 verses 8 and 9, because it does include a kind of fall. Rejoice not over me, O my enemy, when I fall, I will rise.

When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light for me. I want to be helpful, I want to be helpful for the next 50 minutes or so to manage the failures of this past year, and help you not be destroyed by them, help you not be paralyzed by them. And I want to be helpful for the next year or 60, 70, 80, that God will empower you to fight the fight of faith every day, so that you can say, when you're standing in my place here, He kept me.

He has not let me down. He has been faithful to me. That's what I want to do, I want to help you.

And I was reading in my devotions the other morning, and they just put it on the blog this morning, David told me as we were walking over here, I didn't know that. That's a good coincidence. That after the resurrection, Jesus was amazingly eager to have a restored relationship with all of His 11 disciples that had forsaken Him.

It says in Mark 14, 11, they all forsook Him. So did you do that this year? Did you walk away? You did, some of you did. You just walked away.

I'm done with it. I don't care anymore. It's too hard.

It's not paying off. I'm just out of here as far as the Christian life goes. And that's what they had done.

At His hour of greatest sorrow, they left Him. So here He is risen with sovereign triumph over the universe in His hands. And what does He do? He meets Mary and He says, Mary, go tell my brothers, I am going to my God and your God.

I am going to my Father and your Father. What's the point of that? Brothers, your God, your Father. I want you back.

He's still your Father. And then He meets them in the room. He passes through the door evidently, and He just shows up.

What's the first thing He says? Peace be to you. I mean, they must have felt like, oh, we are going to get spanked here really bad or worse. And He says, peace be to you.

And then Peter, after Judas, who's not coming back, Peter did the worst. I'll go with you. I'll die with you.

No, you won't. Three times you're going to deny me. But do you remember Luke 22, 32? I have prayed for you, Peter.

When you turn, strengthen your brothers. Not if you turn. I mean, this is sovereign, pre-crucified Jesus saying to one, you're going to deny me.

And when you turn, I've got that sewed up with the Father. Strengthen your brothers. So He comes to Peter on the beach, remember, with the fish, 157 fish, and after that little scene, and He looks right at Peter and says, do you love me more than these? Yes, Lord, I love you.

Do you love me more than these? Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Do you love me, Peter? Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. And every time, three times for three denials, you get what's going on? Three times you can tell me, just like you didn't, you do.

Do you? Yes, you do. Tend my sheep, feed my lambs, shepherd my flock. I've got work for you to do, Peter.

Let's go. So if that's where you were in 2011, I threw it away, I denied it, I walked away. I just want you to hear loud and clear, He will have you back for 2012.

So let this conference be a decisive turning. Just say it in your heart and to Him, I'm done with the failure, I am so thankful that you will have me back, I'm coming back. And hear those words, peace be to you, my brother, your father, do you love me? I've got work for you.

So I want to help you with the past year, but mainly, I would like to be of help for the rest of your life. I would like to be of help in the fight of faith, which is every day, and in particular, the fight against lust, or the bondage to pornography, or the bondage to masturbation, or the bondage to sleep with your girlfriend, or whatever form, this whole physical thing over here, which is designed by God to be a good and beautiful thing, just holds you like a slave. I would like to help you with that.

And I'm going to do it in a way that might be a little different. I'm going to tell you a story of a man's life, namely Augustine. Augustine was born in 354, I think, AD, so 1600 plus years ago, and he was in bondage to lust for 16 years, had a concubine all that time, had a son to her, never married, in all of his life, just had sex every day until he was 32 years old.

And the reason I want to tell you this story and go into his soul with you is because stories sometimes have an unusual power. Examples of people that have failed and God rescued them have power, and secondly, because his way of getting free was that a sovereign joy, that's his phrase, a sovereign joy severed the root of the pleasures of sin. They lost their power not by a direct assault, but an indirect assault.

Namely, not an assault on, I'm not turning it on, I'm not clicking the mouse, I'm not pushing the button, I'm not going her again. Instead of that, which is good, over here was, I'm coming, and I must have more of this. So that's what I want to do.

I want to take you there, and I printed out an email that I got Monday, 22nd of November, 2010, from a man whom I won't name, and I'm going to read it to you to show you what I hope happens. Now, he does refer to one of my books. I'm going to direct you to another book.

The point here is not that he got help from a particular book. The point is the kind of help he got, which he could have gotten better, and he later realized from Augustine, than from me. So I'm directing all of your attention to Augustine.

I'm going to mention a book of Augustine's in particular. I'm going to tweet this afternoon at 2 o'clock where to get it, how to get it, what translation to get. Here's the experience.

A battle began raging in my heart from the time I was 13 years old, and it continued with shame into my earliest days at a Baptist seminary. I had given myself to the pursuit of pornography as a teenager, and my pursuit of it continued through Bible college and well into my adult years. I have vivid memories of

being sprawled on the floor, face down before God, asking the Almighty to drive the insane pursuit of death from my heart.

I purchased books, sought counsel, scoured the Bible as if it were an encyclopedia, searching for the trick of my deliverance. About midway through seminary, one of your books was casually introduced to me during a lecture by a seminary professor, *The Pleasures of God*. Something about the title resonated with me, and I left class one afternoon set on purchasing it.

That day was the dawn of a new beginning to me. Let me pause here. *The Pleasures of God* is not a book about sex at all, except that everything about God is about sex.

It's just about how can you help someone get a bigger vision of God and what he's really like, and so the book unpacks what God takes pleasure in because you can judge a person's character by what they delight in, and so if you know what God delights in, you can know more of his character, and knowing more of his character, you can be shaped into it and be indirectly freed from these bondages that hold us. So that's what's going on here. It was different than any other book I had purchased, and I began painstakingly soaking the truth presented on each page.

Your sermon series on Ruth awakened me to a sovereign God who was plotting for my glory. The words of Ruth changed me and began to transform my thinking. Pornography was the fruit of a far more sinister sin.

In the months and years that followed, the Lord introduced me to the power of a new delight. My life in Christ gradually stopped becoming a duty, but instead became a pursuit of a higher pleasure. I laughed with giddiness years later as I read the testimony of Augustine.

The work of Christ in Augustine's life was eerily reminiscent of my own battles. That's why I'm going to Augustine. I've learned most of what I've learned from Edwards and Augustine and people like that about how to fight the fight of faith, not only against lust, but against every sin.

They're all fought the same way, namely by a sovereign joy that masters you and severs the powerful root of the other controlling pleasures. You fight fire with fire, joy with joy, pleasure with pleasure, beauty with beauty. That's the way you do it.

So he was born 354 A.D., November 13. After three decades of bondage to sexual sin, he was converted and became the Bishop of Hippo. He was born, by the way, in North Africa.

He was African, and he became the Bishop of Hippo, which is in present-day Algeria in Africa. So we're studying the theology and the life of a North African. Here's what he said, or here's what Adolph Harnack said about his influence.

Not all of you even know who Augustine is, probably. I want you to feel how huge he is. You've heard names like Calvin and Luther outside the Bible.

Well, Augustine was their teacher. He lived a thousand years before them, but all of them say he's our teacher. So he is one of the most influential human beings that have ever walked the planet, both in the Church and outside the Church.

Adolph Harnack said the greatest man the Church has possessed between Paul the Apostle and Luther the Reformer was Augustine. He entered the Church and the world as a revolutionary force, and not merely created an epoch in the history of the Church, but determined the course of its history in the West up to the present day. He had a literary talent second to none in the annals of the Church, and Warfield said the whole development of Western life in all its phases was powerfully affected by his teaching.

After Jesus and Paul, Augustine of Hippo is the most influential figure in the history of Christianity. So, if those are even close to the truth, what you're seeing is that a man who lived in absolute bondage to sex for 32 years was then used by God to be the most influential Christian outside the Bible ever. That's amazing.

We should be hopeful. The book that I'm going to encourage you to read, I mean if I could just make one thing happen aside what's going on in here, one habit for 2012 it would be that all of you would read Augustine's Confessions. It's a classic.

It's one of the most famous books in the world. You ought to read it just to be an educated human being, and it's 350 pages. It's the only book that I know that is totally addressed to God.

Every sentence in it is a prayer. Every sentence. I'll say more about that in a minute, but it is unique and has unusual power.

Get it. It costs you \$7.50 at Amazon this afternoon if you go there, and if you're a prime person it won't even cost you postage. So, if you want to know what translation I recommend you can ask somebody who does Twitter after 2 o'clock this afternoon.

As I grew to manhood, he wrote in that book, I was inflamed with desire for an excess of hell's pleasures. My family made no effort to save me from my fall by marriage. Their only concern was that I should learn how to make a good speech and how to persuade others.

So, at 16, he leaves his city of Thagast and heads for Carthage, and his mother, Monica, who is famous for praying for him all these years until he's converted at age 32, she says goodbye to him and pleads with him not to commit fornication, especially with another man's wife. That's what she ends her farewell with. So, he says, I went to Carthage where I found myself in the midst of a hissing cauldron of lust.

My real need was for you, my God, who are the food of my soul. I was not aware of this hunger. So, he took a concubine and had her on the side for the next 15 years.

He had a son, Adiodatus, I don't know how to pronounce it. And it's tragic what became of them, but I'll let that story go for another time. Now, here we are, he's 30 years old.

So, I'm skipping all that dissolution. You can just use your imagination, or maybe you shouldn't, for what he was doing all that time. He moved to Milan, Italy when he was 30 years old.

And there he came under the influence of Ambrose, a pastor. And he attended, mainly for literary reasons, because Ambrose was just a good speaker. And he sat under his ministry week in and week out until God took him.

So, I'm going to read you the account that he wrote in the Confessions of what I think we could say is one of the most important days in church history. Maybe one of the most important days in world history, given

the effect that Augustine had on the church, and the church has on the world. So, what's happening now, and what could happen for you? I'm just thinking of those of you for whom this has not happened, or some form of it.

But as I read this, it's about a page, page and a half long. As I read this account of his conversion, and how God did it, you might feel the Holy Spirit moving in your heart, mind, and body, beckoning you out of the bondages in which you live in a similar way. So, listen prayerfully.

Ask God to use it that way. So, the day comes, and he is with his friend, Olypius, in a garden, and they're talking about the impossibility of a purity, sexual purity in particular. There was a small garden attached to the house where we lodged.

I now found myself driven by the tumult in my breast to take refuge in this garden where no one could interrupt that fierce struggle in which I was my own contestant. I was beside myself with madness that would bring me sanity. I was dying a death that would bring me life.

I was frantic, overcome by violent anger with myself for not accepting your will and entering into your covenant. I tore my hair. I hammered my forehead with my fists.

I locked my fingers and hugged my knees. I just picture him on the ground, agonizing over whether he can let a lifetime of sin go. The battle became pretty clear for him between the beauty and pleasure of sexual lust versus chastity or continence with Christ.

I was held back by mere trifles. They plucked at my garment of flesh and whispered, are you going to dismiss us from this moment? We shall never be with you again, forever and ever. And while I stood trembling at the barrier on the other side, I could see chaste beauty, the beauty of continence in all her serene unsullied joy as she modestly beckoned me to cross over and to hesitate no more.

She stretched out loving hands to welcome and embrace me. So now the battle has come down to these trifling clutches. You will never have us again.

So pornography, for example, I'm sure it has said that to you. You're going to make a decision never to see me again. Really? Really? Brothers, that is possible.

I bear witness. That is possible. Feels impossible.

It is not. So they're clutching at him. These trifles, as he called these, these fangs in the garment of his flesh.

And over a river is this beautiful woman called chastity or continence. Who will win? It's beauty against beauty. It's joy versus joy.

There's no victory here about. No, no, no, no. That's not victory.

Crossing that river into the arms of godliness and Christ. That's victory. Having a new sunshine over there, a new kind of tree, a new and high and sovereign pleasure.

That's victory and freedom and hope and joy and salvation. I flung myself down beneath a fig tree and gave way to the tears which now stream from my eyes. In my misery, I kept crying.

How long will I go on saying tomorrow, tomorrow? Why not now? Why not make an end of my ugly sins at this moment? All at once, I heard the sing song voice of a child in a nearby house. Whether it was the voice of a boy or a girl, I cannot say. But again and again, it repeated the refrain, take it and read, take it and read.

At this, I looked up thinking hard whether there was any kind of game in which the children used to chant words like these, but I could not remember ever hearing them before. I stemmed my flood of tears and stood up telling myself that this could only be a divine command to open my book of scripture and read the first passage on which my eyes should fall. So I hurried back to the place where Olypius was sitting, seized the book of Paul's epistles and opened it and silence.

I read the first passage on which my eyes fell. Not in reveling in drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather, arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetites.

I had no wish to read more, no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of this sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled. And then at age 32, he turned and never went back.

His choice not to marry may not have been the wisest choice. Marriage is a beautiful thing. Sex is a beautiful thing.

But given what he had endured, I sympathize with his choice. I don't want you to become Platonists who solve the problem of the sinful use of the body by no use of the body. That's not my goal.

It was his choice. I will just never go there. And he lived a chaste and celibate life until the end and became the Bishop of Hippo, not by his own choice, but because people saw him soaring in godliness and in effectiveness of communication about the sovereignty of grace.

And they made him. And he was there until he died at age 75. Oh, brothers, there's hope for you.

There really is. So he was converted and began to think it all through. That's the way it happens, isn't it? You think your theology comes before your experience, and often it does.

But often your theology is an effort to understand, what has God been doing? What has God done to me? How did he do that? I want to understand this because I have to. I would like to help other people. So I'm going to take you in a few-minute tour of his theological reflections on how did that happen? What did he do to me? Augustine's arch opponent from then on was a British bishop named Pelagius.

He lived in Rome. You may have heard the term Pelagianism somewhere in your reading or studies. Pelagianism from Pelagius, Augustinianism from Augustine are two radically different views of our nature, who we are since Adam, and how we come into fellowship with God and live successfully there.

Two radically different views. Pelagius did not believe in original sin the way Augustine did. That is, he didn't believe that our minds are so darkened by sin, and our wills are so bent by sin, and our emotions are so enslaved by sin, that we couldn't on our own break free into faith and godliness.

He said, you can't. And Augustine said, no, without a sovereign intervention of God's grace in your life. And his whole life was spent trying to understand what's that like? How do you experience that? What is

sovereign grace? How do you experience it? How do you taste it? He said things that drove Pelagius up the wall.

He said things like this. This is one of his most famous quotes from the Confessions. Give me the grace, O Lord, to do as you command, and command me to do what you will.

O holy God, when your commands are obeyed, it is from you that we receive the power to obey them. That's Augustinianism. Command what you will, give what you command.

That's the essence of what I believe and what campus outreach is built on. It's another word for reformed. I'm a slave.

32 years to prove it for Augustine. Will it take that long for you? I'm a slave to my sin. It may not even be lust for you.

It may be the praise of man, desperately needing approval from girls or men. Enslaved to always be a second-hander, looking for please like me, please praise me, please accept me. Governing all your behavior to avoid anything other than that.

That's slavery. So I don't know what your slavery is, except you're male and I'm assuming you've got issues with sex. So we're all slaves.

How will we be free? Not Pelagius' way. Let me try to describe freedom, Augustinian and Pelagian. Because we had our backup about freedom.

Oh, free will. I got my free will. Okay, here's what Pelagian says freedom is.

Here's God and godliness and here's sin. For Pelagius, freedom is right here, it is poised in perfect equilibrium, containing the power to go this way or that way. That's freedom.

There's sin, there's God, I'm here. Augustine looks at that and says, that doesn't exist in the universe, and it shouldn't, and I don't want it. I'm either here or I'm here.

I'm not poised in equilibrium. And my goal is not to be there. He said some amazing things.

I just wrote them down again last night. I was just blown away by the fact that he describes free will, or he describes the wrestling with choices. Okay, evil, good.

Satan, God. Unbelief, belief. The wrestling here.

He said, I don't want to live there. Wrestling with choices is a necessary evil in a fallen world, he says, until the day come when discernment and delight in godliness are one. You get that? Right now, I'm so, even as a saved John Piper, I'm so corrupt with remaining corruption that I'm struggling what to do.

And Pelagians picture freedom. You can go this way, you can go this way. I don't want to live hovering between good and bad, right and wrong, wrestling with my free will as to which one goes which way.

I'm going to be totally enslaved to the good because the good has become totally compellingly beautiful to me. There isn't a greater freedom in the world than to do what you want to do for a thousand years with no regret because what you want to do is love godliness and love God. This isn't freedom.

In fact, biblically, this doesn't exist. You read Romans 6. We are enslaved to sin or we are enslaved to God. There is no hovering in the middle.

And the only way to move from here to here, Augustine discovered biblically and experientially, is I have to be set free. I can't do it. I can't do it.

It doesn't sound real male, so don't try to be theologically machismo. Be theologically childlike. Unless you turn, become like a little child, you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven.

To be a child says, God, I'm a slave. I'm a slave to cravings and desires and longings and yearnings. And I can't make myself love godliness.

I can't make myself love Jesus. I can't make myself love chastity. I'm just in love with all this stuff.

And that's true. You can't. That's what Augustine discovered.

So let me read to you this amazing statement of his understanding of what happens. During all those years of rebellion, where was my free will? What was the hidden secret place from which it was summoned in a moment so that I might bend my neck to your easy yoke, O Lord? How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose. You drove them from me.

You who are the true, the sovereign joy. Now that phrase captured me years ago. I put it in the title of a book.

I love that phrase. And can you imagine anything better than to be set free, not by sovereign wrath or sovereign anger or sovereign severity, but sovereign joy. Meaning, well let's keep reading and see.

You drove them from me and took their place. You who are sweeter than all pleasure, though not to flesh and blood. You who outshine all light, yet are hidden deeper than any secret in our hearts.

You who surpass all honor, though not to the eyes of men who see all honor in themselves. O Lord, my God, my light, my wealth, my salvation. The way grace works, according to Augustine, and he's right about this, biblically true, is that grace is God's giving us a sovereign joy in himself that triumphs over the pleasures of sin.

Grace is God's giving us freely, powerfully, a sovereign joy in him that is superior to the pleasures of sin and thus severs the root of their power. Any other way to try to get free results in despair or legalism. Either you fail in despair or you succeed and beat everybody up with your self-righteousness.

But if you are set free by a blood-bought, Christ-exalting, sovereign joy, nobody boasts about enjoying a hot fudge sundae. You might boast about eating asparagus, but not about eating a hot fudge sundae. Like, I finished it.

I finished the whole thing. You wouldn't. Well, it's good.

It's good. You don't boast when you do what you want to do. You boast if you do really hard things and people admire you and pity you because you sacrifice so much.

So if you're set free by God's sovereign, supreme, superior joy, you're not only free from, you now, go back to my little freedom illustration, you're not here hovering. You are increasingly, and it's only partial in

this life, increasingly satisfied by what's good and beautiful and holy and God-exalting, which means you can do what you want to do. That's freedom.

And one of these days, this is why I want the second coming yesterday. You know what's going to be best about the second coming? After seeing Jesus not sinning anymore. Not even battling sin anymore.

Not even feeling the slightest inclination to any sin anymore. Can you imagine a more magnificent freedom than to do what you want to do for a billion years? Every morning, every night. And it gets better and better because you see more and more of him.

Augustine penetrated to the bottom of his own soul and the bottom of the Bible when he realized every man, this is a quote now, every man whatsoever his condition desires to be happy. There's no man who does not desire this and each one desires it with such earnestness that he prefers it to all other things. Whoever in fact desires other things, desires them for this end.

If that's true, if it is, I believe, then the battle for godliness is the battle for joy. You try to deny your quest for joy, you deny that you're a human being. God made you to be happy.

You want to be happy like you want to eat. Who has it in his power, he said? Who has it in his power to have such a motive present to his mind that his will shall be influenced to believe? Who can welcome in his mind something which does not give him delight? Who has it in his power to ensure that something that will delight him will turn up? Or that he will take delight in what turns up? If those things delight us which serve our advancement towards God, that is due not to our own whim or industry or meritorious works, but to the inspiration of God and to the grace which he bestows. So saving grace, sanctifying grace, converting grace for Augustine is God's giving us a sovereign joy in God that triumphs over other joys.

We can be free. And he gives us that gift now, now in measure. That's why I began by saying I want to help you with the fight of faith.

Not the drift of faith or the coasting of faith in 2012. It will be a fight. But when you've tasted the sovereign joy, when the sovereign joy has laid decisive claim to the roots of your emotions and your heart, then you know you can fight in the strength that God supplies and get the victory.

So what follows in Augustine's understanding of the Christian life is that we are pursuing joy. That's what I'm going to talk about tonight for all of us. All of life is the pursuit of maximum pleasure in God.

Here he's talking again. The soul of men shall hope under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be made drunk with the fullness of thy house and the torrents of thy pleasures thou will give them to drink.

For in thee is the fountain of life and in thy light we see light. Now, I'll keep reading here, but listen, one of the reasons that this is not landing on some of you with any effect at all, not stirring or moving or quickening or awakening anything is because your capacities for longing have shriveled up. Matt Chandler was sitting here on his stool yesterday and said some unbelievably wise words about, he said, this is the most entertained generation in the world, history of the world, and you have universal access.

It's all on your phone to all the information in the world, which means you can titillate yourself with anything, anytime you want and you're all bored, he said. And I was sitting right here and I thought, I'll bet they don't think they're bored. I'll bet they think they have instant access to non-boredom right here all the

time.

And then he said, and the tragedy is you've got enough here to deceive you so that you don't realize you are bored. That's profound. I hope you thought about that.

So right here in the middle of this quote that I'm reading, Augustine is assuming something really scary and really terrible about this room right now, namely that there are people in this room that are not numbed so much as the capacity for thrill, the capacity for magnificent pleasures has just gotten smaller and smaller and smaller because you're getting it here, here, here. These are really teeny by and large, teeny pleasures. You get a news thing, that's teeny and a sex thing, that's teeny, a little YouTube clip that's funny, that's teeny.

It's on and on, entertain, entertain, entertain, entertain, entertain, entertain, entertain each other with texting and it just shrinks and shrinks and shrinks and pretty soon you visit the Grand Canyon, you just text on the side. You don't see anything. You can't see anything.

So here's what he says. Give me a man in love. He knows what I mean.

Give me a man who yearns. Give me one who is hungry. Give me one far away in the desert who is thirsty and sighs for the spring of the eternal country.

Give me that sort of man. He knows what I mean about sovereign joy. If I speak to a cold man, he just does not know what I am talking about.

Then if you're in that category, I think you should right now be crying out in your heart, oh God, don't let me be that man. Which leads me to prayer. If you say, okay, all right, if this is the battle, if the battle front is the battle to experience a sovereign joy that severs the root of all other sinful, all sinful pleasures, then what do I do? Is there anything I can do? Or do I just lie in my bed and wait for sovereign joy to show up? And the answer is that you pray like crazy and that you expose yourself to as many displays of God's greatness as you can, which is why I'm urging you to read Augustine's Confessions.

You pray, you cry out to God. Prayer and the display of God. What do I love then? This is Augustine's effort.

I'm almost finished. This is Augustine's effort to help you experience God with such joy that it conquers. What do I love when I love my God? Not the sweet melody of harmony and song, not the fragrance of flowers, perfumes, and spices, not manna or honey, not limbs such as the body delights to embrace.

It is not these that I love when I love my God. And yet when I love Him, it is true that I love a light of a certain kind, a voice, a perfume, a food, an embrace. But they are the kind that I love in my inner self when my soul is bathed in light that is not bound by space, when it listens to sound that never dies away, when it breathes a fragrance that is not borne away on the wind, when it tastes food that is never consumed by the eating, when it clings to an embrace from which it is not severed by fulfillment of desire.

This is what I love when I love my God. And so he prayed. I think this is why the confessions are 350 pages of prayer.

Because he knew if you are sovereign, if you're the only one who can sever the root of these things that hold me in bondage, all I know to do is look to you and cry to you, look to you and cry to you. You are ever

active, yet always at rest. You gather all things to yourself, though you suffer no need.

You grieve for wrong, but suffer no pain. You can be angry and yet serene. Your works are varied, but your purpose is one and the same.

You welcome those who come to you, though you never lost them. You are never in need, yet are glad to gain. Never covetous, yet you exact a return for your gifts.

You release us from our debts, but you lose nothing thereby. You are my God, my life, my holy delight. But is this enough to say of you? Can any man say enough when he speaks of you? Yet woe betide those who are silent about you.

So my question is, do you know any taste like that at all? Has God become to you such a treasure? Has Christ crucified, risen, reigning, coming, present, become to you such a pleasure, such a spring, such a light, such a treasure? How sweet, these are his words one last time, how sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose. You drove them from me, you who are the true, the sovereign joy. You drove them from me and took their place.

Oh Lord, my God, my light, my wealth, my salvation. So brothers, this is the battle to be fought indirectly against every bondage in your life. If you have blown it for 18, 20, 25 years, be like Augustine.

And say, I now renounce these and I turn my face to Jesus Christ and I turn my face to God the Father and to his promise. In my presence is fullness of joy, at my right hand are pleasures for every more. And I receive it, I embrace it as my supreme pleasure.

Oh Father in heaven, for my sinful battling 66-year-old soul, I pray. And for the souls of these young men, I pray. Sovereign joy, set us free for the glory of your great name and the pleasurable walk of liberty.

In Jesus name.

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