

# Desiring God - Lesson 4

by John Piper

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*John Piper emphasizes that true love for others flows from the joy found in God, encouraging believers to pursue joy as a means of expressing love and generosity.*

**Duration:** 1:31:53

**Scripture:** Psalm 1:1-2, Psalm 119:11, Psalm 119:97, Psalm 119:105, Isaiah 35:10, Isaiah 58:10-11, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Spiritual Warfare", "Christian Living"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the issue of pornography and lust in the context of the internet. He emphasizes the importance of both cultivating a close relationship with Jesus and actively resisting temptation. The speaker also discusses the concept of 'gutsy guilt' and how to fight as a justified sinner. He encourages the audience to have a global vision for the cause of Christ and to pour themselves out for the unreached peoples. The sermon emphasizes the need for a deep understanding of God's word and the importance of memorizing and meditating on specific verses.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at [www.DesiringGod.org](http://www.DesiringGod.org) Argument number eight for why you should pursue your joy in God all the time is that love for people is the overflow and expansion of joy in God. Now, here's what I'm addressing here.

The chapter on love in Christian hedonism or in Desiring God is one of the most important chapters because the question is, alright, if you grant that we should pursue God for the delight that there is in Him and He's magnified and honored by how much satisfaction we get from Him and not other things, how does that relate to the horizontal dimension of loving each other? Do you love others for that reason? How do they fit? That probably took me longer in my pilgrimage to work through than the front end of vertical Christian hedonism. And this text in 2 Corinthians became kind of a paradigm for me in understanding how love works. Let me just read it to you and point out a couple of things.

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia. So grace has been poured out or given. He's writing to Corinth which is in southern Greece.

Macedonia is that northern part of that peninsula where Thessalonica and Philippi and Berea are. And he's saying that in the church of Philippi and others great grace has been poured out. And now he's writing to the Corinthians to encourage them to respond similarly.

Great grace has been poured out in the churches of Macedonia that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their poverty overflowed in a wealth of liberality. For I testify that according to their ability and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord Now, right there, of their own accord means they were not under any external constraint contrary to their own accord. This grace that was poured out on them so worked that their wills accorded with this liberality begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints.

So Paul is trying to motivate them to give liberally to share in the offering that he's going to take to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Now I drop down to verse 8 just to draw in the word love. I am not speaking this as a command but as proving through the earnestness of others that's these Macedonians the sincerity of your love also.

So, in other words, what he's been describing here is love. This is what happened in Macedonia and he wants it to happen in Corinth. What is love? According to this text.

That's what I ask. What is love? What does it look like? What are the inner dynamics of love? Because he calls this love. Well, number one, it starts with the grace of God being poured out or shown, made known.

The grace of God arrived in Philippi. The grace of God came. Grace to you.

Grace to you. When Paul says that, that's not a throwaway word at the beginning of his letters. Every single letter, grace to you.

It came to them in power and what was the effect of it? Well, the effect was this. It didn't take away affliction. It increased affliction.

But it brought abundance of joy. It didn't take away poverty. Abundance of joy and poverty.

Overflowed. Now just stop there a minute. Just let that sink in.

This is so contrary to a health, wealth and prosperity gospel. These people saw the grace of God such that in the midst of affliction and the midst of poverty they had abundance of joy. So where was the joy coming from? It wasn't coming from improved circumstances and it wasn't coming from improved possessions.

It was coming from the promise that God would one day bring them out of this mess into fellowship with Himself forever and ever and that their sins could be forgiven and there would be no more guilt and no more condemnation. No more fear of hell. No more meaningless existence.

Everything counts and you're on your way to glory. This slight momentary affliction is working for us an eternal weight of glory. That was the mindset of the early church.

We Americans, goodnight. This country is so deadly. So deadly in its effect upon us.

We think and book after book after book after book is written that Christianity should fix our problems. Fix our psychological problems. Fix our marriage problems.

Fix our parenting problems. Fix our financial problems. Fix our health problems.

So that the coming of Jesus is not very exciting. We want this world to be fixed so we can enjoy our three score and ten. Thank you.

And if Jesus wants to come a little later when I'm old and don't have any more fun, then He can come. But what 30 year old today is praying, come Lord Jesus wrap it up. Wrap it up.

Come. Come. Come.

So I'm trying to plead and lead our staff on Tuesdays, the first Tuesday of every month. Those of you who are part of Bethlehem will hear about this. That we will take our Tuesday meal times that we eat together and not eat on the first Tuesday.

But fast specifically for the coming of the kingdom. The coming of the Lord. The effect of the grace of God is to bring them into a time of affliction.

To not bring them lots more money, but rather to fill them with joy. Now, what's love? Their abundance of joy and deep poverty overflowed in a wealth of liberality. That's love.

I want to prove by the earnestness of others that right there. The sincerity of your love. So this is what happened in Macedonia.

That's what I want to happen in Corinth. I want you to love like they loved. And how did they love? They loved by the overflow of joy.

There's my definition. Love is the overflow of joy that meets the needs of others. I don't know whether in the book I altered the wording a little bit.

But since I wrote it, I tended to add a word or two just to make sure there's not a misunderstanding. Overflow sounds too passive in one sense. Because there is a sense in which you are longing for this joy to expand.

Not just dribble over the top. But expand and flow into another heart. And ignite their joy.

And enlarge their delights in the grace of God. And when that happens out of you. When your life overflows in joy.

I am workers with you for your joy. 2 Corinthians 1.24 When you come to the end of a day and you have spent yourself. And you are very tired.

And your joy, though it's weary and they had tears in it. And it spilled over into other people's lives. And they have been blessed by your life.

You feel a largeness of love for God. And a largeness of delight in God. That's bigger than if you'd spent the whole day just alone with Him.

Delighting in His promises. Love is the capstone. That was the fourth point of Christian hedonism at the beginning.

Love is the overflow of joy in God. So we see it carried through in chapter 9. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart. Not grudgingly or under compulsion.

For the Lord loves a cheerful giver. Anybody who says your duty is to tithe. It doesn't matter how you feel about it.

How shall I avoid overstatement here? Sinning. It's wrong to tell people that this text is not true. It's wrong to say God expects you to give and it doesn't matter how you feel about it.

The text says God loves a cheerful giver. So as the plate comes down the pew. And you're feeling greedy because you want to buy a new sound system.

And therefore write a small check, half your tithe maybe. You don't want to tithe. What's going on in your heart there matters.

It's not the amount of the check that matters. It doesn't matter. Believe me.

That's not what matters. God is watching the heart. And this is what he loves.

So if you're not feeling it. Here are the three steps. You do or more.

I don't know how many there are. Number one. You repent and say I'm so sorry God.

This morning that I don't feel like trusting you to supply my needs. And writing a big generous check to advance your kingdom. That's the way I am this morning.

Let's be honest. Okay. Let's be honest.

Second. You cry out. Restore to me the joy of my salvation.

You pray. Change me. Change me.

And then. Thirdly. You look to a promise.

You look at some promise. Be content with what you have. For the Lord has said I'll never leave you.

I'll never forsake you. Therefore we can confidently say the Lord is my helper. I will not fear.

What can man do to me? We hear a promise. And the promise by the grace of God quickens in us. Restfulness and contentment in God alone.

And then fourthly. We write the check. For whatever.

Whatever. You feel like writing it for. And it may be that the prayer had not yet been answered.

Okay. I do believe that if it lies within you to do a right thing. Before you have a right feeling.

If you walk through those first three steps. It's not hypocrisy to write the check. If you skip those first three.

It's probably hypocrisy. You're probably wondering about the person next to you. And whether they're watching you write the check.

And you're supposed to write it so. You write it. That's hypocrisy.

But if you've said. Oh God I'm sorry. I feel this way.

Oh God help me. Change me. Oh God thank you for your promise.

And still. You're not yet changed. Say.

Lord. I'm going to write this. In the hope.

That in the very writing of it. You will awaken. My delight.

I do that. Almost every day. With regard to something in my life.

I live this way. Because I'm falling. For me as a pastor.

It has to do with phone calls I've got to make. Hard phone calls. Church discipline kind of stuff.

Or rebuke kind of stuff. Or you get a word. Somebody said somebody to somebody.

And somebody's hurt. And somebody to somebody. And you just don't want to get it.

And you sit there looking at the telephone. I don't want to do this. I don't want to do this thing.

And so you repent. And say. That's not a good thing for a shepherd to feel.

You've got some joy. And you've got some wisdom. And you've got some grace.

And you've got some responsibility. It's a gift. It's a wonderful thing.

Do this. You pray. Or I could give you a long list.

But you don't. Here's a word to a pastor. Shepherd the flock of God among you exercising oversight.

This is 1 Peter 5.2. Not under compulsion. You see that? Don't feel driven by some external constraint. If that's the way you feel.

Pray. Repent. Seek deliverance from it.

Not under compulsion. But voluntarily or willingly. According to the will of God.

Not for sordid gain. Don't work for money. But with eagerness.

That is joy. God loves a cheerful pastor. Is the paraphrase of 1 Peter 5.2. God loves a cheerful giver here.

And God loves a cheerful pastor here. All of that to say that the pursuit of joy in God sustains and drives love. They are not at odds.

And if you ask, yeah, but if you pursue your own joy in God in loving other people. Aren't you really just using other people? To advance your own private communion with God? And the answer is no. Because at the heart of every good deed is the desire that your joy become their joy.

And they be drawn into your joy. So that together with them you both experience an expanding joy in God. Nobody whom you bless who knows that you're being motivated that way is going to fault you as a selfish person.

Never have I ever had anybody in the hospital. If I've gone to visit somebody and I walk in in the evening and they open their eyes and they say, Oh, pastor, you didn't need to come. You're so busy and it was a long drive, blah, blah, blah.

And I say, it's my pleasure. I always get blessed when I visit people in the hospital. Never have they ever said, you are so selfish.

You always get blessed. Never. And the reason is because, just ask yourself this question.

Do you feel more loved when people love you joyfully or grudgingly? When people do a good thing for you joyfully or grudgingly, do you feel more loved? And if you feel more loved when people do things for you cheerfully or willingly, because they delight to do them for you, then it must be that the pursuit of that delight is an important part of that love. And I'm arguing that the pursuit of that delight is a pursuit of delight in God. 6.9, pride and self-pity are overcome by the pursuit of joy in God.

I've had people ask me over the years, won't you become proud? Isn't this just a pride thing if you pursue your joy all the time in God? And the most common text I like to use is this story about the rich young ruler. Jesus said, How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter into the kingdom of God. The disciples were amazed at his words, but Jesus answered again and said, Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God.

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. And they were even more astonished and said to him, Then who can be saved? And looking at them, Jesus said, With people it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.

Peter began to say to him, Behold, we have left everything and followed you. Now, what do you think his tone of voice was there? I wonder. Behold, we have left everything and followed you.

A person who lives the Christian life, thinking mainly in terms of the sacrifices that he's making, will be a either self-pitying or proud person. If he makes sacrifices and nobody notices, he'll self-pity. If he makes sacrifices and they notice and praise him, he'll be proud.

What's the solution then to self-pity and pride, which are two sides of the same coin? And the answer is the answer of Jesus in verse 29. He says, We've left everything. Oh, we've left everything, followed you.

It's hard to be a Christian. Jesus said, Truly, I say to you, no one has left houses or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms for my sake in the Gospels, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age. Houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, farms.

Yes, along with persecutions and in the age to come eternal life. Now, what's the point of that answer? What is the point of that answer? What Jesus really saying? Here's Peter. Lord, we've left everything to follow you.

And instead of Jesus saying, That's right, you have. And I really admire your sacrificial spirit. Why does not he respond like that? I just love people make sacrifices.

In fact, I wish more people would make sacrifices. Jesus does call you to sacrifice. Yes, yes.

And he wants he wants them to realize that in following him, they never lose ever. This little thing here is persecutions. That's medicinal side effects of the medicine that makes you well.

The therapy of following Jesus and finding eternal life and finding in this life, sisters and mothers and children and farms. That means you're part of the church. You're part of the church.

And when the church is being what it ought to be, every parentless person should have mothers and fathers. Notice it does not include fathers. I think that's probably intentional because God is our father.

And he just wanted to make a special highlight there. Mothers, children, farms. You got you got what you need if you've got the church.

But mainly you've got eternal life. So get off it, Peter. Get off of your pride.

Get off of your self-pity and be like David Livingstone. December 4, 1857, talking to the students at Cambridge University after years of sacrifice and suffering in Africa. He says, For my own part, I have never ceased to rejoice that God has appointed me to such an office.

People talk of sacrifice that I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Is that a sacrifice which brings its own blessed reward and helpful activity? The consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter. Away with the word in such a view and with such a thought.

It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather, it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, danger.

Now and then, with the foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life. Yes, yes, yes. They may make us pause and cause the spirit to waver and the soul to sink.

But, let this be only for a moment. All these are nothing. Philippians 3, 7, I count them all as refuse.

All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall be revealed in and for us. I never made a sacrifice. I did add a chapter on suffering to the 10th anniversary edition.

Precisely to make clear these last points here. Number 10 and number 11. There is such a thing as self-denial.

It is, but not ultimate self-denial. Matthew 13, 44. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field which a man found and hid.

And from joy, from joy over it, he sells everything that he has. That's self. He'll sell his wedding ring.

He'll sell his house. He'll sell his business. And if he has to, he'll sell his life.

And he has to. Nobody can be my disciple who does not renounce everything that he has. Luke 14, 33.

There is self-denial. But we deny ourselves everything to have the treasure. Everything to have the treasure.

So there's no ultimate self-denial. Get that plain. Because that's going to be one of the first objections people raises.

Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Christian hedonism disobeys self-denial. Mark 8, 34.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself. And here's John Piper telling everybody to glut their own desires rather than to deny their own desires. Just get it clear.

Denying yourself means taking up your cross. That means dying and following the treasure. And if you don't deny yourself in order to gain the treasure, your self-denial is wicked.

Has no spiritual value at all. What gives it value is that it testifies to the superior value of what you are denying it for. That's the whole point.

What's the point of denying yourself things, even health and safety and life? I just read, for example, I heard on the news yesterday, that the CIA thwarted a major blow-up of the embassy in Uganda. And that high-level, intensified, protective work is happening at the embassy in Tajikistan. Now, we have missionaries in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Right next door. And what I thought when I heard that was, it would only take the slightest cultural movement for the hostilities among Muslims against Americans to be so intense that Oscar and Kathy and their five kids could be killed instantly through a mob action. They know that.

They know that. That's self-denial. But it's not because they're not dead in earnest about pursuing the fullness of the blessing of God in their lives.

They want joy. Believe me, Oscar knows what he's doing. I contemplated what that funeral would be like in this church.

Because his dad would be very mad. He didn't want him to go. The eleventh argument, and I see now we've run out of time for number six.

I'll just name these. Suffering is required and sustained by the pursuit of joy in God. So, the call to suffer I do not deny.

In fact, in my book on future grace, in my book on missions, and in my book on desiring God now, I have chapters on suffering just to make plain that I don't think the Great Commission is going to be finished without suffering. And yet, suffering will be sustained by this four in Romans 8.18. We will be heirs of God and fellow heirs with Him if we suffer with Him so that we may be glorified with Him. And four, I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared of the glory that is to be revealed.

If your joy is not flowing to you from an eternal glory, but only from circumstances, what will you do when your life is on the line for Jesus? And there is no more benefit in this life to be had at all. Just death. What will you do? If you are not living for the glory of heaven, you will apostatize.

That's what you'll do. You'll throw in the towel. You will rationalize the forsaking of your faith.

And number 12, the duty of serving God is sustained by the joy of being served by God. This is a whole lesson to itself. Just to point out that if somebody says to me, this whole approach to Christianity of pursuing your own joy doesn't sound like serving God.

It sounds like you're kind of serving yourself. And here I want to be very careful and make sure we understand that God is not served by human hands as though He needed anything. Or I should have included Mark 10, 45.

The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve. God means to serve us and thus make our serving a tribute to Him as we enjoy His serving of us. From days of old, they have not heard or perceived by the ear, nor has I seen a God beside you who works for one, the one who waits for Him.

God works for the one who waits for Him. Or the Him who serves, serve by the strength which God supplies, so that in all things God may get the glory. We get the help, God gets the glory.

We get the joy, God gets the honor. So yes, even in this area of service, we must continue to pursue our joy as God pledges Himself to work for those who delight in Him and wait for Him. Okay, we want to make a shift now away from the defense of Christian hedonism to the application of how you become this way.

And we turn to number seven here. How then shall we fight for joy? And I want to start with this. Realize that authentic joy in God is a gift.

It's a gift. It's a gift. On the one hand, that makes us helpless and desperate.

On the other hand, it makes us rest. It is called the fruit of the spirit. Joy is a fruit of the spirit, not a work of the flesh.

You can't produce it by the flesh. You can produce a lot of different vibrations in your body by the flesh. But you can't produce joy in God.

Psalms 51, 12, David prays, Praise, restore to me the joy. That must mean that he believes God does that. God does that.

God gives that. No one comes to me unless the father who sent me draws him. This is a gift to be able to come to Jesus for satisfaction, to come to him as bread, to come to him as water.

We must be drawn. So that colors how I look at all the rest of these 13 points. It's a gift.

Now, realize that joy must be fought for relentlessly. Now, that sounds in tension with number one. We were talking about this last night.

It was your conversation that caused me to think about that. There's a tension here between resting in its being a gift and fighting for it. And yet, I said we'd come back to this word workers.

And here we are, 2 Corinthians 1, 24. Not that we lord it over your faith, but we are workers with you for your joy. Isn't that remarkable? That Paul would say it's a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. And say, I work with you that you might have it. So there must be strategies.

There must be strategies of life by which we can position ourselves by grace for the fuller work of the Spirit in our lives. What are those strategies? That's what I'm doing here under number seven. You know, when I came up with this, you know where I got this list? John Piper's experience.

So this is not an infallible list. I didn't get this because I found it anywhere. I just, when I started preparing this part of the lesson, and I prepared it in stages over the years, I asked, how do I fight this? I'm Mr. Christian Hedonism, right? I'm supposed to be happy.

So I fight to be what I teach others to be. The question is, how? How do you do that? And I'm just giving you, I'm just giving you how I do it. That's all.

And that means that you may find half of these helpful and half of them not you at all. Now, a few of them, I believe, are essential. A few of them are just me, like probably reading books on theology, that sort of thing.

But some of them are essential. This is essential. Faith has joy at its heart.

We've already argued that. And so the fact that there is a fight of faith means there's a fight for joy. I have fought the good fight.

I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. Or 1 Timothy 6.12. Fight the good fight of faith.

If faith has joy at its heart, then to fight the good fight of faith is to fight for joy. I don't make any distinction in my life between fighting for faith and fighting for joy. Paul calls it in Philippians 1.25. I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your advancement and joy of faith.

Joy of faith. That's the same as being worker, worker for the advancement and joy of your faith. I work with you for your joy.

I stay behind and advance your joy of faith. I love the fact that Paul, in two letters, Philippians and 2 Corinthians, said his reason for being as an apostle was to heighten the joy of his people. So that I feel warranted to say, John Piper exists as a pastor at Bethlehem to heighten and intensify and make durable through life and death the joy of this people.

That's why I exist. I'm a worker with you for your joy. This seminar is to advance your joy.

Future Grace Seminar will be to advance joy. My teaching on Wednesday night is to advance joy. Number three.

It's not only a battle, but now a battle for joy. But I think we need to, three, resolve to attack all known sin in your life. If you try to get 95% of your life in good order with communion with God and delight in God, and you have a little 5% over here, hidden in a closet, pilfering at work.

You take pencils, pornography, or you gossip. This little, I feel I need to share this with you. For prayer, for prayer.

And then you nail somebody. You got this little pocket of sin that you cherish. You don't want to give it up.

It's going to make your capacity to delight in God very difficult. Romans 6 says, consider yourselves to be dead to sin. In other words, fight.

Reckon yourselves dead to sin. But alive to God, in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body.

Attack it. Don't let it reign in your mortal body to obey its desires. You see, sin has another set of desires.

Lusts. Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness. But present yourselves to God as those alive with new desires.

From the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness. So this issue of fighting sin, yielding yourselves up to God, moving away from one set of desires, becoming alive to a new set of desires, is so important for growing. So set your sights on lust.

I was dealing with a man recently who just called me and confessed. No, he emailed me first, then we talked about the internet. It's just deadly, just so deadly in its pornographic dimensions.

And so we met recently and we labored over this issue. And I gave him some practical strategies of attacking that thing head on. See, there are two ways to fight sin, especially the real gutsy kind like lust.

And one is to cultivate a sweet walk with Jesus that we're going to be talking about here as a foundation. And then the other is the more frontal, immediate, head-on no to every particular temptation that comes along. And both of those are absolutely essential.

Number four, learn the secret of gutsy guilt. How to fight like a justified sinner. I preached a sermon about ten years ago or so, I don't know how long it was, probably longer than that, in which I used this phrase, gutsy guilt, and it has stuck in my own mind as a very important thing.

And the text of Micah 7, listen to this. Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall, I will rise.

Though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is a light for me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against Him. Indeed, until He pleads my case and executes justice for me, He will bring me out to the light and I will see His righteousness.

That is amazing. I am just amazed that that's an Old Testament text and not a New Testament one. Because that is a beautiful, perfect description of how a justified sinner fights his way through failure back into a right walk with God.

Just look at it. Here he has sinned. I have sinned against God.

He's not talking about some inexplicable, emotional, blue period in his life. It is explicable. He has sinned.

Somebody has observed his sad condition. He's under the indignation of the Lord. He's in darkness.

And they're making life hard for him, saying, Ha, Christian. Sinner Christian. Failing Christian.

Ha. Now, what are you going to do in that moment? It's your fault. You blew it.

You sinned. Circumstances are terrible. There's darkness.

God is indignant about what you've done. A frown is on His face. And people are compounding it and making it worse.

I mean, you just, let's just die, okay? Let's just shrivel up and die. And look what this person does. This is, I call, gutsy guilt.

Not gutsiness after guilt, but gutsiness in guilt. Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Because though I have fallen, and I now am in darkness and indignation, though I fall, I will rise.

Though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is a light for me. For me. For me.

Indignation of the Lord. I bear the indignation of the Lord. Yes, yes, the Lord shows indignation to His precious children.

He disciplines them, even to the point of shedding blood. But He is for me under this indignation and behind this indignation. I have sinned against Him.

And I will bear that indignation until, He doesn't know how long it's going to last, how long the discipline will last, or how long the darkness will last, until He, the Lord, who is mad at Him, pleads His case. The judge who is frowning at Him, He says, I will sit here and I will bear His indignation, but He is going to vindicate me. He's going to come around from behind the bench.

He's there on the other side of the bench. How many times? He is going to get up and take off His big black robe, and come around to this side of the bench, and put His arm around me, and shuffle through the papers, and find this thing called the New Covenant, and lay it there for the judge with the big bloody signature, J-E-S-U-S, at the bottom. And He's going to go around on this side, and He's going to look down at it, and He's going to go, He's going to plead my case.

He's going to become my advocate. My little children, I write these things to you that you may not sin, but if we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. That's what's going on here.

And He is going to execute justice, not against me, but for me. He will bring me out to the light. Now, we could stop right here, and I would have shared with you the most important thing.

Because one of the things that I was thinking about as I prepared this again yesterday was, Oh Lord Jesus, I want to honor You in this, and I want Your cross to be exalted. And I know that I could talk for hours, and not make explicit mention of the cross, because I'm talking about the application of redemption in the human heart and its joy dimension. But right here, I'm going to honor that thought.

Right here, I want to say to you, the solution of how you become a kind of person that can maintain a right joy in God is the cross. Is the advocacy of God for sinners rooted in justification by faith based on the blood of Jesus. And I just long for you and for myself to be able to do this.

The strong people in the world, that is the people who know how to lay hold on God for ongoing daily strength, live like this. Because everybody sins every day. Everybody sins every day.

And if we couldn't think this way, if we couldn't relate to God this way, if we couldn't look up and see the frown of God disapproving what we've just done, and take hold of Him and say, My Father will not let me go. Do your frowning discipline as you may, but you are my Father and my advocate and my Savior, and you will vindicate me. If we can't do that, we're going to sink, we're going to drown in our own sinfulness.

And it will seem like an absolutely impossible life. Christianity will seem like an impossible life. It's not an impossible life because of that.

Number five, realize that the battle is primarily a fight to see God for who He is. You come at joy indirectly through beholding God. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Psalms 34, 8. Or the text we've already looked at, and I won't read it again. 2 Corinthians 4, 4-6, where the light shines in the heart. Or 2 Corinthians 3, 18, perhaps most important.

But we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord are being changed. How are we being changed? Beholding the glory of the Lord are being changed from one degree of glory to the next. So if you want to be changed so that your heart is a tender heart that has all those emotions that you're supposed to have, what do you do? You take whatever steps you can to see God.

See God. We must see God. Because it says when you behold His glory, you're changed.

Here's the way John puts it. Beloved, we are God's children now, but it does not yet appear what we shall be. We know that when He appears we shall be like Him, be changed.

Why? Because we shall see Him as He is. Even at the second coming, our transformation into His likeness is connected with our beholding of Him. Seeing is becoming.

Beholding is becoming. But there is no direct beholding of God. So where do you see Him? That's what number six is about.

Meditate on the Word of God day and night. God reveals Himself in His Word. What we see of God in the Word is the kindling of the joy of faith.

So look at a few testimonies to this effect in the Bible. Psalm 23.3 He restores my soul. Twenty-third Psalm in that famous phrase, He restores my soul.

He restores my soul. But now compare that with Psalm 19.7. The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul. So if you want life, this is revived technically.

If you want life, the life of joy, the life of hope, the life of peace in your soul, God's got to restore it. God's got to revive it. But He uses means.

And Psalm 19.7 says the law of the Lord, the Word of the Lord, the teaching of the Lord restores the soul. So He does it through His Word. Or verse 8 of Psalm 19.

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. Is your heart happy? If it's not happy, how much do you soak in the Word of God? Wesley Duell wrote a book, Letting God Guide You Daily, I think it's called. And he said one sentence in there that I remember just shocked me.

He said, there are seasons when I must take a retreat to get away to pray. And sometimes I must read 50 chapters of the Bible before I am in the right spirit to commune with God. Now, what that implies is that our souls and our minds are being bombarded and saturated hour by hour in this culture with carnality, unspirituality and godlessness.

And that affects us. We are being shaped continually by the forces around us in advertising, in media, in art, in commerce, in conversation. So few impulses relate to God.

How then shall we combat this? What is the antidote? And surely it is to listen to God, to simply linger in God's speaking presence. Your words, Jeremiah 15, 16, were found and I did eat them and they were a joy to me and became the delight of my heart because I am called by your name. John 15, 11, I have spoken these things to you that my joy may be in you.

Do you believe that the gospels exist as a means of getting the joy of Christ into your life? And if you believe that, how much time do you spend meditating on the gospel? How many people come into my office in all manner of difficulty? Especially difficulty of soul. And if I ask them, tell me about your walk with God. Tell me about your communion with Him over the word.

There is generally a looking down and a well, that hasn't been good lately. Well, what do you mean? For example, oh, it's real hit and miss. Well, like what? What do you mean? Well, frankly, frankly, I just haven't been doing it.

I'm willing to start there with people. I don't say, get out of here and shape up. I'm willing to start there because there are reasons for that.

There are dynamics in their lives that are bringing that about. There are practical things they can do to turn that around. And there is no surprise that if we give the Lord... We've done surveys.

This is a Bible-believing church, right? Thirteen, fourteen hundred people come to this church on Sunday morning. We've done surveys here as to how much Bible-reading people do. And it's absolutely shocking, absolutely shocking how little people pray and read their Bibles.

And then wonder why God doesn't solve their problems. Wonder why their marriage isn't working, or their kids aren't obeying, or their work isn't flourishing, or their soul is so distressed. He spoke these things to us that His joy may be in us and that our joy may be full.

He has a remedy. Soak in it. Live in it.

Psalms 1. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. Now let me just give you a little tip.

Tips. I don't like to write books on tips, but everybody needs tips every now and then. So here's a tip.

How do you do that? Now I'm a pastor, I'm a Bible man, and I struggle with this. I have to remind myself continually what this means and how to do it. I will, for example, get in my little prayer corner in the morning and spend an extended time over the Word, read four or five chapters, praying as I go, and that can take an hour if you pause and pray between verses for your family and for the elders and for the church and missionaries and for the world.

And I'll finish, and I'll at one level feel a clean conscience because I've given the time. I put in the time. And I get up, go to my computer, get to work.

And what hits me, if God is merciful to me at that moment, is right now I could not quote any single verse that I just read. It was good while I was reading it. It felt good.

It tasted good. It colored my prayers. I believe God was pleased.

I believe missionaries got help. And now I'm ready to go to work, and I don't remember, I can't say any of them. So how am I going to meditate on the law of the Lord all day? I don't think this means read your Bible all day.

You've got to go to work. So the tip is, when you've done reading the section, one chapter, two chapters, whatever you read, paragraph, find a verse or a phrase and memorize it for the day. And take a little piece of paper like this and write on it the verse.

Write the verse. For example, off my front burner. Frankly, I forget what I read this morning.

So I didn't do my tip, but I did my tip. I don't remember yesterday either. I'm going to back up three days.

I didn't write them down. The ransomed of the Lord shall return. And come with singing to Zion.

And everlasting joy will be upon their heads. And they shall obtain joy and gladness. And sorrow and sighing will flee away.

And what I've been noticing since I nailed that one a few days ago, I forget how many days ago it was, is that I've been noticing the word ransom and redeem repeatedly in the book of Isaiah. But I haven't been as successful memorizing them. You've got to have something to take with you if you're going to meditate

on the law of the Lord.

It's like a lozenge. It's like a spiritual lozenge. You put it under the tongue of your soul and you let it dissolve all day and you drink it.

So a biblical lozenge enables you to meditate on the law of the Lord day and night. And I've got all these verses here on the value of scriptures for the growth of your joy. That's real central for me.

Let me give you a few illustrations from history, from missionaries. Like Hudson Taylor. This is written by his son.

It was not easy for Mr. Taylor in his changeful life to make time for prayer and Bible study, but he knew that it was vital. Indeed it is. Well do the writers remember traveling with him month after month in northern China by cart and wheelbarrow with the poorest of inns at night, often with only one large room for coolies and travelers alike.

They would screen off a corner for their father and another for themselves and with curtains of some sort. And then after sleep had at last brought a measure of quiet, they would hear a match struck and see the flicker of candlelight, which told that Mr. Taylor, whoever weary, was pouring over the little Bible in two volumes, always at hand. From 2 to 4 a.m. was the time he usually gave to prayer, the time he could be most sure of being undisturbed to wait upon God.

Now we all know the stories like that are unrealistic. Because there's no way I'm going to stay awake from 2 to 4 a.m. Or if I could, I'd fall asleep talking to you at, you know, 12 p.m. But the point is, in his life, probably while he was riding on those little carts between villages, he could sleep. But he probably couldn't concentrate and read and meditate.

So he'd doze off riding along. And then he'd wake up and preach or deal with the people and doze off and ride along. And then at 2 a.m. he would get up and do what he had to do.

Susanna Wesley had 17 children. And she took her apron at the kitchen table. You've heard the story perhaps.

And she pulled it up over and made a tent for herself. And she taught her children. You should read Susanna Wesley's letter to John about disciplining children.

She says, if you don't control a child by the time he's one, if you don't break the rebellious will by the time they're one, you'll have one chaotic family and you'll never be able to have any peace at all. So she had her children obedient by the time they were little. And when they saw the tent go over her head, they don't come near mommy.

They're silent. It is possible to find a way in the busiest of life to do this. I often ask people, they'll say, I still have time in the morning to read the Bible.

And I say, I don't care if you read it in the morning. Read another time. But I sometimes ask, did you eat breakfast? Well, yeah.

Well, why not skip breakfast and eat Bible? Just get your priorities right. I mean, everybody has the same amount of time. We're just declaring our priorities.

If you think eating breakfast is more important than reading the Bible, you're wrong. Unless you read it some other time. One of the reasons fasting exists is because we need to find time to read the Bible.

Number seven, pray earnestly and continually for open eyes and an inclination for God. It's not enough to read the Bible, folks. Because the Holy Spirit has to move upon you to open your eyes to the Bible.

Hitherto have you asked, John 16, 24. Hitherto have you asked nothing in my name. Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full.

Ask, ask and your joy will be full. Do you pray prayers like these? Psalm 90, 14. Oh, satisfy us in the morning with your loving kindness that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

Do you ask God, satisfy us in the morning? I pray that prayer or something like it all the time. You know, sometimes you get into a funk and you're so inclined to self-pity. That is, you want your spouse or your friends to see you're in a funk and feel sorry for you and say, oh, poor you and pet you a little bit and treat you with some gentleness.

That you don't pray that prayer because you really don't want it. Yet, the funk feels good, though it feels bad. Because people pity you when you're in a funk.

They pay attention to you. Something very deep here about depression or about those really awful expressions of dysfunction where people cut themselves. I've dealt with numerous women over the years who compulsively cut themselves.

Eating disorders usually involved that cut themselves on their arms or their stomach and have to have stitches. And I try to figure these women out. And one of them said to me, they touch me when they're sewing me up.

The longing. Depression can get very, very low and drive people to do the strangest of painful and sad things. And one of the steps to have our joy restored is to ask God to satisfy us in the morning with His loving kindness.

Not the touch of another human. Or, Psalm 85, 6, Will you not yourself revive us again that your people may rejoice in you? Revive us that we may rejoice in you. Let's pray that for our churches.

Psalm 51, 12, Restore to me the joy. Pray for the joy. Mark 9, 24, I believe, help my unbelief.

If belief involves joy, ask God to help your unbelief. Here's one that I pray a lot. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.

Ephesians 1, 18, May be enlightened so that you will know what is the hope of your calling. We need to have the eyes of our heart enlightened. Not just the eyes.

You see, when you start reading the Bible, You've got physical eyes and you can make your physical eyes move over the pages and construe the logic and understand the definitions of words and the flow of an argument. But so what? If the eyes of the heart don't see glory, Don't see hope, Riches of glory, Inheritance. That's what we pray for.

Open my eyes, Psalm 119, 18, That I may behold wonder, Wonderful things out of your law. So I never start reading my Bible at home, This may be an overstatement, but it feels like true as I think back, Without

praying something like that prayer. I open my Bible, and before I start, I say, Oh Lord, as I read your word now, Would you enlighten the eyes of my heart, And would you open the eyes of my heart, That I might see wonderful things out of your law.

Don't let this be a mere intellectual exercise. Let this be a communion with you as I behold your glory in your word. And you stand forth as a person out of these pages and make yourself known to me.

Amen. And you start reading, staying in the spirit of dependence on him. Psalm 119, 36, Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to gain.

You gotta ask God to incline your heart. Some of you right now are hearing this, We talked about this last night, some of us, And this is feeling at this moment like a regimen, A burdensome regimen. Oh dear, I thought Christian hedonism was all about freedom and joy, And now we're back to discipline and regimen.

Well, the realistic state of affairs is, It's a gift, But God uses means to cultivate it and increase it, And the word and prayer are the two main means, And the prayer must involve a prayer for an inclination. If you had this inclination already, nothing would be a regimen. The fight in the Christian life is to become the kind of person Who flourishes spontaneously in a regimen and doesn't need discipline.

But that's never going to happen ultimately in this life. Otherwise the New Testament wouldn't have been written the way it's written. We must ask God to incline our hearts, To open our eyes, To restore our souls, To satisfy us in the morning, To give us the joy of the Lord.

We're asking because we're always drifting the other direction. Number eight, Learn to preach to yourself rather than listen to yourself. Psalm 42.5, Here's the psalmist preaching to himself, Why are you in despair, oh my soul? Why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence.

Now here's what Martin Lloyd-Jones says about that, Preaching to yourself. Have you realized, Lloyd-Jones says, That most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself Instead of talking to yourself? That's a big statement. Most of the unhappiness in life is owing to the fact that you are listening to yourself.

So you wake up in the morning, And all kinds of messages are there. Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them, But they are talking to you.

They bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who's talking to you? Yourself is talking to you.

Now this man's treatment, The man he's talking about is this man right here. This man's treatment in Psalm 42 was this, Instead of allowing this self to talk to him, He starts talking to himself. Why art thou cast down, oh my soul? He asks.

His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says, Self, listen for a moment, And I will speak to you. Now that is very, very important.

That we learn to take scripture, And preach truth to ourselves. It's not just in reading the scriptures, We must take the scriptures, And assert them over against our flesh, And the devil, and the world, And preach them to ourselves. I say no to myself a lot.

I just preach a lot of things. My carnal nature will bring up something, And I just say, No! Self. That's not acceptable.

And then, You direct your attention over to the hedonistic alternative in Christ, And you tell yourself about that, And you remind yourself about that, But you don't just passively sit there, Letting the mind just go on, Worrying away with its bad news, Or its temptations, Cultivating a fantasy, That will involve you in more covetousness, Or greed, Or lust, Or power mongering, Or the praise of men, And savoring what it might be like, If they like you, And you just kind of, You've got to butt in. You butt in, And talk to that message, And say, No! Shut down! Click off! I've got some truth to talk to you about, From the Bible, And it can be very powerful. God will deliver.

Number nine, Spend time with God-saturated people, Who help you see God, And fight the fight. Jonathan Rose, 1 Samuel 23 16, Jonathan Rose, And went to David at Horesh, And strengthened his hand in God. I am so fortunate, To have around me, The staff that I have, And the wife that I have, And now with grown sons, The sons that I have, Who daily strengthen my hand.

And it's almost always with the word of God. Take care, brethren, That there be in any one of you, An evil, unbelieving heart, Falls away from the living God. But, how do you take care against that? Encourage one another, Day after day, As long as it is called today, So that none of you may be hardened By the deceitfulness of sin.

So you don't just preach to yourself, You put yourself in relationship with people. He who walks with the wise, Shall be wise. You put yourself in connection with people, In a small group, Or in a Sunday school class, Or in a friendship, Or you find the sages, And you be with them, As much as you can be with them.

And let them minister to you, And let their taste for God, Rub off on you. Number ten, Be patient in the night of God's seeming absence. This is almost like gutsy guilt, But a little different.

David said, I waited patiently for the Lord. He inclined to me and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, And out of the miry clay.

Now that's where he was, When he was waiting patiently. So you may be there this morning, I don't know. You may feel like you're in a pit of destruction, Or in miry clay, And you can hardly get your legs out of it.

And there's no energy, There's no fleet footedness, There's hardly any inclination, You just feel yourself sinking. One of the things that's necessary there, Is to wait patiently for the Lord. Now he didn't just wait, He inclined to me and heard my cry.

While you're waiting, You cry to God. And God comes in due time. How long here? A day? A month? If Bob Hamlet were here, One of the most significant older lay ministers in our church, He wouldn't mind me telling you that, His depression lasted eight years.

And God used the Word of God to bring him up out of it. He's a real proponent of Scripture memory today in our church. He set my feet upon a rock, And making my footsteps firm.

He put a new song in my mouth, A song of praise to our God, Many will see and fear, And will trust in the Lord. That's one of the reasons God lets you stay there. You see that? I waited patiently for the Lord.

How long? A season. It took patience. It was long enough to take patience.

What was the effect of it? Evangelism. That brought people to trust Jesus. Because there was something about you, Having walked through that, That you felt the rock in a new way.

You felt the song in a new way. You praised God in a new way. And when people saw a new fear, And a new trust came into their lives, And you were more fruitful.

Don't begrudge the seasons of darkness. William Cooper tried to kill himself three times. Labored with depression.

Wrote the great hymns we love. There's a fountain filled with blood. And God moves in a mysterious way.

May you fearful saints, Press courage, take the clouds you so much dread, Are big with mercy, And will break in blessings on your head. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace. Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast, Unfolding every hour. The bud may have a bitter taste, But sweet will be the flower. Blind unbelief is sure to err, And scan His work in vain.

God is His own interpreter, And He will make it. To me, that hymn was worth His whole life. It hangs over the mantle in our living room, And has associations that are very precious.

And it does for others in this church. The woman who stitched that for us, So that we could hang it there, Gave it to me after my sermon series on Job. Walking through an unbelievably dark period in her life.

So, thank you, William Cooper, For your darkness. Get the rest and exercise and proper diet, That your body was designed by God to have. It is vain for you to rise up early and retire late, Eating the bread of anxious toil or painful labors.

God gives to His beloved in His sleep. Take a Sabbath and get eight hours of sleep. I should be preaching after last night.

But I do plan to make up for it on Sunday afternoon. Because I have a sermon to write this afternoon, And so probably will not get eight hours of sleep tonight. But I promise you, Unless something intervenes, That after lunch on Sunday, I will probably sleep until six o'clock.

So I will get it. Elijah, you remember, This is the story of Elijah. He runs for how many miles to beat the chariots, And he's just, God gave triumph on Mount Carmel, And when he arrives there, Jezebel is on his case, And so he hightails it for the mountains, And when he arrives in the mountains, He's absolutely exhausted, And he says, Lord, take my life.

In other words, he's depressed, Under the point of suicide. There's no point in living, And God says, With some miraculous means, Eat this and go to sleep. And when he wakes up, It says, In the strength of that rest, He went all the way to Sinai.

Forty days. Jonathan Edwards' story there, About how Edwards used food in a very careful way. He carefully observed the effects of the different sorts of foods, And selected those which suited his constitution, And rendered him most fit for mental labor.

I wonder how many of you study the effects of foods on your body. Study food, study rest, and study exercise. And without this feeling like a big legalistic thing, Just say, I want to be maximal.

I want to be maximal for Jesus. Maximum joy, Maximum energy, Maximum life, Maximum patience. And then study how your life works.

Analyze what effect a big, heavy pasta has on you. Or caffeine, or sugar. Or quantities, double and triple helpings.

Analyze the effect of a five-hour night's sleep, Upon your threshold of anger with your spouse, Or children, And the resources of dealing with a crying two-year-old. There's a connection there. Analyze the absence of exercise, Where none of these, what are they called, Irving your brain, little endorphins or something, That when you jog or walk fast, These chemicals are stirred up so that your brain does what God made your brain to do.

Not get depressed, but feel a little more lively. Study those things for God's sake. Make a proper use of revelation in nature.

When the sky is clear this afternoon, which they say it was going to do, Go out tonight and look at the sunset and just look at it. Just bathe in it and see if there isn't something healing in it from God. Read the great books if you're that kind of person.

I think biographies are just great. I mentioned a few great books on God, Like Stephen Charnock on the existence and attributes of God, And Thomas Watson on the body of divinity, And then some of my favorite biographies, Murray on Edwards, and Edwards on Brainerd, And Bainton on Luther, and Brown on Augustine, And Elliott on Amy Carmichael. Do the hard and loving thing for the sake of others' witness and mercy.

Listen to this amazing text from Isaiah 58. If you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, In other words, if you pour yourself out, inconvenience yourself, And find people who need something, And labor to meet that need in Jesus' name and for His glory, Then your light will rise in the darkness, And your gloom will become like midday, And the Lord will guide you and satisfy your desire in scorched places, And give strength to your bones, And you will be like a watered garden and like a spring of water. Are those promises or what? I mean, is there anybody in this room who doesn't want to have light go up in your darkness? Have your gloom become like midday? Be satisfied in your desires in scorched places.

Have strength in your bones. Be like a watered garden that bears fruit for other people and a spring of water. If you want to be that way, why not believe God who says, If you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, That's going to happen.

We stay at home, watching TV, putzing around, Basically living for our own private comforts, And wonder why there's so much gloom in our lives. Lastly, get a global vision for the cause of Christ, And pour yourself out for the unreached peoples. God be gracious to us, Psalm 67, 1. God be gracious to us and bless us and cause your face to shine upon us, In order that your way may be known on the earth.

God blesses you to make his way known. Same thing in verse 7. God blesses us that all the ends of the earth may fear him. So if you don't have a vision for all the ends of the earth, You're going to cut yourself off from these blessings.

The blessings start coming to you. They're intended to flow through you for the nations. If you say, I'm not interested in the nations, I've got a problem of my own.

The blessing's going to stop. J. Campbell White said, Most men are not satisfied with the permanent output of their lives. Nothing can wholly satisfy the life of Christ within his followers, Except the adoption of Christ's purpose toward the world that he came to redeem.

Fame, pleasure, riches are but husks and ashes, In contrast with the boundless and abiding joy, The boundless and abiding joy, Of working with God for the fulfillment of his eternal plans. The men who are putting everything into Christ's undertaking, Are getting out of life its sweetest, most priceless. Let me close in prayer.

O Father in heaven, we have touched on glorious things, And we are a needy people. O God, would you grant your Holy Spirit to be poured out on us now, To embrace you and these particular strategies of seeing you, Knowing you, and loving you, That we might be transformed from one degree of glory into the likeness of Jesus. We want people to see Jesus in our lives, So that they can come to delight in Jesus, So that our joy in Jesus might expand into their joy in Jesus.

So, take us through the remainder of this day, With a sense of profound dependence on your provision, And remind us that there is no God like you, Who works for those who wait for him. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

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