

Desiring God

by John Piper

John Piper's sermon emphasizes that true joy and satisfaction in God glorifies Him and fulfills our purpose in life.

Duration: 34:20

Scripture: Psalm 37:4, Psalm 100:2, Philippians 1:19

Topics: "Christian Discipleship", "Godly Joy"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the need for believers to hunger for God and be convicted of their worldly desires. He argues that discipleship requires a complete surrender to God, as illustrated by the parable of the man who sells everything to obtain a hidden treasure. The preacher also highlights the importance of pursuing joy in God as a means of honoring Him and glorifying Him. He discusses the nature of evil, stating that forsaking God is the ultimate evil. The central thesis of the sermon is that God is most glorified in believers when they are most satisfied in Him, and therefore, believers should prioritize maximizing their joy in God above all else. The preacher supports this thesis with biblical references, including 1 Corinthians 10:31 and Philippians 1.

Transcript

This morning to have in our chapel, Dr. John Piper, the director of Desiring God Ministries, as well as the pastor of the Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1946. His father was an itinerant evangelist who was still actively ministering through international radio and Bible courses.

Dr. Piper has written a tribute to his mother who died in 1974 in the booklet, *What's the Difference?*, which is also chapter one of the book, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. Dr. Piper attended Wheaton College from 1964 to 1968, majoring in literature and a minor in philosophy. He then completed a Bachelor of Divinity at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California in 1971.

Through Dr. Daniel Fuller, he discovered the writings of Jonathan Edwards, his most influential dead teacher. He did his doctoral work in New Testament studies at the University of Munich in Munich, West Germany from 1971 to 1974. Upon completion of his doctorate, he went on to teach biblical studies at Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota from 1974 to 1980.

In 1980, sensing an irresistible call of the Lord to preach, John became the senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he has been ministering for these past 20 years. Together with his people, John is dedicated to spreading a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all people. He is the author of several publications, and he and his wife, Noelle, have four sons, one daughter, and one grandchild.

Dr. Piper, we're honored to have you in our midst this morning. Would you join me in welcoming him to our pulpit? I don't think it would be any more against the fire code for you folks standing out there to sit in the aisle than it would be where you're standing, so it would not offend me in the least, and in fact, I would encourage any of you who would rather sit in the aisle to come in, but if that's where you want to be out there, that's okay. Let's pray together.

Father, please take these few minutes now and help me to be faithful to the scriptures and to be filled with your Holy Spirit and to be protected from the devil and all his fiery darts, and would you grant to this listening audience that's all around me here a docile mind and heart to submit to whatever accords with your word and to be protected from whatever doesn't, and so work mighty changes, Lord, wherever they're needed, and I pray that the ripple effect would go to the nations and to the decades, and I ask, Lord Jesus, that you would be exalted now in our midst and satisfy our hearts with your steadfast love in the morning, that we may rejoice and be glad in you all our days. In your name, Lord Jesus, we pray, amen. One of the clearest and most central truths in the Bible is that God is infinitely glorious, infinitely beautiful, infinitely majestic, and it follows from that that his supreme goal in all that he has done and is doing and will do in creation and in redemptive history is to uphold and display and to magnify that glory, which has the ripple effect for you, according to 1 Corinthians 10:31, that you are to do everything you do, whether you eat or drink, to the glory of God, which means to so speak and so eat and so drink and so live and so preach and so counsel and so marry and so bury and so play racquetball or ultimate frisbee, that God looks glorious in your life, that he looks beautiful in your life, that he looks satisfying in your life.

That's your reason for ministry and your reason for being. So here's my life thesis, and I have one shot at Dallas, and so I will give you my whole package in 25 minutes. My thesis is that if God is infinitely glorious and if God does everything that he does from creation to redemption and consummation to uphold and display and magnify that glory and therefore calls you to join him in that great enterprise of God-centeredness, then this is true.

God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him, which means that you should make it your lifelong vocation to maximize your satisfaction in God above all things. That is your job, above all things, is to maximize your joy in God. Now, since this is Dallas, take your Greek testaments please, this is mine, and turn to Philippians chapter 1. I have high expectations.

I don't do this at every seminary. Philippians chapter 1, I want to just argue very briefly exegetically for that thesis from two verses, maybe we'll read three. We'll start at verse 19 and read through perhaps just verse 20, 21.

And I'll read it very literally so you can follow along there. For I know that this to me will fall out under salvation or deliverance, depending on how you interpret Soterian, through your prayer and supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to the eager expectation and hope of me, according to my eager expectation and hope, that in nothing I might be ashamed, but in everything with boldness or openness, courage, as always, also now, here's the key phrase, Christ might be magnified. In my body, whether

through life, whether through death.

So now let's collapse that down and paraphrase it, get it clear. Paul's high expectation and grand hope for his life, this is why he lives. This is the message I preached in February 1980 when I candidated at Bethlehem Baptist Church to say, this is what I'm about, and I hope it's what you're about.

I want, he says, more than anything that Christ will be shown to be great. Surely that's the meaning of this word here. Megalumpheasetai, mega.

I want Christ to be mega in my life. I want Him to be shown to be magnificent and glorious and beautiful and all satisfying in my life and in my death, through my body. Now, how does that happen? How does it happen so that you live and die in a way that makes Christ look great, which is the only reason we exist? And that's given in verse 21 with this great explanatory clause here, this gar clause.

Most important words in the Bible are un and gar. For to me, to live. Now correlate the word live there with the word life in verse 20.

He said, I want Christ to be seen as magnificent in my life. And now he says, for to me, to live is Christ. And then he says, and to die.

To die, correlate the word die with the word death in verse 21. To die is gain. Now, let's just work for a moment with the die pair.

I want Christ to be seen as magnificent in my body when I die. How does that happen? For to me, to die is gain. Now you finish the message.

You finish the message. You build the theology on that. What is that saying? Christ will be seen as glorious and magnificent and all satisfying to the degree that when you lose all your family, all your health, all your job, all your future on earth, you say, die.

Now, why? Why would that show Christ to be gain? Verse 23. Much more, exceedingly better. He's going to go and be with Christ.

And that will be Paolo Malon Crayson. When he dies, he says, he's going to go to be with Christ, which is infinitely better than everything he loses here. Moral eight.

These two great realities. The goal for Christ to be magnified in your body and the heart state of dying which says, Christ is all. Christ is better to me than my wife.

Christ is better to me than my grandchildren. Christ is better to me than more books. Christ is better to me than minister.

Christ is better to me than that long for retirement. Christ is better to me than preaching in chapels. Christ is better to me than sex.

Christ is better to me than money. Christ is better to me than motorcycles or whatever else. Swim ball gets on.

I just visited his office and saw a motorcycle in there. I remember the, what was it? Ruminator, percolator. I can't remember what it was.

Simulator. Simulator. That was it.

Whatever it is, if you can lose it at the moment of your last gasp and feel gain, you glorify him. You get the gain. He gets the glory.

Does that feel like a contradiction? Everywhere I go, people say that's a contradiction. That to pursue your gain is unbiblical. I just read it again in a notable American theologian whose name, if I said it, everybody in this room would know.

He said, to quote, the fundamental motive of Christian obedience is always the heart of gratitude and never the hope of gain. Unquote. Wrong.

Wrong. Wrong. And it's ruining the church.

It's ruining it. It hangs in the air of America like a gas that to pursue your own joy contaminates virtue and ruins worship. And I'm here to say the exact opposite is the case.

To the degree that you undertake to deny this pursuit of gain in Christ, you will ruin worship, destroy your church, and contaminate virtue. Now, to defend that in the next 15 minutes, I have eight points. Let's see how many we can do.

What I want to do is, first of all, let Jonathan Edwards have a say here. Jonathan Edwards, bless you, bless you. Wrong, wrong, however.

Not the most influential dead teacher. The most influential extra-biblical dead teacher. Let's get that straight here.

The Apostle Paul. Because Jesus isn't dead. The Apostle Paul is the most influential dead teacher in my life.

And Edwards is a very distant second. All right, but here's what he said. So if it helps any to have another authority beside this Johnny come lately, here it is.

So God glorifies himself toward the creature in two ways. This is a quote from the Miscellanies. One, by appearing to their understanding.

Two, in communicating himself to their hearts, and in their rejoicing, and delighting in, and enjoying the manifestations which he makes of himself. God is glorified not only by his glory being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified if they only see it.

His glory is then received by the whole soul, both the understanding and by the heart. God made the world that he might communicate, and the creature receive his glory, and that it might be received both by the mind and heart. He that testifies his idea of God's glory, get this now, he that testifies, and that's what preaching is, and there are many who get only half the truth here, to the great hurt of their churches.

He that testifies of his idea of God's glory doesn't glorify God so much as he that testifies also his approbation of it and his delight in it. In other words, you give God half the glory that is due when you only understand and preach him accurately. The other half comes from the exuberance of your soul's delight in his glory, and therefore preaching is expository exaltation.

You exalt over a text, that's what preaching is, and if your heart is not pursuing delight in God, you won't. Consider that pursuit a contamination of preaching. You will be a half preacher, and produce a half people, and they will be sick, and there are so many sick churches who are preached to by half preachers because they have been lured into this crazy Kantian stoic ethic that says the pursuit of your own joy contaminates and ruins virtue and worship, and it is thoroughly unbiblical.

You insult text after text after text after text to believe that ethic. It blew me away in 1968 when I first saw it, and I've been trying to understand it ever since. So here are my eight points, we'll get as many as we can in.

Number one, this truth that you are to pursue your joy to the end that God would be glorified in your being satisfied in him is taught by the fact that we are commanded to pursue our joy. Psalm 37.4, delight yourself in the Lord. Psalm 100 verse 2, serve the Lord with gladness.

This is not an option, this is a command. Tell me if you should not obey commands, and should you pursue the obedience of commands, and if one of the commands is rejoice always, and again I say rejoice in the Lord, to say you shouldn't pursue that joy is wicked. Second argument, the Bible threatens us if we will not be happy in God.

Deuteronomy 28 verse 47, listen to this, because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, therefore you will serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you. You consider joy an option? Icing on the cake of Christianity? Caboose at the end of the train? Wrong! If you do not serve the Lord your God with gladness, you will serve your enemies. He threatens terrible things, Jeremy Taylor said, if we will not be happy in him.

Third argument, the nature of faith, the nature of faith, what is faith? Take two texts, Hebrews 11 verse 6, without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe two things, must believe that he is, and that he is the what of those who seek him. Can't believe it says that. And people deny that that's the nature of faith.

Faith is coming to God for reward, period. You cannot please God if you don't come to him for reward. And he is the reward.

I could defend that from the book of Hebrews, because the new covenant coming to fulfillment in this book describes, I will walk among you, I will be your God, you will be my people. The essence of this reward is God with us, at his right hand are pleasures forevermore. The nature of faith is, let me bring in the other text, John 6 verse 35, I am the bread of life, Jesus says, he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me will never thirst.

What is believing in that verse? It is a coming to Jesus so as to be satisfied with him. Or better, in the full picture of John's theology, so as to be satisfied with all that God the Father is for us in Jesus. So my third argument is, the nature of faith commands that we pursue our joy in God, as a means of honoring God.

Fourth argument, the nature of evil. What is evil? I wonder if we had different definitions of evil offered in this congregation. If the first definition that comes to your mind is, acting contrary to the authority of God, you're one kind of Christian.

And if you answer with Jeremiah, you're another kind of Christian. Jeremiah in chapter 2 verse 13 says, Be appalled, O heavens, be shocked. He's calling the whole universe to be appalled at this now.

For my people have committed two evils. What are they? One, they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water. And what's the other one? They have hewn out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Be shocked, universe! I offer the world a fountain, and even their theologians rise up and say it's wrong to pursue drinking in this fountain. Even their ethicists say it's wrong to be motivated by the desire to glut yourself on this fountain. Be shocked, be absolutely shocked, Dallas, that anybody would ever teach that, or believe that, or act on that.

I hold out a fountain of living water. I do not mean for you to deny your desire to be happy in that water, and turn away to anything else. I mean for you to come and fall on your face, and drink from me, and drink, and drink, and drink, and spend eternity drinking, so that when you look up every now and then, and you will, you'll look up every now and then, you will say, ah, and that's worship.

That's worship. Worship is not bringing buckets of your labor into the service on Sunday morning, and dumping them into the fountain, as so many pastors tell you you should. The reason we don't have life in the service is because you don't come here to give, that's the problem.

You just come here to get. Wrong! Wrong! That is not the problem. The problem is they've gotten up and watched television, and stuffed their face with the white bread of secularism, so that they're not hungry for God when they come.

And you have to spend the first half of the sermon with an emetic. It's called conviction. Trying to get them to vomit out the world, so that they're hungry for God, because when they're hungry for God, and they drink in God, and they taste God, and they're satisfied with God, I tell you, he is mightily glorified.

Fifth argument. The nature of discipleship. The nature of discipleship.

Let's just take Matthew 13, 44. The kingdom of heaven is like a man who found a treasure hidden in a field, and covers it over. And, now I'm going to leave out a phrase, and he goes and he sells everything he has, and buys that field.

What phrase did I leave out? From joy he goes and buys, sells everything that he has. I tell you, it was seeing little Greek phrases like apokaros, years ago at Fuller Seminary, that just blew my mind away. And I was reading Ethicist, and I was saying, no, no, Jesus versus Ethicist.

I'll take Jesus any day. So, here's a call to discipleship. Leave everything for the sake of the kingdom.

What's your motive? Apokaros. I want joy, God. You've made me to long for joy.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, for not telling me that I have to deny that in order to get to you, but rather presenting the kingdom, the king, Jesus to me, so that from joy in him I can count everything as rubbish. That's the way Paul paraphrased it. Philippians 3, for the surpassing value of knowing Jesus my Lord.

And since I've brought up self-denial, let that be the, what, sixth argument? Where are we? Number six. What about self-denial? You might be sitting there saying, whoa, this is really weird. This sounds like hedonism.

It's pure Christian hedonism. It is pure, unadulterated Christian hedonism. No apologies.

I define hedonism as a life devoted to the pursuit of pleasure. That's all I'm about. In God.

What about self-denial? Mark 8, 35. Whoever would be my disciple and deny himself, come after me, for he who seeks to save his life will lose it. So, Piper, you are commending suicide.

Say, read the rest of the verse. I always say, read the rest of the verse. 99% of the objections that are brought up against good theology should be answered by, read the rest of the verse.

Or at least chapter. And the rest of the verse says, but he who would save it must lose it. Now, what's he appealing to? Don't want to lose your life, do you? No? Well, lose it then.

You say, whoa, what does that mean? John's version, the way Jesus said this in John 12, 25, makes it a little clearer what he means. He who loves his life loses it. But he who hates his life in this world guards it for eternity.

So, what is Jesus arguing in these two texts, 12, 25 in John, 8, 35 in Mark? What's he arguing? He's arguing, you want your life? You want it forever? You want maximum joy? Listen, I don't want 80 years of joy and then hell. No, thank you. I don't want 99% pleasure in this world and then hell.

I want 100% proof pleasure for 10,000 ages of ages and anything less you offer me. I'm saying, no, thank you. That's all my hedonism means.

Because Jesus is appealing to that. Hate your life, students. Go to the hard places.

Lay down your life for your congregations so that you will keep it forever. We can do this. We can do this in three minutes, I think.

Seventh, and it's right, we're on the brink of it here. Where does love come from? Sounds like you're telling us to be so, so pursuant of our own pleasure, you can't possibly commend people to be loving people and talk to them like that because it says in 1 Corinthians 13, 5, love seeks not its own. Love seeks not its own.

Well, there's no time to exegete that text, but I think it means love seeks not its own immediate gratification, its own material pleasure, its own earthly enhancement, but oh, love seeks its own eternal joy big time. And there'll be a couple of texts that'll prove it. Number one, Acts 20, 35.

Checked it out in the Greek again this morning just to see how this participle in the English version works. Paul is saying farewell to the Ephesian elders and he says now, it is necessary. You've got this Greek day construction and then he's got a couple of infinities that follow that.

It's necessary as you serve the weak to remember the words of the Lord, how he said, it is more blessed to give than receive. Now, mark this. When I was doing my doctoral dissertation in Munich on Love Your Enemies and working for month after month on the motivation of love, scholars, I fell out of love with scholarship in Munich, Germany and fell in love with the Bible.

Isn't that strange? My dad was worried, oh, my son's going to Fuller in Munich and he's going to lose his faith. You know, God is so good because I could have. A lot of people do.

God is so good. God did this. God opened the word to simply say if it says in the word, it's more blessed to give than to receive.

Don't you let any New Testament scholar or any big highfalutin ethicist with lots of degrees after his name tell you that to do something for the blessedness there is in it contaminates the love and turns it into selfishness and not love. And here's the key word. It's the word remembering.

Paul said when you serve toiling with your own hands the weak, remember the words of the Lord how he said it is more blessed to give than to receive. Now the ethicists have to say forgetting what he said because the blessedness will contaminate the love as a motive if you remember it. I tell you, do your exegesis carefully here because if Paul says keep the blessedness in your mind as you go to the hospital wishing you were at home playing with your kids and you're on your way to the hospital at a late night and you're tired and you need rest and they haven't had you for a few nights and you're wondering what should motivate you here and you try to deny your desire for joy you will contaminate virtue but if you say Jesus has said I will remember it Jesus said there's more blessedness in this and as you walk in that room and you take that dear lady by the hand who's just had the cardiac arrest and you look into her eyes and she opens her eyes and she says oh pastor this is what all old ladies say they're so deferential she says oh pastor you didn't need to come you're so busy that's what they all say young people don't say that young people say it's about time but she says oh pastor you're so busy you didn't have to do this now if I said I know I didn't have to and I didn't want to but it's my duty and I'm here if I said that she'd be hurt but if I say I know and it's late but you know what as I was driving here I was praying and the Lord reminded me of the blessing I'm going to get here and as I look into your eyes there's no place I'd rather be than here giving you a word of encouragement and receiving back echoes of appreciation and love and faith from you and then when you tell her I'm here because I delight to be here she feels honored love is not contaminated by the pursuit of joy in love by the pursuit of joy in love and ultimately in the God of love okay I'm two minutes over the time I said I had to stop so I'm done and I will end with this final word the goal of all things is to glorify God that is to show Him to be magnificent in your life whether by death or by life and the way to do that is to be maximally satisfied in Him and to pursue that satisfaction in everything you do let's pray Father I pray now that You would take this and make it a seed of biblical reflection that You'd refine it in any way it needs to be refined and that You would magnify Yourself in the lives of these men and women I pray through Christ Amen

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