

Finishing Well in the Face of Death

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting in God's promises and finding satisfaction in Him, even in the face of unexpected challenges and uncertainties. It encourages listeners to meditate on the Bible to strengthen their faith, fight against unbelief, and seek joy and contentment in God. The speaker highlights the need to believe that God works all things for good and urges the audience to seek a heavenly city, focusing on eternal rather than temporary satisfaction.

Scripture: Genesis 45:7, Isaiah 46:4, Romans 14:7, Hebrews 13:14, Romans 8:28

Topics: "Trusting God's Promises", "Finding Joy in Uncertainty"

Description

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Transcript

Since this is my last time with you and I'm getting on a plane right after this session, I want to thank Rod, especially for inviting me, and thank Nelson for all that's gone into the conception and development of this project and vision, and Dieter, wherever he went to see it, for leading us in worship, and you for being such absorbent listeners to draw out of me what I feel so full of. This has been good for me to be here. It's a real great thing, because when I was asked, I didn't... There's some things in me to really struggle with whether to do it or not, and this was not one of them, because I feel God's in this movement, I feel He's in this room, I feel that my generation is not finished and has something absolutely stunning in Christ to offer the world.

I've been wondering whether I'm the oldest baby boomer here, so I'd like to take a survey. I'm the oldest baby boomer at my church. Now, you know baby boomers were born in 1946, so I want to ask, you raise your hand, if you were born between January 1 and January 10, 1946.

Raise your hand. Oh, shoot. Okay, forget it.

I'm not the oldest baby boomer here. I thought I could be real fatherly, and I'll be fatherly anyway. I'm going to do something different this morning than I had planned, because of one of you, two of you at

least, you'll be perhaps gratified to know that our little brief interchange last night caused some rumblings in my soul, and as I got up a little before six this morning, began to pray and seek the Lord about this, I really felt like another message saying almost the same thing, which is what I was going to do, would perhaps seal it, but I think if you haven't got it by now, you're probably not going to get it.

Although, I am going to take that message and do it in five minutes, so open your Bible, open your Bible to Hebrews, and where we're going to go after we take five or seven minutes on this message that I'm not going to give is to back up and ask, okay, very practically, show us, tell us practical steps about how to become and sustain this kind of intense delight in God that you're talking about that glorifies Him. In other words, a more of a how-to message, a more of a, so if I were to spend an hour in the room this afternoon, what would I do with it? But, in chapter 13, this message was going to be called Finishing in the Face of Death, and it was going to have two parts to it. It was going to be partly from chapter 11 at the end, and partly from chapter 13, so maybe let's just look briefly at chapter 11, and I'll give you the text and show you where I was going to go with it.

At the end of chapter 11, starting in verse, oh, let's say, 33, no, 32, what more shall I say? Time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, now notice, through faith, or by faith, that is, by laying hold on the reward, by coming to God for all that He is for them, and by being content in Him rather than circumstance, or money, or health, or family, or job, that's faith, by that they conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, people like Daniel, for example, quenched raging fire, that's Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight, women received back their dead by resurrection, now, smack dab, in the middle of verse 35, without any warning whatsoever, that litany of triumphs shifts. And He doesn't say, now, the rest of what I'm about to say is accomplished by lack of faith. This is the litany of what you accomplish by faith in a triumphant, sovereign, all-satisfying God.

Let's just keep reading the list. I'll pick it up again at the first of verse 35. Women received their dead by resurrection.

Some were tortured by faith. Some refused to accept release that they might rise again to a better life, better resurrection, by faith. Others suffered mocking and scourging by faith, even chains and imprisonment by faith.

They were stoned by faith. They were sawn in two by faith. They were killed with the sword by faith.

They went about in skins of sheep and goats and destitute, afflicted, ill-treated by faith, of whom the world was not worthy. I tell you, if you let your well-to-do friends, like we were just hearing, set your standards, you will not do this. If you say, well, when the world sees people hiding in caves with scarce and lanky clothes on, not able to barely feed themselves, they don't think they're worth very much.

But this text says, such people, the world is not worthy of them. The world is not worthy of them. Most missionaries don't get to come here and stand in the limelight and tell a story about their lives and get a little bit of, we admire you.

They just do their work for 30 or 40 years and die and go to heaven and get it all. But this text says, the world isn't worthy of those people. Chapter 13.

So that's about 20 minutes worth. Now, in chapter 13, verses 12, 13, and 14, I want to show you the structure and the challenge that maybe I'll come back to and end with again this morning, but this is going to be the closing challenge. So Jesus suffered outside the gate, on the garbage heap of Gotha, in order to sanctify, set apart, purify, give to His Father as a special possession, to sanctify the people through His own blood.

Now notice that great, therefore, therefore, let us go forth to Him outside the camp. Now that means outside this room with all these beautiful lights and this nice air conditioning and having had a nice breakfast and feeling the security that everything will go right today, nothing will break and get where you need to be, outside the camp. Let us go, go outside the camp bearing abuse for Him.

I talked to one of you the first night here, a pastor who said that after I gave that litany on the book of Hebrews and started into it, that it was starting to open lights on this book he'd never seen before. Many of you came to the book of Hebrews thinking, this book is the New Testament version of Leviticus. This is not a book where there's anything really practical.

This is Melchizedek book, right? This is utterly irrelevant to Baby Boomers and Busters and X's. You can't preach Hebrews because it is so wild and foreign. You've got this priesthood, you've got these tabernacles, you've got these food laws, you've got all this stuff.

Well, I hope you have been disabused of that because this is one book designed to make radical Christians and here it's coming to a climax. Let's go. Isn't that what it says? 1313, therefore let us go with Him outside the camp of America, outside the Disneyland of the world.

Which is absolutely unrealistic in a world like ours. If you've only lived here, if you've only grown up in America, if you've had hot water, if you've had plumbing, if you've had 9-1-1, if you've had a doctor at your disposal, if you've had a car, you're wildly rich. So let us therefore go with Him outside the camp bearing abuse for Him.

So you've got this practical dimension of the stuff of the camp. Oh, I love the camp. I've got this big collection of shells or this nice computer or my cars and my houses and my clothes and I've got a camp and it's a good camp.

God gave me the camp. Blessed by God. So you've got that dimension and now you've got this abuse thing.

I don't like to be disliked. I don't like to be disliked. I don't like to be criticized or abused in any way.

And the Bible says let us go with Him and bear some abuse for Him. Choose abuse. Choose abuse outside the camp.

End of the message. Now, what we're trying to do in these minutes together is render some accounting of why the Land of Copes cry for why such a big Christian generation is having so little impact. It is the case.

Why the exportation of this brand of evangelicalism to Malawi or wherever is getting lots of people recruited as evangelists. And I'm going to argue that the structures and the bribery and the corruption doesn't seem to change. And after 150 years in Cameroon, for example, you still have to ship Westerners over there to teach the seminary.

What's wrong here with this picture? And I'm arguing that it's because we are Reader's Digest finishers and not Paul finishers. And I'm asking how do you become Acts 20, 24 finishers? I do not count my life of any value, nor as precious to myself, if only I might finish my course and complete the ministry I receive from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God in the face of what the Holy Spirit continually testifies to me, namely, affliction and abuse outside the camp await me everywhere. If we were like that, then there would be a greater impact.

But, in fact, I'm tempted to say most. I'll just say a lot of American Christians would have read that first paragraph in Reader's Digest and actually heard it as attractive. Weep, read and weep.

A boat to cruise, a little softball, much as the joints can take, and shells. And I'm not going to get into the details of that. Wow, wouldn't that be great? No, and you all know it wouldn't be great.

And my answer has been that there will be no finishing without fatalities and no finishing without a fight, and that the fight is a fight to be glorifying God and to be satisfying the soul, and that those two fights are one fight because God glorifies Himself as God by satisfying our souls in God. And if you want to be cut free from the camp and the love of the praise of men, you have to be satisfied in God so fully that these things are as refuse to you. And now the last question then is, as I was asked last night, can you just say some more practically about how you stay that kind of person? Or do you think it just happens once and then you're automatically that kind of person? And I hope you've heard the word fight.

Fight! Every day! For me, it's a fight every day. And it's a fight every day. So let's take the next 30 minutes or so and talk about this.

Stay in Hebrews first to get the pattern. It's still in chapter 13 at the beginning. There is a pattern.

This book right here is called Living by Faith and Future Grace. What I said to the man, wherever you are, who is responsible for this message, and find him and complain. Sorry, I'm doing what I'm doing here, but I don't know his name.

I said, I wrote a book in answer to the question you're asking. Forget the book. I have another message for you.

It was you, wasn't it? I can't remember. You look like it. Well, I did write a book on it, and basically this book is called The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace.

Everything back there says the same thing. It doesn't matter which one you buy. You don't need to get them all.

But if you wonder where this is all coming from, it's coming from this. How to live by faith understood as being happy in God and all that He is for us. So happy that we don't need the world anymore and we can die happily for Jesus.

To live is Christ and to die is, tell me, gain. Say it again. To die is gain.

Now if God would just make you believe that in the bottom of your heart, you'd be very radical people. You're dangerous people. I read somewhere that the Pope said after Calvin's death, the power of that heretic lay in his utter indifference to money.

Amen. Now, look at verses 5 and 6 of Hebrews 13, and I want to show you a structure of living by faith in future grace or the how-to, the structure of the how-to, and then we'll just take as many examples of how to do it so I can flesh it out for you as we can. Keep your life free from the love of money, beginning in verse 5. Keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have.

Now, be amazed at that commandment because what that commandment is telling you to do is something you cannot do. Be content. If you're discontent right now, that is, something is in your heart is just rising up with discontentment, can you right now push a button and change contentment or discontent to contentment? You can't do it.

The states of the heart that are our biggest problems are outside our immediate control. If they were in our immediate control, none of you would be here. You'd all be on the mission field laying your lives down for Jesus with no struggle at all.

But you can't push buttons to take away anxiety. You can't push buttons to take away lust. You can't push buttons to take away anger at your parents.

You can't push buttons to take away greed for more money and longings for security. These things have to be wrought on you. And so the question came to me, can you tell us something to help us? This is scary.

You're asking us to perform things we cannot do. You're calling us to live at a level we cannot live. And that's exactly what verse 5 is doing, what I've been doing.

Keep your life free from the love of money. Be content with what you have. Now, here comes the Bible strategy for change.

If you're a greedy, selfish person, or just an average run-of-the-mill chicken, this is the answer. Listen, for, see that little word for? That's the biblical signal. Some support and help is coming here.

For God has said, that's the he, God has said. Now stop there. I agree entirely with this man I was talking to last night, and I'll just make the principle plain.

The fundamental strategy, you're going to really be disappointed at this, is prayer and Bible reading. Sorry, you can't get any deeper, but there's more to say. We can flesh that out and maybe help you to be stunned by what the Bible really is and what it has to offer, because here comes the Bible.

For God has said. That's the answer to covetousness and every other battle in the Christian life. God has said.

So you must, over against every sinful, sinful state of heart that keeps you off the mission field with anxieties and greeds and lusts and bitternesses that war against your soul, you must put over against them, God has said. And that's the Bible. So what did he say? God has said, I will never fail you or forsake you.

So just stop right there. That's a quote from the Old Testament. So even the New Testament uses the Bible to undergird these radical commands of not being money lovers, but rather content.

And the answer is a promise. That's my, see what I do is I, in my writings, I try to take these old fashioned, run of the mill, everyday blockbuster atom bomb truths that nobody thinks are important, like read your Bible and trust the promises of God and just put them in new language, like faith in future grace. Isn't that,

don't you think that's a clever title? Faith in future grace.

That means trust the promises of God. But who's going to read that book? That's what you're called to do. All of you find a way to say the old fashioned, tried and true, deeply changing, powerful truth.

This is it. If you love money and if you're anxious about finances, listen to God in the Bible, namely promises, future grace, promises. One of them is I will, future tense, that means not in 50 years when you get to heaven, but starting right now and every second for the rest of your redeemed life, which is all of your life, I'll never leave you.

I will never forsake you. And then stop and meditate. I'm talking meditation now on the Bible and meditate on who said that.

This is not a financial counselor following you around. What's he going to do when the market drops another 300 points? Well, dollar cost averaging. Just keep doing it every day.

That's all he'll be able to say. God owns the stock market. He owns the universe.

He's sovereign and omnipotent. And he says, I'll never leave you and I'll never forsake you. And then look at the conclusion that he draws here.

Hence, therefore, we can confidently say the Lord is my helper. You got to learn now. I'm just saying this is the bottom line.

I have nothing more profound than what I'm counseling you right now. You got to stop. You get up early in the morning, you open your Bible.

You're feeling anxious. Okay. I do every morning.

I feel anxious. I'm wired that way. And I open my Bible looking for promises.

I want God to tell me I don't have to be anxious. And there's some reasons you don't have to be anxious. They have to go into your head.

And then you pray things like open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things. Or you pray, incline my heart to your word and not to getting gain. These are Bible prayers that God will work here while your eyes and your head are working here with this book and you land on the Lord is my helper.

The Lord is my helper. And you stay there for about 10 minutes thinking about it. Who's the Lord? What kind of help? Is he able? You put every problem.

Remember old George Mueller? George Mueller, when he was asked one afternoon in the midst of his stressful pastoral and orphanage running life, how are you able to be so peaceful this afternoon when all these children look to you and so little is guaranteed? And he said, I rolled 60 things onto the Lord this morning. The word rolled is the word is a literal translation of Psalm 55. Roll your burden, cast your burden on the Lord for He cares for you.

He cares for you. He's your helper. So you fight unbelief, that is, you fight for contentment, you fight for joy, you fight for satisfaction by looking at the Lord in prayer until almighty God brings the peace that passes understanding and frees you to take risks for Him when you get up off your knees.

That's the strategy. Now let's go outside Hebrews for a little bit. I suppose I should have finished reading the text.

The Lord is my helper. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? And of course the answer to that is kill you.

You're having your devotions, you read, what can man do to me? And everything in you cries out, he can abuse me. He can torture me. You said so in chapter 11 verse 35.

What do you mean, what can man do to me? And the Lord, if you do this long enough, the Lord will bring to your mind Romans 8. We are counted as sheep to be slaughtered. What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Tribulation, or persecution, or peril, or nakedness, or famine, or sword? What's the answer? No! In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us, for I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, man cannot do anything ultimately harmful to me.

You learn how to interpret the Bible by meditating for your soul on the Bible. People who only treat the Bible kind of intellectually and academically, never wrestling with, what do you mean? What can man do to me? He can kill me. You get mad and you start wrestling.

Then you learn how to interpret the Bible. Get into it for your soul and He takes you to places like Romans 8. And He helps your soul. Man can't do anything to me that God does not permit him to do in His love for me.

And if we had time, we'd go to chapter 12 here in Hebrews and look at all that persecution and how it's the Father's discipline to work righteousness into us and so on. Now let's go outside Hebrews. I think what might be helpful to do is to take a few sample conditions of the heart that seem to militate against this radical way of life that I've been talking about and ask how meditating on promises helps you triumph over that evil state of unbelief.

Let's talk a little bit about just anxiety per se. The Bible so relentlessly says, don't be anxious. Jesus, remember in Matthew 6, let not your heart be anxious.

Don't be anxious about anything. Not what you eat, not what you drink, not what you wear. All the Gentiles seek these things.

Your Father knows that you need them. Seek the kingdom first. Everything will be added to you, there it is, although it won't, because they're going to be tortured and Romans 8 says they're going around naked and in famine, so it doesn't get added to you.

So close your Bible, it's not a true book, and go collect shells. No, no, God won't let you go. He won't let you do that.

He takes you, in response to that little soul struggle, to Philippians 4. You might want to turn there. Philippians 4, got some financial worries or anxieties or whatever. Verse 19 says, my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus.

Really? What about nakedness? What about famine? What about being sawn in two? What about running around unclothed, hiding in caves, the people of whom the world was not worthy? Really? So back up in the chapter to verse 11. Not that I complain of want, for I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. What a lesson, oh Paul teaches, teaches.

I know how to be abased. He's been in prison many days. He's been in the sea a night and a day, floating, wondering if he'd drown.

He's been stoned. He's been beaten with rods. He has been whipped with 39 lashes five times.

Imagine what that back looks like. One time leaves your back like jelly. It heals after a few months, it happens a second time.

Heals slower after a few months. Infection, fever, no antibiotics, no 911, nobody understands. It heals, it happens a third time, same back.

It heals, it happens a fourth time, same back. Slow, slow, slow healing. Now it's purple, just big, big purple back.

And it happens one more time. That's the man who wrote this. I know how to abound and I know how to be abased.

In any and all circumstances, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me. Now compare the all things of verse 13 with the every need of verse 19 and see if light does not come into your mind.

My God will supply every need of yours. I can do all things, including be abased, including hungering. Therefore, if the all things that he can do in verse 13 includes going without food and being abased through much suffering and imprisonment and abuse, then the every need of verse 19 cannot be having all the food you might want and escaping every imprison that you would like.

It means in every crisis he will meet the need that you have to keep you trusting and glorifying him. That's what Matthew 633 means too. In the wider biblical context of Jesus' message when he said, seek the kingdom first and all these things, food, clothing, drink will be added to you, he means enough food, enough clothing and enough drink to do what I want you to do and glorify me and be content in me, which may mean none and starvation in southern Sudan after your parents have been crucified upside down and you've been sold into slavery.

That's what it might mean for a Christian 11 year old. But God will never leave him. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all and the final delivery is to heaven.

We don't know which one of those. Now, what I'm illustrating here, it may sound like, oh, you are preaching the same message, but what I'm trying to illustrate is the use of the word in my struggles to be this kind of person. You see, I'm a very skeptical person.

When he says, what can man do to you? I say, kill me, explain. I'm not easy to satisfy when I read the Bible. When it says I can do all things okay, get out of jail, okay, have all the food you need in southern Sudan, explain.

I'm trying to illustrate how you meditate on the Bible to strengthen your soul in the midst of incredible obstacles against finishing well. Because if you can't do for yourself what I'm doing for you now, what are you going to do? We had a veteran missionary come home after three terms, I think that's sort of veteran, some of you a lot longer than that, but we gathered at our house about 80 or 90 people and gave them the word and somebody raised their hand and said, we're new, we're all getting ready for missions, what's your counsel to us? And he said three things, get Bible, get Bible, and get Bible. Because they had been through a lot.

And all the anthropological, sociological, missiological stuff, which yes, yes helps, the bottom line is can you survive as a believer? Can you keep trusting Him when the kid is unconscious between Cancan and Abidjan in the airplane with malaria at two years old? Can you stay believing as a mom? And the answer is you preach to yourself, you say the Lord has said, and you preach truth to yourself over against the lies of your carnal nature or Satan or skeptical people. I'll take a few more examples here. Suppose you're anxious about, oh, being useless.

You would use a promise like Isaiah 55, my word will not come back to me empty. Or maybe one like 1 Corinthians 15, 58. Are you anxious always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not what? It's not in vain.

You want your life to be not in vain? Pour it out in the work of the Lord. Everything is vain. We had it hanging on our kitchen wall as a boy when I was growing up.

And now it hangs on our kitchen wall, a little glass sign that says only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. It won't be in vain.

Nobody may have ever heard of you tucked away in some little village, but nothing is done in vain. And all the hosts of heaven behold, and you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just. Or you might fear or be anxious about weakness, some weakness that you have, a personal weakness, a physical weakness.

Then you go to a promise like 2 Corinthians 12, 9. My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness. And you meditate on that.

You take it like a lozenge into your mouth and you roll it around while it dissolves and the juices of grace and hope and future promises go down and nurture your soul and the fear that grips it and changes your affection so that you delight in him. Or you might be anxious about a big decision. Many of you might really be anxious right now about the implications of this time together.

And you would go to Psalm 32, 8, where God says, I will instruct you, I will teach you, I will counsel you with my eye upon you. You know, God is not interested in playing games with you, in toying with your future. He's not like that.

And you may say, well, why doesn't He just placard it on the wall then? Because if He placarded it on the wall, you would obey it because it's on the wall and not because your heart has been deeply moved by the greatness and beauty of it. I think that's why God is as quiet as He is in His dealings with us. He means to lead us into His will by Romans 12, 2. Don't be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

He wants you transformed, not wall reading. Carnal people can read handwriting on walls and out of fear do it, because if He can write on the wall, He can do bad things to me. He wants people transformed by a

glimpse of His glory, because He wants you transformed by beholding the glory of the Lord.

We are being transformed from one degree of glory to the next, and the place you see the Lord is in the Bible. The function of the Bible is to reveal the glory of the Lord. Beholding the glory, we are being transformed, and out of the transformation we prove what is the will of God.

And when we make a choice about the will of God from a transformed heart in love with the glory of God, then He's pleased by the obedience. Everything else would be legalism and externality. So don't begrudge His quietness.

Don't ask for lightning. Don't ask that it be written in the sky. Or you might be anxious about opponents.

We've talked about that enough. I'll pass over that. You might be anxious about affliction.

We've talked about that. Here's one. You might be anxious about aging, and what it's going to be like to grow old in a new chapter.

You'd already kind of figured out the way it was going to be like to grow old in your present vocation. You kind of saw the chapter would go this long, and then, you know, after trifocal, I don't know what happens, but you kind of got it figured out that this body is fading, and there will be stages, and you've got your reservation at Augustan home in the live-in independent part, and then there's a medium skill, and then there's a real skill, and then there's the cemetery. And so you kind of plot it out.

But now you've got this new challenge to get old somewhere else, and there's a text about that. There's a text for every fear. There's a text for every fear.

And this is not called proof texting. This is called desperation. This is called life quest.

This is called, I must know what you promise me, or I can't survive. And the text is Isaiah 46, for even to your old age, I am He, and to gray hairs, I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear.

I will carry, and will save. What more do you need? What more do you need? Even to your gray hairs, I will carry you. I have made you.

I will bear. I have created you. I will carry you.

Wow, what a promise. Or it might be death. You might be afraid of death, and if you're afraid of death, wow, pick and choose your page in the Bible.

I like Romans 14, 7 to 9. None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

For to this end, Christ died and rose again, that he might be Lord of the living and of the dead. Wow, why should we fear? Why should we fear? It's on most every page in the Bible. Don't fear death.

Christ has triumphed. The whole purpose of his coming was to overcome, oh, Hebrews again. Hebrews, Hebrews, Hebrews.

Since the children share in flesh and blood, chapter 2, verse 14, he himself likewise took on human nature in order that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death and deliver all those who had been held in bondage by the fear of death their whole life. Oh, freedom from the fear of death,

because Jesus came and clothed himself with mortality so that he could die. Let us go with him outside the gate and do it.

How are we doing? Almost. Where's my leader? Am I supposed to stop at 10 or am I way over time? I have to preach tomorrow morning and go home and write a sermon. 10 o'clock? Five more minutes.

Okay, thank you. I mean to stay on time. I will go five more minutes and stop.

Would you rather talk about lust, bitterness, or impatience? What? Who's persistent? The men are afraid to say lust. Let's go to impatience. What I mean by impatience, this may sound like a small thing to you, but what I mean by impatience is being forced by God to go to an unplanned place of obedience at an unplanned pace.

Being forced by circumstances to go to an unplanned place of obedience at an unplanned pace. And all of you have experienced this, even if it's just sitting at a red light that never changes because it's broken. When you feel massively frustrated and impatient that the cancer ruined everything, or the child died at 21 and all the dreams and all the investment seemed like down a rat hole, or the downsizing.

And this was not in the plan. And you feel impatient. This was not the plan.

Whether it's sickness or death or vocational, structural things that come into your life and you didn't choose them, they just came, they changed everything. In missions, visas don't show up, planes don't take off, medical thing doesn't arrive, the mail is opened and lost, nothing works, everything breaks. Frustration after frustration after frustration, from little teeny ones like Sheraton and Ramada to big ones like death.

The temptation to get angry and to be impatient and to say, I don't get it, and to want to get it fixed is huge. Now at that point, how to be content, how to delight in God comes from words like Joseph, the story of Joseph. Genesis 45, 7. Remember, Joseph is thrown into a pit by his brothers, and he's thrown into the pit.

And he says, no, this was not in the plan. This wrecks my day and maybe my life. And they start pulling him up out of the pit, and he says, oh good.

And they sell him into Egypt. He says, that's not what I planned. I don't plan to go to Egypt.

And he starts to rise in Potiphar's house. Okay, I see your hand, Lord, it's good. And then she lies about him, and he goes to jail.

So pit, some recovery. Slavery, some recovery. Jail, some recovery.

This is not a planned life. It's down, down, down, down, down. And some of you are on the graph.

I graphed this for my people. I've written it in the newsletter. There's a graph of the Christian life here.

And some people in this room right now are in the pit stage. Some are on the way to Egypt stage. And some are in the house of Potiphar stage.

And some are in the prison. And now along comes a butler and a baker, and you tell them their dreams, and one gets hanged, and the other gets his job, and you say, remember me? And he forgets you for two years, and that's where you are this morning. And then the point of the story begins to emerge.

He becomes the vice president through a dream of Egypt. His brothers come down, and the tables are turned, and they're scared to death after their father dies that he's going to take vengeance upon them. And he says, and this is probably the most important sentence in the eleven, however many chapters it is, by which he tells the story from chapter 37 to 50 of Genesis, you meant it for evil, and God meant it for good.

That's chapter 50, verse 20. You meant it for evil, God meant it for good. B.B. Warfield, the great Princeton scholar, was married to Annie Kincaid in 1876.

And they took a honeymoon to Switzerland, and she was struck by lightning and paralyzed for the next 39 years of their marriage. He never went more than two hours from his home. He turned down every denominational appointment and taught in Princeton Seminary within walking distance of his home, and cared for an invalid wife until she died 39 years later.

That's finding yourself in an unplanned place of obedience, going at an unplanned pace of obedience. So when I heard that story, I got out a little devotional book by Warfield to see what he wrote about Romans 8, 28. And this is the sentence that captured it.

God will so govern all things that we shall reap only good from what befalls us. He had a right to say it. So I suppose the last application of this simple structure of living by faith in future grace, or using the Bible to fight for faith, or stoking the engines of delight in and joy in and satisfaction in God would be, can you believe God when He says all things work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

And if you can believe that greatest of all promises, then you will be ready to finish well in the face of affliction, and in the face of imprisonment, and in the face of death. So I plead with you in my closing exhortation, leave the shells and join Paul on the Calvary road and let us go with Him, with Jesus, outside the camp, and let us go with Him. Bearing abuse for Him, and then I didn't read verse 14, did I? Let's close with this verse.

Verse 14, Hebrews 13, for, there it is, the biblical foundation, for here we have no lasting city, but we seek a city which is to come. Be satisfied. Be satisfied.

Be satisfied. With the city to come, where there will be no more sun and no more moon, for the glory of the Lord will be our light, and the Lamb will be the lamp. O God, I pray that we as a people would learn how to fight the fight for joy and satisfaction in you by meditating on and praying over your precious promises in the Bible, which are unparalleled in their power to create radical Christians.

I am so thankful, Lord, for the truth that you are glorifying yourself as God, being by satisfying my soul in God. Let that glorious truth land on your people here with life-changing power and send them into your mission for their lives and help us to finish well for the glory of the Lord and for the satisfaction of our own souls. In Jesus' name, amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/o6Ks4ZG5-Bk.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-piper/finishing-well-in-the-face-of-death/>

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