

# Gravity and Gladness on Sunday Morning - Lesson 3a

by John Piper

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*Worship is an inward experience of the heart, delighting in God, and it's the ultimate goal of Christian living, not just Sunday services.*

**Duration:** 38:14

**Scripture:** Psalm 37:4, Habakkuk 3:17, Matthew 6:33, John 15:5, Romans 12:1, Philippians 4:4, 1 Peter 4:11

**Topics:** "Christian Living", "Worship Practices"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of relying on the grace of Christ moment by moment and consulting God's ways in our daily lives. He emphasizes the need for integrity and hard work, allowing the principles of Scripture to shape our actions. The speaker also explores the shift in worship practices from the Old Testament to the New Testament, highlighting the essence of worship as finding delight and satisfaction in God. He references Luke 12:33 to illustrate the concept of storing treasures in heaven through acts of love and selflessness.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org). Lord, our prayer this morning now is that you'd seal our hearts and bind them like, as with a fetter, to you so that they don't wander away from you, not for these few hours, nor for our whole life. We're prone to wander.

Our flesh is much given to leave. But you have triumphed over our flesh. You have put it to death, and we now count it dead so that we might live to righteousness, and draw near to you, and rest in you, and rejoice in you, and have fellowship with you.

So even as we study together, may our communion with you be real and deep. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let me summarize where we've come on our course outline here. The first unit that took us most of the time last night was all about the shift from Old to New Testament in which we have a radical intensification of worship as an inward experience of the heart. Please don't hear me saying that that reality and that experience wasn't there in the Old Testament.

It's just that given the nature of the people of God as an ethnic political entity in the Old Testament, the nature of worship was not so much in the mode that would fit it to be a gospel-spreading worship that could go to all cultures, but one that was tailor-made for this Middle Eastern people of Israel to give it cohesion and to give it a testimony among the nations. And therefore, all those details could be spelled out, and worship was bound very much around the forms of the tabernacle and so on. But clearly, when you read the Psalms and when you read the saints of the Old Testament, they knew this experience of intense inward experience of the heart.

But when you come over to the New Testament, Jesus, as he comes on the scene, begins to undo some of that limitation on space and place and form. And when we come to the epistles, we find very little specific teaching about how to do formal, public, corporate worship services. But rather, what we find is teaching about the essence of worship, which we argued was a delight in God, a rejoicing in God, a being satisfied in God.

And of course, that will have implications for all kinds of acts in worship, including supplication and repentance and confession and praise and adoration. But the essence is this heart experience of a satisfaction in all that God is for us in Jesus. So, I argue that in the second unit here.

And then we began to spell out four implications of this and we got through two of them. And we were on the third or getting at the third when we ran out of time last night. So, let's look at the last two implications that I'm drawing out here under the second heading.

What is the inward essence of worship? The third implication of saying that the essence of worship is satisfaction in God is that it protects the primacy of worship by forcing us to come to terms with the fact that worship is an end in itself. So, it protects the primacy of worship. Now, let me clarify that because I almost decided to give a whole unit or a part of a unit to a paper I wrote some years ago called Adjusting the Way We Talk About the Goal of Worship at Bethlehem.

I got concerned after a while that every time I said the word worship, people thought Sunday morning service. If that's what you think when you say worship, then I don't think it would be right to talk about the primacy of worship. Because I don't think the gathering on Sunday morning in this fallen age where there are thousands of unreached peoples and millions and billions of unreached and lost people, that our gathering corporately is primary.

I think, rather, that worship is the satisfaction of the heart in God and that satisfaction comes to its completion as it expands itself to draw others in. So, mission and evangelism and all the things you do to display the worth of God to the world, not just celebrate it among the people of God, has a primacy in this age that is higher, I believe, than gathered worship. But it's not higher than worship.

So, when I wrote in the front of the Green Book, Let the Nations Be Glad, that missions exist because worship doesn't. And, therefore, the goal of missions is to create worshipers. That's true.

That's true. But the goal is not for us to meet in a building by ourselves celebrating that we've been found. The goal is to do that and then to expand that to draw others in and do it again and expand and do it again.

Then, when this fallen age is over, there's no more missions. But worship never ends, so worship really is the ultimate goal. Now, let's be clear here what I mean when I say it protects the primacy of worship.

Worship as the heart experience of satisfaction in God really is primary. Otherwise, you wouldn't want to bring it about in somebody else's heart. The ultimate thing they need to do is delight in God.

And the ultimate thing that others need to do is delight in God. It has a primacy, whether it's in the gathered group or not. And if you start making it a means to an end of something else, like evangelism or missions, you destroy it.

Because missions is an attempt to bring it about. It's not mainly an attempt to bring missions about. Missions is necessary to create the heart satisfaction in God that gives Him glory.

The services, the gathered services are not the primary thing. The inward experience of knowing, delighting in, being satisfied with God is the primary thing. Maybe if I read this, that'll come clear while we work our way through this.

If the essence of worship is satisfaction in God, then worship can't be a means to anything else. At least we shouldn't feel it as a means to anything else when it's happening. It does have good effects on many things.

But if you try to turn worship into a means to something else, you belittle God. You simply can't say to God, I want to be satisfied in you so that I can have something else. That would mean you're not really satisfied in God, but in that something else.

And that would dishonor God and not worship Him. In fact, for thousands of people and pastors, the event of worship on Sunday morning is conceived of as a means to accomplish something other than worship. We worship to raise money.

We worship to attract crowds. We worship to heal human hurts. We worship to recruit workers.

We worship to improve morale. We worship to give talented musicians an opportunity to fulfill their calling. We worship to teach our children the way of righteousness.

We worship to help marriages stay together. We worship to evangelize the lost among us. We worship to motivate people for service projects.

We worship to give our churches a family feel, etc., etc., etc., which I think is a big problem. In all of this, we bear witness to the fact that we do not know what true worship is. Genuine affections for God, which is the essence of worship.

Genuine affections for God are an end in themselves. I cannot say to my wife, I feel a strong delight in you so that you will make me a nice meal. That is not the way delight works.

It terminates on her. It does not have a nice meal in view. I cannot say to my son, I love playing ball with you, Barnabas, so that you will cut the grass.

You can't talk that way. It's not the way delight or love works. If your heart really delights in playing ball with him, that delight cannot be performed as a means to getting him to do something.

Now, I'm not denying that worship may have a hundred good effects on the life of the church. It will. Just like true affection in marriage makes everything better.

My point is that to the degree that we do worship this inner experience for these reasons, to that degree, it ceases to be authentic worship. Keeping satisfaction in God at the center guards us from that tragedy. Now, let me before we do number four, let me just see if you have questions about that or if that's clear.

If worship is the if the essence of worship is an inner being satisfied with God rather than just the performance of certain things on Sunday morning. That's an end. That's the end of the line.

That's what we'll be having in heaven forever and ever and ever growing and growing satisfaction in God as he reveals more and more of his glory to us finite creatures who can't handle it all at once. You can't say, God, I delight in you so that I will get well. I can't you can't say I delight in you so that I will get a spouse.

You know, that whole issue of singleness. That text is often you delight yourself in the Lord. He'll give you the desires of your heart when you delight yourself in the Lord.

He is the desire of your heart. And then he does do many other things by way of gifts that he brings us, but they are as dangerous as they are helpful in that they tend to sometimes compete with God. We saw last Sunday that afflictions, afflictions are as much a gift in refining our love for God and our faith in God as gifts of ease are.

More so. So what I'm what I want to encourage pastors to do and what I want to discipline myself to do is avoid thinking of the essence of Sunday morning as fundraising or getting a building built or doing more evangelism or getting marriages fixed or or or I want all that to happen. But I know that the goal of a good marriage is so that both will worship God better.

It's not the other way around. You don't worship to have a good marriage. You have a good marriage in order to worship.

And you try to get all the barriers out of the way in a relationship so that both are free so that your prayers are not hindered. Like like first Peter three seven says, live together with your wives according to knowledge as with a weaker vessel so that your prayers may not be hindered. It's not the other way around.

So it's an end in itself. And I think you preserve that best. This is implication number three.

By saying that the essence of worship is to be satisfied in God. Yes, go ahead. Would this explanation of worship be also a good definition? OK, question, let me repeat it for the tape and who didn't hear.

Is there a correlation between this and unconditional love? Since unconditional love is often defined as not loving somebody to the end that they would do something for you. But when that love terminates on them as a person. Now, the reason I hesitate to say yes is because I think in the horizontal dimension of counseling where this is often used.

The love in view is not the kind of love that we have for God, who is infinitely worthy of love and thus has met all the conditions of being delighted in. It's usually you say between a husband and a wife where flaws abound and you're supposed to not let the flaws govern the measure of your love. That's the I think what's meant by unconditionality.

That is, you don't check your wife out from day to day. Did she meet five conditions today? And so she gets five degrees of love, 10 conditions, 10 degrees of love and so on. That kind of that's what this, I think, concept is meant to overcome.

But we shouldn't think that way about God. See, God, we don't love God with this agape kind of love that overcomes obstacles like we have to every other human. We don't ever say love covers a multitude of sins when it comes to God.

God has, in a sense, created the possibility for us to commit the absolutely conditional love in that he is totally perfect and worthy of our love. So I hope I'm not mixing you up. So, yes, there's the I see the parallel that you see that it's unconditional in the sense that we're not saying I love you, God, provided that you fix this relationship.

Or I love you, God, provided that you do this or this. We're saying what you have shown me of yourself is infinitely worthy of terminating my affections and my satisfaction on you alone as you are. Is that clear? I don't know if I muddied the water there or not, but that's a good insight.

And I just want to make sure we didn't we didn't put God in the position of a flawed friend or spouse that you have to unconditionally love in that sense. It might be helpful just to clarify that. Let me read you a text from Habakkuk.

See if this is not what you meant. I think this is what you meant. This is Habakkuk 317.

This is the text my wife and I used at our wedding. And Sarah Livingston just had it read at her wedding here, too. Though the fig tree do not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail.

The fields yield no food. The flock be cut off from the fold. There be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

I will joy in the God of my salvation. I think that's what you meant. And that's beautiful.

No food, no vines, no olive, no grains in the field, no sheep in the fold, no cows in the herds. In other words, famine, desperation, but we have our God. That's what we're after.

Number four. Fourth implication. Finally, the last implication of saying that the essence of worship is being satisfied with God is that this accounts for why Paul makes all of life an expression of worship.

This accounts for why he makes all of life, not just services, an expression of worship. All Christian behavior is to be done out of satisfaction in God and with a view to preserving and increasing our satisfaction in God. I wrote a whole book to justify that sentence, namely *Desiring God*.

But let me commend it to you with one word from the Lord Jesus. One text. Take Luke 12, 33.

Jesus says, sell your possessions and give alms. And thus provide for yourselves purses that do not grow old with a treasure in heaven that does not fail. Now think about that for a moment.

Sell your possessions and give alms is a practical act of love for others. But he motivates it by saying, in doing that, here's what you're going to really be doing. You're going to be providing yourselves with purses that do not grow old.

So if you sell, if you empty your purse here in the cause of love, your purse gets bigger and more permanent, more durable, more full in heaven. Treasure in heaven that does not fail. Now, how can it be real love if you're being motivated by your own treasure in heaven? That's what people would ask.

How can this be real love? So let me just think about that for a moment. The treasure in heaven I take to be increased measures of joy at God's right hand and pleasures in his fellowship in the age to come. Jesus said that we are to provide ourselves with that.

In other words, make efforts to increase your joys with God in heaven. He says that the way to do this is to sell your possessions and give alms. That's simply illustrative of all the ways of sacrifice and love in the Christian life.

Live this way so as to provide yourself with treasures in heaven. In other words, aim in all you do to maximize your satisfaction in God forever. Now in the age to come.

And if someone asks, here's the key question. Is it loving to give alms to others with a view to maximizing our own joy in God? The answer is a resounding yes. Because in giving up worldly things ourselves so that we can meet the needs of others.

Our aim is to persuade them that the treasure of God that frees us to give like this is so valuable. They, too, should embrace it and live for it. And so join us in the ways or the joys of heaven.

People will feel loved if they see that they're joining us in the enjoyment of God will increase our joy in God. Say that again. I don't think people will say you're selfish or manipulative.

If they ask you, why are you doing this for me? Why did you give me this? Why did you stop to help me? Why did you come to visit me? And you say, because in spreading my joy in God to you, it gets bigger for me. Do you think people will at that point say, no, you're a selfish person? If you say, by including you, by reaching out and enlarging my joy in God so that it wraps you into it. So that you and I have joy together in God, which maximizes my joy in God and your joy in God.

I just don't think a person would say you're a selfish person at that point. And if they do, I think what they're really saying is you've got to leave God out of the picture when you love me, which would be atheistic and wouldn't be loving. So I do think it's right to be motivated in all you do by a quest for your greatest satisfaction in God.

Provided you understand that the way God has set up the world and the way he set up the redeemed heart is that the redeemed heart enlarges in its joy in God as it draws others into it. A shared joy is a doubled joy is the way sometimes we put it. So that if you become indifferent to the joy of others while you are just sitting here in your kind of Buddha-like trance of enjoyment with God, you're not enjoying God to the full.

You're cutting yourself off from the enjoyment of God to the full. In fact, the joy that you claim to have will soon rot in your bones like the Red Sea turns salty and can't support any fish because it has no outlets. So you have to spill over and when your love and your joy in God is spilling over, it's getting bigger and others are getting wet with it and drawn into it.

So it's not either or. It's not I must deny myself a quest for joy in God so that I can bring joy to other people. That won't work.

I must glut myself on joy in God so that I spill over to others and in the very spilling over, I'm pursuing more joy in God through their joy in God, which is why I believe that was my fourth implication, why I believe. For Paul, all of life is an expression of worship in Sunday morning. I'm expressing and enlarging my delight in God through acts of corporate worship.

And on Monday morning, I'm enlarging and expressing my joy in God by letting it spill over onto others and trying to draw others into it. Questions? I think that's the end of this unit now. One more.

One more page. So I believe it can be shown biblically that all our behavior should be motivated by a deep satisfaction in God and a desire to expand that satisfaction by spreading it to the lives of others. Therefore, the root of Christian living and the root of congregational praise.

It's the same root, which is why for Paul, worship simply cannot be merely or even mainly thought of in terms of Sunday services, but all of life. He has an absolutely God saturated vision of Christian existence when our whole life is consumed with pursuing satisfaction in God. Everything we do highlights the value and worth of God, which simply means that everything becomes worship.

May God make himself that precious to us. OK, questions on that's the end of section number two in your outline. And the next thing we're going to turn to is services and whether they're normative and whether preaching is normative.

But before we do that question or comment at this stage about what we've been over so far. Yes, sure. What was the purpose? The question is, what was the purpose of the form, the formal dimensions of corporate worship in the Old Testament, if all of life is meant to be worship? And I think the best I could say is that in the Old Testament, the people of God's existence is a come see existence rather than a go tell.

The religion of the Old Testament is basically come see what God has done for Israel. Come see the temple. Come see the wealth of Solomon.

So the the the queen of Egypt comes and sees Queen of Sheba and she marvels and goes and tells what God does for these people in and of themselves has a reputation. And he's preserving and he's working in this people to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, which then when he comes, spills over the banks at the end of his life. And says, go make disciples of all nations.

So I think worship is designed as an elaborate and extraordinary unifying element in the cultural life of the people of Israel amid tribes where they were constantly threatened with destruction and dissolution. Whereas today, we are not a come see religion anymore. We are a go tell religion.

We're scattered among all ethnic groups, among all peoples and all nations with no geographic, no political, no ethnic center like they did. So so much has changed that I think the nature of of the corporate event is made flexible. That's that's the best I can do.

And if I have any further insights or thoughts about that, why there would be such a focus on elaborate formal structures of corporate worship in the Old Testament. Down to the details of the curtains and the threads and the rings and the bars and the washing of the hands and how you kill the animals and all these things. And today, Christ has become our Passover lamb.

He's our priest. He's our sacrifice. He's our temple.

He has been the fulfillment of all of that system. And now wherever Christ is met. Two or three people.

There he is in the midst. And there you meet God. And there you have a worship service.

Even in a little tent in Turkey. Other questions or comments? From the idea of all worship, all of life is worship. We're trying to breakfast.

It's going well. How could you elaborate on how does breakfast work by God? How does being a chemical engineer or an insurance adjuster? How do you glorify God the way you do your job on Monday? Elaborate on that. Elaborate on how is eating breakfast or drinking orange juice or eating pizza or working on a computer or designing a building or whatever.

How does it become worship? How do you do it to the glory of God? Oh, there's so many different things you can say. But let me just think out loud for a minute. I think primarily you'd go to first Peter four eleven.

Let him who serves there. I'm just going to let that be as broad as possible. That word serve not just serve in church, say, teaching Sunday school, preaching or doing an usher, but serving God anyway during the day.

Let him who serves serve in the strength that God supplies so that in everything God may get the glory through Jesus Christ to whom belongs the dominion forever. So if you want God to get glory in the way you serve, eat breakfast, type in a computer or whatever, you do it in the strength that he supplies. Now, that's an act of faith by which as you get up in the morning and go to breakfast or go to your job, you say, Lord, I know that without you, I can do nothing.

John, fifteen, five. I ask that you would give me the enablement and the grace to do what I have to do today joyfully in reliance upon your strength. You pray, then you act in that or you trust the promise that he'll do that and you act.

I'm spelling out Aptat for your APT. Admit that you can't do it by yourself. Pray for God's enablement.

APT. Trust a particular promise that he'll help you. I'll be with you.

I'll strengthen you. I'll help you. I'll hold you up with my victorious right hand.

And then, A, you act and then T, you thank God. So one answer, David, to the question would be, what are you relying upon as you drink orange juice and as you work on the computer or as you dig a ditch or lay a brick or teach a class? What are you relying on? Moment by moment, what are you resting in depending on? Is it the grace of Christ flowing to you moment by moment? A second thing I would say is you consult God's ways for doing things. That the old issue of integrity at work, the whole issue of hard work, the whole issue of respect for people.

You let the principles of Scripture shape and form the way you do your work. So at breakfast table, when I was trying to get this across to my kids, when they were smaller and we were talking about how you drink orange juice to the glory of God, I would say, for example, suppose you see this orange juice jug and it looks like it might have enough in it for three glasses and there are four people. Now, how do you drink orange juice to the glory of God here? Well, you say here, let me pour and you fill up three glasses and you leave yours empty.

That's that's drinking orange juice to the glory of God, because what you're saying is I want to serve you. I personally do not need this orange juice to be happy in God. He has met my needs this morning and I'm overflowing in generosity to you.

The other brothers would, after they get up off the floor, having seen this, they would then see God in the life of their other brother and they would give glory to God for that act of generosity by which he testified to God's having satisfied him so much so that he doesn't need to be there. I got to get my orange juice. This is as much mine as it is yours.

Well, that that kind of talk doesn't glorify God at all, because it simply magnifies your dependence on orange juice, not your dependence on God. So that would be a second way. A third way would be the way you think about gratitude in those moments.

Where did this orange juice come from anyway? God made the oranges. God created the tree. God put the sun down.

God put the rain down. God kept the disease away. He didn't let a hurricane happen.

He didn't let a freeze come too quick. And the orange juice happened. Then he also supported the whole infrastructure of this culture that gets it from Florida to here, fresh.

How does that happen? Trucks and roads and all kinds of common grace that's just abounding on this country. Every time you eat a piece of fresh fruit in the middle of Minnesota winter, you should say, amazing grace. That God would so by common grace bring such blessing upon this land.

So that's a third way. Granted, the way you do gratitude. Maybe that's enough for now, but I think in a God where life book one, I have I have a chapter in there called How You Drink Orange Juice to the Glory of God.

And I spell out some more in there. One more question. Do you? OK.

All right. If you wonder about that APTAT, A-P-T-A-T, as a way of of living by the power of the Holy Spirit, Bob says he'll put some on the information table out there. All right.

Let's I know there are more questions. There'll be more time for for answers later, too. So let's turn to unit number three here.

Worship services. Here I've just made a two or three hour case for the fact that the essence of worship is not a service. Nevertheless, this course really is about the gravity and gladness of Sunday morning and what we do.

And so I want to develop seven theses here to the effect that I do believe in worship services. And I think it would be wrong of the Church of Jesus Christ not to gather regularly. Indeed, I think weekly on the on a day set aside.

Indeed, I think the first day of the week is the day to gather with some biblical precedent because Jesus rose from the dead on that day. So all of that I do not reject, but in fact, build my life around. So let's work through some arguments for why there should be worship services and why preaching has a crucial role in them.

Regular corporate seasons or services of worship. The pursuit of full satisfaction in God through supplication. Expressing our dependence and longing for God.

Thanks expressing our gratitude for God's glory and gifts. Praise expressing the delight of admiration and adoration to God. This is normative for local churches.

There are at least three arguments for this claim. I think. Here's number one.

There is a pattern of corporate worship in the Old Testament. And we may assume the regular gatherings of the early Christians had similar elements. Although the details of what was in the New Testament gatherings for worship are very sparse.

This vagueness is, I believe, intentional on God's part so that the New Testament will be a very flexible missions book for all cultures. Not a prescription of form that would make cultural adaptation harder. So my first argument is the fact that God did have some concern for order and form.

Regularly in the Old Testament and called for one day a week to be set apart as holy for religious exercises. Probably is going to be picked up in some way in the New Testament. Yes, go ahead.

That's a very good observation that all of the details in the Old Testament, what Moses was given as God wrote these things for him on the mountain, was written after a pattern, as it were, in heaven. You get that picked up in Hebrews, where now the heavenly temple, Christ has entered into the holy of holies in the temple. So there'll be some sense in which we must come to terms with how we reflect now that heavenly pattern of worship.

There it was reflected in a very formal, outward, external structuring of things. And now Christ has fulfilled that temple and that priesthood and that sacrifice so that it's going to be different. It's going to look different, but there's going to be some way that we acknowledge that heavenly reality in the way we connect with God through Christ who has fulfilled all those things.

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