

# Learning from the Bible's Songbook

by John Piper

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of delighting in the Lord and commanding our emotions to love, stand in awe, exult, rejoice, be glad, hope, and give thanks to God. It explores the Psalms as a guide for navigating embattled emotions and the essential role of spiritual emotions in authentic worship. The message underscores the battle for joy in God and the need to prioritize Him above all else to avoid perishing.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 116:1, Psalm 73:25, Psalm 119:103, Psalm 107:9, Psalm 69:32, Psalm 58:10, Psalm 51:8, Psalm 90:14, Psalm 1:1, Romans 8:36

**Topics:** "Delighting in the Lord", "Spiritual Emotions in Worship"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Would you pray with me? What will I render to the Lord for all of his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation, empty, and call on the name of the Lord to fill it. So come and fill our cup, and pour it out in this room, in Jesus' name, amen. So why is the songbook of the Bible punctuated with so many commands addressed to our emotions? Why do we read, love the Lord your God with all your heart, oh you saints? Why do we read, let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him, Psalm 33? Why do we read, let all the earth exult, Psalm 64? Delight yourself in the Lord, Psalm 37.

Rejoice in the Lord, Psalm 97. Be glad in the Lord, Psalm 32. Hope in God, Psalm 42.

Give thanks to the Lord, Psalm 33. Love, stand in awe, exult, delight, rejoice, be glad, hope, give thanks. Those are commands.

They're not testimonies, they're not promises, and they're not prayers. There are lots of testimonies to God's faithfulness in giving emotions. I love the Lord, Psalm 116.

There is nothing on earth I desire besides you, Psalm 73. How sweet are your words to my taste, Psalm 119. Those are testimonies, not commands.

The Psalms are full of promises that he will come through with emotion. The Lord satisfies the longing soul, Psalm 107. The humble will be glad, Psalm 69.

The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance, Psalm 58. Those are promises, they're not commands. The bottle is filled.

The Psalms, in particular, are filled with prayers. Let me hear and be glad. Let the bones that you have broken rejoice, Psalm 51.

Oh, gladden the soul of your servant, Psalm 86. Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, Psalm 90. So there are lots of testimonies, lots of prayers, lots of promises, but love, stand in awe, exult, delight, rejoice, be glad, hope, give thanks.

These are not testimonies. These are not promises. These are not prayers.

These are commands addressed to our emotions, and specifically, Godward emotions and positive emotions of delight, delight in God, loving God. In fact, all of them, all of those are directed to God. They are commanded that we feel something toward God.

Delight yourself in the Lord, love the Lord, stand in awe of the Lord, exult in the Lord, rejoice in the Lord, be glad in the Lord, hope in the Lord, give thanks to the Lord for the Lord. Why? Why is the songbook of the Bible punctuated with so many commands addressed to our emotions? Why are we told over and over again, be glad in the Lord, rejoice in the Lord, delight in the Lord? Here's one answer to the question. Comes from Psalm 1. There are so many commands from God to us to delight in God, rejoice in God, be glad in God, because if we don't, we will perish.

And God would spare us perishing. That's why he's commanding us to delight in him. So you know Psalm 1, right? There are two kinds of people in Psalm 1. First, there's the blessed man.

And what marks him? His delight is in the law of the Lord. So here's a person who has put the tongue of his heart to the sweetness of the word of God and tasted that the Lord is good. And his delight is in the Lord through the word.

And there's another kind of person in Psalm 1. Verse four, the wicked are not so. They don't delight in God, they don't delight in his word. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, but the way of the wicked will perish.

So one answer to the question, why are we told? Why are we commanded over and over again, delight in the Lord, love the Lord, exult in the Lord, be glad in the Lord, is because if you don't, you die everlastingly. If we find more delight, more gladness, more joy in other people or other things besides God, we will perish. Here's the way Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 16.22. If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed.

Here's the way the Apostle John put it, quoting Jesus in Revelation 3.16. Because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. That's Jesus. So God commands us over and over again to delight in him above all things, be glad in him, be satisfied in him, rejoice in him, exult in him more than anything else in the universe.

Now, that just pushes the question back one step, right? To say, why is the songbook of the Bible punctuated with so many commands to rejoice, address to our emotions, which so many people think, you can't command my emotions. God can, and he does. It just pushes the question back, okay, if I perish, because my heart finds more pleasure in other things than in God, why? What, I mean, that's big, why? Why would God threaten such things? But the question just moves up a notch.

There are two parts to the answer to that question. Why would you perish if you do not delight in God above all things? First part of the answer, because God is supremely valuable, because God is supremely precious, because God is supremely desirable, God is supremely satisfying. So like his word, he is more, is more to be desired than gold, even much fine gold, sweeter also than honey, and drippings from the honeycomb.

He is that, whether anybody on the planet feels that or not, let God be true, though every man a liar. He is infinitely precious. That's the first part of the answer for why we would perish if we do not experience him that way.

Here's the second part of the answer. When we actually taste God as precious, supremely valuable, beautiful, satisfying, his intrinsic value, precious, preciousness becomes an experienced value, becomes an experienced preciousness. And the reason God created the universe, and the reason he sent his son into the universe to redeem a people for himself in worship forever, was to take his intrinsic worth, his intrinsic value, his intrinsic preciousness, his intrinsic infinitely satisfying nature, and go public with it, echoing his excellencies in the experience of his people as they delight in him.

That's why he made the world. This is the core of everything. He made the world to go public with his value, his beauty, his glory, and it finds an echo in the experience of delighting in him more than everything.

So those are the two halves of why, answering why we would perish if we don't delight in God more than money, or marriage, or children, or fame, or success, or anything. Not to delight in God is to dishonor him, and people who live lives of dishonoring God perish. When the psalmist, Asaph, cries out in Psalm 73, whom have I in heaven but you, and on earth there is nothing I desire besides you, my flesh and my heart may sail.

You are the strength of my heart and my portion. There are no words that glorify God more. I wonder if you believe that.

Experiencing God as your desired portion so highly, intensely, deeply, thoroughly that all the other goods of the world are as nothing glorifies God more than any other emotion or state of your heart. Jesus told a parable, a one verse parable goes like this. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field.

The kingdom of God is like a treasure. Experiencing King Jesus is like having a treasure. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up and in his joy, he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field.

Now notice, it does not say the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man sells everything he has to buy that field. It's way more radical than that. People sell things, people do all kinds of sacrificial things in life for all kinds of ulterior motives with no delight in the treasure, no sense of satisfaction in Jesus.

Jesus slams the door on that. In his joy, he sells everything he has. Have my wedding ring, have my heirlooms, have my books.

Have my sermon archive, take it, I get Jesus. There are millions and millions of Christians who think they're Christian and do not think that way, don't feel that way. It's a decision they made, it's a commitment they have, it's a duty they do, they do the right stuff.

What do they do with the Psalms? The early Christians, I was watching that Graeme Staines video, the early Christians magnified God by delighting in God more than everything. Listen to Hebrews 10, 34. Picture yourself in this situation now.

Your comrades are in prison and you know that if you go public and visit them and take them the food they need, they might identify you with them and you get in trouble as well. You had compassion on those in prison and you joyfully, oh God, make us like this, you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property since you knew that you yourselves had a bitter possession and an abiding one. That's Jesus forever in eternal happiness and fellowship.

You had an eternal possession, so when you headed for the prison, you looked over your shoulder and they're trashing your house, they're burning down your house. It says they rejoiced. Come on, where is Christianity today? Complain, complain, complain.

What do you think they sang? What did they sing as they looked over their shoulder, they're on their way to love their brothers and sisters in prison. Their houses are being trashed and burned. Go home, Christian, get out of here.

We hate Christians. What did they sing? Well, if they had lived in the 16th century, we just sang it. Let goods and kindred go.

This mortal life also, the body they may kill. God's truth abideth still. His kingdom is forever.

I'm going to the prison. But they didn't live in the 16th century. So what did they sing? I don't know, but here's what.

Here's what, here's what I'll bet they sang. Whom have I in heaven but you? And on earth there's nothing I desire besides you. My flesh, my heart, my house, my books, my computer may fail, but you are the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

I'm going to the prison. Singing, that's crazy. Oh, that we would be Christians.

Oh, that our churches would be Christians. What is at stake in human emotion is the glory of God. If you don't delight in God, you dishonor God.

And the more you're satisfied in him, the more he's glorified in you. It is no more optional for us to pursue gladness in God than it is for God to pursue glory in us. They are both absolutely essential.

And in the redeemed, they happen together. God pursues the magnifying of his beauty in the satisfying of your soul in that beauty. That's why he made the world.

It's gotta happen or you perish. You must be born again. No person can do this.

No human being can do this. So the Psalms clarify for us how essential the spiritual emotions are for authentic God-glorifying worship and living. Our emotions are not optional.

I hate the talk that is icing on the cake or caboose at the end of the train or somehow marginal when it's central. You die without them. You must experience a miracle.

Now, right here, I'm looking for my clock. It's going, that's good. We're in good shape.

I'm not gonna rush. Now, right at this point, the Psalms do something else for us. And it is utterly crucial what they do.

It's not in the middle of the Bible by accident. Oh, what a precious, precious book. Can you live without it? Can you live without the Psalms? Can you survive without the Psalms? Can you fight for joy without the Psalms? I have no idea how anybody survives without this help that God put in the middle of our Bible.

We, they do something else for us. They keep us from being naive, having a naive optimism about the emotional possibilities of fallen people. And they help us navigate the seas of embattled emotions.

When we're born again, the Spirit of God opens the eyes of our hearts to see God, to see Christ, to see his beauty, his glory in the cross, in the gospel, as more valuable, more precious, more satisfying than anything. That's how you become a Christian. You see him that way.

However, it would be, the Psalms make plain, naive and unbiblical to think that our gaze on the glory of Christ remains so clear to the end of our days, and that the responsiveness of our heart to that sight of glory remains so intense to the end of our days that the Christian life is one of unclouded vision of God and unhindered joy of God. That happens for nobody, except one person, and he is in heaven. The Psalms, more than any other book in the Bible, illustrate that sobering fact.

The psalmist's vision of God is often obscured. The psalmist's joy in God is often conflicted and embattled. For example, I am ready to fall, and my pain is ever before me, Psalm 38.

I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged, Psalm 25. There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation.

There is no health in my bones because of my sin. My iniquities have gone over my head. They are like a heavy burden too heavy for me, Psalm 38.

Why are you cast down, O my soul? Why are you in turmoil within me, Psalm 42? You have rejected us. You have disgraced us and have not gone out with our armies. You have made us turn back from the foe, and those who hate us have gotten spoiled.

You have made us like sheep for the slaughter and have scattered us among the nations. All day long my disgrace is before me and shame has covered my face, Psalm 44. Quoted in Romans 8, 36, by the way.

I am weary with my moaning. Every night I flood my bed with tears. I drench my couch with weeping.

My eyes waste away because of grief, Psalm 6. This is why we cleave to the Psalms. They are us, pain, loneliness, affliction, trouble, guilt, burdens, no health, cast down, turmoil, shame, moaning, weeping, nights flooded with tears. Are you in the world? That's us, unless we are utterly hypocritical.

Now, if some soft prosperity preacher responds and says, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, that's pre-Christ, that's pre-Pentecost. We live on the other side of Christ, the other side of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We don't walk in that kind of defeat and misery.

I say, then why did Paul say, I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart? Unceasing anguish in the heart of a man who said, rejoice, how often? Always, go figure. I mean, this is the miracle of the Christian life. Unceasing anguish, my kinsmen are perishing.

What do you expect me to feel? Rejoice always. Can you do that? Yes, you can. If you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, not easy.

It's a miracle. Yes, you can. There's no way to survive without that.

Why did he write, we are treated as imposters and yet true as unknown, yet well-known, as dying and behold, we live as punished and yet not killed, as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. My favorite phrase. Oh, God, thank you that that's in the Bible.

Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. That's the goal of my life. I got so many sad things in my life, I can hardly stand it some days.

And I'm told to rejoice always, not only always, in everything. It is these things, sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, making many rich, yet poor, having nothing, but possessing everything. I love Paul.

Why did he write for all of us? That was apostolic testimony. Here's for all of us. This is Romans 8, 23.

Not only the creation groans, but we ourselves, I'm looking at you, spirit-filled people. Not only the creation, but we ourselves, all these worship leaders, John MacArthur included, all creation, even though he hardly admits it, because we sat one time on a platform and you couldn't get this at all, John. You just, you live at a level so far above me, I just think.

But I'm saying, even MacArthur, back to the Bible, not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit, groan inwardly, waiting for the adoption of our bodies, waiting for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies. Or this old outer self is wasting away. Tell me about it, 72-year-old Piper.

What are these? And if you talk to me, I'm gonna say, what? What? Would you mind saying that again? And that's nothing, right? This is nothing compared to what people die with, who are golden Christians, golden Christians. How many have I buried way better than me who suffered so much more than me? Don't tell me about this prosperity expletive. I assume you're clapping because I have self-control.

The emotional realism of the Psalms is not owing to their being pre-Christian. Before and after Christ, joy is embattled. We will fight for joy till the day we die.

We will sail through the waves of every imaginable discouragement. And they don't get easier, folks. Sorry, you thought teenagers were a problem? But make no mistake, we fight for joy.

That's what we have to have in him. And our lives hang on it. But life is a battle against delighting in anything more than we delight in God.

That's the battle. And the Psalms show us over and over again that life is not smooth sailing, but rather they show us how they navigate it. What did they do? What did they do? They show us how they looked to

the Lord, Psalm 34.

How they remembered his wondrous works, Psalm 105. How they meditated on the watches, in the watches of the night, Psalm 63. How they confessed their sins and received forgiveness, Psalm 130.

And how they gathered in worship with the great congregation, Psalm 42. How they cried to the Lord in every form of prayer, Psalm 51. And how they waited for the Lord and hoped in him, Psalm 130 and 39.

To be bought by the blood of Jesus and to be born by the spirit of God means that you have beheld and embraced Jesus as your all-satisfying treasure. That's what it means to be saved. You have seen him as supremely precious and you have embraced him as your supreme, all-satisfying treasure.

And the rest of life is war against everything from the television, everything from the movies, everything from advertising, everything at your job, everything in the family that wants to kill it and make other things seem more desirable, more precious, more valuable than he is. We fight until we can say, and then we fight until we can say it again, whom have I in heaven but you? And on earth, there is nothing that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but you are the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

And if it is slow in coming, we do not turn to broken cisterns or empty wells. We wait, we wait and we trust it's gonna come. To you, oh Lord, I lift up my soul.

Oh my God, in you I trust. Let me not be put to shame. None of those who wait for you shall be put to shame.

They shall be ashamed or wantonly treacherous. I look away from my weak, worldly, embattled soul to Christ and wait. I will wait for you, I will wait for you.

On your word, I will rely, I will wait for you. Surely wait for you until my soul is satisfied.

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