

Sorrowful Love Springs from Serious Joy

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of finding joy in Jesus to overcome selfishness and live a life of sacrificial love. It explores the concept of enduring hardships by focusing on the joy set before us, as exemplified by Jesus enduring the cross for the joy ahead. The key message is to run life's marathon with endurance, laying aside weights and sins, while looking to Jesus as the source of joy and strength to sustain a life of love for others.

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1, Hebrews 10:34, Hebrews 11:26

Topics: "Joy in Jesus", "Endurance in Sacrificial Love"

Description

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Transcript

Thank you, Rob, and thank you for trusting me with these few minutes of your time. Actually, I don't assume you trust me. I assume that I'm a total stranger to most of you, and therefore it seemed good to me that I would give you maybe three bullet points about my life and ministry that would help you to lean into what I have to say.

Number one, I share with your pastors here a total allegiance to and submission to the Bible as God's only authoritative, infallible word to the world. So I don't expect that I come to you with any authority whatsoever except what I'm able to see here and savor here in my soul and then show you from the pages so that if you don't see it in the book, don't believe it because I say it. So that's number one.

Number two, ever since 1994, I have had a mission statement. It existed before that in seed, but then became explicit. I exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things, for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.

Now, that means that I am not in Cincinnati. I'm not at the vineyard willy-nilly. I'm not here on a lark.

I'm not here to tickle anybody's ears. I'm here to so open the Word that by the Holy Spirit, your passion for the supremacy of God in every area of your life would soar with joy through Jesus Christ. That's why I'm

here.

So that's number two, my mission. And number three is that I'm driven by a particular focus. Now, this has marked, governed, shaped, controlled me ever since 1968.

That's 50 years ago when I was 22. And that focus is this, God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in Him. And here's what that means.

It means that if I could, by the Word, through the Spirit, be used of God this morning to so deepen your satisfaction in Christ above all things so that no suffering could rob you of that joy, you would be able in that kind of life to make Him look great. When you are so satisfied in Jesus that no suffering can take that away, you make Jesus look great. That's what I'm after.

I want you to so live your lives that you get the joy and Jesus looks great. So those are the three, my allegiance, my mission, my focus, and you can decide now whether you're going to lean in for the next 25 minutes or not. So let me pray and ask God to help us see what's really there in Hebrews 12, 1 and 2. I thank you, Father, for the assurance this morning that you care for us, that I will receive from you strength and anointing for three services to speak plain, obvious, glorious, unfathomable, life-changing, Christ-exalting, soul-satisfying truth into the lives of your people.

And I ask you to help me now and grant them ears to hear in Jesus' name. Amen. So you can either look up here or look in your Bibles to Hebrews 12.

We're going to look at verses 1 and 2. We're going to focus on one particular phrase in verse 2, but try to see it in context. And let me tell you why I'm going to this text and what question I'm trying to answer. I'm trying to answer the question, how can I, how can you overcome our selfishness? Because every one of you are way more selfish than you think you are.

How can I overcome John Piper's selfishness so that I live my life at any cost to myself for the sake of love so as to make Jesus look great? That's the constellation of questions. I want to be done with self-exaltation and self-serving. I want to be a person for others called love.

I want the fact that it might cost something not to matter. And I want to do it in a way that makes Him, not me, look great. That's the goal of this.

That's the question I'm trying to answer. And I think the answer is in verse 2. But let's read verses 1 and 2. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, let me say that again, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. That's where He is today.

And He got there through the cross and through the shame by looking to the joy set before Him. So that's what we're going to focus on. That phrase in the middle of verse 2. For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross.

Now, before we dig into that, let me just set the stage. Chapter 11, you know, is the hall of fame of faith in the Old Testament. All those saints who by faith did this and by faith did that.

And though dead, it says, they're still speaking. And that speaking is their witness. They're dead, their lives through this text are still speaking.

And in verse 1, that speaking is called witnessing. You see that? Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, so their lives, Abel and Enoch and Abraham and Sarah, they are witnessing as we run. So here's the picture.

I think, more or less, is that life is a marathon. We're running, right? Let us lay aside every weight and sin, verse 1. Let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run, run with endurance. Don't give out on this race of life, of faith and love.

Keep running. Let nothing stop you. Because you're surrounded by those witnesses who finished.

They finished. You can finish. So I think, I've never run a marathon.

The longest I've ever got is 12 miles when my kid was in school and we did this fundraiser and I pushed his bike up the hill. So I figured, that's as good as 26 miles because I'm pushing a bike the whole way. So, I've never run, but you finish it and instead of going and lying down in the grass, you circle around if you're Abraham and you stand by the side while John Piper is running and you say, Piper, you can do this.

I finished it. You can finish it. I think that's the picture of the witnesses, this big cloud of witnesses who finished by faith.

And they're saying to us on our marathon, where the wind is in our face and our thighs are screaming, you can't do this. You can. That's what they're saying.

So life is a marathon. We're surrounded by these witnesses saying, yes, you can do this. And verse 1 points out that two things are true of real runners who finish.

And don't get disqualified at the end and wind up in hell. Number one, they're not stupid. And number two, they don't cheat.

Do you see that? Lay aside every weight. Don't wear an overcoat if you're doing a marathon. Don't carry dumbbells in your pants.

That's stupid. And number two, don't cheat. No performance enhancing drugs in your vein.

We don't cheat. And we're not stupid. I think that's the point of weight and sin.

Weight and sin. So when I was raising five kids, trying to anyway, I remember that they would want to do something I disapproved of. And as we began to talk, they'd say things like, Daddy, what's wrong with it? And my response generally to that statement based on this text and others, weight and sin, weight and sin, was, look, can we just not only ask the question, what's wrong with it, but, will it make you a great runner? Will it help you with all your energy, all your mind, and all your heart, and all your love to be so devoted to Jesus that nothing will stop you from maximally running, maximally quick, finish the race.

You will be a great runner. The question is not, what's wrong with it? The question is, will it help you run? So I don't think the issue is merely, okay, what's the lowest standard we can possibly find? What's cheating? What's cheating? We won't cheat. We'll carry dumbbells.

We'll wear overcoats while we run. But we won't cheat. That's crazy.

Don't live your life like that. So many people just try to figure out lowest standard possible to be a Christian. That's just insane if you know Jesus.

Stupid. That's what it says. Weight.

You don't run with weight. So the main point here is run. Take hold of your life.

Run your marathon. It's a marathon of love. It's a marathon of faith like we saw in chapter 11.

And the question is, how do you do that? How do you stay on course for 72 years plus and not give in to all the temptations to leave the track and carry weights and cheat and do all kinds of things, but to rather give your life utterly and become a faith-filled, loving person no matter how many muscles are screaming at you? You can't do this. How do you do that? And the answer is in verse 2. So let's look at it. Looking to Jesus.

That's how you do it. Looking to Jesus. So I'm going to end this message in a few minutes by asking and pleading with you, get to know Him so that when you sing those songs, that's not just words.

He's enough. I'm sitting there thinking, does anybody here mean that? I mean, those are off-the-chart crazy lyrics. Gloriously crazy.

True. But will you walk out of here really feeling He's enough? Well, that's what this is asking you to do, telling you to do. Look to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of your faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of God.

So how did He finish His race? So He had a marathon, right? His only lasted 33 years. And the last leg was horrific. So He's running a marathon with nails in His hands, and nails in His feet, and a spear in His side, and a crown of thorns on His head, and spit dripping off His beard from the sidelines where they're mocking Him all the way to the end, and spitting at Him.

And He finished it. How in the world did He do that? Because my guess is if you had to live a day like that, you'd say, I'm out of here. If that's the way you treat your children, I'm done.

So you have to answer, how will I finish my marathon if I have to face wind and hills or heat like that? And the answer for Jesus in verse 2 was, for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross despising the shame. So the last several hundred yards, quarter mile, I don't know, Good Friday to 3 o'clock on Thursday night in the garden, sweating blood till around 3 o'clock the next day. How did He do that? How did He finish that? And how will you finish? Let me pause here and just make sure we have a common assumption.

I'm not going to make a case for this. I'm going to just assume it that you all agree that those last 12 hours or so of Jesus' life in which He resolved to go through the cross, stayed on the cross when they were mocking Him and saying, if you're the Christ, come down, we'll believe on you, blah, blah, blah. And He stays there till He's dead.

That that was the greatest act of love that has ever been performed in the history of the world. I'm just assuming that. That was love.

So you see how this is moving now. I'm asking in this sermon, how can I get rid of my selfishness, become a man for others in love at any cost to myself? You see the picture? I want to be done with selfishness. I want to be a person who's willing to spend his life benefiting others, not immediately myself.

And I would like to stick to that marathon style of life, maximally blessing, maximally honoring at any cost. How? And the answer here is for the joy that was set before Him. For the joy that was set before Him.

So you look to Him now and learn from Jesus how to finish your marathon of faith and love. Answer for the joy that is set before you. How can I run like this? I will run like Jesus.

So the title of this message that I jotted down was Serious Joy as the Spring of Love. Now I hope you can see it in Jesus' life at least. Serious joy, meaning a joy that penetrates through the most horrific finishing of a marathon with nails and thorns and spear and mocking.

Serious joy penetrating through and never, never wavering off the marathon. How can I get there? Now, suppose someone, this is so crucial, I've been trying to motivate myself and other people with that joy set before us for the sake of love for the last 50 years. So I think that's the biblical paradigm of how you conquer selfishness and become loving.

You look to the joy that is set before you. It is so satisfying. It frees you from the fleeting pleasures of sin.

Enables you to lay down your life for others. That's the paradigm that I see in Jesus and I'm being invited into here. Here's the question it raises.

When you say, Piper, that Jesus was sustained on the cross by joy that He hopes to get beyond the grave, aren't you turning love into another form of selfishness? I mean, He wants to be happy. So, in wanting to be happy, He goes ahead and endures the cross. So now it's all about Him and His happiness.

He's not loving you. He's trying to make Himself happy. That's the key objection to my life and what I've taught for the last 50 years.

Is it selfish of Jesus? Not loving, but selfish to do? In verse 2, for the joy that was set before Him, for that joy, He endured this cross. Does that turn the cross into selfishness? You need an answer to that question. Because the text says that's how He did it.

And a lot of people think that's not love. A lot of professional, scholarly, ethics teachers teach that if you seek reward, you're not loving people. Here's why it's not selfish.

Selfishness is the use of people, the exploitation of people to achieve your own ends without regard to whether it benefits them. I don't give a hoot about you. I'm after my happiness.

I'm going to step on you if I have to. That's selfishness. Love doesn't forsake the pursuit of happiness in God.

It doesn't forsake. Like, okay, I have to regard God as unsatisfying. I have to have no interest whatsoever in whether I'm happy in Him when I get to heaven.

I have to forget all of the promises of God that I'm going to be glorified in His presence. I'm going to be with Jesus. It'll be spectacularly satisfying.

I have to forget all of that so that I can be sacrificed to God. I'm sacrificially loving other people. The Bible just won't go there.

What is love then? Love is when you pursue that joy at any cost to yourself, even the cost of your life, so as to bring as many people with you into that joy as you can. Nobody regards that as selfish. Nobody regards it as selfishness.

If you are pursuing a joy which you are willing to suffer to include them in. Nobody. In fact, I would argue if you forsake the pursuit of that joy, you've got nothing to offer them.

So, that's not a successful objection. So here's the big question practically. Okay, if you're on to something here, Piper, like if you're right that the most beautiful, perfect, glorious person in the universe, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, finished His marathon, loved people for the joy that was set before Him.

He was sustained by that joy. Was there any joy on the marathon? Or is it just out there? Like here, no joy. Just suffering.

And out there, spectacular, all-satisfying joy in the future. How can you be sustained in the moment when that is having no effect on the moment that's a piece of it? Here's what I mean. If I ask, okay, help me Hebrews.

Come on, I want to get this. Help me to discern how a joy set before me has an emotional effect right now to deal with my suffering. How does it work? And I go back in chapter 11 to verse 1 and it says, faith is the substance of things hoped for.

Substance. Sometimes translated assurance. It's a very unusual word.

Here's the idea. Faith right now. Right now.

Gethsemane. He sees hours away, or let's say three days away, resurrection, vindication, triumph over death and hell and sin. That's coming.

Oh, that is awesome. I will be there shortly. Faith.

His faith. Our faith. Right now is the substance of that.

Substance. At least that means taste it as a piece of it, right? Right now, if you have real clarity about the joy set before you with Jesus forever, faith feels it now through tears. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6.10, sorrowful yet always rejoicing.

Sorrowful yet always rejoicing. Which means that the joy is not after sorrow, before sorrow, it's in sorrow. How's that? That's because faith is a substance of that joy that you're hoping for.

Now, last question. Are there any examples of how this actually works in Hebrews? So, let's put up Hebrews 10.32-34. Or you can look at it in your own copy of the Scriptures. Hebrews 10.32-34. I tell you, few texts in the Bible convict me more, fill me more with longing to be a different kind of person than the fallen, incomplete John Piper.

Recall the former days. These people made a great start. They're starting to drift, and that's why this book is written, but they made a great start, and this is what it looked like.

Recall the former days when you were enlightened. That means saved. Light broke into your heart.

You endured a hard struggle with sufferings. Life didn't go better for them when they got saved, it went worse. Sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach.

Okay, some of them actually got clobbered head on. And affliction. Sometimes being partners with those so treated.

So you saw your Christian friend or family member being mistreated and you chose to identify with them. For you had compassion. Now he's explaining one of those occasions of identification with those who were suffering.

You had compassion on those in prison. Okay, they were put in prison. You were not put in prison.

So you had to decide whether compassion would free you from the fear of the risk of identifying with them, or you go underground and let them suffer alone in prison while you stay safe and keep your skin, and your house, and your kids, and your computer, and your books safe. And it says, and this is the miracle that I long for, and I hope you long for. You had compassion on those in prison.

How did you have compassion? Because you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property. Now, accepting the plundering of your property is one glorious thing. Joyfully accepting the plundering of your property is crazy.

Christians are crazy. Wonderfully, gloriously, otherworldly, miraculously crazy, which would make Cincinnati say, hmm, hmm. Look at those crazy people.

How in the world do they endure, you name it, endure whatever? Whatever God is pleased in His sovereignty to let wash over your life in sorrow and pain. They joyfully accepted the plundering of their property. That's like Jesus embracing the cross, despising the shame, right? How did they do it? They did it, it says.

Watch the next phrase. Just like Jesus did it. Since, last phrase of verse 34, since you knew that you had a better possession and an abiding one, I just ask you, am I making this up? Or is that not an exact statement of the logic of Hebrews 12.2? For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross.

For the better possession and abiding one, they joyfully accepted the plundering of their property. That's the key to the Christian life. At least, I want to be done with selfishness.

I want to be a loving person. I want to be able to give my life away with joy as I die for others to make Him look good. That's what I'm after.

And that's the first illustration of it there in Hebrews. And there's one more I want to show you. So let's go to chapter 11 now.

And we'll look at verses 24-26. And watch Moses do the very same thing with the very same logic motivated by the very same joy set before him. By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

So he's in the palace of the Pharaoh as a child of the Pharaoh, which means he has access to every conceivable wealth and pleasure that Egypt has to offer at its highest echelons. So what about the cross?

What about shame? Let's keep reading. He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God.

Oh, what a ragtag, ornery, rebellious group of people there were that he had to lead through the wilderness. And he has a choice to stay in the palace or lead this cranky people who never get it through the wilderness on the way to a promised land. And he never gets there in this life.

What a sad way to live. And he chooses it. I want to do that with the years I have left.

I just want to do that. I hate this word retirement. I think it's a bad word.

It's not in the Bible. So no offense if you're fishing. A little bit maybe.

But get a life. Get a life. You are on the planet for a few more months or years and they're designed to be like this.

Choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. I love that word fleeting because it says you're on to something, Piper. You're on to something.

Because it's not pleasure that's bad. It's fleeting pleasure. Ones that only last 80 years.

There's a joy set before you. It's not selfish and it's not wrong to want to be with Jesus free from sinning, free from cancer, free from depression, free from discouragement, free from rheumatoid arthritis, seeing Him face to face forever, ever increasing joy. It's not wrong to want that.

I'll tell you what's wrong. Wanting 80 years of fleeting pleasures in the palaces of Egypt. That's what's wrong.

So this text is another picture that we didn't even finish reading it yet. Let's keep going. He considered, how did he do this? How did he embrace this reproach? He considered reproach of Christ, the reproach of the Messiah, whom he could see by the eye of faith coming.

He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt. How? For he was looking to the reward, the joy that was set before him. So now you've seen three instances of the key to your life.

Hebrews 12, 2. Hebrews 10, 34. Hebrews 11, 26. All say the same thing.

For the joy that is set before you, spectacular, off the charts joy, endure your cross. And if your faith can embrace that, you will taste it now. We do.

We do, right? Right in the middle of the tears, flowing down our face with a dead husband in the coffin, or a little child with a malformity that you never dreamed would happen when you got pregnant, or whatever is making your life really, really hard. This tastes awesome. This will sustain you.

This will get you to the end of your marathon. So let me end like this. If you go deep with Jesus, and I said at the end, I'll be ending up here, looking to Jesus, looking to Jesus.

Get to know Him. Get to know Him now and forever. And if you get to know Him so deeply that He's an all-satisfying joy to you, three things are going to happen.

All right, here we go. And we're done. One, your joy, even in sufferings in this life, will overflow.

Even in sufferings, your joy in Him, in that joy that is set before you, will overflow. Number two, that joy will sustain a life of marathon love for others. It will sustain it.

You can make all the sacrifices necessary to love other people because of the joy set before you. And number three, that joy-sustained love in Him will make Jesus look great. So Father, I pray that Jesus would look great.

Through a life of love, a marathon of love sustained by satisfaction in the joy set before us, namely, Jesus Christ. In His name I pray, Amen.

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