

# The Glory of God and Gladness of Man

by John Piper

---

*This sermon delves into the profound theological insights of Jonathan Edwards, focusing on the central and essential role of joy in understanding God and glorifying Him. Edwards emphasizes that joy is foundational to God's being and essential for human union with God. The sermon explores the Trinity, creation, fall, and redemption, highlighting how joy is intricately woven into God's nature and His redemptive work through Christ. It concludes with a powerful reflection on how God's joy in Himself becomes our joy in Him, leading to the fullness of joy and union with the Triune God.*

**Scripture:** John 17:26, Psalms 16:11, Romans 8:7, 2 Corinthians 4:6, Hebrews 11:25, John 15:11, Psalms 73:25, Romans 1:23

**Topics:** "Joy in God", "Union with the Triune God"

---

## Description

This sermon delves into the profound theological insights of Jonathan Edwards, focusing on the central and essential role of joy in understanding God and glorifying Him. Edwards emphasizes that joy is foundational to God's being and essential for human union with God. The sermon explores the Trinity, creation, fall, and redemption, highlighting how joy is intricately woven into God's nature and His redemptive work through Christ. It concludes with a powerful reflection on how God's joy in Himself becomes our joy in Him, leading to the fullness of joy and union with the Triune God.

---

## Transcript

Father, even though our focus is not now primarily on an exposition of your word, but rather an explanation of what Jonathan Edwards saw there, I feel a need for your help. And I know we all need your divine illumination in order to see the kinds of things that Edwards saw and was moved by. And so I ask you to grant me to be plain and faithful to him and to you and all of us, Lord, to grasp in some measure the kinds of things that Edwards saw with such dazzling clarity.

I ask this in Jesus' name, amen. I have some comfort in the fact that my talk has very little application in it. And the two comforts are, number one, that everything I have said and done for the last 40 years has been an effort to apply this talk.

My life is an imperfect echo of what I'm going to say. I am not a dispassionate scholar when it comes to Jonathan Edwards. I love the man.

I do. I love him. And what I say here, I believe is true.

And therefore, you can ask it as though I said it as my view. So there I've just ruined all scholarly distance and dispassionate analysis and confessed that I am totally committed to the kinds of things that I have seen and love. And my other comfort is that Todd Wilson, his heart beats with mine and what I leave out, he should add at the end.

And then we'll apply it together, I hope. So here we go. For Jonathan Edwards, joy is central and essential for what it means to be God and what it means to be God-glorifying.

Joy is not a secondary ethical issue in Christian theology. It is foundational ontology. It's part of what it means to be God.

Joy is not an emotional icing on the cake of Christian obedience. It is an essential element in all God-exalting obedience. There is no true deity and there is no true virtue without joy.

So we can say, I think, without exaggeration, Edwards has elevated joy to a place of infinite importance, infinite as essential to the infinite divine being and infinite as essential to our eternal union with the divine being. So that's the thesis of this talk, that joy has that rank in Edwards' thinking. So here's what we're going to do.

We're going to walk through Trinity, creation, fall, and redemption, tracing the role of joy in God and in God's revelation of himself in creation and redemption. So let's start with Trinity, and how it all hangs together is simply magnificent in Edwards' thinking, I think. What we're going to see is that joy is essential to God's Trinitarian being and that man is created in the image of God in such a way that joy is essential to our wholeness and union with God.

For Edwards, God the Father is, quote, the deity subsisting in the prime, unoriginated, most absolute manner or the deity in its direct existence. Then the Son and the Holy Spirit have their eternal being as God's knowing himself perfectly and God's enjoying himself perfectly. Quote, as God with perfect clearness, fullness, and strength understands himself, views his own essence, that idea which God has of himself is absolutely himself.

This representation of the divine nature and essence is the divine nature and essence again. So that by God's thinking of deity, deity must certainly be generated. Hereby, there is another person begotten.

There is another infinite, eternal, almighty, and most holy and the same God. The very same divine nature. And Edwards is not only at pains to make a conceptualization of the begetting of the Son in God's knowing God helpful, he's at pains also to show that it accords with biblical language.

Like the logos of God, John 1. The image of God, 2 Corinthians 4. The radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of the nature of God, Hebrews 1.3. So the second person of the Trinity is eternally begotten by God's imaging God, thinking God, knowing God, in such fullness that the person stands forth fully God. Quote, he is the eternal, necessary, perfect, substantial, personal idea which God hath of himself. And that's risky language and Edwards has been criticized, but I don't think he minimizes the full personal nature of the Son in this kind of conception.

The Holy Spirit is eternally generated between the Father and the Son, fully enjoying each other. Quote, the Godhead being thus begotten by God's having an idea of himself and standing forth in a distinct subsistence or person in that idea, there proceeds a most pure act. And an infinitely holy and sweet energy arises between the Father and the Son.

For their love and joy is mutual. In mutually loving and delighting in each other, the deity becomes all act. The divine essence itself flows out and is as it were breathed forth in love and joy, so that the Godhead therein stands forth in yet another manner of subsistence and there proceeds the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, namely deity in act.

So, the Son of God is the fully divine personal standing forth of God's idea of himself generated by God's infinite understanding of himself and the Holy Spirit is the fully divine personal standing forth of God's joy. The Father's joy in the Son, the Son's joy in the Father generated by God's infinite delighting in himself. So, here's Edward's summary of the Trinity.

The Father is the deity subsisting in the prime unoriginated and most absolute manner or the deity in its direct existence. The Son is the deity generated by God's understanding or having an idea of himself and subsisting in that idea. The Holy Ghost is the deity subsisting in act or the divine essence flowing out and breathed forth in God's infinite delight in himself.

And I believe the whole divine essence does truly and distinctly subsist both in the divine idea and divine love. Love meaning not sacrificial love but complacent delighting love. And that therefore each of them are properly distinct persons.

Now, the main thing to see for our purposes is that Edwards, for Edwards God's being consists essentially in knowing himself and enjoying himself. His knowledge of himself is infinite and his delight that he takes in himself is infinite. The being of the Son is the personal standing forth of his knowing himself and the being of the Holy Spirit is the personal standing forth of his joy in himself.

Hence my statement at the beginning. Joy is not a secondary ethical issue in Christian theology but part of the foundational ontology at the heart of what God is as God. The Holy Spirit is the personal subsisting of God's joy in God.

You can't say anything greater about joy. Now we move to creation. The implication of that nature of the divine being is that God's being as perfect knowledge of himself and perfect joy in himself is what he meant to put on display and to communicate to the creature in creation with man as the apex of that creation.

He means to communicate the Trinitarian knowledge of himself to man and the Trinitarian joy in himself to man. He means for man to see and to share in the knowledge that God has of God and the joy that God has in God. And in doing that put himself most fully on display for man's knowledge and enjoyment.

Quote, because God infinitely values his own glory consisting in the knowledge of himself and joy in himself he therefore valued the image, communication or participation of these in the creature. Which means, and this is where the harmony of it all for me becomes so beautiful. Which means that God created man with two faculties reflecting his own essential being.

The faculty of understanding and the faculty of willing. I have to clarify what he means by willing or you won't necessarily connect it with enjoying. But he does and you'll see why in just a minute.

Quote, God has endued the soul with two faculties. One is that by which it is capable of perception or speculation which is called the understanding. The other faculty is that by which the soul not merely perceives and views things but is some way inclined either liking or disliking, pleased or displeased, approving or rejecting.

This faculty is sometimes called the will. So Edwards does not have a role for a third faculty called emotion. We often think knowing, willing, feeling.

He doesn't. He has two faculties in the soul. Body is something else.

The body has its animal spirits, its butterflies, its sweaty palms and fluttering eyelashes. That is not what he means when he's talking about affections or the actions of the soul or the actions of the will. So there's no third faculty for Edwards.

Rather, what are the affections? Love, hate, desire, fear, hope. What are they in his psychology here of the human soul? They are, quote, the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the will. Quote, the will and the affections of soul are not two faculties.

The affections do not differ from the mere actings of the will but only in the liveliness and sensibleness of exercise, unquote. So to choose something, as we say, by willpower, the sheer willpower, and to choose it because you love it, enjoy it, are not the actions of two distinct faculties. They are simply the acting of the will, one with less inclination and the other with more lively inclination.

And that's important to see for understanding how the human soul is in the image of God in these two faculties. God creates man in his image with the capacity to know the truth and the capacity to will, that is, to be inclined to, to enjoy supremely what is supremely enjoyable, namely God. And the reason for this creation is so that God's glory could be put on display most fully in man's knowing him and enjoying him, understanding and rejoicing in him, seeing and savoring him.

All I've done most of my life is try to use different language so that people wouldn't think I'm cheating. Now comes for me what has been the most important paragraph in Edwards that I've ever read and probably outside the Bible the most important paragraph I've ever read, period. And I say that because this paragraph that I'm about to read has been most universally shaping of all that I've thought and done.

In ministry, in writing, in theology, in pastoral practice, this paragraph is stunningly important for me. It unlocked the key to a whole way of seeing the world and a whole way of life which I have called Christian hedonism. And what's remarkable about this paragraph is the way the Trinitarian reality of God's knowing God fully in the person of his son and God's enjoying God fully in the person of the Holy Spirit is reflected in our capacities to know reality and to love reality.

Here's the paragraph. This happens to come from the miscellaneous all tucked away. God is glorified within himself these two ways by appearing to himself in his own perfect idea of himself or in his son who is the brightness of his glory or two, by enjoying and delighting in himself by flowing forth in infinite delight towards himself or in his Holy Spirit.

So, here's the analogy now. Move from Trinity to us. So, God glorifies himself toward the creatures also in two ways.

By appearing to their understanding. Two, in communicating himself to their hearts and in their rejoicing and delighting in and enjoying the manifestations which he makes of himself. And here's the most important sentence.

God is glorified not only by his glories being seen but by his joys being, his glory being, his being being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is

then received by the whole soul by both the understanding and by the heart.

God made the world that he might communicate and the creature receive his glory and that it might be received both by the mind and heart. He that testifies his idea of God's glory does not glorify God so much as he that testifies also of his approbation of it and his delight in it. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

We'll be on my tombstone if my wife has caught on. So what emerges from this paragraph is that joy in God is not only at the heart of what it means for God to be God, but at the heart of what it means for man to glorify God. We read the key sentence again.

God is glorified not only in his glories being seen, but it's being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. If you believe that, everything in your ministry will change.

Everything. That sentence changes everything. Counseling, funerals, marriages, preaching, child rearing, everything changes if that's true.

So maybe there is some application in this. After all, I just added it. Which is why I said at the beginning, for Jonathan Edwards, joy is central and essential for what it means to be God and for what it means for humans to be God glorifying.

One of the greatest revelations about God that comes from seeing this central and essential role of joy, glorifying God, is that we need not and we must not put man's joy and God's glory as competing motives in God's reason for creating the world. But did he create the world for us or did he create the world for him? Did he create the world to display his glory or to make us happy? If you're with me so far, you can see immediately those dare not be, cannot be alternatives. And if you don't see it, you're not with me yet.

But we'll keep trying. They are not alternatives. They happen as one in the same act.

And here's how he says it. God, in seeking his glory, seeks the good of his creatures because the emanation of his glory implies the happiness of his creatures. Their excellency and happiness is nothing but the emanation and expression of God's glory.

God, in seeking their glory and happiness, seeks himself and in seeking himself that is himself diffused, he seeks their glory and happiness. So for Edwards, joy is central and essential to what it means for God to be God and central and essential for what it means for humans to be God glorifying. And in creating the world, God sought the communication.

He wants to spill over and share what the Trinity is enjoying and knowing. He's going to share that. Put that on display, make that go public in souls that are created in the image in such a way that we have the capacity for knowing the most magnificently knowable and enjoying the most supremely enjoyable.

And in that experience of knowing infinite truth, beautiful glorious truth and enjoying it, we are made happiest and his worth is displayed most fully in our response. So that you dare not and cannot, must not make alternatives. Did he create the universe in order to make man happy or did he create the universe in order to make himself look glorious? They are one as he created the world.

There never can be a conflict between man's supreme happiness and God's supreme glorification. That's a liberating thought. I have seen that statement change thousands.

There can be no conflict between man's supreme happiness, supreme is key. There are all kinds of ways to be happy that dishonor God. There can be no conflict between man's supreme happiness and God's supreme glorification.

Supreme happiness is only found in knowing and enjoying God and this supreme joy in God displays the all-satisfying greatness of God. So much for creation. Now fall.

When the human race fell in Adam, we not only incurred guilt by our union with Adam but also inherited a nature that no longer enjoys God supremely and cannot. The mind of the flesh, this is Paul, Romans 8, the mind of the flesh is hostile to God for it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot. And those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Our affections today, every single person in this room and on the planet, our affections today are profoundly misdirected and beyond human remedy. The holy God-given self-love that once found all its good in God has collapsed in on itself. Quote, Man shrunk into a little point, circumscribed and closely shut up within himself to the exclusion of others.

God was forsaken. Fellow creatures forsaken. And man retired within himself and became wholly governed by narrow selfish principles.

And that term wholly governed is Edwards' way of talking about moral inability. Moral inability. Natural inability for Edwards is to be unable to do a thing though you will to do it fully but are hindered by something extrinsic to the will like chained to a chair and being told to get out and willing to get out and with all your heart and you can't get out because you're chained.

That's natural inability. That's not our depravity. Our depravity is moral inability and it means being unable to do something because you lack the inclination to do it.

Your will is so corrupt you can't want what you ought to want. And we all know by personal experience that's real. That's real.

And it's a horrible bondage. It's a frightening condition. Our will is too corrupt to delight in holiness.

We do not by nature delight in the things of God. We are like beasts who drink poison. We have exchanged the glory of God for the glory of the immortal God, Romans 1, for images resembling mortal man.

Here's the way Edwards put it. Evil affections radically consist in inordinate love to other things besides God. So the essence of the fall, the essence of man's fallen nature is that our minds are unable to see God as supremely beautiful and our wills are unable to enjoy God as supremely enjoyable.

We can't. We cannot see or taste. The Bible says taste and see that the Lord is good.

We cannot see or taste that God is good. So we give ourselves like animals to fleeting pleasures that in the end poison us. Psalm 73, 22.

Hebrews 11, 25. My people have committed two great evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and have hewn out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

So that's sin. Sin is turning away from God as all satisfying and digging in the dirt and sucking on the ground, desperately trying to find a better alternative than God. The essence of evil, the central nature of sin is preferring anything to God.

And all of us have sinned and failed to embrace the glory of God as our supreme treasure. We have exchanged it for what cannot satisfy, and so God is dishonored and we are dissatisfied and damned for a lifetime of daily insults to the infinite valuable God. That's fall.

That's the condition of every man. We are in bondage with a moral inability to love God, delight in God, enjoy God, and see God for who he really is in his compelling beauty. Which brings us now finally to redemption.

The fallen condition of mankind is not the end of the story. God immediately with the fall undertakes to put in motion his eternally planned work of redemption and in the fullness of time sends his son into the world to both recover and advance. And I'll try to explain both of those.

The son comes into the world to recover what was lost and advance it in the original purpose of creation, namely the glory of God and the gladness of man. That's why I'm summing up God's original purpose in creation. The glory of God in the gladness of man and his glory has been besmirched, hidden, trampled on, belittled, and our hearts have shrunk up into total incapacity to find full and lasting joy at his right hand.

In the death and resurrection of Jesus, the original purpose of creation is recovered. First, we'll talk about recovery. Recovered and secured.

The countless sins of God's people in preferring the creation over the creator were punished in the death of Christ so that God's holy wrath was satisfied. Second, the glory of God's majesty that had been so injured by its defamation through our sin was restored and repaired by Christ's God-glorifying sacrifice. Third, the perfect righteousness that we needed in order to stand before a holy God without being consumed was completed so that it could be by faith imputed to us.

And fourth, the new covenant privileges of new birth and sanctification were purchased so that the Holy Spirit could be poured out in his renovating power so that the blind could see and the dead hearts could delight again in God. Edwards pointed in his second most famous sermon, maybe, to 2 Corinthians 4-6, God who said let light shine out of darkness has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Verse 4 had said, the God of this world blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

And what's the remedy for that blindness, that deadness, so that we can't see light, we can't see glory, we can't taste it, we don't love it, it's foolishness and it's a stumbling block. And an hour later, he's the wisdom and he's the power of God and we're ready to lay down our lives for him. What happened? Well, verse 6 happened.

The God who said let there be light shone into our hearts. Edwards called it a divine and supernatural light immediately imparted to the soul. That's right.

That's a faithful rendering of verse 6 of 2 Corinthians 4. God says to John Piper's dead heart years ago, let there be light. And what was boring and foolish and confusing and irrelevant became everything. And I was born again.

That's regeneration. The light that he imparts spiritually now, it's not a physical light, this is a spiritual reality. The light that he imparts grants that the mind can now see the beauty of the glory of God for the infinite value that it has, is, and thus a new taste, taste is born.

A new seeing begets a new savoring. We see him as compelling. We see him as beautiful.

We see him as all satisfying and without any long chain of reasoning, we are there with our hearts cleaving and loving and delighting and desperately needing and being satisfied by what we have been granted to see. So what is the new birth? Quote, the first effect of the power of God in the heart in regeneration is to give a heart a divine taste or sense, to cause it to have a relish for the loveliness and sweetness of the supreme excellency of the divine nature, end quote. So the aim of creation that was lost in the fall is restored.

The heart of man now is supremely rejoicing in the supremely enjoyable and he is on display for our minds to see in his beauty and his worth. Now I said Christ came and achieved not only restoration but advance. So let's close with that.

The work of Christ in redemption does not only restore. It advances God's aim in creation. Christ was not merely a remedy or an afterthought to recover what was lost.

The history of redemption climaxes with the cross, not only as a means of restoration but a means of advance. Christ was the goal of creation, not a means to the goal. He didn't just recover a goal.

He was the goal. And by his incarnation and death and resurrection, the glory of God was put on new display in its most vivid and lavish excellency. Christ did not come and die and rise only to restore our joy in God but to become our joy in God.

The incarnate God did not appear simply to enable us to rejoice in God, but to become the focus of our rejoicing in God. Edwards put his incomparable lens to the gospel of the glory of Christ to describe the glory of Christ most compellingly in maybe the third most famous sermon, namely the excellency of Christ which I love. And the beauty of Christ in that sermon is developed in a stunning way to show that when Christ did his work, he wasn't in his work merely enabling us to have something we had lost but to become in that work the very focus of the glory that we once thought we saw and now see in fullness.

So here's his description of the glory of Christ, that we could not know the glory of God, that we could not know without the revelation of God in Christ. The beauty is in the juxtaposition of these seeming opposites. If you've read this sermon, you know what this is going to sound like.

Infinite highness and infinite condescension, infinite justice and infinite grace, these are things that mingle in Christ and thus constitute his incomparable beauty. Infinite glory and lowest humility, infinite majesty and transcendent meekness, deepest reverence towards God and equality with God, infinite worthiness of good and the greatest patience under sufferings of evil, an exceeding spirit of obedience with supreme dominion over heaven and earth, absolute sovereignty and perfect resignation, self-sufficiency and an entire trust and reliance on God. Christ, the incarnate second person of the Trinity, the Redeemer is now the fullness of the revelation of the glory of God.

He didn't just repair our ability to see something old. He became what God meant for us to see all along. So for example, when it says in Psalm 16:11, you make known to me the path of life.

In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore. The Old Testament saints tasted that and it was glorious.

And they didn't have a clue what the fullness meant. At God's right hand. None of the saints knew the fullness of the meaning of that promise.

That at God's right hand are pleasures forevermore. It took the incarnation and the New Testament revelation to show that the pleasures at God's right hand are the pleasures of God the Father in God the Son. And the pleasures of God the Son in God the Father.

And now He has come. This is my loved Son in whom I delight. I am well pleased.

And you should put into the term well pleased billions of tons of pleasure. We gloss over those words so quickly. This is my beloved Son in whom I, God Almighty with all my infinite energy am totally pleased.

And have been from all eternity. And now you can see what my joy is. Now you can see the joy that is at my right hand.

My joy is joy in my image in my Son. You can come into that. And then He prayed.

Jesus prayed and He suffered. For what no eye had seen or ear heard that the children of God through faith in Christ would actually be taken into the life of the Trinity. And bound to God by the indwelling love of God for God.

The indwelling love delight in rejoicing of God in God. Here's the prayer. John 17:26.

Amazing. I didn't see this until Edwards showed it to me. I'm so blind.

I'm such a doll. Thank you Lord for Jonathan Edwards. I made known to them your name.

This is Jesus praying for you. I made known to them your name Father. And I will continue to make it known that the love with which you loved me.

Now pause. There is no mercy in God's love for Jesus in the Trinity. It is all joy.

There are no self-sacrifice that the Father makes to love the Son. This is just total energy of joy. The love with which you loved me.

I pray that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them. God's love for the Son infinite in joy comes into you and becomes your love for the Son. Have you ever felt emotionally inadequate to respond to God? Yes.

You won't be emotionally inadequate in the end because you will respond to God with the energy of the joy of God. His name is the Holy Spirit. What binds the children of God to their Father for eternity is that we enjoy the Son of God with the very joy of God the Father.

And we should add, Jesus had already said, I don't know if you've ever put this together, in John 15:11, I've spoken these things to you, that what? That my joy might be in you. So now, you not only have Jesus

praying for the love of the Father for the Son to become my love for the Son, but you have Jesus saying, and my joy? My joy in the Father? I've spoken to you so that my joy would be in you. There's no other way for your joy to be full than for my joy in God to become your joy in God so that now we have our joy in the Father being the Son's joy in the Father and our joy in the Son being the Father's joy in the Son.

And we must have a new resurrection body or we will be blown to smithereens by that experience. And that's not a joke at all. That is why you must have a new body.

These experiences are so magnificent that this, I just read to my family the other day, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. That doesn't mean you won't have a resurrection body, it means this one won't work. This one will not work for that experience, forever.

Let me give you one last quote and we'll wrap it up. God is both exhibited and acknowledged. His fullness is received and returned.

The refulgence shines upon and into the creature and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God, are something of God and are refunded back again to the original so that the whole is of God and in God and to God and he is the beginning and the middle and the end. So, I conclude where I began.

Surely, we can say without any exaggeration, Jonathan Edwards has shown us that joy is elevated to a place of infinite importance, infinite in its essential role in the divine being and infinite in its essential role in our union with the Father and with the Son by the Spirit. So, Father, as we contemplate with Edwards, your being, your creation, the horrors of the fall and our bondage and your glorious atonement and restoration and advance grant us eyes to see, grant us hearts to taste. I ask in Jesus' name.

Amen.

---

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/nhO3yLQMxjs.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-piper/the-glory-of-god-and-gladness-of-man/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**