

# Build Your Life on the Mercies of God

by John Piper

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of building your life on something, specifically the mercies of God revealed in Jesus Christ, and cultivating mercy in your home and in your relationships.*

**Duration:** 36:00

**Scripture:** Romans 15:8

**Topics:** "Divine Mercy", "Christian Living"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of building our lives on the mercies of God in Jesus Christ. It is a call to live a life rooted in mercy, both in forgiving the guilty and showing pity to the hurting. The message is divided into two parts: building our lives on something and specifically on the mercies of God manifesting in Jesus Christ. The speaker prays for hearts to be transformed by mercy, for unbelievers to see the beauty of divine mercy, and for believers to deepen their experience of God's mercy.

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## Transcript

My aim in this message tonight and for you who are watching this this morning is that you might be encouraged by God and enabled by the Holy Spirit to build your lives on the mercies of God in Jesus Christ. The message has two parts. The first will be that you would build your lives on something and the second is that you would build it on the mercies of God manifesting Jesus Christ.

So let's pray that God would do that encouragement and the Spirit would do that enabling. Let's pray. Lord, I can speak but I can't cause anybody to build their lives on mercy, but you can.

And so I'm asking, Father, that in this sermon the Holy Spirit would so move through the Word that human hearts would be built on mercy, would be saturated with mercy down to the core of their being and that mercy would be the mercy manifest in Jesus Christ crucified and risen. So come and help me. I pray this for unbelievers, Lord, who have come into the room that they might so see the beauty of divine mercy in Jesus Christ that they would be compelled to yield allegiance to Him.

And I pray it for all of your believing people that more deeply than they've ever tasted, they might taste mercy and that more firmly than their own mercy and more deeply than they've ever been transformed down there in the bottom of their souls, they would be transformed by mercy. We want the world to see the glory of your mercy. So change us into good images of yourself, I pray, in your mercy.

Through Christ I pray. Amen. So there are two parts.

One, build your life on something. And two, build it on the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. First, build your life on something.

Now, where do I see that in the text? I see it in the word, therefore. I'm going to spend half the message on this, more than half. I appeal to you, therefore, this is verse 1 of chapter 12.

I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God. What does therefore mean? How do we use the word therefore? I'll give you a couple of illustrations from our life as a church. On April 28, the day before I left on writing leave, the church met in this room and voted 315 to 39 to say, let's go for it.

Treasuring Christ together by the campus, feed it out for a worship, get in there by next January or February, and spread a passion for God's supremacy through multiple campuses, church planting, global diaconate, big risk, huge costs. Let's do it. Therefore, in just a few days, we will sign that document, which means that the action of the elders to sign the document doesn't hang in the air.

It doesn't come out of nowhere. It's built on something. They're not just out there doing it.

It's built on something. It's built on years of thinking, praying, planning, months and months of final haggling and working and laboring with Moundview, weeks of disseminating information, a powerful, wonderful discussion and argument and disagreement in the business meeting where the 39 disagreeers are the most wonderful people in the world, the kind of people you want to really disagree with if you've got to disagree with anybody. Therefore, because of all of that, we're going to sign the document.

It's built on something. Let me give you another example from Fortaleza, Brazil, last week. My wife is there.

Caliph is there. Twelve of our folks are there building a church, blessing the people. My wife flew to Rio, which is 10,000 miles away from Fortaleza.

You obviously don't know your geography, because Brazil isn't 10,000 miles across. It just feels like it, like Texas. Well, it's at the bottom, and Fortaleza is at the top.

She flew to Rio to be with Linda Oatley, who is one of our missionaries to street children in Rio. And they met her and learned her ministry and ministered there for three or four days and then took Linda to Fortaleza, which is on the northeast coast of Brazil, and met up with the rest of the team who had flown down from here last Saturday, a Saturday week ago. And Linda Oatley went along with Noel to be a part of the team from Rio, where she's a missionary, and she gave her testimony that night there, which goes something like this, to the women in the church for whom they're building this church.

I always wanted to be a missionary. From the time I was young, my husband would have nothing to do with it. In fact, in the end, he abandoned me and divorced me.

And now, as a single woman, after long wrestling and praying and struggling, I have given my life at age 50 to street children in Brazil. The next morning, the pastor's wife of the church, in a gathering of the women, said, I want to say something. She stood up and she said, my husband has felt called, burdened, and a longing to be a missionary in Chile from Brazil for our whole ministry together.

And I've said no. And last night, all my objections fell to the heart was changed. And therefore, I'm willing to go.

Therefore, her choice, her action doesn't come out of nowhere. It doesn't hang in the air. It's not rootless.

It has a foundation. It's built on something. The faithfulness of God manifest in the life of Linda Oatley.

I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God. Therefore means, I'm about to open up to you a way of life. In chapter 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, I'm about to open up a way of life to you.

And it doesn't hang in the air. This life doesn't come out of nowhere. This life is not rootless.

This life is not arbitrary. This life is built on something. This life has roots.

This life that I'm calling you to has a foundation. And it is Romans 1 to 11. He spent 11 chapters and we spent six years laying this foundation.

That's no small commitment because the life built on it is a very radical life. I'm now turning from doctrine, chapters 1 to 11, to practice. I'm now turning from theology to ethics and morality.

I'm now turning from a vision of God and sin and Christ and cross and resurrection and Holy Spirit and justification and sanctification to a life that is so different from what the world will live that if you don't get the connection, you won't live the life. It's built on something. That's the meaning of the word, therefore.

Now, that may seem really obvious to you that chapters 12 to 16 are built on chapters 1 to 11, that life is built on doctrine, that ethics is built on theology, that doing is built on knowing. That may seem patently obvious to you. It is not obvious to millions of people, like 800 million Hindus, for example.

Now, the reason I think of Hinduism right here is because I've been reading about it. So, let me read to you a quote from an article from this week that I've been reading so that you can see the two totally different worldviews in regard to how to use the word, therefore. This is by Herbert Hoffer from Mission Frontiers, last issue.

The proper name of Hinduism is Sanatana Dharma or the eternal way of life. You can have whatever beliefs you like, but you are expected to live out Dharma. Your religion is expected to participate in the values and customs and organization of society.

If a Hindu finds you to be a person of character and propriety, it does not matter to him that you have differing theological beliefs. What matters first and foremost is that you are a person of Dharma. Within Hinduism itself, one can identify hundreds of different religious traditions." Now, you can see there are worldviews millions of miles apart here.

Hinduism does not have eleven chapters of objective doctrinal knowledge about God, the nature of man, the nature of sin, the nature of death, the nature of Christ, the nature of salvation, the nature of faith, the nature of the Holy Spirit, the nature of the Christian life. It doesn't have eleven chapters of teaching objective truth followed by, therefore, Dharma. Dharma hangs in the air.

The Christian life, the kind of love, the kind of sacrifice, the kind of purity, the kind of holiness to which God calls us, doesn't hang in the air. And it doesn't come out of nowhere. And it's not without roots, and it's not without foundation.

It's built on knowledge of the way God is, and the way Christ is, and what Christ did, and what He's doing now, and His nature and character, and how the Spirit works. And all of this knowledge is essential to Christian Dharma, or whatever you want to call the way we live, or ought to be. And I just view Hinduism as an example because I've been reading about it.

I could do the same thing with lots of American philosophies that discount truth and choose their lifestyle out of the air because it pleases, not because it's built on anything. And you just need to know that the Christian life that you're called to live is built on something. Let me give you a reason for why this is so, and one application to your family.

Here's the reason. Unlike Hinduism and most other philosophies of life, Christianity, or if you don't like that word, being a Christ person, a follower of Jesus, has one main goal. To magnify the glory of the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

We exist to display Christ. That's why we exist. Therefore, you have to build behavior explicitly on that Christ and His glorious deeds, or the behavior won't call attention to Christ.

The whole point of Christians being Christians is to call attention to how great Jesus is. Not us. Not like, I keep my nose clean, why don't you? That's not Christian morality.

Christian morality is when people see you and admire Jesus. Otherwise, morality is useless. Let's eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

But if there's a Christ, and if there's a God showing mercy in and through Christ, and He created the universe in order to display the full range of the beauties and the character and the glory of God in Christ, then we must build our lives on that consciously and explicitly, so that when we do what He calls us to do, He gets the glory, not us. That's the whole point of Christian living. Other religions don't have that goal.

Don't abstract your ethics and your morality, your sense of right and wrong, and the choices you make, and the kind of house you have, the car you drive, the clothes you wear, the way you spend your money, your leisure time. Don't abstract that and separate that out from all that you believe about Jesus. Build your choices on Jesus, which leads me to the application for parents.

Parents, this is so simple. In a sense, it's so simple, and yet so utterly profound. Teach your children the meaning of therefore.

Teach your children that their behavior should be built on something. Don't ever let come out of your mouth, at least not as the whole point, the words, just do it. That's not Christian parenting or Christian morality, as frustrating as children can be at times.

Just do it is not Christian, even if the it is right. Pharisees just did it. We say, because of the mercy of God in Christ, therefore, act like this.

Because of the mercy of God in Christ, therefore, talk like this. Because of the mercy of God in Christ, therefore, feel like this. We help our children get a foundation under their behavior, so that when they go off to university or high school, for that matter, they're not operating on what's wrong with it mentality.

What's wrong with this movie? What's wrong with this party? What's wrong with these drugs? What's wrong with this drink? What's wrong with this joke? What's wrong with this way of using my money? That's

the wrong question. The question is, how can I so live that Jesus is made to look better than parties? It's not an easy question to answer. I'm not saying it's easy.

I'm saying it's the right question. So, parents, put a foundation underneath the do's and don'ts and rights and wrongs and goods and bads and ugly and beautiful, all the choices you want your kids to make. Make sure that they're able to say, therefore, I do this and know what's behind it.

Therefore, I talk like this. Therefore, I don't go there. Jesus Christ did not come into the world to help you party better.

He came into the world to help you so be ravished with joy in Him that others would see you have a better party. That's the application. Cultivate in your home the meaning of therefore.

Build your life on something. Now, second half of the message, second point, which is shorter, is do it on the mercy of God in Christ because that's what it says. I appeal to you, verse 1, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by, through the mercies of God.

Now, this is amazing to me. We'll get practical here. And as he starts, he has to reach back over 11 chapters and choose one word to say, through this I appeal to you.

And he chooses the mercies of God. Isn't that amazing? A little summary of chapters 1 to 11, the mercies of God. I want you to live out of the mercies of God.

I want to open up for you now four or five chapters of lifestyle that flows from the mercies of God. Would you listen to me through the mercies of God? And so Bethlehem, I say, let's do this. Let's really do this.

Now, this is not an accident. This is not a quick decision on Paul's part that doesn't really fit in essentially and integrally with his worldview. Let me show you what I mean by that from chapter 15.

Just a page or two over. Let's go there. Romans 15, 8 and 9. And you'll see why he chooses this word, mercies of God.

Romans 15, 8 and 9. I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show Christ's truthfulness. In other words, he became an incarnate Jewish person, Messiah, to show Christ's truthfulness in order to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs and, here it comes, in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy. He's willing to sum up the whole purpose of the incarnation of the ministry among the nations, the Gentiles, by saying, my goal is that the Gentiles would glorify God for His mercy.

That's my goal. Everything else is means to that end as I display the glory of His mercy in His Son, Jesus Christ. And then you can know you're on the right track here if you just read through chapter 12, highlighting all the mercy that he is going to build on the mercies of God.

So let me walk through chapter 12 with you so that you'll know he is not throwing words away here. He is thinking, I want them to be merciful people. That's what will show my Son to the world.

If they're willing to live by mercy, it will be so counter-cultural, so counter-intuitive to the human heart, that they will see Jesus. Verse 8, end of the verse, the one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness. Verse 19, let love be, I'm sorry that's verse 9, let love be genuine.

Verse 13, contribute to the needs of the saints, mercy. Verse 14, bless those who persecute you, that's mercy. Verse 15, second half of the verse, weep with those who weep, that's mercy.

Verse 16, second half of the verse, associate with the lowly, that's mercy. Verse 17, repay no one evil for evil, that's mercy. Verse 19, never avenge yourselves, that's mercy.

Verse 20, if your enemy is hungry, feed him, mercy. If he's thirsty, give him drink, mercy. There's no doubt where he's going here.

What is mercy? It's got two components that seem to be drawn out in the New Testament. One is being forgiving toward the guilty, and the other is being pitying toward the hurting. It's what you'd feel for a dog that's just been run over.

Your mercy is hurting. No guilt there to be forgiven. Both are true, absolutely true about God, and you can see them both if you just go back to what may have been one of the most pointed and beautiful statements of the love of God in chapter 5. It goes like this, but God shows his love for us in that while we are yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Now that's being more kind and forgiving to the guilty than we deserve. That's verse 8. And then comes, actually I'm reversing them, verse 6, while we were still weak, mark that word, that's different from sinners. While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

So both of these features of mercy, pitying the weak, broken, helpless, hurt, and forgiving the guilty who are sinners and don't deserve anything, and God in his mercy does both. And that's what he wants us to build our lives on. He forgives and he pities.

So as I move to a close now, I just, first of all, before I exhort you, I want to say, would you pray that for me? If you feel like it, you can pray it for all those sinners in the back of this, this is the bulletin, just all those sinners there. But this one right up here, who is in this very dangerous upper left-hand corner, would you pray, not just, oh make Pastor John a merciful person, but be a more specific prayer. Pray this, pray that in that part, whether it's here, here, heart is here, biblical said kidneys, heart, kidneys, mind, soul, wherever it is, the deepest core of John Piper, where unpremeditated words, facial expressions, grunts come, unpremeditated, that that core would be so penetrated by the mercy of God, so broken, so transformed, that my reflexes are merciful.

If I think enough, I can manage mercy. I don't want to have to live that way. I would rather be so deeply merciful that I respond reflexively to treat people better than they deserve.

So that's my prayer for myself, and what I would like you to pray for me. How are we going to manage as a church if God doesn't do this among us? We are in a growth mode and a stretch mode. We're pushing the limits of what a church can bear on several fronts, and you know what happens when you do that? The elders have to meet till midnight, and people talk about whether something's wise or not, and the emotions get frayed, and when the emotions get frayed, the deep down, unpremeditated self shows all over the church, and we can hurt each other with words that we would like to take back.

So as a church, let's do this for each other. Let's be merciful to each other. God wants to push us here to the limit, and underneath, he wants to hold us up with mercy, and what about the stresses of being a Bible-believing church in a day like this in the world, sending out missionaries in a world like the one we are living in, with hostilities on every side towards people who say the Bible is inerrant and absolutely

authoritative and the last court of appeal in the life of every human being on planet earth, or people who say marriage is one woman and one man in lifelong commitment, or who say it is absolutely horrendous that the ban on partial birth abortion has been overturned, or who say, have we done justice racially in the acquittal of those policemen, or there is one way to heaven and one alone by the knowledge and the faith in Jesus Christ.

What are we going to do when we take stands like those, and either verbal or physical reprisals come? How will we do? Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord. If your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he's thirsty, give him a drink. We won't be able to do that unless we build our lives on something way bigger than air or arbitrary choices about right and wrong. We've got to have underneath us a massive mercy, and our roots have to be going way down into mercy.

So Bethlehem, let's build our lives on something and learn what therefore means and teach to our kids, and let's build it on the mercies of God revealed in Jesus Christ. And that simply means for all of us now, embrace that mercy, receive that mercy, entrust your life to that mercy, savor the sweetness of that mercy, sell yourself out to that mercy, and let it sink down in and shape everything you do. Father, for the sake of the glory of Jesus, help us build our lives now on mercy.

Amen.

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