

Q and a Piper and Mbewe

by John Piper

The church should focus on being the salt of the earth and the light of the world, rather than trying to be relevant in a post-Christian age.

Duration: 43:59

Scripture: Psalm 119:18, Matthew 6:33, John 4:24, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 11:6

Topics: "Question Answer"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the pursuit of joy and satisfaction in life. They emphasize the importance of engaging in various means of grace, such as being part of a church community, studying the Bible, and worshiping God. The speaker also highlights the significance of taking care of one's physical well-being, including getting enough sleep and exercise. They stress the transformative power of a life lived in accordance with the teachings of Christ and the importance of promoting unity and harmony among people of different backgrounds and cultures.

Transcript

All right, thank you again for all the excellent questions, Pastor John, and then Pastor Conrad can join in as well. Good one to get us started. Regarding engaging culture, very trendy phrase these days, this gentleman says, I have MacArthur on my one shoulder saying take only the best of culture into the church.

I have Driscoll on my other shoulder saying redeem it all. How do we navigate the balance? Well, we certainly should redeem what's redeemable. And I think best is too high a standard.

I don't do anything best. I don't preach best. I don't act best.

I don't read best. I just don't live at that level. And I wouldn't know how to define it either.

I mean, I love John MacArthur. OK, if he was sitting here, I'd just kind of hug him like this and say, we mean best, best, like only classical music. That's really best, isn't it? Well, or is there best rock, best folk, best country, best blues, best jazz, best or I mean, what is best? So I don't know for sure what to say to that particular counsel.

I don't find that statement giving me much guidance because it sets a not only a qualitative standard that I think would rule out most of our hymns. And I think would. We were just talking about over there with Stuart Townend, how he writes songs, and I said, you know, one of the songs I can't understand why it

has survived, except for the tune is the first Noel, the first.

No, that's really bad poetry. I know it's your wife's name. I know for a fact it's not best.

In fact, most of the songs that we sing are not best. If you broke the music out and read them as poetry, they would be average. I would say John Wesley was an average poet and Isaac Watts was an average poet.

So all that to say, make the sieve of what is brought into the church. What's edifying, what's loving, what serves the truth, what serves the spread of the gospel without compromising the gospel? I think the criteria of the New Testament are not aesthetic best criteria, but rather they are criteria of love. I remember one more comment.

I don't want to talk too long. I remember somebody said to me when I first came to Bethlehem, we want to have a special music, every service, special music, which means a solo or a quartet or something. I said, well, if that's the way you do it here, I'll go with that.

And they said, and we want it to be the best. No, no mistakes. Nobody misses a note or anything.

And I said, well, now my priorities here are this. I want to be excellent in forgiveness. So if somebody misses a note, the real issue there is, are we excellent in forgiveness and love and care? And so I'm I'm I'm real, you know, loosey goosey when it comes to criteria concerning non true things, that is, forms, forms of how you do this or that in most culture is forms.

And I'm a real stickler when it comes to truth. Those lyrics better tell the truth and I want them to tell it well and well means clear and helpful and compelling and not necessarily. I don't know.

That's what best would mean for me. Clear, helpful, compelling, edifying, Christ exalting. And that's probably what he meant.

Thank you. I hope so. It's helpful.

Pastor Conrad, is your church forgiven you for that first solo that you say? Yes. To last as long as John and myself have lasted our congregations, you do need to have very forgiving congregants. That's right.

That's right. Anything else you wanted to add on that question? That's fine. Okay.

Next question. Would you please comment on the role of the personal relationship with the person of the Holy Spirit in producing this passion and joy that you spoke of? Me. Pastor John.

By the book Communion with God by John Owen, there's nothing like it on the planet. Nothing. I don't know of anybody that's written a book that has tried to distinguish how we commune with God, the father, God, the son and God, the spirit.

Most of us think in general terms of communing with God or Jesus, maybe. And so I was helped by that book a long time ago to take the Holy Spirit seriously as a person who can be grieved by me and who dwells in me and who longs to make Christ beautiful to me. But honestly, I think what the Holy Spirit wants me to say here is quietly.

He's the shy member of the Trinity. He would say, just make sure you say I'm in you to help you see Jesus. I'm in you to help you love Jesus.

I'm not in you mainly to get you to talk to me. I'm not in you mainly to get you to look at me. I'm in you mainly as the member of the Trinity that is granted to change you so that when you open your eyes in the Bible, you see Christ as magnificent.

So I think Packer's book, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* with its thesis that the main ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the son of God is right. But when you realize that it should make you love him, I mean, if when you see Jesus, he's beautiful to you, he's everything we just heard. He should be all consuming to you.

And, you know, that can only happen by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It's like somebody sets a feast before you and, you know, they made this and you love it. You're going to hug the cook, you know, thank the cook.

And so I do think I we should love the Holy Spirit. We should be thankful to the Holy Spirit. We should worship the Holy Spirit.

And to that degree, one of the questions that's often asked me is, should we pray to the Holy Spirit and we should say things like come Holy Spirit? That's a prayer. And we should say that to Jesus as well. So I don't think you can love Christ the way Conrad opened Christ for us without loving the Holy Spirit who enables that.

Thank you, Pastor Conrad. I think this might be a good one for you to answer and have some particular context to it. Typically in Africa.

What is your view on the apostolic prophetic model of church? Is there anything there that you can latch on to? Apostolic what? They wrote in all caps, so I can't tell you this is an official thing or if it's some of the various apostles and prophets that are all around in churches in Africa. OK, I certainly don't understand the actual terms that are being used there, assuming they are nouns that are referring to something current. But whoever asked the question, my answer amounts to this, that God in his word.

Discourages us from making much of titles. Whether it's bishop or reverend or pastor or whatever other title you might be going by, cardinal, apostle, as we've just heard here. It mustn't be an issue of what title I am going by.

Because titles amount to what you read on a grave, a tombstone. The grave itself would be full of dead men's bones. But on the outside, you have been thoroughly whitewashed.

The right reverend, doctor, apostle, something, something. And everybody thinks, wow, this is holiness walking on two feet. When really your own wife and children don't want to hear anything from your mouth.

They know better. They know better. Yes, that's good.

So that's the first thing that I really need to emphasize. And the spirit of Christ, you can't miss it in the gospels, particularly where he discourages that being an emphasis. Secondly, as I was mentioning earlier in my sermon, what matters is, is Christ being preached here? Whatever the title is on the church, on the ministry, is Christ being exalted in this place? Are sinners being drawn to Christ? Are saints being built up

in Christ? Once that is there, there will be a lot of other gray areas.

We are all still learning. We probably might be in denominations that might go by the name of, what's that? Apostolic prophetic. Okay, we may be coming from there.

But if Christ is your all in all, a number of these things begin to fall flat. As you start centering more and more on what the Holy Spirit, through the scriptures, is clearly teaching you concerning our all sufficient Savior. So that, I think, would be my general answer, since I'm not exactly sure.

I've never come across this particular, if it's a denomination or group or ministry. I thought I'd just give those two answers. The negative, don't make much of titles and all that.

A positive, major on the Lord Jesus Christ and you won't go wrong. Your initial thoughts on the question, does Africa need an apostolic ministry today? All right. Again, let's assume we put aside apostolic as some title.

That we now have individuals going around saying, you know, I'm apostle something, something. Let's put that aside. Okay.

If we're thinking of an apostle in biblical terms, that is a sent out one. With a ministry that's really establishing God's work, where God's work is either absent or extremely weak. Which is really what the apostles were doing in a general sense.

Then, yes, we do need God to raise up such signal servants. Who will draw the attention of both the church and the unchurched people to the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes at great sacrifice to themselves.

But because they are so taken up with Christ. That as the apostle Paul himself says to the Philippians. Some are preaching him out of good motive, others bad motive.

To me doesn't matter as long as Christ is being preached. So in that sense, yes, we need to pray in our different towns, cities, countries. And indeed as a continent that God will raise up such clear voices.

Individuals whose ministry will be trailblazing for others. Thank you. Thank you, Conrad.

Pastor John, this person writes. It seems to me that in evangelical circles. There is a growing division between those who are reformed and those who are not.

This again to me seems to be threatening unity in the church. Are you aware of this and does it concern you? The first part, there's a there's a there's a growing division between those who are reformed and those who are not. I don't know whether that means there's always been reformed and non-reformed.

And the division now is clearer or harsher. Or whether it means there's lots more reformed people coming into being and therefore it's manifest that there's a difference. The second is true, I think I speak out of an American context.

There's there's a heightened awareness of reformed soteriology and the majesty of Christ. And the glory of God and the sovereignty of God. And I consider that a glorious thing, as I see that movement sometimes called the New Calvinism or the Young, Restless and Reformed.

The name of the book that Colin Hansen wrote or the New Reformed is just a younger set. The mindset in that group, the newer, younger Calvinists, they are less divisive than the old ones. And I love the old Calvinists.

I'm thinking Banner of Truth say, I stand on the Puritan shoulders. I would give my right arm to be as significant as what has happened through the ministry, say, of the Banner of Truth Trust. And those guys paid dearly.

Now, here comes a younger set. They're all hip and cool and weird and and whatnot. And lo and behold, they're five point Calvinists and they're complementarians who don't have women elders.

And you think they'd have to be in the backwater of culture and have no impact and no significance at all because they believe such weird things and don't let their women be pastors. Wow, that's crazy in America. And here they are growing six thousand person churches.

And you wonder what in the world the mindset of that that phenomenon and really in the world, it's a small phenomenon. OK, no pretensions here. It's a little thing which God can do with it, whatever he wants.

He can dump it, he can blow on it and bless it or he can be done with it whenever he pleases. But that it exists is a beautiful thing. And I would take the average younger guy in that movement and say he's not cultivating animosities with Armenians.

He's just not about that. He is so bent on winning lost people to Jesus and showing them the whole counsel of God that he doesn't give a lot of time to trying to show other people wrong and beat up on non Calvinists. So, yes, the differences are coming clearer because the teaching is more explicit.

But I don't think that is owing to a divisive spirit. I mean, Paul said it is necessary that there be some divisions among you in order that the genuine might be manifest. And if somebody is humbly, lovingly teaching the truth and others are kind of, oh, this is different.

And therefore, I feel different from you now. I mean, a lot of you have experienced this 18 year old comes home from college, from campus outreach, and he's just on fire for the supremacy of God and his two parents. Look, whoa, what is that? And now there's a cleavage in the family and he doesn't want that to be.

I love you, mom. I love you, dad. Can we just talk? And they sense difference.

And so, yeah, that that's happening. But I know there are there are fighting fundi Calvinists and fighting fundi Armenians, and there's always going to be some ugliness in the church. But I think if you take a message that we just heard here and make that the staple of our lives, it won't be our we won't be responsible for that kind of unnecessary cleavage.

My but I say one more thing. I love I love this book. I love this book way more than the institutes or way more than Jonathan Edwards and an Armenian who's a lover of this book.

And you can smell humility on that guy and absolute submission to this book. Man, can I go a long way with that guy? I can talk to him all day long, whereas a Calvinist that comes along, he never quotes this book. He just quotes Calvin.

I don't want to spend any time with him. I don't know. I'm not interested.

He's just he's just always blabbering away. He's read some latest catechism or some latest book, and he's on to this doctrine of that doctor. Say, would you give me a verse? Give me a verse.

I just want to hear God come out of your mouth instead of. So in that sense, I hope that I'm a I'm a winsome person. If an Armenian says, look, I think everything I say is in this book.

Me, too. Let's talk. Let's go to this book together.

Let's worship the God we see in this book. And my is amazing how far you can go with those people. Pastor Conrad, your thoughts.

Observing a similar rift in the African church scene, reformed, non-reformed. Yeah, I think my comment would be closer to what John has just said towards the end. And it's the fact that, first of all, attempting to hide the truth for the sake of unity is basically holding hands in the dark.

And you just don't know whether it's the hand of a human being or some other creature, extra celestial creature. So I think we shouldn't hide the truth. We shouldn't dim the light.

However, in not dimming the light, what I have seen is that where the word of God has, first of all, dealt with the individuals, there's humility, there's love. So it's not the kind of individuals who feel they've served the Lord because they've rubbed people the wrong way. The people feel they've served the Lord because they've caused people to go off in a half.

You know, I've told them that that's not biblical Christianity. So there must be truth, but it must be truth told in love. And therefore, those who genuinely are teachable, yielding to the word of God, as we just heard, they may not agree with the Calvinistic teaching, but in the midst of all that, there will still be respect and the bridge will still be there for some level of fellowship as we relate to one another.

And my final comment, therefore, is the fact that what I see, at least in the Zambian context, is that, yes, the division seems to be clearer, but it isn't because the Calvinists are being looked down upon and being seen as the cause of divisions as things are, but rather as those that are being admired, although people still think we need to clear a few things doctrinally before we can really be at one with them. Thank you. Pastor John, how do we make sure that the church is seen as relevant in an age where we are largely considered irrelevant? Well, David Wells or Os Guinness or somebody said nothing goes out of style as fast as relevance does, which is a caution.

It's not a it's not totally helpful. It's kind of like saying only use the best in worship. But it's a caution that a lot of younger guys think relevance is what you wear or whether you can refer to the star of the TV show that everybody's watching.

And so you kind of whoa, he's culturally hip. You know, he's I just think that kind of relevance is thin and dated and and is not necessary and has perils in it, because if you push on that, you've got to work pretty hard to stay relevant. And that means immerse your brain in a lot of junk.

And Christ is always relevant because relevance means you need him and you always need him. Christ is always supremely relevant, more relevant than anything else in your life. So what what I feel we have to do is find ways to say that.

That people can hear you're in America, use English, you know, and find ways to describe him that make him look magnificent if you can. I mean, this is the Holy Spirit's work, but the Holy Spirit causes human beings to speak of him. So I don't think much about relevance.

I don't get up in the morning and I don't get go to bed at night thinking I got to be relevant. I got to be relevant. I spend most of my time trying to understand what's in this book and feel it.

And I I feel that's going to work because I just live in this world. I'm a real American. I sound like an American.

I act like an American. I dress like an American. I'm an American.

So when I just be me saturated with this, it works, it just people get it, they just so it seems to me kind of got to work not to be relevant. If if you live in the world, if you're reading advertisements on the side of the road and thinking about them, if you know that Twitter exists, there's such a thing as blogs and that there is such a thing as TV and and Internet and what people are doing with it, if you just if you're in all that and then you're mainly saturated with this, then you just be. And so I'm just not into relevance.

And I think Christ is just so magnificent. And if I if he could be, I have a wife. I have four sons.

I have a daughter. I got cancer. I have a divided and squabbling church.

I'm getting old. My hair's falling out. I can't hear as well.

I'm just human, which is what everybody is. So I'm trying to figure out how do you have cancer for Christ? How do you have kids for Christ? How do you keep a marriage together for Christ? How do you keep yourself out of your secretary's bed for Christ? Just what? Just I'm just this is life. TV isn't life.

That's ridiculous, you know, just so live life and and just build Christ into everything you're struggling with and then just let it show, you know, let your people see you struggle with your marriage and struggle with your kids and struggle with your cancer and struggle with your lust and let them see it and show them how you get victory. And how can that not be relevant? So I don't I don't even I don't even own a television. I've never had a television and nobody's ever said you're so out of it.

No, I haven't a TV. What I said, I said to him, they said, how are you going to raise kids if you don't have a television? I said, well, move into the city. Why should they have to watch it on TV? Just just go outside.

There's drugs and there's gunshots and there's guys trying to rape women in your front yard and just move into the city. You need a television. That's ridiculous.

Well, get real. Yeah, Tim wants me to add something. OK, the only addition I'd like to make is.

And Matthew five, our relevance really is being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. If relevance has to do with the fact that we have simply become a bouncing board for the opinions of journalists and major media houses, then, yes, we shouldn't be relevant. Because we shouldn't simply be saying what they want to hear.

But our relevance, first of all, comprises the changed lives through the gospel. Those lives that came to us directionless, broken. Some of them wanting to jump off a skyscraper.

And now they have found Christ. And they've pieced their lives together. They've mended their marriages. They're giving direction to their families. In the corporate world, there's been a seismic change that's observable to all. That is our initial relevance.

And it cannot be pushed away as a mere philosophy. You can't push away a life that has been transformed that way. And then the second relevance is really the fruit of those lives, wherever they are.

Whether they're in politics or business, in the community, wherever they are. When people say, you're not being relevant, show them your membership list. Say to them, can you see where I've poured my life? Now, if these individuals are not being relevant to our world, then, yes, I'm not being relevant.

So that's what I really say. The salt of the earth and the light of the world. Thank you.

Pastor John, the issue of a multicultural, multiracial church. You know something of the history of South Africa. A couple of brief suggestions.

I know we only have a couple of minutes left, but a few thoughts. I know you're in an inner-city, urban church. Developing a Christ-centered, multi-ethnic ministry when racial tensions are high.

We are not a great model in this. We work at it. But if you were to show up at Bethlehem, it would be largely white.

And so and yet we are in a downtown neighborhood that's that's very diverse. The challenges are not mainly racial, they are mainly class. And socioeconomic.

And educational level. And it's just unbelievably hard. To preach and sing and lead in a way that feels natural to people across wide.

Educational spectrums. Very hard. I think we idealize the early church.

We don't know. We know that there were wealthy and slaves. Men and women.

But we don't know how they grouped around. We don't know how that worked. My guess is the tensions were huge and they had to work very hard at it.

So my counsel is work at it. I mean, what I've said is that I'm going to go to my grave sitting at the table with African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians. It's the way we think in America.

Anyway, in those categories, it's much more diverse here. Probably getting more diverse in America. I'm never going to walk away from that table of discussion and effort because there isn't anything harder to stay at than this that I know of.

Because as soon as I try my best to write something, say something, preach something, reach out to cross a culture divide, you're going to get clobbered. You did it wrong. You should have done it yesterday.

Somebody is going to get in your face that you said something demeaning. You used a tone of voice that didn't work. You wore the wrong clothes.

You used a word that was offensive. And the temptation is I'm taking my ball and going home. I tried.

They didn't want it. I'm going home. And I just said, I'm not going to do that.

I'm just going to come back to the table over and over again, whether they want me or not. I'm there. And so that's the first thing, work at it, read about it, reach, reach out, have friends across ethnic and socioeconomic lines and labor to do some things in the church that are that remove obstacles to people of other cultures, though you can't remove them all because we're just so different.

And maybe the last thing would be focus on leadership until the staff has diversity. It will be very hard for the congregation to have diversity and so pray like crazy, read, study, reach out, love, get your get your theology of reconciliation from Ephesians to write that God has is taking these these groups and in Christ, as he reconciles them vertically, he's reconciling them to each other. Get that nailed down.

Preach on it to your people. Lift the awareness of the people to the fact that this is not a social issue, but a blood issue as the name of a sermon I did from Romans five, nine. And he has redeemed people from every tribe and tongue and people, a nation by his blood.

And if Christ paid his blood to redeem a multi-ethnic crowd, we better not dishonor the blood by being indifferent to that harmony and that effort. So I wish I could tell better stories about success, but all I can do is commend broken hearted effort wherever you are, whatever the lines are, the walls are and the divisions are labor to be a reconciler and a peacemaker for Christ's sake and in Christ's name, not because it's the cool thing to do to be multicultural or multi-ethnic. Thank you.

Last question, our final moments, two different individuals wrote, how do we find more of this joy and satisfaction that you've described? One is a missionary in the Middle East who's back visiting. How do I sustain that in the midst of those challenges, this person saying, how do I find it when it's been missing a long time, this joy and satisfaction in God? That's that's the most common question that I get after a talk like this. And it's the how question.

And so for years and years and years, I began to assemble my list of things that I do and then put them in a book. The book is called When I Don't Desire God, When I Don't Desire God, subtitled How to Fight for Joy. So this answer that I'll try to give now is utterly inadequate because there's it's to me, this is just life, how to do this is how to live.

My whole life is devoted to sustaining. Joy, trying to and beholding the glory of the Lord, we are being changed from one degree of glory to the next, and this comes from the Lord, who is the spirit. So how do I get changed? I become by beholding.

So if Jesus showed up here. You'd have some affections, you'd be. You'd be trembling, you'd be terrified, you'd be on your face.

So we need to see him, the place we see him, there's this great verse in First Samuel three, and the Lord revealed himself at Shiloh by the word of the Lord. He revealed himself by the word of the Lord. So I can't see him.

I walk by faith and not by sight. Where do I look? I have to see him in order to be changed by him. And the answer is he reveals himself here.

You know where I'm going. The bottom line is, read your Bible and pray. But that sounds so, so trite, doesn't it? This is where I go.

I get up in the morning. I sit down or kneel down over this book and I cry out to the Lord. Psalm 119, verse 18, open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things out of your law.

And sometimes he gives me beautiful glimpses and sometimes he doesn't. But I know there's no other place to see him with any reliability than here. And so become a Bible saturated person.

I read one time Wesley Duell. Now, there's an Armenian for you. OK, Wesley Duell.

I love his books on prayer. He wrote one time, when I go on a retreat to meet Jesus, sometimes I have to read 50 chapters of the Bible before my heart is cleansed from the world in order to see him. When I read that, I felt so unbelievably convicted.

I have never read 50 chapters of the Bible in a row. So you should say to me someday when you find me depressed. So did you try 50 chapters? And I would say, no, I'm sorry, I'm not practicing what I preach.

And that that is reality, isn't it? We mope around. I don't know why the Lord doesn't give me joy. And, you know, you haven't done all he has given you to do it.

I don't mean do like if I do it, I earn something. I just mean there's a fountain. Go drink.

You know, there's a fountain. So put your face in it and stay there until it tastes good. So and there's so much more to say about all the means of grace that God has given us.

The church is a means of grace and being with God's people in Bible studies and worship is a means of grace. Sunshine outside is declaring the glory of God. And people have written poems to echo the beauty of nature.

That's a means of grace. Exercise and sleep are a means of grace. One of the first questions I would ask somebody come into my office who's depressed and discouraged, I'd say, how much sleep did you get last night? They said, I don't sleep very well any night.

Well, OK, we got to work on this, because I know that if I go three or four nights on five or six hours of sleep, I'm not a Christian anymore. Meaning meaning that my my fruit of the spirit quotient has sunk so low like patience. Patience is the fruit of the spirit.

I think patience is the fruit of sleep. And the great theological challenge is to figure out how these bodies relate to the fruit of the spirit, because if you don't get exercise and if you don't eat right and if you don't sleep, you'll you'll be you'll be a less fruitful Christian. And yet fruit comes from the spirit.

So does it come from the body or does it come from the spirit? Does it come from eating steak and drinking orange juice or does it come from the spirit? Does it come from sleep or does it come from the spirit? And one answer to that question is yes. And the spirit gives it the humility to go to bed because you're not God. So don't think you can run the world, pastor.

Go to bed. You need to go to bed and get a good nine hours of sleep for three days in a row and then come to talk to me about how bad you feel about how the church is going. My hopes for my church vanish if I don't get any sleep.

It did just vanish. And so that's a piece of it. Physical, raw care for this temple of the Holy Spirit is a piece of it.

That's a great note to end on, really end on the word of God, which is all pointing towards that message that you heard about knowing nothing but Christ crucified. Amen. Shall we pray? Our father, how gracious you are, how extravagant, how lavish in your goodness to us through these men as messengers, as voices, mouthpieces of your word.

Your word tells us to imitate our leaders, to consider the outcome of their faith, their lives and to imitate their faith. Those who spoke the word of God to us. Thank you for these men.

Thank you for their ministry. Thank you for Pastor Piper and how his books have mentored many of us for decades and nourished our souls when they were weakest and fed us with the bread of heaven. How enriched we are.

How gracious you have been. Lord, how merciful you are. Thank you for these men.

Energize Pastor John even now as he preaches to us in a few moments. Indeed, drive deep into our hearts these truths we've been challenged by even in this time of discussion. Thank you for men who speak with wisdom on their tongues, whose mouths bring healing and life and nourishment to our souls.

We give you thanks in your son's mighty name. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/22/SID22593.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-piper/q-and-a-piper-and-mbewe/>

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