



Thought For The Day, Radio 4, June 1, 2026

Good morning.

Football fans are experts in the art of disappointment. When I lived in Sunderland the football club's fanzine had the title, 'It's the hope that kills you'. That sentiment rang true for me on Saturday night as I watched my favourite Arsenal players miss two penalties and our European Champions League dreams disappear into the Hungarian night air.

However, two days after that crushing defeat, I am left wondering if disappointment is all that bad. Yesterday, as hundreds of thousands of Arsenal fans hit the streets to demonstrate their love for their club, we saw how the communal sharing of the whole spectrum of emotions, joy, pain and disappointment amongst them, is one of the ways sport can bind people together. Disappointment can also be powerfully motivational and I'm sure that, like all the best competitors, the Arsenal players will soon pick themselves up and strive to do even better next season.

Many Christian thinkers have argued that disappointment has a positive purpose, even that it is part of God's plan, because it raises in people's hearts deeper questions about the direction and purpose of their lives.

Among them, the great fourth century Christian writer and thinker Augustine suggested that disappointment indicates where people have placed their trust in things that are unable to offer lasting fulfilment. Friends, family and wealth - these aren't bad things - we need them. It's just they are fragile and so will inevitably let people down. Yet that very disappointment can direct the Christian to the God in whom lasting satisfaction is found. As Augustine wrote in his famous prayer, 'You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you'.

The story of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus illustrates what Augustine is saying. These two are bitterly disappointed after witnessing the death of the one they hoped would launch a revolution. But as they walk along the road, the collapse of their initial expectations leads them to a stunning new realisation: that Jesus is alive again and that in him all their deepest needs and desires are met.

Career, family, politics - all these things will inevitably carry disappointment at some stage. I have met people for whom a profound sense of disappointment has become almost the defining feature of their lives. That is a trap that needs to be avoided. Because when channelled in positive ways, the intensity of disappointment can lead to transformation, helping people to discern the deeper foundations upon which they can build their lives.

Rt Rev Philip North, Bishop of Blackburn