

Delight #1 – Introduction & Joyful Delight

Based on *Delight! – Discipleship as the adventure of living and being loved* by Justin Rossow

Bible Reading

*The LORD your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing.*

Zephaniah 3:17

Introduction

Most Tuesday evenings I drive to a pub in Northwood to spend the evening with a very good friend. Conrad Gempf is a New Testament theologian and a lecturer at London School of Theology, which comes in very useful when I am preparing talks like this one. He's a Lutheran, but despite that, he's an OK kind of guy.

Back in 2020, Conrad mentioned that he was editing a book that an American friend of his was writing. He also mentioned that a design was needed for the cover, and wondered if I was interested in getting involved.

I said yes, and ended up designing not just the cover, but laying out the entire book.

The author of the book, Justin Rossow (he's a Lutheran, but despite that, he's an OK kind of guy), even convinced me to design some T-shirts for him... and, no, I don't own one.

As I was thinking through what to follow my 'Understanding the Bible' series with, Conrad suggested that the 'Delight!' book might be appropriate... and after some thought, I decided he was right. And so, here we are!

So, why delight?

Justin begins his book with an image that captured his imagination. The image is that of a young child who notices an adult has arrived at their home... it could be their mum, dad, a grandparent, cousin or friend. The important thing is that the child loves and trusts the adult, and when they recognise them they immediately run to greet them, at which point the adult extends their arms, lifts them up and twirls them around.

And as their eyes meet, the child giggles with joy. You all know that kind of laughter, it's infectious, and soon the adult is laughing as well, which makes the child squeal with delight... and so the adult continues to twirl the child around, both of them lost in a moment of pure joy, pure delight.

I hope that everyone here has at one time or another experienced that kind of joy. The experience of loving and being loved. Of shared joy and delight.

And even if you haven't, this series is going to look at how God's love for us involves delight that is like this, in fact, it is even more enjoyable, real and powerful.

And, before you think this all sounds a bit too fluffy and rose-tinted for a 'Brett' series, I do want to emphasise that following God can also be confusing and difficult. It's not all laughs and giggles.

When Jesus called his first disciples, he didn't promise them an easy time. In fact he told them that it was only by losing their old lives that they could gain a God-centred, authentic life.

And yet this new life is a life that should be filled with joy. The kind of joy that can be experienced even in the most difficult situations.

That joy, the joy of knowing Jesus, flows directly from Jesus' joy of knowing you. That's a phrase you don't hear very often, so let me say it again... Jesus finds joy in knowing you!

The Bible, from beginning to end, is filled with pictures of how God delights in his creation, and in particular in the crown of his creation, humans, God's image on earth, the ones he created to represent him to enjoy, explore and cultivate this planet.

The Bible portrays a God who enjoys the humans he has created. Jesus made it clear, in words and in the way he lived his life, that God will go to extraordinary lengths to let humans know he loves them and that he wants us to live in relationship with him.

And, just to make sure you realise it's still grumpy old Brett talking, knowing Jesus also means acknowledging your failure to live up to God's perfection. Following Jesus demands repentance and a continual willingness to change and grow into the person he wants you to be.

But, wonderfully, repentance and delight are *both* gifts from the Holy Spirit. Delight should be as much a part of your life as a disciple of Jesus as repentance.

To some of you this will be an encouragement. To others it might seem more of a challenge. The author of *Delight!* suggests that a possible description of discipleship is...

'An adventure of loving and being loved.'

When I first read this I was skeptical. But as I read further, I became more and more convinced that he is onto something very important. And I hope to convince you of this as well.

Despite the popular view of God being a moralistic killjoy, the Bible has plenty of evidence to the contrary, and – shocker! – much of it is in the *Old Testament*.

And as Christians we have met with Jesus, God become man, who lived a life that was so full of love, joy and forgiveness that people called him a 'glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' (Luke 7:34)

The God of the Bible wants us to live in relationship with him in a continual interaction that is characterised by mutual delight.

The previous series on understanding the Bible was a broad overview of the Bible's story from beginning to end. This series will be digging deeper in on particular Bible texts, often focussing on specific words. The previous series was mainly about breadth. This one will be mainly about depth.

Let's start with today's reading...

*The LORD your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing.*

Zephaniah 3:17

Zephaniah depicts God as a Mighty Warrior who saves Israel from its enemies. But the imagery is intimate, it is OK for us to read this verse through a 'personal' lens. God the Mighty Warrior saves individuals as part of saving the Israelite community.

And this mighty warrior is no Batman figure who having defeated the enemy promptly disappears from the situation. No, God is so pleased to see that you are in one piece that he rejoices over you, with singing!

The main Hebrew word translated here as 'delight' is 'sus' (*pron. suice*) (שׂוּס)

But it's more than just delight... it is 'great delight'. Hebrew regularly employs the repetition of words, or words with a similar meaning to emphasise them, like we might say, 'mega, mega important', or 'super, extra special'.

The literal interpretation of the Hebrew is ‘delighting with great delight’, with the second ‘delight’ being the Hebrew word ‘simchah’ (שמחה), with the second syllable pronounced gutturally like the Scottish say ‘Ach!’.

And that’s followed by another related word that the NIV translates ‘rejoice’.

The Hebrew word is ‘gil’ (pron. *jeel* (גיל))

This is a very physical word, used for an emotion so strong that it makes you jump up and spin around. It can be used to express the kind of surprising fear that makes you jump, but here it is being used to describe a joyful emotional experience. God the mighty warrior jumps up and starts singing to you!

One of the things I want you to take away from these talks is that our life as Christians is not just about reading the Bible and doing what it says (and, yes, I know that I am someone who could be accused of making it seem like that is what the Christian life involves).

However, under this dour, wrinkled exterior, there is a heart that loves Jesus in a way that regularly reduces me to floods of tears at my gratitude for his unrelenting and undeserved love for me. Since I gave my life to him in my late teens, he has never given up on me, even in situations when I have been persistently disobedient to him.

And I’m not a special case. He loves each one of you. When you walked into this church this morning, Jesus was delighted to see you. When you take the time to read the Bible, the Holy Spirit is ready and waiting to help you learn more about the God who loves you.

And when you pray, when you confess your failures and doubts, when you bring your worries and requests to your Heavenly Father, that Mighty Warrior rejoices that you are his.

And, as we realise just how much God loves us, despite our failures, despite our selfishness and rebellion, it inspires us to love him back.

Psalm 119 is a (very long) love song to God's word, it takes about a quarter of an hour to read out loud from start to finish... and yet in Victorian times many people memorised it!

But for today, we'll stick to just one verse.

Psalm 119:14 reads:

*I rejoice in following your statutes
as one rejoices in great riches.*

And, yes, the Hebrew word translated as 'rejoice' is 'sus' (*pron. suice*).

Knowing, understanding and following God's statutes, God's way of doing things, is like realising you have come into an unexpected inheritance worth millions of pounds. And when this sinks in, you jump up and shout 'Yes!', possibly followed by a little dance around the kitchen as you dissolve into helpless, joyous laughter.

As Christians we live in relationship with the creator and sustainer of the universe, the God who sent his only Son to die for our sins. And we will live forever. FOR-EVER! We do have good reason to be joyful.

When one of his disciples, Philip, asked Jesus to show them God, Jesus said:

'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.'

John 14:9a

Remember what I said earlier, this Jesus, who the religious authorities thought enjoyed his life a little too much for comfort, is happy to say that he represents God the Father.

Being a Christian should not mean walking around with a permanent frown. In fact, being a Christian should make us smile more often, in the most ordinary situations, and even in the midst of difficult times.

And, as I said earlier, we can do this because Joyful Delight is not dependent on circumstances. It is a *gift* from the creator and sustainer

of the universe, who has chosen to make it possible for you to live in joyful relationship with him, in good times and bad.

One of the darkest moments of Jesus' life, when he celebrates the Passover with his disciples, is recorded in all four Gospels. Jesus knows what is coming, he is about to be betrayed by one of the disciples gathered around the table, followed by being arrested by the religious authorities, falsely tried, beaten, ridiculed and crucified.

Bear this in mind as he wraps a towel around his waist and washes his disciples' feet (including Judas's) demonstrating to them that God's representatives are to be those who love and serve others, not lord it over others.

That's how we get 'Maundy Thursday', Maundy is from the Latin 'Mandatum', from where we get the English word 'mandate' or 'command', because Jesus gave his disciples the command to love one another.

And what reason does he give for doing this?

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

John 15:11

Just in case you missed it...

*I have told you this so that my **joy** may be in you and that your **joy** may be complete.*

The Greek word used for joy in this verse is 'Chara' (pron. Ka-Rah!)

It is taken from the word that usually gets translated as 'grace', as in 'amazing grace', or as many Christians know it, 'God's Riches At Christ's Expense'. This is deep, authentic, God-given joy.

Yes, on the eve of the worst day of Jesus' life, before he spends hours in prayer with his Father coming to terms with what his earthly mission entails. Before one of his disciples betrays him. Before he is

mocked and beaten within an inch of his life. Jesus is talking about JOY! *Complete, perfect joy*. The kind of joy that is robust enough to survive *anything* the world throws at it, including suffering and confusion.

As we journey through this series, I want us to wrestle with and grab hold of this truth, to claim it as ours. When you become a Christian your relationship with God is restored. You are adopted into his family. And you are given access to God's power through God the Holy Spirit. This is all gift, all from God, it doesn't depend on us. All we have to do is cooperate, to say, "Yes God, I want to do what you want me to do."

I'm sure you have questions about how this works out in real life, and I will address some of these in coming months, meanwhile why not leave this service with the resolve to say, "Thank you God for adopting me into your family, help me to want to do what you want me to do", and to make it your daily prayer in the coming weeks. In my experience, God loves to answer prayers like that.

Amen