

Delight #3 – Delicious & Desirable Delight

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

Bible Reading

Come, all you who are thirsty,

come to the waters;

and you who have no money,

come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk

without money and without cost.

Why spend money on what is not bread,

and your labour on what does not satisfy?

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,

and you will delight in the richest of fare.

Isaiah 55:1-2

Introduction

Last time we looked at two kinds of delight that are found in the Bible, the first one was thoughtful delight, the kind of delight that we experience when we have to concentrate on solving a problem, and get pleasure from fitting the pieces together.

And then we examined playful delight, and how it can inspire us to read the Bible with a sense of anticipation and adventure.

Today we are going to start with one for the foodies among you...
delicious delight.

In the late 1960s, my parents travelled to Australia. While there, my mother came across a recipe for cheesecake that she uses to this day.

It is delicious, with a thick base of crushed digestive biscuits and butter supporting a layer of philadelphia cheese & double cream, topped with fruit and chocolate.

It has become a tradition for her to make one when the family visit her in Somerset, and then we fight over who gets to take the leftovers (when there are any) home.

Most of you will remember the Billingtons. One of Emma's many talents is creating beautiful fruit cakes.

Not only do they look amazing, they taste fantastic, just the right mixture of fruit and not too sweet. And for years, Emma has made one for me for Christmas, and on my birthday. I make it last as long as possible, cutting a small slice to eat with a cup of coffee at breakfast time. I am always a little disappointed when I get to the final slice.

You probably have a favourite food or meal, the kind that makes you hungry just thinking about it. The Bible talks about God's word being like that.

Once again, Psalm 119 provides us with an example:

*How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth.*

Psalm 119:103

God's Word, the Bible, when we think about it deeply, applying it to our lives and the lives of others, brings with it a specific variety of delight. Delicious delight.

Receiving and internalising God's Word is not only nourishing and life-giving, it can also be a source of deep pleasure because it gives us the ability to savour the presence of God himself. We are often told that studying God's word is as important as getting regular meals (and this includes dessert!). But studying his word includes dessert. It's not just making sure you eat your greens, there is cheesecake and fruit cake as well.

As Psalm 34:8 says:

*Taste and see that the LORD is good;
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.*

and Psalm 37:4

*Take delight in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

It's not just God's words that are a delight, it's God's presence itself. The Psalmist is encouraging us to taste, to savour and enjoy God. To delight yourself in God is the gateway to receiving the true desires of your heart.

The Hebrew word for 'delight' in Psalm 37 is *anog*, which comes from the noun, *ōneg* that refers to something that is delectable and tender.

The Psalmist is saying that approaching God with the attitude that his presence in your life is something you look forward to like a delicious meal will result in the desires of your heart being fulfilled.

You've probably heard of the phrase 'a vicious circle' or 'vicious cycle', when a bad decision leads to more and more bad decisions, with the consequences that this entails.

Well, the Psalmist is calling us to partake in a virtuous cycle, or virtuous spiral. As we spend time with God, reading his words, talking with him in prayer and putting what we learn into practice in our lives, we will see that what we long for most begins to shift towards what God has been wanting to give us all along.

God wants us to move towards living a life that is orientated towards savouring him and his presence. Delighting in him for who he is. Pure goodness. Pure love. Pure joy.

This is something I am beginning to understand... my prayer life tends to be mainly about asking God to do things for me and other people, thanking him for all the good things he has done and is doing in my

life, and asking him to help me live a life that uses the gifts he has given me to glorify him.

None of these things are bad. But they are not the whole thing, and not even the *primary* thing. God does want us to pray. God does want to give us good things. And God does want us to live lives that use the gifts he has given us to glorify him.

But, and I'm speaking here from personal experience, as we seek delight in God himself, rather than in and through the things and people in our lives, we will see the desires of our heart becoming orientated towards a deeper and more fulfilling relationship with God.

We all know (or should know) that treating God like a cash machine is not right. And yet some of my prayers get close to doing so. And the desires of *my* heart are rarely pure. So often I discern a need in my life, and then I turn to God to ask him to help me fulfil it.

What the Psalmist is doing is putting things in the right order. He is urging us to learn to take delight in the presence of God, through reading the Bible, spending time in prayer, worship and fellowship. And as we do so, our focus will move from us to him, and the desires of our hearts will move from me, me, me, to the desires of God's heart... and with that realising that the plans he has for us are so much better than the ones we have for ourselves. And so we begin to enjoy the mutual delight of a loving parent and their trusting child.

One of the effects of sin is that it folds us in on ourselves. We become isolated, selfish and self-seeking. Learning to delight in God just for the sake of delighting in him helps to correct this. It is why singing worship songs and praying for other people is such an important part of a church service, turning our focus from us to God, helping us to see things the way he sees things.

And as we do this, we will become conscious of things in our lives that we need to stop or change. But we will also begin to take delight in

things that God has given us in our lives that we haven't been aware of before. Seeking God's presence in our lives corrects our focus and gives us a new and more balanced perspective on life.

Isaiah 58:13-14 reads...

*'If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath
and from doing as you please on my holy day,
if you call the Sabbath a delight
and the LORD's holy day honourable,
and if you honour it by not going your own way
and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,
then you will find your joy in the LORD,
and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land
and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.'
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*

The Hebrew word translated 'please' is *chephets* (pronounced 'kay-fets) צָפֶת . It is another 'delight' word that is used about something you desire because it brings you joy or delight.

The words 'delight' and 'joy' in these verses are translations of the first Hebrew word we looked at 'ōneg'

Isaiah 58 is talking about two types of delight... the delight of pleasing ourselves, and the delight of pleasing God. In this case it is talking to the people of Israel about the importance of keeping the Sabbath holy, honouring God's command even when it is inconvenient to them.

And it is saying to us that if we learn to turn our gaze away from ourselves and towards God, delighting in the things that he wants us to do rather than finding pleasure in being our own selfish, inward-looking selves, we will discover our joy *in the LORD*, the LORD who wants us to flourish in him.

God wants us to come to church on Sunday with an attitude of optimistic expectancy, looking forward to a time of worshipping him,

talking with him, learning about him and sharing fellowship with other believers.

And he wants us to read our Bibles with the same level of expectancy, looking forward to discovering new things about him, about ourselves, and how God wants to work in our lives.

And the same goes for our prayer lives, he wants us to look forward to them in the same way we look forward to a delicious and nourishing meal.

And it extends to every second of our lives. He wants to be involved in every moment of our day, from cleaning the kitchen to putting the bins out. And as we do this, we will find ourselves moving away from the things that we know *don't* please God... not because we are scared, but because the good things bring us more joy.

Earlier in the book of Isaiah, Chapter 55:1-2 reads...

*'Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;*

*and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!*

*Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.*

*Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labour on what does not satisfy?*

*Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.*

Which was probably what Jesus was thinking of when he fed the thousands as he tried to get the crowds that were following him to focus on the message he was attempting to get across to them.

John 6:26-27 reads...

‘Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.’

Jesus is, not for the first or last time in his ministry, frustrated that the people around him can’t see beyond their own immediate wants. Jesus, God in human form, loves to give good gifts to the humans he has made in his own image. The feeding of the thousands was Jesus demonstrating the immense generosity of God. But it was *complementary* to the *primary* message that he was trying to communicate.

A few verses later we read...

Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’

‘Sir,’ they said, ‘always give us this bread.’

Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’

John 6:32-35

Jesus is not merely the giver of bread that sustains bodily life, he *is the bread* that gives God’s eternal life to those who put their trust in him.

Because we live in a fallen, broken, sinful world, some followers of Jesus do go physically hungry and thirsty. Christians get ill, they suffer injustice. Jesus wants nothing to do with the ‘prosperity gospel’.

During his time on earth, Jesus gave us glimpses of what the *renewed* creation would be like. He healed people, he turned water into wine. He fed thousands of people.

But his main message was that we have to stop focusing on ourselves, on our personal plans and agendas, and instead turn towards the one who knows exactly what we need, and has the power to make it happen. And he knew, he knows, that when we do that, when we take what he says seriously and apply it to our lives consistently, that we will never want to go back to how things were before.

Which takes us to the next delight. Earlier in this talk we looked at Isaiah 58:13-14, where Isaiah is encouraging the Israelites to please God rather than pleasing themselves.

The word he uses is *chephets*, desirable delight, and while in these verses it is being contrasted with the delicious delight of knowing and obeying God, the Bible also uses it to describe the mutual delight that we share in our relationship with God.

We've been looking at some verses from the book of Isaiah. Like most prophets, Isaiah is (unsuccessfully) attempting to steer Israel away from rejecting God's ways, and from the judgement that will result from it. And yet, even in the midst of some of his most harsh words, God's love for his people shines out...

*No longer will they call you Deserted,
or name your land Desolate.
But you will be called Hephzibah,
and your land Beulah;
for the LORD will take delight in you,
and your land will be married.*

Isaiah 62:4

OK, let's get to work on this verse. Now, first of all, top marks to all of you who spotted the word 'delight'.

The cool, if a little nerdy thing is that there is another 'delight' hidden in the verse... remember what I said about the 'thoughtful delight' of digging deeper in to the scriptures? Here's an example:

Isaiah is using a number of names for Israel. The NIV translates the first two into English, Deserted and Desolate. But not the next two. And, guess what, Hephzibah means ‘my *delight* is in her’, *chephets!* And for those who like word puzzles, there’s *another* hidden meaning in there...

God is, through Isaiah, promising that the relationship between God and his people will be restored... and the language used is of the most intimate kind, it is using the language of marriage, of a groom and his bride. The word ‘Beulah’ means... married.

God is declaring that he takes delight in his people, and is utterly committed to them.

And God kept his promise. Jesus, God in human form, restored the relationship between God and humans by dying in our place, defeated death by rising again, and provided us with power to live lives that are pleasing to God by sending his Holy Spirit.

As Christians we are invited to take an active delight in God.

*Taste and see that the Lord is good;
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.*

Psalm 34:8

This won’t always be easy. Christians are forgiven, but not perfect. And we have an enemy who will do his best to twist even our best intentions.

When we decide to read the Bible regularly, you can be sure that there will be a hundred good reasons why something else is more important. When we start to pray more, we will frequently find our mind wandering, and worrying about whether we are talking to ourselves. Or if you’re anything like me, falling asleep.

And as a result, all too often we give up in our attempts to draw nearer to God. Like improving our diet or exercising, we start out with good

intentions, only to fall back into our old habits. And many Christians end up settling for much less than they should.

One of Satan's most successful ploys is to tell us that we'll never be able to enjoy a relationship with God. You're too sinful. You're too lazy. You're just not the 'spiritual type'. You've tried all these things before, and they didn't work. Satan is a superb liar. He excels in half-truths, and providing us with excuses to take the easy way out.

Jesus told his disciples shortly before he was crucified,

"In this world you will have trouble.

But take heart, I have overcome the world!"

John 16:33b

No one is too sinful, too lazy or too 'unspiritual' to fall on the Father's goodness, accept Jesus' forgiveness and ask for the Spirit's power to live a God-filled life. Minute-by-minute, day-by-day and year-by-year, we need to learn to trust and act on God's promises, and when we fail, to ask for forgiveness, and to *start again*.

It's the virtuous circle I talked about earlier, and as you learn to live it, God's will for your life can move from being a burden, to being a delight.

Amen.