

Delight #5 – Your adventure of delight

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

Introduction

In the previous four talks we've looked at how the Bible describes various forms of delight, including...

joyful delight,

thoughtful delight

playful delight.

delicious delight

and desirable delight

And then we looked at how, despite God creating humans in his image so that *he* could be a source of delight to *us*, and *us* a source of delight to *him*, that Adam and Eve chose to listen to the devil rather than God, allying themselves with the devil and becoming alienated from God and captive to sin.

Which left humanity not just *deserving* death, but *belonging* to death, *owned* by death.

And yet God's utter goodness and faithfulness did not change, and Jesus through his life, death, resurrection and ascension, brought humanity back into God's ownership.

All humans are self-centred and sinful, even our best actions are tainted like filthy rags, and yet God considers us valuable enough to redeem us from sin and death. Jesus paid a huge price to bring us back into God's ownership.

And the primary reason for accepting God's grace is not to receive a 'get out of hell free' card, it is to *experience* and *delight in* God's reality, his *goodness, love* and *acceptance*, in our day-to-day lives.

In the previous talks we looked at how the Bible says a lot about the mutual delight of God's love for us, and our love for God. We have also seen how God sees us. We are his treasured possession, worth dying for, despite having rebelled (and continuing to rebel) against him.

But it doesn't end there, in fact, that is just the beginning of the story, a story that will go on for eternity, an eternity of us delighting in God's presence, and God delighting in us.

And that story doesn't begin when we die, or when Jesus returns. It starts right here, right now, as we learn to experience the mutual delight of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in ways that engage our emotions, our minds and our bodies... sometimes joyfully, sometimes tearfully, sometimes just plain confused... but always with God delighting in us living in relationship with him.

It's not just about us being saved by God and then setting out in our own strength to let the rest of the world know about it. That will only lead to burnout and disillusion.

What God wants us to do is another example of a virtuous circle.

God's delight is grounded in his work for us. And our delight is grounded in God's work in us. It's all God's work. We don't have to work up our own delight in God. We don't have to work alone at being a 'good Christian'.

Being a follower of Jesus means delighting in how God is working in your life as you ask for the Spirit to shape you into the person he wants you to be. This is the adventure of delight.

And this adventure will be exciting. It will also be uncomfortable. Most of us don't enjoy not being in control, and when we become a follower of Jesus, we have to hand over our map and compass (or satnav) to him.

As G.K. Chesterton said:

'An adventure is an inconvenience rightly considered'

Even the most surface reading of the Gospels makes it clear that following Jesus does not guarantee you an easy life. Proper adventures are not 'safe'... as I regularly say to young parents who are excessively protective of their children.

To play safe is not to play.

And we will make mistakes. We will not always get things right. But as another quote from G.K. Chesterton says...

If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly.

And I can tell you from personal experience, there will be times when we won't have a clue what is going on. And that is when we lean into Jesus and tell him we're scared, that we are worried that this 'adventure' is just something we've made up in our head.

Unlike other 'gods', the God of the Bible is not a God who can be controlled. Offering our lives to Jesus means giving up control of our lives to him, trusting that while we do not know what the future holds, we know, and are known and held by the one who holds the future.

God's will as God's delight

Psalm 119:35 reads:

Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight.

Here the Psalmist is talking about finding delight in God's commands, the words of God that reveal what he does (and doesn't) want us to do.

And of course, we nod our heads and say 'Amen'. But do we really *experience* what the Psalmist is saying? If we are honest, do we really equate God's commands, God's will, with delight? Or do we think of it as something we have to do to stay in his good books?

More like keeping to the 20 mph speed limit signs that are sprouting up everywhere at the moment than eating dessert?

And, of course, this will affect our relationship with God. If we aren't confident that doing God's will for us is something that is ultimately delightful, it will negatively affect the way we live our Christian lives.

In a previous talk, we looked at a Hebrew word that means pleasure, or desire. *Chephets* (pr. KAY-fets) refers to something you desire because it brings you pleasure or delight.

Pleasure and desire are both good gifts from God. Although humans have often warped and twisted them, *chephets* is a positive word. In fact when the Old Testament was first translated into Greek, it was usually translated as *Thélēma* (pr. THELL-aye-ma).

Which means 'good pleasure' or 'will'. And in the Bible texts, God's will and God's pleasure often overlap in meaning.

It is popular to think of God's decrees, or laws, as a series of 'Thou shalt nots'. But God's decrees include promises to protect us, declarations of his love for us, and story after story of how he acts in human history to reveal his goodness and steadfastness towards us.

In the verse we just looked at, the word 'delight' is $\gamma\eta\eta$,

Chephets (pronounced KAY-fets) in Hebrew, and $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\eta\mu\alpha$ *Thélēma* (pronounced THELL-aye-ma) in Greek.

Biblically, the experience of pleasure and desire overlap with God's will and commands. English translations of the Bible frequently lose the 'feel good factor', translating *Thélēma* more soberly as 'will' or 'good purpose', but at the heart of it is that God's will, God's *good* purpose, is that we discover delight as we do things the way we were created to do them, living without regrets or fear, taking delight in God's forgiveness and love.

Jesus is the ultimate example of someone who is obedient to God's commands and experiences delight in them. Although equal to the Father, he submitted himself to becoming a human being so that he

could demonstrate God's love for us, and ultimately free us from our captivity to sin and death.

Shortly before his crucifixion, Jesus is explaining to his disciples that he will soon be returning to the Father, but assures them that even though he will not be with them physically, the disciples will still be able to 'see' him.

Not surprisingly, the disciples are baffled, and one of them asks him to explain more clearly.

John 14:23-27 reads...

Jesus replied, 'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.'

'All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.'

Again, we have this close linking of God's will with God's peace. God the Father sends God the Holy Spirit to empower us to obey what God the Son has taught us. And as we do this, we receive a supernatural peace, God's peace, that calms our hearts when we encounter suffering, trouble and fear.

Being a Christian does not insulate you from suffering. In fact, there are many instances in the New Testament where temptation and suffering seem to be an essential part of us growing in our relationship with God.

This is a mystery that I am still working out in my own life, but when I look back on my 45 years of being a Christian, I can see that some of

the most difficult times have also been the times when I have grown closest to God.

During Jesus' earthly life he experienced a regular battle between delight and suffering. At the beginning of his ministry when Jesus is baptised, God the Holy Spirit rests on him, and God the Father confirms with a voice from heaven that this is his beloved Son, who he *delights* in.

And immediately after this, Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Yes, God the Son is led by God the Holy Spirit to be *tempted by the devil*.

And so the personification of evil is given permission to test Jesus' commitment to his mission to save humanity.

'If you are the Son of God', is Satan's opening line. And so follows three invitations for Jesus to use his divine power to short-circuit Jesus' earthly mission that he knew was part of God's plan to redeem creation from sin and death.

Satan wants Jesus to use his status as Son of God in the way that most earthly kings would, to *get their own way*. Jesus knows that God's power is profoundly different. Jesus knows that *obedience to God's plan* is what must define him and his ministry here on earth.

Now, obedience is not a popular word in today's world. It's a word we identify with training dogs or grudgingly observing the 20mph speed limit.

But Jesus understood that obedience to God's will and God's delight are inextricably linked.

And so he resists the devil's temptations. And he does so by remembering and quoting God's word at Satan. Unlike Adam and Eve before him, he is obedient to what God has told him. Weary, hungry and thirsty though he was, he refused to abandon the mission he was set on completing.

Oh, and if you are wondering where the 'delight' has gone, let's make things even more difficult.

At the end of Jesus's ministry, just before he is crucified, he prays three times that there might be some other way than this for him to complete his mission to save humans from sin.

And then, so stressed that he is literally sweating blood he prays...

'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'

Mark 14:36

If you ever want proof of Jesus' full humanity, here it is... he knows that there is no other way to fulfil his mission, he has been aware of it from the beginning of his ministry, but as the awful reality of what it entails gets closer, he longs that it might not be so.

And here's a thing. The word used for 'will' in this prayer is the same Greek word used to translate the Hebrew word Chephets (pr. KAY-fets) 'desirable delight' in the Old Testament, Thélēma (pr. THELL-aye-ma)

And it's not just here that the word is used. When Isaiah is talking about the promised Suffering Servant, the one that the New Testament identifies as Jesus, the same word is used.

*Yet it was the LORD's **will** to crush him and cause him to suffer*

Isaiah 53:10a

Yes, the same word that is used for desire or pleasure, something that you set your will on because it brings you delight is being used about Jesus' suffering. Somehow the suffering and death of Jesus is delightful to God.

And if you are sitting there thinking, 'Brett, that's just plain wrong', I have deep sympathy with you, I felt the same way as I was preparing this study. But stick with me, and lets dig a little deeper into Isaiah 53.

*It was the LORD's **will** to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the **will** of the LORD will prosper in his hand.*

*After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.*

Isaiah 53:10-11

Isaiah 53 is talking about a Suffering Servant who will be punished for humanity's disobedience. The Servant of God who will take our sins upon himself so they can be removed from us.

But this is not the end of the story. The Servant dies, but the will of God, the desirable delight of God, will prosper because the sacrifice has been made. After the Servant has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.

The thing that pleases the God the Father is not the suffering and death of his Son in isolation. It is the obedient suffering, sacrificial death and victorious resurrection of Jesus, and with it the redemption of his creation that is his desirable delight.

To take a much more trivial example, it's like my gym workouts. They cause me pain, but the pain has beneficial results.

Jesus' suffering and death are essential to the story of salvation, but so is Jesus' victorious resurrection, ascension and eventual redemption of his creation. The Father's delight is in the whole story, that the obedience of the Son will rescue the humans he loves so much from being captive to sin and death.

Remember what we learned about wisdom, seeing the whole picture, this is a good example of it.

And, as God's people, living in a world where suffering of all kinds is never far away, it is a source of great comfort to know that Jesus can identify what it is like to suffer mental and physical pain. It is an even greater comfort to know that God has destroyed death's power, and that one day we will enjoy an eternity in a renewed creation where there is no sin, sorrow, pain or death. Where we will delight in God's presence forever.

Jesus' suffering and death has a purpose. His pain and suffering are not meaningless. As he dwells invisibly among us today, he is delighted that people like you and me, his children, are able to live lives free of guilt and full of hope, able to delight in his love and look forward one day to seeing him face to face.

And it gives us a reason and motivation to learn obedience to God's will for our lives. Not because we have to, but because we want to, because we believe that God's will and God's delight are linked.

I remember when wearing seat belts was made compulsory. My dad was furious about it, saying they were uncomfortable and time-wasting. But their implementation has saved thousands of lives.

When we encounter trouble and suffering, and we will encounter them, we do it knowing that it is only a part of the story. And that has been the testimony of billions of Christians over the centuries, as they obeyed Jesus's commands even when it means persecution and death.

And we don't do this alone. On the night Jesus was betrayed, he explains that while he will not always be with them in physical form, his death and resurrection will prepare the way for God the Father to send the presence of Jesus the Son through God the Holy Spirit...

'If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.'

Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.'

John 14:15-21

God's Spirit lives in every Christian. We have not been left as orphans, Jesus has adopted us into God's family. And as we learn and obey God's commands, God's delight will grow in us. As Jesus says...

'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.'

John 15:9-11

Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands you will remain in my love... is not a threat, it is a promise! Just as Jesus kept his Father's commands, and remains in his love. And why has he told them this... So that his joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete!

Amen!