

THE PLEASURE OF GOD IN HIS CREATION

*May the glory of the LORD endure forever,
may the LORD rejoice in his works.*

P S A L M 1 0 4 : 3 1

THE COTTAGE IN GEORGIA WOODS—JULY, 1990

Two nights ago I took a kitchen chair, put it in the grass beside the cottage and sat down to watch the moon. Ordinarily I live beside a busy freeway in downtown Minneapolis where the car lights and street lights hide the sky. But for these few weeks of vacation and study-leave, I live with Noël and our sons on the outskirts of Barnesville, Georgia, on a piece of wooded property called “Brightwood.” There are no street lights and no freeways. We sleep in a little cottage down the hill from where my wife’s parents live. Just across the barbed wire fence there is a tiny “mobile study” about sixteen-by-eight-feet with windows on two sides. It sits in a clearing surrounded by two-hundred-year-old oak trees and eighty-foot arrow-straight Georgia pines mingled with maple and sweet gum trees. This is where I sit and write and, between paragraphs, stare out over the four-acre lake at the bottom of the hill.

This is a place made for eyes and ears and nose and skin, and a big heart. Almost every day I simply stop and stand still between the cottage and the study or between the lake and the woods or on the hill going up to “the house”—I feel so moved by the beauty of this amazing world of sight and sound and smell and touch that I want the moment to last long enough for all the beauty to soak in and to stay.

Coming down to the cottage from the house the other day, I stopped at a rotting stump and broke off a piece of wood. It was surprisingly hard and snapped instead of crumbling. I looked and saw that the broken part was streaked and reddish and even moist. I put it to my nose and was jolted by the best cedar fragrance I have ever smelled. All the way to the cottage I kept inhaling this amazing aroma from a piece of wood that has probably been dead for ten years.

About fifty yards from the cottage, toward the pecan orchard, we are cultivating a worm bed. There’s a pile of mulch with some old tires and cement bricks and a wooden door lying on the mulch to keep it moist underneath. We water it now and then with the hose. When we want some worms we lift up the door and turn over the tires and blocks and let the granddaddy longlegs scatter by the hundreds. Then I use the pitchfork to scrape off the top layer of mulch while my seven-year-old son spots the crawlers and wigglers, snatches them with his hand and puts them in a bucket. They are floppy and fast. But Barnabas is faster.

Three or four times a day I stoop down to go under the barbed wire fence between the study and the cottage. There is a big pink rope wrapped around the wire so that we won’t get snagged. The metal post, holding the wire where we crawl through, is hollow. To our amazement we discovered that a little gray tree frog lives in the post. There is a little water in the hollow and he goes up or comes down in the post according to the heat and the light. He will let us walk right up to him as he sits on the edge of the post in the evening. It is clearly his place, because he has been there for several weeks now and nothing we do chases him away. This has made me wonder about all the other tree frogs that at night produce such an incredible whirring and buzzing and scratching in these peaceful woods (along with the crickets and cicadas). I have wondered if all the tree frogs are as possessive of their turf as he is. If so,

there are thousands of little knotholes and crooks and branches all staked out and claimed by their own little tree frogs. It must be an amazing world of turf and territorialism up in those trees that completely escapes us humans.

Where we swim, at the north end of the lake, the fish eat freckles and moles and chigger bites and other assorted blemishes on my back and legs. So I have to keep moving in the water, or go out in the deep part. The water is generally warm like a bath on the surface and wonderfully cool down under. But what I like best about the water is the way it looks from the window of my study. It is always moving peacefully. And early in the morning it catches the sun with ten thousand flashes and makes a constant display of crystal pieces moving on the surface. The leaves between me and the lake turn green-yellow-black-and-back-to-greenish-yellow as the breeze conspires with the reflections of the lake and the shadows to make the whole hillside burst with golden light and life.

To stay fit, I run about three mornings a week—early enough to avoid the 95-degree heat we have been having most of this visit. I set my new stopwatch that I got for Father's Day and take off about 7:15. I run up Atlanta Street toward town, turn right on the two-block-long Main Street, run past the two banks, the First Methodist Church, and the library, and head out of town on the other side passing the old mansions with gigantic trees in their front yards that go back past the Civil War days to the times of the Revolution. I assume all the dogs in Barnesville have been attacked by humans because if they ever start barking at me all I have to do is stoop down like I am picking up a stick and they turn and run away. About twenty minutes out I make a U-turn and find a new way back for variety. It takes me past the cemetery. (How desolate is a cemetery without trees!) It takes me by First Baptist and then the pecan praline plant; then across the kudzu gully and the pasture where they keep Flash, the asthmatic horse. By now I am soaked in sweat. My legs are numb, so they don't hurt. But the enemy is the heat. Sweat pours off my head and down my face. (I always forget to wear the headband.) It is salty to the taste and burns my eyes. Some mornings my lungs and heart just can't get enough coolant and oxygen to the muscles to keep me going and I have to walk for a while. This morning it was cool enough

to keep on going for about four-and-a-half miles without stopping. I even sprinted the last fifty yards to win an imaginary race. Ah, the glory of exhaustion and triumph!

REAL LIFE IS PHYSICAL

The point of all this happy rambling is to say that real life is physical. It has to do with touch and smell and sight and sound and taste. It has to do with trees and stumps and fish and frogs and ants and birds and leaves and water and heat and slaw and iced tea and numb thighs and salty sweat and worms and granddaddy longlegs and ten thousand other creatures and sensations that come to us because God made a physical world.

As I said, two nights ago I took a kitchen chair and went outside at about 10:30 and sat down to watch the moon. It's been making a lower and lower arc over the southeastern hemisphere these last nights. This night it was just above the power lines that trespass with modern technology on this little Georgia paradise. The moon was almost full. The gray-orange face was pocked with beautiful gray blemishes. The constant caressing of the thin clouds could do nothing to cleanse the old man. His defects are too deep and too old.

I sat there and soaked again in the lavish beauty of the sky and the droning crickets and tree frogs, with the soft breeze on my face and the smell of pine; and I marveled that God, who is spirit and cannot be seen or touched, would make an ocean of physical reality that smells and shines and feels and tastes and sounds. As C. S. Lewis said,

There is no use trying to be more spiritual than God. God never meant man to be a purely spiritual creature. That is why He uses material things like bread and wine to put the new life into us. We may think this rather crude and unspiritual. God does not: He invented eating. He likes matter. He invented it...

I know some muddle-headed Christians have talked as if Christianity thought that sex, or the body, or pleasure, were bad in themselves. But they were wrong. Christianity is almost the only one of the great religions which thoroughly approves of the

body—which believes that matter is good, that God Himself once took on a human body, and that some kind of body is going to be given to us even in Heaven and is going to be an essential part of our happiness, our beauty, and our energy.¹

I admit that when I sit beneath the beauty of a Georgia moon or look out over an early morning lake or marvel at the age and strength of a great tree, I wrestle with doubts that this much joy should come from material things. I touched on this problem in *Desiring God* (142–143) and explained how I have resolved it in my own experience.² But I did not raise the problem for God himself.

So there are two questions that I want to raise in this chapter: 1) Does God take pleasure in his creation? And 2) if so, what becomes of the fullness of delight that he has in his Son? Why is God not an idolater to love the creation?

DOES GOD LIKE THE WORLD?

The first question I would answer with a resounding, “Yes!” God *does* take pleasure in his creation. How do we know this? Genesis 1 describes for us not only the fact of a well-ordered creation by God, but also God’s

1. Quoted from C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, in *A Mind Awake: An Anthology of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Clyde Kilby (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), 210–211.

2. The problem was raised there especially by the psalms. For example, Psalm 73:25–26 says,
 Whom have I in heaven but you?
 And there is nothing upon earth
 that I desire besides you.
 My flesh and my heart may fail,
 but God is the strength of my heart
 and my portion for ever.

And Psalm 27:4 says,
 One thing have I asked of the LORD,
 that will I seek after;
 that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
 all the days of my life,
 to behold the beauty of the LORD,
 and to inquire in his temple.

These psalms seem to say that a true saint will be so filled with joy in God that the joys of material things, like moonlit nights, will not be able to add anything. They seem to say that the only joy we should have is joy in God, not in the creation. But St. Augustine said something that was very helpful in putting it all together. He prayed like this: “He loves Thee too little who loves anything together with Thee which he loves not for thy sake.” Quoted from Henry Bettenson, ed., *Confessions*, in *Documents of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 54. What Augustine showed me was that there is a way to delight in God’s creation that is not for its sake but for God’s sake. Discovering how to do that is the secret of not committing idolatry on moonlit nights and beside sparkling morning lakes and over biyearly catfish feasts.

response to his creation. Six times God stands back, as it were, and takes stock of his creation. Each time the text says, “And God saw that it was *good*” (verses 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). And when all was finished and man and woman were created in his own image, it says, “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was *very good*.”

I take this to mean at least that God was delighted with his work. He approved of it. He was glad that he had done it. When he looked at it, it gave him pleasure. It is as though he said, “Yes, that’s it. That will do just fine. That’s exactly right.” And we get the clue early on in the story that the root of his delight in creation has to do with imaging forth his own glory, because only after he created man and woman *in his image* did God add the word “very” to the word “good.”

We can see the joy of God in his creation best, perhaps, in Psalm 104. It is a song to express God’s exuberance over what he has made. The key verse is verse 31:

May the glory of the LORD endure forever,
may the LORD *rejoice* in his works.

This is not a prayer for something that might not happen, as though I were to say, “May Noël make spaghetti for supper tonight.” The psalmist does not mean: “Oh, I hope God will rejoice in his works, but I am not sure he will.” If that were the meaning, then the first line of the verse would have to have the same sense: “Oh, I hope God’s glory will endure forever, but I am not sure it will.” But that is surely not what he means. The rock-solid confidence of the whole Bible is that the glory of the Lord will not only endure forever but that it will cover the whole earth like the waters cover the sea (Numbers 14:21; see also Habakkuk 2:14).

The psalmist is not praying that an uncertainty might come to pass. He is exulting in a certainty that *will* come to pass, and indeed has come to pass and is taking place right now. There is no doubt behind the shout, “May the glory of the LORD endure forever!” And there is no doubt behind the shout: “May the LORD rejoice in his works!”

So the answer to the first question is *yes!* God does take pleasure in his creation, because this whole psalm shows (as we shall see) that the

“works” in mind are the works of creation—things like water and clouds and wind and mountains and thunder and springs and wild asses and birds and grass and cattle and wine and bread and cedars and wild goats and badgers and rocks and young lions and sea monsters. God delights in all the work of his hands.

THE EXULTATION OF HEAVEN AT CREATION

I love the picture that God paints for Job when he is interrogating Job about creation. In Job 38:4–7, God queries,

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
 Tell me, if you have understanding,
 Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
 Or who stretched the line upon it?
 On what were its bases sunk,
 or who laid its cornerstone,
*when the morning stars sang together,
 and all the sons of God [angels] shouted for joy?*

Do you see the picture? No man was there. So Job should humble himself and realize there are a few things he (and we!) may not understand. But in making this point, God cannot resist, it seems, mentioning what the mood of heaven was like at the moment of creation. “All the sons of God shouted for joy.” All the angels had evidently been created before the universe. And it is not hard to see why. God meant there to be an audience when he created the world. I am sure he said, “Watch this!” when he spoke the galaxies into existence. Imagine the awe and wonder that exploded among the angels. They had never seen or even imagined matter. They are all “ministering *spirits*” (Hebrews 1:14) and have no material bodies as we do. When God brought material stuff into existence with all its incredible variety and utterly unheard-of qualities of sight and sound and smell and touch and taste, this was totally unknown to the angels. God had made it all up. It was not like the unveiling of a new painting made of all the colors and paints we are all familiar with. It was absolutely, totally, unimaginably new! And the response of the sons of God was to shout for joy.

Now I admit that God does not say explicitly in this text that he himself shouted for joy. But do you suppose that God sat by with a blank face and no emotion, while millions of holy angels shouted for joy over his creation? Something would be very out of sync in heaven if that were true. I think God told Job about the joy of the “sons of God” because sons get their dispositions from their Father. If the finite sons were shouting for joy over the greatness and wonder of the Father’s creation, you can be sure that the Father’s delight both in the creation and in the sons’ joy was immense.

Now the question is, *why?* Why does God have pleasure in his creation? There are two reasons why this question is important to me.

SHOULD THE SON BE JEALOUS?

One is that I feel compelled to explain why this pleasure God has in his creation is not an act of idolatry. Why is it not a dishonor to the Son of God? Why shouldn’t the Son be jealous? Should the Father really share his affection with the world? Should he not be totally satisfied in the beauty of his own perfections reflected back to him in the person of his Son?

The other reason for asking why God delights in his creation is that we need to know this before the delight itself can tell us very much about God’s character. Two people can desire the same thing for such different reasons that one is honorable and the other is perverse. (One man might want grain to make bread; another might want it to make booze.) Our aim is to see the true glory and worth of God. And our assumption is that “the worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love.” So we want to see what God loves—what he has pleasure in. But this assumes that we understand why God loves a thing. Unless we know why God has pleasure in creation we will not be able to draw any clear conclusions about what this pleasure implies about God’s worth and excellence.

I will try to sum up my answer to this second question in five statements based mainly on Psalm 104 as well as some other parts of Scripture. These five statements about why God delights in his creation are not really five separate reasons because they overlap so much. But they each express a little differently the basic reason. It helps to appreciate the true beauty of

a precious stone when you turn it in the light and look at it from different angles. And we will see that the answer to this second question also answers the first, namely, why God's love for nature is not idolatry.

WHAT DAY AND NIGHT PROCLAIM

First, God rejoices in his works because his works express his glory. I see this first in Psalm 104:31:

May the *glory* of the LORD endure forever,
 May the LORD rejoice in his works.

What these two lines show is that God enjoys his works because they express his glory. In other words, the two halves of this verse are related something like this: "As long as the *glory* of the LORD endures in his works, God will indeed rejoice in his works." Or you could say, "May the glory of the LORD endure forever, *so that* the LORD may rejoice in his works."

I find this idea confirmed in Psalm 19:1–2:

The heavens are telling the *glory of God*;
 and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
 Day to day pours forth speech,
 and night to night declares knowledge.

It is clear that there is one main message creation has to communicate to human beings, namely, the glory of God. Not primarily the glory of creation, but the glory of God. The glory of creation and the glory of God are as different as the love poem and the love, the painting and the landscape, the ring and the marriage. It would be a great folly and a great tragedy if a man loved his wedding band more than he loved his bride. But that is what Romans 1:19–23 says has happened. Human beings have fallen in love with the echo of God's excellency in creation and lost the ability to hear the incomparable original shout of love.

What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his

invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God *they did not glorify him as God* or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and *exchanged the glory of the immortal God* for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.

The message of creation is this: *there is a great God of glory and power and generosity behind all this awesome universe; you belong to him; he is patient with you in sustaining your rebellious life; turn and bank your hope on him and delight yourself in him, not his handiwork.* Day pours forth the “speech” of that message to all that will listen in the day, speaking with blindingly bright sun and blue sky and clouds and untold shapes and colors of all things visible. Night pours forth the “knowledge” of the same message to all who will listen at night, speaking with great dark voids and summer moons and countless stars and strange sounds and cool breezes and northern lights. Day and night are saying one thing: God is glorious! God is glorious! God is glorious!

This is the most basic reason that God delights in his creation. In creation he sees the reflection of his own glory. This is why he is not an idolater when he has pleasure in the work of his hands.

CREATION AND CHRIST

But what about the Son of God? Does this mean that the creation is in competition with the Son for the affection of the Father? Remember that the Son too is called the radiance of God’s glory (Hebrews 1:3). Does God delight partly in the Son and partly in the creation? Does the creation rob the Son of any of the Father’s delight? Should the Son be jealous of the creation?

No. Before creation the Father and the Son rejoiced in each other with overflowing satisfaction. That was the point of chapter 1. When the time came for creation, the Bible says that *both* the Father *and* the Son were active in the work of creation. The Father had not wearied of the

Son and decided to create another enjoyment to make up for his disappointment with the Son. This is plain from Scripture:

For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Corinthians 8:6)

By him [Christ] all things were created. (Colossians 1:16)

In these last days he [God] has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Hebrews 1:2)

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. (John 1:1, 3)

In other words, the work of creation is not merely the work of the Father as though he had to satisfy a need that the Son couldn't meet. Nor was creation merely the work of the Son as though he had to satisfy some need that the Father couldn't meet. Instead it was the work of both of them together. And the impulse was not deficiency of delight but a spilling over of mutual joy. Jonathan Edwards expresses it like this: "Surely it is no argument of the emptiness or deficiency of a fountain, that it is inclined to overflow."³ If someone should ask whether God was less happy before the Father and the Son released their joyful creative energy, Edwards answers, "Though these communications of God [in creation]—these exercises, operations, and expressions of his glorious perfections, which God rejoices in—are in time; yet his joy in them is without beginning or change. They were always equally present in the divine mind."⁴

So when the Bible teaches that creation expresses the glory of God, we must not think merely of the glory of the Father or the glory of the Son,

3. Jonathan Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 102.

4. *Ibid.*

but rather the glory that they have together. And the glory that they have together is that overflowing mutual joy in each other's perfections. So creation is an expression of the overflow of that life and joy that the Father and the Son have in each other.⁵ There is no competition or jealousy in the Godhead. The Son and Father are equally glorified in creation, because creation is the overflow of gladness that they have in each other.

So the first and most basic statement we can make about why God rejoices in his work of creation is that creation is an expression of his glory.

NO HUMANS HEAR THE PRAISE OF THE DEEPS

Second, God rejoices in the works of creation because they praise him. In Psalm 148 the psalmist calls on creation itself to praise the Lord:

Praise him, sun and moon,
 praise him, all you shining stars!
 Praise him, you highest heavens,
 and you waters above the heavens!
 Let them praise the name of the LORD!
 For he commanded and they were created...
 Praise the LORD from the earth,
 you sea monsters and all deeps.
 (verses 3–5, 7)

Again in Psalm 103:22 David cries out,

Bless the LORD, all his works,
 In all places of his dominion.

What does this mean? We might say that sun and moon and stars praise God by testifying to us about God. That would be true, as we have just seen (Romans 1:19–23). But what about Psalm 148:7? “Praise the LORD you sea monsters *and all deeps!*” What human is in the deeps to hear this praise?

5. It would not be wrong, I think, to say that this is why the Bible says, “The Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). The Spirit is the life and joy of the Father and the Son, standing forth with so much of the perfection and fullness of each of them that he too is a divine Person. See chapter 1, note 24.

One of my favorite poems is “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” written by Thomas Gray in 1751. One of the stanzas says,

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Gray had been moved by the thought that on the bottom of the ocean there were beautiful gems that no human eye would ever see, and that in distant deserts millions of flowers would bloom, blush with vivid colors, give off a sweet fragrance, and never be touched or seen or smelled by anybody but God!

God, it seems, wanted Job to think about this very thing. He asked him, “Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? . . . Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on a land where no man is, on the desert in which there is no man . . . Do you know when the mountain goats bring forth? Do you observe the calving of the hinds?” (Job 38:16, 25–26; 39:1). In other words, God was claiming that he alone sees the deeps of the ocean and brings rain in the desert where no man is and watches, like a midwife, at the birth of every mountain goat and wild deer.

This is what moves the psalmist in Psalm 148:7, “Praise the LORD you sea monsters and all deeps!” He doesn’t even know what is in all the deeps of the sea! So the praise of the deeps is not merely what they can testify to man. Creation praises God by simply being what it was created to be in all its incredible variety. And since most of the creation is beyond the awareness of mankind (in the reaches of space, and in the heights of mountains and at the bottom of the sea) it wasn’t created merely to serve purposes that have to do with us. It was created for the enjoyment of God.

RANGER RICK IS A THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

I have a confession to make. *Ranger Rick* is one of my favorite magazines. When it used to arrive in our house with the address, “Piper Boys,” I was one of the first Piper boys to take it to the couch. The reason is simple:

in spite of its utterly unwarranted and unnecessary evolutionary bias, it inspires more praise in me than most other journals. It is a monthly record of man's discovery of incredible phenomena in nature that up till recently have only been enjoyed by God for thousands of years.

For example, I read about the European water spider that lives at the bottom of a lake, but breathes air.⁶ It comes to the top of the water, does a somersault on the surface and catches a bubble of air. Then it holds the bubble over the breathing holes in the middle of its body while it swims to the bottom of the lake and spins a silk web among the seaweed. It goes up and brings down bubble after bubble until a little balloon of air is formed under its silk web where it can live and eat and mate. When I read that, there was a moment of worship on our living-room couch. Doesn't that make you want to shout, "O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (Psalm 104:24)?

I sat there with my mouth open, and I think God smiled and said, "Yes, John, and I have been enjoying that little piece of art since before the days of Abraham. And if you only knew how many millions of other wonders there are beyond your sight that I behold with gladness every day!"

Consider sea monsters that we virtually never see. Psalm 104:25–26 says,

Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
 which teems with things innumerable,
 living things both small and great.
 There go the ships,
 and Leviathan which you formed to sport in it.

Why did God create great sea monsters? Just to play, to frolic in the ocean where no man can see, but only God. The teeming ocean declares the glory of God, and praises him a thousand miles from any human eye. That's the second reason God rejoices in his works.

6. Ellen Holtzen, "Home Is a Bubble," *Ranger Rick* (January 1987): 14–15.

WISDOM BEYOND COMPREHENSION

Third, God rejoices in the works of creation because they reveal his incomparable wisdom. This is the point of Psalm 104:24.

O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
 the earth is full of your creatures.

“*In wisdom* you have made them all!” In other words, the Lord delights in the expressions of his wisdom. This universe is a masterpiece of wisdom and order. Or if you just take a part of it, like the human body—what an amazing work of knowledge and wisdom! Who can fathom the human brain and the mystery of how mind and body work together? Whether you look near or far, whether you look for bigness or smallness, the wonders of nature stagger the mind with the wisdom woven through it all.

Did you know that there are ten thousand known species of diatoms? In a teaspoon of ordinary lake water there may be a million of these tiny invisible plants. And what are they doing while entertaining God with their microscopic beauty? (I know they are beautiful because *Ranger Rick* had magnified color photographs!) What are they doing? They are making tons and tons of oxygen so that the animals in the water can breathe! The world is full of the wisdom of God!

O LORD, how manifold are your works!
 In wisdom you have made them all.

The psalmist marveled at how everything works together so wisely.

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
 and plants for man to cultivate,
 that he may bring forth food from the earth.

(Psalm 104:14)

What a wonderful experience it is when God grants us a moment in which we don't take anything for granted, but see the world as though it was invented yesterday. How we would marvel at the wisdom of God. We should pray for the eyes of children again, when they saw everything for the first time. William Quayle reminded me of this recently in his lively book, *The Pastor-Preacher*. He said, "A cow has pretty eyes, as quiet as a pool of quiet water, but uneventful eyes. There is no touch of wonder in their dreamless depths. The eyes are therefore soulless. A child's eyes are fairly lightning. They are to see things: they are the windows of the brain, and bewilder like a play of swords of fire."⁷ These are the eyes we need to see the unending wisdom of God running through all the world. There will be no exhausting the understanding of God. We will be making new discoveries for all eternity.

The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth,
He does not faint or grow weary,
his understanding is unsearchable.
(Isaiah 40:28)

POWER WITHOUT EQUAL

Fourth, God rejoices in the works of creation because they reveal his incomparable power. In Isaiah 40:26, Isaiah looks up at the star-filled sky—perhaps on a night like I remember on a mountain in Utah in September 1968, when the sky was literally a sheet of light, and star could not be distinguished from star—he looks up and says,

Lift up your eyes on high and see:
who created these?
He who brings out their host by number,
calling them all by name;
by the greatness of his might,
and because he is strong in power
not one is missing.

7. William A. Quayle, *The Pastor-Preacher*, ed. Warren W. Wiersbe (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 76–77.

If Isaiah was stunned at the power of God to create and name and sustain every star in the heaven that he could see, what would be his worship today if he were shown that the nearest of those stars in his sky, Alpha Centauri and Proxima Centauri are twenty-five million million miles away? And what would be his worship if he knew that what he was seeing in his night sky was a tiny patch of our galaxy which has in it a hundred billion stars, and that beyond our galaxy there are millions of galaxies?

It seems in recent decades that God is enjoying keeping the astronomers on the edge of their seats with new glimpses of his power. In the fall of 1989, newspapers reported the discovery by two Harvard astronomers of a “Great Wall” of galaxies stretching hundreds of millions of light years across the known universe. The wall is supposedly some five hundred million light years long, two hundred million light years wide and fifteen million light years thick. In case your high school astronomy has grown fuzzy, a light year is a little less than six trillion (6,000,000,000,000) miles. This Great Wall consists of more than fifteen thousand galaxies, each with millions of stars, and was described as the “largest single coherent structure seen so far in nature.”⁸

I say “was described” because three months later in February 1990, God opened another little window for tiny man to marvel again, and the newspapers reported that astronomers have discovered more than a dozen evenly distributed clumps of galaxies stretching across vast expanses of the heavens, suggesting a structure to the universe that is so regular and immense that it defies current theories of cosmic origins. The newly found pattern of galactic matter dwarfs the extremely long sheet of galaxies, dubbed the “great wall” (now written without caps!), that was reported in November 1989 to be the largest structure in the universe. They now say the great wall is, in fact, merely one of the closest of these clumps, or regions, that contain very high concentrations of galaxies.⁹

What is this universe but the lavish demonstration of the incredible, incomparable, unimaginable exuberance and wisdom and power and greatness of God! What a God he must be!

8. *Minneapolis Star Tribune* (18 November 1989): 13A.

9. *Minneapolis Star Tribune* (23 February 1990): 2A.

GOD AND GOD ALONE

Fifth, God rejoices in the works of creation because they point us beyond themselves to God himself. God means for us to be stunned and awed by his work of creation. But not for its own sake. He means for us to look at his creation and say: If the mere work of his fingers (just his fingers! Psalm 8:3) is so full of wisdom and power and grandeur and majesty and beauty, what must this God be like in himself!

These are but the backside of his glory, as it were, darkly seen through a glass. What will it be to see the Creator himself! Not his works! A billion galaxies will not satisfy the human soul. God and God alone is the soul's end. Jonathan Edwards expressed it like this:

The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. . . . [These] are but shadows; but God is the substance. These are but scattered beams; but God is the sun. These are but streams; but God is the ocean.¹⁰

This is why Psalm 104 (vv. 31–34) comes to a close like this, with a focus on God himself:

May the glory of the LORD endure forever,
 may the LORD rejoice in his works,
 who looks on the earth and it trembles,
 who touches the mountains and they smoke!
 I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
 I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
 May my meditation be pleasing to him,
 for I rejoice *in the LORD*.

In the end it will not be the seas or the mountains or the canyons or the water spiders or the clouds or the great galaxies that fill our hearts to breaking with wonder and fill our mouths with eternal praise. It will be God

10. "The Christian Pilgrim," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2, 244.

himself. This is why God has pleasure in his creation. It is the overflow of the satisfaction that God the Father and God the Son have in each other and therefore the revelation and proclamation of God's glory day and night.

CLYDE KILBY'S RESOLUTIONS

As I close this chapter, I recall a lecture given by Clyde Kilby in Minneapolis on October 22, 1976, at the First Covenant Church. I attended mainly to see him because he had been one of my favorite teachers at Wheaton College where I was a literature major in his department. I recall the evening because what he said there is so relevant to what I am trying to do in this chapter. One of the things I would like to happen because of this chapter is that readers would open their eyes even wider to the glory of God in the world around them. Kilby had eyes. Oh, what eyes he had! He read to us eleven resolutions he had made for staying alive to God's glory. I will only mention one in closing.¹¹ He said, "I shall

11. The other ten of Kilby's resolutions are worthy of serious reflection:

- (1) At least once every day I shall look steadily up at the sky and remember that I, a consciousness with a conscience, am on a planet traveling in space with wonderfully mysterious things above and about me.
- (2) Instead of the accustomed idea of a mindless and endless evolutionary change to which we can neither add nor subtract, I shall suppose the universe guided by an Intelligence which, as Aristotle said of Greek drama, requires a beginning, a middle, and an end. I think this will save me from the cynicism expressed by Bertrand Russell before his death, when he said: "There is darkness without, and when I die there will be darkness within. There is no splendour, no vastness anywhere, only triviality for a moment, and then nothing."
- (3) I shall not fall into the falsehood that this day, or any day, is merely another ambiguous and plodding twenty-four hours, but rather a unique event, filled, if I so wish, with worthy potentialities. I shall not be fool enough to suppose that trouble and pain are wholly evil parentheses in my existence but, just as likely, ladders to be climbed toward moral and spiritual manhood.
- (4) I shall not turn my life into a thin straight line which prefers abstractions to reality. I shall know what I am doing when I abstract, which of course I shall often have to do.
- (5) I shall not demean my own uniqueness by envy of others. I shall stop boring into myself to discover what psychological or social categories I might belong to. Mostly I shall simply forget about myself and do my work.
- (6) I shall open my eyes and ears. Once every day I shall simply stare at a tree, a flower, a cloud, or a person. I shall not then be concerned at all to ask what they are, but simply be glad that they are. I shall joyfully allow them the mystery of what Lewis calls their "divine, magical, terrifying, and ecstatic" existence.
- (7) I shall follow Darwin's advice and turn frequently to imaginative things such as good literature and good music, preferably, as Lewis suggests, an old book and timeless music.
- (8) I shall not allow the devilish onrush of this century to usurp all my energies but will instead, as Charles Williams suggested, "fulfill the moment as the moment." I shall try to live well just now because the only time that exists is now.
- (9) If for nothing more than the sake of a change of view, I shall assume my ancestry to be from the heavens rather than from the caves.
- (10) Even if I turn out to be wrong, I shall bet my life on the assumption that this world is not idiotic, neither run by an absentee landlord, but that today, this very day, some stroke is being added to the cosmic canvas that in due course I shall understand with joy as a stroke made by the Architect who calls himself Alpha and Omega.

sometimes look back at the freshness of vision I had in childhood and try, at least for a little while, to be, in the words of Lewis Carroll, the ‘child of the pure unclouded brow, and dreaming eyes of wonder.’”

One of the tragedies of growing up is that we get used to things. It has its good side of course, since irritations may cease to be irritations. But there is immense loss when we get used to the redness of the rising sun, and the roundness of the moon, and the whiteness of the snow, the wetness of rain, the blueness of the sky, the buzzing of bumble bees, the stitching of crickets, the invisibility of wind, the unconscious constancy of heart and diaphragm, the weirdness of noses and ears, the number of the grains of sand on a thousand beaches, the never-ceasing crash crash of countless waves, and ten million kingly-clad flowers flourishing and withering in woods and mountain valleys where no one sees but God. I invite you, with Clyde Kilby, to seek a “freshness of vision,” to look, as though it were the first time, not at the empty product of accumulated millennia of aimless evolutionary accidents (which no child ever dreamed of), but at the personal handiwork of an infinitely strong, creative, and exuberant Artist who made the earth and the sea and everything in them. I invite you to believe (like the children believe) “that today, this very day, some stroke is being added to the cosmic canvas that in due course you shall understand with joy as a stroke made by the Architect who calls Himself Alpha and Omega” (note 11, resolution 10).