

Delighted With God

By David Feddes

Somewhere along the line, Charles Darwin lost it. He lost his taste for joy. He lost the ability to be happy. Things which once delighted him became dull, even disgusting. Darwin wrote, Up to the age of 30 or beyond it, poetry of many kinds ... gave me great pleasure ... formerly pictures gave me considerable, and music very great, delight. But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry: I ... found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have also almost lost any taste for pictures or music... My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts.

The famous scientist knew something serious was happening. He wasn't just bored with certain poetry or paintings; he was losing his taste for beauty and joy altogether. He suspected it might be hampering his intellect; he was pretty sure it was hurting his moral character; and he knew beyond a doubt that it was drying up his happiness. His emotions were starving and his soul was shriveling, making him more a machine than a man. Darwin knew all this and regretted it, but he didn't know what to do about it.

How did this happen to Charles Darwin? Maybe he was wounded by grievous events or had physical problems that dragged him into depression, but I can't help wondering whether Darwin's problem had anything to do with how he had come to see humanity and all forms of life: as the product of random evolution and survival of the fittest. And I can't help wondering if Darwin's approach has left many of us in the same predicament, with little taste for beauty or delight. How many of us have had our thinking reduced to dealing with dead, dry data; our motivations reduced to competition and survival of the fittest; and our joy reduced to some occasional bodily pleasures? It may well be that there's a link between Darwin's evolutionary theories and the widespread depression and loss of joy in the world since Darwin.

I mention Darwin's doldrums not to dwell on the subject but to introduce its opposite: what it's like to believe not in a dead process but in the living, loving God of creation, and what it's like to have a joy which, instead of shriveling and dying, keeps growing into pleasures beyond imagination. You've heard Darwin admit that the older he got, the more joyless he became; now let's listen to someone with the opposite experience.

A Delightful Inheritance

Psalms 16 in the Bible is a joyful prayer of David. His attitude is quite a contrast to Darwin's. It's a prayer of happy thanksgiving. In this prayer David uses words like "good," "secure," "pleasant," "delightful," and "glad." He speaks of fullness of joy and unending pleasures. He relishes his present life, and he expects an even better future. And what's the key to it all? His trust and delight in his God.

David begins Psalm 16 by expressing total dependence on God. He says, "Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge. I said to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing" (v. 1-2). David sees God as the Giver of every good thing, and as he goes on to speak of good things that God gives, David overflows with happy thanksgiving. David exclaims, Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my

heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand (Psalm 16:5-11).

What an outpouring of happiness! And what a contrast to Darwin! Darwin's sense of beauty and joy kept diminishing, while David's happiness kept bubbling up in a fountain of overflowing joy and unending pleasure for all eternity.

Let me ask you: Whom do you feel more like, Darwin or David? Are you losing your zest for life and your taste for joy? Or can you speak of a delightful inheritance and of a future which holds even greater joy and eternal pleasures? Do you know what happy thanksgiving is really about? Are you truly happy? Are you truly thankful? Are you delighted with God?

Delight in God recognizes the fact that every delightful thing in our lives, every delightful thing in the whole world, comes from the Lord. As David put it in Psalm 16, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing." Any happiness worth having, any joy worth enjoying, comes from God.

Perhaps the dumbest idea in human history is the notion that God is a killjoy who wants to stifle and spoil our pleasures. How could any idea be dumber than that one? God invented pleasure-it's his idea! Why would he want to ruin it?

When you're feasting your eyes on a sunset or a waterfall or the fall colors of a tree, who do you think invented all those splendid colors and gave you eyes to see them? When you're listening to the whisper of a breeze or the chirping of a bird or the giggling of a baby or the melody of music, who do you think invented all those sounds and gave you ears to hear them? When you're sinking your teeth into scrumptious food and washing it down with a refreshing drink, who do you think got the idea for all that flavor and gave you taste buds to savor it? Who made creatures that could enjoy loving kisses and tender caresses? Who came up with the idea for all this? How could God invent all this and be an enemy of pleasure?

God invented happiness and gave us the manufacturer's manual in the Bible, but we tend to think we know better than God how we ought to handle certain pleasures. God warns us not to go against his design, and that makes us think God is the enemy of pleasure, but in fact he's the enemy only of ill-gotten, self-destructive pleasure, which ends up causing more pain than pleasure.

God isn't against sex; he invented it. He's only against misusing sex by seeking it outside marriage. God isn't against enjoying wine; he invented wine for our gladness and enjoyment. He's only against misusing wine to get drunk. God isn't against enjoying food; he invented food. He's only against gluttony and letting food rule us. If you ignore God's design for sex and wine and food, if you chase pleasure on your own terms, you eventually find that these things are less and less enjoyable and more and more like a slavemaster dominating your life.

At any rate, God is no enemy of pleasure. As the Creator, he invented one pleasure after another, and whether we seek pleasure in the right way or the wrong way, the fact remains that the good things themselves are gifts from God. So let's get rid of the silly idea that God is against pleasure and wants us to be miserable. Apart from God we have no good thing.

The simple truth is that God isn't against happiness; happiness is his idea. In fact, it's not just his idea; it's at the very heart of who he is. God is a happy God. The Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, is a union of unlimited delight. And the delight of Father, Son, and Spirit in one another overflows, bringing delight to God's creatures. God is delighted,

and he is the source of everything that is truly delightful. In Psalm 16 King David says to God, “Apart from you I have no good thing.” When David says that, he's not flattering God. He's just stating a fact. The Bible says in James 1:17, “Every good and perfect gift is from above.” God isn't an obstacle to happiness; God is the source of happiness.

In Psalm 16 David speaks of pleasant places and a delightful inheritance. No doubt David could point to many things in his life which he enjoyed and for which he was thankful. So, too, many of us can see one blessing after another that God has given to us. We look at the place in which we find ourselves and at all that we've received, and when we add it all up, we can't help saying with David, “The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.”

Delighting In God

But Psalm 16 isn't just about being delighted with the stuff God gives us. It's about being delighted with God himself. The soul that feasts on God himself will find God's gifts to be delightful as well. But those who try to enjoy the gifts without the Giver often find that after awhile they are getting sick and tired of the gifts as well.

We saw earlier that Charles Darwin gradually lost his taste for beauty and his capacity for joy. Why was that? The things he once loved were the same as ever. The literature, the poetry, the music, the pictures, the scenery—they didn't change. But Darwin did change. He couldn't enjoy those things the way he once did, though they were as lovely as ever. Maybe you've had the same experience. You enjoy something for awhile; you think nothing could possibly be more delightful or make you any happier; and then, for some reason, the beauty wears off and the joy fades, even though the thing itself didn't change at all.

C. S. Lewis described the problem this way: “The [things] in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them... These things ... are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never visited.” God designed us to find delight in him, not just in his gifts, so if we are not connected to the Giver, the gifts become less and less enjoyable for us.

On the other hand, when we praise the God from whom all these blessings flow, then we see every good thing as a signal of his supreme goodness, and we savor every delight as a taste of a greater, everlasting delight that still awaits us. For a child of God, pleasure is a religious experience: every experience of something joyful is at the same time an experience of God himself. As C. S. Lewis says, “to receive it and to recognize its divine source are a single experience. This heavenly fruit is instantly redolent of the orchard where it grew. This sweet air whispers of the country from whence it blows. It is a message. We know we are being touched by a finger of that right hand at which there are pleasures for evermore.”

This means not only seeing God as the Giver of every good and perfect gift but also seeing the Lord himself and eternal life in his presence as the supreme gift. We should praise God for the beauty of the earth, the wonder of each hour, and the joy of human love, but we can't stop there. After praising God for those gifts, we join the hymnwriter in singing: “For Thyself best gift divine to the world so freely given. For that great, great love of Thine, peace on earth and joy in heaven. Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.”

We'll be most delighted with God, not just when he gives us this or that gift, but when he gives us himself. We see this when we dig deeper into verse 5 of Psalm 16. We've been reading from the New International Version, which translates that verse, "Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup." And that's true as far as it goes. If our life is a feast, then God is the one who provides us a generous portion to eat and a brimming cup to drink. When the translation says, "Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup," it's make a true statement. But the New King James Translation is better here. It's closer to the original Hebrew and captures the richer meaning when it says, "Lord, you *are* the portion of my inheritance and my cup." See the difference? God doesn't just *assign* my portion and cup; at the deepest level, he *is* my portion and cup. David isn't just delighted with what God has given him; he's delighted with *God!* That's why he can say in verse 6 that he has a delightful inheritance: *God* is his inheritance, and God is delightful!

The Bible rings with this message. Already in the early history of God's people, the Lord makes this clear. Even before Abram is renamed Abraham, God tells him, "I am your shield, your very great reward" (Genesis 15:1). God doesn't just offer to provide a shield; he *is* the shield. He doesn't just give various rewards; he *is* the reward, the *very great* reward.

Abraham's reward, the living God, is also David's reward, his highest joy—and Psalm 16 isn't the only place David says so. David finds God so satisfying that in Psalm 37:4 he urges, "Delight yourself *in the Lord* and he will give you the desires of your heart." Some of us tend to switch that verse around. First we decide what our hearts desire, and then we ask God to give us what we want so we can be delighted. But David tells us to put first things first. First focus on God himself and glorify him and enjoy him: "Delight yourself in the Lord." Then, once the Lord is your greatest delight and desire, it shapes all your other desires, and the Lord meets those God-centered desires and moves you to desire even more of him.

No matter how much stuff some people have, they will never be as happy as the person who has God. David says in Psalm 4:7, "You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound." If you have only goods, you will eventually get tired of them; but if you have God, you will always want more and more of him. David says in Psalm 63, "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you... Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you... My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of food." God is more satisfying than even the best banquet; his love is better than life itself.

Unshaken

Sometimes, though, this is hard to believe. Faith can come under attack. Take Psalm 73, for example. The psalmist Asaph wrote this psalm after a terrible inner struggle. He saw some wicked people who seemed to be prosperous and trouble-free, and he envied them. He almost slipped into thinking he'd be better off without God.

But just when he was on the verge of giving up his faith, he went to the place of worship. There the Lord straightened out his mind and refreshed his spirit. In the presence of God, Asaph saw that the wicked were destined for destruction, and he discovered afresh how much God really meant to him. He confessed his struggle and his stupidity in being so bitter, and then he prayed, "You hold me by my right hand ... and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart

may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever... it is good to be near God” (Psalm 73:23-26).

Even if you already know the Lord Jesus, you may have doubts and struggles. But God keeps bringing you back. He keeps showing you that in him you have a delightful inheritance. You know that even if your flesh and heart fail, God is your portion forever, and it's good to be near him. Despite struggles, you can enjoy happy thanksgiving and say with the prophet Isaiah, “I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God” (Isaiah 61:10).

The Lord's presence brings not only delight but a sense of direction and of security. In Psalm 16:7 David rejoices that God counsels and instructs him day and night. “Because he is at my right hand,” David declares in verse 8, “I will not be shaken.”

Just how unshakable is his confidence? *Nothing* in the future can shake him, not even death itself. David says in verses 9 and 10, “Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.”

When David says this, he's not just speaking of himself. In Acts 2 the apostle Peter quotes these words of David from Psalm 16 and points out that “David died and was buried.” But, says Peter, David “was a prophet” and knew God's promise to place a descendant of David on the throne forever. “Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay.” God's Holy One, the great Son of David, Jesus Christ, did not see decay but rose again on the third day. And because of the resurrection of Jesus, which David glimpses in Psalm 16, David knows that in the Messiah all of God's people also overcome death. God is not the God of the dead but of the living, and if this living God is your delightful inheritance, death will not get the last word.

What is the last word? Life! Joy! Eternal pleasures! “You have made known to me the path of life,” exults David; “you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.” That’s the ultimate in happy thanksgiving: when you know that you have a happier future than you can possibly imagine, a future of pleasures that never end, that last forever.

Millions of people follow Charles Darwin in thinking that life is just a struggle for survival in which everybody and everything eventually ends up dead. If you believe that, if you think death is the end, then even while you're still alive, your delight is deadened. Even the good things of this life become less and less enjoyable and your soul starts to rot away.

But if you delight in the Lord, and if you know that the end is not death but life and fullness of joy and eternal pleasures, then you have a great future to look forward to, and the joyous light of that final future with God shines back into your present life and increases your delight and your confidence and your capacity for enjoying life here and now. When you delight in God and believe in heaven, then you also experience every good thing in this life as a message from God and an appetizer for heaven. You know you are being touched by a finger of that right hand at which there are pleasures for evermore.