

Take delight in the Lord

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning everyone. Well, to many people, I think being a Christian is hard work because it seems like it's a life spent fighting our desires. You know what I mean?

For example, fighting the desire to sleep in on a Sunday morning, to come to church, even though we don't really feel like it. And so it's fighting a desire. And we come to church and good, we've done it, we've overcome that temptation to sleep in.

Or praying or reading the Bible when we actually feel like watching TV. How many of us have been in that situation? Or sacrificing our money and time for God's purposes, even though we would have actually loved to use that money for ourselves.

To buy that new flashy thing that we've been eyeing out. And that's what the Christian life is for many people, I think. It's a struggle. Struggle to put aside the things we want in order to do what God requires of us.

I wonder if you've felt that struggle, if you are a Christian. Well, I want to surprise you this morning and tell you that's not what God wants at all. See, God doesn't want you to suppress your desires in order to serve Him.

[1 : 1 6] In fact, He encourages you to have desires. God made us with wants. God made us with desires. And He encourages us to have desires. And He even promises in His Word to give you what you desire.

To give you what you desire. And not many Christians realize that. Not many Christians realize, firstly, that God wants us to desire and have desires. But secondly, that He actually wants to satisfy those desires.

There's nothing wrong with having desires. And the verse that I want us to consider this morning, which is one of the many places we discover this in the Bible, is Psalm 37, verse 4. You might want to open there and have a look in your Bibles, but I'll have it on the screen behind me as well.

Because listen to what it says. It says this quite plainly. Now, I want us to consider just this verse this morning. It says, Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Now, think about that for a second. Think about that. God wants to, and He promises to give you the desires of your heart. Do you believe that?

[2 : 2 2] Do you actually believe that? Because He tells that to us in His Word. And the problem is, we often don't believe that.

And the problem is, we often don't let Him give us the desires of our heart. Because we don't really believe that He wants to satisfy our desires, let's be honest. And so we try to satisfy our desires in all the wrong places.

We saw last week how the Apostle Paul warned us against what he calls deceitful desires.

Counterfeit desires that can never satisfy.

Desires that promise things they don't deliver. And we spend our life chasing after these deceitful desires. Chasing after them, thinking they'll satisfy us. But when we get them, they don't satisfy us. You'll remember if you were here last week.

And God knows that. God knows that that's why we're so unsatisfied. And so He gives us this amazing promise. That He will satisfy our desires. That we don't need to chase after other things to satisfy our desires.

[3 : 1 8] Because He will satisfy our desires. He will give us what we desire. But notice this promise also comes with a condition. And that is that we seek those desires in the right place, not the wrong place.

And that is by taking delight in the Lord. And so this morning, I want us to learn how to do that. I want us to learn how to take delight in the Lord. By considering this promise in Psalm 37 verse 4.

First we'll look at the condition of this promise. And then we'll look at the promise itself. So firstly the condition. Take delight in the Lord. Do you know what that means? Delight?

Delight? Delight? It literally means to find happiness. To find enjoyment. To find pleasure in something. That's what it means. And there's lots of things in the world that we delight in, aren't there?

There's lots of things that you delight in. In fact, everybody delights in something. It makes life worth living to have delights. A life without delight is not a life at all. We delight in holidays.

[4 : 20] We delight in relationships. We delight in tasty food. And when we're not delighting in those things, you know what we're doing? We're working towards getting those things that we delight in.

That is what our life consists of. We are either busy delighting in something. Or we are chasing after something to delight in. You are either doing one of those two things at any moment in time.

It wouldn't be unfair to say that you spend your life pursuing the things that delight you. And we can't help but do that. We're wired to do that. We do it without thinking. In fact, I want to read you a quote from Blaise Pascal.

Who's a famous philosopher. And he wrote this. All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end.

The cause of some going to war and of others avoiding it is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man.

[5 : 22] That's quite a thing to say. And this guy was clever. And he observed human nature. And that's what he said. He said we can't help seeking after our own happiness. No matter how much we deny ourselves.

No matter how much we want to do our duty. We still are seeking after our own happiness behind the scenes. Subconsciously. We can't help it. We're wired to do that. And in fact, that's not a bad thing.

That's how God made us. God made us to seek happiness. He designed us to be happy. He designed us to have pleasure.

And to pursue it. And that's what the command delight means. Literally, pursue pleasure. God is commanding us to pursue pleasure.

Pleasure. Think about that for a second. Isn't that surprising? Considering how we often think about God. And we think about his commands as burdensome.

[6 : 19] And we think about his commands as things we have to do out of duty. But no. His command here is to pursue pleasure. Specifically though. And this is important.

He wants us to pursue pleasure in him. Take delight in the Lord. And so you see God doesn't. And I want to get this straight this morning. God doesn't for a moment want us to stop seeking happiness. And stop seeking pleasure in order to serve him. Like many think he does. Rather he wants us to continue seeking happiness. And to continue seeking pleasure. But to do that in him. Rather than in the unsatisfying deceitful desires.

Of the world. That we tend to seek our happiness in. But we never quite get it. In fact you could say that this is the central. Most primary thing that God wants people to do in their lives.

He doesn't want duty. He doesn't want sacrifice. Or even just obedient. God wants your delight. More than anything else. Because all those other things will flow from your delight in God.

[7 : 22] All the other things he wants. And consider God's law for example. You know what the central commandment is of God's law. The commandment that sums it all up. What did Jesus say?

He said love the Lord your God with all your heart. And with all your soul. And with all your mind. And with all your strength. You know what that's saying? God wants you to be enraptured with him. He wants you to be absolutely taken with him. In all your being. Your emotions. And your heart. And your body. And your soul. And your mind.

Right? Because unless we are. Unless we are delighting in God. All our duty and sacrifice and church attendance is really just pointless. Pointless.

Consider the case. To illustrate this. Consider the case of a husband and a wife. Right? Now what does the wife want of her husband? His duty? His sacrifice? His obedience?

[8 : 21] No. More than all this. She wants him to love her. Doesn't she? To desire her. To delight in her. Imagine.

Imagine I arrived home one day. With a big bunch of flowers for Jean. Right? And I knocked on the door. And she came to the door. And she saw this big bunch of flowers. And she says, Oh Nick, they're beautiful.

Thank you so much. And she gives me a big hug. And then imagine as she's giving me this hug. I step back and I hold up my hand. And say rather matter-of-factly, Don't mention it. It's my duty. Now, what happens?

Okay? Isn't it good? Isn't it good to exercise my duty towards my wife? Shouldn't she be impressed by that? Aren't I honoring her by dutifully serving her?

No, no. No, I don't honor her by doing my duty. If my heart's not in it. You see? In fact, if I give her flowers just out of duty, I'm dishonoring her.

[9:19] I'm belittling her. I'm saying that she doesn't have enough worth or beauty in my eyes to arouse affection or desire or delight and all she has is my sacrificial duty. No, that's not what she wants.

Well, that's not what God wants either from us. To serve God out of duty and not delight and pleasure is to dishonor him. It's to belittle him.

It's saying that he's not valuable enough to us to serve because we want to but only because we have to. That's belittling God. And he wants none of it. And so he commands that first and foremost, before anything else, that we love him, that we delight ourselves in him, that we seek our happiness and pleasure in him because if we're not doing that, nothing else matters.

And that's why it's so important, this command that he gives us in Psalm 37 verse 4. Another reason why this is so important though and so vital for us to do if we're going to follow God, if we're going to live for God, is that unless we are delighting in God, truly in our hearts, delighting in God, unless we're doing that, we will sooner or later be led astray by the things we delight in more, won't we?

You know why it's such a struggle to not sin? Simply because we still think sin will make us happier than God can make us. That's why we sin at the end of the day. And if we continue to think like that, then sin will eventually win because we will always chase after the thing, eventually we will chase after the thing that gives us the most happiness.

[10:50] We're wired to do that. We can't do anything else. And so if we're not convinced that God will give us the most happiness, then we will inevitably turn away from him to the things that do.

Eventually we will turn away and chase after the things that make us happier than God if we don't find our happiness ultimately in God himself. A man will leave his wife for another woman.

Not primarily because he believes this new woman will make him happier than his wife can, which may be the case. No, he will leave his wife because he believes that this woman will make him happier than God can make him.

You see the difference? And that's why he disobeys God's law. Because he's looking for his ultimate happiness in a woman rather than in God. A person will steal because he believes the money that he gets can make him happier and give him more pleasure and security than God can give him and that's why he does it.

You see, so sin is really just at its heart a failure to seek our ultimate happiness in God. It's a failure to obey this vital command to take delight in the Lord.

[12:00] And that is why we sin because we don't do that because we take delight in other things. And so how do we do this? How do we... Obey this command to take delight in God.

How do we find pleasure in a God that we can't see or taste or touch or smell? You know, is it a matter of finding pleasure in his creation?

Spending time enjoying nature, going for a nature walk or stopping to take in a beautiful sunset. Is that how we delight in God? Well, not really. Good and enjoyable as those things are, but that would be like me saying, I'm going to take delight in my wife by enjoying the music she plays on her guitar.

But that's not really where my delight in her springs from. Nice as your music is, love. My delight springs from who she is. My delight in my wife.

Not what she can produce, but who she is. And I got to know who she is through spending time with her and listening to her and communicating with her.

[13:02] That's how I got to know her as a person. That's how I got to delight in my wife and fall in love with her. And in the same way, we delight in God, not primarily by delighting in the things he's created or even the gifts he gives us.

It's good to enjoy those things, but delighting in them is not the same as delighting in the God who made them. And it's important we understand this. We delight in God primarily through getting to know him as he truly is by spending time with him in his word, the Bible.

You can't delight in God without getting to know him. You can't delight in a person. You can't fall in love with a person without getting to know them. And you do that through words, through communication. It's exactly the same with God.

We learn how to delight in him. We fall in love with God through his word, through getting to know him in his word. But not just reading it as a fact sheet about God. You know, I didn't fall in love with my wife by reading a fact sheet about her, where she was born and what her favorite color is and all that.

No, it was, I fell in love with her when I engaged with her directly, one-to-one, when we communicated, when we revealed each other's hearts to each other.

[14 : 15] That's how we got to know each other. And so I didn't fall in love with my wife through what she produced. I didn't fall in love with her through just plain facts about her.

I fell in love with her through getting to know her intimately. And it's the same with God. God's word is given to us, not as a way of engaging with facts about God, but rather engaging with God in intimate relationship.

It's a living book, unlike any other, used by his spirit to bring us to know God as he truly is, to see what is on his heart so that we can delight in him as a person.

And so every time you pick up the Bible and read it, every time you come to church and listen to the Bible being preached, you should be seeking to get to know God more deeply in personal relationship through it so that you can delight in him.

There's really no other point reading the Bible other than to love God, to delight in God, to obey this command that he gives us, to delight in him.

[15 : 21] Because once you can know God as he truly is and learn to delight in him, then he promises to give you the deepest desires of your heart. And that's the next thing I want us to see, the promise that he promises here, to give us the desires of our heart.

If we truly believe that, wouldn't our lives be completely different? If we truly believe that God promises to give us the desires of our heart. Now we must understand this is not saying that once you delight in God he will give you all the things you desire.

It's not saying that if you learn how to delight in God he will give you that Lamborghini that you've been eyeing out. That's what the prosperity gospel teaches and that's wrong. Rather, what this means is that once you learn how to delight yourself in God, you won't look for your ultimate happiness in those things anymore because you'll find out that they do not satisfy but God satisfies. Your desire for God will replace your desire for satisfaction in other things. You won't want to find satisfaction in those things once you've tasted who God is.

And then when you do that, when you taste delight in God, then he will give you what you desire more and more. He will satisfy you with himself.

[16 : 39] Far more than the things he can give you. He will give you himself. And that is what you were made for. That is what you were made to delight in. In relationship with God himself, the source of all of all enjoyment, all happiness, all satisfaction.

He will give you himself. And that is why he sent his son to earth in order to give you himself. That is what the gospel is about. That is what Jesus coming to earth is about.

Jesus came to die for our sins that have been separating us from God, that have been stopping us from enjoying God, that have, our sins that have kept us fearful of God's judgment. He came and he died for those sins.

He took the punishment in our place. The sins that would otherwise condemn us to hell, Jesus took so that rather we can experience heaven. And heaven, let me tell you, is enjoying God himself forever without limit.

That is what heaven is about. It is funny, whenever you read about heaven in the Bible, you don't read about all the nice things we'll have in heaven because that's nothing compared to the fact that we'll know God, we'll stand face to face with God and we'll enjoy him like we've never enjoyed anything else ever in heaven.

[17 : 55] That's what heaven's about. That's how heaven's defined, in God's presence. And so, that's what Jesus did to make that open, to let you experience God for eternity.

eternity. All you've got to do is take that way now. You've got to take that way to God that he has opened, that way that he has opened for you to enjoy him forever, and you've got to take that by trusting in Jesus.

And when you do, he promises to satisfy the deepest desires of your heart in himself, not just in this life, but in eternity. Do you believe that? That's what I really want to ask you this morning.

Do you believe that your greatest happiness can be found in God? Or are you still chasing after happiness in lesser things that can never satisfy?

C.S. Lewis once wrote, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

[19 : 10] We are far too easily pleased. Isn't he right? We are far too easily pleased. We are far too quickly satisfied with what the world can give us that we don't seek the much greater satisfaction we can find in God.

Many of us still don't really believe that we can find so much happiness in God because we've never really experienced it. And so, God has given us something to help us.

God has given us something to help us while we wait for heaven, where we will discover in heaven, if you're not convinced now, when you get to heaven through faith in Christ, if you are one of his people, you will discover in heaven and you will be totally convinced of the delight and pleasure you can have in God.

In fact, in heaven you won't need to be convinced because you will just experience that delight that God made you for. But in the meantime, while we're on earth and we wonder and we doubt whether we can actually find happiness in God, God has given us something to start tasting those delights, even now.

And that is the gift of worship. Worship. You see, worship, especially worship in song, is the way we learn to delight in God.

[20 : 28] It's the way we learn to engage our emotions in who God is. And worship or praise is actually something we all know how to do, whether or not you know it.

You praise the things that you delight in. You speak of it to others. When your favorite football team wins the premiership, what do you do? You praise them. You might not get down on your knees and sing songs, although you never know, some football fans might, but you at least tell of them to others or you post it on Facebook or you make it known.

That's what praise is. It's making what you delight in known to those around you. when you visit a beautiful place. You don't feel the full enjoyment of it until you share it with someone else, do you? Until you praise it. We're wired to praise. We're wired to, if we experience something amazing, to tell others about it. We can't help it. We are designed to praise the things we delight in.

We are creatures whose instinct is to praise. Again, I quote C.S. Lewis, who's written a lot on this. He says, we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment.

[21 : 40] It is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are. The delight is incomplete until it is expressed. You see what he's saying?

He's saying we don't feel the full pleasure of something until we praise it. We don't feel the full pleasure of a beautiful sunset until we have someone sitting next to us looking at it as well and that we can share that experience with.

Because we are creatures who are designed to praise and we're designed to find our ultimate pleasure in something by praising it. And the same is true of God. It is the Christian experience of praise and worship that we learn to enjoy God.

And yet, I think, all too many Christians waste their time of worship at church. They just sing the songs because they're up on the screen.

They just mouth the words and wait for the sermon. You know, we waste that time, that opportunity to enjoy God. And that's why I decided to preach before we worship this morning.

[22 : 48] So that none of us wastes the opportunity we're about to get to delight ourselves in the Lord. God. Are you going to use this time of worship to do that now?

Are you going to take this opportunity to engage your emotions in delight of God? To obey this command to delight ourselves in the Lord?

Are you going to focus on the truths that you're singing and let them bring our true delight of God in your heart? Because as we heard in our opening reading, Jesus says, a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kinds of worshippers the Father seeks.

True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, deeply, from the heart, not just on the surface.

and in response to the truth about God that we find in the Bible in spirit and in truth. Is that how you worship? Is that how you're going to worship this morning? In spirit and in truth?

[23 : 56] Because those are the types of people that God is seeking. Those are the people who will inhabit heaven. Those who worship God in spirit and in truth. And so I want to give you an opportunity to do that right now.

Please don't waste it. Use this extended time of worship and let God reveal himself to you again through the truths that we sing.

Just clear your mind and focus completely on God now. To help you to do that, Alan's going to read Psalms in between our songs who are written by others who have delighted in God in history so that we can share their delight, that we can be inspired to delight in God now.

And use this time, please use this time to rekindle or maybe experience for the first time what it means to delight yourself in the Lord.

And so it can set you up for a week of delighting in God because that's really what praise and worship on Sunday should do. It should help you, prepare you for a week where you will be delighting in God every day.

[25 : 03] Will you do that this week? Will you use this time now to delight yourself in the Lord? Well before we do, I invite you to join me in prayer. It's a prayer of confession and it's also a prayer to ask God to help us to delight in Him now.

So this prayer will appear on the screen behind me. Let's just take a moment of silence to consider where your own heart is now to remember that Jesus has come and paid for your sins.

If you trust Him, He has given you full access to God to delight in Him forever. Let's pray this prayer together, shall we? Heavenly Father, I was made to delight in You, but I confess I've looked for delight in other things and not in You.

These have not satisfied me, and yet I have kept chasing them. Forgive me for my failure to delight myself in You, the source of all happiness.

forgiveness. Thank You for sending Jesus to open the way to You. I trust in Him now, and I pray restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and grant me a willing spirit so that I may worship You in spirit and in truth for the praise of Your glory.

[26 : 26] Amen. Amen.