

Delighting in God

Last fall, as well as this this spring semester, I've been a part of this thing called Rooted that you have been hearing about. If you haven't heard anything about it, Rooted is a 10-week small group discipleship experience that seeks to help people connect to God, to the church and to their purpose in life. One part of Rooted is something called a prayer experience that every group does.

Last fall when my group gathered for this prayer experience, I didn't necessarily have anything specific that I felt that I needed to hear from God about; I was just open to whatever God might want to say to me. We started the night praying together as a group and then we had about an hour alone to seek God. As I settled in and began to quiet my heart, I sensed God communicating His love for me and then in a way that wasn't audible, but nonetheless was very clear, I sensed God saying, "You don't delight in me. You work hard for me, but you don't delight in me." This didn't come so much as a rebuke, but rather it was more of an invitation to something deeper with God.

And so since that night back in September, I've been on a journey to understand what it looks like to delight in God. The truth is clear that I should delight in God; but it is one thing to know a truth in your mind; it is another thing to get it into your heart. And so I've been praying about this issue. I've been processing it with some good friends. And I've spent time reading and meditating on passages that address this issue.

I believe that for me and for you, God is inviting us into a relationship with Him in which we find genuine delight in Him. And so this morning I want to invite you into this same journey that I have been on to understand this idea of delighting in God. My hope for you and for me is that we would indeed be a people who have great delight in God.

Now, the place to start is to understand that . . .

I. We are Commanded to Delight in God

Philippians 4:4 says:

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!

Psalms 32:11 says:

*¹¹ Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones;
And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.*

And the verse that I've spent most of my time meditating upon is Psalm 37:4, which says:

⁴ Delight yourself in the LORD;

And He will give you the desires of your heart.

Rejoice in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord. Delight yourself in the Lord. This is not just for those who are more emotionally wired. It is a command for all of us – *delight yourself in the Lord.*

What God was doing that night when we gathered for prayer was revealing to me that I was not obeying this command. I work hard for God, but I was not delighting in Him. And so God, in His grace, pointed this out to me. It's grace, because if I'm not obeying this command, it means that I'm missing out on God's best for me, because anytime we don't obey God in any area of life, we are missing what Romans calls His good, acceptable and well-pleasing will (Rom. 12:2).

The best way for me to walk through this life is by delighting in God. And the same is true for you. If you are not delighting in God, you are missing His best for you. And so, do you delight in God?

Well, maybe we need to think a little bit about what it actually means to delight in God before you can answer this question. And so . . .

II. What does it mean to delight in God?

The word, "delight," that we find in Psalm 37:4 means to take great pleasure in something; it means to have great enjoyment in something.

Let me illustrate it this way. As someone born and raised in Nebraska and who grew up going to Husker football games with my dad, I delight in Husker football. Now, stick with me. When I talk about the Huskers, you can think Wildcats or Chiefs or whatever your favorite team is. What does my delight look like? Well, I read articles about the Huskers. I talk about them with my Husker friends. I'm excited that spring practice starts tomorrow! During the season, I pretty much watch every game either on TV or in person. Most seasons I will drive up to Lincoln for 2 or 3 games. Last year a friend and I drove all the way to Ann Arbor, MI to go to their game against Michigan. When they win, which isn't a lot these days, it feels good. Because I delight in the Huskers, I give it my attention. I give it my time. I talk about it. My emotions are involved. That's a picture of delighting. I take great pleasure in Husker football.

Now, here's the thing about this command to delight in God; it is not just a command to THINK in our minds that God is desirable. It certainly starts with how we think about God, but ultimately it is a command to FEEL great pleasure in God. Until I started looking at this last fall, I don't think this idea had ever been clear to me that this command involves our feelings.

John Piper does a great job of making this point in his book *Desiring God*. He says:

Consider the analogy of a wedding anniversary. Mine is December 21. Suppose on this day I bring home a dozen long-stemmed roses for Noël. When she meets me at the door I hold out the roses, and she says, "O Johnny, they're beautiful,

thank you.” and gives me a big hug. Then suppose I hold up my hand and say matter-of-factly, “Don’t mention it; it’s my duty.”

What happens? Is not the exercise of duty a noble thing? Do not we honor those we dutifully serve? Not much. Not if there’s no heart in it. Dutiful roses are a contradiction in terms. If I am not moved by a spontaneous affection for her as a person, the roses do not honor her. In fact they belittle her. They are a very thin covering for the fact that she does not have the worth or beauty in my eyes to kindle affection. *(Desiring God, pp. 92-93)*

To obey the command to delight in God is to be moved to affection for God. We see His worth, His beauty, His love, and those things should stir our affections for God. This is what it means to delight in God.

And so let me ask you again, do you delight in God? Is there affection in your heart for Him? Do you find pleasure and satisfaction in God? Or is your relationship with Him merely dutiful?

Some of you do delight in God. You don’t just serve Him dutifully; you have great pleasure and satisfaction in God. Others of us, however, would say that we are missing this. We might have good theology about God and we may work hard for him, but we are missing this sense of delight in God. This is what I believe the Holy Spirit was impressing on my heart during that time of prayer with my Rooted group last fall.

And so if this is true of us, what do we do to cultivate a heart that delights in God?

III. How do we get to a place of delighting in God?

At the heart of delighting in God is experiencing Him. It’s about seeing God rightly. All of us have heard about the Grand Canyon, right? We’ve seen pictures and we’ve read descriptions about it. But to really appreciate the Grand Canyon you need to experience it. I remember the first time I saw it as a young boy on a family vacation. It was more beautiful and majestic than any picture could convey. And every other time I’ve seen it I’ve had the same experience. You don’t have to work at being amazed at the Grand Canyon. You just are when you see it.

I think a similar thing is true with God. When we experience Him, when we see Him rightly, it leads to delighting in Him. Now, I say this with one qualification. It does this IF we know God as our Savior. If a person has not yet bowed the knee to God and received His grace and mercy, when that person begins to see God rightly, what is stirred up is not delight, but fear. It is right to fear a holy God if we stand opposed to Him and under His judgment. But when we trust Jesus and experience God’s forgiveness, though holy reverence should certainly continue there should also be delight in our experience of God.

And so, how do we get there if we struggle to delight in God? Again, I think the key thing is seeing God rightly, and so how do we do that?

I think the place to start is to **meditate on God's character**. In Psalm 27:4, David prayed:

*⁴ One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek:
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 meditate in His temple.*

David longed to be in the house of the Lord where he could focus intently on God. Why? So that he might *behold the beauty of the Lord*. The word, *beauty*, literally means "delightfulness." David was determined to see and meditate on the delightfulness of God. We need to do the same thing. Meditate on God's character.

One of the things that I have been meditating on is God's love . . . His love for ME! In my mind, I believe He loves me. But if I'm going to delight in God this truth needs to get into my heart. And so I have been meditating on it so that it gets into my heart in a way that I experience His love for me and respond appropriately with delight.

God is a God of love, and faithfulness, and goodness, and kindness, and grace, and many other qualities that are beautiful. Mediate on them. Mediate on how you've experienced His love or faithfulness or grace.

And so meditate on God's character. Another ways to do this is to **meditate on what God has done to save you**.

Isaiah 61:10 says:

*¹⁰ I will rejoice greatly in the LORD,
My soul will exult in my God;
For He has clothed me with garments of salvation,
He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness,*

Habakkuk 3:18 says:

*¹⁸ Yet I will exult in the LORD,
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.*

There is delight in God here, right? Because of the experience of salvation there is rejoicing. So much of God's beauty is revealed in our salvation. Love. Grace. Mercy. Kindness. Compassion. Meditate on this!

One of the reasons I love being around new believers is that this experience of being forgiven and saved is so tangible that they don't have to work to delight in God. They just do because they are deeply aware of what God has done for them. But for those of us who have been be-

lievers a little longer, sometimes we forget this experience and so we need to choose to meditate on our salvation and what it reveals about God. Meditate often on your salvation. Keep it in the forefront of your mind that it might help you delight in the God.

Another thing we can do is to **meditate on God's abundant goodness**.

In the book of Nehemiah, after Nehemiah helps mobilize Israel to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem they have a time where the word of God is corporately read and then the Levites retell Israel's history to the people. In 9:24-25 this is what the Levites say about Israel when God first led them into the Promised Land:

*²⁴ "So their sons entered and possessed the land.
And You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites,
And You gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land,
To do with them as they desired.
²⁵ "They captured fortified cities and a fertile land.
They took possession of houses full of every good thing,
Hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive groves,
Fruit trees in abundance.
So they ate, were filled and grew fat,
And reveled in Your great goodness.*

God was so good to the children of Israel. And their response to God's abundant goodness? They didn't just THINK, "God is good." No, they *reveled in* [God's] *great goodness*. That's delight, revealing in God's great goodness.

God has been so good to each one of us. He has given us life and provision and food and shelter. He has given us families and friends. He has blessed us with the local church. He has given us the freedom to worship Him openly. He walks with us in our difficulties. He has been our strength when we are weak. We experience these every day. And so if you want to grow in your delight in God, remember His goodness to you. Meditate on it!

And so meditate on God's character. Meditate on your salvation and what that reveals about God, and remember the many ways that He has been good to you. As we meditate on these things they can help us see God rightly that we might genuinely delight in Him.

In the last month God has brought another truth about Himself to my attention that I think is a really critical part of seeing God rightly. And that is this: **Understand that God delights in you.**

A number of weeks ago, a friend asked me if I believed that God delighted in me. In some ways I wasn't sure what I thought about that. I know He loves me, but delight? Does God delight in me? Does He delight in you?

As I've thought about this, I do believe that Scripture teaches this very thing. And I think it is a really important issue for us in learning to delight in God. Psalm 149 says this:

*¹ Praise the Lord!
Sing to the Lord a new song,
And His praise in the congregation of the godly ones.*

*² Let Israel be glad in his Maker;
Let the sons of Zion rejoice in their King.*

*³ Let them praise His name with dancing;
Let them sing praises to Him with timbrel and lyre.*

The psalm is proclaiming that it is good and right for God's people to delight in God. It is all over these verses. But then look at what verse 4 says. What is the source of the ability to delight in God in this way?

*⁴ For the Lord takes pleasure in His people;
He will beautify the afflicted ones with salvation.*

Delight in Him. Be glad in your Maker. Why? Because the Lord takes pleasure in His people. He delights in us first!

If you think that God's disposition towards you is anger or disappointment or indifference, you will not delight in him. The good news is that if you are in Christ, God's disposition towards you is love, grace, mercy, and kindness. He delights in you! God is the father in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15) who has His arms wide open to you. What did that father do when his son returned? He threw a party. He HAD to celebrate for he delighted in his son. Have you ever thought about how the son must have felt about his dad? How would the son's response not be to delight in his dad? But it started with his dad's delight in him. This is God's heart towards you!

Lord takes pleasure in His people. God delights in you first! To know and believe this is seeing God rightly. And when you and I can experience His delight in us, the natural response is delighting Him.

It's been about 5 months now since God whispered to my heart that I work hard for Him, but don't delight in Him. As I mentioned earlier, when God showed me this, it wasn't so much a rebuke as it was an invitation to something deeper with God. I'm still in process, but I believe that I'm beginning to experience just a little taste of this deeper life with God through seeing Him rightly and responding with delight.

I believe that God wants to invite you into the same journey of seeing Him rightly and responding with delight. Today, we are celebrating communion and so much of what I'm encouraging

us to do is expressed here, right? In remembering what Jesus did for us, we are reminded of our salvation. We are reminded of the character of God – His love and grace and mercy. And so today as you eat the bread and drink the cup, be reminded that when Jesus died on the cross your name was on Jesus' mind. He did this for you. He did this because He loves you. Let this stir up delight.