

Enjoyment is Not Optional

Matt Perman

Pursuit of our own pleasure is a necessary element of worshipping God and loving people. Far from the moral value of worship or a good deed being ruined to the extent that we seek our own pleasure, an act of love for others or worship of God is only loving and honoring to the extent that we pursue our own pleasure.

We must delight in God if we are to honor and glorify Him

Why is this? First, because *we delight in what we value*. Delight is the response appropriate to something that is supremely valuable. God is supremely valuable above all things. Therefore if we do not delight in God, it shows that we do not consider Him supremely valuable. "Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name" (Psalm 97:12). "Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy" (Psalm 43:4). "Love the Lord your God with all your heart..." (Matt. 22:37).

Second, because *praise is the overflow of our enjoyment of God*. Therefore, since we only praise what delights us, we cannot praise God if we do not delight in Him. In fact, praise is not only the *expression* but the *completion* of our enjoyment in God. Have you ever thought of praise in this way? It is true. Have you ever gone to a great movie that you deeply enjoyed? What were you doing as you left the movie? You were most likely discussing with your friends how great it was. You were praising it! But if your friends had told you to keep quiet and stop talking about how much you enjoyed the movie, your enjoyment would have been lessened; it would not have been complete. This is because praise is not just the expression of our enjoyment of something, it is also the completion and fulfillment of our enjoyment.

Isn't this great news—the highest end of mankind (glorifying God through our praise) is at the same time the greatest and most passionate joy of mankind! "Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation" (Psalm 95:1). "My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47). "Shout joyfully to God, all the earth; sing the glory of His name; make His praise glorious. Say to God, 'How awesome are Thy works!'" (Psalm 66:1, 2).

Third, *delight confers great honor to God because it shows that His glory is supremely valuable*. "When someone delights in you, you feel honored. When someone finds happiness in being around you, you feel treasured, appreciated, glorified," notes John Piper quite rightly (Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Missions*, p. 27). On the other hand, if we did not delight in God's glory, how could we say that He was really valuable to us? Wouldn't it be a contradiction to say you value and love God but do not have any good feelings toward Him? "Delight yourself in the Lord" we are commanded in Psalm 37:4.

It is not selfish to pursue joy in God

Note this—I am not saying that we should pursue joy *from* God. We are to pursue joy *in* God. I phrase it this way to guard against two errors. The first error would be to think that our experience of joy is independent or separate from our experience of God. It is not; *God Himself is our joy*. "I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy" (Psalm 43:4). Thus, we are not pursuing joy *from* God, but *in* God. In fact, the Bible commands us to do this: "Delight yourself in the Lord" (Psalm 37:4). "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). How can it be selfish to do what God commands us?

Pursuing joy in God also guards against the sin of pursuing God in a way that does not honor Him. It is not enough just to say "pursue God" because there are wrong ways to pursue God. For example, seeking God for material gain is wrong because it does not honor Him. But, as we have seen, seeking God because He is our delight most honors Him because it is the response appropriate to His infinite value! So we do not simply say "pursue God" but neither do we say "pursue joy from God." We say pursue joy *in* God! "Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Selfishness is a matter of what you value and where your focus is. Pursuing God because we delight in Him, however, puts the focus on God and not ourselves. And since God is what we delight in most, it means we value Him most. This makes pursuing God out of joy God-centered, not self-centered (and therefore selfish) since our focus and value is God, not ourselves. My girlfriend does not accuse me of selfishness for being in a relationship with her because she makes me happy; in fact, there would be a real problem if I was in a relationship with her even though she did not make me happy!

If we do not seek our joy in good deeds and do them joyfully, we fail to honor God or love people

Why? As we have already seen, we must pursue joy in God and His glory to honor Him. But good deeds glorify God. Therefore, if I do not pursue *this* joy in doing a good deed, I am being indifferent toward God and not valuing His glory. I

am saying "God, you aren't worthy enough to engage my interest and delight." The Bible says that Christ "for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame..." (Hebrews 12:2). "Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing" (Psalm 100:2). "I delight to do Thy will, O God" (Psalm 40:8). "Thy testimonies are wonderful; *therefore* my soul observes them" (Psalm 119:129).

Pursuing your own joy in a good deed is necessary to be truly loving to the other person because it most honors the person you are helping. For example, if I give my girlfriend flowers, but then shrug off her "Thank you very much!" with a "Don't mention it, it's my duty as your boyfriend. Don't worry about me giving these to you for selfish reasons, because I don't enjoy giving you things" there is a real problem. Doing a deed out of duty does not honor or value the one we are helping. But let's say I respond with "It's my pleasure! I enjoy giving you things!" She is honored not in spite of the fact that I pursued my joy in giving her flowers, but because I sought my joy in giving her the flowers! Delight honors and values the other person more than duty.

It is not selfish to seek our own joy in doing good deeds

Good deeds are good because they reflect and display God's character. Since, as we have seen, we must delight in God, we must therefore also delight in good deeds to the extent that they reflect God. Second, as we have just seen, good deeds are truly loving to the other person to the degree that they are not done begrudgingly. As the flower illustration demonstrates, seeking my own joy in an act of love does not make my love insincere; it is in fact the only way to be truly loving to the person! The joy we seek in doing good is joy in the other person's welfare. We are not seeking our own joy at their expense or independent of their benefit. We are showing that we value them because our delight is their benefit and happiness; we have tied up *our* own joy in *their* joy. Selfishness is focusing on yourself and pursuing your own benefit at the *expense* or *exclusion* of others. I am not saying pursue your joy at others' expense, but *in the joy and benefit of others*. If your joy is in the other person's welfare, not yourself, your focus is on them, not yourself. Thus, it is not selfish. "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Specifically, *the ultimate benefit we seek for the other person in any act of love should be that they praise God and enjoy Him more when they experience His love through us*, because their glorifying and praising and enjoying God is the best thing for them. But God's exaltation is what most delights us, and seeing others enjoy Him as well and thus share our joy will doubly delight us!

Do you see the connection here? Pursuit of my joy and the other person's welfare are not two separate pursuits, but the same pursuit! *Their* joy and benefit is *my* joy! The fear of selfishness comes from thinking that pursuit of my joy and

the other person's welfare are separate pursuits that are not in harmony. But they are not separate pursuits; they are the same. No less than the apostle John penned these words: "We write this that our joy may be made complete" (1 John 1:4). He later said "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth" (3 John 1:4). John's joy was that his spiritual children walked in the truth, and he sought to "make [his] joy complete." The apostle Paul wrote "And this is the very thing I wrote you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all, *that my joy would be the joy of you all*" (2 Cor. 2:3).

Thus, we cannot worship God if we don't delight in Him. And we cannot honor God or love people in our good deeds unless we pursue our own joy in doing good. But if we do delight in God, and therefore we also delight in good deeds since they glorify Him by displaying His character, we can be in continual worship to God moment by moment throughout the day by continually "delighting [ourselves] in the Lord" (Psalm 37:4)!

Glorify God *by* enjoying Him

Do not forget this utterly life-changing discovery: pursuit of God's glory and our delight are not at odds with each other, but they are the same pursuit! "God is glorified precisely when we are satisfied in Him—when we delight in His presence, when we like to be around him, when we treasure His fellowship. This is an utterly life-changing discovery. It frees us to pursue our joy in God and God to pursue His glory in us. Because they are not two different pursuits. *God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him*" (Piper, p. 27). "The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever," notes Piper.

Therefore, pursue your joy in God to the highest possible extent! In everything you do, do it to see more of His glory because His glory is your treasure and greatest joy! As C.S. Lewis has said "if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us...we are far too easily pleased" (quoted in Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, p. 15).

"In Thy presence is fulness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever" (Psalm 16:11).

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*. If you would like to discuss this article in our online community, please visit our [RPM Forum](#).

Subscribe to RPM

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [RPM](#), please select this [link](#).