DUTY AND DELIGHT

A Journey of Faith in Living and Giving

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This Bible study is intended for use with the Duty and Delight Stewardship Program introduced at the 2017 Convocation of the North American Lutheran Church. Both the study and the program are available for download by clicking Stewardship under the Resources link at thenalc.org.
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Two Important Words

When it comes to words and what they describe, few are more important than “duty” and “delight.” To be sure, most of us have thought about both more than once. But most of us would also benefit if we gave them some further attention. This is especially true if we hear these words describing two important motivators in our lives before God. Webster’s Dictionary defines “motive” as “something (as a need or desire) that causes a person to act.” So, what is it that motivates us, and what role, if any, is played by duty and delight?

Two Different Things

“Duty” has to do with what is “owed,” with “obligatory tasks, conduct or service,” with “moral or legal obligations.” In a now-famous speech to The Corps of Cadets at West Point, General Douglas MacArthur once said:

“Duty, Honor, Country — those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be and what you will be.”

West Point, New York, May 12, 1962.

Duty has to do with “ought” and “should.”

Although it begins with the same letter of the alphabet, the word “delight” describes something different. Delight is things that “bring the greatest pleasure,” that “offer the highest joy.” Delight isn’t defined by what is owed, but rather by what is truly enjoyed at the deepest possible level. Listen to a vocalist or musician, and one can sometimes tell whether what’s being offered comes simply from a duty pursued or from a deep sense of personal delight.

Both Are Addressed in Scripture

Both duty and delight are referenced repeatedly in Scripture. But there is one surprise in this repetition: Contrary to what we may think, the Biblical words for “delight” are found far more frequently than the Biblical words for “duty.” To some extent, this frequency depends on the translation one is reading and on how certain Hebrew and Greek words are rendered. But, when it comes to the two English words themselves, for every occurrence of the word “duty,” there are approximately seven occurrences of the word “delight.” Is that merely coincidental, or important for us to note?

Biblical Examples of “Duty”

In 2 Chronicles 8:14, we read:

“According to the rulings of David his father, he [Solomon] appointed the divisions of the priests for their service, and the Levites for their offices of praise and ministry before the priests as the duty [Hebrew “dabar’] of each day required....”

In Ezra 3:4, we read:

“And they kept the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the rule [or duty, Hebrew “dabar”], as each day required....”

In Luke 17:10, we hear Jesus say:

“So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants, we have only done what was our duty.’”

The Greek word Jesus uses here for “duty” is “opheilo.” St. Paul also uses this word in Romans 15:27 for Christian service which “ought” to be rendered.

In each of these examples, duty deals with appointed rules and requirements, or with service that ought to be offered. Duty has to do with obligatory tasks, with what should be done.
Biblical Examples of “Delight”

As mentioned, for every Biblical occurrence of the word “duty,” there are approximately seven occurrences of the word “delight.” Of these, roughly half speak to instances of God’s own delight, especially in His own called servants. The other half speak to instances of human delight, especially human delight in God and the ways of God.

Examples of God’s own delighting:
In Proverbs 8:29-31, the Wisdom of God is described as God’s delight [Hebrew “shaashuim”] and as something delighting in God’s human creation:

“…when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I [Wisdom, cf. 8:1,12] was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.”

Many understand this “Wisdom” in Proverbs 8 as a reference to Christ himself, “the first-born of all creation” through whom “all things were created” (cf. Colossians 1:15-16).

In Numbers 14:8, Joshua and Caleb proclaim:

“If the Lord delights [Hebrew “chaphets”] in us, he will bring us into the land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey.”

In Psalm 1:1-2, the psalmist writes:

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight [Hebrew: “chephets”] is in the law of the Lord…. ”

In Isaiah 58:13-14, we read:

“If you …call the Sabbath a delight…then you shall take delight [Hebrew: “anag”] in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; ….”

Again, the psalmist in Psalm 112:1 writes:

“Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights [Hebrew: “chamad”] in his commandments!”

In Psalm 119:47:

“…for I find my delight [Hebrew: “shaa”] in your commandments which I love.”

And in Psalm 40:8:

“I delight [Hebrew: “chamad”] to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”

A True Story of Duty / Delight

Recently, one of our seniors was scheduled for a serious surgery with a lengthy recovery. This member was, of course, concerned about the outcome. She even wanted to plan her funeral.

On the Sunday before surgery, she made it a point to drive herself to church. She was too weak to get out of her car, so she rolled down her window and, waving her pledge envelope in her hand, she flagged down a member going into church. She said, “Please put this in the offering plate. I don’t know when I’ll be back.”

What was truly remarkable was this woman’s faith. She was intentional about her giving. She was both bound to duty and set free in joy. After her recovery, I asked her what motivated her to drive to the church that morning when she was in such discomfort. She replied, “It is my offering! And I know the church is counting on it.”

Pastor Dona Johnson, NALC Stewardship Team
Some Thoughts and Questions for Further Discussion

On first hearing of the words “duty” and “delight,” what thoughts or feelings come to mind?

Was the subject of “duty” ever discussed in the home of your childhood? If you can remember, how did you feel about the topic?

Was the word “delight” ever used in your childhood home? In what connection?

Of the two terms “duty” and “delight,” which of the two, do you think, is easier for most people to appreciate?

How do both duty and delight figure in the Biblical story of Zacchaeus (cf. Luke 19:1-10)?

What difficulty with delight does St. Paul confess when he writes: “For I delight in the law of God in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members” (Romans 7:22)? How might you paraphrase these words of Paul from your own experience?

John Newton, author of the hymn “Amazing Grace,” also authored another hymn with the verse below. What kind of “wedding” is Newton talking about?

Our pleasure and our duty, though opposite before, since we have seen his beauty are joined to part no more.
Duty — Something Familiar to Lutherans

Duty historically has received strong emphasis among Lutherans. We owe this in part to Luther himself. For Martin Luther, duty was not only an important subject, but also an important motivator in living before God.

The German word “schuldig” conveys this important understanding. “Schuldig” and “Schuldigkeit” have to do with what is due, what is owed, and what is right before God. We find this word in Luther’s Small Catechism, in Luther’s explanation to The First Article of the Apostles’ Creed. There, after noting all of God’s gifts, both past and present, Luther writes:

“For all of this I owe it [German “schuldig”] to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him” (p. 355).²

An older English translation (still familiar to many Lutherans) put it this way:

“For all which it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him” (p. 9).³

At the end of his Small Catechism, Luther also included a section entitled “Die Haustafel,” often translated in English as “Table of Duties.” This section included Scriptural guidance for people in all kinds of states, with words “particularly pertinent to their office and duty.” Included in this “Table of Duties” is the listing of tasks and responsibilities for not only Bishops, Priests and Governing Authorities, but also Husbands, Wives, Parents, Children, etc. (p. 365).²

Previous generations gave these “duties” closer attention as part of their catechetical instruction. Today, many Lutherans know of them only in passing. But “duty” remains a familiar word and is in several well-known hymns.

“Awake My Soul, and with the sun
Thy daily stage of duty run;”

Thomas Ken, 1637-1711: “Awake My Soul,” LBW 269

“Put on the Gospel armor;
Each piece put on with prayer.
Where duty calls or danger,
Be never wanting there.”

George Duffield, 1818-1888: “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus,” LBW 389

“Where my soul in joyful duty
Waits for God who answers prayer.”

Benjamin Schmolck, 1672-1737, tr. Catherine Winkworth

“Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty,” LBW 250

Duty — Also Familiar to Others

Many others have also spoken of duty.

At the very end of his message, the Old Testament author of Ecclesiastes wrote:

“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing whether good or evil.”

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Mark Twain once said:

“Do something every day that you don’t want to do; this is the golden rule for acquiring the habit of doing your duty without pain” (p. 293).⁴

Mother Teresa once said:

“Duty is a very personal thing. It is what comes from knowing the need to take action and not just a need to urge others to do something” (p. 292).⁴
Examples of Duty Abound

The pages of history are full of sterling examples of duty, both called for and met. The call to duty has, in fact, often inspired the greatest of sacrifice. Many of the greatest examples of duty and its cost come from the military. James Bradley and Ron Power’s book “Flags of Our Fathers” recounts many of these in vivid detail.

“The hard statistics show the sacrifice made by Colonel Johnson’s 2nd Battalion: 1,400 boys [many still teenagers] landed on D-Day; 288 replacements were provided as the battle went on, a total of 1,688. Of these, 1,511 had been killed or wounded. Only 177 walked off the island. And of the final 177, 91 had been wounded at least once and returned to battle.

“It had taken twenty-two crowded transports to bring the 5th Division to the island. The survivors fit comfortably onto eight departing ships.

“The American boys had killed about 21,000 Japanese, but suffered more than 26,000 casualties doing so. This would be the only battle in the Pacific where the invaders suffered higher casualties than the defenders.

“The Marines fought in World War II for forty-three months Yet in one month on Iwo Jima, one-third of their deaths occurred. They left behind the Pacific’s largest cemeteries: nearly 6,800 graves in all; mounds with their crosses and stars. Thousands of families would not have the solace of a body to bid farewell: just the abstract information that the Marine had “died in the performance of his duty” and was buried in a plot, aligned in a row with numbers on his grave. ...

“I think of the message someone had chiseled outside the cemetery:

“When you go home
Tell them for us and say
For your tomorrow
We gave our today” (p. 246-247).5

A different example — but not all that different — is recounted by Henry and Tom Blackaby in their book “The Man God Uses.” There they tell the story of David Brainerd and his untiring efforts to reach Native Americans with the Gospel.

“Jonathan Edwards described David Brainerd (1718-1747) as one prone to melancholy and depression, who did not ‘proportion his fatigues to his strength.’ ... God called Brainerd to serve as His mouthpiece to the Indians of Pennsylvania. Riding horseback through severe winter conditions and laboring long and hard took a toll on Brainerd’s health. Nonetheless, he continued in his faithful service for God to the Indians. He died at age 30 in the care of Jonathan Edwards, who published Brainerd’s diary as an example of faithful service and loyal dedication to God” (p. 92).6

Reading Brainerd’s diary, one can’t help but see a man motivated by a profound sense of duty. His “melancholy and depression” may not have lifted him up as a prime example of joyful delight. But unquestionably Brainerd was motivated by a profound commitment to God and others — a beautiful example of spiritual duty. But is duty really “the end of the matter,” as the author of Ecclesiastes once put it? Is it enough, as Mark Twain once said, simply to “acquire a habit” of doing what “you don’t want to do”? Or enough, even as Mother Teresa once put it, simply to know “the need to take action?” Is duty the best motivator there is for living and doing?
Some Thoughts and Questions for Further Discussion

Why is the concept of duty so important in the military?

Can you think of any occasion when a sense of duty might be a more fitting motivator than a sense of delight?

In what sense, if any, could we say that God is also motivated by duty?

Jesus speaks of what the Pharisees “ought” to do (their religious duty) in Matthew 23:23. But Jesus also seems to say that the “oughts” of the Pharisees were still “missing the boat.” Why was that the case?

Can you think of an example from your own life when duty was motivating you?

What are the benefits, as well as the limits, of a sense of duty when it comes to supporting a particular cause or charity?

Has something that was a duty for you ever changed into a delight?

Consider the following words by C.S. Lewis:

“Then comes another discovery. Every faculty you have, your power of thinking or of moving your limbs from moment to moment, is given you by God. If you devoted every moment of your whole life exclusively to His service you could not give Him anything that was not in a sense His own already. So that when we talk of a man doing anything for God or giving anything to God, I will tell you what it is really like. It is like a small child going to its father and saying, ‘Daddy, give me sixpence to buy you a birthday present.’ Of course, the father does, and he is pleased with the child’s present. It is all very nice and proper, but only an idiot would think that the father is sixpence to the good on the transaction” (p. 142-143).7

What are some of the dangers of a sense of duty, when it comes to any thoughts of “giving something to God”?
Three

THE WAY OF DELIGHT

We Pray...

Heavenly Father, we know what it means to delight in something. You delight to show mercy. By your Spirit, rekindle in us the gift of delighting in you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

A Different Kind of Motivator

It’s not that duty represents something wrong or harmful. Far from it! On the contrary, duty and a sense of it have inspired countless good things and even the greatest of sacrifice. How many parents have shouldered their responsibilities day after day, if not always out of joy and excitement, then at least out of a sense of duty and responsibility? How many soldiers and first responders have put themselves in harm’s way time after time, if not out of joy and delight, then out of a sense of duty toward the well-being of others? How many inspectors of railroad tracks or food items have spared many a life, simply by doing their duty toward the public?

A sense of duty isn’t something bad. In most cases, it’s something to be honored and emulated. But duty isn’t the only motivator, and, if Scripture is heard, it isn’t even the best motivator. For, better than duty, there remains something more, something other. There remains, as Saint Paul might put it, “a still more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31).

There remains the gift of delight.

God’s Own Delight Shows Us the Way

Where do we learn best about delight and the nature of it? We see it and learn it best from God himself through the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament.

Have we really noted how time and time again the delight of God describes the very nature and motivation of God? How much room have we made in our thinking for a God who delights in things? Is this even part of our understanding of God, of what moves and motivates God? To be sure, God is a God of commandment and expectation with every right to expect dutiful obedience. But there is also another side of God — the God who takes delight, especially in His own.

God’s Delight as God’s Gift of Grace

Thanks be to God that, even after the coming of sin into the world, God continues to take delight in being a God of grace and to find delight in those who hope in him. God’s delight is sign and proof of His love and grace. In these delight-filled passages, the word “delight” speaks to what lies “at the very heart” of God, of what motivates God’s own doing.

In 1 Kings 10:9, the Queen of Sheba (of all people!) says to Solomon:

“Blessed be the Lord your God who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord loved Israel forever, he has made you king…. ”

Some delightfully gracious words of God are also heard through Isaiah in Isaiah 62:4:

“You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight is in Her…. ”

Amazed by the steadfast love of God even for sinners, the prophet Micah writes in 7:18:

“Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.”

A special delight is found toward those who hope in God’s love, as in Psalm 147:10-11:

“His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.”

Even in God’s reproving of his own, the author of Proverbs, in Proverbs 3:12, finds evidence of a special kind of paternal delight:

“for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”
God's Delight Finds Its Fullest Expression in Jesus

If God in the beginning was delighted with His own creation, and continued to be delighted in showing love and mercy to sinners, then God was, is and always will be especially delighted in His Son and chosen Servant. Speaking of Jesus through the inspiration of the Spirit, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed for God, in the 6th century BC:

“Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights….”

Isaiah 42:1

Speaking of his Son through a voice from heaven, God declared at Jesus' baptism:

“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

Mark 1:11

In this passage, the Greek word “eudokesa” used for “well pleased” can also be translated as “delighted.”

If we want to know what delights God most of all, Scripture says it’s God’s own Son, who, amazingly, came into this world precisely so that, through Him, God could delight once again, without impediment, in all those who trust in Him. Speaking to this delightful result, without using the word “delight” itself, Jesus said to His disciples in John 15:11:

“These things have I spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

The work of God in Jesus is about the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. It’s also about joy. It’s about delight — God’s own delight in being a gracious God; God’s own delight in His Son, our Savior; our own delightfulness recovered and made full again in Him.

Martin Luther wrote:

“If …Adam had remained in the state of innocence, he would have tilled the earth and planted little plots of aromatic herbs, not only without inconvenience but as it were in play and with the greatest delight” (p. 103).8

But that original innocence and delight faded. It disappeared with the coming of sin. Only God himself could restore it. Only His delightful Son could accomplish that. The Good News is the story of God making His own human creation delightful once again. Do we still delight in it?

The angels did at Jesus’ birth, as did the shepherds after them, leaving those shepherds “praising and glorifying God for all that they had heard and seen…. ”

Now, perhaps, the angels brought their message in dutiful obedience to God. Perhaps the shepherds also went to the manger in dutiful obedience, for they had been commanded by some very powerful beings. But, in both cases, there was also more at play than duty alone. There was an indisputable delight.

The same might be said about those angelic beings and early visitors at the tomb on Easter morning. It would be reasonable that each brought the message on that day in dutiful obedience to powers beyond his or her own. But there was much more to it! There was also Good News of great joy, even if on that first Easter morning it was only beginning to sink in. For that day would soon become the most delightful day since the days of creation, those days “when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy…” (Job 38:7). For now there was a new joy, a new delight, and a new motive for living before God, one that would far surpass any mere sense of duty.

A True Story of Duty/Delight

Her name was Hannah. She was a large woman, with a reddish complexion that seemed to shine brilliantly when she approached the communion rail. When she received the wafer, she would look up into my eyes with one of the most beautiful smiles I can remember in my whole career. It never failed. It always brought a smile from me, as well. I loved administering Holy Communion to her. For Hannah, the Sacrament was pure, unadulterated delight. While she was eventually home bound and I gave her and her husband communion there, she never lost the glow. She and her husband had a deep sense of duty and responsibility and served the Lord faithfully for many years. It was her delight in the body and blood that will always bless my soul.

Rev. Dr. Eugene Grimm,
NALC Stewardship Team Leader
Some Thoughts and Questions for Further Discussion

Think of a personal delight or a delightful memory from the past. What made it delightful?

Is it wrong to delight in anything other than God?

One of the Hebrew words for “delight” (“chashag”) is used in Deuteronomy 10:15. The ESV translates this verse as follows:

“Yet the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.”

How does the phrase “set his heart in love” help us to understand God’s own delight?

Next to God himself, it seems fair to say, there is no one in Old Testament Scripture who gives more evidence of being delight-filled than David the psalmist. David also celebrates his delight in God’s commandments: “Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it” (Psalm 119:35). How is this different from a spirit of legalism? Do you see David’s “delight” as a gift from God, or a “gift” to God? Or was it both?

How often is “delight” mentioned in congregational meetings, denominational meetings and other Christian conversations? Why might this be the case?

Have you ever met anyone whom you would describe as “a delightful giver”? Can the delightful giving of some inspire a similar giving in others?

In what way did Jesus display delight in his ministry here on earth?

The Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness reads in part:

“For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of your holy name.” LBW, p. 56

Do you think the word “delight,” as used in this confession, is appropriate?
Delight as A Still More Excellent Way

The Delight that Jesus Himself was and is, and the saving delight that Jesus brings to sinners, lies at the heart of the Good News of our salvation. Martin Luther may have spoken repeatedly of duty before God, but he spoke even more passionately about this delightful Good News. If we have forgotten this side of Luther, his sermons of the “Christmas Book,” edited by Roland Bainton, are a good resource. Here we see Luther’s sheer *delight* in retelling the Gospel story:

“And the angel said unto them, ‘Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.’ This *joy* is not just for Peter and Paul, but for all people. Not just to apostles, prophets, and martyrs does God say, but to you, ‘Come, see the baby Jesus’” (p. 36).⁶

Adding to the delight of the Gospel itself and its joyful proclamation, there’s also the delightful singing of this Gospel in the carols and hymns of the Church. Here too, references to “delight” easily surpass all references to “duty.”

In the Advent hymn “O Lord, How Shall I Meet You” (LBW 23), Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676) wrote:

“O Lord, how shall I greet you … / My hope, my heart’s *delight*!”

In the Christmas hymn “Your Little Ones, Dear Lord” (LBW 52), Hans A. Brorsen (1694-1764) wrote:

“O blessed hour, oh sweetest night / That gave you birth, our soul’s *delight*”

In the Holy Week hymn “It Happened on That Fateful Night” (LBW 127), Isaac Watts (1674-1748) wrote:

“It happened on that fateful night / When pow’r’s of earth and hell arose Against the Son, our God’s *delight* / And friends betrayed him to his foes.”

In the Easter hymn “With High Delight Let Us Unite” (LBW 140), translated by Martin Franzman (1907-1976), hymn writer Georg Vetter (1536-1599) “pulls out all the stops”:

“With high *delight* let us unite / In songs of sweet jubilation.”

Many other hymns could be cited. But probably none is more important than Luther’s Pentecost hymn “Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord” (LBW 163):

“Teach us to know our God aright / And call him Father with *delight*.”

Luther was a strong advocate of *duty*, but Luther also understood the joyful journey to *delight*.

We Pray ...

Heavenly Father, you are delightful beyond our imagination. Through your Spirit, teach us to delight in you, and to find ever-growing delight in serving you. In Jesus name, Amen.

We All Take Delight in Many Things

Taking “delight” in things has the potential to get in the way of our delight in God.

David Wells writes a telling commentary on American culture in his book “God in the Wasteland.”

“It is one of the defining marks of Our Time that God is now weightless. … Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God’s existence may nonetheless consider him less interesting than television, his commands less authoritative than their appetites for affluence and influence, his judgment no more awe-inspiring than the evening news, and his truth less compelling than the advertisers’ sweet fog of flattery and lies. … Weightlessness tells us nothing about God but everything about ourselves, about our condition, about our psychological disposition to exclude God from our reality” (pp. 88 and 90).¹⁰

To what do you and I assign the beautiful word “*delight*”? A warm shower, a good meal, time spent with loved ones and friends? A new purchase? Is there still a prominent place in our lives for the “high delight” of Vetter’s Easter hymn (left)?

If God and our Savior Jesus are still the best reason for any and all delight, how do we give expression to that delight in our own words and deeds?
The Continuing Call to Delight in God

To each of us, with a promise attached, the Psalmist of old calls out:

“Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

Psalm 37:4

Similar words are found in Question 1 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, authored by a group of English and Scottish theologians and laymen in 1647:

“Question 1. What is the chief end of man?
Answer. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” [emphasis added]

Author John Piper writes: “God created us to live for his glory, and God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in him” (p. 49). In candor and confession, Piper also writes:

“This was the great coming together for me — the breakthrough. What was life about? What was it for? Why do I exist? Why am I here? To be happy? Or to glorify God? Unspoken for years there was in me the feeling that these two were at odds... and that is why I was confused and frustrated so long. Compounding the problem was that many who seemed to emphasize the glory of God in their thinking did not seem to enjoy him much” (p. 31).

“Now we see that in creating us for his [God’s] glory, he is creating us for our highest joy. He is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him” (p. 36).

Youth Evangelist Louie Giglio once joyfully confessed: “My desire is to make knowing and enjoying God the passionate purpose of my life” (p. 47). All of this sounds like delight, doesn’t it? Delight in God!

Still Making the Journey Toward Delight

If we’re honest about it, how many of us would say that “we’ve fully arrived,” that we’re totally at the goal of delighting in God? Isn’t much of our motivation at times still a sense of duty, if even that, rather than delight? Even if we sing about it in worship, wouldn’t it be more truthful to admit, if we’re making any progress here at all, we’re still only on the way?

Continuing the journey from duty to delight, from “shoulds” and “oughts” to the still more excellent way of delighting in God is a holy calling, and a life-long endeavor. Along the way, we might humbly ask: How would my life be different if my own motivation were always more and more delight in God? How would my congregation be changed if this delight in God were echoed by others? How about the life of my denomination? Would a sense of duty and obligation continue be enough, a customary meeting of common expectations? Or would we begin to exhibit a “still more excellent way,” a still more delightful response?

Regarding one of the signs and marks of such living, Piper writes:

“...what I know even more surely is that the greatest joy in God comes from giving his gifts away, not in hoarding them for ourselves. It is good to work and have. It is better to work and have in order to give. ...The world is not impressed when Christians get rich and say thanks to God. They are impressed when God is so satisfying that we give our riches away for Christ’s sake and count it gain” (p. 72, emphasis added).11

By the Spirit’s power, may the fruit of the journey toward delight in God clearly be visible always more and more in each of us!

A True Story of Duty/Delight

Along with Time, Talent and Treasure, Christians have the privilege of Testimony and, through it, stewardship of influence. Who knows when we will have a chance to change hearts and minds by naming the precious name of Jesus in connection to our everyday service?

Years ago, when I traveled a lot in my work, I occasionally earned free upgrades to first class on long flights between the West Coast and Chicago. On one such flight, the head flight attendant asked if I would mind giving up my aisle seat and taking the window seat instead? The last passenger to board would be a frightened first-time flier who had taken a bad fall while deplaning her previous flight. Due to her size and the angle of the fall, she had been pinned between seats in the aisle and needed emergency medical assistance to get up. “You look like someone who could help her through this long flight,” the attendant said, almost pleading with her eyes. Long story short, I said “yes,” moved over to the next seat, and had a delightful time visiting, praying with, and assuring the lady during the long flight.

Half way through the flight, the lead flight attendant asked to speak with me privately. By switching seats, she told me, I had done more than help the lady. I had helped the crew avoid a conflict with the other first-class passengers who, being “regulars” on that flight route, had a history of being rather demanding. “If we don’t keep them happy, it can cost us our jobs. Please, let us do something for you,” the lead flight attendant said as she offered

Continued
Some Thoughts and Questions for Further Discussion

It’s been said that true delight in God springs from God’s delight in us. How is this especially true through our Savior Jesus Christ? See 1 John 4:19.

John Piper writes in Don’t Waste Your Life, “But what I know even more surely is that the greatest joy in God comes from giving away his gifts” (p. 72).11 Can you think of a time when you truly experienced this kind of delight-full giving?

Do you think it’s true that if we delight in God we will also be generous in our giving?

A Lutheran layperson once said: “If parishioners are happy, there won’t be any money problems in the church.” Is there any truth in such a statement? Are there any potential dangers in such a statement?

Do you think there would be any “money problems” in your own congregation or in the North American Lutheran Church if all of its members delighted in God?

Second Corinthians 9:7 says: “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” In what way do these words of Paul also speak to the journey from duty toward delight?

Evidencing his own delight in God, Charles Wesley wrote the following words (LBW 505):

“For thee delightfully employ
Whate’er thy bounteous grace has giv’n,
And run my course with even joy,
And closely walk with thee to heav’n.”

Can we still sing them and mean them?
Bibliography


Superscript numerals in the text refer to the following: