

# Delighting

## *Disciplines of Disciples, Sermon 2*

### Psalm 16

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At times the Bible commands emotions. Take joyfulness as one example: “Rejoice in the Lord always,” writes Paul; “again I will say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). The Psalmist writes similarly, “Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice ... shout for joy” (Psalm 32:11). There’s also contrition, genuine sorrowfulness over sin. John Frederick taught us about this from Psalm 51 last week: “For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it.... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:16-17). We could add the command to be thankful, to have feelings of gratitude toward God: “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good” (Psalm 107:1).

The Bible is, of course, aware that our emotions often seem outside of our control. Commanding your heart to feel happy can be like commanding a stone to smile. And the Bible is aware that at times life can be so hard that certain emotions—like joy—can be near impossible (think of Job<sup>1</sup>). Yet, the Bible does command feelings at times. And today I want to consider the biblical command *to delight*. To delight means to take pleasure in something—to revel in it, enjoy it, savor it.

The Lord commands Israel to delight in His Word as one might delight in a Thanksgiving Day feast: “Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in rich food” (Isaiah 55:2). Speaking to the downcast in Psalm 37, David commands us to take delight in God, “Delight yourself in the Lord” (Psalm 37:4). That even David—the sensitive and hot-blooded David!—commands us to delight is instructive. David is what we might call in modern jargon, “a feeler.” He knows from experience what it’s like to feel controlled by your feelings, rather than feeling like you can control them; think of the episode with Bathsheba, or his reaction to the death of Absalom. But David learned, at least in part, how to funnel and fuel his feelings. He often did so through music and psalm writing.<sup>2</sup> The “sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1) wrote over seventy of the Psalms.

### ***Psalm 16 and the Discipline of Delight***

I want to turn to one of these Psalms, Psalm 16, because it stands as a test case for how David practiced delight. Here, in our second sermon on disciplines of disciples, I want us to consider the discipline of delight by seeing it at work—at work in the heart of David here in Psalm 16.

We don't know the specific situation behind Psalm 16, but it's clear David had faced a trial that was life-threatening: "Preserve me, O God" (v.1). "Because you are at my right hand, I will not be shaken." (v.8). "You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption" (v.10). The danger is now past, and David doesn't focus on how his outward circumstances changed. Rather, he speaks of how his heart changed; how it moved from feelings of fear and despair to the heights of joy, the promises of gladness: "My heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices" (v.9); "In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures (or delights) forevermore" (v.11).

*How did this shift from despair to delight happen? How does David practice the discipline of delight? If we walk through the Psalm, we can see that delighting involves three things: (1) The Portion, (2) The Practice, and (3) The Promise.*

## I. The Portion

David quickly moves past his prayer for protection in v.1 to a decided setting of his face toward God:

I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you." (v.2).

In verses 3-4, he sets his gaze upon those who also seek after God, and resists those who don't:

As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight. The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips (vv. 3-4).

Finally, in verses 5-6, David makes his case crystal clear: He is after God alone.

The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance (vv. 5-6).

Notice the word “portion” in v. 5. David says, “the LORD is my chosen portion.” In David’s time, “portion” often stood for the portions of land that were apportioned to the twelve tribes of Israel. These portions of land were incredibly important for them: the land was their home, security, and livelihood. Everything else they enjoyed—labor, family, worship—depended in large measure on this land.

Some commentators think David may have written Psalm 16 when he’d been driven out of the land. David was of the tribe of Judah, and that tribe’s land apportionment was in southern Israel and included Jerusalem. Throughout David’s life, he was often a man on the run. He fled into the territory of the Philistines when Saul was trying to kill him. At the height of his power, a plot by his son Absalom sent him away from the royal city. At times David found himself outside of his portion of land, sleeping in the wilderness, and even living in caves (see 1 Samuel 21, 22, 27; 2 Samuel 15).

We might imagine the background of Psalm 16 as a time when David felt his kingdom slipping from his hands, his inheritance of land stolen from him. And in this circumstance, he makes this bold declaration: “The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot” (v. 5). God is David’s Land. God is David’s City. God is David’s Good. God is David’s Portion. “I have no good apart from you,” David says. Saint Augustine once wrote, “He who has God has everything; he who has everything but God has nothing.”

*What does it mean for God to be your portion? What does it mean “to have nothing good apart from God?”* It doesn’t mean that you don’t, or shouldn’t, enjoy anything other than God. What it means is that God is your greatest treasure, and you can’t really enjoy other things apart from Him. To lose God would mean to lose a sense of joy or happiness in all else.

Imagine a groom at his wedding. His dearest friends and family are with him. There is a great party planned with good food and wonderful music. There will be so much joy. But the bride doesn’t show up. She bails. Now can this man still enjoy his friends and family? Can he still enjoy the food and music? These things are all still there and haven’t changed at all. Why can’t he go on and enjoy the afternoon with all his friends? Because the bride is his portion. Her presence gives everything else on the wedding day its meaning. Without her, the food loses its taste, the music falls on deaf ears, and the family and friends’ well-wishes mean nothing. This is what it means when God is your portion. To lose God is to lose everything.

This is the first step in understanding David’s practice of delight. He sets the gaze of his soul toward God as his portion. David will not delight in things that require God’s absence—but only things that fall beneath the light of God’s presence.

Second, we can discern something about how David might have *practiced* delight—what he actually did to get his heart to start inclining toward God.

## II. The Practice

In verses 7-9, David speaks of the Lord counseling him and of setting the Lord before him:

I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure (16:7-9).

We get the sense here of God’s closeness to David, both in speaking to David and standing before and beside him. We also see David actively doing something—“setting the Lord before him, always.”

### ***To set God before me is to set myself to live (embody) His Word***

Israelites were forbidden to make images of Yahweh. So, when David says, “I have set the LORD always before me,” he’s not setting up a statue of his deity in a foreign land. More likely, David would be constantly meditating on God’s Word, prayerfully, as a way to invite the presence of God near to him.<sup>3</sup>

Using language similar to v. 8, elsewhere a Psalmist says, “I set your rules before me” (119:30). And in another instance where God’s “counsel” comes up, the Lord says to David: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you” (Psalm 32:8). I believe this image of David “setting the Lord before him” and of God “counseling David” suggests David immersing himself—perhaps by memory—in God’s Word.

It is often the case, especially in the Psalms, that God’s people *experience* delight in God through God’s Word. A well-known verse is Psalm 119:103, “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.” When an ancient Israelite spoke of God’s Word, they often meant the first five

books of the Bible. Especially important was the Law: The Ten Commandments and what is known as the Shema from Deuteronomy 6:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart (Deuteronomy 6:4-6).

Now it might seem strange to us to think of God's *Laws* as sweeter than honey. Have you ever found yourself reciting the Ten Commandments as a way to delight your heart? Are commands such as "thou shalt not lie" and "thou shalt not steal" sweet to the taste? Or when fighting the temptation to envy someone's talent or circumstance, do you find the words, "thou shalt not covet" delightful? On the contrary, in many instances God's laws can seem sour to our taste—especially when they go against competing desires.

But we must think a little deeper if we are to understand what David and others mean when they speak of sweetness and life-giving delight in the Word of God.

What they are experiencing is what you might call the deep-truth of the Word of God. When it is lived, day by day, you discover in your soul and experiences that it's true. It holds water, it has intrinsic validity. Here, in keeping this law, is rock-bottom reality. When a person truly seeks to love God and neighbor, when they stop lying to others and themselves, when they celebrate others' accomplishments rather than coveting, and so on, they begin to feel as though they have touched firmness, their lives are coming into alignment with their true nature. They are not just created in God's image—now, by living His Law, they are shining as God's image.

There is a twofold delight in this living of God's Law. Firstly, it makes life *practically* better. You are like the traveler who, after being lost on bumpy back roads, has found herself back on the highway headed in the right direction. It feels good, even delightful, to be traveling on this path. Secondly, the more one lives according to God's ways, the closer one *feels* to God. As David orders his life according to God's ways—even in a foreign land—he creates in his own heart a house for God. Even away from the Temple in Jerusalem, David is building a temple for God through his own life.

Students, when you choose to obey God rather than follow the crowd, it may seem hard at first. But there is a deep delight in walking a path that you know pleases God.

The discipline of delight means having the Lord as our portion. We practice this by setting Him always before us, day by day *embodying* His Word in such a way that it invites His presence and pleasure into our lives. We taste and see that He is good and say with David: “my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure.” (16:9)

Finally, let us consider the final two verses, 10-11, and what we can call *the promise* of delight. David ends with great confidence that his future promises ever-increasing joy, and he delights in such a promise. To see what this means, we need not only to read the final verses here in Psalm 16 but to see them at work in the first Christian sermon.

### III. The Promise

The final verses in Psalm 16 find David delighting in not only the security that life with God brings but the joy:

For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Some people wonder if David has the afterlife in mind in these verses; if what he means is that God will not abandon him to the darkness of hell but bring him to the joys of heaven. This is precisely how the early Christians understood the meaning, although they had the advantage of learning that in this Psalm the Holy Spirit spoke through David about another.

Shortly after Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciple Peter—filled with the Holy Spirit—gave a bold sermon in the city of Jerusalem:

**Acts 2:22:** “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders ... you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. <sup>24</sup> God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

<sup>25</sup> For David says concerning him [*now Peter quotes the final verses of Psalm 16*],

“I saw the Lord always before me,  
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;  
<sup>26</sup> therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;  
my flesh also will dwell in hope.  
<sup>27</sup> For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,  
or let your Holy One see corruption.  
<sup>28</sup> You have made known to me the paths of life;  
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

But notice who Peter says these words are ultimately about.

<sup>29</sup> Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. <sup>30</sup> Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, <sup>31</sup> he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

**Psalm 16 is about Jesus. And Jesus lived out the reality of Psalm 16—and he did it for us. Jesus suffered the loss of his earthly portion. Jesus suffered the pains of abandonment and death.**

### ***Jesus endured for the joy before him***

But in all these things, Jesus looked *through* the loss and fear and pain of the moment, to the presence of God. He meditated on God’s promises to him. He saw his future in God’s hands. And Jesus endured the cross for the joy [the delight!] set before him (Hebrews 12:2), the promise of “the gladness of God’s presence” (16:11; Acts 2:28).

### ***Jesus’ death for us signals God’s delight in us***

*And do you know what Jesus’ death and resurrection mean for us? They mean not only that God has secured our future—he will not abandon his people to Hell—, but even more so, that God delights in us*

(see Romans 5:8<sup>4</sup>). If God sent His own son to die for us, and His Holy Spirit now to guide us, it's because God *desires us*. As God spoke over His people through the prophets:

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...**; for the LORD **delights in you** (Isaiah 62:4).

The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing (Zephaniah 3:17).

Even if clouds of despair are so thick in your life that you cannot imagine feeling any kind of delight, you can rest assured that there is a delight that enfolds you—the delight of God your Father, extended to you through the outstretched arms of God the Son. And it is just this, God's delight in us, that is the rock-bottom, never-ending, foundation for our own delight in Him: *"He loves me so! How can I not also love him!"*

Friends, our feelings are not sovereign over us; God is. And God delights in us, and God desires that we delight in Him. Set His Son before you this week—as your portion and your highest good. Order your hours according to God's ways. And delight yourself in this astounding truth: in Christ Jesus, God Almighty delights in you.

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## Endnotes

1. "Job opened his mouth.... 'Let the day perish on which I was born...Let that day be darkness'" (Job 3:1-4).
2. A natural musician, it was David's lyre that could calm King Saul when fits of madness descended upon the king.
3. Especially if David is far away from Jerusalem and the Temple—where he might go into the house of the Lord to be with God—we should imagine David meditating on God's law as a way to set the Lord before him.



4. Christ's atoning death for us *displays, demonstrates, proves*, not just God's interest in abstractly upholding the laws of divine justice, but more, his *love* for us: "but God shows his love for **us (you, and me!)** in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).