

Finding True Joy, Happiness and Pleasure

INTRODUCTION:

- I. We live in a world that is constantly looking for joy and true happiness – for real lasting pleasure.
 - A. The problem is, no one seems to know where to find it.
 1. But it doesn't stop people from trying.
 - a. And so, people try to find joy, happiness and pleasure in everything from illegal drugs, alcohol and illicit sex, to isolating themselves in their own little world by spending all their time on the Internet, to losing themselves in the world of video games, or becoming addicted to TV and movies.
 - B. However, finding true joy, happiness and pleasure is really no mystery.
 1. **Psalms 16:11** – *In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*
 2. I'm sure every Christian would agree that true and lasting joy, happiness and pleasure comes only from God.
 3. However, there are times when we all feel we're not as close to God as we would like to be.

4. And there are times when we all go through periods of spiritual weakness – those "down times" when we are troubled with depression or anxiety and uncertainty.
- C. In times like this is there anything we can do to become closer to God?
1. The good news is, "Yes." There are things we can do to draw closer to God.
 2. The answer is found in **Psalms 16:8**: *I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.*
 3. It's only when we truly "set the Lord before us" that we close the gap between ourselves and our God, and receive the true benefits of His presence.
- D. So, in this lesson, I want to look at just a few things we can do to draw closer to God – things we can do to "set the Lord before" us.
1. Anytime you find those feelings of distance between you and God, here are some things you can do.

BODY:

- I. Perhaps the easiest way to "set the Lord before you" is to simply look around at the handiwork of God in creation.
 - A. I would challenge anyone to say they live in a more majestic and more beautiful place than Alaska.

1. When friends hear about all the snow we've been having here, they frequently ask "Why would anyone want to live there?"
 2. My reply is to simply ask, "Have you ever been to Alaska?"
- B. There is no question about the fact that creation speaks to us of God.
1. Creation literally shouts of God's glory and His knowledge.
 - a. **Psalms 19:1-2** – *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. 2 Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge.*
 2. Creation also shouts of God's eternal power and His deity.
 - a. **Psalms 68:8** – *The earth shook; the heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God; Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel.*
 - b. **Romans 1:20** – *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse. . .*
 3. We are so blessed to live in the very heart of such breath-taking beauty of God's creation.
 - a. I don't know about you, but I'm just blown away by the majesty and grandeur of the Northern Lights.

- b. If that doesn't shout about the glory and power of our God, I don't know what would.
- 4. If you want to draw closer to God then I suggest one of the first things you do is to simply look around at God's majestic creation.
- C. By the way, did you know the Bible is filled with examples of others using natural settings to draw closer to God?
 - 1. Isaac would go out into the fields to meditate (cf. Genesis 24:63).
 - 2. Jesus would often go to the mountains to pray (cf. Matthew 14:23).
 - 3. So one of the best ways to draw closer to God is to not just look at all He has created, but to get away from man's creation (cities) and drive or walk into God's creation (nature).
 - 4. In fact, a very beautiful song written by a gospel preacher – a member of the Lord's church – reflects this idea. His name is William Slater, and he wrote:
 - a. *Walking alone at eve and viewing the skies afar,
Bidding the darkness come to welcome each silver star;
I have a great delight in the wonderful scenes above,
God in His power and might is showing His truth and Love.*

– *Alone At Eve*, William W. Slater, vs. 1

- II. Here's another way you can set the Lord before you – namely, through God's revelation, the Bible.
 - A. The Word of God reveals everything we need to know about God.
 - 1. Even though God's creation is a wonderful way to draw near to God, we're limited in what we can learn about God through creation alone.
 - a. We can see His power, His divinity, His glory, and His knowledge and wisdom.
 - b. But we really can't learn anything about His will and purpose for us through creation.
 - 2. Therefore, God revealed Himself – His will and His purpose for us – through His divinely inspired Word, the Bible.
 - 3. This is how we can come to fully and completely know God.
 - a. This is how the apostle Paul put it: **1 Corinthians 2:9-12** – *But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." 10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?*

Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

- b. Paul also wrote: **Ephesians 3:3-5** – . . . *by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets. . .*

B. Depending on the Word of God to draw closer to God is nothing new – again the Bible is filled with many wonderful examples.

- 1. David repeatedly used Scripture to stay close to God.
 - a. **Psalms 119:92-93** – *Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction. 93 I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life.*
 - b. **Psalms 119:105** – *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*
 - c. **Psalms 119:147-148** – *I rise before the dawning of the morning, and cry for help; I hope in Your word. 148 My eyes*

*are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on
Your word.*

2. Jesus used Scripture to stay close to the Father and to ward off the Tempter.

a. **Matthew 4:4** – *But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"*

b. **Matthew 4:7** – *Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"*

c. **Matthew 4:10** – *Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"*

3. Let the Word of God help you draw closer to Him who is the only source of peace and strength.

4. William Slater also reflected in his song on how God draws near with His Word.

a. *Sitting alone at eve and dreaming the hours away,
Watching the shadows falling now at the close of day;
God in His mercy comes with His Word He is drawing near,
Spreading His love and truth around me and everywhere. . .*

– *Alone At Eve*, William W. Slater, vs. 2

III. Not only can you draw closer to God through His creation, and through His Word, you can also draw closer to God through prayer.

A. I think we all know that every successful relationship has to be a two-way relationship – where each one in the relationship communicates with the other.

1. God had communicated and revealed Himself and His nature to us through His creation and especially through His Word.

2. Now it's our turn to do our part and communicate with God through prayer.

3. Through prayer we have the blessing of being able to express every concern to God, and by which we also receive blessings in return.

a. **Philippians 4:6-7** – *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

4. And through prayer we can draw close to God in a bold and confident manner where we obtain mercy and grace in return.

a. **Hebrews 4:14-16** – *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of*

God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

B. Once again, we have many wonderful examples in the Bible of those who drew closer to God through prayer – especially in times of need.

1. This is what David did when he needed to draw near to God to confess his sins and seek forgiveness.

a. **Psalms 32:3-6** – *When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. 4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. 5 I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. 6 For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him.*

2. Jesus also drew closer to God through prayer during the moment of His greatest trial.

- a. **Matthew 26:36-44** – *Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." 37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. 38 Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." 39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." 40 Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 42 Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." 43 And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. 44 So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.*
3. If you want to draw near to God, draw near to God's throne through prayer – let Him know of your deepest needs.

4. Once again, William Slater's song reflects on the beauty of being able to plead with God to guide us to our home in heaven.

- a. *Closing my eyes at eve and thinking of heaven's grace,
Longing to see my Lord, yes, meeting Him face to face;
Trusting Him as my all wheresoever my footsteps roam,
Pleading with Him to guide me on to the spirit's home.*

– *Alone At Eve*, William W. Slater, vs. 3

IV. Finally, allow me to suggest one more way you and I can draw closer to God – through associating with and having fellowship with God's people, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

A. There is no question about the strength we receive from associating with one another

1. Solomon explains why there really is strength in numbers.

- a. **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12** – *Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. but woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. 11 Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? 12 Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

2. The bottom line is we need one another to remain strong and faithful – because there is a very real danger in falling away if we begin to isolate ourselves.
 - a. **Hebrews 3:12-13** – *Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*
 - b. **Hebrews 10:23-25** – *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*
 3. Just as coals in a fire keep each other hot, assembling together is designed to keep our "fire" for the Lord burning as well.
- B. And, as you might guess, we have examples of where Christians of the first century drew strength from one another.
1. Where did Peter and John go after they were first threatened and then released by the Sanhedrin?
 - a. **Acts 4:23-24** – *And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders*

had said to them. 24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord. . .

2. And later, when Peter was arrested by Herod and put in prison, and then released by an angel in the middle of the night, where was the first place Peter went?
 - a. **Acts 12:12** – *So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.*
- C. When you stop to think about it, the times when we assemble together to worship is really a taste of what it will be like to be in God's presence in heaven.
1. There's no question about the fact that we can draw near to God together through songs, prayers, the observance of the Lord's Supper, through giving back to God from the blessings He has given us, and through a study of His divinely inspired Word.
 2. But just imagine how wonderful it will be when we finally come into the very presence of God in heaven.
 3. Again, William Slater reflects on this great longing in the chorus of his beautiful song "Alone At Eve."
 - a. *Oh! for a home with God, a place in His courts to rest,
Sure in a safe abode with Jesus and the blest;*

*Rest for a weary soul once redeemed by the Savior's love,
Where I will be pure and whole and live with my God above!*

– *Alone At Eve*, William W. Slater, Chorus

CONCLUSION:

I. So, if you're feeling a little distance between you and God, you can solve that problem by simply doing what the Psalmist David did – by setting the Lord before you.

A. How do you do that?

1. First, by contemplating God's creation. His power, majesty and divine nature is seen all around us – especially in Alaska.
2. Second, by spending time immersed in God's divinely inspired Word. This is how God communicates to you His will and His desires for you.
3. And third, by spending time in prayer. This is the unique privilege we have as children of God to talk with our Father in heaven. Prayer is how we communicate the desires of our heart to God.
4. And finally, by having fellowship with your brothers and sisters in Christ – especially in worship – where we can encourage, strengthen and edify one another.

B. If you do these things, you will not only be able to draw closer to God, you will also be singing with David the words of Psalm 16:

1. *"In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."* (Psalms 16:11)

II. Of course, being able to draw close to God assumes you already have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and that you're continuing to live faithful before Him.

A. If you haven't obeyed the gospel of Christ, I can assure you there is distance between you and God.

1. Sadly, that distance is self-imposed. That distance is of your own making – it's not something God desires.
2. God has done His part to provide you salvation:
 - a. God sent Jesus to die on the cross and shed His blood for you.
 - b. Jesus willingly laid down His life to redeem you from your sins.
 - c. And the Holy Spirit has revealed in Scripture what you now need to do – namely, come to Christ in faith, repenting of your sins, confessing your faith in Him, and be buried with Him in baptism for the remission of your sins.

3. Since God has done His part to draw you to Him, now it's your turn to draw near to God through your obedience to His will.
- B. And, if you're already a Christian, and yet feel a distance between you and your God because of sin in your life, there's a solution to that problem as well.
1. Simply humbly draw near to God in prayer, asking God to forgive you of those sins, and to give you the strength you need to live more faithful in the future.
 2. There's no quicker way to draw near to God than through repentance and prayer.
- C. But maybe you're feeling a distance between you and God simply because you're going through periods of spiritual weakness – one of those "down times" when you're troubled with depression or anxiety and uncertainty.
1. It's at times like this that we need the prayers and the encouragement of our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- D. So, whatever may be putting distance between you and God, we urge you to close that gap.
1. Simply do what James the Lord's brother said you need to do:
James 4:8 – *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*