

enjoy

Finding the Freedom to Delight Daily
in God's Good Gifts



Trillia J. Newbell

Praise for
Enjoy

“In *Enjoy*, Trillia Newbell draws us toward a better understanding of the goodness of God. She invites us to give ourselves permission not just to see his goodness, but to savor it in tangible ways in the simple pleasures of life. Her message is challenging and freeing, practical and personal, spoken with the graciousness that characterizes her life and ministry. I was drawn to reflect on my tendency to misuse or take for granted God’s good gifts, and I was reminded that enjoying them as they were intended to be enjoyed is nothing less than an act of worship.”

—JEN WILKIN, Bible teacher and author of *Women of the Word*

“I can’t think of anyone who better epitomizes the theme of this book than Trillia Newbell! Her joyful spirit and big-as-the-world smile are infectious and emanate from a woman who, in the midst of a broken world, has found true, robust joy in our God who is making all things new and has given us countless good gifts to enjoy.”

—NANCY DEMOSS WOLGEMUTH, author, host/teacher of *Revive Our Hearts*

“Trillia Newbell writes with wisdom and grace on why Christians can and should take joy in the gifts that God has given us. This practical book will help all Christians see how the gospel transforms every part of our lives. Trillia Newbell is a gift to the church.”

—RUSSELL MOORE, president, Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

“Are you weary of contrived checklists and lackluster limitations that stifle faith and steal your joy? This book is the breath of fresh air you’ve been craving. In this delightfully refreshing read, Trillia invites us, indeed, to taste and see that the Lord is good—and so is this glorious world and everything in it. God has given us all good things to enjoy, and this book sets us free to relish every moment of every aspect of our lives.”

—DEIDRA RIGGS, author of *Every Little Thing*

“In her new book *Enjoy*, Trillia Newbell warmly invites us to the forgotten feast of joyful living. She reveals how we can find delight in our duties, pleasure in our play, fellowship in our friendships, and wonder in our world. Most of all, she faithfully encourages our enjoyment of God as we enjoy the gifts he’s given.”

—MELISSA KRUGER, author of *The Envy of Eve* and
Walking with God in the Season of Motherhood

“I grew up in the church. I’ve heard literally thousands of messages canvassing almost every topic you can imagine. Almost. I have never in my life heard a single message that God has greenlighted me to simply enjoy him and all of the gifts he has for me—until now. My friend Trillia Newbell has done both Christians and those curious about Christ a great service. She’s eulogized the ‘curmudgeon God,’ portrayed by so many Christians throughout the centuries and has unleashed a smiling God who wants his children to come alive through the gifts he’s given us. I so wish I had read this decades ago.”

—BRYAN LORITTS, lead pastor of Abundant Life Christian Fellowship and author of *Saving the Saved*

“As you walk with Christ and mature, you come to realize true Christians live in a state well described by the apostle Paul: ‘Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.’ Trillia Newbell has the ability to point you to real joy in Jesus while not ignoring the pain that’s an ever-present reality for us all. You will find real comfort in her biblical exposition of this world’s beauty without sugarcoating the bitter parts of Christian life. I truly appreciate an author capable of such balance.”

—AIXA LÓPEZ, blogger at Corazón a Papel (*Heart to Paper*); pastor’s wife; and board member, Christian Alliance for Orphans (CAFO) of Guatemala

“God is mighty and powerful, all knowing and everywhere at once. These are good truths. God is also a loving Father who gives good gifts to be enjoyed deeply by his children. Christians should belly laugh often, enjoy dinner with friends, and be awestruck by the beauty of God’s creation. In *Enjoy*, Trillia does a masterful job of helping us learn to enjoy God’s good graces to us.”

—MATT CHANDLER, lead pastor, teaching, The Village Church

“Can we honor God by enjoying his good gifts? Boldly and simply, Trillia Newbell says yes. Take up her practical and biblical challenge to find delight in the everyday. Most important, let your heart brim with gratitude and praise for the Giver of all good things.”

—JEN POLLOCK MICHEL, award-winning author of *Teach Us to Want* and *Keeping Place*

“Trillia J. Newbell has an infectious joy. Her joy in the Lord and the good gifts he gives us bursts forth from these pages like a firecracker on a summer night, like a flow of water between the rocks, like an uncontainable word of praise for a job well done. This book, like its author, is a delight.”

—KAREN SWALLOW PRIOR, PHD, author of *Booked* and
Fierce Convictions

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MULTNOMAH

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Trade Paperback ISBN 978-1-60142-852-3

eBook ISBN 978-1-60142-853-0

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Cover design by Kristopher K. Orr

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Published in the United States by Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Newbell, Trillia J., author.

Title: Enjoy : finding the freedom to delight daily in God's good gifts / Trillia J. Newbell.

Description: First Edition. | Colorado Springs, Colorado : Multnomah, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016038847 (print) | LCCN 2016040507 (ebook) | ISBN 9781601428523 (pbk.) | ISBN 9781601428530 (electronic)

Subjects: LCSH: Joy—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Pleasure—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Spirituality—Christianity. | Glory of God.

Classification: LCC BV4647J68 N48 2016 (print) | LCC BV4647J68 (ebook) | DDC 248.4—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016038847>

Printed in the United States of America

2016—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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*This book is dedicated to my kids,
Weston and Sydney.*

*Life will get difficult, but God is
truly good and faithful.*

Believe in him. Lean on him.

*I pray you learn to delight in him
and enjoy his good gifts to you.*

*May you glorify God and enjoy
him forever.*

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An Invitation to Enjoy

A few years ago I bought a bike. Not just any old bike, but a Specialized road bike, which is a style often used for racing or longer rides. After spending a couple of months mostly sitting to finish up several writing projects, I wanted a new and interesting outlet for fitness. A good friend is an avid cyclist, and hearing his delight in the sport made me that much more curious. So instead of testing the waters, I just jumped straight in.

Let me tell you, I love cycling. For so many reasons. I'm never more aware of God's beautiful creation than while riding through it on my bike. I'm drawn to worship and rejoice and thank God for his gifts, like oxygen, trees, and the horses I ride past on one of my routes. Not to mention how much I benefit from the exercise, which helps me focus with renewed energy when I return to the tasks of my day.

But here's the thing: simply enjoying my time on the bike didn't feel right to me. It seemed that my cycling needed to have a greater purpose, that the time invested needed to be legitimized by something with deeper meaning. So not long after I bought

the road bike, I began training for a triathlon. I connected with an organization I love and built a fundraiser out of my leisure activity. That felt right. The problem is, it wasn't.

As I began to formalize my plans, I connected with a leader of the organization I wanted to fundraise for. Soon I realized that what he desired me to do and what I actually had the time for wasn't possible. I couldn't finish all the projects for the fundraising effort and train and still have time for the rest of my life activities related to work and family. It quickly became too much for me. In the end, a small wreck on my bike put me out of training for a few months. In terms of triathlon training, especially when new to the sport, that's a long time. In the end, I missed my race. I was terribly sad but realized God was teaching me much through this situation.

I started to recognize the importance of knowing my limits and learning the discipline of saying no. But beyond that, I began to ask myself why I felt I couldn't have a hobby solely for the purpose of enjoyment. Why did I wrestle with guilt over time spent riding my bike, feeling as if it were a waste of time unless I turned it into something greater? Could a leisure activity possibly be a way to glorify God?

In the months since, I've discovered the answer is a definite yes.

Have you, too, struggled with whether it's okay to enjoy something in your life, such as maintaining a flower garden or sitting down to read or dancing with your husband? I imagine I'm not alone in feeling confused about the purpose and significance of leisure, as well as other pleasures in life, and I'd love to share with you some of what I've discovered. In this book, you and I will consider together why God gave us things like leisure, relation-

ships, work, creation, and sex. And my prayer is that in learning to better enjoy, recognize, and appreciate these gifts, we'll learn to more clearly see and more passionately worship the provider of all these good gifts.

GOD'S INVITATION TO ENJOY

The world has its share of dark and difficult things. After all, life is not all rainbows and butterflies. I know this all too well, having experienced the deaths of dear loved ones, the pain of unfair criticism, and the agony of miscarriages. Yet the Bible specifically instructs us to rejoice in our sorrows, to delight and give thanks. Does this mean we're supposed to walk around pretending everything is okay? I don't think so.

The apostle Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, unpacked this apparent paradox. After describing the various sufferings he and his companions had endured, Paul wrote of being "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Corinthians 6:10). He didn't pretend life was easy. He acknowledged the hardships he had endured, and yet he also recognized that he had a great Savior and, as a result, much reason for rejoicing.

Paul continued this theme in 1 Thessalonians: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (5:16–18). He also revealed that joy is a fruit of the Spirit—something that is developed and nurtured within us by his presence in our lives and by his grace (see Galatians 5:22). So we can conclude that we *need* God in order to have true and lasting joy.

The reality is that you and I live in a fallen world, yet at the same time, God has given us abundantly more than we could ask

for or imagine. You and I have been given gifts upon gifts from God, gifts he intends for our enjoyment. In the pages to come, we are going to think on these things and even experiment with how we can move beyond recognition of these wonderful gifts to practical delight in them.

So what does it look like to truly enjoy? I think God lays it out for us in 1 Thessalonians, in the verse we just looked at. Our enjoyment is all about him. He gives good gifts, and we in turn thank him. But we not only thank God—we experience the fullness of enjoyment as we let those gifts point us to truths about him.

Think about your favorite dish. My mouth begins to water as I imagine taking a bite of a strawberry dipped in Nutella. Eating a strawberry can seem so trivial until we begin to reflect on the Giver of the gift. Knowing who is behind the gift brings significance to that food and prompts an attitude of thanksgiving. We can enjoy every single bite to the glory of God (see 1 Corinthians 10:31).

The reality, however, is that nothing in this world can be truly fulfilling. The whole earth groans for the new heaven and earth (see Romans 8:22). We long for something better. It's a longing that won't be fulfilled here—not now, not on this earth. The president of Desiring God ministries, Jon Bloom, summed up this sentiment well:

Right now even the best things are not what they should be. And so much goes so very wrong. In this partial age, our bodies, our loved ones, our careers, our creations, our investments, and our plans are all subject to the forces of futility (Romans 8:20). This age is marked more by

suffering (8:18), longing (8:19), groaning (8:23), and hope (8:24) than by fulfillment.¹

I think the Preacher in Ecclesiastes would have given Bloom a hearty “Amen!” When I read the first few sentences of Ecclesiastes, it makes me want to throw in the towel and head straight to heaven! “All is vanity,” he proclaims. Why bother with toil, or anything else for that matter? Yet if you keep reading, you see redemption. You see why we participate in the everyday activities of life: it’s all vanity, sure, but it’s all a gift from our heavenly Father! Consider these biblical contrasts:

Toil is exhausting (2:22–23); rejoice in God’s good gift of work (5:19).

The toil to eat and drink is vain (Psalm 127:2); eating, drinking, and work are God’s gift to man (Ecclesiastes 3:12–13).

There’s much to lament about, but we can and should enjoy, delight, and rejoice. Zack Eswine, pastor of Riverside Church in St. Louis, Missouri, puts it like this: “[The Preacher in Ecclesiastes] maintains that God exists and is knowable. Therefore purpose can be recovered, not beneath the sun, but in the One who created the sun.”²

Purpose. There must be purpose in order for us to make sense of the world. That purpose isn’t found in the world; it’s found only in God. If, as *The Westminster Catechism* declares, the chief end (or purpose) of man is “to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever,”³ then part of enjoying God now is learning to enjoy what he has done, what he has given, and what he has created.

Let’s start our adventure into more fully enjoying God by looking at one of the first things he revealed about himself in the Bible.

GOD DELIGHTS

In Genesis 1 God created the heavens and the earth, and what did he say? Not “I did an okay job.” No, he delighted in all he created. He said it was good and then *very* good! This wasn’t a half-hearted proclamation. He announced “It is good” with the same power as when he said, “Let there be light.”

Notice also as you read through the creation story that each time God created something, he paused and said it was good.⁴ He didn’t wait until the end of all his work and then declare it good. All along the way, every detail was thoughtfully created—and it was good. The light, sea, animals, and plants—he saw that they were all good.

I’m not especially creative when it comes to art, but I do love to cook. As I think about God creating the whole earth, it reminds me of what it’s like to cook a meal, though this example certainly will fall short! When I roast fresh vegetables, for example, I need to gather the ingredients—sweet potatoes, red onions, Yukon potatoes, carrots, turnips, leeks, garlic, and maybe a little cauliflower—and then slice and dice. It’s not uncommon for me to pause and take a picture of the raw vegetables because, to me, there’s unique beauty and goodness in the sliced vegetables. I usually delight in the aroma of one of the spices I decide to toss in along with the olive oil. Even now, writing this, I had to take a brief moment to close my eyes and imagine the smell! After forty minutes of roasting in the oven and occasional tossing to mix the flavors, I pull the vegetables out. Again, I’m reminded that it’s good. And that’s only the sight and fragrance! When I taste the explosion of flavors, the goodness of these foods is evident to me.

Now, let's go back to Genesis 1. Can you imagine the delight God must have experienced when he created all things and they were perfect? I get such joy out of cooking a panful of vegetables—surely when God said his creation was good, he meant it in the purest, most delightful way. What he made was very good. That our holy, awesome God would take pleasure in his creation and declare its goodness is truly amazing.

When I think about the creation story, it's not hard for me to imagine how the Lord could make the sea and say it's good, or plants and animals and say they are good. But think about how the Lord knew that one day man would sin against him and that this sin would affect every aspect of his beautiful creation, yet he still created us and said man was good. It is unbelievably remarkable to me. The author of Psalm 8 captures my thoughts well:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your
fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in
place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him dominion over the works of your
hands;
you have put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen,

and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
(verses 3–9)

I look to Genesis 1, and I see God's amazing handiwork and marvel that he delights in man. Zephaniah 3:17 tells us that God rejoices over us. This is true even after the Fall. What amazing grace! And we know that God so loved the world that he gave his Son for us. It's astonishing and humbling. It shouldn't be this way, but it is.

So how does all this relate to our delight in God's gifts? What's the opportunity for you and me?

As God's image bearers, you and I have the capacity to reflect certain aspects of our heavenly Father. And there is no doubt he has given us the same capacity to declare over his creation that it is good. We can rejoice and delight and find joy in what he has given us. But as sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, we must also contend with those things that tempt us not to enjoy.

DISTORTED BY THE FALL

Of all creation, we know that man was unique. Adam and Eve were created in the image of God and given dominion over everything else. After creating mankind, God finished his work and declared that it was very good. And then he rested. (So *rest* must be a good thing, right?)

So here we are. God has created Eden and placed earth's first people in the garden to work it. Work was part of his original design, even in paradise! God gave them everything they would need—I imagine it was actually *far* beyond what they could ever need. There was only one rule: don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. From our vantage point, it doesn't seem like a tough request. *Hey—you've got all you need. Surely you can abstain from eating from this one tree, right?* But we know how this ended, and it wasn't pretty. Eve fell into Satan's trap, the couple ate the apple, their eyes were opened to good and evil, they tried to clothe themselves, and finally they hid from God. The world was forever changed as a result of their disobedience. What was once beautiful had now been marred by sin.

It would be easy for me to self-righteously declare that, in their place, I wouldn't have eaten that fruit. I'd like to think I would have self-control, that I wouldn't covet, that I wouldn't fall for the lies of the devil and question God's goodness for me and commands for living. God had given them so much to enjoy, yet they decided it wasn't enough. The truth is that the same lies we see in Genesis 3 often hinder us today from enjoying what God has given to us.

As I noted earlier, true and right enjoyment focuses on God, on delighting and enjoying him forever. But because of the Fall, our approach toward enjoyment seems to fall into two different categories: either you and I are fully engaged in hedonistically pursuing our joy and fulfillment in the things of this earth, or we fear that anything we take joy in is ultimately sinful and selfish. We live either as if the world were our playground and everything is ultimately about us and our fulfillment or as if we were wasting precious time if not engaged in serious pursuits.

Some may suggest the solution is simply to live a little and enjoy what God has made as long as you're careful to thank him as you delight. As I've thought and studied, I don't think this is how one truly enjoys. It's not that we find something we enjoy and then try to cram God into it. We enjoy because we know that the gift is given by God for our enjoyment. The gift starts with God as the Giver. If we believe this and see all things as his gifts to us, we are free to abandon our man-made rules and self-imposed guilt and simply enjoy.

Discontentment

But fixing our eyes on the Giver is rarely our natural response to good gifts. Sometimes it can be a struggle even to recognize certain things in our lives as gifts.

My children are incredibly grateful kids, but every now and then I'll see this struggle played out in their response to something I've given them. You probably know what I'm talking about. You've labored in the kitchen for hours, or maybe just five minutes, but at least you're making an effort to feed them, right? You set a plateful of love in the shape of food in front of one of your kids only to hear, "I don't want that." *What? You don't want it? Do you want to eat at all?* We may be tempted to pull out the classic line, "There are kids who have nothing, so you'd better eat this."

The truth is, we can be just like our kids. We can have so much and then say to God, "I don't want that."

My husband and I attend a church small group that includes a great mix of personalities. Not one of us is similar, actually. Recently, this was highlighted during our prayer time. Winter was on the horizon, and I confessed to the group that I tend to become

melancholy and despondent in the winter, when it's dark, cold, and rainy. I know this is influenced by the seasons, because the moment the sun comes out in the spring, my demeanor changes—I'm lighter and feel a sense of joy as I see life return to the earth. So this year I thought I'd take action and ask for prayer. Another woman in my group is the exact opposite. She loves winter and rain—lots of rain. I would pray for sunshine, and she would pray for downpours! Besides having a good laugh and fighting over prayer requests during those winter days, I realized the Lord was showing me something about enjoyment: when my heart is discontented, it's hard for me to see God's work and gifts.*

I've prayed for some time now that the Lord would help me enjoy the darkness of winter. He answered the prayer—not by taking away the dark but by helping me think of creative ways to enjoy it.

One memorable Saturday, the temperatures were low and a chilly rain was pouring. I set up our little music system, pulled out some games, and opened a sliding glass door to the back porch so we could hear the rain, and our family began to play and sing together. It was one of the most delightful Saturday mornings we've had. The darkness remained and the rain still fell, but by focusing not on my discontentment but on the gift of a slow day at home with my family, I found a reason to enjoy the rain. I'm not saying every rainy day is like that, but it did serve as a reminder to me that God is good even in the darkness.

A lack of contentment isn't the only reason we might struggle with enjoyment, but it is likely one of the root causes. We may desire a different home, child, husband, job, body, meal, or even

* Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a real disease that affects many. For more information, resources, or help, visit the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation at www.ccef.org.

lifestyle for various reasons, but at the root you'll likely find a heart wrestling with contentment. Perhaps you've had the thought, *If I only had _____, then I would be joyful*, or *If he'd only change that aspect of his personality, then our marriage would be perfect and I could enjoy him*.

I would go so far as to say that if we can learn to be content, we can know the joys of life in any circumstance and declare along with Paul the famous words of Philippians 4: "For I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content" (verse 11). Paul was persecuted, imprisoned, and abandoned by his friends, and yet he learned to be content. Jeremiah Burroughs, a seventeenth-century Puritan writer, made this observation about this passage: "The doctrinal conclusion briefly is this: That to be well skilled in the mystery of Christian contentment is the duty, glory, and excellence of a Christian."⁵ That's a fairly strong statement, don't you think? But I'm convinced that, by the grace of God, we too can train ourselves to be content in any and every circumstance.

Paul learned to be content, and it resulted in peace. But what if he had instead grown angry, resentful, and cynical because of his circumstances? I imagine we might have different epistles! But beyond that, his personal life and well-being would have been strained. He would have, of course, remained in relationship with God because of Jesus, but that relationship would also have been strained. If Paul had not fought for contentment, perhaps he would have given up on ministry or would have begun serving the Lord in resentment rather than out of love. If Paul hadn't fought for contentment and joy during his suffering, he may have assumed that God left him to suffer alone. But Paul understood the eternal glory and reward that was awaiting him. When we don't receive what we think we deserve and allow discontentment to

consume us, the result is grumbling, complaining, frustration, and anger. We begin to view the world and everyone in it, including God, as being set against us. In our discontentment, we often stiff-arm the Lord's good gifts to us, and instead of receiving and enjoying, we grumble. We see fault in them, or we long for something else. It's as if he brought his bride, the church, to a feast with Gulf Coast shrimp and we asked for a Big Mac instead.

What God chooses to give us is infinitely better than what we think we want or need. This, among other reasons, is why we want to fight to be content with what the Lord gives us.

Ingratitude

Part of this battle to receive good gifts from God is reflected in the way we receive good gifts from other people. I wonder if Paul recognized this as he described his interaction with the Philippian church. As we read on to verses 14–20, we get a glimpse of the remarkable relationship between the Philippian church and Paul. The church continually showered Paul with gifts, as if they couldn't help themselves. They wanted Paul to know how grateful they were for his labors on their behalf. And Paul never once sought the gifts! He received them only because he knew it would bring the Christians joy and also because he knew their sacrifice was a fragrant offering to the Lord. He realized the value of their giving went well beyond simply supplying his needs.

This relationship serves as an example for our own earthly relationships. I definitely have friends and family whom I love dearly, and I can't help but shower them with gifts. But what if Paul had continually refused their gifts? What if my friends and family did the same? What if he mocked them or sent their gifts back? What if Paul never thanked them? Surely we give without

the need for thanks, but the gratitude of the receiver is a kind blessing. I'd be sad, maybe even slightly hurt, and definitely confused if my gifts met with resistance, especially from those I love most. Why wouldn't someone want something that is good?

What Paul probably realized was that the kindness and love of the Philippian church toward him was an extension of God's care and love for him. After thanking them for their gifts and stating that he was well supplied because of their generosity, he pointed their attention (and his!) back to the Lord: "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (verse 19).

Sometimes our pride keeps us from receiving and being thankful for good things from others. We don't like to receive. Our pride keeps us from wanting to appear needy. We can fear that receiving good gifts from others might reveal our need or even our inadequacy. But in our relationship with the Lord, we offer nothing; all we *can* do is receive. Sure, we can offer praise and we can thank him, but again, it's all because of him. It's all about him.

When we understand that everything we have and do in this life is from and about him, you and I can guard against the temptation to worship the creature and the created rather than the Creator. In other words, we can enjoy life while also remembering to give God the glory for what we have or do or taste or see. We receive graciously with thanksgiving, rather than pursuing gifts for their own sake, which can lead to sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry, jealousy, rivalries, envy, and other "works of the flesh" (Galatians 5:19–21). As we find our joy in the Lord, our hearts become content and we find our lives characterized by fruit of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, and self-control.

Guilt

Because of the Fall we sometimes fail to recognize the “good” of God’s gifts and, like Adam and Eve, reach for something we think we’ll like more. Other times we fail to recognize the Giver of those gifts, and again we focus on feeding our desires. Yet another effect of the Fall is that we’re tempted to ignore the various gifts God has given us because of guilt. We struggle with feeling as if we were wrong to enjoy them. Maybe you think, *I shouldn’t eat that. I shouldn’t care about how my home is decorated. Sitting on a beach is a waste of time.* Remember my bike? Yeah, guilt is exactly what I was experiencing.

But hasn’t God given us dominion over all creation? One of the first things God did when he created male and female was to declare that they had dominion over the earth. God told them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over . . . every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28).

Please don’t misunderstand me; I’m not calling for a reckless rule without thought or concern over how to wield our dominion. God has given us a great responsibility and honor, and we must steward his world to the best of our ability. How that looks for you and for me may vary, but the command to glorify him in it remains universal. To eat, drink, and do all things to the glory of God means not abusing the good things he has given to us. But I think we forget that we have dominion over the earth. Instead of enjoying it, we lament, worry, and feel guilt when we attempt to delight in the things the Lord has given us. Again, the gift giving started with God in Genesis 1, and you and I need to remember that the gifts we experience today begin with God too.

As I reflect on the Fall of man, it’s humbling to see how

similar we are to Eve. Her sin isn't all that different from our sin and struggles today. But our difficulties in fully enjoying God's gifts to us aren't just related to Eve's temptation. As I mentioned earlier, we often find it difficult to simply enjoy the things of earth. We believe we must have a great purpose in our pursuit of them. Our hobbies must be legitimized or incentivized. Or maybe shame leads us to believe we don't deserve to enjoy anything. In view of the people suffering around the world, and sometimes in our own lives, how can we sit here and enjoy our relationships, sex, food, arts, creation, and more?

NOT THE END OF THE STORY

It would be tragic if the story ended with a world broken by Adam and Eve's sin. Thankfully, it doesn't. God always had a plan of redemption for the world. He sent his Son to redeem the world, and that alone is means for great rejoicing. And in time, all things will be made new.

But well before Matthew 1, God cared immediately for the needs of Adam and Eve. He sent them out of the garden clothed with garments of skins. God cares deeply for his creatures and is indeed the Giver of good gifts. In the meantime, we can live in the certainty that although our world is absolutely fallen and stained by sin, God's gifts are all around us.

The Fall of man introduced sin and decay into God's perfect setting. But God is a God who redeems. Not only does he delight and rejoice in his creation, but he's also given you and me the capability to enjoy, delight in, and give thanks for all he has created.

But how can we live this reality on a daily basis?

THE ENJOY PROJECT

My goal for this book is that, together, you and I will gain a deeper understanding of what it means to delight daily in God's good gifts—and that we'll put that understanding into practice. So I designed The Enjoy Project as a tool to help us put our faith into action.

Please bear in mind that the project is *not* a must-do list. In other words, you can enjoy God's gifts without completing any of these steps. And you certainly aren't obligated to do this in order to please God. This is simply a list of suggestions to help us all—that's it! So if attempting the project will add to your stress or not completing it will leave you feeling as if you've failed, please don't attempt the project. It's simply here for you to use as much or as little as is helpful for you. Now that you understand what The Enjoy Project is *not*, let me explain what it *is*.

When I told you about my cycling experience, I mentioned that I jumped straight into the sport and took off. That's true—kind of. I bought the bike, but not until after some thorough research and asking advice from my cycling friends. I then bought a book about triathlon training and joined a triathlon team to get a little help. I knew I wanted to do it, and although I had the necessary tool (the bike), I realized it would be helpful to have a little push—teammates and trusted friends to cheer me on and guide me. My hope is that this book will be a tool and The Enjoy Project will help propel and guide you and me along the way to enjoyment.

At the end of each chapter, we'll pause to consider seven or eight ideas for how we can put to use what we're learning. Assuming you read a chapter per week, the project will give you ideas for

applying that week's insights while reading the next chapter. The goal is to put into practice at least one item per chapter, or as many as you are able to, with the hope that you'll eventually do all seven. Of course, feel free to do whatever you'd prefer. If you would like to try one a day, hitting all seven in the week, go for it!

The point of the project is simply to begin to put into action what you've learned, in ways that will increase your own enjoyment—and often enrich the lives of others.

I'd like to encourage you to keep a journal for each week. Again, this is not a rule, simply a suggested way to track what you experience during the Project as your eyes are opened to new opportunities to delight in God's goodness. I don't think you need to write pages and pages, but a paragraph detailing your daily experience might prove useful.

God encourages us to recount his goodness, so perhaps journaling your Enjoy Project will help you remember God's faithfulness and take note of how you and others were affected by it.

The Enjoy Project is developed in such a way that it could be done completely on your own, but if you can, grab a friend (or two or three) to do it with you. If you decide to do it in a group, schedule a consistent time to connect and exchange notes, share fun stories, and encourage one another. Help your friend resist the temptation to feel guilty while she's trying to enjoy!

In summary, here's what it looks like:

1. Find The Enjoy Project at the end of each chapter.
2. Decide which suggestion(s) you'd like to try.
3. Schedule a day to do it, and map out a plan, if needed.
4. Do it.

5. Journal about the experience. How effective was it? Were you able to enjoy the process? What encouraged you about it? What new thing might you begin enjoying as a result? How did it affect others around you? How was God glorified, or how did you recognize God's goodness through this action?
6. If you're in a group, share your thoughts.

To put the Project to the test, a friend and I decided to do it from start to finish. We were able to take what we were discovering about God, roll up our sleeves, and figure out how to enjoy him and all he has done. I was challenged, encouraged, and inspired. I was amazed to realize what I had been taking for granted. The Project brought intentionality to all that we were doing and thinking about. It truly was a joy!

Before we move on to the Project, just one more word of explanation: You'll notice that the seventh suggestion for each week is to "pray and preach the gospel to yourself." I've come to realize that, as followers of Christ, we are what I call leaky vessels. We forget to remember that it is the gospel—the reality that Jesus died on the cross, bearing the wrath that we deserved, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father on our behalf—that enables us to live and enjoy life. The gospel isn't something we simply hear once and move on from; it should guide our every moment. If you have placed your faith and trust in the finished work of the cross, then you are clothed with Christ's righteousness. We can all approach the throne of grace because of Jesus. Of all God's good gifts to us, salvation should be the one we delight in at every opportunity.



The Enjoy Project: An Invitation to Enjoy

This is the beginning of The Enjoy Project! Here are your suggestions for practicing joy this week:

1. Decide how you will document your journey, whether by journaling, starting a blog series, or some other means. If you are journaling, go ahead and secure a journal.
2. If you've decided that accountability will be a helpful tool, identify who you will invite to join you in The Enjoy Project.
3. There is beautiful fruit that can come from learning to enjoy. What are a few areas, specifically concerning the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22–23, in which you hope to grow during this project and as you read the book?
4. Write down aspects of life that you find difficult to enjoy, such as your spouse, children, leisure, work, church. This could be based on a lack of contentment, fear, or guilt—the reason will be worked out in due time. Be honest and vulnerable. There's nothing to fear, and the goal is to increase your joy, so make your list as long or as short as you like, whatever will help you focus your thoughts on tangible goals in the weeks ahead.

5. Write down your hopes for the Project. For example, "I hope to find new ways to enjoy rest, such as learning to take a Sabbath."
6. Look back over the chapter to identify one idea or truth that really stands out. Find a way to put that into practice this week.
7. Pray and preach the gospel to yourself.

Lord, thank you that you are the Giver, that out of your generosity and love you've filled the world and our lives with gifts. Help me to see them, enjoy them, and praise you as a result. Guard my heart against the enemies of joy: discontentment, ingratitude, and guilt. And thank you for the gift of Jesus, who covers all my sin and shortcomings.



God calls us to both

heavenly
purpose and
earthly pleasure.

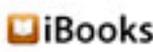
—Michael Wittmer



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