

GIVE ME JESUS: DELIGHTING IN CHRIST THROUGH THE MEANS OF GRACE

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Living the Christian life without enjoying Christ is like a pie without sugar—it might look like a pie, but it's not what a pie is supposed to be. It is sometimes hard to detect when our relationship with Christ has lost its sense of sweet delight and pursuit. This is a subtle form of drift that all Christians must guard against. Remember, to drift away from shore, all one needs to do is, well, *nothing*. Stop paddling toward the shore, and soon the current will sweep you out to sea.

So how do we prevent ourselves from gradually drifting away from God? Hebrews 2:1 says, “We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift from it.” *Attention*. This is a valuable commodity in a generation of constant distraction.

The old phrase *means of grace* captures how we practice this attentiveness. A means of grace is a pathway to receiving and living in the good of what we have in Christ. Like the spoon that lifts tasty soup to the mouth, a means of grace is the way spiritual nourishment is delivered to us.

Most believers are well acquainted with the primary means of grace that God uses to keep us delighting in and living in the good of our relationship with Christ. One quickly thinks of concentrated time in Scripture, the life of prayer, and gathering with the community of believers. Though we may practice more than these basic pathways of grace, we certainly cannot prac-

tice less without suffering significant spiritual loss.

The Scriptures are Where We Gaze upon Christ

When we take a picture with our phones, the image imprinted and saved is precisely where we pointed the camera. What the lens “sees” is what is saved on our phones. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, we are told that we are transformed into the same image as we behold Christ. What we “see” by faith is what is imprinted on our hearts. The question is, how exactly does one behold Christ this way?

We behold Christ by looking intently into the pages of holy Scripture. Everything we know about Christ in his eternal glory and flesh-and-bone humanity is found in the pages of Scripture. Jesus himself said, “it is they [the

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Scriptures] that bear witness about me” (John 5:39).

This involves unhurried time in the word, individually and in community. We must pause to ponder truths about Christ’s person and redemption in the whole of Scripture until our hearts are warmed and lifted in worship.

Like kindling on a campfire, it sometimes takes a few attempts before the fire starts. The key here is slowing down and deliberately choosing to give our undivided attention to this gazing. That will require us to turn other things off—in the language of Scripture, “go into your room and shut the door” (Matt. 6:6). Then we search the pages of Scripture until we find Christ. And like the Magi of old, when we find him, we will worship Him (Matt. 2:8, 11)!

Prayer is a Pathway to Abiding in Christ

Through the accomplishment of the cross, we are invited to communion with the living God (Heb. 10:22). Here we enter holy ground. In Ephesians 3:14-19, Paul makes it clear that the Holy Spirit’s supernatural power is needed to grasp the “love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.” It is also clear that this love is experienced in answer to prayer. It is a prayer asking that we may live in the good of Christ’s love for us.

But this knowledge of God's love is maintained through prayer as well. Therefore Jude 20-21 says, "Praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God." One of my favorite verses in the Old Testament expresses the same thought in a slightly different way: "I have always been mindful of your unfailing love and have lived in reliance on your faithfulness" (Ps. 26:3, NIV). This kind of praying then begins with a request and continues with simple expressions of trust. We trust that God actually is relating to us the way Scripture says he is—exulting over us with loud singing (Zeph. 3:17)!

This praying involves both a seeking and then a firm standing on what is given. We echo back the Lord's song over us in our prayers (Ps. 42:8) and can confidently say that "We have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us" (1 John 4:16).

The Gathered Church Helps Us to Commune with Christ

David Mathis says that fellowship is a help when we drift from other means of grace. "When the desire to avail yourself of hearing his voice (in the word) has dried up, and when your spiritual energy is gone to speak into his ear (in prayer), God sends his body to bring you back."¹ He also says, "Corporate worship is the single most important means of grace and our greatest weapon in the fight for joy, because like no other means, corporate worship combines all three principles of God's ongoing grace: his word, prayer, and fellowship."²

It is easy to forget the reason why corporate worship is so powerful. There is much more going on than simply songs and smiles and encouraging words. 1 John 1:3 reveals the Trinitarian ground and delightful source of the fellowship we experience with each other: "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

Here we see the often unnoticed dimension of the gathering of the church. It facilitates enjoyment, communion, partnership, and friendship, which is an overflow of the fellowship we have with God the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. Just as a musical concert is best experienced in an appreciative crowd of fans, so the church gathered is where we enjoy, treasure, and commune most deeply with Christ.

1. DAVID MATHIS, *HABITS OF GRACE* (WHEATON, IL: CROSSWAY, 2016), 148.

2. *IBID.*, 156-157.

The key here is presence. This means of grace is for participants alone. To know this reality, we have to be there—each of us indwelt by the Spirit, strengthening and encouraging each other with our gifts, experiencing God’s active presence as his people meet to worship him.

How is Christ best treasured in our lives? By taking the necessary time to ponder Christ in Scripture until affections for him are kindled in our hearts, by abiding in his love through prayer, and by joining our puzzle piece together with the many other puzzle pieces of the church gathered, so that we can display the finished picture of Christ to each other, and delight in the wonder of that picture together.

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