

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

1 TIMOTHY 4:4-5

*The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*

PSALM 19:1

I was standing today in the dark toolshed. The sun was shining outside and through the crack at the top of the door there came a sunbeam. From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. Everything else was almost pitch-black. I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it. Then I moved so that the beam fell on my eyes. Instantly the whole previous picture vanished. I saw no toolshed, and (above all) no beam. Instead I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences.

C. S. LEWIS

“MEDITATION IN A TOOLSHED”

*God in the Dock*¹

How to Wield the World in the Fight for Joy

*Using All Five Senses to See the
Glory of God*



In this chapter we wrestle with the relationship between physical causes and spiritual effects. If that sounds vague, consider some examples: Can physical sounds (like music or thunder) cause spiritual effects (like joy in Christ or fear of God)? Can deep ravines produce reverence for Christ? Can a sizzling steak produce satisfaction in Jesus? Everybody knows that music and thunder can cause joy and fear. But can they cause spiritual joy and spiritual fear? Can cliffs and food waken the joy of faith?

Usually the word *spiritual* in the New Testament refers to something or someone that is brought forth by the Holy Spirit, controlled by the Holy Spirit, and directed to the goals of the Holy Spirit, especially the adoration of Christ. But music and thunder and ravines and steak are not the Holy Spirit. They are natural parts of the material creation. What is the relationship between them and spiritual joy?

Or to ask the question another way: In the fight for joy in God can we use physical means? The answer is not easy. That's why I said we would "wrestle" in this chapter. Not all joy exalts Christ. Joy exalts what we rejoice in. If we rejoice in revenge, then we exalt the value of revenge. If we rejoice in pornography, we exalt the value of pornogra-

phy. Those are clearly sinful. But what about innocent pleasures? If we rejoice in a beautiful sunrise, what do we exalt? The sunrise? Or the Creator of the sunrise? Or both? And what makes the difference in our hearts and minds?

Many unbelievers are deeply moved to rejoice in the beauty of a sunrise. They do not have the Holy Spirit and do not adore Christ. What is the difference between their joy and spiritual joy? Is the experience the same and only our knowledge different? Or is the joy itself different? If so, how?

IS PATIENCE A FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT OR OF SLEEP?

I take up this question because our everyday experience, as well as the Bible itself, demands it. We know from experience that our spiritual and physical life are intertwined. Losing sleep increases our impatience and irritability, but the Bible says that *love* is “patient . . . it is not irritable” (1 Cor. 13:4-5), and it calls love and patience fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). So are love and patience fruits of the Spirit, or are they the fruit of sleep?

Even in the Lord's work no one would deny that a rush of adrenaline may accompany some great challenge and give wakefulness and energy for some God-ordained task. But the apostle Paul says, “I toil, struggling with all his energy that *he* powerfully works within me” (Col. 1:29). What is the difference between Paul's physical adrenaline and the powerful energy he feels from Christ? Are they totally separate? Or does Christ somehow work through adrenaline?

THE WORLD OF SIGHT AND SOUND

To grasp the scope of this issue, think of your five senses and the countless sensations they bring and how these affect your emotions and your spiritual life. You have the sense of *sight*, and you see the sky with its clouds and its shades of blue and its horizons of red and orange and its nighttime of moon and stars. You see the earth with its thousands of species of birds and land animals and fish and trees and plants, and its varied terrains of deserts, fields, mountains, plains, forests, hills, canyons, and ravines with rivers. And you see human beings, male and female, short and tall, thin and heavy, with countless hues of skin, no two alike. And you see all that man can make:

paintings, sculptures, dramas, movies, machines, buildings, roads, computers, planes, clothing, electrical generators, nuclear plants, artificial hearts, microwave ovens, cell phones, air-conditioning, antibiotics, universities, and governments.

And you have a sense of *hearing*. You hear the sounds of animals: the bird singing, the cat meowing, the dog barking, the snake hissing, the mosquito humming, the frog croaking, the horse neighing and clip-clopping, the pig oinking, the cow mooing, and the rooster crowing. And you hear the sounds of inanimate nature: the ocean waves crashing, the dead tree falling, the landslide plunging, the frozen lake cracking, the volcano exploding, the stream rippling, the thunder rumbling, the rain pounding. And you hear the sounds of man: talking, laughing, whistling, humming, clapping, crying, groaning, screaming, stomping, singing, playing on a hundred instruments, pounding nails, revving engines, operating machines, scraping old houses, thumping along with crutches, cooking sizzling hamburgers on a grill, tearing open an envelope, slamming a door, spanking a child, breaking a dish, and mowing the lawn.

THE WORLD OF TASTE AND SMELL AND TOUCH

And you have a sense of *taste*. You taste hundreds of foods and drinks: sour lemons, sweet honey, sharp cheese, tart grapefruit, salty chips, hot salsa, tangy punch, and countless unique flavors of bananas, milk, nuts, bread, fish, steak, lettuce, chocolate, coffee, green peppers, onions, vanilla ice cream, red Jell-O, and a range of medicines you would rather swallow than taste.

And you have a sense of *smell*. You smell roses, honeysuckle, apple blossoms, lilacs, bread baking, bacon sizzling, toast browning, pizza warming, coffee percolating, clove spice, spilled garbage, raw sewage, paper factories, hog farms, favorite perfumes, newly mown grass, gasoline fumes, pine forests, old books, and cinnamon rolls.

And you have the sense of *touch* and inner sensations. You feel cozy heat curled by a fire, warm flannel sheets on a cold night, a cool breeze on a sunny day, the silk edge of an old blanket, a dog's fur and soft tummy, a foot rub, a shoulder massage, sexual stimulation, the resistance of weightlifting, the pounding of jogging, the dive into a cold

mountain lake, the hammer landing on your thumb, the ache in your lower back, the migraine headache, the nausea of seasickness, the kiss of a lover.

PHYSICAL SENSATIONS AND THE SWEETNESS OF GOD

Any one of these five senses, or any combination of them, can give you emotions. And some of these emotions feel virtually the same as the spiritual emotions we are commanded to have in the Bible: joy (Phil. 4:4), delight (Ps. 37:4), gladness (Ps. 67:4), hope (Ps. 42:5), fear (Luke 12:5), grief (Rom. 12:15), desire (1 Pet. 2:2), tenderheartedness (Eph. 4:32), gratitude (Eph. 5:20), etc.

Not only do our senses produce emotions, but the proper or improper use of our bodies can have a huge effect on the way we experience spiritual reality. Rejoicing in the Lord is different when you have nausea than when you are well and singing in a worship service. Proper eating and exercising and sleeping has a marked effect on the mind and its ability to process natural beauty and biblical truth.

So the question must be faced: How do we use the created world around us, including our own bodies, to help us fight for joy in God? In God, I say! Not in nature. Not in music. Not in health. Not in food or drink. Not in natural beauty. How can all these good gifts serve joy in God, and not usurp the supreme affections of our hearts?

Our situation as physical creatures is precarious. The question we are asking is not peripheral. It addresses the dangerous condition we are in. We are surrounded by innocent things that are ready to become idols. Innocent sensations are one second away from becoming substitutes for the sweetness of God. Should we use mood music and dim lighting and smoke and incense to create an atmosphere that conduces to good feelings and “spiritual” openness? You can feel the dangers of manipulation lurking just below the surface.

But no one escapes the problem. Everybody uses physical means. We all choose some kind of lighting. We all choose some kind of atmosphere, no matter how stark. We all use some kind of music, even if only voice. We all make choices about how we sleep and exercise and eat. And presumably we are not acting like atheists when we make these

choices; we believe they have something to do with God. There is no way around the issue. We must all come to terms with how our physical, sensory lives relate to our spiritual joy in God.

JOY WITHOUT BRAINS?

As much as we are sure that our joy in God is more than chemicals and electronic impulses in the brain, we are also sure that, in this present age, we experience this spiritual joy only in connection to a physical body. And the interplay between the two is mysterious. There is, in some strange way, an overlapping of spiritual joy and psychological emotion and physiological event. They are not identical. We know this because God has strong spiritual emotions, like anger (Ps. 80:4) and joy (Zeph. 3:17), but he has no physical body. So there are spiritual emotions that exist independently of physical bodies. And presumably, redeemed people will have strong emotions of adoration and satisfaction at God's right hand after they die and before their bodies are raised from the dead (see Phil. 1:23; Rev. 6:10). So we believe that joy in Christ is not identical with physical brain waves but has an existence above material reality.

In spite of the theoretical popularity of naturalistic evolution, which says all there is in the universe is matter and energy, almost nobody will approve if you put their sense of justice in the same category as a dog's bark. So even those who have no conscious belief in God intuitively operate on the assumption that their emotion of love and their sense of justice are more than electrochemical events in the brain.²

Nevertheless, these supra-physical things are linked with our physical brains. And so it is that our joy in God and its physical expression in the brain are inseparable in this mortal life. Spiritual emotions (which are more than physical) can have physical effects, and physical conditions can have spiritual effects.

THE SPIRITUAL ORCHESTRA AND THE PHYSICAL PIANO

C. S. Lewis thought deeply about this issue and wrote about it in a sermon called "Transposition." His argument is that the spiritual life of emotion is higher and richer than the material life of physical sensation

in the way a symphony orchestra is richer than a piano. When the music of spiritual joy plays in the soul, it gets “transposed” into physical sensations. But since the spiritual “orchestra” is richer and more varied than the physical “piano,” the same piano keys have to be used for sounds that in the orchestra are played with different instruments. As physical people with souls, we always experience spiritual emotions at both levels: the orchestra and the piano.

There are at least four reasons why Lewis’s analysis is helpful. One is that it explains the fact that introspection can never find spiritual joy in God, but only its residue of physical sensation. The reason is that the moment we turn from focusing on God to focusing on the emotion itself, the emotion is no longer what it was. It leaves its trace only in the physical sensation, not in the spiritual reality. The reality of spiritual joy depends moment by moment on the steadfast seeing of the glory of God.³

Second, Lewis’s analysis helps explain why the physical sensations we find when we look behind the spiritual emotions of ecstasy and terror seem to be identical. In other words, the physical trembling and the queasy stomach seem to be the same for terror and ecstasy when we analyze them by introspection. Lewis explains that this is what we would expect when an orchestra of emotion is transposed down onto a simpler instrument: Very different spiritual emotions must play on the same piano key.

If a good man looks into the face of his fiancée and feels the pleasure of a warm love somewhere—he can’t tell if it’s in his head or chest, or even more visceral—and then he turns from looking at his lover to find the pleasure—wherever it is—what he will probably find is a physical sensation indistinguishable from lust. The orchestra of love uses the same physical note on the piano that lust uses to play her music, but everyone knows that love and lust are not identical emotions.

But if they are the same at one level—playing on the same piano key of the body—why then do we experience the spiritual emotions so differently when they are actually happening—even differently in our bodies? For we do indeed experience lust and love, or terror and ecstasy, as physically different. We experience terror as unpleasant and do not want to repeat it, but we experience ecstasy as pleasant and would like to have it again.

SPIRITUAL EMOTION ENTERS AND TRANSFORMS
PHYSICAL SENSATION

Lewis answers that in the transposition from the higher to the lower, the spiritual emotion actually enters into the physical sensation so that the sensation becomes part of the higher emotion.

The very same sensation does not merely accompany, nor merely signify, diverse and opposite emotions, but becomes part of them. The emotion descends bodily, as it were, into the sensation and digests, transforms, transubstantiates it, so that the same thrill along the nerves *is* delight or *is* agony.⁴

This is extremely important. It leads to the third reason why Lewis's analysis is helpful: It answers the materialist-skeptic who looks at the brain waves for "delight" and for "agony" and argues that there can be no reality to the so-called spiritual difference, since both are registered in the brain with the same electrochemical reactions. So he concludes that there is no such thing as spiritual emotions, but only physical sensations. Tragically, that is what millions of modern people claim to believe. But Lewis's analysis shows that this mistake is exactly what we would expect if "transposition" is true. The person who approaches it only "from below" can only hear the piano.

The brutal man never can by analysis find anything but lust in love . . . physiology never can find anything in thought except twitchings of the gray matter. . . . [The materialist] is therefore, as regards the matter in hand, in the position of an animal. You will have noticed that most dogs cannot understand *pointing*. You point to a bit of food on the floor: the dog, instead of looking at the floor, sniffs at your finger. A finger is a finger to him, and that is all. . . . As long as this deliberate refusal to understand things from above, even where such understanding is possible, continues, it is idle to talk of any final victory over materialism. The critique of every experience from below . . . will always have the same plausibility. There will always be evidence, and every month fresh evidence, to show that religion is only psychological, justice only self protection, politics only economics, love only lust, and thought itself only cerebral biochemistry.⁵

Fourth, Lewis's analysis helps us understand how to use the world of physical sensation for spiritual purposes. From his contrast between the spiritual orchestra of emotion and the physical piano of sensation we are reminded not to equate spiritual emotion and physical sensation. They are not identical. That is a crucial truth to keep in mind. On the other hand, Lewis also reminds us that spiritual emotions, like joy in God, are only experienced in connection with physical sensations. They are not identical, but they are almost always inseparable. In this earthly life, we are never disembodied souls with only spiritual emotions. We are complex spiritual-physical beings who experience joy in Christ as something more, but almost never less, than physical sensation. I say "almost" to leave open the exceptional possibility that, contrary to his usual way of working, God can do miracles in the midst of suffering, such as ecstasy in the midst of flames, while burning at the stake.

Moreover, Lewis reminds us to be amazed that the higher can actually transform the lower. Spiritual emotions, which are more than physical, can have chemical effects, and not just the reverse. It is true that chemicals can affect emotions. But too seldom do we pray and plan for the spiritual to have chemical effects. As legitimate as sedatives and antidepressants may be in times of clear chemical imbalance, we should not overlook the truth that spiritual reality may also transform the physical and not just vice versa.

BEING INTENTIONAL IN HOW WE USE THE PHYSICAL FOR THE SAKE OF JOY IN GOD

But our main question in this chapter is how the lower can affect the higher. That is, how can the physical world of sensation properly assist our joy in Christ? What Lewis has shown us is that God has created us in such a way that there is a correspondence in this life between spiritual emotion and physical experience. God ordained that the brain and the soul intersect and correspond. They are not identical. The physical events in the brain and the spiritual events in the soul do not correspond one to one. But they are interwoven in a way that encourages us to take steps so that the influence flows in both directions for the glory of Christ.

That would mean, for example, that on the one hand we seek by

prayer and meditation on God's Word to waken joy in Christ so that it has a healing, strengthening effect on the body. And it would mean, on the other hand, that we use the physical world, including our own bodies, so that, according to the laws of God's creation, joy in Christ will be more intense and more constant. In other words, Lewis has helped us see that there are some legitimate steps we can take at the physical, sensory level in order to properly increase our joy in God.

I say this in spite of the danger mentioned earlier that we run the risk of manipulation (mood music, smoke, and dim lighting) to create "spiritual" emotions, which turn out not to be spiritual at all. There is no running from the responsibility of using physical reality wisely for spiritual ends. Our physical lives will affect our spiritual lives whether we plan it or not. Better to think it through and be intentional.

THE BIBLE ITSELF SAYS: SEE GOD IN THE WORLD

Far more important than the wisdom of C. S. Lewis is the biblical wisdom of God. The Bible gives us good evidence that we should indeed be intentional about touching our joy in God with physical means. We have already seen in Chapter Five that *seeing* the glory of God is the essential and proper basis of our joy in God. We argued from 2 Corinthians 4:4 that the most central and controlling means of seeing God is by means of hearing the gospel. "The god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing *the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ*, who is the image of God." The deepest foundation of our joy, as justified sinners, is that Christ died for our sins and thus revealed the smiling face of God for all who believe. That's the way it is with all the Scriptures: They enable us to see, in them and through them, the glory of God. "The LORD revealed *himself* . . . by *the word of the LORD*" (1 Sam. 3:21). God himself stands forth to be spiritually seen and enjoyed "by the word of the LORD."

But the Bible tells us of other means of seeing the glory of God, and therefore other means of wakening and intensifying our joy in him. For example, Psalm 19:1-4:

The heavens declare the glory of God, *and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose*

voice is not heard. Their measuring line goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

If seeing the glory of God is a proper spiritual cause of our joy in him, then our physical gaze at the heavens—the sun and moon and stars and clouds and sunrises and sunsets and thunderstorms—is a proper means of helping us rejoice in God. So here we have a clear biblical warrant for using the physical world (“the heavens”), by means of the physical organ of sight, to pursue a spiritual effect, namely, seeing the glory of God and experiencing our joy in it.

Other Scriptures make explicit the connection between the physically visible work of God and joy. For example, Psalm 92:4, “For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy.” I assume that this joy is not idolatrous—that is, I assume it does not terminate on the works themselves, but in and through them, rests on the glory of God himself. The works “declare” the glory of God. They point. But the final ground of our joy is God himself.

LEARNING FROM LIGHT IN A TOOLSHED

C. S. Lewis, whose greatest gift was his power to see what few see, described an experience that demonstrated how the physical world helps us see the glory of God.

I was standing today in the dark toolshed. The sun was shining outside and through the crack at the top of the door there came a sunbeam. From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. Everything else was almost pitch-black. I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it. Then I moved so that the beam fell on my eyes. Instantly the whole previous picture vanished. I saw no toolshed, and (above all) no beam. Instead I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences.⁶

So we can say that when we “look along” the heavens and not just “at” the heavens, they succeed in their aim of “declaring the glory of God.” That is, we see the glory *of God*, not just the glory of the heavens. We

don't just stand outside and analyze the natural world as a beam, but let the beam fall on the eyes of our heart, so that we see the source of the beauty—the original Beauty, God himself.

This is the essential key to unlocking the proper use of the physical world of sensation for spiritual purposes. All of God's creation becomes a beam to be "looked along" or a sound to be "heard along" or a fragrance to be "smelled along" or a flavor to be "tasted along" or a touch to be "felt along." All our senses become partners with the eyes of the heart in perceiving the glory of God through the physical world.

So on the one hand, Lewis has shown us that our more-than-physical spiritual emotions are incarnated in our physical sensations, transforming them so that they take on the quality of the emotion. And on the other hand he has shown us that the physical sensations are partners in perceiving the glory of God in the physical world and therefore are means of awakening and shaping those very spiritual emotions. Specifically, joy in God can be awakened by the physical display of God's glory, and that very joy enters and transforms the physical experience of it.

THE APOSTLE PAUL HELPS US USE THE WORLD IN THE FIGHT FOR JOY

Does the Bible itself give us any explicit help at this point to insure, as much as possible, that our use of the physical world does in fact help us perceive the glory of God, so that our awakened emotions are not simply natural but spiritual? Yes, the apostle Paul addresses this issue in a fairly direct way in 1 Timothy 4:1-5.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

Notice that Paul predicts the coming of false teachers who have a very negative view of the physical world, particularly sex and food (which

together involve all five of our senses). So these false teachers “forbid marriage” and “require abstinence from foods” (v. 3). Paul regards this as rebellion against God, because God’s purpose for his good creation, Paul says, is that “nothing is to be rejected” (v. 4).

Instead of rejecting God’s creation, Paul says there are two things we should do with it: receive it with thanksgiving (vv. 3-4), and sanctify it (sanctify = make holy, v. 5). Consider how each of these connects the physical world with our joy in God.

GRATITUDE FOR A GIFT INVOLVES JOY IN A GIVER

The sexual pleasures of the marriage bed and the culinary pleasures of good food, Paul says, are to be “received with thanksgiving.” This is directly related to joy in God because of what thanksgiving is. First, gratitude is an emotion, not just a choice. You can make yourself say, “Thank you” when you do not feel gratitude, but everyone knows the difference between the words and the feeling. Gratitude is a spontaneous feeling of gladness because of someone’s goodwill toward you. Their gift may not even arrive. It may get lost in the mail. But if you know that you were remembered, and that someone took the trouble to buy you something that you would have enjoyed, and that they sent it to you, you will feel gratitude, even if the gift never comes.

Which means, secondly, that the emotion of gratitude is directed toward a giver. Gratitude is *occasioned* by a gift, but is *directed* to the giver. Third, gratitude is a kind of joy. It is not a bad feeling or a neutral feeling. It is positive and pleasant. We do not regret feeling gratitude—unless we were deceived, and the gift turns out to be a trap. Begrudging gratitude is an oxymoron. There is no such thing. No one feels gratitude out of duty when they really don’t want to. Gratitude is spontaneous and pleasant. It is joy in the goodwill of the giver.

The dominant link in the Bible between our gratitude and God is that God is good. “Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!” (Ps. 106:1). This link between our thanks and God’s goodness is repeated over and over (Ps. 107:1; 118:1, 29; 136:1; 1 Chron. 16:34; 2 Chron. 7:3; 5:13; Ezra 3:11). What is most significant about this link is that our gratitude is ultimately rooted in what God *is*, not in what he *gives*. It does not say,

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he *gives* good things.” That is true. The good gifts, like sex and food, are occasions for the gladness of gratitude. But they are not the ultimate focus of our joy. The sensation of pleasure runs up the beam of God’s generosity until it stops in the goodness of God himself.

I stress this because it is very easy for us to *say* we are thankful for the pleasures of sex and food, but never even take God into the picture. When that happens, the joy of sex and food is not joy in God, and is not spiritual, and is not an honor to God for his goodness. Enjoying God’s gifts without a consciousness of God is no tribute to God himself. Unbelievers do this all the time. Therefore what Paul is teaching us here is that the proper use of physical pleasures in sex and food is that they send our hearts Godward with the joy of gratitude that finds its firmest ground in the goodness of God himself, not in his gifts. This means that if, in the providence of God, these gifts are ever taken away—perhaps by the death of a spouse or the demand for a feeding tube—the deepest joy that we had through them will not be taken away, because God is still good (see Hab. 3:17-18).

SANCTIFYING SEX AND FOOD

Then, after saying that *gratitude* connects the physical world with joy in God, Paul goes on to say that this connection happens when the physical creation is *sanctified*. “Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for *it is made holy by the word of God and prayer*” (1 Tim. 4:4-5).

The words “it is made holy” represent one Greek word (*hagiazō*), which sometimes means to set apart for holy use, as when Jesus said, “For which is greater, the gold or the temple that *has made the gold sacred?*” (Matt. 23:17). Here the use of gold in the temple sanctifies it (same word as in 1 Tim. 4:5). The gold is not itself changed, but it is given a God-exalting function by the way it is made part of God’s temple. Other times the word *sanctify* means to transform something into a condition that will be suitable for God-exalting purposes, as when Jesus prays for his disciples, asking that God would “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). So when Paul says that sex and food are sanctified by the Word of God and prayer, it probably

means that they are transformed and made suitable for their purpose of waking and strengthening our God-exalting joy in Christ.

How do the Word of God and prayer bring about that sanctification of sex and food? The most obvious observation is that the *Word of God* is his speaking to us, and *prayer* is our speaking to him. So the general answer is that sex and food are made useful for God-exalting joy when we listen to what God has to say about them, and then speak back to him our affirmations of his truth and our need for help.

SANCTIFYING PHYSICAL SENSATIONS BY THE WORD OF GOD

But we need to be specific. The relevant truth God speaks to us is 1) that he created sex and food (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:24-25; 3:16); 2) that they are good (Gen. 1:31); and 3) that they are intended not only to beget and sustain life, but also for our enjoyment. Paul says to Timothy about the wealthy in his congregation, “Charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who *richly provides us with everything to enjoy*” (1 Tim. 6:17). 4) In addition God’s Word tells us that the physical world of nature is declaring the glory of God (Ps. 19:1), so that the enjoyment it brings should rest finally in the beauty of God himself. 5) And the Word gives us many particulars about the proper use of sex (e.g., no fornication or adultery) and food (e.g., no addiction or excessive asceticism) and other natural pleasures. 6) Finally, the Word of God tells us that we are sinners and do not deserve anything but the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18; 3:9), and therefore the joy of seeing the glory of God in and through the pleasures of sex and food is an absolutely free gift bought with the blood of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:32).

Knowing and affirming these truths from God’s Word transforms sex and food from mere physical pleasures into partners in *revelation* and *rejoicing*. These physical sensations partner with the spiritual eyes of our hearts to perceive the *revelation* of God’s glory in creation and to promote our *rejoicing* in him. When Paul said in Titus 1:15, “To the pure all things are pure,” he had something like this in mind. He contrasts the pure with “the defiled and *unbelieving*.” That links Titus 1:15 with 1 Timothy 4:3 where Paul says that sex and food are “to be received with thanksgiving by *those who believe* and know the truth.” In other

words, sex and food are designed for *believers*, the pure in heart. For “to the pure all things are pure.”

To those who submit gladly to the truth of God about themselves as sinners, and about Christ as the Savior, and about the Holy Spirit as the Sanctifier, and about God the Father as Creator—to them sex and food are sanctified. That is, they are pure. They are not unclean idols competing for our affections, which belong supremely to God. They are instead pure partners in the revelation of God’s glory. They are beams of his goodness *along* which the pure in heart see God (Matt. 5:8).

SANCTIFYING PHYSICAL SENSATIONS BY PRAYER

Thus sex and food and other natural physical delights are sanctified “by the word of God” (1 Tim. 4:5). But the same verse also says they are sanctified by “prayer.” One way that prayer sanctifies sex and food and other physical sensations is by expressing to God our thanks for his goodness. But prayer has another role. Prayer also means asking God for the illumination of the eyes of our heart so that, in and through our physical sensations, we would see the glory of God. Prayer acknowledges that we cannot achieve our own purity. We cannot sanctify our own sensations. We cannot open our own eyes. And therefore we cannot enjoy God in all his gifts without the enabling grace that God gives in answer to prayer. Therefore we pray that the truth will have its sanctifying effect by the power of God’s Spirit.

Thus prayer and the Word of God together sanctify sex and food—and every other good gift in this world. That is, the physical reality of food and human bodies, along with their physical sensations, become pure partners in the revelation of God’s glory and the wakening of our joy in him.

THE DIRECT USE OF THE WORLD IN THE FIGHT FOR JOY

When we consider carefully how to use the physical world for the advancement of our joy in God, we realize that there is a *direct* use to be made of nature and an *indirect* use. The *direct* use is when we take steps to see and hear and smell and taste and touch God’s creation (and man’s representation of it in art) in order to perceive the glory of God

more fully. The *indirect* use is when we take steps to keep our bodies and minds as fit as we can for spiritual use. Let's consider these in turn.

The *direct* use of the physical world in our fight for joy may be a trip to the Grand Canyon, or rising early enough to see a sunrise, or attending a symphony, or reading a historical novel, or studying physics, or memorizing a poem, or swimming in the ocean, or eating a fresh pineapple, or smelling a gardenia blossom, or putting your hand through your wife's hair, or watching Olympic gymnastics finals. All these and a thousand things like them are *direct* ways of using the natural world to perceive more of the glory of God.

THE GLORY OF GOD IS AN OVERWHELMINGLY HAPPY THING

And even though some encounters with God are terrible, it seems plain from Scripture that God wants us to rejoice in the glory we see in nature. I base this, for example, on Psalm 19. After saying, "The heavens declare the glory of God," David reaches for language to show the joy being communicated by the heavens. He says in verses 5-6 that the sun "comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat."

Clearly this poet wants us to see and to feel that when the sun pours forth speech about the glory of God, the message is that the glory of God is an overwhelmingly happy thing. Why else would he say it is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber? The point here is not merely that the bridegroom is decked out in the finest clothes and surrounded by his noble groomsmen. The point is that this is the happiest day of his life. This is the fulfillment of dreams. This is the beginning of a whole new kind of joy. That's what the glory of God is like. That's the message we should hear when we see the sun rise with lavish red and gold and lavender in the eastern sky. God's glory is a happy thing—like the happiness of a bridegroom on his wedding day.

This is even more explicit in the other picture David uses at the end of verse 5. When the sun rises and pours forth speech about the glory of God, it is like a strong man that runs his race *with joy*. How can we not

think of Eric Liddell in that great scene from the film *Chariots of Fire* as he takes that last turn in the race for the glory of God, and his arms drive like living pistons, and his head goes back in that utterly unorthodox position, and every fiber in his body does just what it was made to do, and the smile breaks out across his face, and everything in Eric Liddell cries, “Glory to God!”

That’s what the glory of God is like—it’s like the happiest day of your life; it’s like every muscle and every tendon and every ligament and every organ and all your mind and your emotions working just the way they were created to work on the day of triumph. The glory of God is the happiest reality in the universe.

DON’T NEGLECT THE GIFT OF HUMAN REPRESENTATIONS OF GOD’S GLORY

In our fight for joy, we must not neglect the ministry of God to our souls in the world that he has made. We should make direct use of the world to see and savor the glory of God wherever he has displayed it. This includes the efforts of man, by his design and art, to represent something of God’s glory. Even those who do not believe in God often sense that there is more to see in what they see. The Bible insists that every human being, even when suppressing the knowledge of God, does indeed “know God” and has “clearly perceived” his attributes in the things he has made.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God. (Rom. 1:19-21)

This means that even the artistic works of unbelievers sometimes penetrate through the commonplace to the outskirts of the glory of God. Believers whose hearts are purified by the grace of Christ may see from this vantage point vastly more than the unbeliever. So even the unbelieving artist may unwittingly assist us in seeing and savoring the glory of God in the world he has made.

THE POWER OF HUMAN WORDS TO MAKE THE WORLD
A CAUSE OF JOY

It is not a mistake that so much of the Bible is written in poetry. Nor is it a mistake that there are so many biblical metaphors and similes. The lesson is that God has ordained for language to pierce and portray what colorless language cannot do. The human heart moves irrepressibly toward poetry because it knows intuitively that the natural world is not all there is. The heart may not even believe that the heavens are telling the glory of God. But it knows, deep down, that they are telling something more than meets the physical eye.

Therefore, in our fight for joy it may often be helpful to read penetrating literature and see powerful drama. Not because they can ever rival or replace the Scriptures, but because they are part of the God-revealing creation and its reflection. God did not put us in the world to ignore it, but to use it wisely. From the beginning, human beings have discovered that the reflection of the world in human art wakens us to the world itself and what the world is saying about God. Echoes can waken us to the shout of reality, and poetry can give us eyes to see. If we weren't afflicted with persistent sleepiness of soul, we might see all the glory there is in nature. But as it is, we need help from creative artists.

Richard Foster is justified in writing:

I am concerned that our reading and our writing is gravitating to the lowest common denominator so completely that the great themes of majesty and nobility and felicity are made to seem trite, puny, pedestrian. . . . I am concerned about the state of the soul in the midst of all the cheap sensory overload going on today. You see, without what Alfred North Whitehead called "an habitual vision of greatness," our soul will shrivel up and lose the capacity for beauty and mystery and transcendence. . . .

But it isn't just the substance of what we say (or write or read or hear or see) that concerns me. It is the way we say it. To write pedantically about radiance or infinity or ubiquity stunts the mind and cramps the soul. To find the right word, to capture the perfect image, awakens the spirit and enlarges the soul. Mark Twain noted that the difference between the right word and the almost right word is like the difference between the lightning and a lightning bug.⁷ . . . The ancient Hebrew prophets cared enough about their message that they

frequently delivered it in poetic form. May new prophets arise in our day that will call us to faithful living in words that are crisp and clear and imaginative.⁸

And when they arise, one way that we fight for joy in God is to read what they write. The heavens are telling the glory of God. Seeing it is the ground of our joy. And often reading what others have seen wakens us to see what they saw, or even more.

FIGHTING FOR JOY WITH SIGHTS AND SOUNDS THAT HUMANS MAKE

And of course, words are not the only way that artists waken others to the glory of what they have seen. There is visual art (drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, film), and there is music. I will not say much here because I am out of my element. What I know about art and music I know from experience, not formal study. I am a witness, not a judge. And what I testify to is the power of visual art, and especially music. As it is with creative writing, so it is with these: They have the potential to awaken the mind and heart to aspects of God's glory that were not perceived before. Paintings or photographs of mountains and streams can call forth a sense of wonder and peace. If we are willing to "look along" (not just "at") these pictures, as Lewis taught us, our eyes will run up the beams to the Original Glory, and the wonder and peace will rest finally in the wonderful and peaceful mountains and streams of God's power and mercy.

Music, it seems to me, is the most complex art of all. Who can really explain what happens when music works its power? Its transforming effects are documented in cases ranging from Parkinson's disease⁹ to plants.¹⁰ As with all things in nature and in the hands of fallen man, it can be used to reveal or conceal the glory of God—to corrupt the mind or illumine the mind. At its best, music echoes a true perception of some facet of God's glory. The ambiguity of the medium itself, combined with cultural and social and personal associations, complicates the display of that glory in sound.

I recall reading the story of a tribal person, with no exposure to Western culture, being flown to Europe and taken to a performance of Handel's *Messiah*. He sat almost the whole time covering his ears with his hands because, as he explained later, it was just so much noise to his ears. That is an extreme illustration of the complexity of communicat-

ing with music. Nevertheless, the power is there, and it works every day for good and for ill. My point is that in the fight for joy it is good and right to pursue a deeper sense of God's glory with the help of music.

WIELDING THE WEAPON OF MUSIC IN THE FIGHT FOR JOY IN GOD

If this were not right, the Bible would not command us so often to sing (e.g., Ex. 15:21; 1 Chron. 16:23; Ps. 96:1) or to play on instruments (e.g., Ps. 33:2-3; 57:8; 81:2; 150). Music seems to be woven into worship and the world of nature. Among the many creatures that God has made in his wisdom (Ps. 104:24) are the birds that God has taught to sing: "Beside [the springs] the birds of the heavens dwell; they sing among the branches" (Ps. 104:12). Surely God has not created music as a pointless distraction from rational apprehensions of God. Surely, this too is part of the creation that is "declaring the glory of God."

To wield music well in the fight for joy we should be filled with the Word of God, so that our minds are shaped by biblical truth. If our mind and heart have been molded by the contours of God's character and humbled by the grace of the gospel, we will discern better what sounds reveal and correspond to the varied glories of God. And since this depends so much on cultural contexts and personal backgrounds, we will need not only a grasp of musical richness, but also deep theological grounding in God-centered truth, and cultural sensitivity, and an awareness of the dynamics of the heart, and profound love for people of all kinds.

We must make it our aim that the joy awakened by music be joy in God. Not all pleasures of music are pleasures in God. Then the effort to delight in God through music will involve a prior shaping of the mind by the Word, so that structures of sound that do not conform to God's character are not pleasing in the first place. Then the effort to delight in God through music will also involve a thoughtful testing *after* the music has already awakened joy. Is this joy, we ask, rooted in something good about God? Is it shaping my emotions into a Christ-exalting configuration? Is it stirring my desires to know Christ better and love him more and show him to others at the cost of my own comfort? So *before* and *after* music has its immediate effect, we pursue the goal that music make us more glad in the glory of God.¹¹

FIGHTING FOR JOY WITH THE WONDER OF
THE COMMONPLACE

I don't want to give the impression that in our fight for joy one must always make special plans to pursue such revelations of God's glory—like a trip to the mountains or a theater. Most of the time we should simply open our eyes (and ears and noses and skin and taste buds). Not that this takes no effort. Clearly human beings have a strange malady that makes the ordinary glories of each day almost invisible, and certainly less interesting than their imitations in theaters and television. There are more ooooh's and ahhh's over the visual effects on a thirty-foot theater screen than over the night sky and the setting sun. Why is it so hard for us to feel wonder at the usual when clearly it is more spectacular than the man-made imitation?

Clyde Kilby, a former literature teacher at Wheaton College, who had a great influence on me when I was there, gave this answer:

The fall of man can hardly be more forcefully felt than simply in noting what we all do with a fresh snowfall or the first buds of spring. On Monday they fill us with delight and meaning and on Tuesday we ignore them. No amount of shouting to us that this is all wrong changes the fact for very long. . . . Only some aesthetic power which is akin to God's own creativity has the capability for renewal, for giving us the power to see.¹²

This is a tragic condition captured by the proverb, "Familiarity breeds contempt"—or breeds blindness to ordinary and obvious beauty. But surely redemption through Jesus Christ means that we will be freed from that proverb someday. And since our redemption has already begun in this age, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians ought to have better eyes than people in general for seeing the wonders that day and night pour forth. We ought to be the kind of people who walk out of the house in the morning with the same sense of expectancy that we take into the theater—only more.

CHESTERTON'S ELEPHANTINE PURSUIT OF THE OBVIOUS

Once when we were discussing in class this issue of human blindness to everyday wonders, Dr. Kilby recommended that we all read G. K.

Chesterton's book *Orthodoxy*. He said it would do more to help us see the glory of God in everyday life than anything he could say. I got it and read it. I recommend it, not because its theology is always right (he is Roman Catholic and does not like Calvinism), but because it holds out hope of seeing the divine glory of the obvious better than any book I know.

Chesterton says of the book that "it recounts my elephantine adventures in pursuit of the obvious."¹³ He identifies one of the great causes of our blindness as self-absorption. He says that a person who is becoming morbid over fears and preoccupations about what others think of him needs the liberation from his illusion that anyone gives a hoot!

How much happier you would be if you only knew that these people cared nothing about you! How much larger your life would be if your self could become smaller in it; if you could really look at other men with common curiosity and pleasure; if you could see them walking as they are in their sunny selfishness and their virile indifference! You would begin to be interested in them because they were not interested in you. You would break out of this tiny and tawdry theater in which your own little plot is always being played, and you would find yourself under a freer sky, in a street full of splendid strangers.¹⁴

In other words, what we need is a kind of childlikeness. And romantic tales are often used to awaken it.

When we are very young children we don't need fairy tales: we only need tales. Mere life is interesting enough. A child of seven is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door and saw a dragon. But a child of three is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door. Boys like romantic tales; but babies like realistic tales—because they find them romantic. . . . This proves that even nursery tales only echo an almost pre-natal leap of interest and amazement. These tales say that apples are golden only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found that they were green. They make rivers run with wine only to make us remember, for one wild moment, that they run with water.¹⁵

The point is that Christ frees us from self-preoccupation and gives us—yes, only very gradually—a childlikeness that can see the sheer wonder

of the staggering strangeness of the ordinary. Chesterton said that this discovery for him was captured in a riddle: “What did the first frog say?” Answer: “Lord, how you made me jump!”¹⁶ In another place he says that he came to the point where what amazed him was not the strangeness of people’s noses, but that they had noses in the first place. In becoming more childlike and more able to see glory in the wonder of the ordinary and the routine, he points out that we are becoming more like God.

[Children] always say, “Do it again”; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, “Do it again” to the sun; and every evening, “Do it again” to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that he has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.¹⁷

I linger over this point—that seeing the glory of God may not require making a trip to the mountains or buying a ticket to the theater, but only opening our eyes—because I believe untold resources for mental health and spiritual joy in God lie all around us if we would but open our eyes.

KILBY’S PRESCRIPTION FOR USING THE WORLD IN THE FIGHT FOR JOY

At the end of his life my teacher, Clyde Kilby, came to Minneapolis and gave a lecture on how he intended to do just this. It was the last time I heard him, and the message that bequeathed to us who listened was the same legacy he had left to me when I was in his college classes. He summed up his talk with eleven resolutions. I commend them to you as one way of overcoming our bent toward blindness for the wonders of the ordinary.

1. At least once every day I shall look steadily up at the sky and remember that I, a consciousness with a conscience, am on a planet

traveling in space with wonderfully mysterious things above me and about me.

2. Instead of the accustomed idea of a mindless and endless evolutionary change to which we can neither add nor subtract, I shall suppose the universe guided by an Intelligence which, as Aristotle said of Greek drama, requires a beginning, a middle and an end. I think this will save me from the cynicism expressed by Bertrand Russell before his death, when he said: "There is darkness without and when I die there will be darkness within. There is no splendor, no vastness anywhere, only triviality for a moment, and then nothing."¹⁸

3. I shall not fall into the falsehood that this day, or any day, is merely another ambiguous and plodding twenty-four hours, but rather a unique event filled, if I so wish, with worthy potentialities. I shall not be fool enough to suppose that trouble and pain are wholly evil parentheses in my existence but just as likely ladders to be climbed toward moral and spiritual manhood.

4. I shall not turn my life into a thin straight line which prefers abstractions to reality. I shall know what I am doing when I abstract,¹⁹ which of course I shall often have to do.

5. I shall not demean my own uniqueness by envy of others. I shall stop boring into myself to discover what psychological or social categories I might belong to. Mostly I shall simply forget about myself and do my work.

6. I shall open my eyes and ears. Once every day I shall simply stare at a tree, a flower, a cloud, or a person. I shall not then be concerned at all to ask *what* they are but simply be glad *that* they are. I shall joyfully allow them the mystery of what [C. S.] Lewis calls their "divine, magical, terrifying and ecstatic" existence.

7. I shall sometimes look back at the freshness of vision I had in childhood and try, at least for a little while, to be, in the words of Lewis Carroll, the "child of the pure unclouded brow, and dreaming eyes of wonder."²⁰

8. I shall follow Darwin's²¹ advice and turn frequently to imaginative things such as good literature and good music, preferably, as Lewis suggests, an old book and timeless music.

9. I shall not allow the devilish onrush of this century to usurp all my energies but will instead, as Charles Williams suggested, "fulfill the moment as the moment." I shall try to live well just now because the only time that exists is just now.

10. If for nothing more than the sake of a change of view, I shall

assume my ancestry to be from the heavens rather than from the caves.

11. Even if I turn out to be wrong, I shall bet my life in the assumption that this world is not idiotic, neither run by an absentee landlord, but that today, this very day, some stroke is being added to the cosmic canvas that in due course I shall understand with joy as a stroke made by the architect who calls Himself Alpha and Omega.

FIGHTING FOR JOY BY THE INDIRECT USE OF THE WORLD

I mentioned earlier that in our fight for joy there is a *direct* use to be made of nature and an *indirect* use. We've been talking mainly about the *direct* use—that is, when we take steps to see and hear and smell and taste and touch God's creation (and man's representation of it in art) in order to perceive the glory of God more fully. But with Kilby's eleven resolutions we have begun to cross over to the *indirect* use of nature. What I mean by the *indirect* use of nature is the steps we take to make our bodies and minds as proficient as possible in their role as physical partners in perceiving the glory of God.

Keep in mind that when the Bible says that “the heavens *declare* the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1), it is clear that the heavens are *not* the glory of God. They “declare” it or display it. They are the beam *along* which we look till our eyes run up to the spiritual beauty of God himself. Thus we see the heavens with our bodily eyes, and we experience the sensations of that sight in physical brains. Yet we perceive the glory of God with our spiritual eyes.

Jonathan Edwards describes this kind of joy (through creation) in God as he ponders what heaven will be like. Will we enjoy only God there, or will we enjoy other things as well? What does the psalmist mean when he declares, “I say to the LORD, ‘You are my Lord; *I have no good apart from you*’” (Ps. 16:2), or “Whom have I in heaven but you? And *there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you*” (Ps. 73:25)? Edwards answers:

The redeemed will indeed enjoy other things; they will enjoy the angels, and will enjoy one another: but that which they shall enjoy in

the angels, or each other, or in anything else whatsoever, that will yield them delight and happiness, will be what will be seen of God in them.²²

This is what we pray toward even now—that all our joy in the things of this world would be because, in and through them, we see more of the glory of God. Spiritual beauty is perceived in and through physical beauty but is not identical with it. This is why I call the body with its sensations the physical *partner* in perceiving the glory of God in the natural world.

Edwards gives us an illustration of the indirect use of nature in the fight for joy. He writes:

When the body enjoys the perfections of health and strength, the motion of the animal spirits [= physical responses] are not only brisk and free but also harmonious. There is a regular proportion in the motion from all parts of the body that begets delight in the inner soul and makes the body feel pleasantly all over. God has so excellently contrived the nerves and parts of the human body. But few men since the fall, especially since the flood, have health to so great a perfection as to have much of this harmonious motion. When it is enjoyed, one whose nature is not very much vitiated and depraved is very much assisted thereby in every exercise of body or mind. *And it fits one for the contemplation of more exalted and spiritual excellencies and harmonies, as music does.*²³

What this means is that there are conditions of the body and the mind that are more conducive than others to the perception of spiritual beauty. This is the main reason for trying to handle our bodies with a wise measure of discipline. We want to see and savor the divine glory that God declares in the heavens and on the earth and in food and sexual intimacy and music and poetry and art. And Edwards is saying that there is a condition of the body that hinders or helps the perception of God's excellencies.

THE GRACE OF GLORY REVEALED TO SUFFERING CHRISTIANS

Immediately I feel a qualification rising in my own mind. Beaten and battered prisoners for Christ often have extraordinary views of the beauty

and sustaining sweetness of Christ. They are without food or warmth or cleanliness or any physical comfort. Yet they call persecution sweet names and put to shame most of us who are fit and hardy. They often have a superior spiritual sight in their broken health and simple meals.

So please don't interpret this final part of the chapter as a kind of chipper health and happiness regimen. The question is not whether God can reveal himself in precious ways to those who suffer. He can and does. It is possible, as the Bible says, to rejoice in tribulation (Rom. 5:3). "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Pet. 4:14). The question is what we should do during times when we can choose our own lifestyle of eating and exercising and resting. In what indirect ways can we improve the ability of our bodies and minds for their partnership in perceiving the glory of God?

EATING RIGHT FOR THE SAKE OF JOY IN GOD

We have already touched on fasting in the previous chapter. There is a paradox here. By saying "No" to a physical appetite we say "Yes" to the body's ability to help us see the glory of God. A full stomach may say thanks for the food; but an empty stomach may see heavenly food more clearly. That's what Paul seems to imply about the sexual appetite when he says to Christian husbands and wives, "Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer" (1 Cor. 7:5). It really doesn't take much time to have sexual intercourse; so the issue is not to *save time* for prayer. The issue seems to be that fasting from legitimate sexual pleasure tunes the body in a unique way for communion with God. I say this even while remembering how earnestly we contended earlier in this chapter for seeing the glory of God in the very act of sexual intimacy and in the very act of eating. Both are true.

Sereno Dwight tells us that Jonathan Edwards "carefully observed the effects of the different sorts of food, and selected those which best suited his constitution, and rendered him most fit for mental labor."²⁴ Thus he abstained from every quantity and kind of food that made him sick or sleepy. Edwards had set this pattern when he was twenty-one years old when he wrote in his diary, "By a sparingness in diet, and eat-

ing as much as may be what is light and easy of digestion, I shall doubtless be able to think more clearly, and shall gain time.”²⁵ Hence he was “Resolved, to maintain the strictest temperance in eating and drinking.”²⁶

The point here is not to commend the particulars of Edwards’s eating habits. The point is that we be intentional about how our eating affects the ability of our body to be a helpful partner in seeing the glory of God. We live in an era of eating disorders.²⁷ I am not eager to create another one. I commend balance. Put the following two texts beside each other. On the one hand, Paul made food and drink clearly secondary: “The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). But on the other hand, he said, in regard to food, “I will not be enslaved by anything” (1 Cor. 6:12). In the balance of those two truths we can find a way to eat that will provide both the denial and the delight that will fit us for seeing the glory of God in the Word and in the world.

EXERCISE AS AN INDIRECT FIGHT FOR JOY

The Bible has little to say about physical exercise, not because it’s not important for modern sedentary people, but mainly because, in the biblical world of walking and farming and manual labor, the lack of physical exercise was not a problem. The call today is for spiritual wisdom based on biblical principles and contemporary medical knowledge.

The biblical principles would include the following: Our bodies belong to Christ and are meant to glorify him (1 Cor. 6:19-20); laziness is wrong and self-destructive (Prov. 21:25); Christians should be free from any enslaving habits (1 Cor. 6:12); hard work is a virtue and brings rewards (2 Tim. 2:6); advance usually comes through affliction (Acts 14:22); and all Christ-exalting efforts to be healthy flow from faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:14). “No pain, no gain” is an idea that could be documented from all over the Bible, especially the sacrifice of Christ.

Contemporary medical knowledge would include the fact that obesity kills and contributes to dozens of ailments. Not all obesity is self-inflicted. Some medical conditions make it virtually impossible to avoid it. But most of it *is* self-inflicted, and this kind of self-destruction does not enhance the ability of the body or the mind to see and savor the glory

of God in this world, or the glory of Christ who endured the cross by postponing the feast till the age to come (Heb. 12:2).

Another aspect of medical knowledge that should shape our wisdom about exercising is that consistent exercise has refining effects on our mental and emotional stability. One medical report sums up the benefits like this:

The psychological and emotional benefits from exercise are numerous, and many experts now believe that exercise is a viable and important component in the treatment of emotion disorders. A 1999 review of multiple studies found, across the board, that exercise advances the treatment of clinical depression and anxiety. . . . Yet another study found that regular brisk walking cut the incidence of sleep disturbances in half in people who suffer from them. . . . Either brief periods of intense training or prolonged aerobic workouts raise levels of chemicals in the brain, such as endorphins, adrenaline, serotonin, and dopamine, that produce feelings of pleasure. . . . Aerobic exercise is also linked with improved mental vigor, including reaction time, accuracy, and math skills. Exercising may even enhance creativity and imagination. According to one study, older people who are physically fit respond to mental challenges just as quickly as unfit young adults.²⁸

Again keep in mind that the aim of this chapter and this book is not maximal physical health. Nor is it to help you find ways to get the best buzz for your brain. None of that is of any interest to me. My aim is that you will find a way of life that enables you to use your mind and your five senses as effective partners in seeing the glory of God, and that you be so satisfied in him that you are willing to risk your health and your life to make him known. It may seem paradoxical, but that's the way it is: The right use of your body and your mind may enable you to see so much of God that you would sacrifice your life for Christ.

REST AS A WEAPON IN THE FIGHT FOR JOY

Finally, if we would see the glory of God, we must rest. For all his talk about spending and being spent, Charles Spurgeon, the nineteenth-century London pastor, counsels us to fight for joy by resting and taking a day off and opening ourselves to the healing powers that God has put in the world of nature.

For us pastors, he says, “Our Sabbath is our day of toil, and if we do not rest upon some other day we shall break down.”²⁹ Spurgeon himself kept, when possible, Wednesday as his day of rest.³⁰ More than that, Spurgeon said to his students,

It is wisdom to take occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less. On, on, on for ever, without recreation may suit spirits emancipated from this “heavy clay”, but while we are in this tabernacle, we must every now and then cry halt, and serve the Lord by holy inaction and consecrated leisure. Let no tender conscience doubt the lawfulness of going out of harness for a while.³¹

And when we take time away from the press of duty, Spurgeon recommends that we breathe country air and let the beauty of nature do its appointed work. He confesses that “sedentary habits have a tendency to create despondency . . . especially in the months of fog.” And then he counsels:

He who forgets the humming of the bees among the heather, the cooing of the wood-pigeons in the forest, the song of birds in the woods, the rippling of rills among the rushes, and the sighing of the wind among the pines, needs not wonder if his heart forgets to sing and his soul grows heavy. A day's breathing of fresh air upon the hills, or a few hours' ramble in the beech woods' umbrageous calm, would sweep the cobwebs out of the brain of scores of our toiling ministers who are now but half alive. A mouthful of sea air, or a stiff walk in the wind's face, would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is the next best. . . . The ferns and the rabbits, the streams and the trouts, the fir trees and the squirrels, the primroses and the violets, the farm-yard, the new-mown hay, and the fragrant hops—these are the best medicine for hypochondriacs, the surest tonics for the declining, the best refreshments for the weary. For lack of opportunity, or inclination, these great remedies are neglected, and the student becomes a self-immolated victim.³²

GETTING OLDER IN THE FIGHT FOR JOY

We must keep an eye on the apostolic command, “Keep a close watch on yourself” (1 Tim. 4:16). One reason we must watch ourselves closely is

that we change over the years. What was wise eating and exercising and resting in the early years is no longer wise. As I write, I am finishing my twenty-fourth year at the church I serve. I am moving toward my fifty-ninth birthday. I have watched my body and my soul with some care over these years and have noticed some changes. They are partly owing to changing circumstances, but much is owing to a changing body.

I cannot eat as much as I used to without gaining unhelpful weight. My body does not metabolize the same way it used to. Another change is that I am emotionally less resilient when I lose sleep. There were early days when I could work without regard to sleep and feel energized and motivated. In more recent years my threshold for despondency is lower on less sleep. For me, adequate sleep is not just a matter of staying healthy. It's a matter of staying in the ministry—I'm tempted to say it's a matter of persevering as a Christian. I know it is irrational that my future should look so bleak when I get only four or five hours of sleep several nights in a row. But rational or irrational, that is a fact. And I must live within the limits of facts. Therefore we must watch the changes in our bodies. In the fight for joy we must be wise in the adjustments we make.

Spurgeon was right when he said:

The condition of your body must be attended to. . . . [A] little more . . . common sense would be a great gain to some who are ultra spiritual, and attribute all their moods of feeling to some supernatural cause when the real reason lies far nearer to hand. Has it not often happened that dyspepsia [indigestion] has been mistaken for backsliding, and bad digestion has been set down as a hard heart?³³

I once struggled with the truth that joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22), because I knew from experience that it is also a “fruit” of a good night's rest. In other words, I was more gloomy on little rest and more happy on good rest. What brought light to this perplexity is that one of the ways the Spirit produces his fruit in our lives is by humbling us enough to believe we are not God and that God can run the world without our staying up too late and getting up too early. God has united the body and the spirit in such a way that careless uses of the body will ordinarily diminish our sight of the hope-giving glory of God. Not surprisingly, therefore, our joy in God usually decreases with inadequate rest.

ALL THE WORLD A WITNESS TO THE
GLORY OF GOD

Joy in God is not the same as joy in sex or a sizzling steak or deep ravines or powerful music. But God's will is that all these—and every part of his good creation—declare the glory of God. All the world, and even the imperfect representations of it in human art, is a witness to the glory of God. That glory is the ultimate ground of all human gladness. Therefore, the created world is a holy weapon in the fight for joy. But it must be “made holy by the word of God and prayer” (1 Tim. 4:5). To help you do that has been my aim in this chapter.

I waited patiently for the LORD.

PSALM 40:1

*Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.*

PSALM 30:5

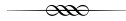
*Ah my deare angrie Lord,
Since thou dost love, yet strike;
Cast down, yet help afford;
Sure I will do the like.
I will complain, yet praise;
I will bewail, approve:
And all my sowre-sweet dayes
I will lament, and love.*

GEORGE HERBERT

“BITTER SWEET”¹

When the Darkness Does Not Lift

*Doing What We Can While We Wait
for God—and Joy*



As this book comes to a close, I am aware that I have put my oar in a very large sea. I rise from my desk and walk past a wall of books that have spoken more wisely than I on the care and cure of sad Christian souls. Just opening these volumes reminds me of how many wise and valuable things remain to be said—and cannot be said in one book. It will always be so. The Word of God is inexhaustible, and the world he made holds countless treasures waiting to be found by clear eyes in search of Christ-exalting joy. And the needs of embattled people who fight for joy will always be as diverse as the people themselves. So I content myself with rowing out into this sea as far as my limits allow, and I pray that you will search out some of these great old books² and go farther in your quest for joy than I have been able to take you.

TO HELP THOSE FOR WHOM JOY STAYS OUT OF REACH

My aim in this last chapter is to give some guidance and hope to those for whom joy seems to stay out of reach. Virtually all Bible-saturated physicians of the soul have spoken about long seasons of darkness and desolation. In the old days they called it melancholy. Richard Baxter, for example, who died in 1691, wrote with astonishing

relevance about the complexities of dealing with Christians who seem unable to enjoy God. “Delighting in God, and in his word and ways,” he said, “is the flower and life of true religion. But these that I speak of can delight in nothing—neither God, nor in his word, nor any duty.”³

How can we help Christians who seem unable to break out of darkness into the light of joy? Yes, I call them Christians, and thus assume that such things happen to genuine believers. It happens because of sin, or because of Satanic assault, or because of distressing circumstances, or because of hereditary or other physical causes. What makes these old books so remarkable is the way they come to terms with all these causes and their many combinations, and how they address each condition appropriately. The Puritan pastor never seemed to give up on anyone because of discouraging darkness.

Long before the rise of psychiatry and contemporary brain electrophysiology, Bible-saturated Puritan pastors recognized the complexity of causes behind the darkness of melancholy. In fact, the first answer Baxter mentions to the question, “What are the *causes* and *cure* of it?” is, “With very many there is a great part of the CAUSE in distemper, weakness, and diseasedness of the body; and by it the soul is greatly disabled to any comfortable sense. But the more it ariseth from such natural necessity, it is the less sinful and less dangerous to the soul; but never the less troublesome.”⁴

In his sermon on the causes and cures of melancholy he has an entire section on “medicine and diet.” He says, in his quaint but remarkably accurate language, “The disease called ‘melancholy’ is formally in the spirits, whose distemper unfits them for their office, in serving the imagination, understanding, memory, and affections; so by their distemper the thinking faculty is diseased, and becomes like an inflamed eye, or a foot that is sprained or out of joint, disabled for its proper work.”⁵

THE PHYSICAL SIDE OF SPIRITUAL DARKNESS

I will not go further discussing the physical treatment of melancholy—and its severe form, depression—than I have gone in the previous chapter. This is the work of a medical doctor, which I am not. What we should be clear about, though, is that the condition of our bodies makes a difference in the capacity of our minds to think clearly and of our

souls to see the beauty of hope-giving truth. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the great preacher at Westminster Chapel in London in the mid-twentieth century, began his helpful book *Spiritual Depression* by waving the flag of warning that we not overlook the physical. It is significant that Lloyd-Jones was a medical doctor before he was called to the ministry of preaching.

Does someone hold the view that as long as you are a Christian it does not matter what the condition of your body is? Well, you will soon be disillusioned if you believe that. Physical conditions play their part in all this. . . . There are certain physical ailments which tend to promote depression. Thomas Carlyle, I suppose, is an outstanding illustration of this. Or take that great preacher who preached in London for nearly forty years in the last century—Charles Haddon Spurgeon—one of the truly great preachers of all time. That great man was subject to spiritual depression, and the main explanation in his case was undoubtedly the fact that he suffered from a gouty condition which finally killed him. He had to face this problem of spiritual depression often in a most acute form. A tendency to acute depression is an unfailing accompaniment of the gout which he inherited from his forebears. And there are many, I find, who come to talk to me about these matters, in whose case it seems quite clear to me that the cause of the trouble is mainly physical. Into this group, speaking generally, you can put tiredness, overstrain, illness, any form of illness. You cannot isolate the spiritual from the physical for we are body, mind and spirit. The greatest and the best Christians when they are physically weak are more prone to an attack of spiritual depression than at any other time and there are great illustrations of this in the scriptures.⁶

Gaius Davies, a psychiatrist in Britain who knew Lloyd-Jones well, observed,

Before 1954, when the series of sermons on depression was completed, no effective antidepressant had been on the market, though some progress was made towards that in 1954. Later, in 1955-6 when new forms of medication were available freely, I know how concerned Dr. Lloyd-Jones was to know which kinds of antidepressants were most effective, because he asked me about them a good deal when I was beginning my medical career, and talked to other doctors

in a similar way. He wanted to know enough to be able to advise those who asked his opinion.⁷

THE PLACE OF MEDICATION IN THE FIGHT FOR JOY

I do not want to give the impression that medication should be the first or main solution to spiritual darkness. Of course, by itself medicine is *never* a solution to *spiritual* darkness. All the fundamental issues of life remain to be brought into proper relation to Christ when the medicine has done its work. Antidepressants are not the decisive savior. Christ is. In fact, the almost automatic use of pills for child misbehavior and adult sorrows is probably going to hurt us as a society.

David Powlison, who edits *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, counsels at the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, and lectures at Westminster Seminary, wrote of a sea change in the mental sciences in the mid-1990s:

Have no doubt, the world did change in the mid-90s. The *action* is now in your body. It's what you got from Mom and Dad, not what they did to you. The *excitement* is about brain functions, not family dysfunctions. The *cutting edge* is in hard science medical research and psychiatry, not squishy soft, philosophy-of-life, feel-your-pain psychologies. . . . Biology is suddenly hot. Psychiatry has broken forth, a *blitzkrieg* sweeping away all opposition. . . . Medicine is poised to claim the human personality. . . . The biopsychologizing of human life is having a huge effect, both in culture and the church.⁸

His conclusion is that this preoccupation with biopsychiatry will pass, and as it does,

biopsychiatry will cure a few things, for which we should praise the God of common grace. But in the long run, unwanted and unforeseen side effects will combine with vast disillusionment. The gains will never live up to the promises. And the lives of countless people, whose normal life problems are now being medicated, will not be qualitatively changed and redirected. Only intelligent repentance, living faith, and tangible obedience turn the world upside down.⁹

Powlison refers sympathetically to Ed Welch's book, *Blame It on the Brain?*—where Welch is willing to employ medication in cases of persistent debilitating depression. Welch says:

If the person is not taking medication but is considering it, I typically suggest that he or she postpone that decision for a period of time. During that time, I consider possible causes, and together we ask God to teach us about both ourselves and him so that we can grow in faith in the midst of hardship. If the depression persists, I might let the person know that medication is an option to deal with some of the physical symptoms.¹⁰

To many, this may seem excessively cautious. But widespread scientific evidence is already reigning in the initial enthusiasm about the unique effectiveness of antidepressants. One summary article in *The Washington Post* in May 2002 put the situation starkly like this:

After thousands of studies, hundreds of millions of prescriptions and tens of billions of dollars in sales, two things are certain about pills that treat depression: Antidepressants like Prozac, Paxil and Zoloft work. And so do sugar pills. A new analysis has found that in the majority of trials conducted by drug companies in recent decades, sugar pills have done as well as—or better than—antidepressants.¹¹

The point of Welch's caution and the *Post*'s skepticism is not that depression or spiritual darkness is disconnected with our physical condition. They are deeply connected. The point is that the relationship between the soul and the brain is beyond human comprehension and should be handled with the greatest care and with profound attention to the moral and spiritual realities of human personhood that may exert as much influence on the brain as vice versa.

In other words, if someone reading this book is on medication, or is thinking about it, I do not condemn you for that, nor does the Bible. It may or may not be the best course of action. I commend you to the wisdom of a God-centered, Bible-saturated medical doctor. If there was imperfection in the choice to use medication, the imputed righteousness of Christ will swallow it up as you rest in him. Don't forget the lesson of "gutsy guilt" from Chapter Six.

WAITING IN DARKNESS WE ARE NOT LOST
AND NOT ALONE

With or without medication there are other things that can be done in the midst of prolonged darkness. And I would love to encourage you in some of these. It will be of great advantage to the struggling Christian to remember that seasons of darkness are normal in the Christian life. I don't mean that we should not try to live above them. I mean that if we do not succeed, we are not lost, and we are not alone, as the fragment of our faith cleaves to Christ. Consider the experience of David in Psalm 40:1-3.

I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD.

The king of Israel is in “the pit of destruction” and “the miry bog”—descriptions of his spiritual condition. The song of praise is coming, he says, but it is not now on his lips. It is as if David had fallen into a deep, dark well and plunged into life-threatening mud. There was one other time when David wrote about this kind of experience. He combined the images of mud and flood: “Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me” (Ps. 69:1-2).

In this pit of mud and destruction there is a sense of helplessness and desperation. Suddenly air, just air, is worth a million dollars. Helplessness, desperation, apparent hopelessness, the breaking point for the overworked businessman, the outer limits of exasperation for the mother of three constantly crying children, the impossible expectations of too many classes in school, the grinding stress of a lingering illness, the imminent attack of a powerful enemy. It is good that we don't know what the experience was. It makes it easier to see ourselves in the pits with the king. Anything that causes a sense of helplessness and desperation and threatens to ruin life or take it away—that is the king's pit.

HOW LONG, O LORD, HOW LONG!

Then comes the king's cry: "I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry." One of the reasons God loved David so much was because he cried so much. "I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping" (Ps. 6:6). "You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?" (Ps. 56:8). Indeed they are! "Blessed are those who mourn" (Matt. 5:4). It is a beautiful thing when a broken man genuinely cries out to God.

Then after the cry you wait. "I waited patiently for the LORD." This is crucial to know: Saints who cry to the Lord for deliverance from pits of darkness must learn to wait patiently for the Lord. There is no statement about how long David waited. I have known saints who walked through eight years of debilitating depression and came out into glorious light. Only God knows how long we must wait. We saw this in Micah's experience in Chapter Six. "I sit in darkness . . . until [the Lord] pleads my cause and . . . will bring me out to the light" (see Micah 7:8-9). We can draw no deadlines for God. He hastens or he delays as he sees fit. And his timing is all-loving toward his children. Oh, that we might learn to be patient in the hour of darkness. I don't mean that we make peace with darkness. We fight for joy. But we fight as those who are saved by grace and held by Christ. We say with Paul Gerhardt that our night will soon—in God's good timing—turn to day:

*Give to the winds thy fears,
Hope and be undismayed.
God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears,
God shall lift up thy head.*

*Through waves and clouds and storms,
He gently clears thy way;
Wait thou His time; so shall this night
Soon end in joyous day.*

*Far, far above thy thought,
His counsel shall appear,
When fully He the work hath wrought,
That caused thy needless fear.*

*Leave to His sovereign sway
To choose and to command;
So shalt thou, wondering, own that way,
How wise, how strong this hand.¹²*

THE GROUND OF OUR ASSURANCE¹³ WHEN WE CANNOT SEE OUR FAITH

It is utterly crucial that in our darkness we affirm the wise, strong hand of God to hold *us*, even when we have no strength to hold *him*. This is the way Paul thought of his own strivings. He said, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, *because Christ Jesus has made me his own*” (Phil. 3:12). The key thing to see in this verse is that all Paul’s efforts to grasp the fullness of joy in Christ are secured by Christ’s grasp of him. Never forget that your security rests on Christ’s faithfulness first.

Our faith rises and falls. It has degrees. But our security does not rise and fall. It has no degrees. We *must* persevere in faith. That’s true. But there are times when our faith is the size of a mustard seed and barely visible. In fact the darkest experience for the child of God is when his faith sinks out of his own sight. Not out of God’s sight, but his. Yes, it is possible to be so overwhelmed with darkness that you do not know if you are a Christian—and yet still be one.

All the great doctors of the soul have distinguished between faith and its full assurance. The reason for this is that we are saved by the work of God causing us to be born again and bringing us to faith. “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). We are not saved by producing faith on our own and then making that the basis of our new birth. It is the other way around. Which means that God is at the bottom of my faith, and when it disappears for a season from my own view, God may yet be there sustaining its root in the new birth and protecting the seed from destruction. This was crucial in Richard Baxter’s soul care.

Certainty of our faith and sincerity is not necessary to salvation, but the sincerity of faith itself is necessary. He shall be saved that giveth up himself to Christ, though he know not that he is sincere in doing

it. Christ knoweth his own grace, when they that have it know not that it is sound.

An abundance are cast down by ignorance of themselves, not knowing the sincerity which God hath given them. Grace is weak in the best of us here; and little and weak grace is not very easily perceived, for it acteth weakly and unconstantly, and it is known but by its acts; and weak grace is always joined with too strong corruption; and all sins in heart and life is contrary to grace, and doth obscure it; . . . And how can any under all these hindrances, yet keep any full assurance of their own sincerity?¹⁴

Baxter's aim here is not to destroy a Christian's comfort. On the contrary, he wants to help us in the times of our darkness to know that we can be safe in Jesus, even when we have lost sight of our own sincerity. The witness of the Holy Spirit that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16) may be clear or faint. But the reality is unshakable. "God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his'" (2 Tim. 2:19). "God is faithful, by whom you were called" (1 Cor. 1:9). "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). Baxter's words are crucial counsels if we are to survive the dark night of the soul. And that night will come for almost every Christian. And when it comes, we must wait for the Lord, cry to him, and know that our own self-indictment, rendered in the darkness, is not as sure as God's Word spoken in the light.

WHEN A CHILD OF GOD IS PERSUADED THAT HE IS NOT

Christians in the darkness of depression may ask desperately, How can I know that I am truly a child of God? They are not usually asking to be reminded that we are saved by grace through faith. They know that. They are asking how they can know that their faith is real. God must guide us in how we answer, and knowing the person will help us know what to say.¹⁵

The first and best thing to say may be, "I love you. And I am not letting you go." In those words a person may feel God's keeping presence that they may not feel in any other way. Or, second, we might say,

“Stop looking at your faith, and rivet your attention on Christ. Faith is sustained by looking at Christ, crucified and risen, not by turning from Christ to analyze your faith. Let me help you look to Christ. Let’s read Luke 22—24 together.” Paradoxically, if we would experience the joy of faith, we must not focus much on it. We must focus on the greatness of our Savior.

Third, we might call attention to the evidences of grace in their life. We might recount our own sense of their authenticity when we were loved by them, and then remind them of their own strong affirmations of the lordship of Christ. Then say, “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). This approach is not usually successful in the short run, because a depressed person is prone to discount all good assessments of his own condition; but it can be valuable in the long run, because it stands as an objective hope and act of love over against his own subjective darkness.

Fourth, we might remind the sufferer that his demand for a kind of absolute, mathematical certainty about his right standing with God is asking for too much. None of us lives with that kind of certainty about any relationships in life, and this does not destroy our comfort. As Baxter says, “No wife or child is certain that the husband or father will not murder them; and yet they may live comfortably, and not fear it.”¹⁶ In other words, there is a kind of certainty that we live by, and it is enough. It is, in the end, a gift of God.

One can imagine a wife obsessed with fear that her husband will kill her, or that during the night one of her children will kill another one. No amount of arguing may bring her away from the fear of this possibility. Rationally and mathematically it *is* possible. But millions of people live in complete peace about these things, even though there is no absolute $2 + 2 = 4$ kind of certainty. The certainty is rooted in good experience and the God-given stability of nature. It is a sweet assurance—and a gift of God. So we say to our suffering friend, don’t demand the kind of certainty about your own relationship to God that you don’t require about the other relationships in your life.

It follows from this that we should all fortify ourselves against the dark hours of depression by cultivating a deep distrust of the certainties of despair. Despair is relentless in the certainties of its pessimism. But we have seen again and again, from our own experience and others’, that

absolute statements of hopelessness that we make in the dark are notoriously unreliable. Our dark certainties were not sureties. While we have the light, let us cultivate distrust of the certainties of despair.

FOLD NOT THE ARMS OF ACTION

Waiting for the Lord in a season of darkness should not be a time of inactivity. We should do what we can do. And *doing* is often God's appointed remedy for despair. Wise Christian counselors, ancient and modern, have given this advice. George MacDonald, whom C. S. Lewis called "his master,"¹⁷ wrote:

He changes not because you changest. Nay, He has an especial tenderness of love towards thee for that thou art in the dark and hast no light, and His heart is glad when thou dost arise and say, "I will go to my Father." . . . Fold the arms of thy faith, and wait in the quietness until light goes up in thy darkness. Fold the arms of thy Faith I say, but not of thy Action: bethink thee of something that thou oughtest to do, and go to do it, if it be but the sweeping of a room, or the preparing of a meal, or a visit to a friend. Heed not thy feelings: Do thy work.¹⁸

Richard Baxter gave the same counsel three hundred years earlier than MacDonald and traced it back to the Bible.

Be sure that you live not idly, but in some constant business of a lawful calling, so far as you have bodily strength. Idleness is a constant sin, and labour is a duty. Idleness is but the devil's home for temptation, and for unprofitable, distracting musings. Labour profiteth others and ourselves; both soul and body need it. Six days must thou labour, and must not eat "The bread of idleness." (Prov. xxxi. 13-27.) God hath made it our duty, and will bless us in his appointed way. I have known grievous, despairing melancholy cured and turned into a life of godly cheerfulness, principally by setting upon constancy and diligence in the business of families and callings.¹⁹

WHAT MATTERS IS YOUR DUTY, NOT YOUR JOY?

This counsel from MacDonald and Baxter raises a critical question: They both seem to make feelings negligible. They seem to say: What

matters is that you do your duty, not that you feel joy. But that may not be what they mean, and if it were, I would strongly disagree. When MacDonald says, “Heed not thy feelings, do thy work,” he means: Don’t let *wrong* feelings govern you. Act against them. If your feelings are telling you that staying in bed is the best thing today, preach to your feelings and tell them how foolish they are. Don’t lose sight of the gospel in this preaching! Don’t forget that defeating these wrong feelings and getting out of bed is enabled by the Spirit and is *becoming what you are in Christ*. But then exert your will and get up! I certainly agree with this.

But the question is deeper: If joy in God is the fountain of love and the root of right living—as I believe it is—can behavior that proceeds without joy be virtuous? I will answer the question at two levels.

First, I would say that a Christian, no matter how dark the season of his sadness, never is completely without joy in God. I mean that there remains in his heart the seed of joy in the form, perhaps only of a remembered taste of goodness and an unwillingness to let the goodness go. This is not the “joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Pet. 1:8). It’s not the joy that we have known at times and fight to regain. But it is a fragment of such joy—like a man who sits in prison and pulls out a tattered picture of his wife, or a paralyzed victim of a car accident who watches a video of the day he could dance. Or even more fragmentary, the joy may only lie there in the cellar of our soul in the form of penitent sadness that we cannot desire God as we ought. Inside that sadness is the seed of what we once knew of joy.

DUTY INCLUDES THE DUTY OF JOY

The other answer I would give is that we should never say to ourselves or another person in the season of darkness, “Just do your work. Just do your duty. Just act like a Christian, even if you don’t feel like one.” That’s almost good advice. But the problem is in the word *just*. Instead of only saying, “just do your duty,” we must say four other things as well.

First, we must say that joy is part of your duty. The Bible says, “Rejoice always” (1 Thess. 5:16). And in regard to the duty of giving, it says, “God loves a *cheerful* giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). In regard to the duty

of service, it says, “Serve the LORD *with gladness*” (Ps. 100:2). In regard to the duty of mercy it says do it “*with cheerfulness*” (Rom. 12:8). In regard to the duty of afflictions, it says, “*Count it all joy*” (Jas. 1:2). We simply water down the divine command when we call someone to half their duty.

The second thing we must say when we tell a disconsolate person to “do their job” is that while they do their job, they should probably be repenting and confessing the sin of gloomy faith. I say “probably” because even in cases where the main cause is physical, there is probably some element of sinful pride or self-pity mingled with it. I am aware that this may sound like an added burden to the one who is in spiritual darkness. But it is not an *added* burden. If it is a burden at all, it is already there and not *added* by calling it what it is. Failing to rejoice in God when we are commanded to rejoice is sin. False comforts lead to artificial healing. But the truest diagnoses lead to the deepest cures. So, yes, we tell the disconsolate: “If you can, get up from your bed and make a meal, or sweep a room, or take a walk, or visit a friend, or go to work. But it is not a matter of indifference whether you do this with joy in God, and if you can’t, then tell him so, and that you are sorry. He will hear you mercifully and forgive.”

WILL YOU BE A HYPOCRITE IF YOU OBEY WITHOUT JOY?

Which leads to the third thing we say along with “Do your duty.” We say: As you are able to do some of your duty, ask God that the joy be restored. That is, don’t sit and wait for the joy, saying, “I will be a hypocrite if I do an act of mercy today, since I do not feel the joy of mercy.” No, you will not be a hypocrite, *if* you know that joy is your duty, and repent that you don’t have it, and ask God earnestly to restore the joy even as you do the deed. That is *not* the way a hypocrite thinks. That is the way a true Christian thinks in the fight for joy.

And the fourth thing we say, when we counsel the depressed Christian to be up and doing something good, is, “Be sure to thank God as you work that he has given you at least the will to work.” Do not say, “But it is hypocritical to thank God with my tongue when I don’t *feel* thankful in my heart.” There is such a thing as hypocritical thanksgiv-

ing. Its aim is to conceal ingratitude and get the praise of men. That is not your aim. Your aim in loosing your tongue with words of gratitude is that God would be merciful and fill your *words* with the *emotion* of true gratitude. You are not seeking the praise of men; you are seeing the mercy of God. You are not hiding the hardness of ingratitude, but hoping for the inbreaking of the Spirit.

THANKSGIVING WITH THE MOUTH STIRS UP THANKFULNESS IN THE HEART

Moreover, we should probably ask the despairing saint, “Do you know your heart so well that you are sure the words of thanks have no trace of gratitude in them?” I, for one, distrust my own assessment of my motives. I doubt that I know my good ones well enough to see all the traces of contamination. And I doubt that I know my bad ones well enough to see the traces of grace. Therefore, it is not folly for a Christian to assume that there is a residue of gratitude in his heart when he speaks and sings of God’s goodness even though he feels little or nothing.

To this should be added that experience shows that *doing* the right thing, in the way I have described, is often the way toward *being* in the right frame. Hence Baxter gives this wise counsel to the oppressed Christian:

Resolve to spend most of your time in thanksgiving and praising God. If you cannot do it with the joy that you should, yet do it as you can. You have not the power of your comforts: but have you no power of your tongues? Say not, that you are unfit for thanks and praises unless you have a praising heart and were the children of God: for every man, good and bad, is bound to praise God, and to be thankful for all that he hath received, and to do it as well as he can, rather than leave it undone. . . . Doing it as you can is the way to be able to do it better. Thanksgiving stirreth up thankfulness in the heart.²⁰

DOES UNCONFESSED SIN CLOG OUR JOY?

It may be that part of the cause of spiritual darkness is cherished sin that we are unwilling to let go. I have assumed all along in this book that the pursuit of joy implies hatred for sin. Sin destroys joy. It offers deceptive delights, but it kills in the end. In dealing with our sin we can make two

mistakes. One is to make light of it. The other is to be overwhelmed by it. In the fight for joy we must take it seriously, hate it, renounce it, and trust Christ as our only Savior from its guilt and power.

One of the reasons that some people suffer from extended times of darkness is the unwillingness to renounce some cherished sin. Jesus and the apostle Peter and King David all spoke of how unconfessed sin hinders our joy in God. Jesus said, "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23-24). We quench the joy of fellowship with God while we refuse to confess our offenses to man. Peter related this to marriage and said that if a husband sins against his wife, his prayers will be hindered (1 Pet. 3:7). If we want the joy of seeing and savoring God in Christ, we must not make peace with our sins. We must make war.

Listen to the experience of David that comes from unconfessed and unforsaken sin in his life: "Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. For *when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long*" (Ps. 32:2-3). These words are full of hope. We can hold fast to our sin, keep it secret, and "groan all day long" in darkness—or we can confess it and experience the stunning experience of "the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity."

The almost incredible hope of confessing and renouncing sin is that the Lord does not then rub it in our face but cancels it. He does not count it against us. From this side of Calvary, we know how God can do that with justice. Christ bore the wrath of God for that sin (Gal. 3:13). We don't have to. The accounts are settled. Therefore, we should not fear to confess and let go of any cherished sin. The shame will not haunt us. Christ clothes us with his own righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21).

CONFESSING TO GOD AND TO MAN IS SWEET FREEDOM

As we ponder both the deep, unconscious depravity of our souls and the presumptuous sins of our wills, we should pray the words of Psalm 19:12-13: "Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let

them not have dominion over me!” We have *hidden* faults that we cannot even confess, because we don’t know what they are. And we have sins that we know about. It is good news to realize there is a biblical prayer that covers both. “Declare me innocent” of the ones I don’t know about (because of Christ’s blood), and “keep back your servant” from the ones I do know about (by Christ’s power). If you hold fast to sin instead of renouncing it and fighting it, the darkness will remain as a severe, but merciful witness to the outcome of cherishing idols.

Do not be content with whispering your sin to God. That is good. Very good. But he offers us something more: “Confess your sins *to one another* and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (Jas. 5:16). There is a release and healing that flows from confessing not only to God in the secret place of your heart, but also to a trusted friend, or to the person you have offended. The tender words, “I’m sorry, will you forgive me?” are one of the surest paths to joy.

GIVE THE DEVIL HIS DUE, BUT NO MORE

If you ask about the devil’s role in your darkness, I answer: Give him his due, but no more. He and his demons are *always* at work, not just sometimes. There is nothing extraordinary about the *fact* of his harassment. Paul considers it a normal part of Christian warfare to “take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16). Peter counsels us, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith” (1 Pet. 5:8-9). All this is normal. But the quality of his harassment varies from mild temptation to murder. Jesus calls him “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). He has the power to inspire painful persecution and even kill Christians (Rev. 2:10).

But there are three great comforts in the face of Satan’s attacks. One is that Satan cannot do anything apart from God’s sovereign permission (Job 1:12; 2:6), which is governed by God’s infinite wisdom and covenant love. Thus Satan’s servants become God’s sanctifying envoys (2 Cor. 12:7-10). So even if Satan has a hand in your darkness, he is not free to do more than your loving Father permits, and God will turn it for your good (Luke 22:31-32).

Second, the decisive blow against Satan's destructive power was delivered by the death of Jesus for our sins (Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14). This means that Satan can harass us and even kill us, but he cannot destroy us. Only unforgiven sin can damn the human soul. If Christ has covered all our sin by his blood, and if God imputes to us the perfect righteousness of Christ, then Satan has no grounds for any damning accusation, and his case against us fails in the court of heaven. "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died" (Rom. 8:33-34).

THE DEVIL CANNOT ABIDE WITH THE LIGHT OF CHERISHED TRUTH

Third, deliverance from Satan's oppressing, darkening, and deceiving work in the life of the Christian comes most often by the power of truth, and only rarely by exorcism. I have seen demon-possession and have been a part of one very dramatic exorcism. I don't believe the person was a Christian till after the deliverance. The complete takeover of the personality by a demon is not something the Holy Spirit would allow in the Christ-indwelt heart. But that distinction may not matter much to the Christian who is being attacked and harassed from without on every side. The battle can be fierce. What is called for usually is the ministry of 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Gentle, loving, teaching of the *truth* is the process in which God himself grants repentance and a knowledge of the *truth*, which results in an escape from the captivity of the devil. The devil cannot abide truth and light. He is by nature a liar and deceiver. He thrives in darkness. Therefore, if, by God's grace we can bring the full force of truth to shine in the believer's darkness, the devil will not survive the light. Good, solid Bible teaching is a crucial part of deliverance from the darkening power of the devil.²¹

THE DARKNESS THAT FEEDS ON SELF-ABSORPTION

Sometimes the darkness of our souls is owing in part to the fact that we have drifted into patterns of life that are not blatantly sinful but are constricted and uncaring. Our world has shrunk down to mere prudential concerns about ourselves and our families. Ethics has diminished from global concerns of justice and mercy and missions down to little lists of bad things to avoid. We find ourselves not energized for any great cause, but always thinking about the way to maximize our leisure and escape pressure. Unconsciously we have become very self-absorbed and oblivious and uncaring toward the pain and suffering in the world that is far worse than our own.

Paradoxically, depressed persons may say that they must care for themselves and cannot take on the problems of the world, when in fact part of the truth may be that their depression is feeding on the ingrown quality of their lives. This hit home to me when Bill Leslie came to Minneapolis some years ago and told his story. Bill Leslie was the pastor of LaSalle Street Church in Chicago, Illinois, from 1961 to 1989. He died of a heart attack at the age of sixty-one in 1993. His ministry was marked by concern for the whole person in the context of Chicago urban life. In an article on "Compassionate Evangelicalism," *Christianity Today* listed Leslie among the "early holistic ministry leaders."²²

HOW BILL LESLIE BECAME A WATERED GARDEN AND A SPRING

He told of a near breakdown that he had, and how a spiritual mentor directed him to Isaiah 58. He said it was verses 10-11 that rescued him from a season of darkness marked by feelings of exhaustion, burnout, and a dead-end ministry. The text says:

If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

What struck Pastor Leslie so powerfully was the fact that if we pour ourselves out for others, God promises to make us like “a watered garden”—that is, we will receive the water we need for refreshment and joy. But even more, we will thus be “a spring of water” that does not fail—for others, for the demanding, exhausting, draining ministry of urban self-giving. He saw that God’s way of lifting gloom and turning it into light was to “pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted.” This gave him a pattern of divine life that got him through his crisis and kept him going for the rest of his days.

God has made us to flourish by being spent for others. Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Most of us do not *choose* against this life of outpouring; we *drift* away from it. We confuse pressured family life and stresses at work with Christian sacrifice, when in fact much of it has little to do with meeting the needs of the hungry and afflicted and perishing.

Please hear me carefully. This is not the diagnosis for all depression or discouragement. If it were, such self-giving servants would never be depressed. But they are. My point is that *one* of the causes of some people’s darkness is a slowly creeping self-absorption and small-mindedness. And the cure may be the gradual embrace of a vision of life that is far greater than our present concerns. Some things may have to be taken out of our schedule. But as health and joy return, we may be capable of more than we ever dreamed.

WHAT MY EIGHTY-FIVE-YEAR-OLD FATHER SAID WAS MISSING

I would mention in particular the life-giving, joy-producing effect of sharing your faith with unbelievers by word and deed. A few days ago I called my eighty-five-year-old father and said, “Daddy, I am writing a book on how to fight for joy. What one thing comes to your mind from sixty years of ministry as to what Christians could do to increase their joy?” Almost without hesitation he said, “Share their faith.” Joy in Christ thrives on being shared. That is the essence of Christian joy: It overflows or dies.

Millions of Christians live with a low-grade feeling of guilt for not openly commending Christ by their words. They try to persuade them-

selves that keeping their noses morally clean is a witness to Christ. The problem with this notion is that millions of unbelievers keep their noses morally clean. Christians will—and should—continue to feel bad for not sharing their faith. Christ is the most glorious person in the world. His salvation is infinitely valuable. Everyone in the world needs it. Horrific consequences await those who do not believe on Jesus. By grace alone we have seen him, believed on him, and now love him. Therefore, not to speak of Christ to unbelievers, and not to care about our city or the unreached peoples of the world is so contradictory to Christ's worth, people's plight, and our joy that it sends the quiet message to our souls day after day, this Savior and this salvation do not mean to you what you say they do. To maintain great joy in Christ in the face of that persistent message is impossible.

THE AIM IS THAT OUR WORDS WOULD BE THE OVERFLOW OF JOY IN CHRIST

I am aware, again, that this will feel like added guilt for the depressed person. It is not added. It is already there. Hiding it is like hiding part of the diagnosis of a person's disease. Jesus said shocking things, and hiding them will serve no one well in the long run. "Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32-33). This is not meant by Jesus as a heavy burden or a hard yoke. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

What makes the gospel good news is not that Christ can be buried in our TV-saturated lives without the loss of joy. What makes it good news is that God is long-suffering and willing to forgive and start over with us again and again. The depressed person cannot simply go out and proclaim the joy of the Lord. But little by little a life can be built on grace and forgiveness that comes to the point where to be an advocate and a witness to Jesus is like breathing—and just as life-giving. The fight is to enjoy Christ so much that speaking of him is the overflow and increase of that enjoyment.²³

IS THE CAUSE YOU LIVE FOR LARGE ENOUGH FOR
YOUR CHRIST-EXALTING HEART?

J. Campbell White, secretary of the Laymen's Missionary Movement, said in 1909:

Most men are not satisfied with the permanent output of their lives. Nothing can wholly satisfy the life of Christ within his followers except the adoption of Christ's purpose toward the world he came to redeem. Fame, pleasure and riches are but husks and ashes in contrast with the boundless and abiding joy of working with God for the fulfillment of his eternal plans. The men who are putting everything into Christ's undertaking are getting out of life its sweetest and most priceless rewards.²⁴

In the midst of darkness saints may have no strength to pursue such global dreams. But it may be, in the mercy of God, that as we wait for the light to go up, we can do poorly what we would love to do well. Perhaps we can read a short article about the church in China. Or listen to a tape about a missionary who suffered much for the gospel. Or write a note to a missionary family with a few lines about how we are hanging on to grace, and include a brief prayer for them.

LOVING THOSE WHO CANNOT SEE THE LIGHT

For most people who are passing through the dark night of the soul, the turnaround will come because God brings unwavering lovers of Christ into their lives who do not give up on them. Throughout Richard Baxter's sermon on the causes and cures of melancholy are strewn counsels to the church on how to carry the burdens of the depressed. He says things like, "Often set before them the great truths of the gospel which are fittest to comfort them; and read them informing, comforting books; and live in a loving, cheerful manner with them."²⁵ If depressed saints cannot read the Bible or a good book, we should read it to them.

THE AMAZING GRACE OF JOHN NEWTON'S CARE
FOR COWPER

One great example of persevering love for a depressed friend is John Newton,²⁶ the English pastor who wrote "Amazing Grace." He was one

of the healthiest, happiest pastors in the eighteenth century. This proved to be life-giving—to a point—for a suicidal poet named William Cowper, who wrote some of our best-known hymns. Newton had drunk deeply at the fountain of grace, the cross of Jesus Christ. He was filled with joy and overflowing for those who weren't. To taste the kind of person Newton was, listen to this testimony he wrote about how he lived his days.

Two heaps of human happiness and misery; now if I can take but the smallest bit from one heap and add to the other, I carry a point. If, as I go home, a child has dropped a halfpenny, and if, by giving it another, I can wipe away its tears, I feel I have done something. I should be glad to do greater things, but I will not neglect this. When I hear a knock on my study door, I hear a message from God; it may be a lesson of instruction; perhaps a lesson of penitence; but, since it is his message, it must be interesting.²⁷

In 1767, at the age of thirty-six, William Cowper entered Newton's life while Newton was pastor at Olney. Cowper had already had a total mental breakdown and had attempted suicide three different times. He had been institutionalized at St. Alban's Insane Asylum, where God met him in a powerful way through the loving care of Dr. Nathaniel Cotton, and by a converting encounter with the gospel in Romans 3:25.

Immediately I received the strength to believe it, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood, and all the fullness and completeness of His justification. In a moment I believed, and received the gospel.²⁸

After his release from St. Alban's, Cowper moved in with the Unwin family in a parish near Olney. When the father of the family died, Newton came to console them. Cowper was so helped by what he heard that he and Mrs. Unwin moved to Olney to be a part of Newton's church. For the next thirteen years Newton tended the tangled garden of Cowper's soul. Cowper said, "A sincerer or more affectionate friend no man ever had."²⁹

While there, Cowper entered a time of spiritual despair that made

him feel utterly God-forsaken and lost. This lasted most of the rest of his life until he died in 1800. Again there were repeated attempts at suicide, and each time God providentially prevented him. Newton stood by him all the way through this, even sacrificing at least one vacation so as not to leave Cowper alone.

In 1780, Newton left Olney for a new pastorate in London, where he served for the next twenty-seven years. It is a great tribute to him that he did not abandon his friendship with Cowper, though this would, no doubt, have been emotionally easy to do. Instead there was an earnest exchange of letters for twenty years. Cowper poured out his soul to Newton as he did to no one else.

The last days of Cowper's life brought no relief. There was no happy ending. In March 1800, Cowper said to the visiting doctor, "I feel unutterable despair." On April 24 Miss Perowne offered some refreshment to him, to which he replied, "What can it signify?" He never spoke again and died the next afternoon.³⁰

To the end Newton remained Cowper's pastor and friend, writing and visiting him again and again. He did not despair of the despairing. After one of these visits in 1788 Cowper wrote:

I found those comforts in your visit, which have formerly sweetened all our interviews, in part restored. I knew you; knew you for the same shepherd who was sent to lead me out of the wilderness into the pasture where the Chief Shepherd feeds His flock, and felt my sentiments of affectionate friendship for you the same as ever.³¹

THERE IS NO WASTED WORK IN LOVING THOSE WITHOUT LIGHT

You cannot persuade a depressed person that he is not reprobate if he is utterly persuaded that he is. But you can stand by him. And you can keep soaking him, as Newton did for Cowper, in the "benevolence, mercy, goodness, and sympathy" of Jesus, and "the sufficiency of the atonement," and "the fullness and completeness of Christ's justification."³² He may say that they are wonderful, but that they do not belong to him—as Cowper did. But in God's time these truths may yet be given the power to awaken hope and beget a spirit of adoption. Or, even in the absence of evidence that peace is given, they may be used in some

mysterious way to sustain the mustard seed of faith that is so small it cannot be seen.

I do not know the outcome of Cowper's fight for joy. But I do know that true saints enter dark seasons, and should they die in the midst of one, it is no sure sign that they were not born again, nor that they were not sustained in their darkness by the sovereign hand of grace. God has his reasons why he would leave one of his children feeling so forsaken—just as he has his reasons for martyrdom (John 21:19). Sometimes we can see these reasons, and sometimes we can't.

Gaius Davies tells the following story:

Winston Churchill used to speak of his “black dog”: he survived though he was dogged by depression for much of his life. It is said that only because Churchill had faced his own black periods was he able, at sixty years of age, to rally those who felt overwhelmed by the Nazi threat. His own experience of adversity enabled him to be a leader who helped to save the world from the darkness of tyranny.³³

But Cowper did not live to lead a nation into triumphant war. He died miserable. What was his “black dog” good for? It is not for us to render this final judgment. But I bear one small testimony. Without his struggles he probably would not have written, “There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood” and brought hope to thousands of sinners who fear they have sinned their lives away:

*The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day;
And there have I, though vile as he, washed all my sins away.
Washed all my sins away, washed all my sins away;
And there have I, though vile as he, washed all my sins away.*³⁴

And he would not have written “God Moves in a Mysterious Way” and by it helped me and many others through a hundred thickets of discouragement.

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up his bright designs
And works his sovereign will.*

*You fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.*

*His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.*

*Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.³⁵*

There is a legacy of severe mercy in writings such as these. The words are costly. And so they prove precious. So it is with everyone who stands beside a melancholy saint and helps him fight for joy.

William Cowper testified that the legacy had been left to him by another embattled poet and pastor, George Herbert, who had died at the age of thirty-nine in 1633. Cowper said, "This was the only author I had any delight reading. I pored over him all day long; and though I found not here what I might have found—a cure for my malady, yet it never seemed so much alleviated as while I was reading him."³⁶ Not surprisingly, therefore, a poem by Herbert wonderfully sums up this chapter and this book. It's called "Bitter-Sweet." I hope you will read it twice, once to get the flow, and once aloud (as poetry is meant to be read) for the beauty and the meaning. Please don't stumble over the old-fashioned spelling. Herbert would be very happy if you were encouraged in your fight for joy.

*Ah my deare angrie Lord,
Since thou dost love, yet strike;
Cast down, yet help afford;
Sure I will do the like.*

*I will complain, yet praise;
I will bewail, approve:
And all my soure-sweet dayes
I will lament, and love.³⁷*

Or as the apostle Paul put it for all the saints who fight for joy in this fallen world of pain and suffering, we live and minister “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor. 6:10).