

Enjoy: "The Aim Of Prayer"

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[0 : 01] Amen. If you would, take your Bibles and open them up to the book of Psalms this morning. The book of Psalms, and our passage will be Psalm 37, verse 4.

I ask that if you would please remain standing, if you're able, for the reading of God's Word. Just one verse this morning, Psalm 37, verse 4. If you were here last week, you know we're taking a break from the Gospel of John for the month of January.

And our aim in this month, the month of January, is to remind ourselves, as we begin a new year, of our mission and vision as a church. So last week, we covered our mission, which is that we exist to magnify the glory of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And starting this week and over the next three weeks, Lord willing, we'll cover our three-part ministry vision, which is to enjoy God, to equip the saints, and to evangelize the lost.

But what I've felt compelled to do over these three weeks is to blanket those three aspects of our ministry together with a theme of prayer. So this week, we're going to cover how we enjoy God together in prayer.

[1 : 11] So let's read Psalm 37, verse 4. Remain standing and listen along as I read God's Word. It says, Let's pray once more.

Lord, we ask that you would turn our hearts now to delight in you. We ask God that you would change the desires of our hearts and then give us the desires of our hearts.

And we ask all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. You may be seated. If my math is correct, we've prayed a total of four times together already in our worship service this morning.

We prayed at the beginning of our service, after the call to worship. And we prayed a prayer of praise after the catechism reading. We had a prayer for our offering right after the scripture reading this morning.

And then I just prayed for the preaching of the Word. That makes for four times together. And of course, if you were in the Sunday school hour, that hour both begins and ends with prayer.

[2 : 21] And I don't know if you even know this or not, but if you were here 15 minutes before the Sunday school hour, we have 15 minutes before the Sunday school hour every Sunday morning. We walk through the morning service and we pray through the morning service and commit all of our plans to the Lord.

And then guess what? Well, we're not done praying this morning. As you might imagine, after I'm done saying everything I have planned to say, I will pray. And then we will conclude with a time of silent prayer and reflection.

And then I've asked Treg if he would lead us in prayer as a way to apply and respond to what God has taught us this morning through His Word.

I hope that you can tell, if you've been a part of our worship services for any length of time, that for us, prayer is not just an accessory to our worship. It is absolutely a vital element of our life together. It is a vital part of our church family and what we aim to do together. I'll never forget when I was serving at a church in North Myrtle Beach. I served as a pastor on staff at a church there.

[3 : 31] And we also placed a high premium on the value of prayer. And we had some family in town visiting us for the weekend. Amanda's sister and our nephews.

And after the service was over, I do as I always do. I go around and I say, hey, would anybody like to share anything that they picked up, anything they heard from the morning's service? And my nephew was probably seven or eight years old at the time.

And he said, I don't really know. All I know is you guys sure do pray a whole lot. I took that as a compliment. You see, we as a church family are committed, deeply committed, to the value of prayer.

Not just as a transition to move us along through various elements of the service. Not just so musicians or readers can get up and off the stage. But we believe that prayer is one of the primary ways that we both experience and express delight in God.

Prayer is one of the primary ways that we as Christians and we as a church both experience and express delight in God.

[4 : 47] We believe that we magnify the glory of God by enjoying Him in prayer. Our passage this morning is just one verse.

But it is a wonderful promise for us to believe. It is, I believe, it's fuel for us for a lifetime, a commitment of God-exalting prayer.

And if you come here this morning and you feel like your prayer life is struggling, maybe it's grown a bit dull, maybe for you it's a struggle to force yourself into the discipline of prayer, I want you to listen closely to what God has promised you this morning.

This promise is for you. So what I want to do this morning as we walk through just one verse, Psalm 37 verse 4, is I want to discuss what this promise isn't and what this promise is.

What this promise isn't and what this promise is. First, let's consider what this promise isn't saying. Because if God is promising us something, I want to understand what God means by what God promises, right?

[6 : 00] I don't want to import my desires, my wants, my agenda, my selfish motives onto God's promises because a hundred times out of a hundred, what God has in mind is going to be better than what I had in mind.

So let's understand what he's not saying here in Psalm 37 verse 4. This is not a procedure to get whatever you want. This is not a procedure to get whatever you want.

Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you whatever you want. Maybe my heart might want a Ferrari. And maybe my heart wants a spouse, children, grandchildren, a job, a new home.

And maybe my heart wants a million dollars. You see where I'm going. And so you're telling me that all I have to do is delight in God and I will get whatever I want, right? Yes and no.

Yes and no. And we'll see how it's yes in a moment. But for now, we should know that this promise is not a blank check to just get whatever we want out of God.

[7 : 09] There's a movie that I loved growing up. It's called Blank Check. I won't ask you to raise your hand if any of you have seen it. It wasn't probably a nominee for any major awards or anything like that.

But it was a good movie. A kid, he finds, guess what? A blank check. And he writes a dollar amount. I don't remember how much the amount was. Probably a million dollars onto the blank check.

He goes. He cashes it. He turns that blank check into anything and everything a kid could possibly ever want. He had water slides coming out of his bedroom. He had candy. He had all sorts of junk food as much as he wanted.

He had go-karts to ride around his house. He got everything he wanted because he was given a blank check. That would be the wrong way to read this verse. That's not what he is promising us here.

Prayer is not just a means to some other better end. Where we treat God as if he's a magic genie in a bottle.

[8 : 07] If we just rub the bottle the right way. If we just delight in the Lord enough just the right way. Then we will get whatever it is that we wish. We should know that if that's how we treat prayer.

If we read this promise this way. Ultimately what that's saying is that whatever it is that we want. We want more than God himself. And God's value.

God's worth to us. It lies in his ability to give us whatever it is that we want with or without him.

That's not what this is. It's not a procedure to get whatever we want.

It's also not a prosperity gospel promise. It is not a prosperity gospel promise. You know what the prosperity gospel is.

The essence of the prosperity gospel is love God and bad things will not happen to you. Love God and bad things won't come into your life.

[9 : 09] God wants you to be happy. God wants you to be healthy. God wants you to be wealthy. He would never bring something bad or hard into your life. And so if you just have enough faith nothing bad will ever happen to you.

It is a dangerous deception. And it's incredibly popular. And you can imagine why. This lie sells. It is attractive. Apparently I read this week.

This is Oprah Winfrey's favorite verse in the Bible. Did you know that? This is her favorite verse. In the Bible. She was in an interview with Stephen Colbert several years ago. She shared that this was her favorite verse.

But as she explained it, it became abundantly clear that how she understands this promise is radically different from what I'm trying to present to you this morning. As she articulated it, this is a direct quote.

She said, I love this verse because it means if you focus on being a force for good, then good will come back to you. If you focus on being a force for good, then good will come.

[10:11] I spoke with a man several months ago who thought the same thing. I gave him a ride into town. We had about 10 minutes to speak. And so we spoke about the gospel. And he shared that, well, what he believes is essentially that if you just put out good energy into the world, well, good things will come back to you.

If you put out bad energy out into the world, well, bad things will come back to you. I want you to see that's not what the verse says, is it? Look there with me again.

This verse doesn't say be good, be a force for good, do your best, try hard and good will come to you. What does it say? Delight yourself in the Lord.

Delight yourself in the Lord, not just in any old God, not just in good, however you might define good. Delight yourself in the Lord, Yahweh, the God of the Bible, the covenant God of Israel, the God that's revealed in the pages of Scripture.

Delight yourself in him and he will give you the desires of your heart. And it doesn't say, no matter how much we might want it to say this, it doesn't say that if you delight in him, no bad things will ever come into your life.

[11:30] It does not say, delight in him and he will only give you good things in your life. Try telling that to Job.

Try telling that to Jesus. Or to Paul or to Stephen or Peter or James. Or to our brothers and sisters suffering for their faith in Sudan. Try telling that to those worshiping in underground churches in China.

I try telling that to my pastor friend, Jeff, in North Myrtle Beach, one of the godliest men I know, who spent the majority of his working career life doing mission work, building the church in Israel and in the Horn of Africa.

He came home, served as an elder alongside me at our church. Just learned last week that he has cancer. Stage four. Terrible diagnosis for a godly man.

Tell that to my friend Garrett. Who prayed with his family. That his family would grow in the Lord. That they would grow in their hunger for the Lord.

[12:37] That they'd be drawn nearer to the Lord. And then weeks later, he finds himself in the ICU with his daughter. Seizures. Unresponsive.

Been there since just before Christmas. Love God and good things will happen. Love God and good things will happen. Does not work in real life. Love God and bad things won't happen to you.

Does not work in real life. That's not what this verse is promising. So if this verse is true, what that means is there must be a way where we get what we want, even if we don't get what we want.

Are you following me? There must be a way where the desires of our heart are met, even if the wants, the immediate wants of our heart don't go as we plan.

Where we're happy, we're delighted and satisfied, even if our life isn't delightful and isn't always satisfying. We'll get there. Last one here.

[13:39] We should also know that this verse is not possible in our own strength. This verse is not possible in our own strength.

I want you to notice something here. It's so interesting to me. That this is a command. You notice that? We tend to place the emphasis on the back end of the verse as if the back end was more important.

So we say, well, how do I get the desires of my heart? Okay, well, I delight myself in the Lord. Well, how do I get whatever it is that I want? Well, I delight in Him. If I want to be happy, if I want to be wealthy, if I want to be happy and healthy, I delight in Him.

We get the order mixed up. Read it again. This is a command. He tells us, He commands us. It says, delight yourself in the Lord.

And out of that delight, out of that delight as an overflow, as a sure result of a heart that delights in Him, is a promise that all of your desires will ultimately be met in Him.

[14:46] And we're commanded to delight ourselves in the Lord. It's not the only place in Scripture where we're commanded like this either, is it? Or the summary that Jesus gives of the whole law. What is it? You should, you should, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, with all your strength.

We're commanded to love God. That's the call that's made to sinners like us. Love God. Love Christ. Love His Word. Love His promises. And you will be saved.

What's the problem? We can't do that in our own strength. We can't obey this command in our own strength. I can't make you love anything just by telling you to love it.

Especially, especially if you're naturally opposed to it. You can force action, but you cannot force love. Especially if you're naturally opposed to it.

I'll give you an example. If I tell my kids to eat broccoli, they might eat it. If I tell them to love broccoli, I can't make them love broccoli no matter how many times I might tell them.

[15:58] They'll eat it. I can force action, but I can't force love. If you're not an exercise person, it doesn't matter how many times Breeze tells you to lift the weight. He might get you to lift it, but he can't make you love it.

You can compel action, but you cannot force love. So how in the world is this command possibly kept?

How can sinners who are naturally opposed to God, sinners who refuse to delight in the goodness of God, how can sinners obey this command to delight in the Lord?

It's only kept by a miraculous work of God himself in you. To change your heart.

To change your heart. So that now your cold, hard, rebellious heart that doesn't want a thing to do with God, only wants what you can get out of him, treats him as a means to some other end, uses him to serve yourself, sees him as an accessory to your life and not central to your life, now all of a sudden your heart is changed to love him.

[17:12] To desire him. And so what way he wants to trust him, even if we don't get our way.

That's a work, a miracle of God. The only way to have all of the desires of your heart is for God himself to make himself the delight of your heart.

And then to give you as much as you want. I'll say that again. The only way for you to have all of the desires of your heart is for God to make himself the delight of your heart.

And then he says, Come on, you can have as much as you want. You can have as much as you want of me. It happens first at conversion. When you hear the good news of the gospel that Christ Jesus comes to save sinners, that he alone is worthy of our praise, that he's lived and died and risen on behalf of sinners, to restore you to God, to bring you back into right relationship with God, to wipe away everything that stands in the way of your full enjoyment of God himself.

When you believe that message, your heart is changed and transformed to glory and the goodness of God above all things. It happens first at conversion. But even then, after conversion, your heart, believe it or not, is often still slow to delight in God.

I know I'm not the only one. Your whole life as a Christian is now spent fighting for joy in the Lord. Fighting for delight in God.

[18:53] God works that delight in you through sanctification sanctification until you're finally made fit and able to enjoy him forever in glorification. That's the aim of the Christian life.

It's to enjoy him, to delight in him, to love him. That's his work and that's his promise to us in Christ. Delight in God is the work of God.

We can't do it in our own strength, but he works it in us through the gospel. So, what is this verse promising us?

What is this verse promising us? Well, this verse, church, I want us to see, this is an invitation to have your desires changed. It's an invitation to have your desires changed.

Matthew Henry, commenting on this verse, he says, we must make God our heart's delight and then we shall have our heart's desire. Must make God our heart's delight and then we will have our heart's desire.

[20 : 02] What is the desire of the heart of a good man, he asks? It is this, to know and love and live to God, to please him and to be pleased in him.

And St. Augustine, he says it another way, much simpler. He says, love God and do as you please. Don't you love that? Isn't that freeing? Love God and do as you please.

See, we misunderstand that quote if we put the emphasis on the latter half. Oh, I get to do whatever I want and do whatever I please. That's all that's required of me, love God, then I get to do whatever I want.

Yes, if everything you want is developed and defined by your love for God. You can do whatever it is you want. If it's flowing downstream from a heart that loves God, love God and do what you please.

Because the truth is, genuinely loving God, delighting yourself in him will have a transformative effect on your heart. If you delight in him, if you love him, your heart will change away from selfish desires, away from sinful desires, away even from good desires for selfish purposes and towards God and God's desires.

[21 : 20] The one who truly delights in God deep down in their heart of hearts doesn't want anything other than what God wants. Now we might have other wants.

Of course we will. We will have other wants, but if our greatest want is for God to be glorified, for his will to be done, for us to know him more, for us to grow in him, we can be certain we'll have it.

Come what may. Whatever that may bring, you can take anything else away from a Christian, but if they have God, they have everything they need.

We can say with the Apostle Paul, I've learned the secret of being content in all circumstances. Philippians chapter 4, I've learned the secret to being content, to thriving in abundance and in lack and poverty and in riches.

The secret, what is it? I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Have you learned that secret? Have you learned the secret of contentment?

[22 : 28] Come what may, in abundance and in plenty, in lack and in hunger and thirst. Are you content in who God is? Is your heart delighted in him?

That's the work of a changed heart by the power of God through the gospel of Christ. It's an invitation to have your desires changed. Not only this, it's an invitation to have our longings met. You know, another way to misunderstand and misapply this verse is to say, well, this just means I should just squelch all my desires. This just means that I should live like a stoic and have no pleasure, no joy, not want anything.

No, no, no, no, no, no. It's good. It's right for us to have desire. I would say it's good and it's right for us to chase pleasure, to chase joy.

It's a matter of where we chase it and where we find it. The only way this promise is true is for us to shrink, is not for us, excuse me, not for us to shrink our desires but instead to enlarge them.

[23 : 38] God wants our desires to be for things that are more than what this world can provide, not less than what this world can offer. We read from C.S. Lewis last week, I'll do it again.

He says, Our desires are not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us.

Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot even imagine what's meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased.

Do you desire to be happy? Of course you do. Well, you can chase that happiness, you can pursue that joy and drink and sex and ambition or you can pursue happiness in Christ.

We are offered infinite joy in Christ, joy that we can experience right now in part but then in full. Do you desire to be rich? Wealthy?

[24 : 48] Have some property maybe? Have a home? A little bit of equity? Your own little slice of paradise here on earth? That's too small. Don't you understand we will inherit the new heavens and the new earth?

We're sons and daughters of the king. We'll be citizens of the kingdom of God. Do you desire to be healthy? Of course you do. Friend, the time is coming when all sickness will be wiped away for good.

When all death will be wiped away forever. No more sorrow, no more suffering, no more disease. I think this is an encouragement for us to put our hope there in better promises.

You know, where the prosperity gospel goes wrong, you might be surprised to hear this, it is not in saying that God wants your healing. They're not wrong in saying that God wants your prosperity or your happiness or your health.

You may be surprised to hear that. Prosperity theology goes wrong by shrinking God's promises down to a fraction so that they can be had right now.

[25 : 56] It makes our desires not too big but too small. Ten billion dollars in your bank account is a fraction of the riches that await us in glory.

An inheritance for promise that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for you who by God's power are being guarded through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Even though if necessary, you now have had to endure various trials so that the test to genuineness of your faith more precious than gold those refined by fire may be found to result in praise and glory and honor of the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you want health and happiness? A hundred years of life cancer free on this side of eternity?

That's a good run. That is a fraction of what lies ahead of us in glory.

I used to have a church member I think I've shared this with you before who as he aged and got older his knees were aching his back was aching everything was aching y'all know how that is and he would tell me you know pastor I just want one good day before Jesus comes back.

[27 : 17] Just one good day where I'll feel good before the Lord returns. And I loved to remind him brother when Jesus comes back you will feel better than you've ever felt.

More alive than you've ever felt. More limber than you've ever felt. There's better promises ahead of us than what anything in this world can offer you.

This is an invitation to have your desires changed and to have your desires met in ways that far surpass our greatest expectations. Ultimately church this is an invitation to true and lasting joy. don't you want that? And don't you crave that? Everybody does. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

You know that's what the message of the gospel is all about. The gospel is an invitation for sinners to know true and lasting joy in God through faith in Jesus Christ.

[28 : 26] Christ. That's why Christ came. Christianity is not a religion of do's and don'ts. It's not a binding restrictive religion of rules to follow.

Christianity is an invitation to endless infinite joy and the fount of endless joy. God himself John Piper has been one of the greatest advocates for something called Christian hedonism.

Anybody ever heard of that? Christian hedonism. A hedonism you don't want to be called a hedonist. Right? A hedonism is if you're a hedonist you're somebody that pursues pleasure any which way you can find it.

A hedonism is the pursuit of pleasure. A pleasure seeker is a hedonist but Christian hedonism narrows it to say God wants you to be happy and the only way you will truly be happy is in God. God wants you to be satisfied and the only way you will ever truly be satisfied is in God himself. God wants you to chase hard after all the joy and pleasure that your heart can possibly imagine and the only way to have fullness of joy is in God himself.

[29 : 47] See most people if they think about God at all they go through life as if this verse said delight yourself and he'll give you the desires of your heart. Do whatever you want delight yourself if there is a God he wants you to be happy he'll bless you he approves of you you deserve whatever your heart desires.

You see how false that is? Delight yourself in the Lord the source of infinite eternal joy delight yourself in him and you will have all the desires of your heart.

Westminster catechism it tells us what's the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

Psalms 1611 one of my favorite verses opened our service this morning with this verse it says you make known to me the path of life in your presence there is fullness of joy at your right hand are pleasures forevermore that's why we're commanded church to delight yourself in the Lord and you will have all the desires of your heart this verse is an invitation to true and lasting joy in him and that's why that's why this verse is an anchor for our prayer and prayer as we said at the beginning of our time together is one of the primary ways that we both experience and express delight in God prayer is one of the primary ways that God changes our hearts prayer is one of the primary ways that we have the desires of our heart met

David Platt he says the secret to prayer is making your wants God's wants and then asking for whatever it is you want don't you love that the secret to prayer is making your wants God's wants and then go ask for whatever it is you want I want to ask you this week as we go from this place I want to encourage you to stretch yourself in prayer this week stretch yourself in prayer now that may look different for every single person in the room everyone has a different prayer life it looks a little bit different for you than for you than for you than for you I want to encourage you this week one application I want to give to you stretch yourself in prayer this week for you that may mean going from zero minutes to five every day for you that may mean beginning to pray with your spouse that week for you that may mean leaving your phone in the bedroom while you go somewhere else spend some time without distraction alone with the Lord in prayer

[32 : 43] I want you to stretch yourself and fight for your heart's delight in the Lord because it's in him that you'll know fullness of joy church we're going to conclude as we always do with prayer I'll pray for us and then we'll have a time of silent prayer it's an opportunity for you right where you are to respond to what you've just heard from the word in prayer and then I've also asked Treg if he would come up and lead us in a time of focused prayer as we apply the truths that we've just heard from God's word so if you would let's bow together and pray Lord we pray for deeper delight in you maybe for the first time if there's any here who don't know you and they hear this call to delight of the

Lord and that seems so foreign to their hearts God we pray that you would place love for you in their hearts now would you do it God would you place in them an irresistible desire to know you and to love you to be with you to obey you and father for for those of us whose desire and delight has grown cold father we pray that you would kindle a fire in our hearts that we might love you more we ask that we would grow in you father we pray for new desires in our hearts we pray for your desires we ask that you would lead us away from sinful desires worldly desires selfish desires would you show us clearly what those desires are in our hearts and lead us to repent of those and to seek fulfillment in you God we pray these things with confidence that you hear our prayers that even when we don't know how to pray as we ought that the spirit himself intercedes for the saints according to the will of

God we love you Lord and we pray all this in Jesus name amen church let's continue to pray silently where we are you