

Pastor Stef's Book Review – April 2017

Once again my Edmonton book friend sent me a book. This time it was Gary Thomas' *Pure Pleasure: Why do Christians Feel so Bad about Feeling Good (2009)*. I'd never heard of Gary Thomas before this, but the title caught my attention and made me wonder if he was working with the same concept as John Piper's "Christian Hedonism" and C.S. Lewis' idea of settling for sandcastles when God has given us mansions. And that is exactly Thomas' point. In fact, Piper and Lewis are two of the sources he uses in his book, somewhat ironically as the two would have disagreed with each other on much of the rest of their theology.

The basic premise is that God's creation is good and to be enjoyed, particularly by his pinnacle act of creation – humanity. In fact, to enjoy God's creation is to worship the Creator and bring glory to God. The danger is not in enjoying God's creation, but in forgetting the One who made it and exalting the creation as higher than the Creator (idolatry). Unfortunately, as an overreaction to avoiding idolatry, some Christians have steered away from enjoying the pleasure of creation altogether. As if, not wanting to make my birthday present more important than my dad who gave it to me, I choose not to enjoy it at all. Obviously this is not what my father wants, nor is it what our Heavenly Father wants. Instead, I give my father pleasure when I take pleasure in his gift, and remember its status as a gift.

Satan lied to Adam and Eve in the Garden and he continues to lie today. One of his biggest lies is that sin is where real pleasure is found. But sinful pursuits of pleasure always end up settling for *less* than the best. In reality, Satan has nothing to offer. He can only twist God's good things into less than good things. God is the giver of abundant life and the devil steals, kills, and destroys. Sinful pleasures are cheap imitations of the real pleasures found in God's good creation. And sinful pleasures ultimately lead to emptiness, bondage, and death. Enjoying a glass of wine with friends, while having a stimulating conversation, and then going home to make love to your wife, is God-honoring, life giving and full of celebration. Whereas getting drunk and trying to one up those around you with bravado and argument, and then hooking up with someone whose name you don't remember the next morning becomes old, not to mention destructive and hurtful, fast. The world, especially on college campuses and business parties, offers one. Christ and the church, when the church is healthy, offers the other. That is why one of the key character traits of a spirit-filled Christian is joy.

Gary Thomas' book is a great read if you still feel bad about feeling good. If you have already settled this, you can skim it in half-an-hour, as I did, and recommend it to others who need its' message. It's a message that both Christians and non-Christians need to hear.

Hanging in my office is a quote from the Christian, and somewhat weird, children's author Madeleine L' Engle that states, "When loving God and enjoying him forever begins to be dull, we are ripe for temptation." We are more successful in fleeing the cheap imitations Satan offers when we are intoxicated by God than by trying to grit our teeth. This also reminds me of another quote. This one by the second century church father Irenaeus; "The glory of God is a human being fully alive!"

I'd drink to that! 😊