

God, Creation, and the Pursuit of Happiness

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1. Introducing (Hebrew) Happiness

In this paper I will address happiness as it relates to God and to creation in the witness of the Old Testament. This will entail reflections on the happiness of God (in creation and more generally), the happiness given to those who are created in God's image, and the happiness of nonhuman creatures, especially when they praise God.

There are many Hebrew words belonging to the semantic field of "happiness." These words may connote differences in the intensity of happiness, and may stem from different traditions,¹⁾ but from what I can discern, little study has been devoted to this issue.²⁾ Words specifying the absence or diminishment

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1) It might be fruitful to study which traditions use more happiness language(e.g., Isaiah 40-55), which use less(e.g., 1-2 Kings after Solomon's death), and why this should be the case(e.g., the nature of the historical events reflected).

2) For example, William P. Brown claims that the verb *šāmaḥ* "signals...a more heightened, ecstatic level of emotion." William P. Brown, "Joy and the Art of Cosmic Maintenance: An Ecology of Play in Psalm 104," F. Gaiser and M. Throntveit, eds., "And God Saw That It Was Good," *Essays on Creation in God in Honor of Terence E. Fretheim* (St. Paul: Luther Seminary, 2006), 24. He claims that this language of "unabashed joy" is rarely attributed to God in the OT. I have suggested that, of the words used in Prov 8:31, "delighting" (*ša'āšū'im*) may refer to internal pleasure, while "rejoicing" (*šāḥaq*, usually translated "laugh" or "play" (e.g., 2 Sam 6:5; Zech 8:5) for both adults and children) may designate more external indications that one is pleased. Terence E. Fretheim,

of happiness(e.g., the brokenhearted or crushed in spirit in Ps 34:18) and the exercise of certain dispositions(e.g., mourning or anger) also need attention. Whatever the case, a word study approach is not sufficient to uncover the passages that pertain to (un)happiness. A range of human activities must be included since many of these reflect happiness, even when no explicit joy language is found. Such activities include: singing, shouting, making noise(with an uproar or loud voice), praising, feasting, dancing, clapping hands, leaping, stamping the feet, whirling, playing musical instruments(e.g., Exod 15:20-21), and so forth. Even without this sort of verbiage, a text may describe a (conventional) situation wherein the participants are clearly happy, for example: communal worship, some sort of personal or communal triumph, recovery from sickness, or a moment of surprise or amazement(e.g., Gen 2:23).³⁾

2. God is Happy

Happiness is, first of all and most importantly, a characteristic of the divine life.⁴⁾ God is happy-or pleased, delighted,

God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 216.

3) See Mayer I. Gruber, "Nonverbal Display of Joy and Happiness," *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* 2, Studia Pohl 12 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 554-614. Among the several nonverbal examples he gives, the following is especially important: the face/eyes of "the happy individualis perceived to shine or light up"(555). Among biblical texts, Gruber cites various Hebrew expressions for the human face-see 1 Sam 14:27, 29; Job 29:24; Pss 13:3; 19:8; 38:10; 104:15; Prov 16:15; Isa 60:1. For the divine face, see Num 6:25; Pss 4:6; 31:16; 34:5; 44:3; 67:1; 80:3, 7, 19; 89:15; 119:135; Isa 31:12; Dan 9:17. Of Isa 60:1-3, he states: "the Lord's smile is cause for Jerusalem to smile"(563). The expression "lift up the head" is also pertinent (see 1 Sam 2:1; Pss 3:3; 110:7). Gruber also cites many ancient Near Eastern parallels.

joyful.⁵⁾ The following list collates a few of these texts, in part because they tend to be neglected. The more specific creation texts are treated in the next section.

- Num 6:25-26: The LORD *makes his face to shine* upon you, and be gracious to you; The LORD *lifts up his countenance* upon you, and give you peace.
- Deut 30:9: the LORD will again *delight* in you and make you prosperous, just as he *delighted* in your fathers.
- 1Chr 28:4: [God] *took delight* in making me [David] king over all Israel.
- 1Chr 29:17(cf. 16:25-27): I know, my God, that you search the heart, and *take pleasure* in uprightness.
- Ps 35:27: Great is the LORD, who *delights* in the welfare of his servant.
- Ps 44:3: for not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm give them victory; but your right hand, and your arm, and *the light of your countenance*, for you *delighted* in them.
- Ps 147:11(cf. 149:4): The LORD *takes pleasure* in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.
- Prov 15:8(cf. 11:1, 20; 12:22): The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is his *delight*.
- Isa 42:1: Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul *delights*.⁶⁾

4) One of the few studies working on this theme is that of Brown ("Joy and the Art of Cosmic Maintenance"). Dictionaries occasionally have a sentence about divine joy. A "happy" exception is the entry "Pleasure," L. Ryken, J. Wilhoit, and T. Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 651-654.

5) On God not being happy with someone or something, see Ps 5:4; Isa 1:11; 65:12; Amos 5:21; Mal 1:10. See also note 50 below.

6) With "personal affection," Second Isaiah "dares to talk about Yahweh's 'I,' his 'soul'" (nepeš). God commonly responds in this way to sacrifices, but here "it is the response to a person instead." Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, Hermeneia, Peter Machinist, ed., M. Kohl, trans. (Minneapolis:

Isa 62:4-5: You [Jerusalem] shall be called My Delight is in Her...For the LORD *delights* in you...and as the bridegroom *rejoices* over the bride so shall your God rejoice over you.

Jer 9:24: I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I *delight*, says the LORD.

Jer 31:20: Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I *delight in*?...Therefore I am deeply moved for him.

Micah 7:18: Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity...? He does not retain his anger forever, because he *delights* in showing clemency.

Zeph 3:17-18a: [God] will rejoice over you with *gladness*... he will *exult* over you *with loud singing* as on a day of festival.⁷⁾

The following may be offered as an initial response to these texts: God is joyful in taking actions that issue in positive developments for God's people(1 Chr 28:4; Mic 7:18). Joy is God's reason for acting in a positive way on behalf of the people(Ps 44:3; Jer 9:24). The unalloyed joy at the relationship between God and people is likened (by God!) to the joy between a bride and a bridegroom(Isa 62:4-5)⁸⁾ and between a parent and a child(Jer 31:20). Divine happiness is evident when the relationship between God and the people is thriving(Ps 147:11), including when prayers are offered(Prov 15:8), when faithfulness(Prov 12:22) and uprightness(1 Chr 29:17) are exhibited, and when justice is practiced(Prov 11:1). What people do can bring pleasure to the divine life(Hag 1:8). Generally, God is happy over

Fortress, 2001), 127.

7) The calls to Israel to rejoice(Zeph 3:14) find their parallels in God's promise to join them in rejoicing. The verb *gyl* is used almost exclusively for human beings in contexts of worshipful response to God's saving actions.

8) Cf. Elizabeth Achtemeier who writes that God is "like a young man with a new wife-sollicitous, adoring, enraptured...pictures of God that are breathtaking in the love they portray." Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Community and Message of Isaiah* 56-66(Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 98. The emotional element seems especially strong in this text.

the good and constructive things that happen to people (Ps 35:27), in their life rather than their death (Ezek 18:23, 32), and this joy extends across the generations (Deut 30:9). These texts also suggest that, while happiness is an ongoing characteristic of the divine life (not least in view of internal divine relationships), things can happen in relationship with human beings that bring more intense pleasure to God—and intense displeasure.⁹⁾

These texts raise issues relating to divine emotion and, more generally, divine affectivity and/or affectability.¹⁰⁾ The Old Testament contains many texts where God is genuinely affected by what happens in God's world.¹¹⁾ For example, the flood is introduced by a grieving God (Gen 6:6-7), or God is provoked to anger (e.g., 2 Kgs 22:13 and often), or God laments over what has happened to Jerusalem's people and environment (e.g., Jer 9:10), or God, in a salvific move, "cries out" like a woman in labor (Isa 42:14). Then too are passages recounting the divine change of mind in the wake of human prayer (e.g., Exod 32:14; Jer 26:19; Jon 3:10). Such perspectives stand over against views that God is impassible and immutable in some simplistic or absolute sense.¹²⁾

9) See note 49 below for texts where people's actions occasion displeasure for God.

For issues of differing intensities in God, see Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 60-65.

10) "Happiness" is not limited to emotion; it can refer more broadly to a life that is functioning well (to be content). This angle suggests that happiness can persist through times of unhappiness (cf., e.g., many parent-child relationships).

11) For details, see Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*; and Fretheim, *God and World*.

12) It is important to note that God is immutable in several respects, e.g., God's love is immutable. It is often thought that change is a category that is not applicable to God—can change be characteristic of a perfect being?—and hence God cannot be affected by creatures in any way. But if the Scriptures bear witness that God is affected by what happens in the world of creatures, then this classical understanding of God needs at least some revision.

It may be claimed that language that ascribes emotions or changes to God is “only” anthropomorphic or anthropopathic, and hence has no “real” relationship to God. But we should be alert to the fact that biblical language for God is almost always anthropomorphic (e.g., God speaks, God acts, God thinks, God hides). As with all analogical language, then, such expressions need to be examined for the “yes” and “no” of the reference to God.¹³ For example, one might say that God’s emotions are never “out of control.” Generally, theologians seem to have much less difficulty speaking of God’s mind or God’s word than God’s emotions/feelings. Our culture seems to be much more comfortable with a left-brain God and a male God (“big boys don’t cry,” after all). The stereotypical female, by contrast, cannot control her emotions very well!

What difference does it make for our theological reflection and pastoral practice that God is happy? That God enjoys the world and all of its creatures? That human joy occasions a joyful response in the divine life? That human happiness is a gift from God and how we respond to that gift can have a negative or positive effect on the shape of the life of faith? It is probably true to say that the church has stressed the unhappiness of God—most famously in God’s anger at human sin—more than the divine happiness. Does such an emphasis have a negative effect on how people think of God and live their life? On how they value themselves and creation more generally? Does the lack of attention to divine happiness contribute to the often

13) See, e.g., Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, R. Czerny, et al., trans (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977; org. ed. French 1965). Among texts to consider on this matter, see Prov 3:11-12, where God is likened to a father who “delights” in his son. How is God like and unlike such a father? It might be noted that Jesus Christ is not an exception in the life of God; Jesus reveals who God essentially is and this God is revealed in the Old Testament in remarkable ways.

dour and stern countenance of so many Christians? How might increased emphasis on divine joy positively affect the teaching and preaching of the church and the well-being of Christians? Might we enjoy life more than we do?¹⁴

3. God's Creative Work and the Joy that Accompanies It

In creation God expresses joy and other creatures join in God's joy. The joy language used at creation is, in turn, also used to describe the new creation. Creation is a joy-filled task and a joy-filled result for both Creator and created-in the beginning, in the ongoing, and in the new creation.

Gen 1:31: God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was *very good*.

Job 38:4-7: Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?... when the morning stars *sang together* and all the heavenly beings *shouted for joy*.

Ps 104:26: The sea...Leviathan whom you made to *sport with*. (NJB)

Ps 104:31, 34: May the Lord *rejoice* in his works...

May my meditation *be pleasing* to him [i.e., God], for I *rejoice* in the LORD.

Prov 8:30-31: Then I [i.e., Woman Wisdom] was daily beside him...

and I was daily his *delight*, *rejoicing* before him always, *rejoicing* in his inhabited world and *delighting* in the human race.

Isa 65:17-19: For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth...

But *be glad* and *rejoice* forever in what I am creating; for

¹⁴ See also Ellen T. Charry, *God and the Art of Happiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

I am about to create Jerusalem as a *joy* and its people as a *delight*.

I will *rejoice* in Jerusalem, and *delight* in my people.¹⁵⁾
Jer 32:41: I [i.e., God] will *rejoice* in doing good to them [i.e., Israel], and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my [God's!] heart and all my soul.¹⁶⁾

Three creation texts deserve closer analysis: Genesis 1-2, Psalm 104, and Proverbs 8.

3.1. Genesis 1-2

It is often noted that Genesis 1 has a doxological character. These verses may have been shaped in and through liturgical usage and the regular round of the community's praise of God the Creator.¹⁷⁾ Praise language is fundamentally evaluative language, discerning and then voicing the praiseworthiness of something or someone: their beauty, purposefulness, and correspondence with the intention of the one who created. The rhyth-

15) This new creation issues in a joy/delight that is shared by God and people alike (the same two verbs, *gil+sus*, are used for both). What is God creating? God is creating Jerusalem and its people as a joy/delight. So, human happiness is a creative act of God. There will be no more weeping or the cry of distress (which was an effect of judgment in Jer 7:34; 25:10). God will in turn respond to this new creation by rejoicing and delighting in what God has created. Claus Westermann states: "It is not just that the inhabitants of Jerusalem are summoned to rejoice; God, too, can take joy in his new creation...There can be no doubt that Deutero-Isaiah is also the origin of the accumulation of words for joy." Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 409.

16) The repeated "good" in Jer 32:39-44 suggests the creational themes of Genesis 1. See Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 467.

17) See the helpful discussion in Samuel E. Balentine, *The Torah's Vision of Worship*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 81-95.

mic use of the evaluative word “good” in Genesis 1 (with a follow-up in 2:18 and its aftermath) fits with the praise character of these verses.¹⁸⁾ To evaluate the creation as “good” is *to be happy with* the results, to delight in the “final product.”¹⁹⁾ And because it is *God* who declares that each creature is good, God can be said to be happy with the results. Such a divine evaluation conveys a sense of value to each and every creature—both in the sense of value in itself and its value for others—that cannot be matched by any human evaluation. Both human and nonhuman are given the same language of valuation: good.²⁰⁾

Some brief reflections on the divine “us” (Gen 1:26-27; 3:25; 11:7) may be helpful at this point.²¹⁾ A majority of scholars understand that “us” in these texts refers to a council of heavenly beings of which God is a part.²²⁾ In other words, God is a

18) On the image of God as evaluator in Genesis 1-2, see the discussion in Fretheim, *God and World*, 40-42.

19) Note the scare quotation marks. As I have argued elsewhere, I believe God made the world “good” not “perfect,” and thus “final product” is something of a misnomer. See my *God and World*; also my *Creation Untamed: The Bible, God, and Natural Disasters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

20) It is striking that the valuation by God of the goodness of creation in Genesis 1 is a valuation returned to God in praise: “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good” (emphasis mine; Pss 106:1; 107:1; 118:1; 136:1). In other words, the creatures reflect the goodness of their createdness back to God and thereby become a witness to God, reflecting that created goodness toward the entire world.

21) For a recent study of Gen 1:26-28, see Paul Niskanen, “The Poetics of Adam: The Creation of ‘adam in the image of ‘elohim,” *JBL* 128 (2009), 417-436. Note also Brent A. Strawn, “Comparative Approaches: History, Theory, and the Image of God,” Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richardsin, eds., *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, SBLRBS 56 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 117-142.

22) See, for example, Patrick D. Miller, Jr., *Genesis 1-11: Studies in Structure and Theme* JSOTSup 8 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978); J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 55-60. See also Isa 6:8. The later witness that God is one (e.g., Deut 6:4) is not compromised

social being, functioning within a divine community that is rich and complex. God is therein engaged in a relationship of mutuality. And so relationship is integral to the identity of God prior to and independent of God's relationship to the world(see also texts such as Jer 23:18-22).

Such a "good" evaluation by God makes clear that God is not removed from the creation once the creature comes into being. In order to evaluate, one must *experience* that which has been created and one will therein *be affected by* what has been experienced. A remarkable imaging of God! Readers may wonder why God would evaluate God's own work. Would it not be good just by being a creature of God's own making? But a clue to this evaluative process may be found in Gen 2:18, where God observes what has been created and declares that "it is *not* good." That is, God's creation of human beings to this point does not fulfill the purpose God intends for them(God is not "happy with" the human situation at this point); further creative work will be needed.

Consider again the language of Gen 2:18: "It is not good that the man should be alone." To whom is God speaking? It is likely that here again(see 1:26-27) the reader is permitted to overhear the inner-divine reflective process. This would suggest that the *'adam*-creature's not-being-alone is correlated with God's not-being-alone. Or, in different terms, it is not good for the human being to be alone because it would not be good for God either. Only the human being as social and relational to other human beings is truly correspondent to the sociality of God(and to being in the image of God).²³ If so, one might

by this recognition of the sociality of God, for the divine beings in the assembly are not other gods on par with Yahweh.

23) These plural references to God have often been interpreted by Christians as Trinitarian. But it is historically more accurate to say that these Old Testament perspectives regarding the social nature of God provided a theological matrix

then claim that, given the joyful response of the *’adam* to the creation of the woman in 2:23, the inner-divine relationship is also comparably characterized by joy. Such a perspective is reinforced by the “us” and “our” language in Gen 1:26-27.

This not-good evaluation of God’s own work in Gen 2:18 suggests that creation is not conceived in static terms. Rather, it is understood in terms of a *process* wherein the divine response to what has been created leads to further development of the creation and of intracreaturely relationships.²⁴) It is striking that in Genesis 2:23 it is the human who, finally, responds to God’s creation of the woman in a joyous way, delighting in what God has created in response to the divinely discerned creational need. This human evaluative response maybe understood as parallel to God’s “good” evaluation in Genesis 1.

This textual analysis raises the question as to whether God’s vision of human happiness changes over time.²⁵) That is to say, if God’s creative work is understood in terms of process rather than the maintenance of a once-for-all given creation, what it means to be human and what it means to be a happy human

for the development of later theological perspectives. See Terence E. Fretheim, “Christology and the Old Testament,” Mark A. Powell and David Bauerin, eds., *Who Do You Say That I Am? Essays on Christology* (Louisville: Westminster, 2000), 201-215. That is to say, the early Christian reflections about God that led to Trinitarian thought were not grounded solely in claims about Jesus and the Holy Spirit but also rooted in the complexity of the Godhead witnessed in the Old Testament. See further, Patrick D. Miller, “A Strange Kind of Monotheism,” *Theology Today: Reflections on the Bible and Contemporary Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 44-46; Brent A. Strawn, “And These Three Are One: A Trinitarian Critique of Christological Approaches to the Old Testament,” *PRS* 31 (2004), 191-210; and Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

24) Correlatively, Genesis 1-2 do not present the creation as precisely or finally ordered. For example, Gen 1:28 recognizes that God’s creation needs to be “subdued.” See note 19 above.

25) I thank Carl Holladay for pressing my thinking on this point.

will be on the move. Such an understanding suggests that, even within the relatively brief time of the life of Israel (let alone human history), the nature of human happiness may change in view of new times and places.

Moving now to texts concerning the *new creation*, the language of Isa 65:17-19 suggests that, just as God created human happiness in the initial creation, so also God will create human happiness in the creating of the new heaven and earth. In other words, God's rejoicing and delighting in the results of the new creation will correspond to the "good" of the original creation in Genesis 1 (and 2). Not to be missed here is the fact that, for this comparative language to "work," God's rejoicing and delighting must be just as real as the people's joy.

3.2. Psalm 104

Psalm 104:31 is a particularly important text.²⁶⁾ As Brown cogently argues, this verse reflects the "frightful possibility" that if

the creator were to stop enjoying creation, the cosmos would suffer collapse.... The possibility of cosmic demise in the psalm is attributed not to divine wrath against a resistant or hostile creation but to something seemingly more benign, namely, to God's abstaining from joy.²⁷⁾

Creation is not only brought into being by God *but is sustained by the joy of God.*

Psalm 104:34 repeats the verb *šamah*, but this time with

26) See Brown, "Psalm 104"; also Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 172-175.

27) Brown, "Psalm 104," 26-27.

a human subject, namely, the author of the psalm, “May I rejoice in the LORD.” The psalm itself is thus “an act of creativity intended to bring pleasure to God. God’s joy and the psalmist’s joy(vv. 31 and 34) are in some sense parallel: as the psalmist rejoices in God, so God is to rejoice in creation”-further: “God’s delight provides a model for human interaction with the world and God... counter[ing] all manner of treating the world in terms of utility... Ecology is at root an exercise in joy.”²⁸⁾

Psalm 104:26(cf. Job 41:5) speaks of “Leviathan that you [God] formed to sport with [in the sea].” Leviathan is “God’s playmate!”²⁹⁾ Brown continues: “Leviathan brings out God’s playful side, but such play is no isolated moment in God’s engagement with the world.”³⁰⁾ Rather, “it supports all creation.” God finds pleasure in the creation in the very process of its being brought into being and the world’s future is dependent upon God’s continuing pleasure.

3.3. Proverbs 8

What are we to make of the delighting and rejoicing reported in Prov 8:30-31?³¹⁾ The fourfold reference to these themes in

28) Ibid., 27, 31.

29) Ibid., 30. See also Kathryn Schifferdecker, *Out of the Whirlwind: Creation Theology in the Book of Job*, HTS (Cambridge: Harvard Divinity School, 2008).

30) Brown, “Psalm 104,” 31. Brown notes, in contrast to Jon D. Levenson, that Leviathan is “neither a rubber ducky nor a subjugated beast, but a fitting playmate for the divine. For genuine play to occur, Leviathan must be fully alive and functioning.” Jon. D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 17.

31) The paragraphs that follow closely follow my work in *God and World in the Old Testament*, 216-218. See also the reflections on this text by William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 271-316.

four successive lines is striking and emphatic. It strongly suggests that the creation of the world was a moment of great joy for all involved. Moreover, the two words, “delighting” and “rejoicing,” seem to be used as near-synonyms, with the basic idea of “taking pleasure in”(see Jer 31:20; 31:4: “merrymakers”). These words imply an evaluative stance, thinking so highly of what is happening that delight is the only proper response. (An analogue would be parents being delighted at the birth of a baby.) These words thus have reference to joy and wonder both with respect to the creative process itself and to the effects of that process(see also Job 38:7). Basic to this responsiveness is the ongoing close relationship among all involved: God, Wisdom (personified), and the creation itself, especially humanity.³²⁾

To speak of wisdom being God’s daily delight is, most fundamentally, to make a claim about *God*. God is not passive or aloof to the daughter who has been birthed but so enters into this relationship that it has a dynamic and interactive character. Integral to such a relationship is a delighting in the other; wisdom is a source of pleasure to God.³³⁾ In as much as *delight* is an evaluative word, it is parallel to God’s evaluating of the creation as “good” in Genesis 1. Woman Wisdom does not introduce joy and delight into the creative process, God does. But Wisdom as the offspring of God continues that divine commitment and response.

From another angle, God delights in Woman Wisdom because Wisdom has *enabled God* to make the world such a dynamic place. God’s creating would not have had such extraordinary effects without Woman Wisdom. Then, evincing the genuine

32) See Gale Yee, “The Theology of Creation in Proverbs 8:22-31,” Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, eds., *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, CBQMS (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1992), 94.

33) Wisd 8:3 sharpens the point: “The Lord of all loves her.”

character of the relationship, Wisdom delights in God and what God is creating. Notably, their mutual delighting does not take place simply at the completion of the “construction” of the creation; delight is a “daily” matter, occurring all along the way as the creation comes into being.³⁴ Together God and Wisdom take pleasure in each other, in what has been created, and in what continues to be created.

This mutual delight is taken a step further in Prov 8:31, perhaps climactically so. Here Wisdom’s delighting no longer simply relates to God as Creator; it relates also to the *effects* of God’s creative work, namely God’s “inhabited world”-human beings in particular. Even more, as human beings live out their proper role in the world, Wisdom delights in who they are and what they are doing; she has the best interests, the good pleasure of human beings at heart. Then, as 8:32-36 makes clear in the repeated reference to human happiness, Wisdom’s delighting in humanity will be matched by the delight of human beings in keeping Wisdom’s ways. God, Wisdom, and humanity, inter-related as they are, are each represented as delighting. When this happens, God’s purposes for the creation are being realized: The world is a delight!

More can be said about this mutuality of delight. Delight is not amusement in the sense of an activity different from work but a dimension of the relationship itself, including work and all participants-God, Wisdom, and creation. Delight and work must remain integrated with each other; happiness is as much associated with work as with play (so also Eccl 5:18-20).³⁵

34) A widespread pattern in ancient and modern cultures is an expression of joy at the completion of a construction project. See Raymond C. van Leeuwen, “The Book of Proverbs,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible. Volume V* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 95. But this text reports a rejoicing that does not wait for completion; it is expressed all along the way (so also Job 38:7).

35) This point could be contrasted with the common American conviction that

Another way of putting the matter is that pleasure and playfulness are built into the very structure of things, enabling all of life, including God's own life, to be what God intended it to be.³⁶⁾ The pleasure evident in the God-Wisdom relationship becomes a dimension of all of creation, dancing into every creature's life as they are brought into being over time.³⁷⁾ As Woman Wisdom delights both before God and before humankind in an *ongoing* relationship, there is a sense in which "wisdom functions as an intermediary between God and man [sic], between God and his world."³⁸⁾ Wisdom belongs both in the world and with God; as we have noted, Wisdom is both creature and divine. It is not simply a quality "immanent in creation" or "an attribute of the world," it remains alongside God.³⁹⁾ Wisdom delighting with human beings carries the implication of divine immanence-direct presence and involvement in creation. God not only created the world but, in and through the figure of Wisdom, chooses to dwell among creatures in terms that are described as delightful.

Because delighting and rejoicing demonstrate the dynamic

happiness is to be associated with play and not work. These texts refuse to separate these dimensions of life and what makes for happiness.

- 36) See Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 288-289. Fox's emphasis that "Wisdom's play expresses the joy of intellect: exploring, thinking, learning" should not be stressed at the expense of other dimensions of a genuine relationship. Note that in Psalm 119 (vv. 14, 16, 24, 70, etc.) the psalmist takes pleasure in the law because of the way in which it gives shape to a life of joy and gladness.
- 37) Karl Löning and Erich Zenger speak helpfully of the image of God as an artist who forms the world "in a kind of euphoric 'creative high.'" Karl Löning and Erich Zenger, *To Begin with, God Created....: Biblical Theologies of Creation* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2000), 62.
- 38) Helmer Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom: Studies in the Hypostatization of Divine Qualities and Functions in the Ancient Near East* (Lund: Ohlssons, 1947), 55.
- 39) See Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, James D. Martin, trans. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972; org. ed. German 1970), 156.

character of this relationship, this text “excludes any theological view that the universe is a closed system operating according to fixed laws, of either nature or human destiny, which determine every occurrence.”⁴⁰) That Wisdom is not a fixed order will become evident in Proverbs 10-31 by the way individual proverbs sometimes contradict themselves, depending on the life situation. Hans-Jürgen Hermisson also points out that, given the nature of the proverbial literature and its varied contents, “creation did not only happen at the beginning of the world, but takes place continuously; therefore, the orders have not become rigid, but necessarily remain flexible.”⁴¹) Wisdom does not set absolute standards or norms. Wisdom does not fix life in place. The wise and discerning human response may, indeed must, vary from situation to situation if it would be true to Wisdom’s intention. The authority of Wisdom, and the limits of which one might speak, are of such a nature that much freedom of life and expression is allowed. That means that Woman Wisdom opens up the world rather than closes it down: she is always ready to take new experience into account, recognizing that God may be about new things for new times and places. Such is the life of a genuine Creator.

Finally, the presence of irregularities and ambiguities in the order of things means that discernment has to be open to new perceptions and shifts in understanding regarding what is wise. Wisdom is more dynamic than static in view of such changes and perceptions of reality. “These relationships, however, were always extremely variable and could certainly never be evaluated unambiguously. Behind the teachings of the wise men there

40) Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 68.

41) So H.-J. Hermisson, “Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom,” Bernard W. Anderson, ed., *Creation in the Old Testament*, IRT 6 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 122.

lies, therefore, a profound conviction of the ambivalence of phenomena and events.”⁴²) Close attention to actual experience means learning to live with ambiguity. And rejoicing in that reality!

4. Happiness as a Creational Gift of God to Human Beings

Happiness as God’s gift to human beings is perhaps most evident in thinking about the human as created in the image of God. Because God’s life is characterized by happiness, those made in God’s image are also so gifted. Happiness may be a specific creational step in light of Gen 2:18, “It is not good that the man should be alone.” God moves to resolve this identified problem in God’s own creation, and, with creaturely help (Gen 2:19-22), does so by the creation of the woman. The creational situation thereby moves from “not good” to “good” and the ’adam responds with a joyous exclamation (Gen 2:23). God’s action in creation produces human joy. Supporting such an understanding is the parallel depiction of the new creation in Isa 65:18, wherein God will “create Jerusalem *as a joy* and its people *as a delight*” (emphasis mine). Joy is a gift of God in creation and hence it is God’s will for human beings that they be happy.

The joyful response of the ’adam to God’s gift of the woman (Gen 2:23)-the first human words in the Bible-in effect identifies human happiness as integral to what “good” is (and “backfills” into the meaning of “good” in Genesis 1).⁴³) If so, such happiness is integral to what it means to be truly human.

42) Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 311.

43) See above. Also, Jer 32:41 brings the language of “good” into close proximity with God’s happiness.

At the same time, the text suggests that a close relationship with at least one other human being is considered essential for the *ʾadam* to be happy (and that nonhuman creatures are insufficient, though there is a link between human and nonhuman joy).⁴⁴⁾ In other words, *human interrelationships* are essential to the happiness of the human being. In its most fundamental sense, happiness has a relational element(as noted above, this is true of God as well). To be clear, I do not think that the text suggests that one cannot, say, be happy living alone or even thrive in times of aloneness; rather, it is to recognize that such “happiness in isolation” is possible because human others have played an integral role along the way in one’s becoming.⁴⁵⁾ It would seem, then, that happiness is an innate quality of life(perhaps like personality itself) that is drawn out in relationship to others and “matures” over time as one relates to self and others.

On the other hand, happiness can diminish as relationships fail. The testimony of Genesis 1-11 is that human failure has profoundly negative effects on relationships-with God, with other human beings, with nonhuman creatures(including the ground and animals), and with one’s own self(e.g., issues of shame). The negative effects of human behaviors suggest that, at the most basic level, the vision of human well-being(happiness) in the opening chapters of Genesis focuses on well-functioning relationships at all levels of existence.

This way of putting the matter suggests that happiness is, at least initially, *a gift of creation, not redemption*.⁴⁶⁾ Another way

44) See below. Notably, God’s presence does not resolve the issue of human aloneness either.

45) In the psychological literature, one might compare the work of D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 2005; org. ed. 1971).

46) Such a perspective may stand over against the claim of Aquinas that “a perfect happiness...cannot be found in this life and can only be found in union with

of putting the matter: people who are not Christians, nor religious, or who have never experienced redemption, can be happy by virtue of (and within) their humanity in relationship to others. It might even be said that many “non-religious” people are happier than many religious individuals!

This creational dimension of happiness is evident in that the experience of happiness often does not have explicit religious connections. A remarkable variety of God’s good gifts in the creation have the capacity to generate happiness, including the birth of children(Ps 113:9), a birthday(Job 3:7), one’s continuing years of life-from youth to old age(Eccl 11:8-9), good wine and oil(Judg 9:13; Ps 104:15), a good word(Prov 12:25; 15:23), sexual love(Song 1:4), married life(Prov 5:18), a good harvest(Isa 9:3), and, more generally, the capacity to eat, drink, and enjoy one’s work(Eccl 3:13; 5:18-20; 8:15). Many, if not all, of these gifts are a part of human life because they are *creational* gifts. Moreover, most such gifts entail relationships with other people either directly or implicitly. Happiness, that is, is often generated by the daily rhythms in our interrelationships with others.

That these gifts are creational suggests that happiness is a regular feature of life for many people, if not all. These gifts demonstrate that it is a mistake to think that “real” joy comes only in or from a redemptive context. It might be further suggested that this more primal or foundational set of joyful experiences in “regular,”created life becomes a metaphor for the happiness of life in relationship with God, with much “yes” to

God. See Stephen Wang, “Aquinas on Human Happiness and the Natural Desire for God,” *New Blackfriars* 88 (2007), 322. One might quarrel over what the word “perfect” means or what “union with God” entails, both of which are ambiguous at best. Another way of making the point is that human beings do not become something other than (or more than) human in their relationship with God. Their humanity may be enhanced in such a relationship, but they remain finite human beings.

the analogy!⁴⁷⁾ An explicit example would be Isa 9:3:

You [i.e., God] have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you *as* with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.(My emphases)

A contrasting example is Ps 4:7:

You have put gladness in my heart
more than when their grain and wine abound.

The latter text may suggest that the issue is a matter of the depth and breadth of gladness. It might be asserted that being or becoming a member of a community of faith makes some people happier, but this is certainly not necessarily so. *Creational issues are always in play*, from the nature of the personality involved to the character and quality of the relationships with others. At the same time, “happy” does not have a single definition, as if every human being would be “happy” if precisely the same state of affairs came to be in or for each. “Happy” varies from individual to individual.

Despite the importance of creation, there are several texts that suggest that happiness is a gift from God that moves beyond the creational sphere.⁴⁸⁾ At the same time, just exactly what it is that distinguishes these expressions of happiness from the creational is not altogether clear. Is it a deeper quality or intensity of happiness? Is it a more realistic view of happiness? Being

47) It is noteworthy that God and human beings are often the subjects of the same words for joy and happiness. The one possible exception may be the image of the shining face in Num 6:25, but cf. 1 Sam 14:27, 29 (of Jonathan’s eyes).

48) Note the following listing: 1Kgs 8:66; Neh 12:43; Ps 30:11; 32:1-2; 51:12; 94:19; 119:111; Isa 12:6; 29:19; 35:10(cf. Isa 51:11); 51:3; 60:15; 61:1-3; Jer 15:16; Jer 31:13; 33:9.

assured of forgiveness of sin may be the most evident factor at work in these texts—does it gift one with a kind of happiness that has a special quality? Again and again these passages indicate that human joy is something that is endangered, or withered, or perhaps even lost.⁴⁹⁾ On the other hand, various aspects of God’s work among the people can take away sorrows, cares, broken heartedness, and “hates.” So it is that happiness can include healing. New dimensions of joy and life (e.g., “fresh joy” in Isa 30:19) are created by divine action, including God’s goodness, forgiveness, salvation, comfort, steadfast love, law, and presence. What do such “new dimensions” include? Perhaps redemption reinvigorates or revitalizes creational happiness that has been diminished in one way or another and gives it new energy in view of newly shaped purposes for life. Whatever the case, whether in creation or redemption, joy is seen to be a gift of God (see Eccl 5:18-20).

It is clear, regardless, that it is not helpful to speak of “total” or “perfect” happiness (except perhaps as a momentary exclamation!).⁵⁰⁾ Human beings are gifted with happiness, but that gift is never something that is realized in life in some comprehensive or totalizing way. This is the case, not simply because of human sin (though that is often asserted), but also because of the limits entailed in human finitude.⁵¹⁾ Hence, happiness is not only something that is given; it is also something that may be (1) *enhanced*, when, say, relationships thrive; (2) *diminished*, when, say, relationships fail; and (3) *stymied* or *frustrated* in its

49) God is also one who takes joy away or is not delighted. See Deut 28:63; Hos 2:11; Eccl 5:4; Jer 7:34; 16:9(25:10; cf. 33:11); Ezek 35:14-15; Mal 1:10; Amos 5:21; Ps 5:4; Isa 1:11; 9:16; 65:12; Ezek 18:23, 32; 33:11.

50) See further my book *Creation Untamed*, esp. chap. 1.

51) Finitude is a neglected theme in Old Testament theological studies. Even in the new heaven and new earth, human beings will not be static, where no change or no new development is possible. Such a place of stasis would better be described as hell.

development, when, say, limits have been reached. Once gifted with happiness, what we do with the gift will make a difference for ourselves and for others—often a great deal of difference.

5. The Happiness Expressed by Nonhuman Creatures

Does the Bible witness to the happiness of nonhuman creatures? If so, how might we appropriately speak of, say, animals being happy or contented or delighted? And, of what importance is such a reality for understanding and enabling human happiness?⁵²) Anyone who has loved a dog knows that that love is returned (perhaps the same cannot be said for cats!). Given the relationships that human beings often have to pets, household plants, and even trees and other natural elements, we dare not suggest that God is incapable of similar relationships.

One of the more remarkable features of Old Testament creation theology is the extent to which nonhuman creatures are imaged as joyful and happy and engaged in the praise of God.⁵³) God is said to draw nonhuman creatures out or call them forth, and they are said to be responsive in some sense

52) For a beginning on these important questions, see Marc Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals: A Leading Scientist Explores Animal Joy, Sorrow, and Empathy—and Why They Matter* (Novato: New World Library, 2007).

53) For analysis of this and related phenomena, see Terence E. Fretheim, “Nature’s Praise of God in the Psalms,” *Ex Auditu* 3 (1987), 16-30; and Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World*, 249-268. For iconographical evidence related to nature’s praise, see Brent A. Strawn and Joel M. LeMon, “‘Everything That Has Breath’: Animal praise in Psalm 150:6 in the light of ancient Near Eastern iconography,” S. Bickel, et al., eds., *Biblical Quellen/Images as Sources: Studies on ancient Near Eastern artefacts and the Bible inspired by the work of Othmar Keel*, OBO Sonderband (Fribourg: Academic Press/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2007), 451-485 and Pls. XXXIII-XXXIV.

to the work of God within them. This is already true in the opening chapters of Genesis, where God's call to the waters and the earth to participate in creative activity (Gen 1:11, 20, 24) suggests that a response is expected and, indeed, is forthcoming (Gen 1:13). The natural order is certainly not understood to be passive; to the contrary, it is a *co-participant* in God's creative activity.

The extensive list of texts on the inter-responsiveness of God and nonhuman creatures is remarkable (see, e.g., Job 37:6; 38:35, 39-41; Ps 19:1; 50:4; Ps 104:21; Ps 145:10, 15-16; 147:4, 9; 148; Isa 40:26; 45:8; Hos 2:21-22; Hag 1:11).⁵⁴ Specific examples of happiness on the part of nonhuman creatures follows:

- Job 38:7: When *the morning stars* sang together
and all the heavenly beings *shouted for joy*.
- Ps 19:5: *The sun* like a strong man runs its course *with joy*.
- Ps 65:8: You [i.e., God] make *the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy*.
- Ps 69:34: Let *heaven and earth praise him* [i.e., God],
the seas and everything that moves in them.
- Ps 89:5: Let the *heavens praise your wonders*, O LORD.
- Ps 89:12: [The mountains] *Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your* [i.e., God's] name.
- Ps 98:8-9a: Let the *floods clap their hands*; let the *bills sing together for joy* at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming to judge the earth.
- Ps 100:1 (cf. 66:1; 98:4): Make a *joyful noise* to the LORD,
all the earth.
- Isa 32:14: The populous city...will become...the *joy of wild asses*.
- Isa 35:1-2: The *wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom*, like the *crocus it shall blossom abundantly*, and *rejoice with joy and singing*.
- Isa 49:13: *Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth*;

⁵⁴ For a full listing of texts regarding nature's praise of God (ca. 40 total), see Fretheim, *God and World*, 267-268.

break forth, O mountains, into singing!

Jer 51:48: *Then the heavens and the earth, and all that is in them, shall shout for joy over Babylon; for the destroyers shall come against them out of the north.*

Joel 2:21: Do not fear, O soil;
be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done great things!

Note also that in Job 39:18, 22; and 41:29 the (non-human!) creatures of God *laugh*. A key question arises from such texts: What kind of thinking about God and about nature could have occasioned this kind of “happiness” language? In response, it might be offered that it is God’s creational activity that enables these nonhuman creatures to flourish. Happiness and joy is thus a way of saying that these creatures are flourishing, which is to say that they are being what God created them to be.

Interestingly, nature’s praise of God is a theme that never appears in narrative material. Found only in poetry, it is almost exclusively associated with hymnic literature (primarily Psalms and Isaiah). This genre specificity gives no little credence to the oft-suggested notion that what we have here is merely poetic fancy or license or just “highly poetic language.” Or, perhaps one might say that the language of personification is obviously employed: nature is simply *represented* as a human being. But this issue is more complex than such sentiments would suggest. Consider the following judgments by Luis Stadelmann: “Certainly we have here more than a mere poetical personification of the cosmos when it is invited to rejoice”;⁵⁵) Hermann Gunkel: “Such exhortation of creatures to praise of God was not simply a ‘poetic figure’ in Israel; the concept of nature as animate still was lodged” in human minds at that time;⁵⁶) and

55) Luis I. J. Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World*, AnBib 39 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970), 7.

56) Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 5th ed. (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht,

H. Wheeler Robinson: “objects of nature were conceived as having a psychical life of their own... with [their] own psychical possibilities, and their own capacity to be indwelt or made instrumental..by Yahweh himself.”⁵⁷⁾ It is important at this point to remember that nonhuman creatures can really and truly communicate with other nonhuman creatures in various ways and at differing levels of depth and breadth.⁵⁸⁾ Why then, in a theistic framework, would they not be able to communicate with God?

To be sure, natural phenomena must be of such a kind that God is able to sustain a close relationship with them. The nature of such relationships are complex and the evidence ambiguous, but the texts suggest that these creatures have a certain interiority so that more than external relationships with God are possible. That is to say that the possibilities for *an internal relationship* between God and non-human creatures must be left open.⁵⁹⁾ Indeed, the texts seem to require it(see, among other texts, Psalm 148).

In fact, that the joy of nonhuman creatures comes in response to what God has done for all creation gives evidence of the inter-responsiveness of God and these beings. Moreover,

1968), 618. Quoted with approval by Delbert R. Hillers, “Study of Psalm 148,” *CBQ* 40 (1978), 334.

57) H. Wheeler Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946), 12, 15-16, 47. Comparably, G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment*, SBT 2 (London: SCM, 1950), 36; Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, OTL 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1967), 152. For further discussion and possible ancient Near Eastern parallels, see Fretheim, *Word and World*, 253-255; and Strawn and LeMon, “Everything That Has Breath,” 451-485.

58) How this communicating reality is related to issues of “consciousness” would be important to explore. See note 52 above for the emotional lives of animals.

59) To speak in this way does not necessarily lead to panpsychism or vitalism, but it does suggest a greater continuity between the animate and the inanimate than many moderns have been willing to allow.

creaturely response demonstrates that God's action in the world has to do with much more than simply human well-being; it extends to the well-being of the larger, indeed entire, environment. God's work in the world is not just about the salvation of *people*, it is also about the salvation of *the whole (human and non-human) world*. That human joy and nonhuman joy join each other in response to what God has done is witness again to a deeply interconnected world. And the joy of the nonhuman world is not simply over what God has done for human beings, but witnesses also to what God has done for nonhuman beings and for the larger environment of which they are a part. Seen in this way, the joy of nonhuman creatures, though independent of human beings, can nevertheless become a human vocation: how might we relate to these nonhuman creatures in such a way that the effect of our relationship is joyful for them?⁶⁰

It is noteworthy that nature metaphors are often used for God: God is light, water, rock, fire, wind, as well as a few birds and animals—most especially the lion.⁶¹ What might this kind of creational language for God suggest? If God is a rock or a mother eagle, for example, then rocks and mother eagles can be understood to reflect the identity of God in some sense. That is, there is a “yes,” and not simply a “no,” to be discerned between some aspects of these creatures and the reality of God (see, e.g., Ps 36:6; Jer 31:35-36). Such creatures reflect the reality of God in their being what they are.

Nature's praise of God and its associated joyfulness is thus to be related to and understood in light of the larger discussion about metaphors for God. In my judgment, it is basically in

60) See further the insightful study by Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

61) See, e.g., Brent A. Strawn, *What Is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, OBO 212 (Fribourg: Academic Press/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2005).

terms of their intrinsic rather than instrumental value that non-human creatures function as metaphors for the divine. In themselves and all by themselves they are capable of showing forth the strength, care, glory, faithfulness, majesty, etc., of their creator. Generally speaking, the use of natural metaphors for God opens up the entire created order (even maggots, Hos 5:12!) as a resource for depth and variety in our God-talk. In the process, such language tempers a certain anthropocentricity in our reflections about God and our discussions of human happiness.⁶²⁾

The praise of nonhumans offers an example, even a model, for human praise. As these creatures are what they were created to be, so human beings should offer their joyful praise to God. Moreover, the natural order provides raw material for human praise. Without the natural order, the praising metaphors at the disposal of the human would be fewer in number; we would be without much praise-ful painting, joy-filled music, and nature-inspired literature. Without these creatures, the witness of the human would not be what it has the potential of becoming. From the human side, human beings are the secretaries of nature's praise (George Herbert), giving voice to nonhuman praise, and making its genuine happiness articulate for the use and benefit of human beings and their ethics.

6. Conclusion

In closing, the following may be said as a summary of the preceding points:

1. Happiness is characteristic of the life of God, ranging

62) See Strawn, *What Is Stronger*; also Hilary Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics: Re-Reading Amos, Hosea, and First Isaiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

from divine well-being to particular experiences of joy in the course of the God-world relationship. Israel's God is genuinely affected by what happens in these relationships; what creatures say and do brings pleasure(or displeasure) to the divine life.

2. More particularly, creation is a pleasurable task for God with ongoing joy-filled effects for both Creator and creature. Pleasure and playfulness are built into the very structure of things, enabling all of life, including God's own life, to be what God intended it to be. God delights in the results of the divine creative work in and through Wisdom, and the world's future is dependent upon God's continuing pleasure.

3. The life of those who are created in the image of God is gifted with happiness. Essential to such human happiness are relationships with other human beings. Even more, a remarkable variety of God's good gifts in the creation have the capacity to generate happiness. At the same time, once gifted with happiness, what is done with the gift will make a difference in life.

4. God's work in redemption can revitalize diminished creational happiness.

5. Nonhuman creatures are imaged as engaged in the praise of God. Their happiness and joy is a way of saying that these creatures are flourishing as God's good creation and in their ongoing relationship with God and other creatures. The use of nonhuman creatures as resources for depth and variety in our God-talk has the capacity of tempering anthropocentricity in our discussions of God and human happiness.

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<Key Words>

God, happiness, biblical theology, creation, nature, wisdom

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<Abstract>

God, Creation, and the Pursuit of Happiness

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In this essay I address happiness as it relates to God and to creation in the witness of the Old Testament. Happiness is characteristic of the life of God, ranging from divine well-being to particular experiences of joy in the course of the God-world relationship. Israel's God is genuinely affected by what happens in these relationships; what creatures say and do brings pleasure (or displeasure) to the divine life. More particularly, creation is a pleasurable task for God with ongoing joy-filled effects for both Creator and creature. Pleasure and playfulness are built into the very structure of things, enabling all of life, including God's own life, to be what God intended it to be. God delights in the results of the divine creative work in and through Wisdom, and the world's future is dependent upon God's continuing pleasure.

The life of those who are created in the image of God is gifted with happiness. Essential to such human happiness are relationships with other human beings. Even more, a remarkable variety of God's good gifts in the creation have the capacity to generate happiness. At the same time, once gifted with happiness, what is done with the gift will make a difference in life.

God's work in redemption can revitalize diminished creational happiness.

Nonhuman creatures are imaged as engaged in the praise of God. Their happiness and joy is a way of saying that these creatures are flourishing as God's good creation and in their ongoing relationship with God and other creatures. The use of nonhuman creatures as resources for depth and variety in our God-talk has the capacity of tempering anthropocentricity in our discussions of God and human happiness.