

# Enjoying God

By *Patty Cabrera*



Photo: Tom Osborne

**W**e are sensory, finite beings and, as such, our contact with God is always mediated—by sight, sound, touch, and so forth. If we are living at our best we are never not physical and we are never not thinking. These are the only ways we can interact with another person or with creation. Because we can't relate to God in the same way, to enjoy God means to enjoy the world that God has given—to enjoy this world in relation to God. We enjoy God as we enjoy life, which is God's gift. We don't love God in addition to loving creation; rather, we love God because of creation.

We can love God because the experience of enjoying creation provides a glimpse of God. Whether we look at the stars nestled deeply in the black sky or find ourselves in love, we are experiencing God. Ellen G. White wrote, "Even the adornments of the earth, the grass of living green, the lovely flowers of every hue, the lofty and varied trees of the forest, the dancing brook, the noble river, the placid lake, testify to the tender, fatherly care of God and to His desire to make His children happy."<sup>1</sup>

Certainly we don't need the delicately sculpted rose to remind us that we should get more rest. We don't need the elegant mountains to remind us that we should drink more water. We don't need love to remind us to eat. We don't need love to procreate. Love and beauty are not necessary for self-preservation. It is reasonable to believe that God intended that we enjoy the fullness of our humanness as we enjoy the fullness of creation.

When I take my dog Lucy to the lake we both enjoy it. She enjoys running, jumping, and swimming, and I enjoy watching her live in the fullness of what it means to be a dog. If she didn't run, jump, or swim, it wouldn't be as much fun for either of us. I could easily stay at home and just watch her sleep. God enjoys watching us live in the fullness of what it means to be human. I believe that God is happy when we are happy. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10 NKJV).

God gives in creation things we will never see or know how to appreciate, yet God gives with such "profligate abandon, such manic generosity," we could call it excessive.<sup>2</sup> God's creativity doesn't stop where our appreciation does. By way of comparison, in the music recording industry software engineers constantly seek to improve technology that creates clearer recording formats. They continue to improve the resolution and fidelity of compact discs and other recording formats even though the difference in sound is not audibly noticeable to most people.<sup>3</sup> They do this for the sake of art—for the beauty and integrity of it.



## We are called into community with God through one another.

I believe the same is true with God. God's artistry goes far beyond practicality or functionality—it is “the work of a consummate artist.”<sup>4</sup> God saw that it was good “just because.” God's generosity in creation tells us that living is more fun than merely existing.

Trying to love God outside the context of humanness doesn't seem particularly helpful; in practice, it seems impossible. The idea of God as infinite, all powerful, and unchangeable—and thus exempt from having anything to do with creation—defines God as something completely other, and therefore meaningless to us in any practical way. God becomes nothing more than an unknowable mystery. “Such language suggests a formidable God, an exalted being whose dazzling perfection is the direct opposite of what human beings are. People hear that God is almighty but they are weak. God is holy but they are sinful. God knows everything but they are ignorant. God is spiritual but they are bodily. God is eternal but they are mortal.”<sup>5</sup>

I suspect that we can react to this picture of God in a couple ways. Our first reaction might be to shrink away in humiliation and fear of God. Or we might simply become disinterested in a God so unlike us—one to whom we have no access or about whom we have no understanding. God becomes something we cannot relate to or experience in our ordinary human existence. It is as if there were rumored to be another race or life form on another planet that didn't look, act, talk, or exist in any of the ways we do. Despite its rumored existence, we have no way to know it or communicate with it—no way to share with it—which renders its existence meaningless to us in any practical way. That race becomes nothing more than a neat idea in our imagination.

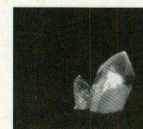
If we want to know anything at all about God—anything meaningful—we must understand in the context of our humanness, in the context of what it means to be finite. Any suggestion that God can only be known or loved via some kind of mystical or supernatural means seems doubtful. The difference is finitude and infinity—our love for God cannot be directly (physically) given to God; rather, our experience with creation necessarily connects us with our

experience of God. Precisely because we are finite, sensory beings, God has given us the beautiful gift of creation. “He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see? . . . He who teaches us knowledge, knows our thoughts” (Ps. 94:8-11 RSV).

I am not arguing that God literally has ears and eyes, but that perhaps God has given us ears and eyes to understand God's own nature through creation. Through our ordinary experience we can better understand and enjoy God's love for us. It isn't that God is in the mountains or flowers literally, but rather that God is encountered in the experience of seeing the mountains or smelling flowers. Human experience allows for meaningful, cognitive content about God. “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead” (Rom. 1:20 RSV). Humanity and the rest of creation sort of “fit” together nicely.<sup>6</sup>

### Humanity as Relational

We are called into relationship with one another. A couple powerful reminders of this point are found in Scripture: “Love your neighbor as yourself,” and “Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me” (Matt. 22:39, 25:45 NIV). Understanding what these sayings mean will, in the words of Jeremy S. Begbie, “affect the way in which we perceive human culture.”<sup>7</sup> The idea behind Begbie's observation is that “every person is to be treated with the respect akin to that which one would show to God, and that each person should act as much as possible in the way God acts in relation to all the rest of creation.”<sup>8</sup> This type of relational modeling based in God's love refuses “to see creation outside its relation to the divine love.”<sup>9</sup>





We are called into community with God through one another. "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9 NKJV). God created humanity so that we can enjoy a relationship with God mediated through our relationships with one another. In the beginning, the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 1:18 NIV). Evidently, it was important that we enjoy engaging in the gift of creation and that we enjoy God within these relationships. "It was His [God's] purpose that the earth should be inhabited by beings whose existence would be a blessing to themselves and to one another, and an honor to their Creator."<sup>10</sup>

We don't love *enough* when we treat creation as a competitor to God because we don't put it in the context of an ultimate meaning. Ellen White's characterization of Enoch's walk with God in the details of ordinary life captures some of what I have in mind. "Enoch's walk with God was not in a trance or a vision, but in all the duties of his daily life. He did not become a hermit, shutting himself entirely from the world; for he had a work to do for God in the world. In the family and in his intercourse with men, as a husband and father, a friend, a citizen, he was the

steadfast, unwavering servant of the Lord."<sup>11</sup>


When we are in a relationship we may not always be thinking of our lover, but we are always aware of him. Every decision we make in some way reflects that relationship. The same is true of how we experience God—the decisions we make and our experience with the world will always be influenced by our awareness of God. "God is placed, not alongside creatures but behind them, as the light which shines through a crystal and lends it whatever luster it may have. He is loved here, not apart from but through and in them."<sup>12</sup>

## Notes and References


1. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8 (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1948), 325-26.
2. Sara Maitland, *A Big-Enough God* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 122-23.
3. The standard audio compact disc has a bit depth of 16 and a sample rate of 44.1K. There are proposals to manufacture compact discs with an improved bit depth of 24 and sample rate of 96K. Compact disc formats such as DVD's (Digital Versatile Disc) already have these specifications. However, for all practical purposes, the human ear cannot tell the difference between the old and new technologies, although some hard-core enthusiasts argue to the contrary.
4. John Randolph Willis, *Pleasures Forevermore: The Theology of C. S. Lewis* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1980), 24.
5. R. William Franklin and Joseph M. Shaw, *The Case For Christian Humanism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 184.
6. This statement may seem somewhat anthropological, but there is a certain "correctness" to this argument that gives strength to the notion that various aspects of human existence and experience give affirmation to the existence of God.
7. Jeremy S. Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards A Theology Of The Arts* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1991), 181.
8. Fritz Guy, *Thinking Theologically: Adventist Christianity and the Interpretation of Faith* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1999), 179.
9. Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 181.
10. Ellen G. White, *The Story of Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1943), 500.
11. Ellen G. White, *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1908), 48.
12. Nicholas Lash, *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 165.

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