**EXCERPT FROM LETTERS TO MALCOLM: CHIEFLY ON PRAYER by C.S. Lewis**

It’s comical that you, of all people, should ask my views about prayer as worship or adoration. On this subject you yourself taught me nearly all I know. . . .

You first taught me the great principle, “Begin where you are.” I had thought one had to start by summoning up what we believe about the goodness and greatness of God, by thinking about creation and redemption and “all the blessings of this life.” You turned to the brook and once more splashed your burning face and hands in the little waterfall and said, “Why not begin with this?”

And it worked. Apparently you have never guessed how much. That cushiony moss, that coldness and sound and dancing light were no doubt very minor blessings compared with “the means of grace and the hope of glory.” But then they were manifest. So far as they were concerned, sight had replaced faith. They were not the hope of glory; they were an exposition of the glory itself.

Yet you were not – or so it seemed to me – telling me that “Nature,” or “the beauties of Nature,” manifest the glory. No such abstraction as “Nature” comes into it. I was learning the far more secret doctrine that ***pleasures*are shafts of the glory as it strikes our sensibility**. As it impinges on our will or our understanding, we give it different names-goodness or truth or the like. But its flash upon our senses and mood is pleasure.

But aren’t there bad, unlawful pleasures? Certainly there are. But in calling them “bad pleasures” I take it we are using a kind of shorthand. We mean “pleasures snatched by unlawful acts.”  It is the stealing of the apple that is bad, not the sweetness. The sweetness is still a beam from the glory. That does not palliate the stealing. It makes it worse. There is sacrilege in the theft. We have abused a holy thing.

**I have tried, since that moment, to make every pleasure into a channel of adoration.** I don’t mean simply by giving thanks for it. One must of course give thanks, but I mean something different. How shall I put it?

We can’t – or I can’t – hear the song of a bird simply as a sound. Its meaning or message (“That’s a bird”) comes with it inevitably-just as one can’t see a familiar word in print as a merely visual pattern. The reading is as involuntary as the seeing. When the wind roars I don’t just hear the roar; I “hear the wind.” In the same way it is possible to “read” as well as to “have” a pleasure. Or not even “as well as.” The distinction ought to become, and sometimes is, impossible; to receive it and to recognise its divine source are a single experience. This heavenly fruit is instantly redolent of the orchard where it grew. This sweet air whispers of the country from whence it blows. It is a message. **We know we are being touched by a finger of that right hand at which there are pleasures for evermore. There need be no question of thanks or praise as a separate event, something done afterwards. To experience the tiny theophany is itself to adore.**

**Gratitude exclaims, very properly, “How good of God to give me this.” Adoration says: “What must be the quality of that Being whose far-off and momentary coruscations are like this!”  One’s mind runs back up the sunbeam to the sun.**

If I could always be what I aim at being, no pleasure would be too ordinary or too usual for such reception; from the first taste of the air when I look out of the window–one’s whole cheek becomes a sort of palate – down to one’s soft slippers at bedtime.

I don’t always achieve it. One obstacle is inattention. Another is the wrong kind of attention. One could, if one practised, hear simply a roar and not the roaring-of-the-wind. In the same way, only far too easily, one can concentrate on the pleasure as an event in one’s own nervous system—subjectify it—and ignore the smell of Deity that hangs about it. A third obstacle is greed. Instead of saying, “This also is Thou,” one may say the fatal word Encore. There is also conceit: the dangerous reflection that not everyone can find God in a plain slice of bread and butter, or that others would condemn as simply “grey” the sky in which I am delightedly observing such delicacies of pearl and dove and silver. . . .

One must learn to walk before one can run. So here. We-or at least I-shall not be able to adore God on the highest occasions if we have learned no habit of doing so on the lowest. At best, our faith and reason will tell us that He is adorable, but we shall not have *found*Him so, not have “tasted and seen.” Any patch of sunlight in a wood will show you something about the sun which you could never get from reading books on astronomy. These pure and spontaneous pleasures are “patches of Godlight” in the woods of our experience. . . .

I do *not*think that the life of Heaven bears any analogy to play or dance in respect of frivolity. I do think that while we are in this “valley of tears,” cursed with labour, hemmed round with necessities, tripped up with frustrations, doomed to perpetual plannings, puzzlings, and anxieties, certain qualities that must belong to the celestial condition have no chance to get through, can project no image of themselves, except in activities which, for us here and now, are frivolous. . . .

It is only in our “hours-off,” only in our moments of permitted festivity, that we find an analogy [to the joys of heaven]. Dance and game*are* frivolous, unimportant down here; for “down here” is not their natural place. Here, they are a moment’s rest from the life we were placed here to live. But in this world everything is upside down. That which, if it could be prolonged here, would be a truancy, is likest that which in a better country is the End of ends.  **Joy is the serious business of Heaven**.