

1st July 2025

Pleasure

**“The whole is either our cupboard of food,
Or Cabinet of pleasure.”**

George Herbert, *Man* (1633)

I had a discussion with a friend recently about pleasure, the legitimacy of giving ourselves to enjoyment, while constantly being aware of the needs of the world. This wasn't about hedonism, putting "me" at the centre of everything, focussing only on pleasurable pursuits and disregarding all else. This was about the legitimacy of personal enjoyment, restoration, relaxation, renewal. Is it OK to open a bottle of Malt, enjoy an expensive meal, go on a special holiday, buy a new coat, in a world of injustice and inequality? Is it selfish and self-centred, or should we give ourselves more to ascetic pursuits, live in poverty, embrace the simpler life?

My friend and I struggled with this, and I suspect you would too. What did we come up with? Simply this ... that we will *always* be faced with those dilemmas, and so we should. But the fact that we're still thinking about them is a good thing and should continue to inform our decision-making. Questioning how we use our personal resources is always important. But I want to go a step further today.

The lines above from the 17th century poet and priest, George Herbert, come from a poem called *Man*. In this nine-stanza poem, Herbert explores humanity's place in creation, our role, purpose and responsibilities. As he reaches a conclusion to his musings, he offers this:

For us the winds do blow,
The earth doth rest, heav'n move, and fountains flow.
Nothing we see but means our good,
As our delight, or as our treasure;
The whole is either our cupboard of food,
Or cabinet of pleasure.

Our world – its winds and fountains, the earth beneath and the heavens above – were given to us to enjoy, "as our delight", "as our treasure". What we are given "means our good", a "cupboard of food" to sustain us, "or cabinet of pleasure" to give us enjoyment. Pleasure, therefore, is a gift from God, so that, when we are restored and renewed by God's gifts, we can continue to work for justice, equity, and the good of all.

A prayer for today

Loving God, thank you for giving me a cabinet of pleasure. Help me to use it well. Amen

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