

Aiming to Please God (Part 1)

by Bayless Conley

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Hello friend. I'm really glad to have you joining me right now. If you have a Bible, I would encourage you to get it. Or, if you happen to have a Bible on an electronic device, open it up because we're going to be looking at some Scriptures that are incredibly important. This is something that I think every follower of Jesus Christ needs to deeply, deeply consider. Because the truth is this will not only affect your here and now in this life, it will affect your eternity. I want to begin by reading something that Jesus said in John's Gospel, the eighth chapter in the 29th verse NKJV. He said,

²⁹ "And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him."

Wouldn't that be a marvelous thing to say? "I always do the things that please the Father." In Matthew 3:17, as soon as Jesus was baptized, a voice came from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Well, I want to be well pleasing to the Father. Let me read to you something that Paul wrote to the Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians 5, I want to begin in verse 6 NKJV. He said this,

⁶ So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.

Meaning, I'm here. I'm in my body. I'm absent from the Lord as far as being physically present there with Him. But he went on and said, 2 Corinthians 5:7 NKJV

⁷ For we walk by faith, not by sight.

That's how we live this life. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. So, if I die, if I lay down my physical body in death, I will instantaneously be in the presence of the Lord. The apostle Paul said, "To live is Christ, to die is gain." One point he said, "I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." Not a little better, it's far better. We should never grieve for those who have died in the Lord. They are far better off. Yes, there's a loss on our side, but not on their side. There's an enormous gain on their side. The next verse is actually the one I want to get to. Verse 9 NKJV, he said,

⁹ Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

"We make it our aim, whether present or absent, here or there, to be well pleasing to Him." That should be our goal. We want to be well pleasing to God. Another translation said, "It's our goal." Another one said, "It's our ambition to be well pleasing to Him." Another one said, "We labor to be well pleasing to Him." We make it our aim. Now, you can't aim at a target that you can't see. If you have a bow and arrow and you're going to take target practice, well, if you don't know where the target is, you're not going to do very well. If you're playing basketball and you can't see the hoop, if you don't know where it is, you don't know where to shoot. If you're playing football, we call it soccer here, and you don't know where the net is, you don't know where the

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goal is, you're not going to do very well. So, if we're going to make it our aim, make it our focus, if we're going to labor, if it's going to be our ambition and our goal to be well pleasing to God, we have to know what pleases Him. It is not just for God's benefit, and I'll explain that in a moment, but it really is for our benefit as well. In that verse we read, he said, "Whether present or absent, we make it our aim to be well pleasing to Him." The very next verse 10 of 2 Corinthians 5 says,

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Meaning the way that I've lived my life on this earth, if truly pleasing God and doing what was good before Him and right before Him, if I do that from my heart of hearts, I will receive a reward. But if I don't, if I spend my life in other pursuits, if I don't consider and make pleasing God my goal, well, I'm going to lose my rewards. Friend, those rewards are eternal. Listen, all believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Not to be judged for our salvation. When we embrace Christ and put our trust in Him, we're washed in the precious blood of the Lamb. Hey, heaven is secure. I became God's child. But everything after that is reward. He gave His life for me, so I should give my life for Him. I will give an account for this earthly life. There will be a working out in eternity. Some of the fruit of the things that I did or did not do in this life. So, I make it my aim to be well pleasing to God. Now, above and far beyond the fact that I'm going to hear about what I did in this life, my motives for doing it, I'm going to receive reward and lose reward. I'm going to stand before the Lord on that day. It makes me nervous, quite honestly, because the Apostle Paul, when he made the statement, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and we'll receive according to what we've done while in these bodies, good or bad." Listen to the next thing he said, 2 Corinthians 5:11a NKJV

¹¹ Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

Paul was terrified thinking about the judgment seat of Christ. Now, if it made the Apostle Paul nervous, it makes me really nervous. I know He loves me, and it's not in a morbid way or a bad way. But I like to say it this way: I live with one eye on the judgment seat of Christ. The most important thing I can do in this life is to be ready for the next. This is just a dressing room for eternity. Now, again, that being incredibly important, here's something that's far more important than that. I can actually bring pleasure to God. If I do those things that are well-pleasing to Him, I can put a smile on my Creator's face. I can bring pleasure to the heart of my Heavenly Father when I do those things that are well-pleasing to Him. Frankly, that is far more important than any benefits that I might receive for getting it right. So, what is it that pleases God? Where should our aim be? What should we be striving after? What should our goal be? What is it that pleases God? All right, listen to this. Hebrews 11:5 NKJV, I'll begin there. It says,

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. ⁶ But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Enoch had this testimony that he pleased God. The Scripture tells us that without faith, it's impossible to please God. Not hard, not super difficult, but impossible to be pleasing to God without faith. So, my number one goals are to have faith, to understand faith, to walk in faith, and to talk in faith. Because without faith, it's impossible to please God. Listen to this. This is Hebrews 10:38 NKJV.

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³⁸ “Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him.”

That is the Lord speaking. “The just will live by faith, but if anyone draws back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him.” So, first and foremost, we need to learn to walk by faith and live by faith. Now, I know some people start talking about faith, and it's this just sort of abstract, undefinable thing. But the Scripture gives us a very technical definition for faith, and then it shows us how faith is expressed in various ways. In Hebrews 11:1 NKJV, it says,

¹ Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

All right, there's your technical definition for faith. The NIV translation says, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for, certain of what we do not see.” The Weymouth translation says, “Faith is a conviction of the reality of things we do not see.” As the chapter progresses from this point, after giving a definition of faith, the writer of Hebrews tells us some of the different ways that faith is expressed. I just want to go to one of them right away. Hebrews 11:4 gives us a prime example and one way that faith is expressed. My friend, this is so applicable to you, and it is so applicable to me. Do you want to be well-pleasing to God? All right, this is a good place to start because without faith, it is impossible to please Him. Verse 4 NKJV says this,

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

So, by faith, Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than his brother Cain did when he brought that offering to God. And we read in the book of Genesis, and we find that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground, which, according to Scripture, was something that was totally acceptable, but it was nondescript. It didn't say anything about it. It was just an offering of the fruit of the ground. But it specifically says that when Abel brought his offering, he brought God his first and his best, which corresponds to what we read here in Hebrews 11:4, that Abel offered God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. And the phrase more excellent means “a better quality.” Abel offered to God his first and his best, and Cain just brought something that basically didn't cost him at all. Friend, it takes faith, especially when you have bills to pay, to give God your first and your best. Anyone can give God their leftovers. After all the bills are taken care of, after all of my obligations are taken care of, after I do the things that I want to do and spend money on myself, “Oh yeah. Well, hey, I've got a little extra. I'm going to put it in the offering at God's house at church, and I'll give it to God.” Friend, those kinds of gifts do not touch the heart of God. It takes faith to give God our first and our best, and He is honored when we give Him our first and our best. Listen to this. Proverbs 3:9–10 MSG says, “Honor God.” Think about that.

^{9–10} Honor God with everything you own; give him the first and the best. Your barns will burst, your wine vats will brim over.

That's from the Message Bible. Other translations say, “Honor the Lord with the first fruits of all your increase.” In other words, of all of your income, give God the very first part and the best part. The Message Bible says, “Honor God with everything that you possess, everything you own, give Him the first and the best.” That takes faith. “I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. I don't know what's going to happen next week.” I think, “Well, I may need to save all this. I can't afford to give God anything.” Friend, I think I can't afford to not give God anything. It is my aim to bring pleasure to God, and I know right here this makes some people nervous. You

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start talking about two things, and people are either all in or they kind of shove you away. You start talking about money, or you start talking about their kids. Those things are very, very close to our hearts, and the Scriptures have much to say about both. Jesus actually talked a lot about finances and us handling money. He said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." So, friend, listen, if we could sit down right now at your kitchen table and maybe share a cup of tea and talk about what we're talking about, you might be a single mother, and you don't earn much, and you're just doing your best to make ends meet and say, "Look, I'm trying to take care of my kids. It's like almost all my money goes to daycare, and I'm just stretched so thin, and you're telling me to give God my first and my best?" Well, I'm telling you, it's going to take faith to do that, and you have to start somewhere. Listen, God's Word is true. When we honor Him with everything we own and bring to Him our first and our best, and writing to people in an agrarian society, He said, "Your barns will burst, and your wine vats will brim over." Well, that's how they measured their prosperity.

In other words, God says, "I will take care of you, and it will open up a channel through which I can pour some abundance and blessing into your life." Yes, it takes faith. You may be a businessman right now, and I'm sitting at your table. We're enjoying a cup of tea, and you're saying, "Well, I have all these employees, and you don't understand. I have insurances to pay, and we have this to do and that to do. We have equipment that needs to be fixed." I understand all that. You might say, "You have no idea the kind of taxes that my government requires me to pay. I mean, they're taking 39, 40 percent right off the top." I know some places where it's far more than that. That's pretty average for where I live, here, in the United States, depending on what tax bracket you're in. I mean, the government just wants to grab their first part. I don't like it, but I pay my taxes. I give to God first, and when I give to God my first and my best, my wife and I, we do it off of our gross, not off of our net, because I reckon that God needs to come even before the government does. Maybe you're saying, "Well, Bayless, you're obviously blessed. You can afford to do that."

Listen, when I was working picking peaches, I gave God the first and the best of every paycheck I received. I used to work in a pear orchard as well. I picked pears. Well, I gave God my first and my best. When I built homes, I gave God my first and my best. When I was a waiter at a Mexican restaurant, I gave God my first and my best. When I was in between jobs and for a period of my life, I even had to live in a car when I first got saved. But for every dollar that came to me, I always set aside the first and the best for God. I've done that my whole life through thick and thin, for richer, for poorer, for better, or for worse. God has always been first. He's always been faithful to take care of me and take care of my family. The truth is God doesn't settle up on the first and the 15th of every month. There were some times when it didn't look like we were going to make it, but as I look back, I can say this and tell you with utter confidence and truthfulness, God is faithful. I'm sitting here today because of the faithfulness of God. This is one of the areas that brings pleasure to God if we will honor Him with the first part of our income, giving Him our first and our best.

I think about the story I heard one time. There were these three guys. They're all Christians, and they started talking about giving to God. One of them said, "Well, I'll tell you what I do." He said, "I draw a big circle on the ground. I take my money, and I throw it up in the air. Everything that comes down and lands outside of the circle, well, I give that to God, but everything that lands inside the circle, that's mine." The other one said, "Well, I do a similar thing. I draw a big circle on the ground. I throw all my money up in the air. Everything that comes down in the circle, I give that to God. Everything outside of the circle, that's mine." The third guy says, "Well, I'm kind of similar. I draw a big circle on the ground. I throw all my money up in the air, and I figure if God wants any of it, He has to catch it. Anything He grabs, He can have. Everything that comes

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down, that's mine." Well, friend, that's not the way that it works. Give Him your first and your best.

I remember hearing a story one time about a family. They went to church, and they got home. They're having Sunday dinner, and the father is just complaining about everything. He says, "The sermon was too long, the music was too loud, the church was too hot, and the people weren't friendly. I didn't like the songs that they chose." He's just complaining about everything. His son, his young son, who was very observant, said, "Well, Dad, you have to admit it was a pretty good show for a dollar." Because that's all Daddy had put in the offering plate, he put a dollar in. Friend, you put a dollar in, you put your nickels and dimes in, or something that doesn't affect your life that doesn't honor God. He's worthy of more than our leftovers. I hope I can hear you saying amen. Let's move on to something else that has to do with faith and brings pleasure to God. In verse 5, we read it there in Hebrews 11. It says, "By faith, Enoch," and we read this a few minutes ago.

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

And without faith, it is impossible to please God. So, by faith, Enoch was taken away. If we read the account there in the book of Genesis, it says that in Genesis 5:24 NKJV,

²⁴ And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.

Now, again, back to the biblical definition of faith. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for. It's the evidence of things not seen." It believes in the reality of things that we can't touch, taste, or handle with our hands and that don't register on our five physical senses. So, Enoch walked with God by faith. Listen, Enoch did not see God any more than you do. Enoch did not feel God any more than you do. Enoch walked with God by faith, the evidence of things not seen. It takes faith to walk and talk with a God that you cannot see. The Amplified Bible in Hebrews 11:1 says, "Faith perceiving is a real fact, what is not revealed to the senses." I was listening to an acquaintance of mine talk about another mutual acquaintance. The guy he was talking about, in my opinion, as far as anyone who I have ever personally known, walked closer with God than anyone with whom I've ever had the privilege to associate with. He's been in heaven for many years now, but this man had a relationship with God that was notable.

Anyway, the other acquaintance, I think they are at a conference together, and they actually had adjoining hotel rooms. So, this one guy is telling the story about this guy who had this extraordinary walk with God. He said he could hear him praying in the next room late at night. He said, "But it wasn't the way I pray." He said, "He was carrying on a conversation, like God was actually listening to him. He was asking God questions, and then it would get quiet. Then, he would respond as if somebody was talking to him." He said, "He was literally carrying on a conversation with God." He said, "It so profoundly affected me." Well, God wants us to walk and talk with Him. When you can't feel Him, when you can't see Him, you lift your hands and say, "Heavenly Father, I just want You to know I love You. I thank You that You're with me. You never leave me. You never forsake me. I thank You that the Holy Spirit is with me. I thank You that You've dispatched Your angels, and they're working on my behalf, for Your Word declares that they're sent forth to minister for the heirs of salvation. Father, I thank You that Your hand is upon me and upon my family."

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You're praising Him when you don't feel any of those things. In fact, it might feel like it's not true. It might look like it's not true in your life. Faith says, "God, You're here." Faith says, "God, You're everything that the Scripture says that You are, and You will do everything the Scriptures say You will do. I'm going to walk with You. I'm going to talk with You. I'm going to live my life as if Your eye is upon me. I'm going to make the decisions that I make in life based upon my trust that You are here all the time, that You see when no one else sees, and that You hear when no one else hears." When you order your life according to this deep abiding faith that you know your heavenly Father's eye is upon you, and He is watching you, and that He is present with you, friend, that brings such pleasure to Him. I think God may be nudging the angels up. "Would you look at My daughter down there? A lot of things have gone wrong in her life right now, and she's being persecuted, but look at her. She is blessing Me. She is praising Me. She is talking to Me. Gabriel, go down and open some doors of opportunity for her." Faith gets God's attention. Faith pleases God. Without faith, it is impossible to please Him. Then, we come to verse 7 of Hebrews 11 NKJV. We find another way that faith is expressed. It says,

⁷ By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Noah, by faith, prepared. Abel, by faith, gave God his first and his best. Enoch, by faith, walked and talked with a God he could not see. Noah, by faith, prepared. He was warned by God of things not seen yet. God says, "There's going to be a flood." Well, there had never been such a thing before. Noah couldn't see it. He had no evidence other than God's Word. So, he got busy and started building an ark. For the next 100 years, he built that ark, and by doing it, he saved his family. We know the story of the flood. Faith is making preparations. Ernest Shackleton, the famous English explorer, had to leave some of his men on Elephant Island. He was going to go and come back for them, but there was early ice that came. Shackleton couldn't get through the ice. He actually tried three different times to get through the ice, and couldn't get through to the men. On the fourth try, he finally got through, found a channel, and got there to Elephant Island. He found his men waiting on the shore with all of their gear packed and ready. He said, "How did you know I was coming?" And the leader of the men said, "Well, sir, every day I rolled up my bedroll, and I gathered all my gear, and I told the men, 'Get your gear. The boss might be coming today,' and so we've come down, and we've stood on the shore every day. We've made preparations." Faith prepares ahead of time, and there's a way to express that in your own personal life.

I remember hearing about a couple in Botswana. There were missionaries there who had labored and worked for so long but had almost no fruit, no converts. The mission's organization that sent them got in touch and said, "Look, do you want to come back? Do you need to come back on furlough? What do you need?" This missionary couple in Botswana said, "What we would like is for you to send us a communion set because we are going to need to teach the new converts to have communion." They didn't have any converts yet. They were preparing, and so they were sent a beautiful communion set, and right after that, they had their first convert, their second convert, their third convert, and then many, many people began to come to Christ, and they had a flourishing ministry. What did they do? By faith, they prepared. It's by faith that we put our trust in a God that we cannot see and that we put our trust in His Son, Jesus Christ, Who died and rose again for us. Put your trust in Him today.

Well, friend, I hope that you got something from that. I'm going to continue along this same line, so you're not going to want to miss upcoming messages. I just want to tell you, I know there are some people in their personal world, who never hear these words, but I want to tell you from the

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bottom of my heart, you are loved. God loves you. He sees you. He's not mad at you, and He wants to help you. Yield your heart to Him. If you haven't talked to Him in a while, get on your knees, talk to Him, and be honest with Him. He sees, and He knows everything about you. So, there's no point in putting on a mask when you talk to God and pretending something that you're not sensing. Now, just be honest with God and do your best to live by the truth of His Word. Make His Word the final authority in your life, and you will have a blessed life. My friend, until next time, God bless you richly.

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