

Aiming to Please God (Part 2)

by Bayless Conley

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Hello, my friend. Thank you for joining me. We're talking about something that has a great impact upon our lives but actually does something for God as well. I'll explain that in a minute. Jesus made a statement in John 8:29. He said, "I always do those things that please Him." In other words, the things that please the Father. Jesus always did the things that pleased the Father. Wouldn't you love to be able to say that? I would. After Jesus was baptized, He came up out of the Jordan River, and a voice from heaven said, "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased." I want the Father to be well pleased in me with my thoughts, with my inward meditations, with the words of my mouth, and with my actions. I want all of those things to be well pleasing to God. My inward motives, I want them to be pleasing to God because He can see what no one else can see. Both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, written to believers, there's a lot about walking in such a way so as to bring pleasure to God. You can be His child and be on your way to heaven, but not live a life that's pleasing to God. It takes an act of your will to live in such a way so as to be pleasing to God. I want to read to you from 2 Corinthians 5:9. The Scriptures say something pretty interesting here. Second Corinthians 5:9 NKJV says,

⁹ Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, (in other words, alive here or in heaven with the Lord, we make it our aim) to be well pleasing to Him.

We talked a lot about the previous verses in our last message, but we want to center in on this. We make it our aim, whether present or absent, whether alive in this world or with the Lord in heaven, we make it our aim to be well pleasing to Him. Other translations say, "We labor to be well pleasing to Him. We make it our goal to be well pleasing to Him." Pleasing God needs to be our ambition, our goal. We need to aim for it. But the truth is you can't aim for a target when you don't know what the target is. I mean, let's say there are five dozen things out on the horizon. You say, "Okay, hit the target." Well, which one is the target? Which one am I supposed to be aiming for? So, you need to know what pleases God in order to aim at it. There's certainly benefit for us. The very next thing the Apostle Paul said is we make it our aim to be well-pleasing to God because we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. We will be rewarded for the things done in the body, whether good or bad.

Now, my salvation is secure because of my faith in Christ. But, friend, everything after that will be rewarded based on my obedience to God, based on my inward motivations, and based on if I walked a walk that was pleasing to Him. So, it's certainly to our benefit to learn about what's pleasing to God. But I think much higher than that, and more important than that is I can actually do things and live in such a way that I bring a smile to my Heavenly Father's face. That I actually can bring pleasure to my Creator. Friend, that is a very lofty goal. If I can bring pleasure to the heart of God, I want to do that. The question is: what is it that brings pleasure to Him? Well, first and foremost, and we were talking about this last time, and I'm going to kind of hook the cars up and continue to go on down the same track, is faith. Faith pleases God. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith, it is impossible to please God." Not difficult, not hard, it is impossible to please God without faith. 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.”

It's what God says. So, we're to live by faith. It's a lifestyle. Faith is not some magic wand that we wave. It's not some trick we pull out of some magic bag. It's a lifestyle. The Bible says this: it defines faith. Hebrews 11:1 NKJV says,

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

That's what faith deals with, unseen realities. The NIV 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.” So, faith deals with the unseen. It doesn't deal with the seen and with the tangible. It deals with the things that are not tangible. As this 11th chapter of Hebrews progresses, it gives us example after example after example of people who walked by faith, did exploits by faith, and made certain choices by faith. It literally gives us practical ways that we can express our faith and should express our faith. We talked last time right off the bat about Cain and his brother Abel. It says in Hebrews 11:4 that Abel gave a more excellent sacrifice to God than his brother Cain. He did it by faith. We found out that more excellent just means better quality. Abel gave God his first and his best. Cain just sort of gave God something that didn't cost him. Proverbs 3:9–10 says, “Honor the Lord with everything you have. Give Him your first and your best.”

The promise is that He would cause your vats to overflow with new wine and your barns to be filled with plenty. That was written to people in an agrarian society. But God basically promises, “If you will honor Me with your first and best, if you do it by faith, I will bless you.” So, we found last time, and I'm going to leave that one there. Faith is giving God your first, and it's giving God your very best, not your leftovers. Then, in verse 7, it says, “Noah, by faith, prepared. He was warned about things not yet seen, and so he prepared an ark for the saving of himself and his household.” We know the story. The flood came, but did you know that Noah worked on that ark for a hundred years? Faith is preparing because God says something. I mean, if the Lord says, “Look, I'm going to take you fishing. You're going to let down your nets for a catch.” Well, if you have a bunch of holes in the nets, faith says, “Okay, you better prepare and sew up all the holes in that net before you go out.” Because you're expecting to catch a boatload of fish, even if you haven't caught anything in the last two weeks, faith prepares.

I remember when we started Cottonwood Church. I think our first Sunday, we had 63 people, the first official Sunday, and then went down to like 45 the next Sunday. We slowly, slowly outgrew the little storefront we were in, and then we moved to another place. We rented out a little commercial office building, and I worked out how many chairs could fit in there. I just knew that God had put something in my heart by His Holy Spirit. I knew that growth was coming. I just knew that God was interested in the people of our community. Not that numbers are that big a deal. If you're a preacher, listen to me. God is very interested in the one-on-one and the individual cases. That is big stuff with God. Most of the Gospels are filled with individual stories of Jesus dealing with individuals. So, don't count those as something small. And don't make the mistake of measuring yourself by someone who maybe has more numbers in their church. You be faithful to those who God brings your way. You be faithful to reach out to others. Because when you're out and about in your daily business, my brother, you have a gift inside of you that somebody at the market needs, that somebody at the gasoline station needs, and that somebody at the soccer field needs. Be faithful in little things. God will make you ruler over more, over much, and over greater things, the Scripture says. But anyway, I just had an inward sense. I knew God was speaking to me. So, I went, and we didn't have much money in the

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church, but I went and bought 160 chairs. I set them up in our little auditorium. And I tell you, there was hardly any room for me to stand and preach.

When I stood and preached, I was so close to the people on the front row. If I got to really preaching, sometimes, I kind of gave people a bath in the front row if I got to spitting when I was shouting and preaching, but it was fun. We filled all of those 160 seats. Then, we filled them again. We had another service. Then, we added more services after that. I remember some of the faithful church members came to me later on and said, "Pastor Bayless, we thought you were crazy buying 160 chairs. We just thought you'd absolutely lost your mind. We have 55 people coming to the church, 60 people come to the church. And here you go, buy an extra 100 chairs, and you put them everywhere. We just shook our heads and thought, 'Pastor has lost his mind.'" They said, "But Pastor, you were right." Well, I was just trusting God. Faith prepares. Faith does things ahead of time based on what God has promised. Whether that's a promise that He's made to you by His Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "When the Holy Spirit comes, He will speak to you. He will show you things to come. He will take the things of the Father and the things that belong to Me, and He will reveal them to you." So, we believe very much in the Holy Spirit's active day ministry today in the lives and hearts of believers. But also, when God makes promises, we need to provide for them. Whether it's a promise of healing or whatever it might be.

In fact, I still remember, oh, many, many, many years ago, a minister friend of mine had an old black and white sort of a grainy video. It was from a tent revival during the healing revival that swept the United States here, especially in the late 1950s, and went into the early 60s as well. They brought in an invalid, and he hadn't walked. He had been bedridden for the longest time. His mother brought him in. His mother was quite old. I noticed on the video that the mother brought in a brand-new pair of shoes with her son when they carried him in on the stretcher. He was prayed for, and right in front of the camera, it was an amazing thing to see. He got up and began to walk. He began to leap. It was like a healing from the book of Acts, when Peter said, "Silver and gold, I have none but such as I have, I give to you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Rise and walk." The man jumped up. He was walking, leaping, and praising God. Well, it was very much like that. I mean, he's walking. He's jumping around in his stocking feet, but I just, I was struck. I don't know how many other people noticed, but Mama had brought a pair of shoes. She was believing the promises of God from Scripture. She just believed he was going to be healed in that healing crusade. And so what'd she do? She made preparations. Faith prepares. Now, you need to seek God. As you spend time stewing on His Word and thinking about it and meditating and rolling it over and over, it becomes alive to you. I think God will show you what your act of preparation needs to be for that promise that is to come. We come to something else there. It's in Hebrews 11:8. It says this in Hebrews 11:8 NKJV,

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

All right, that tells us another way that faith can be expressed. Again, without faith, it's impossible to please God. So, we're aiming at God's pleasure. And if I'm aiming at God's pleasure, I need to find out everything I can about faith. I need to find out how it comes. I need to find out how it goes. I need to find out how it's expressed. How it's expressed vocally and how it's expressed through actions. How it's expressed in the secret place where no one else sees you or knows what you're doing. What does faith look like? We do know this. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.", says Romans 10:17. So if I'm going to be pleasing to God, I need to have a love affair with God's Book because faith comes by me hearing the Word of God. I'm going to say this: it goes by not hearing the Word. The Scripture is faith food. If you

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think about it, I don't know what you had for dinner last night. I can tell you what I had for dinner. I do most of the cooking in my house. It's one of my happy places. My wife is happy for me to cook. So, I love to be in the kitchen. And a friend of mine rang me up and said, "Bayless," a buddy of mine just got off the boat. He caught a bunch of big bluefin tuna. "Do you want some?" I said, "I'm on my way." So, I drive over to his place, and he's in the backyard cutting up these beautiful bluefin tuna. I take a big slab of bluefin home. So, last night we have a young man staying with us right now. It was him, my wife and I. I got these big, beautiful, pristine chunks of bluefin tuna. I put some olive oil, salt, and pepper on it and then coated it with black and white sesame seeds. Then, I just seared it in some olive oil. I made this little dipping sauce that had some ponzu sauce and some coconut aminos. It had some soy sauce in it. It had green onions in it. I ground up a whole bunch of fresh ginger, and I made that. We made some potatoes, and I made a beautiful salad. We sat down, and we had that seared ahi with the sauce on it. Oh, it was amazing. I wish you could have been there. I can tell you about every bite that I took. I remember it.

And you know what? Right now, I'm operating on the strength that last night's meal gave me. But if it's two weeks from now, I could still tell you blow by blow how I cooked the food and what it tasted like. I can talk to you about the texture, but I'm not going to derive any strength from a meal that I ate two weeks ago. No, I have to eat again to get new strength. The same thing is true with God's Word. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. I need to continually feed upon God's Word. The Bible says to desire the pure milk of God's Word so that we can grow thereby. It is spiritual food. I'm not going to derive faith from Scriptures that I meditated on weeks ago or months ago and haven't paid any attention to. No, it's like the manna. They had to go out and collect the manna every day. God said, "Hey, you can't save it up. If you save it up, it'll spoil." Some of them didn't listen to God. They said, "Well, we're going to collect more, and we're going to get it." It bred worms. No, they had to go collect the manna every day. God's Word says, "Man doesn't live by bread alone, but by every word proceeding, literally present tense, proceeding out of the mouth of God." That's what Jesus said.

So, just like they collected the manna every day, I need to feed upon God's Word every day to keep my faith strong. If I'm going to draw the nutrients from God's Word, if my faith is going to be expressed in my speech and in my actions, I'm going to have to have a love affair with God's Book. Again, back to the verse we read, "By faith Abraham obeyed." Faith is obeying God. He went out. God called him to go out to a place, and he went out not knowing where he was going. I mean, he could have said, "Well, God, can You give me a map?" God said, "You just go, and I'll guide you. I'll show you, but you need to get going." And so, by faith, Abraham went. He didn't know where he was going to end up. God doesn't always show you. In fact, very rarely. He won't show you what's up the road ahead. He's just going to say, "Go. You need to do this." You need to obey by faith, not knowing what the next step is. If you get in your automobile and it's nighttime. You turn the engine over. The engine is humming. The headlights are on, and you say, "Well, these headlights are only going 35 meters or 50 feet in front of me. I need them to shine all the way home. I'm not going to go if these lights don't shine all the way home." No, no. You drive that 50 feet, and then you get 50 more feet of light. You drive that 50 feet and then get 50 more feet of light.

Some of you already know what God has asked you to do. And you just need to obey. Somebody says, "But I don't know what's going to happen." No, it takes faith. By faith, Abraham obeyed and went out, not knowing where he was going. As he went, God guided him. God brought him to the place that was going to be his inheritance. I have a dear friend. He, actually, was in Bible school with me. He had come from an executive advertising background but got radically saved. He felt like he was supposed to be in Bible school. So, he went, and while he

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was there, God put a call on his heart to go to the Philippines. He actually went not knowing anybody, not having any contacts, not having a missions organization to send him, and not having the necessary finances. He just knew he was supposed to go. He knew one guy's name over there, and that was all. So, he went to the Philippines. And by the grace of God, he has built an amazing ministry. In fact, we just had a team that came back. We've been working together with him for almost 40 years now. We just had a team that came back, and they went out into these little jungle villages to preach Christ. They saw hundreds and hundreds of people give their hearts to Jesus. They prayed for the sick. They saw amazing miracles take place. This guy has just built an amazing ministry. He's got a lovely Filipino wife.

I think there are some 200 churches now that he's over or that relate to him and his organization. He's having a tremendous effect. But he went because God said, "Go." No guarantees in the natural. He didn't know what was going to happen. He didn't have everything all sorted. And if you're the kind of person who says, "Well, I need to know everything ahead of time." You're not going to walk by faith very much because sometimes God says, "Look, you just need to do this and trust Me. Then, I'm going to show you what comes next after that." Next, we come to Abraham's wife, Sarah. We find that in Hebrews 11:11. Let me read it to you. Hebrews 11:11 NKJV, "By faith." Let's hear it for the girls. "By faith, Sarah herself also received strength." By the way, the word strength there is the same Greek word translated miracle throughout the New Testament.

¹¹ By faith Sarah herself also received (a miracle) strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.

By faith, Sarah received. We've looked at Abel, who by faith offered to God his first and his best. By faith, Enoch walked with God. By faith, Noah prepared. By faith, Abraham obeyed. By faith, Sarah received because she judged Him faithful who had promised. In other words, "God, You said it. And if You said it, then it doesn't matter that I've been barren my whole life. It doesn't matter that Abraham and I have tried and tried and tried and tried, and I've never been able to conceive. I'm judging You faithful because You've promised. God, Your Word is good." By faith, she received. So, again, back to the biblical definition of faith. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. By faith, by the evidence of things not seen, Sarah herself received a miracle and was able to conceive. She received it in its unseen form before it ever came to pass in its seen form. Jesus said this in Mark 11. He said, "Have faith in God. Have faith in God, and whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed. Be cast into the sea,' shall not doubt in his heart, but believe that the things he says will come to pass, he'll have whatever he says. And what things, so ever you desire, when you pray, believe you receive them, and you shall have them." Jesus said this is how faith operates. It can operate by speaking. Have faith in God. It's not faith in a principle, but a principle is involved. It's faith in the promiser. It's faith in God.

So, I have faith in God by having faith in what He said. And this is the way He said that faith operates in prayer. Say, "What things, soever you desire, when you pray, believe you receive them, and you shall have them." By faith, Sarah received a miracle. When it was a physical impossibility for her, but she conceived and gave birth to that miracle baby, Isaac. Now, which, by the way, means laughter. She laughed in her old age at the goodness of God. But think about it. "What things, soever you desire." Maybe that's healing. Maybe that's a better job. Whatever it is, things within the scope that God's promises cover. You can't just go with some outlandish thing that the New Testament doesn't promise you. It's got to be covered by a promise of God. But He said, "When you pray, believe that you receive, and you'll have

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it.” When do you believe that you receive it? When you pray. You've got to believe you receive it in its unseen form when you pray, and you will have it. A lot of people want to have it, and then they'll believe they receive it. That's absolutely backward. Somebody says, “Well, I'll believe it when I see it.” That is not faith. “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” So what things, soever you desire, when you pray, when I'm praying, when I ask God, I believe I receive it. In other words, I believe God has granted to me. “But you can't see it.” No, that's right. I can't see it. I have it by faith. “Well, that's stupid.” No, that's faith. Faith deals with unseen realities. I'm not saying I can touch it, taste it, or handle it. I'm not saying it's a physical reality, but I'm saying I have it by faith. I have received it. I have said, “Yes, I believe God's granted it to me.” And then God says, “And you will have it.” Now, my having it is God's part. Me receiving it is my part. But until I receive it, I'm never going to have it. Some people have never understood that simple thing about faith and prayer.

Listen, again, back to our point. We make it our aim to be well pleasing to God. Faith pleases God. Without faith, it's impossible to please Him. By faith, Sarah, herself, received. So, when I pray because God has made a promise to me, I just say, “God, I thank You. I thank You that You've given it to me. I receive it now. By faith, I have it. I thank You that You've dispatched the answer.” I count it as done. Doesn't matter if I feel it, or I can see it, or there's any outward confirmation. God's part is up to Him. The timetable is up to Him. The how it's going to happen, the receiving part. Well, that's my part. That's the faith part, and that pleases God. Well, I have a lot more to share, but I don't have the time to share it in right now. I hope this has helped you. We want to be well pleasing to God. And without faith, it's impossible to please Him. Find out everything you can about faith. Study the men and women of faith in the Scriptures. Spend time in Hebrews 11. Mull over the Scriptures and meditate on them. Feed your faith, and I really believe that as we fill our hearts with the Word of God, faith comes unconsciously. And what we've been looking at are just some of the ways that faith is expressed and God is pleased through it. So, until next time, hey, my friend, God bless you richly.

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