

Aiming to Please God (Part 4)

by Bayless Conley

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Hello, my friend. Thank you for joining me. We are dealing with a subject that is so important. We're talking about aiming at God's pleasure, bringing pleasure to the heart of our Heavenly Father. Jesus made this statement in John's Gospel. He said, "I always do those things that please Him." When Jesus came up from the waters of baptism in the Jordan River, a voice from heaven said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Well, I want God to be well pleased with me. The Scriptures in 2 Corinthians 5, and I'm going to back it all the way up to verses 6–9 NKJV, just so we can kind of get it in context. It says,

⁶ So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. ⁷ For we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. ⁹ Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

So, whether I'm here still in this earthly life or whether I'm in heaven, it should be my aim to be well pleasing to God, just like Jesus. The Father said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased." He says, "We aim to be well pleasing to Him." Well, how can you aim at a target that you don't see? If you don't know what the target is, you can't aim at it. So, if while we're here—when we get up in heaven with Him, it will still be our aim to be well pleasing to Him. I suppose we can discuss that when we get up there. But right now, what's pertinent to us is to know what is well pleasing to God down here, and He gave us a key. We're given a key here in verse 7. It says,

⁷ For we walk by faith, not by sight.

We found out in one of the previous lessons that without faith, it's impossible to please God. And we looked at different people who walked by faith. Their faith was expressed in different ways and their faith pleased God. I mean, Abraham, by faith, went out not knowing where he was going because God had told him to go. If you have to have all the answers and know everything, you're not going to be able to do much for the kingdom of God. If God says, "Go," you just go. You don't necessarily know what's going to be up ahead, but you just go. By faith, Abraham went not knowing where he was going. It kind of works like this. You drive. You get in your car, and it's nighttime. You turn the engine on. You put the headlights on, and the headlights will shine 50 feet, or maybe 20 meters in front of you, 50–60 feet. And you drive that 50–60 feet, you get 50–60 more feet of light. Then, you drive that, and you get 50 or 60 more feet of light. But if you sit in the car and say, "Well, I'm not going to drive anywhere until these lights shine all the way to my destination. I have to see where I'm going to end up." You'll be sitting in that car until you turn into a skeleton. Now, God says, "Just go and walk in the light that I give you. I'll show you what comes next. I want you to walk by faith."

We also looked at Abraham's wife, Sarah. By faith, she received a miracle when she was past childbearing age because she judged Him faithful who promised. Able, by faith, gave to God his first and his best. Listen, it doesn't take faith to give God your leftovers. Anybody can give God their leftovers. But when you don't know, and especially if you're on a tight budget, a fixed

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budget, you don't know what's going to happen before the month is finished. And up front, you give God your first and your best, trusting Him to take care of you and honoring Him because He's first and most important in your life, that becomes a demonstration of faith. We looked at Noah. By faith, he prepared. Being warned by God about things not yet seen. He prepared an ark to save his life and the life of his household. Faith makes preparations based on the promises and the declarations of God. By faith, Enoch walked with God. And God took him, for he was not. Well, by faith, we found out from Hebrews 11:1 NKJV,

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

So, Enoch didn't see God any more than you do. Enoch didn't feel God any more than I do or you do. Faith deals with unseen realities. He walked with God by faith. He believed that the eye of the invisible God was upon him. He believed that there was going to be a reward. So, he made the decisions and choices of his life based on that. We also looked at Moses. By faith, he forsook Egypt, and he chose the oppression of the people with God to identify with them rather than experiencing the treasures in Egypt for he looked for the reward. Faith is going to cause you to refuse some things, to choose some things, and to esteem some things as precious that the world thinks are ridiculous. We do that because there is a coming reward. We do that because this life is a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. You can spend your whole life accumulating stuff, but you take none of it with you. All you take with you is who you are. That's it.

I read some time ago about a billionaire who passed away. Do you know how much he left behind? Everything. So, if your life is just about getting stuff, upgrading your lifestyle, and upgrading and upgrading and upgrading, you need to think about kingdom things. So, we found out that faith pleases God. We looked at some of the different ways it's expressed. We also found out from Psalm 35 that the Lord takes pleasure in the prosperity of His servant. And we talked about how God is pleased when you're blessed. God's not against your prosperity. God is for your prosperity, but it can't be divorced from this particular attitude. Believers get into trouble when they divorce prosperity and blessing from this attitude. When God appeared to Solomon and said, "Ask whatever you want, and I'll give it to you." Solomon said, "Well, I'm just a child. I don't know how to go out and come in. How can I rule this great people of Yours? Give me wisdom. Give me an understanding heart, so that I can rule this people justly."

The Bible says the Lord was pleased with this speech. He was pleased with what Solomon asked for. And He said, "Because you asked for that and didn't ask for a long life for yourself, didn't ask for wealth for yourself, and didn't ask for the life of your enemies," He said, "I'm going to give you a wise and understanding heart, like no one that was ever before you. I'm going to give you all the stuff you didn't ask for. I'm going to give you wealth. I'm going to do this and that for you." The idea is that God wants to bless us, but He wants our attitude to be that of others first. It's been said that this is how you spell joy. Do you want joy in your life? J-O-Y is Jesus, others, and then you. God is blessed and pleased when we prosper. But when we prosper with a right attitude, when we're seeking the kingdom first, He sees that all those other things are added on to us. We actually talked about those things in detail in our last lesson, if you happen to have been there. I want to move on right now to something else that we find that brings pleasure to God. Something else that we can aim at if we want to bring pleasure to the heart of our heavenly Father. It's found in 1 Thessalonians 2, and I want to read to you beginning verses 4–6 NKJV. It says,

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⁴ But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

So, Paul says, “Look, we've been entrusted with the preaching of the gospel, and so we speak not pleasing men, but as pleasing God. We didn't use flattering words. We didn't use it as a cloak for covetousness. Our aim in preaching the gospel wasn't to get an offering from anybody, but we did it knowing that God was testing our hearts. Not about just the rightness of the doctrine we preach, but about the rightness of our motives in preaching it. We didn't do it to be celebrated by people and for people to go, ‘Oh, wow he's so anointed. She's so special. What a man of God. Oh, my goodness.’ No, we didn't do it for those reasons. We didn't do it for financial gain, but we did it knowing that God has one eye on us and that there's a lost and dying world that needs to hear about a living Jesus. So, we spoke not as pleasing men, but as pleasing God.”

Now, I just want to draw your attention. He said, “God's entrusted us with the gospel.” Obviously, Paul and those that he was speaking about were preachers of the gospel. So, here's the point. Whatever you have been entrusted with by God, whether it's great wealth that God has entrusted you with, whether it's a beautiful singing voice He's trusted you with, physical entrusted you with, whether it's physical ability that He's entrusted you with, a learning ability, a teaching ability, whatever it is that God has entrusted to you, as you use what you've been entrusted with, you will be faced at times with a choice of either pleasing God or men. I want you to consider that. You may be watching me right now, and you're a professional athlete. God has given you an amazing ability, especially in the sport that you're engaged in, and it maybe multi-sports for you. I don't know, but you've just got a knack, and it's intuitive with you. Or it maybe you have this amazing voice, and you just know how to take it up another octave. You know how to make a run in a song that makes the hair on people's necks stand up. And you say, “Well, how did you learn that?” Well, maybe you were instructed, or maybe you had a voice coach, but there's this intuitive thing that God has given you. Again, it could be the ability to instruct or teach, or just this ability to learn; you just grasp things, you hear it one time, and you have it, whatever it is, whatever God has entrusted you with. Again, listen to this. You will be faced at times with a choice of either pleasing God or pleasing men. Galatians 1:10 from the NIV version, the Apostle Paul said this.

¹⁰ Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Now, Paul had, as we read, been entrusted with the preaching of the gospel. He said, “We speak as not as pleasing men, but God.” God is pleased when it's preached straight. Without flattery, without the motive of personal gain, or to be patted on the back or fussed over, God just wants it preached straight. An acquaintance of mine— who's actually been in heaven for many years now. He pastored, I think, what might have been, the largest church in his denomination. It was in a major city in the South, and it was probably one of the wealthiest congregations, at least in his particular state. Some of the wealthiest, most well-known, prestigious people came. Government officials came to his church. Famous people came to his church. Everybody who was anybody came to his church. One Sunday morning, while he was at the door greeting people, they were shaking his hand, and they're patting him on the back after he preached another one of his saccharine, sweet sermons, he heard a voice. It's amazing when he tells this story. He says, “I heard a voice, and the voice said, as clear as anything, ‘Even the devil

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likes your preaching.” He turned around to see who said it, and there was no one standing there. “Even the devil likes your preaching.”

You see, he would preach his little sort of sermonettes, and he was always careful not to offend any of his parishioners. He was always careful not to go too long because he didn't want to bring offense and didn't want to lose any of the wealthy people in his church. He just didn't want anyone to be upset by what he said. Well, when he heard that voice say, “Even the devil likes your preaching.” He turned around, and there was no one there. He suddenly realized the Lord had spoken to him. He spent the rest of that day down in the church basement on his knees, crying his eyes out, and repenting, saying, “Oh God, what has happened to me? I used to be a preacher of righteousness. I used to be a preacher of the gospel. I used to preach without apology. I used to preach it straight. My God, what has happened to me? I've become a man-pleaser. God, I'm not pleasing you.” And he poured his heart out before God, and he repented. He said, “God, never again. I'm going to give it to them straight.” The next morning, oh yeah, he warned everybody before he started. He says, “I know some of you are planning to slip out early and go down to the lake with your boat.” He said, “You better not go until I'm done.” He says, “I have something to say to you today.” And he just preached like the house was on fire. He preached it straight. He preached it without compromise. And yeah, some of the wealthy people got offended and left the church. And not everybody came up, patted him on the back, and said, “That was wonderful, pastor.”

But you know what? The church went through a transformation that day. They lost people, but a revival began to happen among God's people. The church began to grow and grow. People began to get saved by the truckloads in that church. I'm thinking about one individual who got saved in that revival who we had come to speak at our church on several occasions. He went on to be used by God to really bring an impact across our own country. He was saved in the revival that happened in that church. But the revival started when that own pastor's heart was revived. He decided that he was no longer going to preach to please men and no longer use what he'd been entrusted with by God to please people. Friend, all of us will come to that crossroad at one time or another if we truly are servants of Christ. All right, let me move on. First Corinthians 1:21 says, “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them who believe.” All right, just connect it with what we're talking about. “It pleased God.” We're talking about aiming at God's pleasure. All right, “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them who believe.”

Now, if I was God, I think I would have done things differently. I think I would have gone to each and every individual; I would have come in a cloud of glory with lightning bolts and an army of angels around me. I would have revealed myself as God almighty to each person, and I would have taken each of them up to heaven for an hour and let them see the glories of heaven. Then, I would have taken them down to hell for an hour and let them see the tragedy, the emptiness, the darkness, and the woe of hell for an hour. Then, I would have just said, “Okay, choose. Do you want heaven, or do you want hell?” But God didn't do that. God didn't do anything like that. God has chosen to do it through the foolishness of preaching the gospel. You think about that.

The truth dawns on someone's heart when the unvarnished gospel is preached to them. When it's preached without apology, when it's preached straight, yes, in a spirit of love, but when it's just shared directly, the truth dawns on someone's heart. Their conscience is affected as they listen. They take a step of faith, putting their trust in a God that they can't see, but that is communicating with their heart all the while, and they're saved through the foolishness of preaching. Listen to me. Right now, just take a moment. You may be watching me right now, and you've been sort of just weighing things in the balance over a period of time. Maybe even

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before this point in your life, you thought Christianity was just a crutch for people who need help. Well, listen, it's not just a crutch. It's a whole hospital, and we're sick, man. We need a Savior. We need a healer, and His name is Jesus. But maybe at a not too distant time in your life, you thought, "Oh, it's just Christianity. Christians, nah." You're maybe into something else. You're into crystals. You're into chanting. You're into metaphysics. You're into Eastern religion. You're into self-improvement, whatever it is. And you kind of determined you're going to be your own Savior, or maybe you're into reincarnation. You're going to do your best, and then you think you're going to get another shot the next time around. Well, I have news for you. The Bible says it's appointed for men one time to die after this, the judgment. There's no reincarnation, my friend. You don't get a second shot. This is it. But you're watching me. It's not a coincidence. Listen, it's not a coincidence. God sees you. He sees your hungering heart. He sees that deep down, you've been genuinely looking for answers. And here's how it comes to the foolishness of preaching.

Now, here's the story. Man sinned and became separated from God because of his sin. Our forefather, Adam, was the fountainhead, the beginning, the source through which the human race came. Adam willfully rebelled against God and sinned. God told Adam. He said, "Look, everything you want, the whole garden, is yours. There is just one thing, Adam, that I claim exclusive right to. It's the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Now, whether that was a metaphor or an actual tree, I guess we can ask God when we get to heaven. Basically, God was saying, "Look, I alone decide what's right and wrong. What's sin and what is not. There are boundaries. There are guardrails, and I set them. You can't decide that for yourself." God said, "If you ever violate that, the day you do it, you'll die." And you read the story in the book of Genesis. Adam and Eve decided, well, that they wanted to be like God, deciding for themselves what was right and wrong. In other words, "Well, who says God has to be the final authority? Maybe what's wrong for someone else isn't wrong for me. I can decide for myself. I have my own truth." So, Adam partook of that fruit and decided that he was going to be his own God. "I'm going to be like God myself. I'm not going to live within the boundaries you set God." God said, "The day you do that, you'll die."

Yet, you read Adam lived for many, many years after that. So, did God get it wrong? No, in the Hebrew language, the word die is there twice. God literally said to Adam, "The day you do that, you'll die, die. Or in dying, you shall die." Adam did die the day that he rebelled against God. He died spiritually. That doesn't mean to cease to exist. It means to be cut off from a relationship with God. Severed from the life of God. So, he died spiritually. He was cut off from a relationship with God. As a result, many, many years later, he died physically. But the Bible says this in Romans 5, "That through Adam's transgression, sin entered into the world and death through sin." Because of what he did, spiritual death entered the world and sin entered the world. We followed him in our own sin and experienced that separation from God as well. Every person intuitively senses that inside. Something is missing. There's this crazy missing piece to the puzzle we can't find. So, we try and fill it with drugs and alcohol. We try and fill it with sex and relationships. You run from man to man, from woman to woman. You divorce your wife. You get a new one, and you divorce that wife. You get a new one. You divorce your husband, and you get a new one thinking, maybe it's going to be better. Maybe it's going to be better, but it never fills that empty place. Money and things cannot fill the empty place. Extreme sports cannot fill the empty place. Religious ritual and ceremony cannot fill the empty place. Even doing good deeds as noble as they might be. Whether it's caring for the sick or feeding the poor, and those are noble and good things. But they'll not fill the empty place inside.

It's a God-shaped hole. We're meant to walk and talk with our creator. The only way that comes is through His Son, Jesus Christ. See, when we couldn't reach up to God, He reached down to

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us. He sent His own Son, born of a virgin. He lived a sinless life. He worked miracles. He raised the dead. He cleansed the lepers. He healed the sick. He showed us what God was really like, that He wasn't aloof, unconcerned, and uncaring. That He didn't just sort of set the world spinning and walk off. He was a loving heavenly Father who was concerned, who was very present, and wanted to help us with our troubles. Crowds followed Him, and they hung on every word. But some of the religious leaders of the time became insanely jealous. They had Jesus arrested and put through a mock trial. He was turned over to the Romans. He was beaten without mercy, and He was crucified. And there hanging upon the cross, the innocent Son of God, the just, perfect Son of God took our place. The Bible says, "He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us, that we might be made right with God." Jesus died on the cross as our representative and as our substitute. As He hung there on that cross, God, the Father, laid the penalty for all of our sins on Jesus. For everything you've thought wrong, everything you've done wrong, the penalty and the weight of that came on Jesus, and He willingly took it. When it came upon Him, He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" For at that moment, the Father turned His back, and heaven became silent.

The blissful relationship that Jesus had enjoyed with the Father throughout eternity past was suddenly severed when He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us. Yes, He took your place. He took my place. After three days and three nights, the claims of God's eternal justice was satisfied. The Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead. The Bible says this: "If you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, and confess Him with your mouth as Lord, you'll be saved." And that word saved, listen, it just means "you come back into a relationship with God." That which has been severed, that relationship is now reconnected. Adam stepped out from under the authority of God. He said, "God, I'm going to decipher for myself what's right and wrong. I'm not following Your rules. You can't tell me." He was separated from God. Jesus died for our sins because there's no way a holy God and a sinful man can come together unless somehow, that sin is judged because God is not just love. He is also a just and holy God. So, the sin problem was taken care of through the death of Jesus Christ. Jesus is raised from the dead. And when I confess Him as Lord, Lord means boss. It means master. It means literally, "God, I'm stepping back under Your authority." Just like Adam stepped out from under God's authority, we can step back under that authority.

We can be reunited with God and say, "God, yes, there are absolutes. There are guard rails. I put my trust in Your Son, Jesus, and in His precious blood alone to cleanse me. I submit my life fully to You." When you do that, when you confess Him as Lord and believe in your heart, the Holy Spirit comes and makes you a child of God. I'm telling you the work has been done. It's not a coincidence you're listening to me. And through the foolishness of this message, I'm sharing with you right now how God brings salvation. And if you will call on the name of Jesus now, the Holy Spirit will come to you. There in your bedroom. There in your flat. There in your apartment. Wherever you might be, the Holy Spirit of God will come to you, and He will change you. He will wash you clean, and He will give you a new life, my friend. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will not be ashamed. He loves you, my friend. Call on the name of Jesus Christ today and know His salvation. We will see you again. God bless you.

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