

# *His Pleasure Supreme*

There's something that has been brewing in my heart for months now...

**He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."** (Luke 22:41-42)

The Christian knows a joy that no one else in the world does: the joy of living and walking in the loving arms of Jesus Christ, the Son of Almighty God who is nearer to us than our best friends. John Piper says that when a person is born-again, a brand-new appetite is born in him for spiritual things; we Christians are hungry for and satisfied in the Lord as much as we hunger for and enjoy food. I have been living this Christian life for over eight years now, and I can tell you that the sweetest, most wonderful moments I have ever experienced have been in worship or service to Christ. The Lord has revealed the abundant life He planned for me (see John 10:10) over and over again! Like so many of you reading this, and all who have been saved by the grace of God, I have tasted and seen that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8.)

## *The Danger with Enjoying the Christian Life*

In recent months, I have found a danger in discovering how satisfying the Lord is. The danger, I believe, is that when we see how wonderful and satisfying our journey with Christ can be, we may fall prey to the notion that the goal of our lives is our own satisfaction. At times, our heads will be filled with the wisdom of the Word, and we'll know that following Christ – mortifying sin and doing whatever task He has placed before us – is the most satisfying thing we could do. But at other times, we will forget for a moment the joys we have known following Christ, and temptation will be right there waiting for us. We may be tired, stressed out, lonely, bored, or some dangerous combination of these. **At that moment, if our own satisfaction has become our goal, temptation will seem much more satisfying than righteousness.**

This all hit me late one night when I was tempted to lust. I had been going on auto-pilot in my Christian life for a while, not desperate in my need or determined in my resolve, but just coasting on yesterday's graces. Even though I wasn't desperate or determined, my walk had been going rather well because, as I said, most of the time it's easy to see that what God calls good is good indeed. But on this night, I was feeling bored, lonely, and discouraged, and suddenly I remembered the cheap thrill of lust. It was a dull night and I was alone, and sneaking a look at some tantalizing images seemed more fulfilling than just doing my work and going to bed.

That's when I got it (and praise the Lord, it was before I chose to foolishly indulge my sinful desire)—I was missing the point! The goal of that evening was not for me to be content, entertained, and fulfilled when I turned in for the night. No, the goal should have been, and quickly became, to honor and obey the Lord. **I'm called to love the Lord on His terms, and He tells us that His love language is obedience** (John 14:15: "If you love me, you will obey what I command.")

## *Escape from the Suffocating Christian Life*

Please understand: obeying the Lord and living the Christian life is not supposed to be painful all the time or boring. A lot of people think that it is, and they never enjoy any of the

wonders that God allows us on earth because they think misery equates to righteousness. They're wrong: that's not what the God of Israel and the God of the Church teaches us at all. The Christian life is the most exciting and joyful adventure you could ever hope to embark on (John 4:13-15.) There are tremendous blessings for us to enjoy while we make our pilgrimage on earth, and there are countless untold joys waiting for us in Heaven. And the rewards we will receive for the righteous life we live for Christ is a huge motivator for us Christians. Not only is it OK to be thus motivated, but we are encouraged repeatedly in the Bible to be so motivated. (1 Peter 5:4. 2 Tim 4:7-8, Philippians 3:14, and Ephesians 3:6 are just a few examples.)

**Few things are more suffocating in the Christian life than the notion we cannot enjoy affirmation for righteous living.** If a Christian is exhausted and miserable, this may be why: They see God as someone always angry and disappointed when He looks down on us—furious and disgusted when we do wrong, yet still irritated and displeased when we do right because it's still not good enough. This is not the God who made us or the Lord who saved us. For those who walk with Him, our God is a proud Father who wears a big smile on His face when He looks down on His children.

It's true that we cannot fully achieve the standard that God set out for us, for Matthew 5:48 says, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Many people see this as an unbreakable chain of guilt over our heads, but I see it as a blessing. We are new creatures and we can continue to grow; this is clear (Philippians 1:6.) But the pride that comes with victory can be even more destructive than the sinful thing we overcame in the first place, and God *guards our hearts* from this pride with a standard we will never quite achieve (Romans 3:23.)

At the same time, somehow it's also true than many people are honored by God and found pleasing to Him. Just look at the men and women commended for their faith in Hebrews 11 and 2 Timothy 1:5, at David whom God called "a man after my own heart" in Acts 13:22, and at all the promised rewards in Matthew 5:2-12. The epistle of 1 John is full of instructions on how the Lord can be pleased or displeased. We must not forget that our God can be pleased! What a wonderful thing to know that if we're faithful, any one of us at the end of his life can say with Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. **Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing**" (2 Timothy 4:7-8.)

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But here's the tricky part: as good as it is to be motivated by the rewards we will receive for holy living, those rewards are not the most important motivator. There is something that comes first and ought to be foremost for us: THE GLORY OF GOD. The reason for the universe, and the reason for our own salvation, is God's glory. The reason we get so much out of it is that God is so good and wonderful. But we're not getting those crowns and mansions in Heaven so we can praise each other; it is all to the praise and glory of God. When the Lord comes riding on the clouds, all eyes are on Him, not us.

It is wonderful to know that we can please our God, but we ought to pause to realize we can displease our God as well. The pleasure and rewards we enjoy from following the Lord are wonderful, but they serve as an insufficient guide in life. Our pleasure is too unreliable—what we desire may change from hour to hour. But the things that please the Lord stay the same—if I ask what the Lord would have me to do in a moral situation, I'll get the same answer every time. Alistair Begg said that in every situation the first question we must ask ourselves is, "What is the right thing to do?" For these reasons, and all the reasons above, **the Lord's pleasure must be our highest value and our chief pursuit.**

If we desire to please God more than ourselves, we must truly believe that there is a God to please. It doesn't take much faith to adopt bits and pieces of Christianity to our lives that might help things to go well for us, for we are still served if it was all for naught. But if we

forsake our own pleasure for the pleasure of a God who turns out to be false, we are fools and we might well have wasted our lives. Some people talk about sort of a win-win situation with faith in God, where we are served whether He is real or not. But that sort of fence-riding faith never motivated anyone to do anything of eternal significance for God's Kingdom. It's good to think through this now, because it is one of the arguments the Tempter will bring up with us after we decide to live for His pleasure.

### ***An Unconditional Commitment to Christ***

So how does all of this play out practically in our lives? I find motivation and balance in the Christian life by living in tension between several important truths; God can be pleased or displeased, each battle can be won or it can be lost, and the love and the fear of God are the two most motivating truths in life. The Christian life is the most exciting thing any of us could hope to experience on earth, and we should be very motivated by the delight and blessing we enjoy right now when we walk with Jesus, and even more motivated at the rewards waiting in Heaven for a life lived by faith. But we cannot rely on even these good pleasures alone to guide our decisions. Whether we're aware of the rewards or not, we should decide to please the Lord. If our plate is full of blessings, we must choose to please the Lord. If our plate is empty and we find the Christian life a bore and a burden, we should ask the Lord to revive our hearts, but whatever happens we must choose to please the Lord.

Lately, I have felt challenged to make my faith and commitment to the Lord fully unconditional. The Lord does not have to grant my requests for me to obey Him. **He saved me unconditionally, and I ought to follow Him unconditionally.**

This attitude was demonstrated brilliantly in Daniel's day by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they faced the threat of death in a fiery furnace. They replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. **If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up**" (Daniel 3:16b-18.) We must have the resolve that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had: that even if the Lord does not rescue us on earth or grant our requests, we will not bow down to idols; we will follow the Lord. Bethany Dillon sings a song that captures the power and faith of this attitude: "Hallelujah, Hallelujah, what's ever's in front of me help me to sing Hallelujah. Hallelujah, Hallelujah, what ever's in front of me *I choose to sing* Hallelujah." It may be wonderful and it may be painful, but we must follow Him. His pleasure must be supreme.

- Joseph Knable

### **Share Your Story!**

This is what I have been learning this month. What about you? What's your story regarding sexual purity or the abundant life? If you have a story to share or feedback from reading the book or this article, please go to [www.josephknable.com](http://www.josephknable.com) and click on "Contact" and then "Share Your Story." I hope to hear from you!

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