

# Pleasing God

Discovering the Blessing of God's Favor

by

Perry C. Brown



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*With You:*  
*The Promise of God's Presence through the Ages*  
*another book by Perry G. Brown*

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“We often hear sermons about God’s omniscience or His omnipotence. We rarely hear about his omnipresence and immanence. Perry Brown explains what ‘God is with us’ means to you. He teaches various aspects of God’s character and then applies those to both the Old Testament and the New Testament. This unique book will provide both instruction and encouragement to you in your Christian life.”

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Timothy S. Warren, ThM, PhD  
Senior Professor of Pastoral Ministries, Dallas Theological Seminary  
Guide, [PreachingCamp.com](http://PreachingCamp.com)

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If we displease God,  
does it matter whom we please?  
If we please Him,  
does it matter whom we displease?  
*Leonard Ravenhill*





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## *Foreword*

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The Lord takes pleasure in his people.

### *Psalm 149:4a*

**I** have been a Christian for over 50 years, but I have rarely thought about the idea that God might truly be pleased with me. I know that He loves me. I know that He forgives me. But I do not often consider that I might please Him. Among the thousands of sermons I have heard in my lifetime, I do not remember ever hearing one on the subject of “pleasing God.” Most of my attention as a Christian has to do with obeying God or serving God or trusting God, not pleasing God or knowing His pleasure. After researching and writing this book, I still wonder why I have been deficient in this, but I am so grateful that I have discovered it for myself.

Let me assure you that the Christian life is much more enjoyable when we are daily motivated to please our heavenly Father. Every step of trust in Him and every act of obedience to Him is a gift of love for Him if there is the understanding and assurance that He will be pleased with our sacrifices and offerings. Someone might say, “Do we not *owe* our trust and obedience to One who has sacrificed so much for us?” Certainly, but does that mean we cannot also

know He is pleased with our efforts? Or, since we have indeed been “bought with a price” so that we are called to “glorify God in our bodies” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), the New Testament writers make it clear that such is our *duty* to the Lord out of gratefulness for what He has done. But if also He graciously wants us to know that He is pleased with us, that His favor rests on us, wouldn’t we be callous fools to ignore that favor, or worse, to even deny it?

Some may not agree that the Christian life can be or should be enjoyed in this way. “The Christian life is spiritual warfare! We are in a cosmic battle between good and evil!” I agree. “The Christian life is a struggle against our lingering sin nature that seeks to upset us at every turn. Beware the world, the flesh, and the devil!” I cannot disagree with that either. But then I encounter statements like this from the Bible, this one from the Apostle Paul:

Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and *try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord*. (Ephesians 5:8b-10)

How can we discern what pleases Him if we do not know – or do not care to know – when He is pleased? Just as I should be acutely aware when I have failed and disappointed and even grieved Him (Ephesians 4:30), should I not also rejoice and be encouraged when I know have pleased Him? I wonder if constantly dwelling solely on one’s failures – however legitimate they might be – will not result in spiritual stagnation, and even worse, spiritual indifference. The opportunity to please the Lord who died for me buoys me up and propels me forward to greater trust and greater service and, ultimately, greater love.

When I drive a car that is perilously close to running out of gas, I call that “driving on fumes.” Not much real fuel left,

just the lingering vapors of what used to be a full tank of gas. I have felt like that in a spiritual sense – my spiritual fuel gauge dropping rapidly and wondering how much further I can go on the fumes. I look across a sea of people at church and wonder how many others have experienced the same sense of shrinking spiritual sustenance. Knowing God’s smile on my life – His pleasure in my pursuits and efforts for Him – fills my tank again:

In the light of a king's face there is life, and his favor is like the clouds that bring the spring rain.

(Proverbs 16:15)

I dearly hope that you find the words herein encouraging and, even more, motivating. The topics discussed are a sampling of those attitudes and actions by which we may please God. Therefore, I hope you will also look over the list in “Chapter 10: What Else Pleases God?” and discover other ways that we may please our heavenly Father.

The greater purpose in understanding God’s pleasure and favor in our lives is not just for personal *satisfaction*, but also for personal *sanctification* – so that we may grow up in the faith and think and act more like our Savior, becoming “salt and light” in the world by our good deeds (Matthew 5:13-16). The knowledge that God is pleased with us is like a good meal that fills us in the moment and fuels us for the work-to-come that He has prepared for us from eternity.

I need that kind of motivation and encouragement. I pray you discover in these pages that you need it, too, and that it is readily available from the Lord and His Word, the Bible.

Perry C. Brown  
Dallas, Texas  
June, 2022

## *Introduction*

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Walk as children of light ...  
and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

### *Ephesians 5:8,10*

My lovely daughter asked her two-year-old daughter what they should buy Daddy – my son-in-law – for Christmas as they visited a local department store. “A shirt!” said the enthusiastic youngster. “What color?” my daughter asked. “Yeyyow!” said the grandkid. “How about this one?” my daughter asked as she held up a yellow hoodie in the men’s clothing department. “Oooooo, yes, so cozy!” “How about a bag of candy?” suggested Mom. “Yes!” agreed granddaughter. They wheeled their shopping cart to the groceries department, and granddaughter wanted to buy a big \$25-bag of sweets that might have lasted the whole year, but Mom sanely settled on a smaller bag of Dad’s favorite confections. And then the little one suggested a final gift, something she personally enjoyed more than just about anything else. So on Christmas Day, Daddy eagerly opened his gifts of a new yellow hoodie, a bag of Hershey’s Kisses with almonds – and a can of green beans! You see, my granddaughter loves green beans, and she wanted to give a personally cherished gift to her beloved Daddy so that she

might hear his “Thank you!” and know that he was *pleased* with her.

Oh, how we try to please others! I am increasingly convinced that the drive to please others is hard-wired into our spiritual DNA. It is central to what it means to be human. Somewhere and sometime in our earthly sojourn each of us has invested significant emotional energy trying to please someone important to us – whether by pleasing Mom or Dad or an older brother or sister; or by pleasing a teacher or coach or mentor; or by pleasing our peers or our significant other; or by pleasing our constituents, our customers, or our employees. We have sought their affirmation and approval and friendship by in some way trying to meet their needs or their expectations of us. We may have tried to cheer them or make them laugh. We may have tried to comfort them or ease their pain. We persistently sought to please them, and we may have succeeded gloriously – or failed miserably. And that success or failure in pleasing others may still color our relationship with God, our understanding of Him, and our attempts to please *Him*.

So, what does it take to please God? What does He require? It is even possible? Your answers to those three questions reveal, in part, how you understand who God is and who you are in relationship to Him.

Eminent British scholar Adam Clarke calls “love” – the “fruit” of the Holy Spirit resident within Christians (Galatians 5:22-23) – “an intense desire to *please* God, and to do good to mankind.”<sup>1</sup> If this is so, are we stuck with only the *desire* to please Him but never quite sure *when* in fact we have pleased Him? I’ve thought a lot about believing God

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<sup>1</sup> Clarke, p.1166.

and trusting God and obeying Him; fearing Him and looking for Him and living for Him; angering Him and placating Him and satisfying Him; understanding Him and studying Him and teaching about Him; following Him and learning from Him. But I've never thought much about pleasing Him. Yet in 2 Corinthians 5:9 the Apostle Paul says this:

So whether we are at home [in our bodies] or away [in heaven], we make it our *aim* to please him.

That's a stunning statement. The word *aim* (Greek *philotimeomai*) carries the idea of *ambition* or *aspiration*.<sup>2</sup> One Ancient Greek linguist helps us understand the weight of the word when he concluded that the “man with *philotimo* signified someone who loves to receive the praises of his city, but first serves the community.”<sup>3</sup> Paul so wanted to receive the praises of his Savior (2 Corinthians 5:10), but first he labored tirelessly to lead others to that Savior (5:11).

Bible commentator Charles Hodge helps us understand that relationship between loving God and pleasing Him when he says of the Apostle Paul and his associates: “Love to [Jesus], the desire to please him, and to be pleasing to him, animates their hearts and governs their lives, and makes them do and suffer what heroes do for glory.”<sup>4</sup> So when Paul identifies pleasing the Lord as his life's goal

***Pleasing God - and knowing when we do - is vitally important for our spiritual health and maturity.***

<sup>2</sup> Bauer, p.861; Thayer, p.655.

<sup>3</sup> Dimitropoulos. He concluded *philotimo* morphed to that understanding in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., well before Paul's ministry in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.

<sup>4</sup> Hodge, p.500.

and focus, we must pay attention and we must likewise reexamine what *our* life's goal and focus is. Pleasing God – and knowing when we do – is vitally important for our spiritual health and maturity!

In fact, the Bible has *much* to say about exactly what does please God. Thus, the purpose of this book is to explore the Bible's instruction about how we can undoubtedly and assuredly please God, with the goal that not only will we pursue those attitudes and activities that do please Him, but also that we will *know* we are indeed pleasing Him.

### *An Exception to the Rule?*

First, though, we need to examine a couple of our human idiosyncrasies about pleasing others and being pleased, because they may distort our view of pleasing God. You may know someone who appears to want to please no one and in fact won't be pleased by anyone. Although this sounds far-fetched, a friend really asked his hard-to-please mother if she would ever be pleased with anything anyone ever did for her or gave to her. She thought for a moment and then replied without hesitation or remorse, "No." Maybe you know someone like that, too. Such persons can appear outwardly selfish and self-absorbed. They have given up any hope of successfully pleasing someone else because they have never successfully done it themselves. As a result, they have sunk back into themselves and ostensibly dare anyone to please them. However, that sad condition is true only because at some point in their lives they *did* believe they could please someone. They needed to please someone, but they failed. I believe in this case that the underlying need remains, though repressed and dormant and unfulfilled. Although I pray I am wrong, the person I have just described might be you. If

so, to you especially is this book addressed and dedicated. And let me assure you, things *can* be different when we try to please God.

### *The Disease to Please*

In contrast to someone who can't be pleased, you might know someone on the other end of a tainted relationship who seemingly *cannot please*: someone who tries to please everyone and ends up exhausted and discouraged. That person has the “disease to please.” That’s when the innate desire to please is pushed to the limit and strained because expectations are so exceptionally high and the person’s effort is not acknowledged or rewarded to that person’s satisfaction. All legitimate desires and needs can be pushed too far, and any one of them can mistakenly become the sole litmus test of our value and worth. But distortion of a desire does not mean the desire itself is invalid. On the contrary, most distortions in our lives can be traced back to a legitimate, unmet need, like the need to please someone. So let me assure you that if you have repeatedly tried and failed to please others, you are in for a pleasant reprieve. God has provided a way by which we can bring our failures and disobedience to Him, trust in His provision to meet those burdens and receive us into His family and know the satisfaction of pleasing our heavenly Father.

### *Got to Please Yourself?*

Songwriter Ricky Nelson released his “Garden Party” album in 1972, and in the title track he lamented how he was cruelly booed and heckled by music-loving purists who wanted to hear only his older, popular hits at a concert in Madison Square Garden. He waxed philosophical about his



predicament as he concluded in the song:

But it's all right now,  
I learned my lesson well.  
You see, ya can't please everyone,  
So ya got to please yourself.

“Garden Party” became Nelson’s first U.S. top ten hit in almost ten years, and for good reason. The song encouraged the popular philosophy to “be true to yourself.” What’s wrong with that? Isn’t that the antidote to the “disease to please”? Isn’t it obvious that you should satisfy yourself first?

That philosophy assumes that we are ultimately accountable and responsible only to ourselves. Especially for the Christian, that “me first” philosophy is both misleading and misguided, because:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? *You are not your own*, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.  
(1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

It is equally disastrous for the non-Christian to adopt a mindset and lifestyle of pure self-satisfaction, for it belies a proper understanding of one’s spiritual alienation from God and the need for a Savior. During Israel’s history, rampant self-satisfaction marked a particularly unstable time when during the era of the judges “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:25). One Bible scholar observed that the book of Judges documents that period to show “God’s sovereign grace in preserving Israel *in spite of herself*.”<sup>5</sup> From a human perspective, that “me first” era was

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas L. Constable, in Zuck, *Biblical Theology*, p.95. Clarke’s comment (p.284) about elevating self-satisfaction to the ultimate rule of

a catastrophe for Israel. Then in the New Testament, Jesus Himself warned against devoting one's life to self-gratifying pursuits, only to discover at one's inevitable death that he has lost everything of intrinsic value:

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?  
(Matthew 16:26)

The answer to Jesus' question is that nothing pursued in this life with the goal of satisfying self now will ultimately be of any value in preparing for the next life, our literal eternal life. The liberating truth is that as we seek to please God in *this* life we are rewarded with genuine satisfaction now and eternal treasure with God thereafter, because "godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and *also for the life to come*" (1 Timothy 4:8).

### *Pleasing an Angry God?*

Maybe you find it difficult to believe that anyone could possibly please God. You might think that way because you've let one of the Lord's attributes – His anger – dominate and color your entire concept of Him, for better or worse. We tend to make that mistake – let one memory or trait of someone command our perception of that person. Baseball legend Mickey Mantle is remembered as a phenomenal batting champion and homerun king, although he was also a superb fielder, winning the coveted Gold Glove in 1962. Charles Colson will always be remembered as the White House "hatchet man" during Richard Nixon's

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society is sobering: "When a man's own will, passions, and caprice are to be made the rule of law, society is in a most perilous and ruinous state."

presidency, and Colson received a prison sentence as a result. But we forget how he thereafter became an outstanding advocate for prison reform and a wise social commentator, a man whose godly life and influence touched millions. In a lighter vein, television personality Martha Stewart once admitted: “I dated Sir Anthony Hopkins but broke up with him because I couldn’t stop thinking of him as Hannibal Lecter!”<sup>6</sup> Evidently Lecter’s cannibalistic personality in the movie “The Silence of the Lambs” was too much for Stewart to overlook in Hopkins in real life! In such cases, the problem is not with the *person* we are considering but rather with our *perception* of him or her.

In a similar way, I wonder if God is better known for His anger than for His compassion, although the Bible emphasizes the latter far more than the former. Fire-and-brimstone preachers like Billy Sunday – often portrayed as perpetually angry – have left an indelible mark on Western culture’s perception of Christianity. Puritan pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards is commonly remembered for his famous sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” although his own words here do not give the impression of a dour, sour, and sullen preacher:

The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Father and mother, husband, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows, but God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun.

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<sup>6</sup> Owoseje, “Martha Stewart reveals why she broke it off with Anthony Hopkins.”

These are but streams, but God is the ocean.<sup>7</sup>

To be clear, the Bible does clearly and persistently speak of God’s wrath against sin (Romans 1:18-32). But it also assures us that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8), and that “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17). Before we ever considered pleasing God, He acted decisively and sacrificially to provide a way – the *only* way – by which we can *begin* to please Him, through faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior from the guilt and penalty of our sins. (See the chapter “Good News” at the end of the book for more information about this.)

### Your Opportunity

At first it may seem strange to think that such a basic “need to please” – a need possibly unfulfilled through others – might be fulfilled in our relationship with God Himself. But let me go one step further and suggest this:

There is more opportunity to please the Lord of the universe than to please the humans in our lives.

I’m convinced that is true. Even if we have struck out in the human relationships that we consider the most important, the Bible lays out a path by which we may not only know that we have pleased God, but that we can be assured of His divine favor. I say all this not because most of the people in our lives are so difficult to please (although you have your own opinions about that!). But rather I hold out this hope of pleasing God because I have learned through

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<sup>7</sup> Murray, p.143.

the testimony of the Bible that He so delights in our efforts to please Him, and He wants us to be assured of that truth!

Made to Please?

Let me suggest another possibility: You were *made* to please God. The first question from the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1646-47) asks, “What is the chief end of man?” If you do not readily know the answer to that question, you might guess something like “to obey God” or “to follow God” or “to trust God.” No, here’s the answer: “The chief end of man is to love God and enjoy Him forever.”<sup>8</sup> How can we truly love Him and enjoy Him if we are unaware what truly pleases Him? The wonderful truth is that God’s Word, the Bible, is straightforward about how we can know for certain not only that we are obeying and following and trusting God, but also that we are pleasing Him. Perhaps your biggest gain from this book will be discovering not only what pleases God, but also understanding and experiencing His approval – comprehending for perhaps the first time that you were *created* for His *pleasure*!

***You were made  
to please God.***

Celestial Commendations and Celebrations

Is pleasing God something we must wring and cajole out of Him? Not at all! The Old Testament character Job is a beautiful example of someone who enjoyed God’s favor,

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<sup>8</sup> Watson’s book, *A Body of Divinity*, spends over twenty pages exploring and expanding the ideas behind this first answer in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. I commend it to those who wish to pursue more detailed discussion on this valuable insight.

although we might not immediately think of him that way. After all, Job's boom-to-bust-to-boom story is not particularly encouraging on its face. Although Job finally did regain all his family and fortunes after a period of tremendous trial, it is another statement before Job's tortured journey that is especially important to understand:

And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" (Job 1:8)

In case you missed it, that was the Lord God of heaven and earth bragging on one of his faithful servants, to no less than Satan himself. (Another similar endorsement of Job appears in 2:3 after Job's first trials.) Although the Lord had to subsequently correct the mental fallout of Job's despair during his trial (chapters 40-41), God's initial praise for Job should speak volumes about His delight in those who delight in Him. There was "none like him on the earth," but there is no indication in Scripture the Lord's affirmation is unique to Job in the many centuries since then. Indeed, Abraham is called God's friend because of his trust in God's promises (James 2:23) and David is called "a man after [God's] heart" (Acts 13:22). Do you see God's pleasure in those remarkable statements? They are even more remarkable when we remember that neither Abraham nor David was anything like a perfect role model. They both had their share of spectacular failures and colossal collapses of trust and obedience. Their disasters are enduring warnings in the pages of the Bible; yet their enthusiastic commendations from God endure also. Why? Is God daft? Hardly, but He is gracious and even *eager* to get us back on track after a hard fall so that we may once again agree with His plan, pursue

His purpose, and know His pleasure.

God in Our Image?

The great 16<sup>th</sup> century reformer Martin Luther once accused an opponent of assuming that God was too much like himself, chiding him, “Your thoughts concerning God are too human.”<sup>9</sup> Are we simply projecting our own emotions on a God who does not share them?

My daughter has been involved in theatre for over twenty years, starting in middle school, then through high school and college, and then graduating to teaching theatre to middle- and high-school students. We have seen her begin with minor roles in theatre productions for kids, then to landing major roles, then to learning the craft and technical aspects of theatre, then to producing her own shows, and finally to instructing budding theatre students. My wife and I have rarely missed a production in which she had landed a role or which she had directed and produced herself. We have been pleased and delighted with each step she has taken in that exciting journey. Is God delighted and pleased with us in the same way we are delighted and pleased with our daughter’s progress, or are we just projecting our feelings back on God when we say He is pleased with us?

This book addresses that question head-on and let me give you a sneak preview: From beginning to end, from the creation in Genesis 1-2 to the re-creation in Revelation 21-22, God delights in His people! That does not mean that He is *always* pleased with *all* they do, but like a boomerang, we always see the eventual, inevitable return of God’s favor toward and pleasure in His people.

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<sup>9</sup> From “On The Bondage of the Will,” by Martin Luther, 1525.

Content with Less?

A few years ago, the hot water heater in our home sprang a leak, so after the initial messy cleanup we had to replace it. The plumber who installed the new water heater sent me a picture of how he had to crisscross the hot and cold pipes that he connected to the heater. He explained that ever since we had been living in our home – almost 20 years – our hot water heater had been hooked up backwards! He said it probably put out some hot water over the years, but because of the connection confusion it never performed up to its full potential. The more we reflected on his comments, the more we knew he was right. We always thought our hot water supply was meager, but we assumed that’s the way it was. Not so! We had mistakenly accepted the heater’s mediocrity as normal. We *assumed* there wasn’t – and couldn’t be – an adequate amount of hot water available. And we were completely wrong as we endured our tepid showers!

We can trust God, obey God, love God, fear God, and yet *assume* we can never know if we are *pleasing* God. We *can* please Him, and through the Bible we be assured of His pleasure. Knowing that we can and do please Him is not just a luxury; *it can be and should be a daily reality.*

Not Just in Heaven

Some of the Bible passages we will be considering about pleasing God could be understood in the sense that what we do in this life will be pleasing to Him only when we get to heaven. In other words, we can only *hope* we are pleasing to God in this present life; we will only know *for sure* in our next life in the presence of God Himself. We can only know for



sure that our lives have pleased God when we hear His ultimate “Well done, good and faithful servant” (a la Matthew 25:21).

That mindset assumes God is only “out there” in heaven and not here with us now. It assumes that we have no ongoing, dynamic relationship with Him at present whereby we might know from day to day if we are pleasing Him or not. Thankfully, when we study the Bible closely, we learn that neither assumption is true. In fact, God the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in those who have trusted in Christ as Savior (see Romans 8:9 and 1 Corinthians 6:19) and we interact with Him such that we may both grieve Him and even quench the Spirit’s influence (see Ephesians 4:30 and 1 Thessalonians 5:19). My understanding from the Bible is that as we do those things that please God, we are gifted with joy and peace and all those “fruits” of the Holy Spirit’s work within us (Galatians 5:22-23). And by our growth and the presence of those fruits in our lives we can understand by faith that we are pleasing God *now*, in the present, as surely as we understand that we are a part of God’s family by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). In fact, we miss a great satisfaction available to us when we avoid or ignore the assurance of God’s pleasure in and with us here and now. Don’t be short-sighted! Be assured that we can know our loving Father’s pleasure!

### Working in Us His Pleasure

So far, I have been emphasizing how *we* can please God by what *we* do. That is correct, as far as it goes, but there is more to that truth. The Bible says that when we take the time and make the effort to please Him, it is really *Him* working through *us* to please *Him*! For instance, the Apostle

Paul informed the Christians at the church in Philippi:

For *it is God who works in you*, both to will and to work for his good *pleasure*. (Philippians 2:13)

Here's another example from the Book of Hebrews:

Now may the God of peace ... equip you with everything good that you may do his will, *working in us that which is pleasing in his sight*, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20,21)

And again, Paul emphasizes in Ephesians 3:20:

Now to him [God] who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, *according to the power at work within us*.

If you look at the context of that last quote, Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit resident in every Christian as the “power” that is working within us. And you may be assured the goal of that divine workmanship is pleasing to God!

The comforting truth is that when we trust in Jesus Christ for our forgiveness and the gift of eternal life, God is at work in our lives through the gift of the Holy Spirit making us fruitful in a way that both immediately and ultimately pleases Him. What a wonderful assurance that He is guiding us to and through those very situations and experiences that *we* can use to glorify Him and that *He* can use to encourage us with His pleasure!

### *A Pleasing Precedent*

In 1979 a small silver scroll was discovered in a burial site excavated just southwest of the Old City of Jerusalem. Written on the scroll was found the oldest surviving text of

the Hebrew Bible, dating from around 600 B.C. The text is from Numbers 6:24-26 – what is popularly known as the Aaronic Blessing. The Lord has a long history of encouraging His people with His blessing. Moses was commanded by God Himself to command his brother, Aaron, the head of the priests of Israel, to pronounce this blessing over the nation of Israel:

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

And the Lord promised:

So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them. (v.27)

Jewish tradition suggests that this blessing on the people was pronounced every day by the high priest Aaron – and perpetually by his heirs – at the end of their sacrificial duties in the Lord’s Tabernacle and later His Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> Every day after the sacrifices had been completed, this threefold blessing – three times invoking God’s holy covenant name – was proclaimed for all to hear, that at the end of the day they might be reminded neither of His judgment nor of His anger, but rather of His favor – His “shining face.”<sup>11</sup> How could one tire of a beautiful daily assurance like that?

Is such a blessing for Israel only? Can we today know that divine smile, too? As you read on, you’ll discover not only

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<sup>10</sup> Bruce, p.224.

<sup>11</sup> God’s blessing expressed by the figure of His face “shining” upon the object of His favor is a recurring theme of the Psalms; so see Psalm 31:16; 67:1; 80:3,7,19; 119:135.

that you can, but that the Lord *intends* for you to enjoy His favor when you embrace His free gift of salvation for you and then pursue those practices that please Him.

Read!

More than just talking about what the Bible says, I want you to dig into what the Bible means. I'll suggest passages of Scripture that you can further study for yourself concerning the topic of the chapter at hand. As I've noted throughout this chapter, those who please the Lord can also enjoy His favor, so let's focus on this beautiful promise:

For you bless the righteous, O Lord;  
you cover him with favor as with a shield.  
(Psalm 5:12)

How would the favor of God act as a *shield* over your life?

Reflect!

I'll also present wisdom from someone in the past whose life has pleased God. Our first quote comes from the venerable Christian philosopher and apologist C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Weight of Glory*:

The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses ... shall find approval, shall please God. *To please God ... to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness ... to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son – it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can*

hardly sustain. But so it is.<sup>12</sup>

Rejoice!

It is always best to respond directly to God after learning something from His Word, so singing (or just reciting out loud) a well-known hymn that thanks and praises God for the truth He has presented in the chapter is a fitting conclusion to each study. Let's start here:

Composer Harold Lowden needed new lyrics to a “light and summery” tune he had composed in 1915, so he turned to his friend Thomas Chisholm. Chisholm complained that he had no idea how to compose words to go with an existing tune, but Lowden persisted, telling him that he felt God had led him to choose Chisholm to pen the words. A couple of weeks later Chisholm returned the finished lyrics, and the hymn “Living for Jesus” was born. This timeless favorite has since “appeared in scores of hymnbooks of all denominations and has been translated into more than fifteen languages and dialects.”<sup>13</sup> The first verse relates directly to our topic of pleasing God:

Living for Jesus a life that is true,  
*Striving to please Him in all that I do,*  
 Yielding allegiance, gladhearted and free –  
 This is the pathway of blessing for me.

Refrain:

O Jesus, Lord and Savior,  
 I give myself to Thee,  
 For Thou in Thine atonement  
 Didst give Thyself for me.

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<sup>12</sup> Lewis, p.10.

<sup>13</sup> Osbeck, *101 More Hymn Stories*, p.178.

I own no other Master –  
My heart shall be Thy throne:  
My life I give, henceforth to live,  
O Christ for Thee alone.

Must we settle for only *striving* to please the Lord, never  
*knowing* if we truly are? Not so, says Chisholm:

Living for Jesus thru life's little while,  
*My dearest treasure the light of His smile,*  
Seeking the lost ones He died to redeem,  
Bringing the weary to find rest in Him.

“Try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord,” and as you  
do, enjoy the smile of His favor.