

According To His Pleasure

The Pleasure of God

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The sermon that I have to give today started out a sermonette years ago that I gave in the Netherlands, then it was expanded to a Bible study, and given in Zambia and South Africa. Now I have expanded it into a sermon, and hopefully it will be encouraging and answer some questions that you may have about your suffering conditions and that type of thing.

It is very common for people to seek pleasure in illicit sex, gluttony, or drunkenness. The works of the flesh, found in Galatians 5, is a list of activities that worldly people often find "pleasurable," if not through action, quite often through vicarious thought.

People have a distorted short-sighted sense of pleasure for which we will endure the greatest of hardships and sacrifice. For the world, this pleasure seeking is usually in pursuit of something foolish and wasteful; or, at least of little or no value when compared with God's plan of salvation for humanity.

Professional football is a case in point: to some there is no greater pleasure than watching their favorite team play. Although football is a sport that is of debatable value to society, the real problem is in the obsessive behavior of the fans. Most football fans will excitedly watch a football game over going to church, unless they do not have a choice in the matter, and sometimes their wives are able to apply a great deal of pressure in that area..

Psalm 147, tells us that God is not excited over a person's athletic ability.

Psalm 147:10 He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man.

People, especially men, have always been intrigued and excited by the beauty, strength, and speed of a horse. A great deal of effort and money is put into horse racing, which has been popular since early in mankind's history.

And a man's (or woman's) legs, if well proportioned, often represent his power and athletic ability. Though God has made these, they are not what please Him.

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"Pleasure" is generally defined as the gratification of the senses or of the mind; agreeable sensations or emotions; the excitement, relish, or happiness produced by the expectation or the enjoyment of something good, delightful, or satisfying; as opposed to pain and sorrow.

Possibly, one of the most misunderstood characteristics of God is what "pleases" Him. People often accuse God of being harsh, or removed from reality, or they refer to Him as senile. In reality, an accusation of senility against God confirms the insanity of the accuser.

God finds pleasure in many things. It may surprise you that Isaiah tells us that it pleased God to bruise Jesus Christ. But His enjoyment is tied to the accomplishing of His will and purpose. He is willing to sacrifice a great deal to accomplish His plan and reach His goal of bringing many sons to glory.

Nowhere is the righteousness of God's pleasure seen more clearly than in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah's prophecy. Isaiah speaks of how God the Father struck His Son Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 53:4-6 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

These scriptures appear to the casual worldly observer to show the harshness and cruelty of God the Father in striking Christ. But in verse 4, the paradox or the apparent contradiction is that God struck the 'Being' that He loved most. How could He do such a thing? Is God that cruel? We in this room know of course not!

Jesus was put to death according to God's purpose; and therefore, it was according to His good pleasure. God is breathtakingly gracious and He is willing to suffer the temporary agony necessary to complete His goal for the pleasure of adding a multitude of family members to His kingdom. Therefore, in the overall scheme of things, He is pleased to have His will carried out.

All pleasure must be bought at the price of pain—at the price of something valuable. The difference between false and true pleasure is just this—for true pleasure, the price

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is paid before we enjoy it; for the false, the price is paid after we enjoy it.

Perhaps the most surprising statement in the Bible is found here, in verse 10. God the Father is described as pleased to bruise His Son.

Isaiah 53:10 Yet it pleased the LOORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief...

This statement tells us that "To bruise him, or his being bruised, was pleasing to God;" that is, it was acceptable to God for His Son to be crushed by many sorrows. God decided and knew that what He wanted to happen would happen, and He knew He would find pleasure in it when He accomplished it. In other words, He determined that what He was working toward would give Him great pleasure once He had accomplished it. God kept His focus on what His end goal was and what He was doing for all mankind.

The word "pleased" from the Hebrew 'ratsah' means "to be pleased, be pleased with, to accept favorably, to be satisfied." That is an important word there, "satisfied." This is a common term in both biblical and modern Hebrew. It indicates that there is a sense of satisfaction in accepting something.

It does not necessarily imply that there was any direct action on the part of God in bruising him, but only that the fact of Jesus being crushed and bruised in this way was acceptable to Him because it helps in the process of accomplishing His goal.

God is satisfied when man is in a close spiritual relationship with Him. Christ is satisfied because His work and sacrifice has moved formerly separated people into an acceptable stance with God and has provided peace with God. We are satisfied when we know we are accepted by God and in fellowship with Him. So in all of those cases God the Father, Jesus Christ and we are pleased that these things have happened. God had a sense like this with regard to Christ's excruciating and painful crucifixion because He foresaw the overwhelming good that it would produce. It shows the vision that God has in carrying out His plan, and His wisdom extends so far in the way that He sees.

Isaiah speaks of how it would please God to bruise and grieve Jesus Christ as a sin offering for the sins of mankind, but that the end result would be that His pleasure would prosper by the hand of Jesus—by the life, teachings, service and sacrifice of Christ.

Isaiah 53:10 Yet it pleased the LOORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief.
When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall

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prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LOORD shall prosper in His hand.

Even though Jesus was crucified by the hands of wicked men, His death was determined beforehand by God. Jesus was not a martyr, nor was His death an accident. He was God's sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Jesus did not remain dead! The phrase "He shall prolong his days," means that Christ was resurrected to live forever. In His resurrection, He triumphed over every enemy and claimed the spoils of victory of that spiritual battle that Christ was involved in and that we are involved in as well.

Satan offered Christ a present glorious physical kingdom of the world in return for worship. The direct opposite of what God had ready for Him. If Jesus had accepted that offer by Satan it would have meant physical salvation bypassing His own crucifixion. But, Jesus was "obedient to death," and God "highly exalted Him." So by avoiding the temptation of temporary relief from suffering in this physical life, Jesus had the right vision and hope of the future glorious spiritual kingdom of God clearly in mind throughout the entire ordeal and the temptations that Satan placed before Him.

Jesus' beating and humiliation, ending in his death, produced the result that God desired. God willed this because He would have great delight in the fact that His goal of salvation for mankind was taking another step toward its accomplishment. It is an entire process that God has set forth, and there are things that had to happen along the way, one of which was the crucifixion of His son, Jesus Christ.

At the end of verse 10, the word pleasure in the phrase, "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand," is the same Hebrew root word, but is in a different tense than is used earlier. Pleasure in the Hebrew here means: "that which is precious as an object of delight." Jesus is precious and someone in whom the Father finds great delight.

Verse 10, is almost shocking in what seems like disregard for the emotional feelings and suffering of Jesus Christ. But God is not short-sighted. He always sees the end result of what He does. He always considers the end result of His decisions. And so, according to God's overall plan the end result will give Him great pleasure, and God focuses on that end result.

Another part of His reward is found in the statement, "He shall see His seed [i.e., descendants]" To die childless was a grief and shame to the Jews, but Jesus gave birth to a spiritual family because of His life, teachings and death. Isaiah's statement about

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his own natural family in Isaiah 8:18, is quoted in Hebrews 2:13 and applied to Christ and His spiritual family. In those two verses we see the type of the physical family with the spiritual family of the church.

Isaiah 53:11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.

The Servant's, that is, Jesus Christ's work on the tree brought satisfaction. To begin with—the Servant satisfied (or, 'pleased') the Father.

Remember Jesus' words recorded in John 8:29, "And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him." There again we realize that Jesus knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that His death on that cross, that stake, or that tree, would be pleasing to His Father.

The heavenly Father did not find enjoyment in seeing His Son suffer; and we know that the Father is not pleased with the death of the wicked, let alone the death of the righteous Son of God. But the Father was pleased that His Son's obedience accomplished the redemption that He had planned from eternity.

The death of the Servant, that is Jesus Christ, also satisfied the Law of God. The theological term for this is "propitiation." In pagan religions, the word meant "to offer a sacrifice to placate an angry god," but the Christian meaning is much richer.

God is angry at sin because it offends His holiness and violates His holy Law. In His holiness, He must judge sinners, but in His love, He desires to forgive them. God cannot ignore sin, or compromise with it, as that would be contrary to His own nature and Law.

Do we see the necessity to suffer with Christ—so that we too can learn to understand and really commiserate with others in their trials? Because this was a major part of the reason that Christ was to suffer. Or, are we so focused on our own physical discomfort and misery that we cannot see the spiritual benefits for us, and others, in having to persevere through life?

Sometimes we suffer persecution, sometimes we suffer with long term illnesses, or sometimes permanent injuries.

As an act of mercy, God promises to heal. He chooses the time to heal, and His

intervention often depends on certain conditions being met.

1. He requires that we trust in His promise and power to do what He has promised according to His will and within His time frame.
2. He requires that we have faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, represented in the Passover observance by the broken bread, a symbol of His broken body, and the wine, a symbol of His shed blood.
3. He requires repentance of any sins that may be causing the health problem.

Often He heals as He reveals the problem to us. God's action is motivated by love, and we know that the end result is always going to be good. So why are so many seeming to suffer with so many things, and even dying with them, seemingly never having been healed? God knows our miserable state thanks to the intercession of Jesus Christ who was struck and bruised and grieved. The healing will be granted in this life only if it is in the best interest of God's purpose.

You may be surprised to know that God's top priority is not our physical healing; His pleasure is that we are healed spiritually. That is, it is far more important that through physical discomfort and suffering we learn the lessons necessary to perfect us (or more accurately, complete us) in preparation for His Kingdom.

We may have a spiritual problem, or God may need us to be able to deeply understand the suffering of others in order to help others in the future. He certainly has the authority as our Creator, and He has the wisdom as the source of Truth to know specifically where we need our character strengthened.

And, a long term sickness, or an unhealed injury may be (in God's wisdom) the best way for us to receive the experience we need. His ultimate pleasure is that we are a blessing to His Kingdom. He does not want freeloading, helpless, welfare cases draining vibrant life from His government. Look at what He both caused and allowed to happen to the heroes of faith:

Hebrews 11:13, 32-40 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained

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promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

There again we see God's plan, His vision, His wisdom, and His patience in waiting for the right time to resurrect those individuals. Many of them had many afflictions and injuries that they were never healed of even unto death.

Yes, the faithful suffer much, but the eternal spiritual rewards far outweigh the physical discomfort and the suffering in this temporal life. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ has made the healing of our physical and spiritual sicknesses possible.

The breaking of the unleavened bread during the Passover ritual is part of the annual ceremony, we need to be reminded at least once a year that the true Bread from heaven, which we must ingest in order to live, was broken for us.

John writes that Christ's bones were not broken when the soldiers broke the legs of the two criminals crucified at Jesus' side, to hasten their deaths before the annual Sabbath. But Jesus' death resulted from the tip of a soldier's spear puncturing His side and spilling His blood on the earth. Not one bone was broken in Jesus' body, as was prophesied.

So, how was Jesus broken for us?

Christ's body was "broken," not by the breaking of His bones, but by the breaking of His skin. Besides the spear that pierced His side, and the metal spikes that nailed His wrists and feet to the stake, He was subjected to a most severe beating and whipping.

This torture (foretold in Isaiah 52:14) made Him nearly unrecognizable. His body bore a

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lot of welts, skin lacerations and open wounds, spilling His blood over His whole body.

As we read earlier, Isaiah 53:5 attaches spiritual meaning to His scourging, "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."

I Peter 2:24 ...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.

A stripe was "a stroke or blow made with a rod or lash." This is how our Lord's body was broken.

We cannot be but deeply embarrassed and ashamed that we should benefit from His beating, His suffering, His stripes, especially, when we consider that in God's eyes we broke His body! But it is prophesied that by the stripes He received, we would be healed.

I Corinthians 11:23-30 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick [and I add spiritually] among you, and many sleep.

We see, there, that that is what is important for God to heal, first and foremost is the sicknesses that we have of the mind.

When we eat the broken, unleavened bread at Passover, we, as baptized members, must ask ourselves: "Have I been healed by His stripes? Am I in the process of being

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healed by them? Do I really believe this promise?" If we cannot answer these questions positively, then something may be wrong with our faith.

"Discerning the Lord's body" means recognizing our personal guilt for Christ's suffering and acknowledging our transgression of God's law. Discerning the Lord's body means, "*Go and sin no more.*" Otherwise, we "crucify again for [ourselves] the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame."

Why is God pleased with Christ's sufferings? We know that God was pleased: (1) *not* because He enjoyed watching the Innocent suffer; (2) *not* because the Sufferer was in any way guilty or ill-deserving; and (3) *not* because He was ever displeased or dissatisfied with what Jesus did or taught.

So, why is God pleased with Christ's sufferings? Because of three things:

1. He is pleased with Christ's sufferings because Christ voluntarily submitted Himself to those sorrows which were necessary to show the evil of sin. All unrighteousness is sin.

One purpose of Christ's coming was to expose sin, and totally annul its penalty of death for repentant believers.

Hebrews 9:24-26 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another; He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

In view of what was to be gained, that is the eternal redemption of His people, God was pleased that Jesus would subject Himself to such great torture and abuse and death to save us. God was joyful over what He knew the end result would be, and Christ was so willing to further God's own plan of salvation in preparation for His Kingdom.

2. God is pleased with Christ's sufferings because these sufferings show the justice and mercy of God. They demonstrate the extent of His righteousness.

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Psalm 130:7 O Israel, hope in the LOORD; For with the LOORD there is mercy, And with Him is abundant redemption.

In Psalm 147:11, the psalmist explains that God is pleased when we are hopeful of receiving mercy. "The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, In those who hope in His mercy." Another way to please God is to fear Him, and to reverence Him. Hoping in His mercy is another way of pleasing God.

The gift of a Savior, such as He is, demonstrates unlimited loving kindness; His sufferings on behalf of the guilty show the holiness of His nature and law; and all demonstrate that He was ready and willing to make a great sacrifice to save us, and yet resolved that no one would be saved by dishonoring his law, or without payment for the evil that had been done by sinful beings.

3. God is pleased with Christ's sufferings because these sorrows result in the eventual pardon and salvation of mankind, and in His and our eternal happiness. This redemption process in the plan of God is a whole work of loving kindness, and God was satisfied with it as a work of pure and impartial love.

Romans 3:21-26 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Each one of us is accountable for our own actions; and there is always a penalty for sin. Therefore, the price has to be paid. Jesus Christ was willing to be the payment for us so that the

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ultimate pleasure of God the Father, and His family, could be achieved.

Although, the specific suffering and sacrifice that Jesus endured had to be unpleasant (to say the least) for His Father while He witnessed it, it satisfied the Father because it was a major essential step in His overall plan of salvation for mankind.

God finds pleasure in all His work because He always sees the end result of His efforts. He only sees success in His work because He knows He will accomplish it. With God there is no doubting only the assurance that His *WILL* will be done.

God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Following the fall of Jerusalem, He saw the need to encourage the exiled Israelites. So He inspired Ezekiel to tell the Israelites that He is as faithful to His promises to bless as He is to His promises to curse.

Ezekiel 18:23, 31-32 "Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" says the Lord Good, "and not that he should turn from his ways and live? Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord Good. "Therefore turn and live!"

Here we see God's true desire is for all human beings to repent of sin and change their attitudes from enmity to reverence, and as a result, to live, not just physically but eternally.

God created everybody specifically for His pleasure and not for our ultimate death. The purpose of God is in favor of the salvation of everyone; and therefore, not death, sin, or pain can be the ultimate purpose of God regarding mankind.

God made all things for His pleasure; and through that same loving motive He preserves and sustains us all. For this reason, it is very obvious that He

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wants every human being to have the opportunity for eternal life.

The world often pictures God as cruel and angry, because they have hearts of stone and refuse to truly know Him. But, the word of God reveals that, although He is very powerful, He is also a very patient and a very merciful God.

In this same vein, God finds pleasure in each sinner who repents, He concluded Ezekiel's message of personal judgment for personal sin by encouraging the Israelites to repent individually of their sins. Ezekiel continues God's admonition in Ezekiel 33:

Ezekiel 33:10-11 Therefore you, O son of man, say to the house of Israel: "Thus you say, 'If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live?'" Say to them: "As I live," says the Lord GOD, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?"

We see there God pleading with Israel, because He wants them to turn and He wants them all to be in His kingdom.

Death and suffering may last for a time; but if God has no pleasure in them of themselves, they are not the end at which He aims, but the means by which He accomplishes that end.

Neither death, nor sin, nor pain, can be His ultimate plan or pleasure; they are the means by which His holy and righteous designs are put into effect. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked other than to destroy sin.

It is impossible for the purpose of God to fail, therefore whatever God WILLS will be accomplished for His pleasure. Revelation 4:11 says, "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created."

The whole world will have the opportunity to choose to seek God. He says He will accomplish what He sets out to do by His word. Isaiah repeatedly emphasized God's determination to accomplish His goal.

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Isaiah 55:11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I
please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

The death of the sinner was not the purpose of creation. He created mankind for His righteous purpose and pleasure, and He assures us His desire will certainly be fulfilled.

Isaiah 14:24-27 The LOORD of hosts has sworn, saying, "Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, And as I have purposed, so it shall stand: That I will break the Assyrian in My land, And on My mountains tread him underfoot. Then his yoke shall be removed from them, And his burden removed from their shoulders. This is the purpose that is purposed against the whole earth, And this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. For the LOORD of hosts has purposed, And who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, And who will turn it back?"

Who has power to defeat God's purposes? No matter how difficult a mission may seem, God's purposes are planned with complete knowledge and understanding of the circumstances. He is the only One that can make decisions accurately and perfectly, because He sees all. We only have a small part of the whole picture. There is nothing in heaven or on earth that can resist His will. He assures us of His full dedication to His plan of salvation.

We have God's assurance that whatever trials may befall us; however depressing or sad our failures may be; and however negative his molding and shaping of us may appear at the moment, yet we are assured that all his plans are wise, and that they will all stand.

So when we are suffering from injuries that may be permanent, or sicknesses that are long term, we can realize that God is working with us, and that His hand is right there on us. He is carrying out His will, and He has not forgotten us.

God the Father has personally chosen us according to the good pleasure of His will. He wills that we live our lives as living sacrifices for Him. His will is that we work with Him in the renewing of our minds to be more like Christ. That is where the real importance and high priority for God lies, in the spiritual healing of us.

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Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

God finds great satisfaction in carrying out His plan of salvation. Nothing will stop or delay it! But, we do have our part to do, as we see here in Romans 12. We are not only to present ourselves to Him for His exclusive use, but help Him to transform us into His first-fruits, thereby proving His ideal purpose for humanity beginning with us as first in His kingdom.

I find all of these promises, these guarantees, and these absolutes that we have from our Father, so very encouraging.

We know that our redemption is in Jesus Christ, and that God has determined it according to the good pleasure of His will.

Ephesians 1:3-10 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

In verse 9, "according to his good pleasure," refers to that lovingly kind design that He had purposed in Himself, without being persuaded by any consideration from any outside source. His own good pleasure includes the time and method He does it. In our

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physical healing, He tells us that He will heal us, but does not tell us when.

Ephesians 1:11-12 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

In verse 11, Paul speaks of "the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will." Whatever God purposes must take place. Whatever God wills must happen. What God has purposed, will be done for His satisfaction. God's purpose, what He wills, and His good pleasure are all the same thing.

What practical things can we learn personally from this?

By God's righteous standard we can see that not all that we have to do to live our lives as Christians is pleasant. The goal now is not to just desire pleasure from blessings for obedience. If we truly are children of God, we must sacrifice and suffer with Christ; this is part of how we please Him. Not because He wants to see us suffer, but it is because it is a milestone towards His complete and final goal.

Obviously, this is not to say we should go out and look for trouble, but that we can expect that trials and tribulations will find us. This is God's good pleasure for us at this time. I would also like to interject here that we do suffer because of our own fault in nutrition quite often. We should try to find the reason why we are suffering, and the reasons why we have such health problems. God will let us continue to suffer for the same mistakes that we make over and over again. Proper nutrition is part of taking care of the temple of the Lord, that physical temple which is our body.

Romans 8:16-17 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Paul also describes our striving and suffering for Christ's way of life in his epistle to the Philippians. He exhorts the Philippian congregation to have courage and faithfulness in suffering. Those who live by the word of God and teach it have always faced adversaries.

Those who oppose the gospel of Christ, and persecute those who profess it, are marked

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out for ruin. Being persecuted for righteousness' sake is a mark of salvation. Not that persecution in and of itself is a positive mark; many hypocrites have suffered for their religion; but it is a good sign when we are enabled in a right manner to suffer for the cause of Christ.

Philippians 1:27-30 Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.

That means that we cannot stand individually, we must stand together as a church, supporting and encouraging one another.

Suffering for Christ's sake is both a privilege and a gracious gift. Suffering is one of God's means of achieving His purposes both for His Son and all believers. Believers are the faithful, and that is hopefully us.

Paul tells us right here that he struggled with the same battles that we do. He encouraged Timothy by explaining that he must follow his example by applying basic Christian character traits so he could endure hardships from which God would deliver him. Paul said that every righteous person will experience harassment.

II Timothy 3:10-14 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them,

We can see in this world, right now, that things are heating up against Christians, and that we will receive persecution. If we have already received persecution we will receive even more persecution. We know that the health of the people in the world is declining.

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There are more doctors per capita, there are more pharmaceuticals, and drug stores are going up on every corner. There is a lot of suffering and sickness in this world. We know that things are getting worse, and that is not even including the weather.

It is a matter of having the vision, the foresight to see the ultimate pleasure that results from submitting to the will of God, as Jesus Christ did when He died for our sins. My question for you is that are you, and am I, going to be able to have the same attitude when these things hit us, as we suffer continually with Christ? We have God's protection, and nothing can happen to us without Him allowing it, but we also know that there will be martyrs in the end, during the tribulation. Now is the time to strengthen ourselves, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ.

The pleasure of a true Christian is not necessarily to do what is pleasant now, but to do what is needful, to do what is according to God's purpose, to take another step toward our ultimate goal—that is, to be Christ-like in the kingdom of God!

Our pleasure must be according to God's will—according to His pleasure! His pleasure is in creating members of His Family. Our pleasure should be to work under His creative power to become useful members of His Family, and glorifying God the Father and Jesus Christ all of the way!

We can walk worthy of the Lord, and in so doing gratify Him by endeavoring to become better acquainted with His true character. God is pleased with those who desire to understand what He is; what He does; what He purposes; and, what He commands. For this reason He not only commands us to study His works, but to have pleasure in doing so.

Psalm 111:2 The works of the LORD are great, Studied by all who have pleasure in them.

The works of the Lord are great in number; great in magnitude; great in wisdom; and great in goodness. This descriptive word "great" is as appropriate now as it was in ancient times when the psalmist looked up at the heavens with his naked eye having an imperfect view of the real magnitude of the universe, and was impressed by the greatness of God's creation, and stood in awe of it.

How much more are we able to see today of the awesome creation of God in the universe with our enormous telescopes on the surface of the earth as well as in space?

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What we know of the greatness of the works of the Lord today gives us an even greater, more solemn, and awe-inspiring impression than it would have given the ancient psalmist who wrote Psalm 111.

And, the word "great" will still be appropriate under the even larger views that may yet be obtained of the universe by more powerful instruments, by more accurate observation, and by more in depth study.

"Studied by all who have pleasure in them," is more literally translated, "Sought to all their wishes," so it has to be something that we desire to study. Those who desire to be gratified by the works of God will study them. In God's works are found all that they would wish to find with respect to the power, wisdom, goodness, and majesty of God.

It implies that the believer, the Christian, the faithful, have a desire to study His works, or that they find pleasure in examining the proofs of the being and attributes of God in His works. Anyone who loves God will have real pleasure in studying his works as well as His word; and it is as rewarding to find pleasure in the one as in the other.

By His works He has made a world so beautiful that it invites us to contemplate His perfections as reflected in His creation. God delights in those who sincerely desire to understand His character and know what He is. He enjoys those who inquire with humility and reverence into His counsels, and His will.

One great error, among those who weakly profess to be followers of God the Father and Jesus Christ, is the neglect to study God's creation. By studying this, a person learns and sees in vivid detail the attributes of God. The knowledge that it gives is among the best ways of illustrating the Bible.

In Romans 1:20 Paul wrote, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead...."

Paul prayed asking God to fill the Colossians with the knowledge of His divine will; and for them to be helped by Him to live a life worthy of Him. Living a life worthy of Him is the result of knowing and doing God's will.

God gives us knowledge of His will with a practical intent. Since the end of all knowledge is conduct, the knowledge of God's will manifests itself as righteous conduct.

Colossians 1:9-14 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not

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cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

The phrase in verse 10, "that you may walk worthy" or in some translations, "Live a life," translates from a single Greek word *peripatesai*, which literally means "to walk." But it is often used in Scripture to depict life in its outward expression.

To "walk worthy of the Lord," means to live a life that is commensurate with what the Lord has done for us and is to us. It also implies acting in conformity with our union with Christ, and with His purpose for our lives.

The ultimate aim of knowing the will of God, and living a worthy life, is so that we may please God in every way. The Greek word for "please" (*aresko*) suggests an attitude of mind that anticipates every wish. In verses 10-12, Paul expresses four of the elements that please God as: bearing fruit, growing, being strengthened, and giving thanks.

The ultimate pleasure of God is for us to have the humble state of mind that desires to please Him in righteousness even before He asks us to do something; and that we learn to anticipate His will in everything.

Verses 10-14 underline some of the elements in, or constituent parts of, the kind of life that is pleasing to God. The leading ideas, expressed in Greek by four participles, are rendered in English by, "bearing fruit" (v. 10), "growing" (v. 10), "being strengthened" (v. 11), and "giving thanks" (v. 12). Grammatically, they all modify and express attendant circumstances of *peripatesai*—the word translated "live a life."

Bearing fruit means that as Christians we are to exhibit continual fruitfulness. The fruit itself consists in "every good work" or "active goodness of every kind." The apostle Paul greatly emphasizes good works in his letters. But he represents them as the fruit, not root, of a right relationship with God.

We should not only bear the fruit of good works in this life; we should at the same time

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experience personal spiritual improvement. This idea is expressed in the words "growing in the knowledge of God."

"Growing," like bearing fruit, is in the present tense and puts the emphasis on habitual action. In verse 10, the preposition "in" represents the knowledge of God as the sphere or realm in which spiritual growth takes place.

It is possible, however, to translate the phrase as "growing by the knowledge of God." When rendered like this, the text supports that the knowledge of God is the means by which we grow. I might add there, with the help of the Holy Spirit. What rain and sunshine are to the nurture of plants, the knowledge of God is to the growth and maturing of our spiritual lives.

"Being strengthened with all power," expresses a third element in the life pleasing to God. Christians are engaged in moral conflict with powers of darkness, and nothing short of the divine empowerment of the Holy Spirit can enable us to stand.

"Strengthened," which speaks of continuous empowerment, translates the same root word used in Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." This empowerment is according to God's glorious might. In other words, it is not proportioned simply to our need, but to God's abundant supply. God's supply of empowerment is unlimited; it is not a fuel that runs out.

The Greek behind the phrase "His glorious might" is more literally rendered "the might of His glory." Its basic meaning is physical brightness or radiance, but its exact meaning must be determined by its various contexts. Paul uses the term more than seventy times in his epistles. It is a very important term to him because it expresses such a central point of doctrine.

The fourth element of the worthy Christian life is gratitude, or thankfulness. One reason for giving thanks to God is that He has qualified us to share in the inheritance with the other saints.

The Greek word for qualified basically has in it the thought of making sufficient or competent, and can have a shading of the sense of empowering and authorizing. Its usage in this passage suggests that in ourselves we, as believers, have no personal ability for sharing in the heritage of God's people; we can experience this only as God qualifies us for such a tremendous privilege. In other words it is not something that we can earn of and by ourselves.

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To "share in" the inheritance of the saints is to have a portion of the heritage belonging to God's people. There is obvious symbolism to the inheritance of ancient Israel in the land of Promise and the share of the inheritance each Israelite had. As individual members of the God's church, we also have an inheritance, and each of us as a Christian has a spiritual share allotted to us.

The proof that God has qualified us for a share in the inheritance of the saints is that He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and is in the process of bringing us into His kingdom.

"Delivered" or "rescued" translates from the Greek word *errusato*, a word that means to liberate or save someone from something or someone. We have been rescued from the dark domain of the world that Satan rules.

God's purpose agrees with His will and pleasure. And, He has purposed that we will be saved; anyone else whom He calls, who want salvation, will receive it according to God's time frame. But, there are, in a sense, minimum requirements that must be met by everyone to receive the gracious gift of salvation from the Eternal Father and His perfect Son, Jesus Christ, according to their will!

These minimum requirements are: repentance of sin, obedience to God's law, faith and works, sacrifice and suffering, and love of God and our fellow human beings, thankfulness, and glorifying God continually. These requirements do not earn salvation for us.

Isaiah expresses the assurance that God's will *will* be done no matter what anyone else desires. No one has the power to hinder or prevent God from doing all that is pleasing to Him.

There is no better evidence that something should be done than that it is agreeable, or pleasing to God. There is no better security that something is right, than that He wills it. There is no more substantial and permanent ground of rejoicing with regard to anything, than that it is what God desires, loves, and wills.

Isaiah 46:10-11 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, "My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure," Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.

What a wonderful opportunity we have to be the recipients of God's pleasure. His pleasure flows from the essence of His character—His abundant love—so that we can have confidence and "we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose," as Paul encourages us in Romans 8:28.

Our spiritual inheritance includes the pleasure of God, characterized by love and goodness and peace.

King David had a gift for expressing the essence of the glory of God. In Psalm 16:11 he wrote, "You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."