

Taking Aim
At a Lifestyle, “Well Pleasing” to God
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When I was growing up, our house was the gathering place for all the kids in the neighborhood. (My mother’s philosophy was that if everybody was at our house, she never had to worry about where my sister and I were.) Everyone was welcome. Although we did not have a lot of money, my father was gifted at building things. He built a Ping-Pong table, a pool table, and a shuffleboard table in our basement for all our friends to come over and play.

One year I got a gift of a bow and arrow set. My Dad built a target to help hone my archery skills. He made a large box of heavy cardboard, densely stuffed with hay, and painted a big target on it. We set it up in the back yard. I would string my bow, put on my arm guard and take my arrows out in the back yard to practice. My aim began to improve as I shot at the target, over and over again. Once in a while I would hit that small round red circle in the center and get a bulls-eye. I was one happy kid when I hit the bulls-eye. (Being the first born in the family, I probably ran in the house and told my mom and dad to come out and see what I had done so they could share in my joy.)

Now over 50 years have passed. You’ll be happy to know that I am not writing this study to give archery lessons. I am writing about aiming for a different kind of target, and therefore the title of this study - “Taking Aim At a Lifestyle “*Well Pleasing*” to God.” Our main text is found in 2 Corinthians 5:9. Read it below, slowly and thoughtfully and let the words speak to you.

2 Corinthians 5:9 (NKJV)

*“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent,
to be well pleasing to Him.”*

The Apostle Paul wrote that he and Timothy, as one translation puts it, “*make it our life’s passion*” to aim at being pleasing to God. Pleasing God was the bulls-eye on their target. We can embrace the same attitude - to zealously take aim at living our lives being pleasing to God. When you and I hit the bulls-eye with a God-pleasing decision, thought or action, it can bring that same kind of pure child-like joy I had fifty years ago. Only this time the joy we share is with our heavenly Father.

My heart’s desire, as I am sure it is yours, is to be like Jesus who speaking of the Father, said in John 8:29, “... *I always do those things that please Him.*” However, since you and I are not Jesus, as much as we aim to please God and walk in His will, we don’t “*always*” hit the bulls-eye. Our humanity prevents us from hitting the mark every time. It’s like trying to keep the law in the Old Testament. It is impossible. That is why Christ had to go to the cross for us. James 1:25 speaks of the perfect law of liberty, which makes us free in Christ. The Gospel is not about what we do or don’t do. It is about our righteousness in Christ. He has already fulfilled the law. We don’t have to work to do so. We live under grace. Romans 8:37-39 tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God. No one is going to snatch you from the hand of God (John 10:27-29).

Aiming at pleasing God is not about perfection. It is not about performance or following a set of rules. You cannot make God love you more (or less) by doing stuff. It is impossible for Him to love you more than He already does. God who “*first loved us*” (1 John 4:19) has already demonstrated His indescribable love on the cross of Calvary. **Romans 5:8 tells us that aiming to please God is about how we demonstrate our love for Him.** The Greek word for “aim” means, “to show affection for what is personally valued or honored.”¹

- Pleasing God is about a lifestyle of displaying our affection for God. It’s about valuing our journey of sanctification;² about obedience to honor God by doing the things He asks us to do.

¹ Strong’s 5389

² Mentoring Ministry – Theological Terms – Sanctification “To be separated from evil and set apart to God” “To progressively realize our potential in Christ.”

www.mentoringministry.com/resources-and-materials/theological-terms/sanctification/

- Pleasing God is about having the desire in our hearts to become more like Jesus and less like the world every day. It requires a teachable heart and a willingness to change, through the application of His Word, and by the power of His Spirit.

If we set our aim to please Him, we will find ourselves walking in His will. There is no better place to be. That is where all of God's "*magnificent promises*" are found. Although pleasing God, to some people, may seem like a lofty goal, the Word tells us that He has already given you and me everything we need to have a pleasing, worthy walk in partnership with Him.

2 Peter 1:3-4 (TPT)

"Everything we could ever need for life and complete devotion to God has already been deposited in us by his divine power. For all this was lavished upon us through the rich experience of knowing him who has called us by name and invited us to come to him through a glorious manifestation of his goodness. {4} As a result of this, he has given you magnificent promises that are beyond all price, so that through the power of these tremendous promises you can experience partnership with the divine nature, by which you have escaped the corrupt desires that are of the world."

God has done His part. He has given us "*everything we could ever need*" to hit the target, please Him, and walk joyously in His will. So what is our part? The first and essential step to pleasing God is to have faith in Him. We must believe. There is absolutely no other way to begin pleasing God.

Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV)

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

When we believe in Jesus and make Him the Lord and Savior of our lives, we have immediately started the journey of pleasing God. We have taken the first step and are ready to begin aiming

at our target of a lifestyle of doing so. Once we have made the determination in our hearts to aim to please God, how can we be more consistent in accomplishing this? Let's look at some essential elements in building and maintaining a lifestyle of pleasing God.

Essential Elements for Pleasing God

First Element: We determine that no matter what, we will choose God's will over our own will.

In John 5:30, Jesus says, *"I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me."* Jesus sought the will of the Father.

Ideally, God's will and our will should be the same. However that is not always the case. Every day we have decisions to make. We find ourselves at crossroads, in our minds, emotions and actions, where we have to choose which way to go. One signpost has an arrow pointing the way to "GOD'S WILL." The other signpost points towards, "MY WILL." What direction will we take? When the roads look equally as smooth, it's easy to choose "GOD'S WILL." But if the path to "MY WILL" looks like a nicely paved road that is straight as far as you can see and God's path appears steep, rocky, full of curves and turns that will take you to the unknown, which do you choose? Sometimes the choices are difficult to make.

- When I am offended or hurt, will I forgive or hold on to unforgiveness.
- When I am right and the other person is wrong, will I be gracious or arrogant?
- When worry tries to creep up on me will I choose the path of faith, or give in to fear?
- Will I be generous or greedy?
- Sometimes it's the little daily things, the "fly in the ointment." It can be as simple as will I hold my tongue or say something I'll regret? Other choices are more profound. Will I choose to love or hate?

The choices are infinite but the question is always the same. Will I

choose God's will or my will? If we want to please God we must choose, no matter how difficult, to stay on the path of God's will. When the Holy Spirit directs you to pray for someone, or tell them about Jesus, or exercise the gifts He has given you, will you do what God asks you to do? Remember those old cartoons when someone had an angel on one shoulder whispering in their ear and the devil on the other shoulder telling them to do the opposite? It's time to flick that devil off and step on him.

The ultimate goal is to consistently bring our will in line with God's will. Seize the opportunities given you every day. At times, it takes boldness and courage, but you will never be disappointed when you step out in faith and aim to please God. He is with you.

Isaiah 41:10 (NKJV)

"Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

Philippians 2:13 (NKJV)

"For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. "

Hebrews 13:20-21 (NKJV)

"Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant {21} make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

Dr. David Jeremiah³ has said, "The only real meaning in life can come from pleasing God." We can all be assured of a meaningful life if each and every day, we make bold decisions that please God, no matter what. Choose to follow God's will and not your own. Make your daily choices a demonstration of your love for

³ Dr. Jeremiah is Senior Pastor of Shadow Mountain Community Church in San Diego, California.

Him. What could be more meaningful?

Second Element: A second way we can be more consistent in our aim of pleasing God is to maintain a position of humility, regardless of the cost.

Humility is not easy to come by. Our pride is ready to rise up at a moment's notice. We judge, criticize, grumble, and we want things our way. Even Jesus asked God if it was possible for Him to have His way at Gethsemane as he faced going to the cross.

Matthew 26:39, 42 (NKJV)

"He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed saying, "Oh My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." ...{42} Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done."

Twice Jesus asked the Heavenly Father if it was possible to forgo what was about to happen. But in the next breath, Jesus said, *"nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."* Despite the cost, Jesus humbled Himself to do the will the God. Paul exhorts us to have the same mind as Christ.

Philippians 2:5-8 (NKJV)

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, {6} who... {6} made Himself of no reputation," and ...{7} "humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."

Jesus told us (Luke 9:23), *"...Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow Me."* If we desire above all else to be pleasing to Him and stay on the path of the will of God, we must humble ourselves daily; and follow Jesus. Stay as close as you can to Him. Do not allow space between you and the Lord. When the going got tough and Jesus was arrested, Peter *"followed Him at a distance."* (Matthew 26:58). The results for him were heartbreaking. He ended up denying Jesus; and *"went out and wept bitterly."* (Matthew 26:75).

Following Jesus at a distance will not yield the results you are looking for. Humility is a sure way to draw closer to God. Pride is a sure way to put distance between you and Him. Keep your aim focused on pleasing Him. Humble yourself. Place your faith and trust in Him. Be compelled by the love of Christ who died for us.

The first two elements of pleasing God are: [1] choose His will over our will, and [2] humble ourselves, regardless of the cost. These two elements position us for success. Next, we need some information. We need to:

Third Element: Discover and embrace what is pleasing to God. Ephesians 5:10 (NLT) tells us we have to “*carefully determine what pleases the Lord.*”

In order to please God you and I have to discover and embrace for ourselves what is pleasing to Him and reject those things that are not pleasing to Him.

Author Madeleine L'Engle tells a story about a “rabbi, renowned for his piety. He was unexpectedly confronted one day by one of his devoted youthful disciples. In a burst of feeling, the young disciple exclaimed, “My master, I love you!” The ancient teacher looked up from his books and asked his fervent disciple, “Do you know what hurts me, my son?”

The young man was puzzled. Composing himself, he stuttered, “I don't understand your question, Rabbi. I am trying to tell you how much you mean to me, and you confuse me with irrelevant questions.” “My question is neither confusing nor irrelevant,” rejoined the rabbi. “For if you do not know what hurts me, how can you truly love me?”

(Madeleine L'Engle in *Walking on Water*. Christianity Today, Vol. 30, no. 14. (2005))

How do we understand and make a distinction between what pleases God and what hurts God? In order to effectively do that, we must be “*spiritually minded.*”

Romans 8:5-8 (NKJV)

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. {6} For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. {7} Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. {8} So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

The Word is clear. When we think carnally we are at “*enmity*” or war with God and “*cannot please*” Him. When our aim is to please God, we can only reach our goal and hit the mark if we think spiritually and have the “*mind of Christ.*” (1 Corinthians 2:16b).

In order to have “the mind of Christ”, we need to change the way we think. We need to do some renovations in our mind. There are active steps to be taken to renovate your mind. Just like on HGTV’s Fixer Upper (a home improvement TV show), before you can build something new, you have to tear down and remove the old stuff. Renewing our minds will require some demolition of the old way of thinking and rebuilding our thought processes to be in line with the Word of God.

Romans 12:2 (NIV) says, “*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is - His good, pleasing and perfect will.*” That is such an encouraging Scripture. God tells us that we can discern His “*good, pleasing and perfect will.*” We can stop “*imitating the ideals and opinions of the culture around*”⁴ us. But it is up to us to follow His instructions. We have to renew our minds. How do we do that?

God has given us His Word and Holy Spirit to inwardly transform us and teach us. Scripture says, “*He will guide you into all truth.*” (John 16:13-15). He will empower us (Acts 1:8); walk with us and bear the “*fruit of the Spirit*” (Galatians 5:16, 22-26).

Spiritual wisdom is readily available from God.

⁴ The Passion Translation, from Romans 12:2.

James 1:5 (NKJV)

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

Proverbs 2:6 (NKJV)

“For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.”

We discover and embrace what is pleasing to God by renewing our minds, listening for His voice and stepping out in obedience. As we do this, we grow closer to God. Dr. Charles Stanley has said “We only have to travel 18” to hear from God. That’s the distance between our knees and the floor.” (a paraphrase) This brings us to our final element. It’s the fourth way we can be more consistent in our aim to please God:

Fourth Element: We must deepen our relationship with God.

Just like 50 years ago in my back yard, when I got closer to the target, it was easier to hit. When we continue to draw closer and closer to God, it is easier to build and maintain a lifestyle of being pleasing to Him.

Philippians 3:8a (NKJV)

“...everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

2 Peter 1:3 (AMP)

“For His divine power has bestowed on us [absolutely] everything necessary for [a dynamic spiritual] life and godliness, through true and personal knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.”

In order to please God and accomplish His will for our lives, we must continuously seek to know Him more. Our knowledge of God must be progressive and constantly growing. In 2 Peter 3:18, Peter prays that we “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*”

The New Testament uses the Greek word, “ginosko” to convey the idea of the “knowledge” of God or “knowing” God. It’s original meaning is “to know; a constant and progressive experience of knowing; an active relationship between the one who knows and the person or thing known (The Expanded Vine’s Expository Dictionary). Paul’s prayer for the Colossians (Colossians 1:9-10) also addresses this very issue. Turn over your handout. Bob developed this Colossian “Circle of Increase” to use with our Bible school students. It progressively takes you through the Scripture and continuously builds on itself. Let’s look at this. In order to make the diagram of this “Circle of Increase” more easily understood, I have I have taken it to the next page, so you can view it in its entirety.

Please go to the following page to see the “Circle of Increase” from Colossians 1:9-10.

Colossians 1:9-10 (NKJV) – A Circle of Increase

“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be (1.) filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; {10} that you may (2.) walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, (3.) being fruitful in every good work and (4.) increasing in the knowledge of God;”

1.

Scriptural Instruction:

Be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.”

Application:

Study the Word and receive revelation of the truth about Christ and the Gospel. Renew your mind.



2.

Scriptural Instruction:

“Have a walk worthy of the Lord.”

Application:

Examine your behavior. Take what you have learned and apply it. Walk out the changes that need to be made.

4.

Scriptural Instruction:

“INCREASE in the knowledge of God.”

Application:

You want to know more, and change more in order to be even more pleasing to God and more fruitful for His Kingdom.



3.

Scriptural Instruction:

“Fully pleasing Him being fruitful in every good work.”

Application:

Recognize the ways that you are being pleasing to God and being fruitful. Notice the differences in your life and the lives of those you are in relationship with. You now understand the value of the process.



This is an active process that results in a circle of continuing increase, working with the Holy Spirit to *“learn to know God better and better.”* (NLT). As we do our part, as we saw in Hebrews 13:21, God promises to work in us *“what is well pleasing to Him.”*

We have seen that the way we build and maintain a lifestyle of being pleasing to God is to (1) choose God’s will over our own, (2) humble ourselves, (3) discover and embrace what is pleasing to Him, and (4) deepen our relationship with Him. As we mature in Christ, by God’s grace, we can become more consistent at hitting the target of a lifestyle pleasing to God. As a result of consistently seeking to please Him, we can be confident that we will find ourselves making right choices, walking in His will, and finding real meaning in life every day.

As you read in the beginning of this study, the first step to pleasing God is to put your faith in Jesus Christ. If you have never made Jesus the Lord and Savior of your life, or if you have slipped away from Him, now is the time to take your first step in pleasing God. Repent of your unbelief, or repent of any sin that has taken you away from God. Make a heartfelt decision that from today forward, Jesus is your Lord and Savior; and your aim from now into eternity is to serve Him and please Him with your life.

I would like to close with a quote from my husband, Dr. Bob’s upcoming book, called *“Fresh and Flourishing - A contemplative Journey Through Psalm Ninety-Two.”*

“Fruitfulness is not accidental. It requires a purposefully targeted aim with which you try to impact the lives of particular people around you. Each time you take aim, it’s to be with the intent of providing God’s kind of love and grace with your actions. Just as a bowstring is drawn back to increase its power for the release of an arrow, God will freshly anoint you to be sent like an arrow into someone’s life. He will do this whether you are new to the Lord, or have walked with Him for a long time. In either case, you’ll hit the target, flourishing with a sharpness that’s never dulled by age, circumstances or anything else. You’re an explosion of hope, waiting to launch out into somebody’s world, as a testimony to the presence and power of God. For this purpose, you have been created and for this purpose you shall flourish.”

May we all *“make it our lives’ passion to live...pleasing to Him.”*
(2 Corinthians 5:9 - TPT)