

GROUP LEADER GUIDE

Pleasing God: The Will of God

Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-3



ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- April 18- Serve Saturday (Mobilization)
- April 25- Pregnancy Center Walk for life (Mobilization)
- April 26- Parent Info Meeting for Camp (Kids)

Check out the TJC Weekend Recap podcast for a more in-depth look at our sermons each week!

The podcast is available on all streaming platforms!

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: 1 Thess 4:1-3

STORY - I stayed off the radar for the first 4 weeks of bootcamp. But during our marksmanship qualification, I was the highest scoring marksman. We had 3 platoons in our troop/company and my Drill Sgt came up and asked me what platoon I was in. I told him, his. And he was shocked and said, "How do I not know who you are?" Because I went out of my way to do what I was told, followed instructions, and sought to stay out of the line of his anger. I wanted to avoid his displeasure. Or you could say: I sought to please him (them).

What does it mean to please someone? It is to discern what makes them happy and do it. It means to bring them joy, satisfaction, or approval through your actions, words, or character. It's aligning yourself with what they value and desire.

Many of us live each day (even if we don't know it or realize it) seeking to please people. Business owners seek to please customers. Spouses seek to please each other. Employees seek to please their boss. Children seek to please their parents. And if we're honest...we live our lives wanting to please God without knowing exactly what that requires. There is a sense in which we gauge at all times whether we're pleasing God or not.

And consider this, that God can be pleased or displeased is not in dispute. God is personal. He is not abstract. As we read the Scriptures we see constantly the descriptions of God's response to mankind's actions in the world.

- Genesis 38:10 — “What he did was displeasing in the sight of the Lord”
- Numbers 11:1 — “the thing was displeasing in the hearing of the Lord”
- 2 Samuel 11:27 — “the thing that David had done displeased the Lord”
- 1 Chronicles 21:7 — “God was displeased with this thing”

7 times in the book of Judges it says something was "evil in the sight of the Lord." 40+ times in 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles we hear that kind of language.

That we can please or displease God also implies a few other things. One, an objective standard established by God. God's pleasure or displeasure is related to our interaction with that standard. Second, a relationship. Whether you recognize it or not, you as a human being are born into a relationship with God. The fact that your life can please or displease God shows that you are entangled relationally with Him (and this is every human being). Think about it: I can't please Elon or Steph Curry because I'm not in any inherent relationship with them. But that is not true with God. And the base relationship I'm referring to here is God is our Maker/Creator. We are creatures that are accountable to Him.

So the question we're seeking to answer is: how can we please God? There's no one more *worth* pleasing than God. And considering that we will stand before Him one day to give an account, there is no one more *necessary* to please than God.

Scripture Exegesis: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-3

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification:

Notice, first off, that Paul is writing to Christians. He says, "I urge you in the Lord Jesus." He's about to exhort them on something in the Lord Jesus. These actions are things they ought to do "in Christ." Why is this so important? Because there are two different ways that we have to talk about pleasing God? This is key to grasp.

1. Positional Pleasing / Reconciling Pleasing

There is nothing we can do to please God apart from trust and faith in Jesus Christ. Without faith, we cannot please God (Romans 14). Anything we can do if we are not "in Christ" is filthy rags. We can never please God without being covered in the righteousness of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21).

If we have put your faith in Christ, you are reconciled to God. You are no longer an enemy. You are no longer an outcast at enmity with Him. In Christ, you're accepted. You are reconciled. Your positional standing with God pleases Him.

Now, maybe you're sitting here thinking, 'I'm not sure I qualify for that first kind of pleasing — the positional kind. I'm not sure I'm 'in Christ.'" If that's you, hear this: That's exactly where you start. You don't clean yourself up to get in. You come as you are, and Christ makes you clean. The door is open. The question is whether you'll walk through it.

But Paul is addressing here in our passage the second kind. This is what we're looking at in this series.

2. Practical Pleasing / Relational Pleasing

There is the practical living as new creatures in Christ where we seek to please Him. This talks about our relational stance. So in this sense, we can both have God's ultimate pleasure in us because we are in Christ, but in another sense, not be living a life practically that is pleasing to Him. And if we belong to Christ, we should want to please God.

Paul had instructed the Christians in Thessalonica how they ought to "walk." This means how they ought to live each day. This is their life. He then says, "to please God." Their walks ought to please God. And he says that they are, but they are to do so "more and more." That's really important, gang. We want to live lives that please God and we want to keep doing it more and more.

He then says, "Hey guys, this is the will of God for you...your sanctification." This means: your growth in holiness. Your growth in maturity. Remember, for God to be pleased with us means He looks at our lives and says, "Yes. This is what I made you for." You see in Christ, we're clothed in righteousness, but then we live to grow in practical obedience to please God. Our sanctification turns our lives into those that God says, "Yes."

Positional pleasing gets you in the family. Practical pleasing shows you validates you're there.

****ILLUSTRATION - Positional and Practical****

For God to be pleased with us means He looks at our lives and says, "Yes. This is what I made you for."

So how do we do that? What is the will of God for us so that we can be sanctified more and more and please God? We will look at specifics in the next two weeks. But I want to give some general principles today that can start us down that road.

Application:

1. Ask daily: "What pleases You?"

This is a posture. It's a heart posture that leads to life actions. I want to consider this question in everything.

2. Bring everything to Him

Don't just bring your sins to God and ask forgiveness. Bring your decisions, your calendar, your relationships. Submission to God in everything is a habit we build. Our prayer lives should cover daily life decisions and decisions and happen throughout our day, not just in a morning devotion.

3. Measure progress, not perfection.

Paul says, "more and more." God's pleased with the direction, not just the destination. On this side of Heaven, you'll never reach perfection.

Close:

Here's what I want you to remember when you walk out of here: You don't have to guess what pleases God. He's told you. And more than that...if you're in Christ, He's already pleased with you. So now you obey not to earn anything, but because you've been reconciled.

PRAY

- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?
- What is a sin you have been struggling with that you need to repent of?



Discussion

1: Pleasing God Defined – Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:1

Question: What does it practically mean to “please God,” and how would we explain to a nonbeliever that this is different from simply trying to be a good person?

Leader Note: Help the group move from vague morality to relational obedience—pleasing God is personal, not just ethical.

2: Positional vs. Practical Pleasing – Read: 2 Corinthians 5:21

Question: Why is it essential to understand that we cannot please God apart from being “in Christ”? How does confusing positional pleasing (being accepted in Christ) with practical pleasing (how we live) affect our walk with the Lord?

Leader Note: Clarify that positional pleasing is the foundation—our acceptance before God is secured in Christ alone. Practical pleasing flows from that identity, not toward it. Confusing the two leads either to pride (earning) or discouragement (failing).

3: Growing “More and More”

Question: Why is spiritual growth meant to be ongoing rather than static? Why do many people treat salvation like the end goal instead of the starting point?

Leader Note: Encourage progress mindset. Growth is expected, not optional.

4: Bringing Everything to God – Read: Proverbs 3:5–6

Question: What areas of life are easiest to bring before God, and which are hardest? (Work, finances, family, suffering, relationships) Why is this so?

Leader Note: Expect honest answers. This reveals where trust is lacking.

5: Progress, Not Perfection – Read: Philippians 1:6

Question: How does focusing on progress rather than perfection change the way we handle failure in our walk with God? What are some unhealthy habits we fall to when we don’t handle failure appropriately?

Leader Note: This should lead to freedom, not complacency. Growth includes failure.

6: Living to Please God – Read: Romans 12:1–2

Closing Prayer: Close the group by intentionally praying over areas of your life that may be displeasing to God, asking for His grace to grow in obedience and to walk in a way that honors Him



LOOK AHEAD

- **BUILD UP | SEND OUT | REAP THE HARVEST**

- How are you making yourself known at church this week?
- How are you growing to know Christ better this week?
- How are you making Christ known this week?

- **PRAYER**

- **Pray over any request from your group members.**
- **Pray for our team:** Ally Johnson, Director of Creative & Communication
- **Pray for our short-term teams:**
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- **Pray for our long-term units on the mission field:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Browns
- **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>