

# Pleasure

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[ 0 : 00 ] So I want to use this Sam as a foundation, as a basis for looking at the subject for a few moments this evening of pleasure. We looked at work last week and the young folk went on to study it in the questions and then we are looking at pleasure this evening.

I think sometimes as Christians we associate pleasure with sin, exclusively, the whole idea of guilt, the guilt that goes with pleasure, and that we struggle with the idea of seriously looking at the subject from a spiritual point of view.

We think maybe of pleasures that are a bit trivial, maybe a bit sinful. We come from a tradition with deep running principles of work and of self-denial and of sacrifice.

I am always preaching here about suffering for Jesus Christ. Maybe we have a tradition of belonging to a denomination which I heard, not our denomination that has to be said, but I heard a denomination described this week as grim, joyless and uncompromising.

Possibly that is sometimes what we think of Christianity and of our Christianity, grim, joyless and uncompromising.

[ 1 : 27 ] That of course is unbalanced. There is truth, huge and significant truth that maybe needs to be emphasised more than ever today about the reality of suffering and commitment and self-sacrifice.

But it is part of the picture of our Christian understanding. And anything that is unbalanced is ultimately unhealthy. Any extremes of truth are unhealthy.

We must not take one aspect of the Christian truth and exclude other aspects of the Christian truth. We must take them in balance and we must take them together. And we need to recognise that in Jesus Christ we have this great foundation of life that has relevance in work, which we looked at before, and also relevance in pleasure, which we are going to look at this evening.

And that is hugely important. And I want to set it in the context of this Sam. And this is very similar in a sense to the setting of last week's as well. And it would probably be the setting for every one of them.

I hope I will try and be different in each one. But the setting, the foundation of our lives as Christians is the same. However then we go on to apply truth to different areas of our life.

[ 2 : 43 ] Because this Sam really speaks about two kind of groups of people or two ways of living. One is being at rest in God and the other is it being on the run from God.

And that really expresses the kind of different attitude we will have to pleasure. We will have a different attitude to pleasure and the seeking of pleasure if we are at rest with God than we will if we are on the run from God.

Verse 6 kind of is in the middle of the Sam. It really expresses where the Samus is coming from. The Samus is speaking about praise and joy and contentment and pleasures belonging to God. That is his. And he has got this lovely picture here of someone who is at rest with God. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.

Surely I have a delightful inheritance. The Samus is really the picture most of the time. It is a picture of a really happy believer. And it is good for us to think about that sometime.

[ 3 : 53 ] Because we do tend to be morose. And we do tend to think always of the difficulties and the struggles and the battles of being a Christian. But it is wrong that we cease to think about the joys and the pleasures and the privileges that are ours as Christians.

And here is the believer who is at rest with God and he has got a happy spiritual home. This boundary line, that is the kind of the fence lines of his home.

Where is the houses and the gardeners. The kind of boundary lines of his spiritual home are really good. They have fallen in pleasant places. He has got a great inheritance. He loves being where he

is spiritually in this kind of living environment with God as his Lord and Saviour.

It is really a picture of life with God. That is, his home life is good with God. He has settled and he has got a good foundation in life. And he says in verse 1 that he is someone who has taken his refuge in God.

And in verse 3 he speaks about the one who is glorious fellowship with God in his company. And in verse 8 he says, the Lord is always before me because he is at my right hand.

[ 5 : 05 ] I shall not be shaken. So you have got this picture of this sort of home, spiritual home environment with boundary lines. And it is an inheritance that, you know, the Bible speaks about our spiritual inheritance.

That we belong to God, we have got life with God. God is my refuge, I am in fellowship with God. God is the one with whom I have continual company. And that is the foundation of this guy's life.

He is at risk, he is in relationship with God. And not only has he got this great inheritance now, but at the end of the Psalm he speaks about the inheritance that he has got forever with God.

He says, you will fill me with joy in your presence with eternal pleasures at your right hand. And it is the key of redemption really, isn't it, for us, that it is not just a good place to live now, living with God and the company of God.

But we have got eternal pleasures to look forward to in this company forever. Yes, we recognise just now we have still to go through the valley of death. We know that we have got opposition.

[ 6 : 07 ] We know there is tears. We know there are struggles. We looked this morning at some of the heart problems that we have, the troubles and the doubts and the desires that quench or that choke the seed, the good seed of the word.

We saw that this morning. But let's not forget the delightful place that we are in as Christians. Let's not forget the pleasure that we have in our relationship with them, and a pleasure that is going to be an eternal pleasure with them.

And that spiritual foundation, that root of relationship and being in company with God and having a refuge in God and learning from God and loving God through Jesus Christ, that is going to be the root from which we work out pleasure in our lives.

It comes from this relationship with God. That is the perspective we need to have. Look at what the Bible says about our attitude to pleasure and pleasurable things that we do.

We need to have this perspective. We need first not to seek pleasure as an end in itself and seek pleasure as a way of being happy, but seek God for the way of being happy.

[ 7 : 23 ] When we find spiritual prosperity with God, then we will find that we have the right attitude to seeking pleasure in our lives. And when we know God's foundation, that relationship with God, there should be for us in our spiritual life laughter, joy, fun and happiness.

I'm not going to say it's all the time, but these are absolute, not just legitimate, but significant and important parts of being Christian that all comes from this root of pleasure in our lives.

And that is because we are people. If we are Christians, we are at rest with God. We've made our peace with God, and we know that our inheritance is in a beautiful place, and we've got future pleasures within.

So there's that, but there's also the picture in the Psalm of running from God in verse 4. And he just quickly mentions that I'm not going to go and try and explain verses 5 and 6.

Well, verse 5. No, sorry, the second half of verse 4. To be honest, I have no idea what it means. But verse 4 talks about the sorrows of those who will increase, who run after other gods.

[ 8 : 41 ] And isn't it completely the opposite picture? He's speaking about pleasures and joy and delight, and having a good time with God and being in his inheritance, being there rightfully. And then he speaks about those who are not rooted, who don't have an inheritance, whose lines aren't falling in pleasant places because they're on the run, and they're running from God, and they're running after other gods, and they're using these gods to try and find pleasure and happiness in their lives.

It's the opposite picture. It's a picture of people who are always on the run, always seeking, always dissatisfied, ultimately full of sorrow because they're chasing gods that won't bring them ultimate and complete pleasure.

It's disconnected pleasure. And isn't that so often what we're looking for? It's pleasure apart from God. Okay, Sunday, that's my church day.

That's when I go to church, and then I read my Bible, and that's my church stuff. But when I want to have a good time, let's unplug my spirituality and my relationship with God, and I'll try and find pleasure disconnected from God, because there's no pleasure in being connected with God. And that's sometimes the idea we've had. So we're on the run, and we're trying to find pleasure, but we're trying to find it disconnected with God, and that's the position that people who aren't Christians are in.

[10:00] We think God's dull, God's boring, God's for old people or for just before you die, and I'm just going to live and have good times and pleasure, and we're on the run, and we seek pleasure from all kinds of idolatrous pursuits, idolatrous pleasurable pursuits.

And we see pleasure as escapism. Do you see the pursuit of pleasure as escapism as a Christian? Escapism from the drudgery of your miserable rotten life?

Can you not just wait for a Friday night for the pleasure of escaping the drudgery of life? Is pleasure for you an end in itself? The rest of the stuff you do is just in order so that you can have pleasure at the end of it.

It's just self-indulgent, or is it something that is unfulfilling, because it's disconnected from God. That's the picture here of the person who is running after other gods.

They haven't taken refuge in Jesus Christ and in the Lord God, and ultimately the picture is their sorrows will increase. You'll always be on the run. You'll always be looking for more and more pleasures to satisfy, but none of these pleasures satisfy when we are disconnected from God.

[11:19] So the foundation of thinking about or looking at pleasure is always settling first where your identity is. Our identity needs to be in Jesus.

That's when we'll really be able to enjoy life. That's when we'll really be able to enjoy pleasures, because pleasures come from God, and pleasures in the context that God gives us to them are for our joy and happiness and contentment.

So just briefly, some principles with regard to pleasure beyond this, Sam. This Sam speaks about the foundation and the pleasures that ultimately, eternally, we will have with him.

I want to look just at one or two basic truths to consider that young people might think a bit more later on. I think the Bible makes clear that God says that life is more than work.

So if we're looking at work and then we're looking at pleasure or leisure, rest, however we describe it, God makes clear that life is more than work. That's clear from creation, isn't it? The model of creation where we have a work-play balance, a work-rest balance.

[12:31] And that God on that seventh day rests from all that he's done. He stops doing what he's done, and he contemplates the beauty of what he's done. And it's just a model of what life needs to be like, that there is work, but there must be a cut-off point from work, where we change direction, where we stop working, where we look for refreshment, where we look for pleasure and joy in what God has made.

You see, He's made us more than utilitarian people. We're not just to work and sleep and die. He's given us pleasure. You know, He's given us beauty.

He's given us food to enjoy, not just food to give us energy. Isn't there pleasure in all of these things? Beauty and contemplation and consideration of the world that He's given us.

And simply being pleased to enjoy that is part of what it is to be a Christian. I'll have the first quote up, and I'll try and flick them on from then on myself.

And there's this lovely personification of wisdom in Proverbs. We just speak about the wisdom of God. I, wisdom, was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in His presence, rejoicing in the whole world, and delighting in mankind.

[13:44] And it's a picture, just of the pleasure that comes from having God's wisdom and delighting in His world and delighting and rejoicing in His creation and in the mankind of the creation that we're in.

So we recognize that there is, to life, more than work. There is rest and there is leisure and pleasure that goes along with that and the contemplation of His creation that's important.

The Old Testament gives a pattern of that, even in its religious rituals, because there's lots of festivals in the Old Testament religion.

Lots of breaks from routine. Lots of times when people had communal retreats, where they had times of feasting and fellowship and celebration and joy, and where the Bible is full of convocations and hospitality and meals and marriages.

Very often it was in the context of worship, and that's good and right. But there was this general reality and general movement in Scripture that pleasures an important part of God's creation and celebration and rejoicing and a break from routine and a movement away from work.

[15:06] And social intercourse together in pleasure was very important. Then we come to Jesus. No, you put the next one on. I'll just ask you to put the next one on each time, if that's not working. Is it working?

Well, anyway, the text is Luke 7:34, which we know well. Now, we speak about Jesus, don't we, from Isaiah 53, as a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering.

We know that and we recognize that, but we also must recognize that he was seen by those who opposed him as one who was a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. But interestingly, isn't it what it says? But wisdom, the wisdom that's personified from Proverbs. Wisdom is proved right by all her children. And Jesus was a man of sorrows. Jesus had this huge burden with which he came to deal with the sins of humanity, but he was also the one who created an abundance of wine at the wedding, who did so much of his evangelizing and his speaking and his teaching around meals and in homes, who displayed humor in his parables, who loved the company of children.

[16:27] And usually when children love grown-ups, it's because grown-ups have kind of magnetic, the barriers are down, and they're childlike in the way that they can relate to children.

And if people are stiff or uncomfortable with children, children notice that very quickly and will kind of tend to recoil or move away from it. But here was Jesus who invited the children near to him, and he loved his company.

And can you believe that he wasn't playing with them? That he didn't just laugh with them and there wasn't pleasure and joy and happiness in what he did, always around the table of his friends.

And then that whole idea of pleasure and rejoicing, and I know it's in the company of God also, comes forward with the future. And the future pictures that were given were, there's no more tears. Can you see no more tears, but lots of laughter, lots of joy, lots of pleasure, no more suffering, no more sacrifice. But as we read in the Sabbath eternal pleasures at his right hand, the next couple of quotes, we've got them, Hello, Planet Earth, yep, Job 21, Surely God does not reject one who is blameless or strength in the hand of evildoers.

[17:46] He will yet fill your mouth with laughter and your lips with shouts of joy. And the next one, Zechariah, great, Zechariah is tremendous. This is what the Lord Almighty says once again, as it looks forward to better days in the kingdom, men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets in juice of each of them with a cane in their hand because of the age.

The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing their lovely picture, ordinary, everyday picture of pleasure and of joy. So you have indications of this whole, wholesome aspect of living the Christian life, which is, yes, a life of self-denial and a life of suffering and a life of recognition of the seriousness of all our sin and our need of Christ.

But it's also a life of having been set free to enjoy God and to enjoy His world and to enjoy what is good in His world.

And we see that as we enjoy these things, thanking God for what He has given us and as we enjoy pleasure in that context.

So briefly, what does God want us to recognize if we're going to think about this subject? No, next one. Yeah, nope, next one forward. James 1:17, every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows.

[19:17] All good gifts come from God to enjoy. Remember that. He gives us enjoy. Man she fends is to glorify God and enjoy Him and enjoy Him through His gifts.

We don't need to go through life with that. What is it? Grim, a joyless, uncompromising spirit? Why is it that people will think of Christians as grim, joyless and uncompromising?

When we have all things to enjoy and when we recognize every good and perfect gift coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, a good Father who loves us and whom we can thank for His good gifts in our lives and enjoy them like nobody else can enjoy them.

But we're also to enjoy them next slide to the glory of God. So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Whether you eat or drink, isn't it interesting? Whether you eat or drink, it's not. Whether you pray or read the Bible here, how significant and important these are. But whether you eat or drink or

whatever you do, the ordinary things of life, the eating and drinking all the whatever it is we do, do it all to the glory of God. And that surely includes pleasure.

[ 20 : 38 ] Due to the glory of God. If your pleasure pursuits can't be given, can't be taken to God and God can't be thanked for them, we shouldn't be engaged in them, should we?

If our identity is in Christ, we can take from our identity in Christ and we can enjoy freely what He's given us and we can pray and thank Him for that.

We can be guided by Him, we can ask, Lord, guide me into the type. The young people, I'm going to ask them. When was the last time that you prayed about the pleasure pursuits you have?

Lord, is this a good and a wise thing to do? Don't be spiritual schizophrenics. You have this kind of holy living in the church and then when it comes to pleasure, well, you just do what everyone else is doing without any thought of whether God approves or whether God thinks this is good use of pleasure, whether we're making an idol of it, whether we're chasing it, may it be that we do all that we do to the glory of God.

And that can be a great thing. You know, there's nothing better than being able to pray in the middle of a game of five aside, say, thank you, God, just for being here and for the privilege of running around, kicking a stupid leather football hot air in it.

[ 22 : 01 ] Thank you. Thank you for the pleasure of that. Thank you for the legs to run. Thank you for the skills and abilities or lack of them. Thank you. Is that a great thing to do?

For me, it's a great thing. Maybe it might not be five aside, but whatever it happens to me, if you can take God and recognize him and thank him, that's a great thing. It's a wonderful thing to be able to enjoy his pleasures.

You know, isn't it? Eric Little who said that when he ran, when he ran, I feel God's pleasure. Isn't that a beautiful phrase? Yes, yes, I'm going to be a mystery in China, but when I run, I feel God's pleasure because he could eat and drink, do whatever he did to the glory of God.

So we do it to God's glory. We do recognizing all gifts are from him. We do it also, numbering our days. We maybe looked at that last week with regard to work, but it's the same truth, the same reality for leisure also, isn't it?

We do need to number our days. The biblical pattern is six and one of work and rest. We do have to work, and sometimes that can be tough.

[ 23 : 19 ] It's a command, but it's good and it's right. And we don't just work in order to have leisure and pleasure at the end of it. Work is God glorifying, but pleasure is commanded.

Leisure is commanded, rest is commanded. We need to stop. It's important to switch off. There's nothing pleasing to God about being a workaholic.

We're to enjoy, we're to laugh, we're to luxuriate in His goodness through Christ and do it simply for its own good.

Not always doing something for a reason. We don't always go to the gym in order that I need to keep fit. We always read, because I find reading relaxing, but at the same time I'll learn lots of things.

It's not just about, it doesn't have to be utilitarian. There doesn't have to be a reason behind it. We can simply enjoy for the simple pleasure of enjoying and not feel guilty about that in life.

[ 24 : 24 ] It's important remembering and recognizing that, numbering our days. I guess within that the opposite is true that we don't live just to have a good time and to have pleasurable experiences.

Sometimes it'll be great to be in holiday all the time, but it wouldn't really, would it? You don't sound that convinced, but it wouldn't, would it?

Because we need to increase that balance and we need to recognize that pleasure isn't an end in itself. It isn't the point of living. The point of living is the glory of God.

And we thank Him for what He's given us. We thank Him for work and we thank Him for pleasure. I think also that, and this is an interesting principle, the young people might want to discuss it a bit more, I think very often biblically the idea of pleasure is pleasure and community.

Enjoying God and enjoying God's creation together. The Lord rested on the seventh day and he rested with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Enjoyed the pleasure of their own company.

[ 25 : 31 ] And I do think we need to fight a little bit against the temptation towards individuality all the time in leisure and in pleasure.

And it's about our individual pleasure. Maybe more so than ever and you might want to discuss that. I think pleasure is often best enjoyed in company.

About a deepening fellowship in Christian company. That's why when we do things we don't always worship formally together, but we just enjoy each other's company because that's part of the pleasure of being Christians together.

If you think back to some of the best times of your Christian life, when were they? They were maybe in corporate worship, they were maybe at camp, they were maybe at a weekend away, or a Christian wedding, or when we had a kind of caley together in someone's house.

These are great pleasures. That's about making memories, isn't it? People talk about making memories. Sitting in front of a computer, it's not really making a memory playing computer games all day.

[ 26 : 37 ] You're not really going to remember that unless you get sick. You have to get healed. Making memories is usually about being with people. About enjoying experiences together with people.

That's the memories that we think of most. That picture comes through the Bible all the time. So much of the social joy and pleasure in worship was together.

I wonder if sometimes the choice of our pleasures we should consider individual or social activity together.

Lastly and briefly, God will always have us to be aware of the dangers of the pursuits of pleasure. We need to be aware of the danger of seeking pleasure without Him.

From the Psalm that we read, the sorrows of those who will increase who run after other gods, those who look for pleasure and satisfaction and the fulfilling of desire without God.

[ 27 : 44 ] You're seeking in your pleasure life, your pleasure pursuits, the things you do to relax and enjoy. Are you doing them without God? Is it escapism from a dull and boring and horrible God?

Is it the part of your life that you really look forward to where God isn't there? You're running then from the wrong idea of who your God is.

You're running away from Him, you're running towards Him and taking pleasure with you. Because otherwise it will end up in sorrow. If pleasure to you is about pursuing life without God, then consider what He says.

But also making pleasure your God, which is similar. The hedonism, the hedonism of this age, the relentless pursuit of pleasure.

People are finding their identity, not in their work, not in their relationship with Christ. But in party sensual, that simply life is about pleasure. Work is about earning enough to have pleasure.

[ 28 : 51 ] It's all about pleasure. Self-centred, indulgent. Grafying the desires of the sinful nature is the goal of life.

For many people it's that pleasure. That's what I want. That's what I'm looking for. That is what will give me satisfaction in life. It's kind of the rich fool that Jesus speaks about who's making bigger burns.

So he can hold all his crops, so he can eat, drink and be merry and not do any more work. Because that's where his identity is, in just having a life of pleasure and pleasure. Nothing else matters.

Making pleasure your God will always end up dissatisfaction and sorrow. Because pleasure can't be God. Pleasure can't give you what God gives.

And we mustn't seek life as simply the pursuit of pleasure. And then within that unprincipled pleasure, making pleasure your God or seeking pleasure without God or unprincipled pleasure, that is excessive pursuit of pleasure out of its biblical context.

[ 30 : 00 ] Pleasure itself out of its biblical context. Sex, not within the parameters of a loving marriage.

Pleasure that is impure. Pleasure that's maybe isolationist, unsociable. Pleasure that is absolutely passive, just entertain me.

So really passive society that we increasingly live in where everything needs to be done to us and give it to rather than imaginative or contemplative or rejoicing and joyful in what God has done and extravagant and all these different things.

And unprincipled maybe in the philosophies that our pleasures take on board and maybe ungodly or unprincipled philosophies, whether it's the music we listen to, the arts that we're involved in and the films that we watch, whatever it might be.

They're constantly feeding our minds with things that are not glorifying in any way to God that can't be justified. So really what I would conclude with two words.

[ 31 : 13 ] What is thank God? The two words are thank and think. I think in the pursuit of pleasure that's very important and also in our understanding of work. Thank God for what he's done.

Let's not be grim, joyless and uncompromising. Thank God for this world. Thank God for pleasure. Thank God for food. Thank God for laughter. Thank God for joy. Thank God for all his good gifts. Give him the glory. But can I also ask you to think? Think about the pleasure that you are engaged in that's taking up your time. Think about it. Think about how you're spending your time. Think about the balance of your time. Think about what time you're giving to God in it. Think about whether you can ask for God's blessing on what you do in your pleasure. Think. Be thinking Christians, please.

We've got to be thinking Christians. We've got to take Christ into our lives. And you've got to take Christ and I've got to take Christ. So often we're just unthinking and we accept what everyone else is doing just because everyone else is doing it.

[ 32 : 11 ] But let's be thinking. And let's be thinking. And that will enable us more and more, I hope, to really enjoy being Christians and enjoy the pleasures that are in his company and pleasures that will be eternal for us in his company.

There are some questions that the young folk will be discussing. I think there's maybe some excellence there. You can put them on if you want for the screen. There's a couple of the questions. And I think there's maybe some printed out at the back as well for people to take if they want them. So it's just a little look at it through some of the passages and discussing them together. I hope you can come up to the house for that this evening.