

Pleasing God

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I'm going to start with verse 13 and go through 16. 1st Thessalonians, chapter two, verse 13 through 16. And Paul says to the Thessalonians, and we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. For you, brothers, became imitators of the church of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out and displeased God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles, that they might be saved, so, as always, to fill up the measure of their sins.

But the wrath of God has come upon them at last. Father, we thank you for your word. I pray that this morning that your word would speak into each one of our hearts. God, prepare us to live in a way that pleases you, that you would be pleased with our lives and the things that we're doing for you. Father, I pray that you would use your word to speak to each one of our hearts.

We're just grateful, Father, for your work in us. We give you the glory, the credit, and we know it's a result of your spirit working in us. And we thank you for that. So, Father, we pray as Jesus taught us. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and

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the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

You may be seated.

I want to do a little survey this morning before we start, and we'll do a show of hands. How many of you, when you were growing up, how many of you were taught manners?

I hope that as you had kids, you also were teaching manners to those kids. That's important. We see a lack of manners today. But one of the things that we often teach when we teach manners is to tell our children to say please and thank you. Please and thank you.

That's a good thing, isn't it? Why is that a good thing? To say please and thank you.

It shows appreciation.

It shows respect for other people. And it does a lot of things. But one of the things that it is teaching the people who say please and thank you is realizing that they don't deserve the blessings that are coming their way, that it's a gift that someone has given them that they couldn't demand. When you say please, you're asking someone to give you something that you can't demand of them, that you may not even deserve. One great example of that in the Bible was Nehemiah.

You may remember he got word that Jerusalem was in ruins. And God put it on his heart to want to go back to Jerusalem and to restore the walls, the protection for Jerusalem. But he didn't have the right to do that. So he prayed and he prayed and he prayed that somehow the king's heart would want to help him in what he was doing. And so finally it says he got the opportunity to speak to the king.

And twice he said, if it pleases the king, may I? And it did please the king. The king gave him permission to go. But even more than that, he gave him the resources to accomplish the purpose. The king was pleased with him and wanted to help Nehemiah and his burden and concern for his home city, Jerusalem.

Ultimately, though, it was a result that God was pleased with Nehemiah. And he worked through a human agent to provide the resources to do the work that God had done him. Jesus. Well, if God is pleased with you, and I pray that he is, if God is pleased with you, he will provide all of the resources you need to accomplish his work in your life. He is not limited, and he can provide if he is pleased with you.

Jesus illustrated this in his own life and mission several times as you read through Matthew at his baptism and when he was on the mountain one other time, it says, a voice came from heaven. God spoke out of heaven, and he said it to his son. But others heard this. He said, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. The Father was well pleased with the Son because the Son came to do the work of the Father, and he was pleased with that.

If you're a follower of Jesus, and I pray that everyone here, our passion should be to please the Father. That should be our desire. It should be the ultimate goal of our life, that God would be pleased with us. Why is this important? If God is not pleased with you, what is he?

We read this morning this passage, displeased. Displeased that we all have people that we displeased for one reason or another. Might have been us, it might have been them. But I guarantee you do not want to displease the heavenly Father, whom all the blessings in life come from, we either live to please the Father, or we live to please ourself. There is no intermediate in that, either living to please the Father or living to please self.

Paul said in verse four of chapter two, we didn't read that this morning, but he said that he lived not to please men, but to please God, who tests our hearts on the other side of that. And read a little later in verse 15, there are those who displeased, please God and oppose all mankind. And you may say, well, what's the big deal? Well, the big deal it says in verse 15, it says, the wrath of God has come upon them at last. If we please the father, his blessing is on our life.

If we displease the father, his wrath is upon our life. If you're not living to please God, the wrath of God is in your life, whether you realize it or not. You may not sense it, you may not see it, you may not feel it, but eventually that's what will happen in life. And so I want to look at this this morning. How can we please the father?

I believe there's three elements in this. First of all, we need a new will, a will to please God, which essentially means a new heart. Second, we need the word of God to work in our lives to show what it is we can do to please the father. And third, that should result in doing the work of the father. But he has something for each one of us to do.

Work, will, word, work. So, first of all, we need a will, a new will, a new heart. And the thing about the heart, man is unique in the sense that he was created in the image of God. Every one of us was created in the image of God. Adam was created perfect, and he had the ability to love the Lord his God, with all of his heart.

He was placed in the garden. It says in chapter two of Genesis that he was to do the work of upkeeping the garden. He wasn't just there to enjoy it. He actually had something that God wanted him to do. And of course, we know that Adam chose to disobey God and sin to go his own way to please himself.

As a result of that, sin came into the world. As a result of that, death, came into the world and no longer having a heart for God, to please him, to work for him, to do what he asked him to do. And the issue is always the heart. That's the primary issue. Jeremiah 17 nine says the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked and that's all of mankind.

Unless God does something to change that. That's where everyone is. The only remedy for our sin stayed heart is a new heart. And that's why Jeremiah prophesied, I will give them a new heart to know that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart. Ezekiel adds to this when he says that I will give you a new heart and a new spirit, I will put within you, and I will remove the heart of stone for your flesh and give you a heart of flesh, and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and to be careful to obey

my rules.

That's why when Jesus was talking to Nicodemus, he said, I tell you the truth. Unless a man is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. And people question, what does it mean to be born again? Well, one of the things it means is he gives you a new heart, a heart to love God, a heart to desire him above all things, a heart to want to do the work that he has given you. When someone repents of their sin and puts their faith in Jesus Christ, he gives them a new life, a new heart, a new desire to please the father.

And if we haven't got that new heart, we can't do that. It's only as God does the work in our life, and it ends up with a new will we will to do the work of God in our life. That leads to the second thing. We need God's word to reveal to us what pleases him. One thing to say, I want to please God.

What do I have to do to please him? What do I have to not do to not displease him? That's why verse 13 is such a powerful verse. It says that we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God which is at work in you who believe. When someone becomes a Christian, it is because the word of God has spoken to their heart and revealed that Jesus Christ is the only way.

And it gives us the way back to the Father, this relationship with him, where we desire him more than we desire anything else. But we have to grow in that, and we grow in that as we hear the word. And the more we hear the word, the more we apply the word in our lives, the more we're going to see the work of God in our lives. Romans 10:17 says that faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes through the word of Christ. That's why it's important for every one of us that are believers to come and hear the word of God.

We could be doing a lot of different things this morning. Could be sleeping. For one thing, they're watching the mariners play in Kansas City. But we choose to hear the word of God because the word of God is powerful and works in our lives. It brings us to

Christ, but it's also powerful to accomplish his work in each one of us.

And that's why it's important to read the word, to study the word, to meditate on the word, to let the word work in our lives.

We used to say, I'm in the wrong spot. Here we go.

The goal of reading the word is to know Christ, to know his ways, to know what pleases the Father. And the more we know that, the more we're going to accomplish his purposes in our life. The word of God is meant to teach us about God and to train us to be followers Jesus Christ. It reveals the thoughts and intents of the heart and dealing with the basic issues that we all face in life that keep us from really glorifying the Lord. I think the main reason that people don't glorify God because they haven't taken the effort, made the effort to learn what it is that will glorify God with their life.

They're content with their salvation, not realizing that God had much more and purpose from their life. The Bible was written to reveal Jesus Christ to you and I. You may remember when he was on the road to Emmaus, after he was resurrected, talking with the two disciples. And of course, they didn't understand what was going on. And it says that he began to open the word to them, and he told them, o foolish ones and slow of heart, to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted them in all the scriptures, the things concerning him. As you read through the scriptures and you start to ask God, what are you trying to reveal to me about Jesus Christ in my life? And God through the spirit can start to open to you. In my daily reading in the Old Testament, I've been reading through Leviticus and numbers.

Those are exciting books, right? And you just want to kind of pass over that part, all these sacrifices that we don't do anymore, and then numbering all the tribes and all of those things but as I read through this time in both Leviticus and numbers, it talked about those sacrifices that they would make to God. And it said it was a pleasing aroma to God. And the truth is, when you and I put ourselves in a place where we're

willing to sacrifice something for God, not to attain our salvation, not to be accepted by God, but just because we love him, that is pleasing to him. And I guarantee you, if he is pleased with you, he will provide you with everything you need to live a life that will glorify him, and you will be satisfied in that.

If we're Christians and we aren't reading and listening to the word of God, Jesus said, you're foolish. It'd be like going to a class that you needed for a job. And they handed you the textbook and said, if you'll read this, I guarantee that you'll pass the class. Good news. But you get in the class and you go home, and you got the textbook there, and you close it up, and I'm going to go out and play.

I'm going to watch a TV program. I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that. And you never opened the textbook, and you failed the class. That would be foolishness, wouldn't it? You had been provided with what you needed to be able to pass the course.

In the same way God's word provides us what we need. He says you accepted it not as the word of men, but what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. If you are in the word of God, I guarantee you, if you're a believer, that word will be working in your life. It might take a whole lifetime. There may be times when you think, I'm not learning anything, but it will be working in your life, and it is worth it.

It works in believers. That leads to the last thing. If we're going to please God, we have to have a will to work. We read the word to know how to work, and guess what? Then we got to go to work.

Not enough just to know about the work. We actually have to do it. Philippians 2:12-13 says, to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. You have to come to that place where you realize the work he gives you is not for yourself and not necessarily for the people around you. Ultimately, it is for his good pleasure, which means he's pleased with you.

When you offer yourself up to do the work that he's called you to do. When God works in us, he gives us the desire to do the work, and then he provides the resources to do

the work, and ultimately it pleases him. Ephesians 2:10 tells us, for we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, for good works which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. If you heard God's voice calling you to come into relationship with him, I guarantee you that he has a work that he wants you to do. It might be something simple, it might be something really hard.

It doesn't matter. It's what he wants you to do, and he's prepared that in advance. It's not a matter of your salvation. Oh, I got to go to work so I can be saved? No, you are saved, but the result of that is you will want to work for him.

We live in a country that used to be noted for America works. Anyone seen that slogan? Think that's true today? I'm not so sure. There's a lot of people who don't work, who can't work, and we're seeing the consequences of that in our society, and so we want to be careful that we don't fall into that.

Not necessarily true in our country anymore, but it's also not necessarily true in the church that sometimes it's just easy to sit back and let somebody else do it, let somebody else do the work, and we don't get involved. More and more people refuse to work, and even the ones who sometimes are working aren't doing it well. And ultimately, that's shameful in a country, and it is. We're seeing the wrath of God on our country as a result of that. We spend a lot of time, effort, and money teaching our children than we should.

But if we don't teach them how to work, what good is all that education? You've got to be able to apply it in some way. Before I became a pastor, I worked in the food processing industry. I was superintendent of a couple different plants, and there would often be 50 people that would be on the processing line, and the food would come in in its raw state, and we'd have to convert it into something that people would want to buy. And every one of those 50 people was necessary to get the product out the back door.

And if there was just one person who wouldn't work, it affected the whole line, and it made it hard to get things done the way you want it to do. In the same way, God has

given every one of us a job that he wants us to perform. It doesn't really matter what the job is. God's the one who assigns us. We want to come to a place where we say, whatever I can do, Lord, help me to do it in a way that pleases me.

You and I believe that God answers that prayer. A book that impacted my life early in my walk with Christ was a book called Brother Lawrence. Anyone read it? Brother Lawrence, I recommend it to you. It's not very long.

Brother Lawrence was a catholic monk, I don't know, 15th, 16th century in France. And he had dedicated his life serving the Lord, but he wasn't very gifted. They didn't let him ever speak or serve in the chapel. They assigned him the kitchen and the garden. And in the book, he talks about what a joy it was to be able to serve the Lord.

Whether he was out weeding the weeds or peeling potatoes, he did it with a joyful heart. And people started to notice his work, and they were pleased with it. And God was blessed through him. In the same way, we want to come to that place that whatever God has given us to do, that we can do it with all of our heart. And whether other people see it or not isn't the issue.

We're not doing it to please people, Paul said, we're doing it to please God, who tests our heart. He wants to see if it's with joy that we're doing it. Now here's where someone may ask, well, what kind of work are you talking about? What am I supposed to do? We see a clue in verse twelve.

In verse 14 through 16, he says, for you, brothers became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out and displeased God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the gentiles so they may be saved. What's the work of God? The ultimate work of God is he wants everyone to be saved. Everyone to be saved.

He doesn't want anyone to perish. And if we're not part of the work, then we're actually opposing the work. Going back to my days in food processing, we expected everyone to show up to go to work, and that was good. They walked in the door, they

put their time ticket in, started to get paid. But it would have been of no value if they just stood there all day and didn't do what they were supposed to do.

They had to know what their work was and do it in the same way. You and I have to do that. And the work of God is that everyone would be saved. If you're in the church, you have some part in that. You may not be the one that goes out and shares the word with other people and see people come to Christ, but you can stand behind others, just like in the military.

For every one person that's out on the battlefield, they say there's another nine that are behind the line supporting the work. And it's all important. In the same way, whatever we do in the church is important for God. If we're not working to please God. And I think it's something that we really need to question ourselves.

God, have I presented myself before you today to do your work, whatever that is, and not the work that somebody else thinks I should do, but the work that you want me to do. God, would you work in me if we're not doing that? It says it displeases God. I think we can all understand that, don't we? When I was a supervisor, if somebody wasn't working, it really got me angry.

You know, you're not just hurting the company, you're making it hard on everyone else who's having to pick up the slack that you weren't carrying. In the same way we want to do our part. And it says they displeased God because they were hindering the work of God, the work of sharing the gospel, that people are going to be saved. The Jews, who God had appointed to be his people for the purpose of sharing his word, were actually hindering the work of God. And they were opposing it as a result of that.

And he said at the end of verse 16, but wrath has come upon them at last.

They disagree. What this means is that talking about the destruction of Jerusalem, is it just talking about all of the persecution that the Jews have been experiencing for the last 2000 years? Nobody knows for sure, but it says it has not will at the end of the age has come upon them. And the fact is, if you're not doing the work, even though you may feel good, I'm not having to go out there and sweat and slave and do all those

things I'm enjoying today. Well, there's consequences to that when we don't do the work, and you may not experience them at the moment, but they are sure.

And so we want to come to that place where God gives us a will to work. That's a gift from God, a desire to please him. We read God's work with the objective of God. How can I do your work? What is it that pleases you?

And then we ask him, Lord, in the appointed time, appoint me to your work, that I can accomplish something for you. It might be as simple as being the husband or wife that God's called you to be, being a part. I'm reminded of one of the psalms. He says, I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than a king with all of his kingdoms. Whatever it is, it doesn't matter.

It's for the Lord. Hebrews, chapter ten, verse 38. 37. 38 warns us, yet in a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith.

And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. And the fact is, every one of us as believers will stand before the Lord, and we'll give an account of our lives. And the account will be, did you love me? And was it your desire to please me by doing what I've asked you to do? And he says, if we shrink back, and I don't know about you, but we could use that shirk, shirkers, people who don't want to do the work.

And if you've ever been involved in teamwork, you know how painful that is when somebody refuses to do their part, making it hard on you. And so we should be looking to that day and asking God, God, give me the will. Open my eyes to see what it is that pleases you and help me to accomplish your purposes. And the Bible says there will be great reward for that, whatever it was. Great reward for all eternity.

And so I encourage you to be asking God, God, give me that desire to serve you in some way. Reveal to me what it is you want me to do. Then give me the strength to do it with all of my heart. And I believe God will answer that prayer and he'll be glorified. He will be pleased with your life.

We all know what it's like to have done a job, and someone comes along and says, that was really good. I'm really pleased with what you did. Quite a few years ago, when I was working, they gave the top ten reasons that people quit their jobs and moved somewhere else. And you would have thought that the number one would have been, I don't get paid enough. The number one reason that people quit their jobs is they did not feel appreciated in the work.

Number one, above everything else, you can know that when you work for the Lord, you are appreciated. That pleases him. Let's pray. Father God, we thank you that you called us into your kingdom. We thank you that you're revealing your ways to us.

We pray that you would work in each one of our lives to give us that will to do what you've asked us to do. And that we'll do it willingly, with a. With a joyful heart, knowing that it's worked for you. And not to please men, but to please you who test the heart. And we pray, Father, that that work would accomplish its purpose.

Purpose in your kingdom in some way. That it will contribute to the salvation of others in this world. You desire that no one perish, that all come to salvation. Help us to be a part of that work. I pray in Christ's name.

Amen.