

Pleasing God
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Proverbs 15:33-16:11

In a lesson several months ago I told you when our daughter Annie was a little girl she would sometimes ask, “*Are you happy at me?*” She asked the question because she wanted to please Mom and Dad. Annie’s childish question is pretty theologically spot on when it comes to our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

The Apostle Paul prayed for the Christians in Colossae “that God would give them “complete knowledge of his will and...spiritual wisdom and understanding.” He went on to say, ¹⁰Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.” - Colossians 1:9–10 (NLT)

While the title of today’s lesson is “Pleasing God,” the big picture of this passage in Proverbs is the sovereignty of God. God gives us the freedom to make plans and live our lives, but ultimately He is the one who determines the outcomes.

Big Idea: Because God is sovereignly in control of everything the wise person seeks His direction as we make our plans so they will be pleasing to Him.

Let me state up front that this is not a matter of salvation. You can’t be in our group for long without hearing me repeat that salvation is by God’s grace not by our deeds (Eph. 2:8-9.) We don’t please God to earn our way into Heaven but pleasing God IS the pathway to a life He blesses – a life lived with godly wisdom.

Let’s look at these verses in Proverbs 16 to learn how to live in this way. First, let’s talk about making plans:

Proverbs 16:1 (NLT) ¹We can make our own plans, but the Lord gives the right answer.

Proverbs 16:9 (NLT) ⁹We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps.

Proverbs 19:21 (NLT) says we can ²¹...make many plans, but the Lord's purpose will prevail.

- Last Sunday Pastor Jeremy spoke transparently about the frustration of trying to commit to dates for reopening groups in light of COVID-19.
- You might say our leadership is letting God set that date – a wise move.
- God allows us the freedom to make plans and we SHOULD do that but we need to avoid two extremes:
 - Making plans on our own and asking God to make them succeed.
 - Making no plans under the heading of “let go and let God.” People have misused that little saying. It doesn't mean let go of the responsibility to plan your life and work, it means letting go of the outcome. Verses one and nine tell us the outcome belongs to God.
- So, how do I make plans in a way that recognizes God's sovereignty?

³Commit your actions to the Lord, and your plans will succeed.

- How does that work? First, two guardrails to keep us out of the ditch:
- We can't commit any plan to God that isn't consistent with His word.
- We can't commit any plan to God unless it would glorify Him.
- As we saw a few weeks ago in Proverbs 3:5–6 we are to trust Him with all our heart not depending on your own understanding. We are to seek His will trusting Him to show us which path to take.
- The word “commit” here means to “roll.” We literally “roll” the burden of our plans and their outcomes over to Him. Getting practical, we need to slow down and prayerfully seek God's wisdom from His word and godly people.
- That takes humility on our part.

Proverbs 15:33 ³³Fear of the Lord teaches wisdom; humility precedes honor.

Proverbs 16:5 ⁵The Lord detests the proud; they will surely be punished.

Proverbs 16:18 ¹⁸Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall.

Related to humility, Proverbs 16:8 (NLT) ⁸Better to have little, with godliness, than to be rich and dishonest.

- We 21st century people consider ourselves pretty smart and informed. Humility isn't our strongest quality.
- There's a funny quote: *"Famous redneck last words: Hey, watch this!"*
- Proudful famous last words: *"I don't need any help, I can do it myself!"*
- At the risk of being accused of getting "political," A statement from CNN's Chris Cuomo is a prime example of absence of fear of the Lord and humility. "Cuomo closed a recent program by saying we didn't need help from the Almighty, instead we just need to "believe in one another" and "do the right thing for yourself and your community" and that would make things better for the country. Cuomo, who is Catholic, said "You don't need help from above. It's within us."ⁱ [A link to the video is below]
- "Hey Chris, you may not want to go outside in a thunderstorm!"
- Humility precedes honor and the Lord detests the proud.
- Pleasing God requires humility as we recognize His sovereignty.

- When making plans in light of God's sovereignty, motives matter.

²People may be pure in their own eyes, but the Lord examines their motives.

- Do my plans come from a heart that sincerely wants what God wants?
- People may dress their plans up to look like God's will when it's really about selfish desires. Remember the Pharisees? When

Jesus taught about the danger of loving money they ridiculed Him. He replied in Luke 16:15 (NLT) ¹⁵...*“You like to appear righteous in public, but God knows your hearts. What this world honors is detestable in the sight of God.”*

- As we make our plans we need to ask God to check our motives.
- If we’ve asked God’s direction in making plans we need to trust Him to accomplish His purpose. Sometimes we may not understand His purpose.

⁴The Lord has made everything for his own purposes, even the wicked for a day of disaster.

- The Life Application Study Bible: “This verse doesn’t mean that God created some people to be wicked, but rather that God uses even the activities of wicked people to fulfill his good purposes.”ⁱⁱ
- Joseph said to his brothers: *“You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.”* - Genesis 50:20 (NLT)
- Sometimes we don’t understand how life unfolds but if we’re living to please God we can trust that He will bring about our good and His glory.
- What are some of the other outcomes of making plans that please God?

Proverbs 16:6–7 (NLT)

⁶Unfailing love and faithfulness make atonement for sin. By fearing the Lord, people avoid evil. ⁷When people’s lives please the Lord, even their enemies are at peace with them.

- Through His unfailing love and faithfulness, Christ made atonement for our sin by His death on the cross.
- Trusting Him as Savior and Lord removes the penalty of sin.
- Living in reverent fear and desiring to please Him will help me avoid evil.

- Verse seven is a principle but not a promise. Living to please the Lord brings enemies out of the woodwork! That was true for Jesus Himself.
- We WILL have enemies, but sometimes though they hate us for our faith they may respect us for our lifestyle. The Apostle Peter wrote: ¹⁵It is God's will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you. - 1 Peter 2:15 (NLT)

So, What's the Takeaway?

- We've all heard the old Yiddish proverb: "*Man plans and God laughs.*" (That's NOT in your Bible, by the way.) My fear is making plans and having God shake His head and say, "You just don't get how this works!"
- If I'm a Christ-follower I have access to the blessing and wisdom of the Sovereign God of the universe. Why wouldn't I seek Him for direction?
- The great Bible teacher Henrietta Mears wrote: "*A bird is free in the air. Place a bird in the water and he has lost his liberty. A fish is free in the water, but leave him on the sand and he perishes.... The Christian is free when he does the WILL OF GOD and is obedient to God's command. This is as natural a realm for God's child as the water is for the fish, or the air for the bird.*"ⁱⁱⁱ
- God allows us to make our plans but the natural "habitat" of the follower of Christ is seeking His Will and making plans that will please Him. We do that through time in His Word and in His presence.
- We don't go our own way; we seek His way and follow it "step by step."
- Rich Mullins wrote a great song by that title, "Step by Step":
*"Oh God, You are my God
 And I will ever praise you
 I will seek You in the morning
 And I will learn to walk in Your ways
 And step by step You'll lead me
 And I will follow You all of my days"*^{iv}

- Here's the challenge: As we make our plans and live our lives, will we go our own way in pride or will we humbly acknowledge God's sovereignty?
- Will we bring our plans to Him and follow little Annie's example asking our Heavenly Father, "*Are you happy at me?*"

ⁱ <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/entertainment/2020/july/cnns-chris-cuomo->

ⁱⁱ Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 149996-149997). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.preceptaustin.org/the_will_of_god

^{iv} <http://www.songlyrics.com/rich-mullins/step-by-step-lyrics/>