

“My friend and brother in Christ has given us a timely reflection on walking with a holy God. R. T., whom we proudly recognize as a graduate of Trevecca, blends careful exegesis with lived experience. This equals wisdom. In a world bent on seeking pleasure and seeking to please, we find guidance by realizing that in Christ we please the God who knit us together, called us by name, and poured his life into us. I pray that you may emerge from this book with a purer desire to please God.”

—DAN BOONE, president, Trevecca Nazarene University

“Once again, Dr. Kendall has given us an updated and practical recipe for our Christian lives. The reader will find a new lens for the examination of our active faith. Thank you, R. T.!”

—JOHN DIXON, MD, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine

“R. T. Kendall is a gift to the body of Christ across the world. His newest book, *Pleasing God*, challenges me to live a life that prioritizes pleasing God above everything else. We need to share the much-needed message of this book across the church and the world today. Please get a copy, read it, and encourage others to do the same.”

—DR. RONNIE W. FLOYD, author, ministry strategist, and pastor emeritus, Cross Church

“As a child, I desired to please my father. Nothing seemed more important than putting a smile on his face and hearing him say, ‘Well done.’ Likewise, every Christian should desire to please his heavenly Father. In his new book *Pleasing God*, R. T. Kendall shares biblical steps to experience the Lord’s pleasure. Read and apply it, and you’ll experience God’s affirming smile.”

—PASTOR STEVE GAINES, PhD, Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee

“In a virtual world of likes, shares, and retweets, the temptation to please others presses on us all the time. R. T. Kendall humbly guides us by offering a much-needed course correction for why we should and how we can please God. I’ve had the privilege of watching Dr. Kendall live out the pages of this book in his own life. Your intimacy with God will be deeper after reading this volume.”

—ROBBY GALLATY, pastor, Long Hollow Church,
author of *Recovered and Growing Up*.

PLEASING GOD



PLEASING GOD

THE
GREATEST JOY
AND HIGHEST
HONOR

R. T. KENDALL



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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Pleasing God

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*In memory of Ernie (1920–2016)
and Margaret Paddon (b. 1926)*

Find out what pleases the Lord.

—EPHESIANS 5:10 NIV

*He knows the way He taketh,
And I will walk with Him.*

—ANNA L. WARING (1823–1910), “IN HEAVENLY LOVE ABIDING”

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FOREWORD



Once again, a significant work on the Christian life comes from the prolific pen of Dr. R. T. Kendall (whom I know as my friend R. T.). Using Enoch as an example, R. T. skillfully guides the reader into a deeper understanding of how to please God. This is a repeated theme in Scripture, especially encapsulated in Hebrews 11:6 (NIV): “Without faith it is impossible to please God . . .” To what kind of faith is the writer of Hebrews referring? How can it best be described? Is this faith simply a checklist of “dos” and “don’ts”? Or is this faith more about an attitude of the heart? Or a combination of both? In this book we explore the rich heritage of a vibrant biblical faith, drawing from R. T.’s insightful understanding of Scripture along with his life and ministry experiences over the past decades.

Throughout the history of the church, believers have sought ways to draw close to God, to find intimacy with him, and to please him. Some believers in the early church sought God’s approval by living as hermits in the stark emptiness of the desert, believing that self-denial would increase his love for them. Medieval mystics often took up the ascetic life, depriving themselves of food, sleep, and any form of worldly comforts. Taking extreme vows

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of poverty, they believed these practices would earn additional approval from God. While these actions are bewildering to our Western minds, we can appreciate these saints' desire to please the Lord and their willingness to sacrifice for that purpose. But is God looking for these intense ways of living in his followers? What exactly does he expect from us?

We have a relationship with God—and relationships involve the will, the mind, the emotions, and the heart. All of these aspects are wrapped up in finding ways to be pleasing to him. As I read through this book, I am reminded that a large part of pleasing God means making an intentional effort to grow and discover what pleases him, so that we can testify as David did, “My soul follows close behind You. . . .” (Ps. 63:8 NKJV).

R. T. has stated that his purpose in writing this book is to enable the reader to increase in his desire to please God. *Pleasing God* has invigorated my own faith journey, encouraging me to continue pressing on as I seek ways to honor my Lord and deepen the relationship I have with him. As a reader, you can expect the same! May it be said of us, like with Enoch, that we were pleasing to God.

SUSIE HAWKINS

Women's ministry speaker and author

PREFACE



Hebrews 11:5, which states that Enoch pleased God before his translation to heaven, is one of the most important verses in my life. I have written many books, two of which have similar titles: *Believing God* (based on the people of faith in Hebrews 11) and *Worshipping God* (based on Philippians 3:3—we worship “by the Spirit of God”). However, as I look back on all of these books I am surprised that I have yet to write about this important subject: how to please God.

Pleasing God is a handbook for practical Christian living, a book about how to live a rich Christian life. It is written to reflect on some of my life as pastor at Westminster Chapel from 1977 to 2002 and as an itinerant minister since retiring in 2002. My twenty-five years at Westminster were, to recall the words of Charles Dickens, “the best of times and the worst of times.” I fondly remember the greatest compliment I received during my time there, from Ernie Paddon, the church secretary. (In England the church secretary is the major deacon who is right next to the pastor in terms of responsibility and leadership.) He and his wife would often say to me, “You taught us how to live.” Ernie was my chief prayer intercessor and committed to pray for me an hour a day—which

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he did for most of my time at Westminster. He and his wife were stalwart supporters and my greatest encouragers. I dedicate this book to their memory.

This is my second recent book with Thomas Nelson. It has been an honor to work with the legendary Stan Gundry. Dale Williams, my acquisitions editor, has actually become a friend. Emily Voss, who is in charge of publicity, likewise has been a delight to work with. Daniel Saxton, the production editor for this title, has been sharp in offering appropriate suggestions.

I am humbled and grateful that Susie Hawkins has kindly written the foreword to this book. O. S. and Susie have been among the closest friends of my wife and myself for over forty years. My debt to both of them is incalculable. My greatest debt and thanks, however, is to my wife Louise, my best friend and critic.

R. T. KENDALL
Nashville, Tennessee

INTRODUCTION



What is this book about? This book is not about God pleasing us. God can do that, of course. Indeed, he loves to do this. But this book has a different focus. Neither does the title of this book intend to convey that God wants us to see how *nice* he is. Some may wish that God exists merely to please us. But the God of the Bible is not like that. Rather, I am gripped by what is written about an ancient man named Enoch. We are not told that God pleased Enoch. No doubt he did. But what we know is that Enoch “pleased God” (Heb. 11:5).

The greatest honor of anyone’s lifetime is to have the privilege of pleasing God. But there is more. Why should God *care* whether we please him? For only one reason: he loves us. Why should *we* matter? Because he loves us. To return our love for God by pleasing him is a privilege greater than receiving the Nobel Peace Prize or being honored by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. And yet it is a privilege offered to all of us.

I grew up continually hearing the story I am about to tell you. When my mother was six months pregnant with me, my parents were listening to a sermon in a Nazarene church. My father was so moved by the preaching that he put his hand on my mother’s

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tummy and prayed, “Lord, please let me have a son that will preach like this man.”

Nineteen years later I was a student at Trevecca Nazarene College in Nashville, Tennessee, while also serving as a pastor of a Nazarene church in nearby Palmer. I was required to attend chapel every day at Trevecca, which meant I heard hundreds of sermons in my years there. However, I only remember one sermon, from a visiting pastor, C. B. Cox, who took his text from Hebrews 11:5: “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God” (KJV). Pastor Cox dealt with three words: “he pleased God.” I was so impacted by that sermon that I rushed to my dormitory room, knelt beside my bed, and earnestly prayed that I could please God like Enoch did.

My father unexpectedly phoned me that same day.

“Today I heard a sermon that touched me very, very deeply,” I began, then related some details of the message.

“Who was the preacher?” my dad asked.

“A man by the name of C. B. Cox,” I replied.

My dad then said, “Son, that is the very man your mother and I heard when you were still in her womb. I prayed that you might be a preacher like him.”

I am convinced that my dad’s prayer gave me a head start in wanting to please God. This motivation is why I leaped to embrace John 5:44 when my old mentor, Billy Ball (1927–2015), frequently quoted it to me back in 1956. This verse reads: “How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?” (KJV). John 5:44 became my “life verse,” although I would be a fool if I claim to have lived

up to this standard. I have never outgrown the lift I get when people praise me—whether because of a sermon I preached or a book I wrote. And yet I like to believe that this verse enabled me to survive the greatest trials of my life.

I wish I had the anointing that C. B. Cox had when he preached on Hebrews 11:5 at Trevecca many years ago. I remember that he had a calm voice. So many preachers back then shouted when they preached! Not that there is anything wrong with that—I was brought up with shouting preachers in Ashland, Kentucky, as far back as I can remember. Every single one of them shouted. A lot of people in Kentucky and Tennessee in those days felt that unless you shouted when you preached, you weren't preaching. A common example on a preacher's sermon notes during this time was: "weak point, shout here." But I still remember the clear voice of C. B. Cox softly and calmly, stating with extraordinary power: "he pleased God."

I so wish my writing would have a similar effect. I do pray that my book will cause you, the reader, to aspire more than ever to *please God*. I think you would not want to read a book with a title like this if you did not already have a desire to do this.

In the fall of 1955, while I was still at Trevecca, my theology and life unexpectedly changed. I had an extraordinary experience of the Holy Spirit on the morning of Monday, October 31, 1955, while driving from Palmer to Nashville. I saw the face of Jesus. I saw Jesus interceding for me at the right hand of God, making me feel loved in a way I had never felt before. Giving me peace and rest of soul in a way I had never felt before. I had not only inexpressible joy but an assurance that I could never—ever—be lost and that I was chosen. *Not* that I was special. No, nothing like that. But an embryonic understanding of the sovereignty of

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God was clearly implanted in my mind and heart by sundown that Monday evening.

Try not to laugh, but I wondered if the Apostle Paul knew about this sort of teaching. I wondered if it was in the Bible! But it did not take long before I saw the New Testament, and the writings of Paul particularly, in an entirely different manner. My belief in the infallibility of Scripture is rooted in that experience.

My chief mentor Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981) used to say to me again and again, “Don’t forget your Nazarene background.” And on the day I was chosen to be the minister of Westminster Chapel, he said to me yet again, “Preach like a Nazarene.” I was not sure I understood what Dr. Lloyd-Jones meant because the Nazarenes I knew stressed experience more than biblical knowledge. The reason that he liked me was because I had a combination of Reformed theology and openness to the Holy Spirit.

These things said, this book is not written to change your theology. I want to be used of the Lord to encourage you to have a *desire* solely to please *him*. If this does not happen during your reading of this book, I would be greatly disappointed.

The very idea that God can be pleased—or displeased—shows that he has a mind of his own and a will of his own. He knows exactly what he wants, and we can learn what pleases him. This book has three parts: (1) what pleases God, (2) why we should please God, and (3) how we should please God. It is not primarily about how to be saved. It is about pleasing God after one has been saved.

Pleasing God is not an uphill climb. It is the most delightful and delectable venture imaginable this side of heaven. My prayer is that you will experience this—*feel* this—from this moment.

PART I



WHAT PLEASES
GOD?



CHAPTER 1

GOOD WORKS



For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

—EPHESIANS 2:8–10

God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does.

—MARTIN LUTHER (1483–1546)

It may surprise you, if you know anything about me, that I would challenge you to please God. The very notion of pleasing God brings up the idea of earning one's salvation. And I would never tell people that they could ever do anything to make God owe them salvation. Salvation is a free gift. However, in the introduction to this book I said that Scripture tells us to please God. And we know from the book of Hebrews that Enoch pleased God.

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In order to teach you about pleasing God, I need to talk about good works and Enoch.

There is good news and bad news. The good news is time in prayer and practicing total forgiveness are not requirements for being born again, nor are these conditions for remaining saved. Once saved, always saved. Total forgiveness is indeed a very good “work.”

If you are not familiar with my writing and speaking, let me briefly tell you what I mean when I say “total forgiveness.” Total forgiveness is the idea that you totally let your enemy—any person who hurt you—completely off the hook. You commit to truly praying for them to be blessed by God. To me this is a good work because it is the hardest thing in the world to do.

Time in prayer is also a good work. But we are not saved by works, or even the best of works. Rather, we are saved by the sheer grace of God. Indeed, salvation is not of works, lest we boast (Eph. 2:8–9)! God is determined to save us in such a manner so that there will be no boasting before him (1 Cor. 1:29). Be thankful for this; otherwise, neither you nor I nor anybody else would ever be saved. The standard God requires to get into heaven is so high that nobody ever comes up to it. Entrance into glory requires total perfection sixty seconds a minute, sixty minutes an hour, twenty-four hours a day, three hundred sixty-five days a year, and three hundred sixty-six days when it is a leap year. Only Jesus met the standard; he never—ever—sinned. He lived a perfect life for us. He kept the Law for us—indeed, keeping all 613 pieces of Mosaic legislation. Jesus was even baptized for us. The reason he was baptized was *not for himself but for us*—to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). Only Jesus consistently practiced total forgiveness; he alone was “without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

You and I are saved when we are truly sorry for our sins, transfer our trust in our good works to the blood Jesus shed on the cross, and give our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ as best as we know how. We are justified (made righteous in God's sight) by faith alone in Christ alone. It is, as Francis Schaeffer (1912–1984) so often put it, "Faith plus nothing." The faithful Bible reader that you are might ask me, "R. T., how should we understand Jesus's words from Matthew 6:15, 'If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses?'" That verse must be taken in its context. This is from the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus is showing how we inherit God's kingdom, namely, by dwelling in the realm of the ungrieved Spirit. (I will talk more about how we inherit the kingdom and abide with the ungrieved Spirit in chapters 5 and 10.) As I show in detail in my book *The Sermon on the Mount*, the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus's doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Its main focus is how to exceed the righteousness of the religious Pharisees through fellowship with God, intimacy with him, and pleasing him. The Sermon on the Mount is not telling us how to be saved; it applies to those already saved.

Good works are to be demonstrated to others—not to assure ourselves that we are saved. Instead, we get our assurance by looking directly to Christ—not to ourselves. If we look to ourselves, that is "sure damnation," warned John Calvin (1509–1564). James stresses works in chapter 2 of his letter, and good works are for others—not for a person's personal assurance of salvation. James does not tell a person, "Get your assurance by works." Rather, he has the person in mind who struggles to believe our gospel because that person does not see Jesus in us. James urges Christians (probably Jews in Jerusalem) not to show favoritism to the rich person but to the "poor man" who comes to their

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assembly (James 2:1ff). Indeed, he rebukes them: you have “dishonored the poor man” (Gr. *ptochon*, v. 6). Traditional interpreters seem to have overlooked the fact that James never once changes the subject throughout chapter 2—all the way to its end! So, when James says, “Can that faith save *him*?” (Gr. *auton*, v. 14, emphasis mine), he is still talking about the poor man referred to in verse 6. The question, then, is, “Can that faith save the poor man?” No! Rather, that poor man needs to see our good works!

This shows there is not the slightest difference of theology between James and Paul. I deal with James 2:14 in my volume on James entitled *Justification by Works* and also in *Whatever Happened to the Gospel?* Some will be interested to know that when Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones heard my treatment of James 2:14, he said, “You have convinced me.” I also shared my thoughts with Dr. W. A. Criswell when he visited us in London, and he was equally pleased with my understanding of this verse. The rest of James 2 reads by itself, with no need to bend a verse. Although Martin Luther was not happy with James, he should have applied his own statement, “God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does,” to it!

Now for the sobering news: we cannot please God after we are saved if we consciously do the things that displease him. This includes the area of total forgiveness. For instance, Jesus said that if we don’t forgive, we commit murder (Matt. 5:21–22, 43ff). And if we lust, we commit adultery (vv. 27–29). Paul also said that “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10). This is carried out by exceeding the righteousness of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). The Pharisees were widely regarded as the most righteous and most religious people on earth. But, according to their own interpretation of the Law, it appears they could hate people—withhold forgiveness—and

remain good Pharisees. So long as Pharisees kept their hands to themselves and did not act on immoral desires—commit adultery or look lustfully at women—they considered themselves as good Pharisees. However, Jesus’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount tells us that this type of outward righteousness isn’t enough.

How could we surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees? Don’t think that because you are not a Pharisee that you don’t live similarly. My own observation has been that the chief sin of preachers today is pornography. For our righteousness to exceed that of the Pharisees we need to do more than keep up outward appearances. Here are two practical examples: (1) totally forgive people that have done you wrong—that is, sincerely ask God to bless them; and (2) refuse to indulge in lust by objectifying people as sexual objects. Rather, choose to look at men and women with respect because, like you, they are made in the image of God.

According to Paul, to love—demonstrated by carrying out Jesus’s spiritual interpretation of the Ten Commandments—is fulfilling the law. The righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees is not external but internal righteousness—what is in our hearts. This means that we must indeed forgive “from [the] heart” (Matt. 18:35) and “make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom. 13:14)—a righteousness alien to the legalistic views of the Pharisees. In short, pleasing God is a goal carried out by our internal desire, not merely external righteousness.

TWO KINDS OF FAITH

There are two kinds of faith: saving faith and persistent faith.

Saving faith is the faith that comes alive when you hear the

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gospel. It is what I referred to earlier: transferring your hope in good works to the blood of Jesus.

Persistent faith is what we are required to live by once we have been saved. Faith itself—whether saving faith or persevering faith (as some might prefer to call it)—is defined and translated in Hebrews 11:1 variously as the substance—assurance, certainty—of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

This book aims to unfold what persistent faith is and what it does for both us and God. Persistent faith *follows* saving faith. It means you do not give up. It is not merely believing that God “exists” but that you persevere, trusting in God’s rewarding of your diligence in seeking him (v. 6).

The natural man says, “I will believe it only when I see it.” But according to Hebrews 11:1, you cannot call it *faith* if you see it. Rather, it is faith when you don’t see but still believe. For instance, we believe the Bible without any tangible, empirical evidence that it is true. The secular atheist says, “That’s insane.” But this is part of the cross we bear when we accept the offense—the embarrassment or shame—that goes with being a Christian. We are often required to look like fools!

Hebrews 11 describes people who changed their world by persevering faith. I wish all who have saving faith automatically had persevering faith like the saints of Hebrews 11 by consistently pleasing God and continually doing great things, never backsliding. But according to 1 Corinthians 3:11–15, fire will reveal the truth about a saved person’s life; some will experience the horror of their works being burned on the “Day” (v. 13). Nevertheless, they will be saved by fire and granted entrance into heaven because they were on the foundation—Jesus Christ (v. 11). Martin Luther once said that he expects three surprises

when he is in heaven: there will be those present whom he did not expect to be there; there will be those missing whom he thought would be there; and that he is there himself! I think Luther was being intentionally humorous about the third surprise, although Dr. Lloyd-Jones used to say that a true Christian is surprised to be a Christian. He added that if one is not surprised to be a Christian, he wondered if this person has been truly converted!

Hebrews 11 shows what persevering faith can do; it describes those who truly pleased God by their persistence. They turned their world upside down by *believing God*. That was Dr. Lloyd-Jones's definition of faith: believing God. Those referred to in Hebrews 11:4–40 were required to do unprecedented things. Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9). Yet he was not taken to heaven (as he might have wished) but was required to build an ark (Heb. 11:7). Abraham was actually called a friend of God (Isa. 41:8; James 2:23), but he still had to obey God's call to leave his homeland without knowing where he was going (Heb. 11:8)! However, Enoch walked with God (Gen. 5:22) and was translated to heaven without dying. Not a single person in Hebrews 11 had the luxury of repeating what had been done before.

Do you want to please God? If so, are you willing to do what no one has been required to do before?

ENOCH

All that Enoch did in his lifetime could be summed up in these words: he “pleased God.” That was his main accomplishment. This is the greatest thing that can be said about a human being. Enoch did other things too; he was a prophet. This means he heard from

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God. Jude says that Enoch prophesied about the second coming of Jesus thousands of years ago: “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones” (Jude 14).

If a person achieved a thousand Nobel Prizes, was regarded as the greatest leader of his or her nation, or was said to do more good for the poor than Mother Teresa, all this still falls short of the honor to have pleased God. It does not get any better than this!

Pleasing God is an achievement greater than any other accomplishment that can be conceived. The feeling of having pleased God as you near the end of your life is sweeter than anything else that can be imagined.

Enoch had the “testimony”—the witness—that he pleased God. It was the witness of the Holy Spirit. He was not commended by people, by friends, or by enemies. Jesus similarly lived by faith while on this earth (Heb. 2:13; Isa. 8:17), saying that he always did what pleases the Father (John 8:29). He had the witness from heaven that he pleased the Father when he was baptized by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:17). This witness was repeated when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain (17:5). It is what Paul meant by Jesus being vindicated by the Spirit (1 Tim. 3:16).

God gave this satisfaction to Enoch, who knew that he pleased God. God will also do this for you and me. We may not be translated to heaven in advance of the second coming, but God would not have given us the command, “Find out what pleases the Lord” (Eph. 5:10 NIV), if it were out of reach. God is not like that; his commands are not demoralizing. Finding true wisdom may cost you “all you have” (Prov. 4:7 NIV), yes, but the cost is not unreasonable—and is worth it. Prize this wisdom “highly,” said Solomon. “She will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace

her. She will place on your head a graceful garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown” (vv. 8–9).

The cost is related to our ego, which promotes such vices as pride, self-esteem, and wanting to please people rather than God. What can never—ever—be underestimated is the relationship of our pride to the glory of God. Get ready for this truth, if it should surprise you: God is jealous. This is no joke; God is no respecter of persons. If pride causes one to resent God’s jealousy, so be it: God will not bend to you or me in order to compromise his essential nature. That said, his jealousy is for our good. The more you get to know God, the more you will cherish him for being exactly as he is.

The writer of Hebrews does not tell us all that Enoch specifically did which pleased God. We only know that he walked with God and that he heard from God. For example, the writer does not say that Enoch pleased his parents. That can sometimes be hard to do. My first report card when I was six years old and a student in Crabbe Elementary School in Ashland, Kentucky, had 3 Bs and 3 Cs. I remember being sobered by this, knowing that it would not thrill my dad. He said, “Son, work harder and you will bring those grades up to all Bs.” I did. After that, my father raised the bar: “Work hard, and you will have all Bs and some As.” I did. Later my dad challenged, “Work really hard, and you will have all As.” I did—but some were A minuses. And what do you suppose my dad noticed first?

My dad meant well. I regard him as a good father and a godly man—indeed, the most godly man I ever knew. My first memory of him was seeing him on his knees in prayer for thirty minutes every morning. His praying for me when I was in my mother’s womb—as I said earlier—is why I had a head start in living the

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Christian life. His example of praying is why I began praying daily as a teenager. But my dad was not perfect. I do think some of my struggles with the feeling that I do not please God is because I was not always sure I pleased my dad. Therefore, I have had to rise above my upbringing to reach the place where I was pleasing God.

Here is more good news: you don't have to be perfect and without sin to please God. My Nazarene background, added to my father's strict demands, did not help me many years ago. Some of the main leaders—not all, but some—taught sinless perfection. What set me free long ago and sets me free now is 1 John 1:8: “If we *say* we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (emphasis mine). If perfection were possible in this life, Jesus would not have given us the petition in the Lord's Prayer, “Forgive us our debts [trespasses or sins]” (Matt. 6:12; Luke 11:4).

If you had a parent or an authority figure in your childhood who was overly strict and unreasonable, it is not unlikely that you struggle with the thought of pleasing God. Thankfully, God himself understands this! A possible quick shortcut to overcoming this is embracing John 14:9—the very words of Jesus—“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” Look to Jesus. He was—and is—the perfect combination of truth and grace, and of justice and compassion. He puts us in our place with tenderness. He is our intercessor day and night, having never forgotten what it was like to be tempted at every level when he walked on this planet (Heb. 4:15).

Furthermore, the word concerning Enoch does not say that he pleased his friends. You have heard the expression, “With a friend like that, who needs an enemy?” Some of my best friends—including those I admired most—have been the most hurtful to me. I have thought of writing a book called *When Relationships Turn Sour*.

Hebrews 11:5 also does not say that Enoch pleased his authority figures or mentors (assuming he had such). I have lived long enough to observe that *every person I began to admire a little bit too much sooner or later disappointed me*. This is not their fault; it is mine. I should never put any human being on a pedestal. I have almost certainly hurt people, although not intentionally. If you got to know me very well, I would eventually disappoint you! So, too, would those you admire too much. It is only a matter of time before we see unpleasant weaknesses in the best of people. The best of men are men at best. I doubt you would enjoy a long holiday with Elijah, Peter, or Paul. Only Jesus was perfect. And yet even he disappointed Mary and Martha (John 11:21, 32), showing that our flawed expectations don't always line up with what God does. I have actually written a book, *Totally Forgiving God* (criticized for the title rather than the contents), grappling with why God allows things he could have stopped—whether COVID-19, tornadoes, or untimely deaths of loved ones. God the Father is the most maligned person in the entire universe. He is cursed countless times daily but waits for the day when he will explain things.

Additionally, Hebrews 11:5 is silent about if Enoch pleased his wife. Sometimes that is hard to do!

A man once came to me after a sermon in Northern Ireland with this question: “Can your wife be your enemy?”

I looked at him, then paused and said, “Yes.”

“Thank you,” he replied.

The man went on to express gratitude for a book he thought I wrote called *Unhappy Marriage*. I told him that I had not written a book with this title.

“Oh, yes, you have—it changed my life,” he insisted.

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Then I remembered that my book *The Thorn in the Flesh* has a chapter entitled “Unhappy Marriage.” That, to him, was the book!

Louise and I sought marriage counseling for several weeks during our years in London. (I refer to this in my book *In Pursuit of His Glory*.) There are always exceptions, but most marriages sooner or later could benefit from a third party—if qualified—helping them work through issues that are often ignored. But our problem is often that we are too proud to admit we need help!

The writer of Hebrews did not say that Enoch pleased his enemies. You may be sure he had them. When Jesus commanded us to love our enemies, he assumed we would have them. He told us to pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt. 6:12), because we all have those whom we must forgive. I needed this teaching during our most difficult days in Westminster. I have had a number of books written against me, as well as countless articles. One man (now in heaven) took notes during my sermons in hopes of snagging quotes he could use to attack me in his next book! But this was still good for me. I think God raises up adversaries partly to keep us on our toes!

I actually have an enemies’ prayer list (I’m not joking). It was hard at first to pray for my enemies (and ask God sincerely to bless them), but over time it not only became easy but was an incalculable blessing. I would urge you to pray sincerely for your enemies. You don’t pray for them merely for a day or two; you do it daily until the day you die. Don’t despise the person God has picked for your sanctification. Moreover, that very person may one day be your good friend!

We are not told that Enoch pleased himself. Indeed, even Christ did not please himself (Rom. 15:3). He did not come to do his own will but the will of the Father (John 5:30). Christ is

your model. You are not your own; you are bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19–20).

And, as I said earlier, we are not told that God pleased Enoch. Nevertheless, you can be sure that God did please Enoch—I do not doubt this. That said, and I don't mean to be unkind, but I fear many leaders only portray a God who is a God all people will like. These leaders seem to extol a God who will do whatever *we* want him to do—he exists only to make us feel good, to prosper us, to heal us, and to make us happy. They say that if anything adverse happens to any of us, it is from the devil—not God. Or it might be from our lack of faith. Such leaders either do not know their Bibles or refuse to believe their Bibles! It displeases God when we pick and choose from his Word. If we truly love him and want to please him, we will embrace *all of his Word*. We do know that God granted Israel's ill-posed request for special food in the wilderness—"he gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease among them" (Ps. 106:15). God did this because the people of Israel followed their fleshly desires when they asked him for something. They bypassed the truth that God has a will of his own, so he had to discipline them. Likewise, if we don't respect his will—what *he* has determined is good and right—we are fools. Fools.

So, God knows what is best for us. He will not withhold any good thing from those who want to please him (Ps. 84:11).

Here is what we know about Enoch: he pleased God.

You and I must make a choice: who do you want to please? The irony is, if you try to please people you will fail both ways. First, sadly, you won't please anyone indefinitely. Second, sadly, you forfeit pleasing God. I urge you: set your goal to please God. Nothing else matters at the end of the day. The pain in the meantime—and the cost to your pride—is worth it all.

A SUGGESTION TO YOU

Consider this question: which gives you more satisfaction—when God is pleasing you or when you are pleasing him? I will try to be fair. Of course we prefer it when God pleases us—when he answers prayer, gives us joy, heals our bodies, prospers us, provides us with friends who are well connected, and opens doors for us. But I issue this challenge: seek to get your joy from pleasing God, not from when he pleases you! I confess that I find it hard to practice what I preach when it comes to this topic. It just so happens that during the time of my writing this section—at this very moment—Louise and I are in our greatest trial in years. Right now are almost certainly the worst days of our lives. During this time I have kept praying, “Lord, please step in.” It is *as though* the Lord is saying, “You preach that people should get their satisfaction by pleasing me. Now you practice what you preach.” I cannot testify that I have been very good at doing this, but I do know this: there is immense, deep, and thrilling satisfaction from knowing you are pleasing God in your testing.

The Lord never said pleasing him would be effortless. As C. S. Lewis put it, concerning Aslan the lion: “I never said he is safe. But he’s good.” Thus, I do not say it is always easy to please God. But it is satisfying.