

Vital Supplement for Spiritual Vitality

THE PERILS OF PLEASURE:

Proverbs 5 cf. Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

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Perhaps the greatest difficulty or obstacle to the Christian faith is the problem of pleasure. Think about it! What most often governs our actual daily decision-making?

1. A feeling of happiness or satisfaction?
2. Gratification of the senses?
3. Recreation, relaxation, amusement?
4. Some source of happiness, joy, or satisfaction?
5. Somebody's desire or preference?

Simply put, pleasure is simply a desire, inclination, or preference. In many ways our decision-making is intoxicated by the pursuit of pleasure. In fact, it has led some of us to places we never thought we would go. Yet the Bible is clear that some pleasures are meant by God to be enjoyed (e.g., marital intimacy; deep friendships).

So often this personally hits home when we see people we love follow a path of illegitimate pleasures, reaping a whirlwind of negative consequences. While our popular culture, media, & films seem to diminish the reality of those negative consequences, our support groups keep growing & more & more people appear to need therapy.

So many young students have come into my office looking for hope... crying out for restoration...wishing they had made better choices. With their stomachs tied in knots, they wish they could go back in time & redo their choices. The weight of regret some of these young people are carrying is staggering.

How many people do you know who carry around a life time of pain, regret, & remorse due to the pursuit of worldly pleasures? But when tragedy hits them late in life, for some, their values gain clarity. But unfortunately, they came to this realization too late. The best years of their lives are spent & the pleasures they lived for have already vaporized like steam from a hot cup of coffee.

Still there are others who are restless... always moving from one pleasure after another because they have not found what they are looking for. But somehow they hold onto the false idea that the grass is greener on the other

side. So, they move from one person to another...one location to another... one home to another... one hobby to another...always searching yet never finding "lasting" satisfaction. But what is common to many of their stories is that their decision-making was governed by pleasure, not virtue & duty.

Then for some, it is not too much pleasure, it is the disapproval of legitimate pleasures. They assert that "*we are not to enjoy this life.*" "*Live only for the here-after!*" "*We are pilgrims passing through this land!*" Thus, they downplay pleasure & judge others for experiencing feelings of happiness, delight, or satisfaction in this life. They lower their glasses, they lift their eyebrows, and their eyes narrow. "*Your money should be spent doing the Lord's work!*"

So, where do we draw the line? Where is the balance? Our first examination into the problem of pleasure takes us to Proverbs 5. Here Solomon warns his son about the dangers of adultery. But by way of application we are able to glean from this passage two types of pleasures: false pleasures (vv. 1-14) & true pleasures (vv.15-20). False pleasures are illicit or illegitimate pleasures that fall outside of God's purposes. This is seen in verses 2-14 when Solomon warns his son about adultery. Adultery is an example of false pleasure. On the other hand, true pleasures are pleasures that are in keeping with God's purposes. This is evident when Solomon exhorts his son to be satisfied with his own wife.

Thus, from this study we observe the following 7 principles: 1. Cultivate biblical wisdom (vv. 1-2). Strive to see life as God perceives it. How you do so is by internalizing God's Word into your life to the extent that it becomes your identity (Psalm 19:7-11; John 17:17). Why know wisdom? Solomon wants his son not to give into a fleeting pleasure because it will rob him of the best parts of his life. Solomon's advice to his son is for him to not indulge in immoral pleasure, but consider his overall well-being. He wants him to have a long, blessed life.

What are you *actually* living for? What is your life's aim? What is your purpose in life? What you are living for is evident not by the theories in your mind, or some statement you have hanging around your house or office, but what you actually do, pursue, & embrace. Once you know your purpose or calling in life, then some pleasures you encounter or generate will be *properly* legitimate while others will keep you from doing what you need to do, whether they are good or false pleasures. Properly legitimate pleasures contribute to achieving your goal. In other words, you will not allow what is good to rob you from what is best. Therefore, develop a life-purpose statement, & if you are truly wise, then it will be one that seeks to

make God your utmost. For when He is your utmost, you are truly blessed (Psalm 1).

2. Wisdom enables you to discern the nature of a false pleasure (vv. 3-6). See, with false pleasures there is a price to be paid *after* you experience the pleasure (e.g., adultery). Just think about it! Good, honorable families have been destroyed by false pleasures. It is not just limited to adultery. Any form of false pleasure can lead you down a path paved with poison, surrounded by two-edge swords, & generate a lifestyle that will ruin your life. The sad thing is that we can become so compromised, so distorted, & so seared in our thinking by false pleasures that we do not even recognize our own instability, frailties, & degeneration. The warning signs show up everywhere but we have no eyes to see how things actually are.

3. False pleasures extract the best parts of your life from you (vv. 7-14). The loss of health, respect, long life, and resources are just a few examples. But false pleasures also generate emotional baggage which also can take a toll on your life.

4. True pleasures can satisfy you (vv. 15-20). For example, in this portion of Proverbs 5, Solomon contrasts the adulterous woman whose pleasure will generate troubles for you to that of your wife who can satisfy you. Like a cistern, well, or fountain, a wife can satisfy one's desires. This is God-given! This is God-purposed! This is how intimacy is supposed to be enjoyed!

5. The price of true pleasures is paid before hand. For example, abstinence should be practiced until you married. Then, you can fully enjoy marital intimacy. No regrets, no remorse, no brokenness, no ruin, & no shame.

6. True pleasures are God-given! They are to be enjoyed in the manner He intended them to be enjoyed! If you will follow the path God has purposed, then you will be blessed. A committed marriage, a healthy home life, the results of hard work, recreation, & deep friendships are gifts from God, meant to be enjoyed. Once again, you will have no regrets, no remorse, no ruin, & no shame.

7. It is your responsibility to choose between false pleasures & true pleasures (vv.21-23). If you choose a false pleasure, you will be ensnared, that is trapped, by your own sins. But whatever choices you make, know this: absolutely nothing escapes God's attention. He examines everything.

Do not allow false pleasures to rob you of the best parts of your life. Do not become immobilized by pleasures that will keep you from being all that God has called you to be. We have heard too many confessions by those

who wish they could go back in time & make different choices. But rarely do we see someone who will rise up with wisdom & seize God in the manner that He has seized us. Will you be that daring?

Dear Heavenly Father:

Too many of us have enjoyed the false pleasures of this world, energized by the counterfeit kingdom. We wear the scars; we carry the pain; we feel the weight of years of regret. We have become short-sighted. Our understanding has grown dim. Our thoughts and activities are too self-centered. But Father, we humbly ask that you would mightily work in us like you did with Jacob's son, Joseph, and enable us to turn away and flee from every false pleasure, trusting you no matter how difficult the circumstances become. Remove from us those false pleasures that are keeping us from being all that you have called us to be. Exchange our bad habits for godly virtues. Give us a new disposition to live for you, new eyes to gaze upon your person, a new mind to intimately know you, and a new heart that is passionately inflamed for you. There is no greater pleasure than intimately walking in fellowship with you (John 15)! We turn our lives over to you and pray that our life's ambition would be to glorify you in the moment-by-moment decisions we make.

This we ask in the precious name of Jesus Christ. Amen.