

Pleasure: Friend or Foe?

By Jeff Noblit

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: James 4:1-5

Preached on: Sunday, April 27, 2014

Anchored in Truth Ministries

1915 Avalon Ave.

Muscle Shoals, AL 35661

Website: www.anchoredintruth.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/anchoredintruth

Thank you Ann Elaine, what a beautiful song, what beautiful truth.

James 4. When you think about a song that talks about how God is constant, it reminds us of how we need to know the attributes of God because our salvation flows out of his attributes and that is he has immutability, he changes not, he is constant, he has veracity which means he's true and he cannot lie. Once he sets his heart toward you to show you favor, he will be faithful in that because that's the character he has. We struggle with that a lot ourselves because we know we're prone to wonder and waver and falter and fail but God is not like that. Isn't that good? His goodness is constant toward those to whom he's chosen to place his favor toward.

James 4. Again, we're looking at James and James is a pastor of a local church and James gets down to brass tacks, he gets down to where the rubber meets the road. Let's look at it again tonight and I want to give you some very practical things on pleasure. Verse 1 of James 4,

“1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

Now, we want to talk about pleasure this evening and how pleasure is a blessing and pleasure can also be a curse and I've done something I haven't done in years, I lost a page of my notes and I just found it. Sorry, it's going to be 20 minutes longer.

Let's talk about this: pleasure, friend or foe? The apostle here pastoring his local church wants you and I to grasp something and I think he wants you to grasp two things that pleasure can be wonderful and good and I'm not talking about the pleasures that by their very character and nature are evil, I'm not talking about the pleasures of lying or the pleasures of immorality. We're talking about things that can be pleasurable in life but

depending on how you view them and how you use them, they could be good or evil. Of course, in this case, these folks in this church, at least some of them, were involved in quarrels and fighting and it was over their lust for pleasure. So, let's first of all talk about what we don't want to make as the aim of our life.

I. The pursuit of pleasure. There is a very different thing between having pleasure as the aim or the end of your life, the pleasures of this earth, that is. Now, you could say that pleasure is the end of my life if the pleasures of God is the end of your life and, of course, that's good and wonderful but obviously he's talking about the things the earth can give us, those things under common grace where both redeemed men and unredeemed men receive blessings or pleasures from God. While we may enjoy those, we're not to make those our pursuit. And what a world we live in where you hear it everywhere, the folks want a shorter work week. I've heard in recent years about how American laborers need to pull their work week back to be like the Europeans. I don't know how many hours they work but it's not very much and, unfortunately, I think we're going in that direction; we're going to be like Europe before long. Actually, I've heard lately that the middle class in Europe and in Canada has surpassed the American middle class and as far as our economic status and spending value of the money we make. Nevertheless, there's the continual spirit of more holidays, more vacation, earlier retirement and that may not be all bad in every situation, I'm not saying that, but there is that constant putting before us that life is about material stuff, the blessings and the pleasures that are before us.

Our world has made pleasure the purpose and the goal of life, that is, worldly pleasures but the apostle here tells us some things that we need to be aware of if that happens in our hearts. The unique thing about a Christian is, our hearts have been changed and we have a new purpose and a new pattern to our lives but we are prone to fall back into the old man, aren't we? And that's where we have to catch ourselves and repent and get back on track. So, there can be some good things here to help us and sharpen us to stay in the new higher goal that God has given us, the pleasures of God, and not just live for the base and temporal pleasures of this world.

First of all, it has seeking pleasure as your main purpose in life, it has possessive power. It will possess you and control you. He says in verse 1 "your pleasures that wage war." That's an interesting thing. He's saying once you give into this, once you throw a little gasoline on the flame of living for pleasure, it just keeps going and going and going: you can't get enough stuff, you can't get enough new stuff, you can't get enough modern stuff, you can't get enough cds, you can't get enough thousands or tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands or millions. If that's where you put your heart, it just consumes. It begins to possess you. It's an endless pursuit that is never satisfied. It is a consuming fire. Unbridled pursuit of pleasure leads to ruin and that's what he's talking about here: "You guys are quarreling and you're fighting and it's this unbridled pursuit of worldly pleasure that's causing this among you. Proverbs 21:17, "He who loves pleasure," not that it's wrong to have some pleasure, that's not what he's saying. He's saying, "He who loves pleasure," you've made it too high, you've made it your goal. You're not the kind of person that gets up and has a time with God and says, "Lord, I would like to enjoy a good meal today, enjoy my kids today, enjoy this thing or that thing but, Lord, I want to honor

you most of all.” I've been praying and I would ask you to join me in this prayer. Think about your pastor and pray for him. I've asked, “God, let me be effective for you in my old age.” That's what I desire. I want to grow old effective for God. I don't know what all that means, now, I'd like to have some nice things, I'd like to be comfortable, I would like God to give me good health or decent health. Sure, I'd like a good retirement if I'm unable to work full-time but above and beyond that, honestly, my whole heart is, “God, if I could be effective for you. You just put the rest of it together that's best.” Amen? That's a great way to live as you can really enjoy stuff but then not fall apart if the stuff doesn't work out.

Well, that's what James is saying here, “Don't get caught there.” Romans 7, there's been some debate about Romans 7. We'll not turn there for time about whether it refers to a saved man or a lost man, I'm 100% certain it refers to a saved man but Paul talks about how he has the desire to do good but does not do it and there is that element in him that wants to please and keep the law of God but he violates the law of God and how we have that weakness and that struggle in us. So, we're going to have that struggle but we don't have to yield to it and walk in it.

Now, I don't want to be a fatalist here. We're not talking like since we struggle and we have the old flesh that we have to give in to it, like it's just, “Oh, that's just the way it's going to be,” and some folks who teach the sovereignty of God in all things as if God can't be sovereign in all things, I mean, when you say God, you say sovereignty in all things. You don't even have to say that but I had to say it because people have redefined God and dumbed God down to be something he's not but God is God so he is sovereign in all things.

Well, that doesn't mean that under his providence or divine sovereignty that we have to just yield to whatever will be will be. No, we have a sin nature. We have a lusting in our hearts just like these Christians did to pursue pleasure but we don't have to yield to it or walk in it. Like the preacher said: a little girl went out of church one day and she fell in a mud hole but he said next Sunday when I come back to church, I don't expect her to still be laying in the mud hole. Well, that's the way you might stumble and fall but you don't stay there. You get up and go again and so when the things of the world, the pleasures of earth become too important to you, work at repenting of it and walking above that.

Well, it possesses you. If you let it keep going, it's got a possessive power. Secondly, it has a painful price. There is a painful price to living with pleasure as the major pursuit of your life. What does he say there? Quarrels and conflicts and then, verse 2 “you lust,” and the word “lust” there doesn't have to mean sinful lust, it means “strong desire.” You have these strong desires for stuff and “so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.” He comes out with that one again so that's not a very happy life. That describes a very painful life. The source of wars and conflicts is sometimes difficult to discern but here James just puts his finger on the sore spot and says, “Here it is,” boom, “your lusting for pleasure is the reason why you have your problems.” Now, think about that in your marriage. Think about that in your families. Think about that in churches. Is it not true, about 98.9% of the time, fussing and fighting,

da, da, da, da is somebody wanted something and somebody else had it or kept them from getting it. It's no different than the two year old saying, "Mine!" Amen. Sometimes there are 52 year olds saying, "Mine!"

And it's the same stuff and it brings pain and trouble into our lives and so this kind of stuff was happening in the church there. Now, I don't know, I don't have any biblical authority but I would assume James is using a figure of speech when he says, "You lust and do not have so you commit murder and you fight and quarrel." I hope, I believe it would be true, there wasn't actual murder going on other than, perhaps, they were getting very hateful in their attitudes which the Lord says that's like being murderers in your heart. Maybe that's what James was referring to. Whatever else he's saying, it's making them miserable and it's a miserable way to live.

Another thing there is the contamination and condemnation with the world that you have there. He talks about being friends with the world. In verse 4, he says when you make pleasure the pursuit of your life, you're an adulteress. "Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?" A Christian begins to dabble in the things of the world and I think there's kind of an interesting chronology if you will, a progression of the Christian life: when you're first converted and regeneration has happened to your heart, I think you have a thrusting onto God and he becomes the chief joy and the blessing of your life and then you kind of fall off that high and then you begin to realize that a good portion of Christian sanctification is perspiration. You begin to realize there is some real effort to this; there is some real willing to honor God in this. It doesn't just roll off of you and there are a lot of influences. Unfortunately, too often in our churches, there are a lot of influences to pull us away from finding pleasure in God and looking only or too heavily to the world.

At first we become a friend of the world and then we digress to begin to start loving the world and then we digress further to where we're being conformed to the world and I'm convinced that somewhere around loving and being conformed to the world, every true Christian comes to repentance. I just don't think and I can't put a timeline on this, God didn't allow us to do that, but I don't think a true, regenerate child of God can fall into loving and being conformed to the world for long, long seasons of time and God not deal with them because the last one, not only friendship with the world, loving the world, conformed to the world, the last one is condemned with the world. And there will be more than a few in our churches and in professing Christendom who claim to know Christ but when you look at them, hey, we're not talking about brothers who struggle, we all struggle. We're not talking about brothers and sisters who have weak moments, we all have weak moments. We're talking about those who just put their name on the church roll and basically give themselves to the world after that. We can expect those people will be condemned with the world. There was just not enough fruit to verify that anything real ever happened to them.

So, James points out here that this is a thing that if you give yourself to the pursuit of pleasure, it's going to possess you, it brings a painful price with it, there is contamination and the condemnation of the world and then he says you also become a spiritual

adulterer. This is a strong language. This is the kind of language the Old Testament prophets would use to harshly and strongly condemn Israel. He called them spiritual adulterers and he says don't you realize, look at verse 4 again, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?" His point is: once you're converted, you have a marriage union and Paul uses that very type of terminology, that symbolism, to talk about the marriage or the conversion is you're wedded to another. And, friend, when you marry a wife, you are bound to seek your pleasures in her. You're not free to go back out to the other women in the community and find your pleasures and that's the point he's making here: once you come to know Christ, you are united in union with him and he becomes the pursuit of your devotion and your blessings and your pleasures and when you begin to chase after other pleasures as the chief goal of your life, then you begin to commit adultery against him. Powerful language, isn't it? A vivid picture that's needful.

He says when you make the pursuit of the world's pleasures your major goal, you've become a spiritual adulterer and then we sort of mentioned it but he also says you become an enemy of God. As it says there in verse 4, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." Now, here's the point: he didn't mean, again, the Christian who struggles with being tempted to go back to seek the world, he's talking about when you give yourself over and that's what your life is, then you are in league with the whole realm of reality that's under the curse and righteous judgment of God. That's who you are aligned with. You've pledged allegiance to Christ but your running with, promoting and chasing after, the things that God's going to judge. You're in league with that which is the enemy of God and you've become very, very miserable.

Well, that's the kind of things we don't want to be a part of. We don't want our lives to be marked by or known by people who make as the end of their life the pursuit of the pleasures of the world. I didn't say we couldn't enjoy the pleasures in the world, I said they can't be our pursuit and we don't need to be marked by that in our lives. So, let me talk about the other side of the coin; let me talk about proper pleasure. Now, I don't have an aspect of James that I'm going to bring out so I'm going to use a balance of Scripture so we can bring this out because if you're like me, I had an enormous amount of struggle and enormous amount of guilt about this for years as a believer. Just what does it mean when you can't love the world and we shouldn't be pursuing the world's pleasures? How much does that mean? Does that mean I can eat one bowl of Cheerios or is it okay to eat two bowls or is it too much pleasure in the morning?

Now, we do kind of smile when I said it because it does sound a little ridiculous but that's the kind of morbid introspection that you can get into if you want to just take these things so literally as if – we do take the Bible literally – as if pleasure applies to every tiny thing in our lives and you can be like a dog chasing its tail trying to figure out what is right. Well, let me give you some things I think that are good guidelines. First of all, let me just remind you, God didn't call us to be monks. Some people believe God did and I doubt that personally but I don't think God called us to be monks. You're not suppose to seal

yourself away in a cave somewhere and deny yourself anything in the world. By the way, that doesn't make you holy. It doesn't make you more pleasing to God. There was a monk one time who did that and he wasn't there but a few days and he said, "Oh, my goodness, I've brought the world in here with me. It's in my heart." No matter how he secluded himself from it, he was all immersed in it because it was all in him and that's true of all of us.

So, pleasure as we looked at it mainly in these verses in this context, was primarily or in this case, predominantly he's talking about those strong desires to enjoy things outside the will of God and outside the Spirit's leadership in our lives. We don't want to be doing that but pleasure is and can be a very good thing. Let me give you some points here. First of all, our A. in the outline under II., under proper pleasure: view pleasure as a means to the greater end of serving God. See pleasure as a means to the greater end – I've got "correct" on the screen, that's okay – but to a greater end of serving God. In other words, pleasure is not the end, it's a means to a greater end that God has given us. In this case, I would like to talk about the pleasures of rest or relaxation or recreation. These things in their appropriate measure are beneficial so that we might be effective for God. Some down time is essential. God created the heavens and the earth and all the things. He created them and on the last day he rested and I think there's a principle there, there is a Sabbath for the people of God. The point is we're to seek God and we're to seek God's will first in our lives and not pleasure. Pleasure is not the end, it's the means to an end and we need to keep these things in balance.

Now, we can get out of balance if we put one greater than God wants it to be and that can be difficult to discern at times. We know the Lord sent the apostles out to minister. In Mark 6, he said, "Now you men come apart for a while and rest." He actually commanded them to cease ministry for a season and get restored for a while showing us that the pleasures of a little rest and relaxation is essential for his ministers to be effective and it's essential for husbands to be good husbands or fathers to be good fathers or women to be good moms or women to be good mothers or whatever you are: for a Sunday School teacher to be a good small group leader. You've got to have some down time. It balances everything. It's a part of the whole process.

Now, you can get out of balance if you spend too much time in rest and relaxation. You get out of balance if you put too much value on it but you ought to value it in its proper balance. The Lord did give a Sabbath rest. He did give one day a week and said rest on this day and particularly set your heart toward me. Rest from the world and the world's pursuits that you have to be about if you're going to raise families and have jobs. Pull apart from that one day a week and focus on me and rest. These things can be good.

Now, the fatal flaw is when we get these things out of perspective. The humanists and the materialists and the liberal progressives of our age want to tell us that material things and having these blessings and these pleasures is the end of life and it's what we're all about. Making a god of pleasure is deceptive and it will ruin your life and that's a god, by the way, that cannot deliver what you demand of him. You make the blessings of life, you make, "Oh, finally I'm going to retire." Look, retirement is good, I don't think there's

anything wrong with that but if that becomes the end of your life, whatever it is other than God, if you make it your goal when you get there you're going to demand of that idol something that idol cannot give you and you're going to say, "Is this it?"

I told you years ago, you know, when Pam built our first house. It was just your average house and we always wanted a house and we finally saved up and worked and got to the place where we built our first house and I literally wanted to stand out in the front yard and look at that house and say, "Do something for me. Is this it?" I mean, is this it? Because about the time you move in, you crack a window and have to start fixing stuff and pay taxes on it. It's always that way, not that that's wrong, there are some pleasures in having a home certainly but there are burdens and disappointments. It just doesn't deliver what it's supposed to deliver.

You can love pleasure and have pleasure as your purpose but you'll never have enough time to find all the joy in it that you'd like to find. This keeps you frustrated and this spurs on more quarrels and more conflicts because when you don't have the pleasure you thought you were going to get, then you think somebody has got something you ought to have and then you get mad at them for it and the cycle just keeps going and going and going. And if we do get time for pleasure and we get the time off we need, we get the retirement we're looking for, then we find that the rest and the recreation doesn't fulfill like we expected it to. God is basically warning us and telling us that, "There is nothing wrong with your retirement, nothing wrong with you rest and relaxation but you're supposed to find your joy in me so I've made these things to be a blessing but only to an extent so that you would be a little frustrated, so that you would get a little agitated." God is using that to prompt your direction back to him.

Now, we have guys on the other end of the spectrum who are workaholics. I have been there a little bit myself, where you're full of pride and you think you have to do all these things, you have to manage everything and run everything and make sure everything is done just right and there's just a domino of sin and wrong in that. And that can become an idol just as easily and that robs you also and it can be another source of quarrels and conflicts in your life. So, don't live for pleasure. Make your pleasure living for the Lord and take time for pleasures only as needed to keep you effective for the Lord, to keep you aiming toward that greater goal or seeking the Lord and finding pleasure in the Lord. You see, people who live for pleasure are always looking for that magic something that will change their lives when the real problem is within their own hearts.

Let me just make this note: we certainly don't want to be sounding like we're prescribing a joyous life of rule-keeping. That is not God's idea of the Christian life. You've been around people like that. They're just always having a list of rules. The Bible doesn't give a lot of specific commands in a lot of these areas but there are some people that are just intent on creating those rules. I met a minister one time and hadn't really known him very long and we got to talking and the subject of deer hunting came up and I said, "Oh, you deer hunt," and, I mean, before I could get the phrase out of my mouth he said, "Yes, but only one day a week." He was just emphatic about that and I thought, "Well, that's good, I guess but I don't know any law that says that you can only deer hunt one day a week or

says that you should deer hunt one day a week.” I think his heart was genuine but he had a pattern, I found out later, of every area of his life having all these restrictions and he was a miserable person and God doesn't want us to live with this joyous life of rule-keeping. We need to be careful about that. We need to understand what James 1:17 reminds us that, “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” When we enjoy the pleasures of this life, we need to see them as a gift from God.

Well, 2b. See them as a stewardship. See them as a stewardship. That is, when God blesses you and I'm talking about mainly financially and this blessing comes your way, see the things, the blessings which are pleasures, of course, that come your way as things you ought to be prayerful about to give and support other things with them. Again, there's that question: how much do I give and to whom do I give? And you know, that can be an area of deep anxiety because everywhere you look there are needs and everywhere you go there are people talking about people who we ought to be helping. It is, it just can be overwhelming. Now, in the day the Scriptures were written, you walked out your door and you always saw people with great needs. Now, in this day, when they said poor it was really poor. In our day, poor means they don't have three flat screens, you only have two and that's not much of an exaggeration. I remember in Memphis when I went to graduate school in Memphis, I drove to a bad part of town and there was some old dilapidated shacks but some of them had very nice cars and very big televisions in their houses because I could see through the windows at night and see them and what they were watching.

So, poor doesn't always mean poor. In this day poor meant something and so these people could be very pulled as to, “Well, who do I give to and how much do I give?” If you really think about it, how do you pull that off? First of all, you know you have to pay taxes, that gets a big chunk of it. Amen? I pay quarterly taxes and it's just like my goodness. I haven't and I may need to repent here, I just haven't rejoiced in that lately. I know that's of the Lord but it's not a lot of fun it seems like. So, we know we have to do that with the blessings we have financially. But let me free you up and you're going to say, “Pastor, you always go there.” I always go there because the Scriptures always go there and this is where I'm going: almost all examples and exhortations of giving in the New Testament, at least all I could think about, is centered in the local church. It's centered there. In a very real sense, when you go to church, you're marrying a bride, so to speak, and that's where you're primarily responsible for. Doesn't that make it easier? It's just saying, “Okay, I've got to take care of my local church, I want my pastor to be blessed, want a strong program in the church and then also I have to.....” I don't the is that important as far as Scripture says. It doesn't mean you're not supposed to do anything above and beyond your local church support but it means the Scriptures just don't bear that out.

James 2:14-16. Let's flip back over there real quick and remember what's the context here: he's talking about gospel works. Now, if you don't have these gospel works, you're not even a child of God. You have to have some of this as an evidence you belong to God. James 2:14, “What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no

works? Can that faith save him?" What works are you talking about, James? Verse 15, "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so, faith if it has no works is dead being by itself." What's the context? It's the local church. He's talking about your brothers and sisters. He's not talking about society in general. Don't let the liberals interpret this for you. That's not what this means. This is primarily saying as a child of God you look for the needs in your local congregation. That doesn't mean you wouldn't try to help other Christians in other congregations. It doesn't mean you don't try to help the needy of the world in your community. Certainly, you would do that but primarily it's in your local church. That just liberates me. Does that help you? That helps me. I knew when I married my wife I wanted to care for other people's homes and other people's children but I had a primary commitment to her. Men, the enemy can get you really stressed out over all the stuff if you don't get anchored where the word is very clear.

In Matthew 25, Jesus talks about he's going to come back in judgment, he's going to separate folks like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats and he says, "You're going to know who are my children because when I was hungry, you fed me. When I was in prison, you visited me and when I was naked, you clothed me," and maybe he listed one other. They said, "Lord, when did we do all these things for you?" He said, "When you did it to one of the least of these my," what's the word? "Brothers." When you did it for the Christians you knew, brothers and sisters in Christ." Now, a lot of people will be suffering on the earth but he said Christians will not be ashamed or afraid to align themselves with other Christians even when it's costly to do so. They're going to care for each other. They're going to bless each other and give to each other.

So, the local church is the center of these things. The tithes and offerings of the New Testament are centered in the local church. The missions offering that Paul organized in the New Testament was centered in the new church, the Corinthians church pooled their resources and Paul and his associates would take them to the church at Jerusalem. It was a missions offering. So, you give to and through your local church. Now, we certainly don't close our hearts to others but our primary responsibility is the local church family. Listen to what Jesus said, Matthew 26:11, "For you always have the poor with you but you do not always have me." There is a sense in which if you always consider, "Well, we've got to have all the poor." I'm not saying we don't do that but if you consume yourself there, you'll never get back to Jesus, you'll never get back to the gospel and that can be a diversion and a deception of the enemy to get you off what matters or at least what matters the most. That's why we fight this social gospel movement and this social injustice movement that puts all the emphasis on measuring material wealth and making sure everybody is doing okay. Listen, we have concern there but our primary concern is our Lord Jesus, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and the advancement of Christ and his church. That's our primary emphasis.

A third thing: thirdly, make your material blessings and the blessings of life both a cause of humility and of joy. Make them a cause of humility and of joy. Humility because when you have stuff and God's blessed you with blessings and joys and pleasures, you've got to

remind yourself or the Spirit of God is reminding you if you'll listen that God gave that to you. If you're a brilliant person and you've built a company or you've worked hard and you're in your 50s or 60s and you're finally getting ahead and life is comfortable, praise the Lord. Yes, he did bless your industry, he did bless your work ethic, no doubt about that. Scripture teaches that but at the end of the day, God gave you that mind and God gave you that body and God sustained your health to get there.

So, first of all, it's a cause for humility. One thing is, no matter what you have, it's greater than you deserve. We ought to be in hell so make it a cause for humility. Let it cultivate humility in you. But also make it a cause for joy. When God blesses you and there are pleasures in your life and you look at these things, make it a reminder to you that we serve a God that desires to shower his children with blessings. There is nothing wrong with that. Some of you have so revolted from Jimmy Swaggert and Jim and Tammy Fae Baker, you went way over on the other end. You're out of balance on this end as if to say God doesn't want to bless his children even temporal material stuff. He does do that. Not everybody the same. For some reason, he'll make one brother over here very wealthy and another guy just has to work until he dies. I don't understand that completely but God knows what he's doing. Amen? And we rejoice with the brother that has much, we rejoice with the brother that doesn't have much and we'll help him when and if he needs it. But we praise the Lord without jealousy or envy in God's church. Amen? God knows what he's doing in all of that.

But we joy in the fact that God desires to do that and all the temporal blessings, we have to remember, are but types of the spiritual eternal blessings we have in Christ. I mean, you eat a steak dinner – I ate a steak dinner last night because I was with a wealthy church family member and they always eat steak. I'm teasing. We ate a steak dinner and I enjoyed that steak dinner but when you have good things like that, make it cause you to say, "But this is just a type. This is temporal." As a matter of fact, it made me a little sick. It's temporal. It doesn't last. Make it a type that reminds you there's eternal spiritual blessings you're getting in Christ Jesus later. We're tasting them now but we get them in the full later. So, view the temporal blessings as types of eternal blessings we will have one day. In other words, don't look to your blessings, look through your blessings to say, "God gave this and it's to remind me he's a good God and he has great, much, much, much better blessings coming later that never wear out, never fade away." Wow, all this and heaven too! God is good. You know, Jesus used the illustration of an earthly father giving good gifts to his children as how he desires to bless his own children but let's just remind ourselves, let's make the blessings and the pleasures God brings our way a cause for humility and a cause for joy.

The fourth one: let's hold these blessings, these pleasures, loosely, ready to deny them if we need to serve God's church instead. Hold them loosely, ready to deny them if we need to let them go to serve God's church. I mean, you may have a certain kind of life planned out for you and a certain kind of retirement but then things may happen and God may say, "Now I want you to go and do this for my glory." You've got to be able to say, "Okay, I was planning that." Nothing wrong with that. I'm not just holding onto it with a firm grip. I can let that go and serve the Lord. Moses is a good example here. In Hebrews

11:25, Moses refused to be viewed as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Instead, the Bible says, in 11:25 “choosing rather to endure ill treatment with the people of God than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.” So, not all the pleasures of Egypt were sinful but it would have been sinful for Moses because God said, “In this context and at this time, Moses, it's right for you to push away and say no to the great pleasures Egypt could have afforded.” Now, as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, he could have had immense pleasures but Moses says no to those pleasures because God's people were being persecuted and he wanted to align himself with them and be of service to them. Now, does that mean every pleasure Moses enjoyed in Egypt was always evil and sinful? No, but when God calls, we're willing and able to say, “I'll let that stuff go. I want to serve my Lord and be devoted to him.” Have that kind of heart.

So, here Moses as an example to us, gladly gives up the pleasures of Egypt to be identified with the people of God. By the way, the phrase here in Hebrews 11:25 was the passing pleasures. Passing pleasures. Moses realized that this world's pleasures are always and only temporal and serving God may bring affliction. If Moses denies his Egyptian heritage and turns to identify himself with the Jews being enslaved by the Egyptians, he's going to suffer persecution and affliction with the Jews. But he also knew that's only temporal. So, he says, “The pleasures of Egypt are temporal but if I honor God and align myself with God's people, I may be afflicted but that will be temporal. But the pleasures I gain in God are always eternal and they are ever increasing.”

Let that be an example to us. When God brings blessings and pleasures our way, enjoy them. If God lets you have nice stuff, enjoy nice stuff, but don't hold it real tightly. Say, “Lord, this is from you, it's of you and when needed, I can let it go to be like Moses and devote myself to what you're calling me to do.” Don't be surprised if God brings a test to see if you'll do that. In Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas are in prison and it must have been a miserable condition yet they're full of joy. The Bible says that they are singing praises to God there in prison. What happens is, they found grace and they found joy in their affliction. Here's the point: Paul and Silas gave up – Paul was a Roman citizen. He had great advantage in this earth being a Hebrew of the Hebrews also. He kind of had two worlds going on here and he was pretty elite. He puts all that aside, devotes himself to God's work and God's kingdom and God's church and finds himself in prison and in affliction but also finds himself full of joy. He lost nothing and gained everything. Psalm 16:11 says, “You will make known to me the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy and in your right hand there are pleasures forever.”

So, don't be a stick-in-the-mud. Don't be a joyless rule-keeper as a Christian. Enjoy the pleasures God brings your way but keep it in balance knowing that if God calls and when God calls, I can let this go and put my whole attention over to God. These things are only tokens and types of temporal pleasures and blessings. The real blessings and pleasures I'm going to have are eternal and they're with God waiting for me in heaven. Brothers and sisters, we're not of this world. We're just passing through down here and James says, “What's the source of the quarrels and the fights and the pains and the difficulties? Is it not that you're casting too much of your heart and hope on the pleasures of this life?” Well, almost every time, the answer to that is, “Yeah, that's the reason. That's the reason.”

Let's pray together.