

# *Pleasures Forevermore*

Are the seekers finding?

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## Preface

The inspiration for this booklet came from a sermon by Melvin Burkholder (Cambridge Springs, PA), “The Christian and the Fun Mentality.” Nathan Hege (Tremonton, UT) shared the sermon with us on cassette tape and suggested that we consider publishing a booklet in such a vein. After listening to that heart-stirring sermon, we also felt compelled to publish something similar. David L. Martin (Rochester, WA) agreed to write the book for us. We greatly appreciate the simple, forthright, and yet candid language in which he couched our burden on the subject. We heartily endorse his message and his approach. We also acknowledge that portions of wording in the book were taken almost verbatim from Melvin Burkholder’s sermon. We thank Brother Melvin for this contribution.

We pray that the heartthrob of this booklet ring true to the hearts of those that read it. We have not attempted to list all those pleasures that are right in contrast with those pleasures that are wrong. Rather we hope to lead the reader to judge for himself whether his life is tuned to God’s desires in relation to pleasure. The Bible gives us timeless direction for every aspect of life, pleasure included. It alone is the standard by which we seek to measure our lives. Let us look honestly inward and evaluate our lives and pleasures by the light of God’s searching truth.

—Lamp and Light Publishers, Inc.

# Pleasures Forevermore

How delightful this world is! At least it was meant to be. *God virtually crammed His creation with various pleasures.* The feel of a soft pillow at night, the scent of barbecued chicken, the sight of a tree against the sky, the sound of a friendly voice, the taste of spring's first strawberries—these are all pleasures.

Not only are they various, they are variegated. We enjoy, not just colors, but shades of color—sky blue, baby blue, royal blue, navy blue, indigo! We enjoy a virtually limitless range of sights, sounds, scents, flavors, and sensations. Bright, shadowy, resonant, tinkling, sweet, sour, soothing, stimulating—the sensations come on and on.

Often we do not realize how rich we are until we, or someone we know, goes through a loss. A girl who suddenly lost her hearing at the age of eighteen wrote later, “I’d gone to sleep in a secure world full of sound—wonderful dancing sound—and I awakened in a silence as woolly and obliterating as deep snow in the country.”<sup>i</sup> The exception had proved the rule. Her deafness had proven what a wonderful thing sound is.

God gave us the joy of laughter.

Emotionally and psychologically we are rich as well. No other creature on earth knows all we do about the meaning of pity, of awakening love, of reverence, nostalgia, grief, and awe. God gives us our emotions—not just the unpleasant ones like fear and shame, but also joy and satisfaction. He gives us the joy of laughter. He gives us our basic desires—for comfort, for warmth, for friends, for home, for intimacy. And normally He fulfils those desires as we seek Him.

He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:17).

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17).

If pleasure can be so right, why do we often associate pleasure with things that are wrong? The popular saying goes, “Everything I like seems to be either illegal, immoral, or fattening.” Voltaire, the French philosopher, put it more bitterly. “God,” he wrote, “made us love pleasure, so that He might torment us with frightful pains...eternal.”<sup>ii</sup> He seemed to think that pleasure is nothing more than an elaborate bait for the greatest of all traps.

Voltaire is not alone. Some people have taken this concept so seriously that they have become pleasure-haters. They have shunned even food, sleep, and conversation as somehow being bad. Some people have thought the satisfactions of marriage to be immoral.

Renouncing the comforts of life might be appropriate at times, but it should be for better reasons than thinking that pleasure is wrong. Nature and the enjoyment of it are far from evil. For everything good, including pleasure, originates with God.

It is not pleasure as such, but the pursuit of pleasure, that gets us into trouble. This is the realm in which Satan operates. Indeed it is the only realm in which he can operate. He finds himself at a disadvantage in the matter of pleasure because he has never yet invented a pleasure. All that Satan can do is pervert the pleasures that exist and sell them under new brand names.

Certainly he has done an effective job. Without question, his twisted pleasures are pleasurable. A brother who gave his heart to the Lord relatively late in life said frankly about his ungodly years, “There was a certain amount of fun in that kind of life.” No doubt there is pleasure in getting drunk. There is a kind of pleasure in thumbing one’s nose at the law. There is pleasure in crime; why else would people do it? The Bible itself speaks of “the pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:25).

*It is not pleasure as such, but the abuse of pleasure, that gets us into trouble.*

But there is disappointment in sin, too. One young man who was challenged on the sinfulness of his life finally admitted, “I will say that a lot of things out there aren’t as much fun as I thought they were going to be.”

The devil paints his sinful pleasures with a glamour they never warrant. He promises the richest of pleasures and never actually provides more than the hollowest of fun. Since his cleverly painted glamour tends to catch the natural eye, we sometimes associate pleasure with things that are wrong. In contrast to Satan’s perversions, God’s pleasures are rich, full, and genuine. They need no glamour for they are real.

“God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good”  
(Genesis 1:31).

*Many people, however, never fall into the trap of perverted pleasure.*

They stay straight. Does Satan have any bait to offer these well-meaning people?

Yes, the simplest abuse of all—simply the pursuit of pleasure! An ancient Hebrew prophet described people he knew of “that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments” (Amos 6:4–6).

They were not alone. Some ancient Romans had vomitoriums at their banquets. After revelers had gorged themselves, they could go and get rid of the burden in their stomachs, then come back and eat some more. Were these people enjoying themselves? Yes—and no.

Are we any wiser than the ancient civilizations? Hmmm. These days we do not do as the Romans did, exactly, but smorgasbords must sometimes call ambulances to aid people who have overeaten. Meanwhile the search for thrills goes on as men pursue ever more fantastic pleasures.

Entertainment is big business. North Americans spend nearly as much for recreation as they do for groceries. Many people wince at what schoolteachers get paid per year but think nothing of it when a rock musician or movie star gets paid a much higher figure per *month*. If figures tell the story, people think more highly of their entertainers than of

their doctors, their businessmen, their builders, and their mechanics—not to mention farmers, who merely *feed* them! The headlong pursuit of pleasure has captured society.

The winds that blow in the world move the curtains of the church. In fact, many churches have pretty well conceded the issue and joined the world at its own game. Many church members do not have to leave the church to see a movie or listen to a rock band or join a baseball league. That is not only permitted; it is done at church!

The more conservative churches have not escaped unscathed. The current pressure for after-church activities and games and socials is evidence of this. The pursuit of pleasure is snaring the church and trying to wrap its tenacious tentacles of sin around it.

God is watching all this with a great deal of interest. He has designed the world to frustrate the pleasure-seekers, to make them finally scratch their heads and say, “What’s going on here? There must be more to life than pursuing pleasure.”

“Pleasures forevermore”—are the seekers finding? The answer is, ask them! The pleasure-seekers are finding some pleasure, perhaps. But they must admit there is something hollow and short-lived about it all.

Feeding on the husks around me  
Till my strength was almost gone,  
Longed my soul for something better,  
Only still to hunger on.

Another trap for many well-meaning people is pursuing pleasures in activities that they should have outgrown already.

Let us observe a child over the years. As he grows, some of the things that once fascinated him start to fade. His baby rattle holds no appeal to him by the time he is four. His tricycle no longer seems so wonderful once he can ride a bicycle. The bicycle fades when he can drive a car. He has outgrown those once-useful items. He is on to better things.

Sometimes a child needs encouragement to leave the old life behind. Perhaps he clings to his bottle a little too long. Perhaps he cries on the first day of school. As he grows older, he might still be fascinated by younger children’s fun. (After observing younger children sliding down a slippery terrace in cardboard boxes, an older girl facetiously remarked, “It is too bad we are too big to fit into the boxes.”) But with a little help, children are off to new adventures and broader horizons of usefulness.

If a ten-year-old still has the mind of a three-year-old through no fault of his own, we give him due respect and try to make his life as full as we can. But we sorrow for his sake because we know that he will never enjoy some of the blessings the rest of us enjoy.

Another trap well-meaning people fall into is seeking the right pleasure at the wrong time of life.

Normal growing should be the process a person goes through all his life. Always he should be looking forward—to finding a job, to greater maturity, to marriage and a home of his own (possibly), to the call of God wherever He leads. This might take some special

encouragement at times, and of course he will cast some wistful looks backward now and then. (Those birthdays with zeros—age thirty, age forty, age fifty—are somehow a little scary to cross.) Yet always he should be letting go of things behind him, attracted by opportunities before him.

But the natural thing does not always happen. In our society the spotlight falls on young people in their late teens and early twenties. Supposedly they have reached the peak of human existence. Society pushes young children into thinking about boyfriends and girlfriends long before they are ready.

Once a child arrives in young adulthood, society slams on the brakes. It teaches young people to hang onto the trappings of youth and mourn for them when they fade away. Cosmetic surgery, hair implants, paint, and powder help to preserve the youthful façade.

Along with this comes the matter of playing. For some reason, adults who should be moving on to other things just as interesting as playing are sticking to the old familiar things. Stiffening muscles and arthritis finally nudge them in the right direction, but they relinquish the old delights with a sigh.

As always, God is watching with great interest. As people get older, He starts working to help them lose interest in this earthly life itself. The world to come becomes more interesting to people, if they allow it to, and the present world loses more of its charm.

God reminds me of the mother who wants to help her tiny tot lose interest in his pacifier. She snips a bit off the end, then a bit more. Finally the child decides he has better things to do than keep his pacifier. Just so, God cuts people's pleasures a little short, then a little shorter. The idea is not so much to spoil their pleasure as it is to redirect them, to have them look for opportunities to move on in life, to move on in service. The Lord's service yields far greater pleasures anyhow than those we tend to pursue.

Is it not interesting that when people get older, they become physically farsighted? Things nearby become blurred. Things distant—the treetops, the horizon—are as clear as ever. Did God intend this to represent what should be happening with people's spiritual vision as well? Older people should see even beyond the horizon, to a world to come. And young people should be catching the vision as well.

In some ways it seems as if God Himself were going on before us, beckoning and shouting, "Come on! Come on! It's better farther on! Seek me with all your heart—and find pleasures forevermore!"

Turn your eyes upon Jesus;  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of His glory and grace.

Again, people pursue pleasure in itself, and they seek it at the wrong time of life.

But these mistakes are only symptoms of a much greater mistake—people seek the gift instead of the Giver.

Pleasure is not ours to pursue; it is God's to give. We do not find true pleasure by seeking pleasure, but by seeking God and by reaping the blessings He bestows on His children. Once we start grasping after God's gifts, they are no longer gifts but stolen goods. This spoils much of the pleasure in them, both for our heavenly Father and for ourselves.

Pleasure is a great gift. But God is greater than His gifts. That is why Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Just seeing God—and seeing just God—will be all the delight anyone could wish. In the meantime, just having God and serving Him is worth more than all the pleasures of this world. "Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:4) are making a big, big miscalculation. They fail to recognize their own peril, their own spiritual death (1 Timothy 5:6).

These mistakes are symptoms of a much greater mistake—people seek the gift instead of the Giver.

Sometimes God personally intervenes in the lives of those who are not finding their pleasure in Him. Remember the reference above to ancient Hebrews and their banquets? God declared, "Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that shall go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed" (Amos 6:7). The story of those pursuing pleasure today will not be remarkably different. God's judgment falls upon sin.

You say, "I see that. I even understand it between my ears. But how can I get it into my heart? The fact is, I do love pleasures more than God, and I can't help it!"

"Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Psalm 73:25).

God has the answer! He calls it being "born again" (John 3:3).

Our first birth gives us a child's nature, which is just what we need at the time. It is like the first stage of a rocket, propelling us toward adult life. But as we approach adult life, the first stage should drop away and we should be "born again." A new surge carries us forward and upward from that point on.

And how do we become born again? By repenting of our past sins and trusting the atonement of Jesus' blood to wipe them out. By taking an early retirement from pleasure-seeking and seeking the Lord instead. Therefore, when we become born again, our perspective changes. No longer do we pursue self and pleasure. Instead, we follow Christ and find true pleasure in doing so.

Two baptismal vows summarize this nicely. "Are you truly sorry for your past sins, and are you willing to renounce Satan, the world and all works of darkness, and your own carnal will and sinful desires? Do you promise by the grace of God and the aid of His Holy Spirit to submit yourself to Christ and His Word and faithfully to abide in the same until death?" In other words when we are truly sorry for our past sins, we will stop seeking the pleasure of sin. We renounce Satan and all his words and works by resisting temptation. Finding God will displace the worldly, carnal, and satanic lure to pursue selfish pleasure. When we submit to Christ and His Word, we yield to our Master's



wishes in humble obedience and He showers us with true pleasure that comes only by serving Him.

Once our loyalty to Christ has been decided, we are ready for things that are better than ever before. Our testimony is then not much different from Charles Finney's. He once said, "Probably but few persons enjoy worldly pleasure more intensely than I did before I was converted; but my conversion and . . . spiritual baptism . . . completely extinguished all desire for worldly sports and amusements. I was lifted at once into entirely another plane of life and another kind of enjoyment."<sup>iii</sup>

Once we have been born again, we find the thing we were seeking ever since we began growing up. We discover that our itch for pleasure is an "itch that only God can scratch." When our lives are full of God it no longer irritates us, and we no longer try to soothe it by seeking pleasure. We no longer desire to be gratified because we are satisfied. We have left off pursuing pleasure and now are pursuing God.

We no longer need to be gratified because we are satisfied.

Now we understand what Jesus meant when He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled... Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:3, 6, 8). These are the delights we were looking for and did not know it. God's pleasures come to us when we cease pursuing pleasure and pursue God instead.

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men...  
for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:23–24).

A wonderful pleasure that results from the New Birth is the pleasure of  
God's pleasure in us!

Is that a new thought? Certainly God takes pleasure in His universe with all its galaxies and spinning planets. Certainly He likes to observe His seas, forests, plains, and mountains on earth. He cares about His creatures and even notes a sparrow's fall. But He has told us what gives Him more pleasure than anything else. "The Lord's portion is His people" (Deuteronomy 32:9). And again, "The Lord taketh pleasure in His people" (Psalm 149:4).

"Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? Or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?" Eliphaz asked sarcastically of Job (Job 22:3). The answer is actually yes! Knowing this, gives us a zest for living that no earthly pleasure can. "The plowing of the wicked is sin" (Proverbs 21:4); but the plowing of a saint (or his desk work, or his conversations, or his walks along the creek or sidewalk, or his work in the kitchen or shop) is the opposite of sin. It is a positive pleasure to God—and to the saint.

"A false balance is abomination to the Lord: but *a just weight is his delight*" (Proverbs 11:1).

"Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but *they that deal truly are his delight*" (Proverbs 12:22).

"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord: but *he loveth him that followeth after righteousness*" (Proverbs 15:9).



Jesus understood this. He knew the pleasure of His Father's interest and love for Him. His Father's voice from the sky, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased" had to make one of the most thrilling moments in Jesus' life. No wonder Jesus never had to pursue pleasure or wonder what to do to "kill time." He had pleasures much more satisfying than that, even in His daily routines. And so may we—when we cease pursuing pleasure and begin pursuing God.

Living for Jesus through earth's little while,  
My dearest pleasure the light of His smile...

## Does this mean all pleasure, relaxation, and recreation is wrong for a Christian?

Of course not. It just means we can find no greater pleasure than the pleasure God gives us, at His time, in His amounts. We find pleasure, yea, even recreation as we pursue God.

No, diversions are not wrong. It is said that someone once visited the apostle John and found him, not deep in prayer or engaged in lofty meditation, but playing with a partridge. When John saw his visitor's surprise, he pointed to a bow nearby. The string had been loosed from the bow. John remarked that it is not good for a bow to be under constant tension, and it is not good for people to be either.

Jesus Himself believed in taking time away from routine duties. At one point Jesus told His disciples, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile" (Mark 6:31). They left for a spot He knew of on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Interestingly, the recreation He got was more work, for people followed Him to the spot.

Jesus went for a change of pace even to Gethsemane, and many times at that. "And Judas also, which betrayed Him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with His disciples" (John 18:2).

What did Jesus "oftentimes" do in Gethsemane for recreation? What had He intended to do on the other side of the Sea of Galilee? We do not know, exactly. But we have an idea of the kind of diversions He would have approved of.

*Nature.* Jesus made remarks like "Behold the fowls of the air" and "Consider the lilies of the field" (Matthew 6:26, 28). And we agree—in theory. But do we agree in practice? How ironic if we buy a bird guide, only to put it on the shelf and wonder what to do for fun!

Some of us tend to think of nature study as a luxury, something to feel guilty about as long as there is work to do. Not so—God put mysteries into nature for a reason, and He enjoys seeing people search them out, responding to Him in praise and service and enjoying the pleasures He heaps upon them as rewards.

*Children.* Observing children is a form of recreation that not everyone has a chance to enjoy. And the ones who have the chance (including this writer!) too often miss it. People look for pleasure by following the sports and fail to see the child peeking under their newspaper. Yet what could be more refreshing than to watch this bundle of innocence and energy at play, or to do as Jesus did when He took children into His arms and blessed them? It might have been the best moment in His whole day.

## Some people need a diversion from all their diversions.

*Music.* The song of birds, the wind in the evergreens, the water music of rain falling, perhaps even the sound of distant highway traffic, all are music for us if we care to listen. Blessed also is the housewife who sings while she is washing dishes, and the driver who whistles a tune as he drives down the road! People do not have to wait for their music because most people can make their own.

Jesus and His disciples made music for themselves on the darkest evening of their lives. “And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives” (Mark 14:26).

*Physical exercise.* Walking behind a vacuum cleaner might conceivably serve as recreation for a desk-bound person. But most people have to get out of the house and go around the block, swinging their arms. Something about physical exercise brightens the day. We have a way of forgetting that fact until we get moving. Then we realize what we have been missing.

*Conversation.* Not all conversation is relaxation, by any means. But some people have to be reminded that sitting down with a friend or spouse and just talking might be the best medicine they could ever get.

*Going home.* Some people need a diversion from all their diversions. Do you? What better way to get it than to go home, wash your own car, mow your own lawn, and read a book from your own bookshelf?

Or cook your own family’s supper. It does not make sense to install an expensive kitchen and then go eat in a local restaurant.

*Change of pace.* “A change is as good as a rest.” Digging in the garden is a rest from studying. Reading a book is a rest from working in the garden. Work can also be recreation at the same time.

Sometimes speeding up the pace of work can be as much of a diversion as slowing down! Puttering around can become extremely tiresome, as people who finally throw themselves into their job discover.

*Plain nothingness.* The reason many people need so much recreation is because their to-do list is already too long. If they left some blank spots in their date book (admittedly, not always a simple accomplishment), the more relaxed schedule would do them more good than scrambling off to the next sporting event. They must learn to say no.

*Thought and meditation.* Pausing to “hear yourself think” has great value. The early church fathers understood this and spoke of “holy leisure.” Many problems find solutions after time and deliberation. These are problems that never died as long as people “worried on the run.”

*Worship.* “From low delights and fleeting toys I soar to reach immortal joys.” Let no one mock it who has not done it.

Is it not true that there were times we felt too tired to go to prayer meeting but went anyhow, only to come home less tired than when we went? There might be several reasons for this, but certainly worship of the true God is refreshing.

“The living God . . .  
giveth us richly all things to enjoy”  
(1 Timothy 6:17).

## Are there tests by which one can judge a pleasure as either good or bad?

Are there angles of view to help us see a thing the way God sees it? Is there any way to determine whether our activities are a pursuit of pleasure or whether they represent a pursuit of God that brings to us pleasure? Yes, here are some test questions.

### Is it pure pleasure?

Rather than making you feel healthy, like fresh air, some pleasures are “sickly sweet.” Rather than giving you a sense of accomplishment, like a day of hard work, they give you a sense of dissatisfaction. “The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it” (Proverbs 10:22). But many people hardly know what this means. Their pleasures are like a drug, creating a craving but never satisfying it. The “sickly sweet” characteristic is a symptom of pursuing pleasure instead of finding pleasure in pursuing God.

### Can you ask God to bless it?

And can you thank God for it? Of course some people ask God to bless some very ungodly things. But, assuming you are spiritual enough not to do that, can you feel comfortable asking God to direct you in every detail of the activity you are considering? And can you spontaneously thank God for it afterwards, or do you feel a bit apologetic? Are you thanking God for a pleasure you stole? Or are you thanking Him for a pleasure He gave?

### Will it serve its purpose?

Recreation is good—if it recreates. The student who comes to his desk still trembling with physical exertion will get little from his studies. His diversion has spoiled its own purpose. The vacationer who must recover from his vacation has likewise missed the point. So has someone who must work so hard to afford his recreational equipment that he needs still more recreation. The pursuit of pleasure never recreates us as the pursuit of God does.

### What will this pleasure cost?

The money that passes through our hands is really not ours. God is watching to see what we do with it. If we spend it for one purpose, we no longer have it for another. If we fling our money into the pursuit of some fleeting pleasure, what will it cost someone who really needs it—a poor child, for example? And if we pour money into expensive sports or hobby equipment, what will it cost us in terms of the greater satisfaction God desires to give us in reward for our humble, loving obedience?

Much of the money we donate to others slips anonymously away to someone we never knew. Other gifts go to someone we can see enjoying them. Either way, God makes sure that any pleasure we gain by sacrificing for others will be a higher and greater pleasure than the one we lost.

### Will the pleasure produce its money's worth?

For instance, all children, no matter how poor, play. The expensiveness of their equipment does not seem to have much effect on their pleasure. In fact, readily available things that are not usually considered toys, when coupled with a child's active imagination, often bring more hours of enjoyment than expensive toys that soon lose their novelty. The girl who makes her dollhouse by laying straws on the floor for room walls might be having as much fun as the girl who has a three-dimensional, three-hundred-dollar dollhouse. Sometimes we buy children dolls and toys only to hear Grandmother talk about the cornhusk doll she had as a girl and the wooden top her brother had.

Any child growing up without tin cans and scraps of wood and pebbles is a poor, underprivileged child.

This does not mean we should ignore our children's need for playthings. Times have changed. Toys may change too. But the principle remains the same, and the principle is, simplicity brings pleasure. Well, no, it does not bring pleasure. It is just more conducive to pleasure than complexity and piles of stuff.

The more expensive toys are often very specialized toys. A pedal tractor is a tractor and only a tractor. True, you can do all sorts of things with it, but the tractor remains a tractor. A simple wagon can be a tractor; it can be a car; it can be a bus; it can be a boat; it can be a tractor-trailer truck or a buggy. By the same token, a mute doll can make any noise the girl is capable of imagining and mimicking. An expensive talking version has a very limited vocabulary, though the novelty is tremendous (at least at first).

Any child growing up without tin cans and scraps of wood and pebbles is a poor, underprivileged child. The toys he possesses have not given him their money's worth. And anyone who pours money into—golf, for instance—should ask himself if he got as much for his money as if he had played a game of croquet at home with his own children.

The pleasures God gives are not for the wealthy alone. They simply do not cost much money.

### Will it cost me in ways other than money?

“He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man” (Proverbs 21:17). Yes, poor—materially, morally, physically, and spiritually. Without expanding on all those points, just consider the matter of time. Even if a sport cost no money, what about the hours spent that could have been invested instead—invested in things that improved the mind, the soul—yes, and the body too! Pleasures that waste our time or wear us out are not pleasures that result from Godly stewardship.

You can judge a pleasure by the company it keeps.

### How long in terms of years will the benefit last?

Ask anyone in his forties. The passions and appetites that seemed so real when he was twenty are already losing their edge a little. “Remember now thy Creator in the days of

thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” (Ecclesiastes 12:1.)

Look ahead, look ahead. Instead of just spending time, or even killing it, why not invest it? The benefits of Godly pleasure are lasting because they result from effort invested in pursuit of the eternal.

### Who wants to join you in your pleasure?

Is it the warmhearted, the spiritual, the people who build you up? Is it people who know and love the Lord? Or is it, perhaps, the hangers-on at church, the giddy, the people who are addicted to pleasure seeking? You can judge a pleasure by the company it keeps.

### Has your church spoken on the matter?

Conservative churches do not all draw lines at the exact same place, but they have valid concerns, and we should respect the advice they give and the lines they draw.

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

### Here are a few questions someone might have.

#### Is children’s play wrong?

Play is a child’s work. It is a pleasant part of their development. Their little pantomimes prepare them for real life. Jesus spoke of children in the marketplace evidently playing wedding and playing funeral (Luke 7:32). It prepared them for the real thing.

It is fine sometimes for adults to join children in their play. Schoolteachers do it all the time, and there is nothing wrong with Father tussling on the floor with his children or Mother helping her daughters to organize breakfast with their dolls. That is their God-given responsibility and He gives them pleasure with it.

#### What is wrong with adult sports?

By “adult sports” we mean games that adults get together to play. Arguably there are no such things as “adult sports”—just children’s games that adults play.

Adult sports are conspicuously absent from God’s blessing in the Bible. “And the streets of the city shall be full of *boys and girls* playing in the streets thereof” (Zechariah 8:5). The Greeks and Romans had their theaters and amphitheaters, but godly Jews stayed out of them. Early Christians stayed out of them, too, unless they were forced to face lions in the arena.

Usually adult sports rob adult business. “The law of diminishing returns” enters the picture here. To play a ten-minute game occasionally or to go for a half-mile walk is good for most anyone as an occasional diversion. But the last ten minutes of a three-hour game or the last half mile of a ten-mile run is not nearly so beneficial. The good returns have diminished, you see. Adult sports cost more time than the returns justify. We have no time to fiddle around that long with activities that return so little.

Adult sports often last longer than the returns justify.

Adult sports usually involve wrong features. For instance, there is nothing wrong in itself with rolling a ball down an alley and knocking over some pins. But what about the

company one keeps in the bowling alley? Granted, we might meet those same people on the job, but the atmosphere is entirely different there.

Adult sports affect adult talk. We can have a profitable conversation around the table. We can have a good conversation going for a walk. But if we decide to have a game, what happens to the conversation? It completely changes. No longer do we share values or get into any deep subject, or much of any subject at all.

Certainly there are times to relax the brain, exercise the muscles, and get to see another side of people's personalities for a while. We do not mean that once a person becomes an adult he can never pitch a horseshoe again. But it is so easy to let the good rob the best. This becomes obvious when people talk mostly about sports even when they are not playing. Adult sports are a pursuit of pleasure instead of a pursuit of God.

### Where do we draw the line between childhood and adulthood?

As a general rule, it is whatever age children take on adult responsibilities. And that age in life is also the age when they begin to sense God's call in their lives. At that point, as they yield their lives to the Lord, they are letting go of the childhood pleasures and finding their pleasures in seeking God instead.

Children generally know without being told when to quit playing with dolls and tricycles. One boy visited a friend who took him up to his bedroom and got out some matchbox cars and trucks. The friend started pushing them around the "roads" on his quilt, making motor noises. To accommodate his friend, the visiting boy entered the game. But in the bedroom mirror he saw himself pushing a toy around on the quilt, and he was embarrassed. The visiting boy had grown up a little more than the other, and that had made the difference.

One church came up with these guidelines for young people.

1. Playing at home and at school with parental and teacher direction is a normal part of a child's development.
2. Play should begin to taper off when a young person becomes a Christian.
3. Play among upper teenagers should be limited to playing with younger brothers and sisters in the home or during normal family visits.
4. It is not acceptable for young people of the church to gather together to engage in play activities.
5. It is not considered a good thing to have frequent or large gatherings of youth in a home after a worship service for social activities.
6. It is best for mid-teenagers to be with their families and not be left without parental supervision to follow their own social interests.
7. The goal is to keep the spiritual focus in life and not let social interests become predominant.

### Where do hunting and fishing come into the picture?

Is the hunting for recreation? Fine, up to a point. But does this get to be a three-day excursion? Have you perhaps had enough recreation by the end of the first morning?

Is it for meat, with some recreation mixed in? That is fine as long as the meat is not a justification to pursue recreation that costs too much time and money. We are back to the law of diminishing returns—back to the idea of pursuing pleasure or finding pleasure in pursuing God.



Also, one has to consider the rush to own all the “proper” hunting paraphernalia. David the shepherd slew a lion and a bear, and he did not need a costly down-filled camouflage coat to do it.

Fishing? Fishing for an evening in some lake or stream around home can provide a diversion, opportunities to observe and learn from nature, and even breakfast for the morning—all for a reasonable investment. However, if someone must buy an expensive boat and trailer, drive a long distance, and hear the off-color jokes of sportsmen he rubs shoulders with, that changes the picture.

**Is there merit in running along with people in their pleasures in order to win them away from the world?**

The apostle Peter would have said, “They think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you” (1 Peter 4:4). Evidently joining people in their fun was not Peter’s style. He was more likely to point them to “Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead” (v. 5) or to say, “But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer” (v. 7).

Charles Finney, in the following nineteenth century account, makes a point as modern as today.

In my early Christian life, I heard a Methodist bishop from the South report a case that made a deep impression on my mind. He said there was in his neighborhood a slave holder, a gentleman of fortune, who was a gay and agreeable man, and gave himself much to various field sports and amusements. He used to associate much with his pastor, often invite him to dinner, and to accompany him in his sports and pleasure-seeking excursions of various kinds. The minister cheerfully complied with these requests, and a friendship grew up between the pastor and his parishioner that continued till the last sickness of this gay and wealthy man.

When the wife of this worldling was apprised that her husband could live but a short time, she was much alarmed for his soul, and tenderly inquired if she should not call in their minister to converse and pray with him. He feelingly replied: “No, my dear; he is not the man for me to see now. He was my companion, as you know, in worldly sports and pleasure-seeking; he loved good dinners and a jolly time. I then enjoyed his society and found him a pleasant companion. But I see now that I never had any real confidence in his piety, and have now no confidence in the efficacy of his prayers. I am now a dying man, and need the instruction and prayers of somebody that can prevail with God. We have been much together, but our pastor has never been in serious earnest with me about the salvation of my soul, and he is not the man to help me now.”

The wife was greatly affected, and said: “What shall I do then?” He replied: “My coachman, Tom, is a pious man. I have confidence in his prayers. I have often overheard him pray, when about the barn or stables, and his prayers have always struck me as being quite sincere



and earnest. I never heard any foolishness from him. He has always been honest and earnest as a Christian man. Call him.”

Tom was called, and came within the door, dropping his hat and looking tenderly and compassionately at his dying master. The dying man put forth his hand, saying: “Come here, Tom. Take my hand. Tom, can you pray for your dying master?”

Tom poured out his soul in earnest prayer. I cannot remember the name of this bishop, it was so long ago; but the story I well remember as an illustration of the mistake into which many professors and some ministers fall, supposing that we recommend religion to the unconverted by mingling with them in their pleasures and their running after amusements.<sup>iv</sup>

Finally, how much pleasure something produces is not the yardstick by which we determine its value.

Is God in it? Is it His will for me? Our Lord holds the yardstick. He determines whether a pleasurable activity is valuable or not. Only the pleasures that are found while walking with God are valuable to the Christian. Indeed His presence is the greatest pleasure of all.

How different things must look from His perspective! How different from the viewpoint of an angel who has seen God face to face, or a child of God who has passed on! How different, when we ourselves finally move on into glory! Will we have any regrets then, even the most spiritual of us? I suspect that when we close this life, our change in perspective will be so sudden that our first impulse will be to gasp, then to laugh, and then (if we are allowed) to weep.

Pleasures forevermore! Are the seekers finding? Some seekers are! Not those who seek pleasure but those who seek God—and find Him—are finding that fullness of joy. Some day they will find pleasures and delights in God’s presence such as they have only tasted down here. Pleasures here, pleasures yonder, pleasures forevermore!

All that my soul has tried

Left but a dismal void.

Jesus has satisfied;

Jesus is mine.

“Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).

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<sup>i</sup> Mary Hays Heiner, quoted in S.S. Stevens, Fred Warshofsky, and the Editors of Time-Life Books, *Sound and Hearing* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1965), p. 145.

<sup>ii</sup> Will and Ariel Durant, *The Age of Voltaire* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 39.

<sup>iii</sup> Charles Finney, “Innocent Amusements.”

<sup>iv</sup> 4. Charles Finney, “Innocent Amusements.”