

March 15/16, 2025

Created for Pleasure
God's Design for the Church in 1 Timothy
1 Timothy 4:1-5
Pastor Bryan Clark

Growing up in our Fundamentalist movement, this is how I would describe my relationship with God. I understood that I was a sinner, and that God sent His Son to be my Savior. And through Jesus, I experienced the forgiveness of sin so that when I die, I'll go to heaven. As a result of that, I was duty-bound, obligated to follow God. After all He had done for me, I owed Him. That was the least I could do. So, I need to be a good boy, need to follow the rules. I need to do what I'm told because I owed God that. But in the mid-80s, I read a book by John Piper called *Desiring God*. The subtitle was, "Meditations of a Christian Hedonist," which began to completely change my understanding of my relationship with God. I realized I've actually been created for pleasure. That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Timothy, Chapter 4. If you're visiting with us, we're working our way through Paul's letter to Timothy. But before we jump into chapter 4, I want to mentally take us back to the first couple chapters of Genesis, because I think it provides a good background for understanding what was happening in the church in Ephesus.

If you go all the way back to the beginning of the story, we learned that we as people are made in the image of God in order to enjoy a loving relationship with Him. We often use the language, "to dance with God". We learn that we as people are made in the image of God, male and female, and the first commandment in the Bible is to ***be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth***. That is developed further in chapter 2, when we learn more about the relationship between Adam and Eve as a husband and wife experiencing sexual intimacy and pleasure, to be fruitful and multiply. At the end of the chapter, it's described as, ***the two became one flesh. They were both naked and there was no shame.***

We also read in chapter 2, verse 9—the description of the trees and the fruit that God had placed in the garden—was that they were pleasing. It's the Hebrew word for *pleasure*. They were made so that the people in the garden would experience deep pleasure, both by looking at and eating from these trees. And this was described as ***being very good***. So it's interesting to note that this is the world as God intended it to be, a garden paradise filled with pleasure that ultimately would be experienced in a relationship with Him.

But starting in chapter 3, we are introduced to a cosmic war. God has an enemy, Satan, and he hates God and is on a mission to make sure people don't worship God. And the best way to do that is to mess up people's view of God and portray Him in a very unattractive way, as an oppressive God. So the conversation begins between the serpent and Adam and Eve. The serpent starts with, ***Indeed, as God said***. It's very weird Hebrew words. It's very difficult to translate, but it carries the idea that God is not as good as you think He is. It's kind of, we would say, "Really, really, is that

what God said?” And what he says is, “Didn’t God say you can’t eat from any of the trees in the garden?” In other words, what he’s saying is, “Yes, God created a beautiful garden, filled with deep pleasure, both in sexual intimacy within a marriage relationship and from the trees, both looking at them and eating from them. But then he turns right around and says, “But don’t touch it.” Well, Eve is going to straighten him out. So she says, “No, that’s not what God said at all. Actually what God said is, ‘From the trees we may eat, but you can’t eat from this one, or touch it, or you’ll die.’”

Now at first we think, “Not a bad response,” but we start to notice, “Wait a minute, you’ve got a couple things not quite correct.” So, when God spoke He said, “*Of all the trees you may eat freely. Live it up. I put them in the garden for your pleasure, both to look at and to eat from.*” But Eve left out the word *freely*, which is indicative of the fact she is starting to question the goodness of God. Maybe God is not quite as generous as we thought He was. And then she says, “You cannot eat from it or touch it.” We say, “Wait a minute. God didn’t say anything about not touching it.” We refer to Eve as the first legalist. She’s already adding rules to what God has said. But the point of the text is to indicate she’s seeing God as not as generous, and more restrictive. She’s beginning to change her view of God because of the lies of the serpent.

And then comes the real whopper. “Actually, Adam and Eve, think about this. Wouldn’t life be better if you functioned as your own god? *You* decide what’s right and wrong. Surely that would be the best route to the life you desire.” And Adam and Eve thought, “That sounds right,” and so they rebelled against God and disobeyed, plunging the human race into sin and rebellion. And every one of us experiences the consequences of that every single day.

Fast forward thousands of years, and you have the same basic dynamic that they’re dealing with in the first century church in Ephesus. So that’s where we pick up our study this morning. Ryan did a great job last week of talking about why it’s so important that the Church take seriously her role as the guardians of truth, to be the pillar and support of truth. And then chapter 3 ends with this beautiful confession of Jesus and who He is and what He’s done.

But chapter 4, verse 1, then starts with, **But**. (Don’t you just hate that?) But we’ve got a problem here, and here’s the problem. There’s a cosmic war going on. God’s adversary, the devil, is determined to keep people from worshiping Him, and the best way to do that is to mess up their view of Him and make Him seem oppressive and not really attractive. So here’s the problem.

But the Spirit (meaning *the Holy Spirit*) **explicitly** (just means, *clearly*) **says that in later times some will fall away from the faith**, (*NASB, 1 Timothy 4:1a)

So it’s just simply saying the Spirit of God has over and over again—we would say in the New Testament—warned us of this problem. That there is an enemy, and the enemy wants to keep people from God, and he’s going to do that through false teachers. This will be true in the **latter times**, which I think is just another way of saying *last days*. According to the New Testament, the **last days** started with the First Coming of Jesus and His incarnation, and it ends with the Second

Coming of Jesus. Sometimes I'll have people say, "Pastor Clark, I think we're in the last days," to which I say, "I know we're in the last days. We have been for 2,000 years." It's a reference to the fact that every generation before Jesus was looking forward to God fulfilling the promise to send a Savior. It was always looking forward to this.

But God kept His promise 2,000 years ago when He sent His Son to take on human flesh, to walk this earth, live a sinless life, be nailed to a cross, buried, rose again, fulfilling the promise. So from that moment on, we are among the generation with a different responsibility. Our job is to tell people God kept His promise. He sent His Savior—this is what has happened—and to proclaim the message of Jesus until Jesus returns. So that's what's referred to here. We are a generation of the last days. But part of what's going to define the last days is going to be false teachers that will cause some to fall away.

Now, as soon as we hear that language, it has the potential to stir insecurities within us. It's like, "Oh, no, what does that mean?" You may or may not know this, but in Christian circles, there's been debate for hundreds of years around the topic of whether or not you can lose your salvation. Is it possible to be a Christian headed to heaven today, and next year, not? And so it tends to tap into the insecurities we all have. It's like, "Oh no. What if?" We, here at Lincoln Berean, have consistently taught we do not believe you can lose your salvation. It's referred to as "eternal security". Simply stated, if your performance had nothing to do with your salvation, then bad performance would not cause you to lose your salvation. It's never been based on your performance.

So what is he talking about? The Greek word is the word from which we get our word *apostasy*. It just basically means *to drift away* or *to reject* or *to go a different direction*. The text isn't saying falling away from Jesus. It's *falling away from the faith*, which we have consistently defined in 1 Timothy as *the body of doctrine that defines us as Christians*. In many of these New Testament texts, what they're not talking about is, "Are you in or out...are you in or out? You got your salvation; you're going to lose your salvation." We read that into them, but that isn't really what the conversation is.

So think of it this way. Is it possible there could be a real religious person who, at some point is deceived by a false teacher and drifts away, following things that aren't true? Yes, of course. Is it possible that you could have a true Christian who has experienced new life in Christ but is deceived by a false teacher and begins to believe things that aren't true, and that leads them down a path that makes a mess of their life? Of course, it happens all the time. So it's not "in or out", it's just a movement away from the truth and the consequence of that. How does this happen? Verse 2:

...by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, (Vs. 2)

The idea of **seared in their own conscience** carries the idea of what we would refer to as callous, like when you have a callus on your skin, you no longer feel anything. If you've ever learned to

play a stringed instrument, let's say like a guitar, it doesn't take long until the end of your fingers are so painful you can't even hardly touch the strings. You have to kind of suck it up and work your way through that and get calluses built up so you don't feel it anymore. That's the idea of the phrase...that at some point they no longer are sensitive to what they're doing.

...paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, (Vs. 1b)

So what is he talking about? We know that Satan is a liar. Not only does he lie in Genesis, chapter three, but in John, chapter eight, Jesus identifies him as not only a liar, but *the father of lies*. They all originate in him, and he has an army of demons who have been well trained in the art of deception. This is what they do. They lie. They lie about God. They lie about who He is. They lie about what it means to have a relationship with Him. This is the essence of spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare is not about someone writhing on the ground, foaming at the mouth with weird voices coming out of them. That's Hollywood's version. Spiritual warfare is about a battle for the truth, because the enemy is a liar and a deceiver. It says **deceitful spirits**. One of the things that I think is terrifying about deceit is if you're deceived, you think you're right...but you're not right. Proverbs says *there's a way that seems right, but the end is destruction*. Certainly Adam and Eve must have thought, "You know, that makes sense; that is the best way to the life we want." But it was a lie. The enemy is really good at deceiving us, and at the core it has to do with our view of God and what it means to have a relationship with Him.

How does that message get out? It's not the voices of the demons. It gets out, he says, **by means of the hypocrisy of liars...callous...seared in their own conscience**. That word **hypocrisy** is an interesting Greek word. It comes out of the theater. It literally means *to wear a mask*. If I was in the Greek theater, I'd wear a mask and pretend to be somebody else. Even today, if I'm in a play or a drama, I'm pretending to be somebody else. It's the word hypocrisy...hypocritical...liars.

So who are these people? What is the great concern for us here this morning? Who is most likely to lead you astray? I don't think your greatest danger comes from secularism. I don't think it comes from atheism. I don't think it comes from humanism. I think it comes from religion. I believe more people will miss a relationship with God because of religion than any other cause. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, says that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. If you go back and look at the context of that statement, there's no question he's talking about religion. Religion makes sense to people, because everyone has deep within them this longing to know God. And the idea that God would be like the rest of the world—and it's a performance-based relationship—makes sense, because that's how the rest of the world operates.

All around the world, there are religions that are promoting things about God that are not true. They're hypocritical liars. What they're saying about God isn't true. What it means to have a relationship with God isn't true. Who God is isn't true. It's actually offensive to God. People today want to believe all these religious roads lead to God. Frankly, none of them lead to God. They're promoting a view of God that simply isn't true. But it's a very clever strategy to deceive people,

to mess up people's view of God and to view God as a very unattractive, oppressive God. So he identifies the mouthpiece as these hypocritical liars.

So what do you suppose, specifically, is the message? Again, it's not going to be from the secularists. It's not going to be from the humanists. It's not going to be from the atheists. That's not the great risk to us. It's going to come through the legalist. I've contended for years that I believe the number one concern of the New Testament writers for us as believers are the legalists, and that's what he identifies in verse three. What do they teach?

...men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. (Vs. 3)

So there's quite a bit of conversation trying to figure out exactly what's the background. But for our purposes, it's just simply a form of what's called asceticism. Asceticism is a belief that God is such that by denying myself certain pleasures, I can merit some sort of favor with God and at least keep God from whacking me. So the idea of *forbidding marriage* is, in essence, forbidding sexual pleasure. That was the idea of it. And forbidding eating and enjoying certain foods that God has created, is the essence of religion. This is who God is. God isn't a relational, personal God. God is oppressive, and you have to figure out ways to impress Him. You have to figure out ways to appease Him, in order to keep Him from whacking you and maybe possibly gaining some favor with Him. So, by denying ourselves these pleasures, maybe that will impress God, and maybe, in some way, I find some favor with this God. So if I crawl on my hands and knees on gravel for miles to some sort of a shrine I've set up, surely that hurts so much it will impress God, and maybe I can gain some favor with God, and maybe even possibly become super spiritual.

The reason this is also offensive to God is because it is a form of self-righteousness. The reason legalism is so dangerous to us is there's something deep within us that longs to be our own god, and in my own flesh, I want to believe I can do this. I can make myself more righteous. I can make myself more acceptable to God. I can make myself super spiritual. Of course, that's how it works. That's how everything in the world works. But God isn't impressed. There is no such thing in God's economy of "super spiritual". It has nothing to do with your performance. It's a gift of God's grace. You're either in Christ or you're not. There's nobody *more than*; there's nobody *less than*. There is no *super spiritual*. But this idea that by abstaining from these pleasures certainly will get God's attention and appease Him, because that's the kind of God He is, is offensive to Him.

Now, what's so interesting about this is, if we go back to Genesis chapters one and two—in the world as God intended it to be—these are the two specific pleasures described in those chapters: that a man and a woman in a lifelong, one-flesh relationship known as marriage, would experience pleasure, which is just a taste of the ultimate pleasure my soul experiences in a relationship with God. In the same way, God created the trees to look at and the fruit to eat from, to experience pleasure in the garden, to excite something within me that causes me to seek deeper pleasure that can only be found in a relationship with God.

David writes in the Psalms that, “*It’s in the presence of God that there is fullness of joy, and at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*” He has created us as pleasure-seeking people, that our souls might ultimately find what they’re longing for in an intimate, beautiful dance with Him.

Now think of the logic of this. These false teachers are seeking to convince us that to impress God we need to reject His good gifts that He created for our pleasure in order to gain favor with Him. I don’t think that’s going to impress Him. It’s a rejection of His intent. It’s a rejection of His plan. It’s a total misunderstanding of who God is and why He has given these gifts.

Now it’s very important to understand the second half of verse three, when it says **which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.** This text is not a license to pursue whatever pleasure we feel like, because that’s what God wants. That’s a total miss. What he says is, “God is good, and He’s given us good gifts, and if we know and believe the truth, we understand the goodness of these gifts and how they’re designed and intended by God and what role they should play in our lives...to excite within us a desire for more pleasure that ultimately is only found in Him.”

Can someone abuse God’s gift of sexual pleasure? Absolutely! It’s done every day. Can someone abuse God’s gift of food? Of course, they can! It’s done every day. But just because people abuse God’s good gifts doesn’t mean they aren’t good. And when we know and believe the truth, we understand the purpose of those gifts is to experience pleasure that excites something in me that causes me to long for deeper pleasure that ultimately leads me deeper into the presence of God. So he says in verse 4:

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude;

The idea of **gratitude** is saying, “Because I know and believe the truth about who God is and why He has given these good gifts for my pleasure, then I respond back to Him in **gratitude**, in thanksgiving that this is who God is, and this is what God has given me.” The implication is, “I understand the design and purpose and its role in my life that ultimately leads me into His presence, *where there is fullness of joy, and at His right hand are pleasures forevermore.*” Verse 5:

...for it is sanctified (That means set apart. What is set apart? What sets apart these good gifts from God? For it is set apart...) **by means of the word of God and prayer.**

What sets it apart is my understanding, what I know and believe about why God has given me these gifts for my pleasure, and **prayer** is simply referring to the **gratitude**. It’s like a dialog. God speaks to me through His Word, and I speak back to Him through prayer, expressing my gratitude for who He is as a good God, and His longing for me to experience pleasure in His good gifts. But ultimately, the ultimate pleasure is in a relationship with Him. My relationship with Him is not driven out of obligation. It’s not a duty. It’s not what it is. It’s an invitation to experience the deepest pleasure that my soul longs for by entering into an intimate dance with Him. He’s given me good

gifts to experience pleasure now, to celebrate and excite in me a longing for more that leads me to Him.

Once you understand this and cultivate a right view of God, it changes how you view the world. Everything now goes through that lens, and I begin to understand the world in a way I've never understood it before. So when I view the world through this lens, I start to understand the beauty of a sunrise and a sunset. This is something God has created as a good gift for my pleasure, because that's who He is.

A few weeks ago, Patti and I were in Hawaii visiting our daughter, and every evening we found a different place to watch the sunset over the ocean. And as I watched the sun set and the beauty of God's handiwork, I found myself thinking of God with a smile on His face as I experience the beauty of the pleasure that He has provided for me, to stir something in me, to celebrate this pleasure in such a way that I desire to experience deeper pleasure in my relationship with Him, whether it's the majesty of a mountain, the power of the ocean or the beauty of a flower. Maybe it's the mystery and wonder of a night sky. Maybe it's being emotionally moved and stirred by a beautiful piece of music or a breathtaking piece of art. Or maybe it's a trip into the wilderness to experience more of God's handiwork. God has given us good gifts that we might experience pleasure in those gifts to excite something in us, to cause us to long for more, deeper pleasure that can only be found in my relationship with Him.

If people don't understand this, then they don't understand the gifts. So they use them and they abuse them, and they idolize them, leaving their souls more empty and desperate than they were before. We are engaged in a cosmic battle for the truth, and what is at stake are the souls of the humans around us. It's only when we've cultivated a right view of God—we understand what it means to be rightly related to Him, we understand what it means to follow Him—we begin to view the world through this lens where we experience the pleasures that God has provided to excite us to something deeper in Him. But that cannot happen if people don't know and believe the truth.

So whose job is it to make sure the truth is not compromised? It's our job. That's what Ryan told us last week. It's the job of the Church. We've been called to be the pillar and support of the truth, to be proclaimers of the message that people might find what their souls are desperately longing for. May we be faithful to do our job to be the pillar and support of the truth. May we, together, be the Church.

Our Father, we're thankful this morning, You are not an oppressive, distant God that we have to somehow impress and appease. You're rather a God who created us to find our deepest pleasure in a relationship with You. Lord, may we be the Church, the defenders and proclaimers of this truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
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WINTER 2025 // WEEK 10

Life Group Questions

1 Timothy – What Are We Doing Here? // March 15/16, 2025

Created for Pleasure // 1 Timothy 4:1-5

Introduction

Welcome to the final week of our Winter Life Group Session! We will take 2 weeks off after this and will be back the week of April 6th to begin our Spring Session which will last 7 weeks. During the Spring Session we will finish out the 1 Timothy Series and then after Easter we will start a series called Everyday Disciples.

This week, we'll walk through 1 Timothy 4:1-5 in which Paul predicts the false teaching that would mislead believers, how that shows up in the world today, and how we can keep ourselves and those around us grounded in biblical truth.

We invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. Some people even use these questions to take notes during the sermon. The questions are meant to stir your thinking and prompt open discussion, and we do not expect you to cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

- 1) What is one popular trend from your lifetime that you wish would make a comeback?

- 2) What's the best OR worst advice that you've been given in the past year?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
 - c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you
- 2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

1. How would you summarize what you've learned so far from the book of 1 Timothy?

2. Paul has made multiple mentions throughout 1 Timothy about rejecting false teaching, even connecting it to demonic influence here in chapter 4. **What steps can you take to prepare yourself to discern false teachings from true biblical doctrine?**

According to Bryan, what does it mean to "fall away from the faith"? How can we guard ourselves against this?

3. **According to Paul, where does false teaching originate from? How does Genesis 3:1-6 illustrate this?**

The false teaching Paul identifies is a form of legalism, the belief that avoiding marriage and certain foods makes them more acceptable to God. **According to Paul, how should Christians who know and believe the truth respond to the gifts God has given us?**

Is pleasure a sin? Why or why not?

4. **How does the gratitude in verse 4 keep us aligned with God's desire for His church?**

What role do prayer and God's Word play in sanctifying the things God has created (v.5)?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts.

Scripture Focus: Read Proverbs 3:1-12. Pay attention to the specific virtues being taught in this passage, and the reasons why they are being encouraged. Consider how you might live out those virtues on the path that God currently has you on and pray for His instruction and guidance in experiencing those things for yourself.

Prayer Focus: For the next two weeks, when your Life Group is not meeting, prioritize the members of your group in your regular habit of prayer. Make it your goal to include either your whole group or at least one individual in the group into your prayers at least once per day and use this to continue encouraging each other until you come back together to begin the spring Life Group session.

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of “coming together” is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say “Amen” aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?