

## The Pleasures we Were Made For

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Pleasure Principle (Psychology) / Psalm 16:11

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Throughout the Bible, we see people chasing earthly pleasures only to discover that they cannot satisfy the deepest needs of the soul. The prodigal son sought freedom, excitement, and indulgence in a far country, but his pleasures vanished and left him empty and hungry ([Luke 15:11-17](#)). The rich fool filled his barns with abundance and believed he had secured years of comfort and enjoyment, only to lose everything in a single night when God called him into eternity ([Luke 12:16-21](#)). The nation of Israel repeatedly turned from God to pursue the pleasures and idols of the surrounding nations, yet those false gods could neither save them nor satisfy them ([Jeremiah 2:13](#)). Even Moses recognized that sin offers pleasure, but only "for a season" ([Hebrews 11:25](#)). Though these stories differ, they all teach the same lesson: earthly pleasures may satisfy for a moment, but they cannot satisfy forever. Every created thing eventually disappoints when it is asked to do what only God can do. Perhaps nowhere is this truth illustrated more beautifully than in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. Like so many people today, she had spent years searching for satisfaction in places that could never truly quench the thirst of her soul.

When Jesus was returning to Galilee, Scripture tells us that He "had to go through Samaria" ([John 4:4](#)). While His disciples had gone into the nearby town to buy food ([John 4:8](#)), Jesus stopped near the town of Sychar and sat down by Jacob's well, weary from the long journey ([John 4:5-6](#)). This was no ordinary well. It was a place rich with Israel's history, a well associated with Jacob himself, from which he, his sons, and his livestock had drawn water generations earlier ([John 4:12](#)). As Jesus rested beside the well, a Samaritan woman arrived to draw water. Breaking the silence, Jesus asked her, "Will you give me a drink?"

([John 4:7](#)). The woman was immediately taken aback and replied, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" ([John 4:9](#)).

Her surprise reflected centuries of hostility between Jews and Samaritans. After Assyria conquered the northern kingdom, many Jews viewed the Samaritans as a people who had compromised their faith by mixing the worship of the Lord with foreign religious practices. The Samaritans, for their part, maintained that Mount Gerizim—not Jerusalem—was the proper place to worship God [1]. Neither side abandoned its convictions, and over time theological disagreement hardened into social and relational hostility. Marriage between the two groups was forbidden, and ordinary social interaction was greatly restricted [2]. Yet the barriers did not end there. The woman was not only a Samaritan; she was also a woman. In the culture of the day, a Jewish man would not ordinarily engage a woman in public conversation, especially one he did not know [3]. By identifying herself as both a Samaritan and a woman, she highlights the multiple barriers Jesus was crossing—ethnic, religious, and social.

Jesus replied, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water" (John 4:10). The woman, still thinking only in physical terms, pointed out that Jesus had nothing with which to draw water and that the well was deep. She then asked if He was greater than Jacob, who had given them the well (John 4:11-12). Jesus answered:

**John 4:13–14 NIV**

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Intrigued by His promise, the woman responded, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water" (John 4:15). Yet she still misunderstood Jesus' meaning. Rather than speaking of physical thirst, He was addressing the deeper thirst of her soul. To reveal this, Jesus told her,

“Go, call your husband, and come hither” (John 4:16). When she replied that she had no husband, Jesus revealed His supernatural knowledge of her life, explaining that she had been married five times and was presently living with a man who was not her husband (John 4:17-18). The conversation then turned to the subject of worship. When the woman asked where God should be worshipped, Jesus redirected her attention away from places and ethnic distinctions and toward the heart, declaring:

**John 4:23 NIV**

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

Jesus' response revealed that God was not primarily concerned with whether a person worshipped on Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem. What God desires is a heart that worships Him in Spirit and in truth. In Christ, the barriers of ethnicity, geography, and religious tradition give way to a relationship with God marked by genuine faith and devotion.

The woman's search for love, security, and fulfillment through a series of relationships reflected a deeper spiritual thirst [4]—one that no human relationship, however good, could ultimately satisfy. Her arrival at the well during the heat of the day suggests that she may have been isolated from the rest of the community because of her troubled past. Scripture does not tell us why her previous marriages ended, and we should be careful not to speculate beyond what the text reveals. Nevertheless, five marriages would have been highly unusual in both Jewish and Samaritan society [5] and likely marked her as a person whose life had been shaped by significant relational turmoil. More importantly, Jesus makes it clear that her present relationship was outside God's design for marriage, for "the man you now have is not your husband" ([John 4:18](#)). While her circumstances undoubtedly involved sin, they also reveal a woman searching for stability, acceptance, and security in earthly relationships. Yet every well from which she had drawn had eventually left her

thirsty again. Rather than simply condemning her failures, Jesus exposed the inadequacy of what she had been trusting and offered her something far greater: living water. He redirected her attention from the temporary things of this world to the God who alone can satisfy the deepest needs of the human heart [6].

The pleasures of this world are nothing compared to the unspeakable joy found in the presence of God. The enjoyment we receive from people, possessions, accomplishments, and experiences can be real and meaningful, but none of these things can fully satisfy the deepest longings of the soul. Scripture reminds us that life is "a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" ([James 4:14](#)), making every earthly pleasure temporary by nature. Likewise, "the world passeth away, and the lust thereof" ([1 John 2:17](#)), while eternal realities endure forever. Even the joy of those who pursue godless paths "is but for a moment" ([Job 20:5](#)), revealing the fleeting nature of satisfaction apart from God.

The danger of sin lies in its deception. It entices with promises of happiness and fulfillment, yet desire, when conceived, "bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" ([James 1:15](#)). Sin's pattern is always the same: it promises more than it can deliver and leaves the sinner emptier than before. As one writer observed, it produces "an ever-increasing craving for an ever-diminishing pleasure" [7]. In contrast, Jesus offered the Samaritan woman living water that would never run dry. He directed her away from the temporary wells of this world and toward the God who alone can satisfy the human heart. True and lasting joy is found not merely in the gifts God gives, but in the presence of the Giver Himself, through whom and for whom all things were created ([Colossians 1:16](#)).

## We Were Created for God's Presence

**Psalm 63:1-5 NIV**

You, God, are my God,

earnestly I seek you;

I thirst for you,

my whole being longs for you,

in a dry and parched land

where there is no water.

I have seen you in the sanctuary

and beheld your power and your glory.

Because your love is better than life,

my lips will glorify you.

I will praise you as long as I live,

and in your name I will lift up my hands.

I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;

with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

A person who has crossed a desert on foot understands the life-and-death importance of finding water [8]. David draws upon that reality to describe his longing for God. He was not merely interested in God's blessings, protection, or provision; he thirsted for God Himself. His soul longed for the Lord as

desperately as a traveler longs for water in a dry and weary land. This longing is not driven by obligation but by passion [9]. David recognized that God had created him for something greater than the temporary pleasures of this world. God has placed eternity in the human heart ([Ecclesiastes 3:11](#)). We were made for more than fleeting experiences, worldly success, or momentary pleasures. Because the soul was created for fellowship with its Creator, nothing temporal can fully satisfy it. The heart instinctively longs for something lasting, something infinite, something beyond the passing pleasures of this present age. That longing ultimately points us to God Himself. Like the Samaritan woman searching for satisfaction at earthly wells, every person is searching for something that only God can provide.

David discovered what the Samaritan woman was still seeking. He found that God's presence is better than life itself. While the pleasures of sin satisfy only for a season, God's presence satisfies "as with marrow and fatness." Why settle for momentary pleasures that fade when we can experience a joy that edifies rather than destroys, liberates rather than enslaves [11]? God alone was David's lasting satisfaction, deepest joy, and greatest treasure [12]. In God's presence he found living water—victory over sinful desires, a clear conscience, acceptance before God, and sweet communion with his Creator [13]. These blessings are refined, pure, and eternally sufficient because they flow from the One who is the source of all life. This truth is echoed in the words of the sons of Korah:

**Psalm 42:1–2 NIV**

As the deer pants for streams of water,

so my soul pants for you, my God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When can I go and meet with God?

Yet many people spend their lives searching elsewhere. King Solomon possessed wealth beyond imagination. He built houses, vineyards, gardens, pools, and palaces. Kings and queens traveled great distances to witness his glory. Yet after tasting everything this world could offer, he concluded:

**Ecclesiastes 1:2-3 NIV**

“Meaningless! Meaningless!”

says the Teacher.

“Utterly meaningless!

Everything is meaningless.”

What do people gain from all their labors

at which they toil under the sun?

Solomon discovered that life apart from God creates a genuine spiritual famine. When people forsake the Lord, the "fountain of living waters," they hew out broken cisterns that can hold no water (Jeremiah 2:13). The result is a soul that remains thirsty despite worldly abundance. Wealth, fame, power, and pleasure promise satisfaction, but they cannot provide what only God can give.

Living in a fallen world filled with distractions and temptations makes it easy to lose sight of this reality. Yet the God who is everywhere present ([Psalm 139](#)) invites us into fellowship with Himself. Does your soul thirst for the living God? Are you working out your salvation with fear and trembling ([Philippians 2:12](#)), or have the temporary pleasures of this world dulled your appetite for God's presence? If so, repent and turn again to the Lord. Then ask Him to give you both the desire and the power to seek Him, for "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" ([Philippians 2:13](#)). The pleasure we were

made for is found not in the gifts of this world, but in the presence of the God who gives them.

## Sin Promises Pleasure but Produces Emptiness

When Joseph and his generation passed from the scene, a new Pharaoh arose who neither knew Joseph nor remembered what God had accomplished through him (Exodus 1:8). Fearing the rapid growth and prosperity of the Israelites, he enslaved them and subjected them to harsh labor (Exodus 1:11-14). When oppression failed to curb their numbers, Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill every male child at birth (Exodus 1:16). Yet the midwives feared God more than they feared the king and refused to carry out his command (Exodus 1:17). Frustrated by their disobedience, Pharaoh escalated his decree and commanded that every Hebrew baby boy be cast into the Nile River (Exodus 1:22).

Against this backdrop of suffering and death, Moses was born. When his parents could hide him no longer, they placed him in a basket of papyrus among the reeds of the Nile and entrusted him to God's care ([Exodus 2:3](#)). In a remarkable act of divine providence, Pharaoh's own daughter discovered the child, had compassion on him, and adopted him as her son, even though she recognized him as a Hebrew ([Exodus 2:6, 10](#)). As a result, Moses was raised within the royal household and enjoyed privileges few people in the ancient world could even imagine. He received the finest education, lived among Egypt's elite, and had access to the wealth, power, prestige, and pleasures of the greatest empire of his day.

Yet despite having everything the world could offer, Moses turned away from it all. The author of Hebrews writes:

**Hebrews 11:24-26 NIV**

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

Moses understood something that many never learn. The pleasures of Egypt were real, but they were temporary. The treasures of this world could satisfy for a season, but they could never satisfy forever. Looking beyond the riches of Egypt to the promises of God, Moses chose eternal reward over temporary pleasure, divine approval over earthly prestige, and fellowship with God's people over the passing delights of sin. His life reminds us that true satisfaction is not found in what this world offers, but in the God who offers Himself to us.

Sin promises great pleasure, yet it can never satisfy the soul's deepest longing for God. Even when a person indulges every desire and withholds nothing from their heart, the result is ultimately the same. Solomon testified:

**Ecclesiastes 2:10–11 NIV**

I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;

I refused my heart no pleasure.

My heart took delight in all my labor,

and this was the reward for all my toil.

Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done

and what I had toiled to achieve,

everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind;

nothing was gained under the sun.

Likewise, he observed that "he that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase" ([Ecclesiastes 5:10](#)). The problem is not merely that earthly pleasures are temporary, but that they were never intended to bear the weight of our ultimate satisfaction. When people turn from God to self, they do not cease to exist, but they become less than they were created to be. Having abandoned the source of all life, goodness, and meaning, they become diminished reflections of God's design [14]. As Isaiah declares, such a person "feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside" ([Isaiah 44:20](#)). The pursuit of sin promises fulfillment, but it ultimately leaves the soul hungry, thirsty, and empty. Rather than spending our lives chasing pleasures that cannot satisfy, we should heed the invitation God extends through the prophet Isaiah:

**Isaiah 55:1-2 NIV**

“Come, all you who are thirsty,

come to the waters;

and you who have no money,

come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk

without money and without cost.

Why spend money on what is not bread,

and your labor on what does not satisfy?

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,

and you will delight in the richest of fare.

The children of Israel had spent many years in Babylon. Rather than arguing with them or pleading for their attention, Isaiah cast a stone into the still waters of their complacency and awakened the longing for eternity that God had placed within their hearts [15]. Babylon had wealth, power, prestige, and pleasure, yet none of its riches or gods could satisfy the soul. In the same way, Christ offers living water to those dying of spiritual thirst and the pure milk of His Word that we might grow in our salvation with fear and trembling [16]. Even now, God calls us out of the coldness of this sin-darkened world and invites us to sit at the feet of the Master, where true nourishment is freely given—a feast purchased not by our efforts, but by the precious life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

## God's Presence Produces Fullness of Joy

### **Psalm 16:11 NIV**

You make known to me the path of life;

you will fill me with joy in your presence,

with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

In [Luke 10:38-42](#), we are given a remarkable glimpse into the lives of Martha and Mary. When Jesus entered their home, Martha immediately busied herself with the responsibilities of hospitality. She was occupied with serving, preparing, and ensuring that everything was in order for her distinguished Guest. Yet while Martha was consumed with many good things, Mary chose something better. Rather than focusing on the preparations, she sat at Jesus' feet and listened to

His words. Martha wanted to serve Christ; Mary wanted to be with Christ. Her greatest desire was not to impress the Master but to know Him. In that moment, Mary discovered a truth that many still struggle to learn today: pleasure is not merely found in doing things, but in being with the One we love.

In an age overflowing with entertainment, distractions, and endless pursuits of pleasure, it is increasingly difficult to "take time to be holy." Yet Scripture consistently teaches that true joy is found not in what God gives, but in God's presence Himself. The Lord fills His people with joy and grants pleasures that endure forever. The joy of the Lord becomes our strength ([Nehemiah 8:10](#)), sustaining and fortifying us through life's trials. Believers rejoice with "joy unspeakable and full of glory" even though they have not seen Christ with their physical eyes ([1 Peter 1:8](#)). Habakkuk declared that even if every earthly source of security failed, he would "joy in the God of my salvation" ([Habakkuk 3:18](#)). Such joy is not dependent upon circumstances; it flows from communion with the living God.

God's presence does more than add joy to an otherwise empty life—it transforms the soul itself. Isaiah rejoiced because God had clothed him with "the garments of salvation" and covered him with "the robe of righteousness" ([Isaiah 61:10](#)). The Lord replaces guilt with grace, shame with acceptance, and spiritual poverty with eternal riches. In His presence we find forgiveness, purpose, peace, and the assurance that we belong to Him. The pleasures of this world fade, but the joy found in Christ grows deeper with every passing year and will continue throughout eternity.

Yet this joy belongs only to those who can say with the psalmist:

**Psalm 73:25–26 NIV**

Whom have I in heaven but you?

And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

My flesh and my heart may fail,

but God is the strength of my heart

and my portion forever.

The question before each of us is simple: What are we truly seeking? The world offers countless wells from which to drink, yet every one of them eventually runs dry. Christ alone offers living water that satisfies forever. Therefore seek the Lord while He may be found. Come to the waters. Sit at the Master's feet. Drink deeply from the fountain of life. For the pleasure we were made for is not found in the gifts of this world, but in the presence of the God who gives them, both now and forevermore.

## Footnotes

[1] Pierre Everson Cannings, *Leading Beyond: Biblical Leadership That Unifies Opposition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2024).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Michael L. Lindvall et al., “Third Sunday in Lent,” in *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship: Year A: Lent through Pentecost*, ed. Joel B. Green et al. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 72.

[4] Bruce B. Barton, *John*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 81–82.

[5] Craig R. Koester, “‘The Savior of the World’ (John 4:42),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1990), 109:669.

[6] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 220.

[7] Wayne Martindale and Walter Hooper, *Beyond the Shadowlands: C. S. Lewis on Heaven and Hell* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007). [See here.]

[8] Gerald H. Wilson, Psalms, vol. 1, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 890.

[9] David Platt, Matt Mason, and Jim Shaddix, Exalting Jesus in [Psalms 51-100](#)

[10] David Platt, Matt Mason, and Jim Shaddix, Exalting Jesus in [Psalms 51-100](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2020), 116.

[11] Rory Noland, *Worship on Earth as It Is in Heaven: Exploring Worship as a Spiritual Discipline* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 87–88

[12] Ibid.

[13] Joseph S. Exell, *Proverbs*, The Biblical Illustrator (New York; Chicago; Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), 83–84

[14] Gregory W. Lee and Avyi Hill, “Evil as Privation,” in *The Essential City of God: A Reader and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2025), 260.

[15] Geoffrey W. Grogan, “Isaiah,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 312.

[16] Andrew M. Davis, *Exalting Jesus in Isaiah* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 332.