

# Sanctified Life

1 Timothy 4:1-5

As many people are overwhelmed by what happened in 2020 and desperately hoping for something different in 2021, Christians must be grounded in Scripture and thrive where God has us. We live in a time of unrivaled abundance that God wants us to enjoy and use to His glory—to be blessed and to bless those around us.

## Summary of the Text

The “latter times” Paul writes about are relevant to Timothy and the people he ministers to (v. 1). In 2 Timothy he speaks about the perilous times to come in the “last days” when false teachers and imposters would get worse and worse, but Timothy must stay the faithful course (2 Tim. 3:1, 13-14). The false teachers with calloused consciences would forbid marriage and certain foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by His people who both believe and know (experience) the truth (v. 3). Paul then expands what God wants us to enjoy to *every creature*, that is, every created thing, because they are good and as long as the believer is grateful, not to be refused (v. 4). All of these good things God created become holy by the word of God and prayer (v. 5). When we thank God for them, which is done in prayer, and when we use them in wisdom, which is given by the word of God, the created things are sanctified and used to sanctify us. Notice that the false teachers have all the rules—no marriage (helpful companionship, passionate love, children) or good food (feasts, wine, parties). The fact that a thing can be abused is no reason to deny its primary, God-intended, and means-of-holiness use. Legalists hate this because instead of requiring trust in God and saturation in His word for maturity, it’s much easier to make rules and ban stuff.

## Taste & See

One of the most common and false slanders about God is that He is a restrictive killjoy. At some level we have to believe this in order to sin because otherwise we would know that our best interest lines with Him at whose right hand are pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16:11). The first command given to mankind was to eat freely: “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat’” (Gen. 2:16), and only after was one tree prohibited. As we grow in maturity, the gifts and pleasures of God only get richer, and they are means of enjoying Him. Joe Rigney describes three kinds of pleasure that should not distract us from God but cause us to know and enjoy Him more fully.

Sensible Pleasures – Solomon: “My son, eat honey because it is good, and the honeycomb which is sweet to your taste; so shall the knowledge of wisdom be to your soul; if you have found it, there is a prospect, and your hope will not be cut off” (Prov. 23:13-14). Wisdom is found in God, and tasting it is like eating honey: “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!” (Ps. 34:8). “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God” (Ps. 42:1). When we hunger and thirst, and are satisfied and quenched, we learn about and enjoy God. When we look at the sparkling night, rising sun, and rainbowed sunset sky, we see that the “heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1). All the sensible pleasures teach us that God is greater than these gifts, as incredible as they can be. Your friend’s laugh, crisp air on a cold morning, the view of Mount Ranier, rest after a long day’s work, the taste of a perfectly cooked steak—God wants us to delight in these pleasures as gifts from Him. You know how to thank someone for a thoughtful present. God thought up all of these and gave them. Someone filled your stocking, perhaps with socks. Jesus filled your socks with your legs.

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Relational Pleasures – God is triune, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Made in His image, it was not good for Adam to be alone, so God made Eve, a person who makes more people. Before sin entered the world, Adam did not say, “Lord, all I need is You.” He received the gift and praised her (Gen. 2:23). Sin alienated Adam and Eve from each other and the Lord, but God promised the seed of the serpent would overcome: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). Our friendship, fellowships, marriages, cooperation, and care that occur in relationships reflect the life of the Trinity, like sunbeams from the sun.

Vocational Pleasures – Adam and Eve had no jobs but plenty of work, “to tend and keep” the garden of Eden and take dominion over the world (Gen. 2:15; 1:28). They would enjoy the work and the fruit of it by resting on the Sabbath. We are born to work hard as unto the Lord, and to be skilled in our work whether it’s running companies, writing code, building machines, constructing houses, raising the next generation or running the house (Col. 3:23; Prov. 22:29; Eccl. 12:11). Like God did in the six days of creation, we image-bearers create, fill, and transform the world, saying with satisfaction “it is good.” Thorns and thistles notwithstanding, the work is a pleasure, and so is going to bed tired: “The sleep of a laboring man is sweet” (Eccl. 5:12).

## The Comparative Test

These gifts ought to reveal God to us and make us increasingly grateful, but what about when they don’t? This is our fundamental problem, worshiping the creature rather than the creator, the gift rather than the giver (Rom. 1:25). So we have to be humble and wise. As much as we can and should receive pleasures from God, Scripture teaches us to discern the difference between Him and them, and honor Him accordingly: “Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You” (Ps. 63:3). You need to eat honey to know that the judgments of the Lord are sweeter, and then remember to live like it’s true (Ps. 19:10). The comparative tests of Scripture keep us honest: “For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Ps. 84:10); “Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Ps. 73:25-26). Sometimes we need to fast from different things in order to address sin effectively or to pray intensively, and this discipline keeps our appetites in check and hearts focused on the Lord (Acts 9:9, 14:23; 1 Cor. 7:5).

## Trust Him in Suffering

Ultimately everyone is going to lose all of the pleasures God gives in this life, and most of us will lose them slowly. Because of pain and suffering, some people will stop believing in God altogether, but more will conclude He is not good. But in death we are looking forward to greater union with Christ. Paul only sees blessing: “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). Loving God doesn’t make pain and loss hurt less, but it makes it meaningful, even when we don’t know the specific details of His plan. We do know that He will wipe away every tear and use all things according to His good purpose to save this world.