

PLEASING GOD

Hebrews 11:1-6; Genesis 5:21-24

Imagine walking into a great ornate hallway. On the walls are pictures of great people from the Old Testament, both men and women.

With each picture is a brief description of the individual and why their picture was worthy to hang there. You notice that each picture's description begins this way, "By faith." You are in the Hallway of Faith.

Over the entrance to the hallway you read these words: Hebrew 11:1 (NIV) "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

The words remind you that there are realities for which we have no material evidence though they are no less real for that. Faith enables us to know that they exist and are real.

Martin Luther said, "Faith is the "yes" of the heart, a conviction on which one stakes one's life." Phillip Yancey defined faith as, "Believing in advance in something that will only seem logical when seen in reverse."

And inscribed on a cellar wall in Germany where Jews hid from Nazis, "I believe in the sun even when it is not shining. I believe in love even when feeling it not. I believe in God even when he is silent."

This kind of faith is to be sure of what we hope for. There is a risk to live a life with this kind of faith. Eugene Patterson, who gave us The Message Bible, wrote in Living the Message: "What is hazardous in my life is my work as a Christian. Every day I put faith on the line. I have never seen God. In a world where nearly everything can be weighed, explained, quantified, subjected to psychological analysis and scientific control I persist in making the center of my life a God whom no eye hath seen, nor ear heard, whose will no one can probe. That's a risk."

As you begin your walk through the hall, the first hero of faith is Abel. You read that he is commended for his worship and his righteousness. His worship was true and his life was pure, and this was pleasing to God.

The next hero of faith mentioned is Enoch: Hebrew 11:5 (NIV) By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.

Then you notice the words that ties Abel and Enoch and the all the heroes of faith together. And without faith it is impossible to please God... (v. 6).

Wow! It is impossible to please God without faith. This is why all these people are honored. Abel pleased God because of his faith. Enoch pleased God because of his faith.

So how do you please God? By faith! Enoch is an exceptional person. Let's look at how he pleased God.

Genesis 5 is a genealogy of Adam to Noah. After each of the names given come the dismal refrain, "and then he died." Except for Enoch! He was the exception.

Genesis 5:21-24(NIV) 21When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. 22And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. 23Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. 24Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

Two times it says that Enoch walked with God. In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve had a special fellowship with God. But then their sin came between them and God. They no longer walked with Him.

Enoch is our example of what it really means to be in fellowship with God. He experienced the fellowship with God that Adam and Eve had forfeited.

He had such faith in God and so lived for God that instead of letting him die, God took him directly to heaven without dying. (The same Hebrew word is used for the translation of Elijah, 2 Kings 2:3, 5).

The Bible says it this way, "He was no more, because God took him away." He was no longer in this world. This is what will happen to believers who are alive when Christ returns.

1 Thess. 4:17, “After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Vernon McGee tells about a little girl who heard this story in S.S. and was trying to explain it to her mother. “It seems like every day God would come by and say to Enoch, ‘Enoch, do you want to walk with me?’

“Enoch would come out of his house, go down to his gate, and go walking with the Lord. He enjoyed it so much that pretty soon he would wait for the Lord at the gate. God would come along and say, ‘Enoch, let’s take a walk.’

“One day God came by and said, ‘Enoch, let’s take a long walk. I have a lot to tell you.’ So they walked and walked, and talked and talked until finally Enoch said, ‘Lord, it’s getting late; I’d better get back home.’

“God said, ‘Enoch, you’re closer to my home than yours; you can come home with me.’ And so Enoch went home with God.”

Isn’t this a pretty story? The person who pleases God is the one who walks with Him. Walking with God is having a constant God-awareness and being in agreement with Him, for two cannot walk together unless they have agreed to do so (Amos 3:3).

It is to constantly care about pleasing Him. It is to trust Him and follow Him. Here are some suggestions on how to please God:

1. Believe in God

Hebrews 11:6a(NIV) And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists...

This is the starting point. You cannot please God if you don’t believe He is real. The object of your faith is most important. You must believe that God exists. This is basic. God is pleased with those who believe that He exists, but this is just the first step. It is not enough to save a person; Satan and his demons believe in God, but they are not saved.

The Islam religion believe in and worship God, but being sincere in that religion doesn’t do a thing to save the Muslim. You must believe in the true God of the Bible before you can be led to full faith. Here are some misguided understandings of God:

(1) The man upstairs

To some He is simply a grandfatherly, white-haired, indulgent god who smiles down on us, turns a blind eye to adultery, stealing, lying, and cheating, and who will bail us out of the difficulties we get ourselves into.

(2) A warden

Some think God's primary job is to make life difficult and un-enjoyable. Another name would be the great kill-joy.

(3) Vending machine

Other's think that God is there to grant every wish and whim.

(4) God in a box

To others He is a god in a box—very private, and he is what you say he is, and he's there when it's convenient for you.

(5) God standing far off

Some see God as standing far off—He created the universe and started it spinning, and now He stands back watching it run down.

(6) The great measurer

Yet others see God as a great measurer, weighing the good things we do against the bad.

These are not the kinds of beliefs in God that pleases Him. Yes you must believe that God exists before you can be led to full faith.

Belief that the true God exists is the starting place. But to please Him you want to find out more about Him. And you must believe that He cares for you.

2. Believe God cares

Hebrews 11:6b (NIV) ...and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

The first step in pleasing God is to believe in Him. Yet, it is not enough to simply believe that God exists. Enoch did not believe that God was merely a great, impersonal cosmic force.

He knew God in a personal, loving way. This is how you, too, must believe in God. You must believe what He says about himself in the Bible.

You must believe that everything in heaven and earth is His—that He is the ruler of all things—that everything we have comes from His hands, yet still all of it belongs to Him (1 Chron. 29:11-16).

You must believe that He is moral and just and that He rewards your faith in Him. You must recognize that God is a personal, loving, and gracious God. God can be found because He is also seeking you.

David said to his son, Solomon, (1 Chr 28:9) “And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever.”

The Proverb says, (Prov 8:17) “I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.” Jesus was very explicit, (Luke 11:10) “For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”

You must believe all this about God which will lead you to understand that God loves you and has provided the only way of salvation. Then you surrender yourself to God.

3. Surrender to God

Genesis 5:21-22 (NIV) is fascinating and often overlooked. 21When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. 22And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years.

It was after he became the father of Methuselah, at age 65, that he walked with God for 300 years.

We don't know a lot about Enoch, but evidently, up to the birth of this Methuselah he wasn't walking with God. Remember, we are getting close to the time of Noah and the flood.

Enoch did not live in a time of easy believing. There was an evil cancer on the land (read 6:5-7). Enoch was surrounded by false teachers and false teachings.

Until the birth of his child, Enoch was just one of the boys, giving into the whims of society. But when Methuselah was born something changed.

As Enoch looked into the face of his son, there was a spiritual awakening. He realized that only through God was life possible.

From that time on he surrendered his life to God. Enoch's faith wasn't private. It wasn't held just in his heart. It was heard on his lips and seen in his life.

His faith was active and dynamic, vocal and fearless. According to Jude 14-15 Enoch strongly preached to his generation just as Noah did in his. He let them know God was going to judge them.

God was pleased with Enoch because for 300 years he believed in God, believed God cared, and surrendered his life to God.

Application:

Surrender yourself to God. To walk with God means to surrendered your life and will to His. This is what is pleasing to Him. God wants you to come to Him to be willing to walk with Him. Will you?

Will you allow God to continually pervade your thoughts? Will you be willing to give every day to Him? "God this is your day, and I give myself completely and wholeheartedly to you for this day. Use me as you see fit."

Will you ask God to strengthen and guide you to keep you from sin, to direct your choices and decisions, and to use you to glorify Jesus Christ?

To walk with God is dynamic and powerful. But it is also practical. It's the best way to get through the day.

How's your walk with the Lord? Is it as it should be? Could it be better? You can begin your walk with God right now, no matter what you are doing now or have done.