

**THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE:
AN INQUIRY INTO THE PERILS, PURPOSES, & PROBLEMS OF PLEASURE:**

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“Doing wrong is like a joke to a fool, but wisdom is pleasure to a man of understanding.” ~ Proverbs 10:21

I. INTRODUCTION:

- A. I would like to begin by asking you a few questions that touches the heart of this inquiry: Do you ever long for something to be more than it is? I’m not asking if you want something to be perfect. Rather, do you ever find yourself yearning for things to be something more? Have you found yourself longing for things to satisfy?²
1. For example, you commit yourself to living out a dream you have...perhaps a new job, a new direction, a new opportunity, a new relationship, hoping that it will live up your expectations. But then, all of a sudden or perhaps even gradually, your expectations are broken, if not shattered. As a result, you feel disappointment and perhaps even anger and resentment swell up inside of you and remain for some time. You say to yourself, *“Is this all there is?”*
 2. You yearn for things to be something more: your spouse, your friendships, your church, your job, and your home. Perhaps it is holiday gatherings, vacations, or particular opportunities.
 3. What do you do when that happens? Do you say, well, there’s got to be something better... so you try, and try again, only to eventually find yourself in the same situation all over again?
 4. Does the repetition of those disappointments ever crush your spirit? Things have not turned out like you dreamed and feel fractured, hurt... like damaged goods on “Misfit Island.” Perhaps melancholy sets in. Melancholy grows into bitterness. The idea that your dreams can be fulfilled is only an illusion!
 5. But then for some of us the repetition of crushed expectations and dreams can be so traumatic that you find yourself becoming cynical. When you are reminded of those dreams or when you hear some one say those dreams can

¹ This lecture was originally given at the Reasonable Faith Forum on 26 August 2011 at Champion Forest Baptist Church in Spring, Texas. I stand indebted to the extraordinary insights on this issue from Blaise Pascal’s classic work, *Pensees*, and Ravi Zacharias’ “The Problem of Pleasure” DVD presentation (2009) by www.rzim.org. This particular presentation finds expression from a five-part series on the problem of pleasure by Paul R. Shockley: The Perils of Pleasure (Part 1); The Vanity of Pleasures (Part 2); The Longings for Pleasures to Satisfy (Part 3); The Purposes of Pleasure (Part 4); The Pursuit of Pleasure (Part 5). A summary of this five-fold series is available at www.prshockley.org under the tab, “Spiritual Life.”

² I have adapted this question from J. Budziszewski, *Ask Me Anything 2: More Provocative Answers for College Students* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008), 149.

be achieved, you can't help but make, whether silently in your mind, under your breath, or even loudly, some pessimistic remark.

6. This is a common problem I see among young married couples. A young couple gets married and they soon find out they didn't know each other like they thought they would. The romance turned to disappointment and they become cynical of love altogether. They look at each other and say, "Now what?"
 7. Because we realized that our expectations are unrealistic or because of the pain we've faced, some of us have made the decision that we will scale back our expectations. *"If only I could let everything be only what it is. Then I wouldn't have any more of these immature disappointments."* So, you scale back your expectations and perhaps resolve yourself into saying, *"I refuse to expect more from things than they can give."*
 8. Interestingly, this type of mindset of scaling back one's expectations has led some of us down the road to actually claim that "nothing truly satisfies." Disappointments like these have led some people, especially young people, even Christians, to really consider the merits of Buddhism. See, Buddhism teaches that suffering comes from desire. They claim that "the ultimate goal is to have no desire at all-no longings, no yearnings, and no aspirations. When that happens, then you will no longer suffer disappointment because they won't be. The illusion of individual existence will have been annihilated."³ See, what they are attempting to do is kill their expectations in order to be satisfied.
 9. Since some of us in this room have struggled with failed dreams or experienced broken expectations. One common denominator for many of our dreams or expectations is that they are tied to pleasures. Why? We yearn for happiness, joy, and satisfaction? Don't you hunger for...
 - a. A feeling of happiness or satisfaction?
 - b. Gratification of the senses?
 - c. Recreation, relaxation, amusement?
 - d. Some source of happiness, joy, or satisfaction?
- B. Just as our decision-making is often governed by our pursuit of pleasure, our expectations or dreams are often tied to notions of pleasures
1. When these expectations or dreams lead to disappointment, do you believe that you need to lower your expectations, perhaps even eliminate them? Do you ever think you should come to the conclusion that nothing satisfies? Well, I personally I reject that idea. We should not lower our expectations. Rather, we should raise them? Ratchet them up even higher.
 2. Now, you may be thinking, *"You've got to be kidding!"* I'm not.

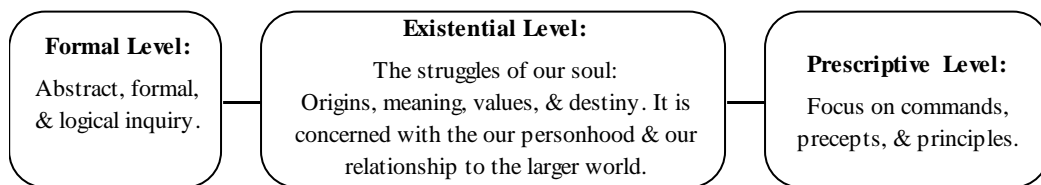
³ Ibid., 134.

3. The bottom line for my inquiry is that *nothing but God Himself fully satisfies. That statement, for as Christians, should make us yearn for God even more.*
 4. But if nothing except God fully satisfies, then what about all those other things such as relationships, family, church, vocation, studies, jobs, dreams, etc are they worthless? No, not necessarily. Rather, they sharpen our focus this one fundamental insight: God Himself is the only one who can satisfy your deepest longings.
- C. Now having given my thesis statement, namely, that God Himself is the only One who can satisfy our deepest longings, three preliminary issues need to be made before we examine the purposes, perils, and problems of pleasure, that is, **(1) how we should begin our inquiry, (2) how will we critique our inquiry, and (3) what we should consider in our inquiry.**

1st Preliminary Issue: How Should We Begin Our Inquiry?

1. Now, I am using the term “inquiry” to note an “investigation” into pleasure. This investigation can be a very personal and relevant issue because it touches many facets of our lives, such as the daily plans we make and the longings we have for satisfaction while exposing our deepest regrets, fears, inconsistencies, and inadequacies.
2. As with any inquiry, whether in the area of apologetics, ethics, philosophy, and theology, we can make pursue it on a formal level, an existential level, or a prescriptive level. Though this may be a bit tedious, let me unpack what I mean by these three levels because it is very important to determine how we will critique our investigation.⁴

3 Levels of Apologetic Inquiry:



- D. **Formal Level:** The formal level would focus on the problem of pleasure on a very abstract, logical level; it would be very cerebral. To be sure, this is something we could pursue but I question how helpful this approach would be for us this evening if our inquiry centered on this approach. Why? Focusing on the problem of pleasure, like other areas of thought, whether it is ethics, philosophy, or theology, can lead to bantering by intelligent people who all equally are trained in formal analysis. So, I question whether it will get us very far in our investigation.

⁴ I credit Ravi Zacharias for this observation of three levels of inquiry. A more detailed chart on these three levels of inquiry may be found at www.prshockley.org.

1. Notwithstanding, I do not want to isolate ourselves from the formal level. Thus, here is my formal argument:⁵
 - 1P. **A very natural innate desire has a real object that can fulfill it.**
For example, Creatures are not born with real needs unless satisfaction for those real needs exists. A baby feels hunger; food can satisfy.
 - 2P. **Human beings have a natural, innate desire for ultimate pleasure.**
 - 3C. **Therefore, ultimate pleasure exists, namely, God. God Himself is the sum-total of His infinite perfections.**
2. This argument is perhaps not the most formidable argument for God's existence. But if we stack this argument up with other arguments for God's existence using a cumulative case strategy for God's existence, then the argument from pleasure, which is an existential-psychological argument, contributes to the likelihood that God exists, then that He does not exist.
- E. **Prescriptive Level:** We could also pursue this inquiry by examining it from a prescriptive level, that is, focusing on the prescriptive commands regarding pleasure as reflected in "ought" commands, precepts, and principles. For example, *"Do not engage in sexual intimacy outside of marriage!"*
- F. **Existential Level:** While the prescriptive approach is merited and we will definitely be including some prescriptive elements as we examine what wisdom literature has to say about pleasure, I would rather center our inquiry in the middle by focusing on pleasure from an existential level.
 1. Now, what I mean by the existential level is that I will be making an inquiry about pleasure by thinking about this pursuit, perils, and problems in relation to our human existence, the shaping of personhood, and our moral stance with the world and God.
 2. ***Why the existential level?*** Existential way of looking at things is looking at ideas in relation to our existence, our destiny, and our personhood. Pleasure is so central to the choices we make, the activities we pursue, and the plans we pursue. We long to be associated with pleasure, to be identified with pleasure, to be known in association with certain pleasures. Even the questions I have initially raised flow struggles of our souls, our personhood, our expectations, and our dreams.

⁵ This argument, which flows from a theme of thought that finds historical expression in Augustine, is closely related to C. S. Lewis' argument from joy whereby he argues that we have a natural innate desire for immortality.

2nd Preliminary issue: How will we critique our inquiry?

- G. **Second preliminary issue** we need to consider is how will we critique our inquiry? Let me just give you a rule of thumb I follow. When I take an idea, a truth-claim, a belief, or a position seriously, I typically apply a seven-fold criterion.⁶ Why? We are so frail, so gullible. See, all too often we embrace an idea, not because it is true, but because we find the idea attractive or the person who proclaims it. Blaise Pascal, a 17th Century Christian philosopher, put it this way, *“People almost invariably arrive at their beliefs not on the basis of proof but on the basis of what they find attractive.”*

Seven-fold Criterion:

1. Is the truth-claim internally coherent? In other words, does the truth-claim harmonize with what I already know to be true?
2. Is the truth-claim empirically adequate?
3. Is the truth-claim existentially relevant?
4. Is this truth-claim workable? If something is true, then it will work. I take it that it is valuable to look at the consequences of an idea even though consequences should never displace truth.
5. Related to workability is viability? If some idea cannot be lived out, then it is not worth while. Though this criterion of viability is a negative test, it is worth using. The question becomes, can one live out this truth-claim?
6. Sixth, does this truth-claim possess **explanatory power** in the area of comprehensiveness? Is this truth-claim weighty, substantive? Does this truth-claim help pull all of life together? In fact, does this truth-claim shed light on other known inquiries, claims, insights or discoveries?
7. And seventh, does this truth-claim possess and/or **generate an aesthetic and moral quality** (s) that meaningfully improves or degrades that which good, honorable, and noble? Does it generate virtue or vice, contribute or degenerate one’s well-being and the good of the community? Does it satisfy, conforming to, and enriching our conscience? Or is it counter-intuitive, extracting the best parts of our personhood?
 - a. In sum, when I apply this six-fold criterion, namely, the criteria of (1) internal coherence, (2) empirical adequacy, (3) existential relevance, (4) workability, (5) viability, (6) comprehensiveness, and (7) aesthetic and moral quality, to truth-claims and worldviews I encounter, I have come to the realization that I am better able to discover and discern that which is true and false among all the

⁶ For a larger discussion about this criterion, see Paul R. Shockley’s July blog article, titled, “Discerning Truth in the Age of Dissonance and Delusion” on www.prshockley.org. It is located in the tab, “Paul’s Pensees” (July 2011).

competing truth-claims and worldviews that exist in our world today.

3rd Preliminary Issue: What we should consider in our inquiry?

- H. ***Lastly, the third preliminary issue*** is an invitation from me. I want you to better understand how I'm going to go about to look at our pursuit of pleasure. To help me communicate what I mean let me draw upon an event that happened in the life of C. S. Lewis:

I was standing today in the dark toolshed. The sun was shining outside and through the crack at the top of the door there came a sunbeam. From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. Everything else was almost pitch-black. I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it. Then I moved, so that the beam fell on my eyes. Instantly the whole previous picture vanished. I saw no toolshed, and (above all) no beam. Instead I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences. But this is only a very simple example of the difference between looking at and looking along.⁷

1. I invite you to consider the vertical and horizontal dimensions of pleasure. I think this mindset will make more sense if you agree with the classic statement by C. S. Lewis, "You don't have a **soul**. You are a **Soul**. You have a **body**." ~C.S. Lewis.
2. How "pleasure" is defined? Whether in English, Hebrew, or Greek, the word "pleasure" is a very rich concept:⁸ In essence, pleasure is a desire, an

⁷ <http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~ivcfgf/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/C-S-Lewis-meditation-in-a-toolshed.pdf>

⁸ Adapted from Encarta English Dictionary. In biblical languages we have two central words: In Hebrew, we have "Avvah" and in Greek, we have the word, "Hedone."

a. Hebrew: **Avvah**: This word is translated to refer to desire (three times), lust (three times), and pleasure (once). It may not be necessarily evil. This word also has been used to refer to covet, waiting longingly, wishing, sigh, crave, want, be greedy, prefer. אָוָה (āwā) **II, desire, long, lust, covet, wait longingly, wish, sigh, crave, want, be greedy, prefer**. The subject of this verb has been used to refer to self, soul, appetite and sometimes the object is meat, fruit, delicate food. Other times the object may be evil itself, a kingdom. But it also used to refer to the feelings of a gluttonous craving, something that brings pleasure, and or some sense of fondness for an object. 1). אָוָה (ʾwh): n.fem.; ≡ Str 185; TWOT 40b—LN 25.12-25.32 wanting, craving, pleasure, i.e., a desire, which can have a focus on the object of desire, and brings pleasure and fondness for the object (Dt 12:15, 20, 21; 18:6; 1Sa 23:20; Jer 2:24; Hos 10:10+)⁸

Greek: **Hedone**: 1. In the N.T. **hēdonē** may refer to pleasure (2 Pet. 2:13), desire for pleasure (James 4:1), or sensual pleasure (James 4:3; Luke 8:14).2. Now when you study this N.T. Greek word you find that it has been used to "mark a non-Christian orientation to life" or "belongs to the sphere that is ruled by ungodly forces" (Luke 8:14⁸ cf. Matthew 13:22). 3. In James 4:1-2 hedonai are in the "service of sin and stand in contrast to *chara* which is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22)." 4. "**hēdonē** comes under the same judgment as fallen human nature. It is one of the basic NT antitheses." 5. This word is used to refer to those who "stand opposed to God. Those who disrupt

inclination, or a preference. In Scripture as in our language today, “pleasure” is used to refer to a feeling of happiness, delight, or satisfaction, sensual gratification, recreation, something satisfying, or somebody’s desire or preference. But pleasure does not merely have a horizontal dimension (a looking at). There is also a vertical dimension to pleasure.

3. God Himself and His ministry to us are associated with pleasure:
 - a. Consider it negatively when God states in Ezekiel 18:32: **“For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.”**
 - b. He also says in Ezekiel 33:11: **“Say to them, as I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?”**
 - c. But positively, God takes pleasure in divine election: Ephesians 1:3-6:

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. ⁹

 1. In this passage you have a Greek word that is translated as “pleasure” or “good will.” Here “pleasure” denotes the fact that God delights in election.¹⁰
 - d. Jesus Himself offers pleasure. On the eve of Jesus’ own trials, sufferings, and crucifixion, He states to the disciples in the Upper Room in John 14:27, *“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.”* The “peace” Jesus that Jesus

the church in 2 Tim. 3:4 are lovers of pleasure (*philédonoí*) rather than lovers of God (*philótheoí*). Love of the world is enmity against God, and yielding to *hēdonái* is disloyalty to him (Jms. 4:1ff.). It influences our relation to God’s will and word and to prayer. Human *hēdoné* opposes God’s will, for we live either according to this will or our own desires (cf. 1 Pet. 4:2). Cf. the evil impulse in the rabbis.

⁹The New King James Version. 1982 (Eph 1:3-6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁰ **εὐδοκία** [*eudokia* /yoo-dok-ee-ah/] n f. From a presumed compound of 2095 and the base of 1380; TDNT 2:742; TDNTA 273; GK 2306; Nine occurrences; AV translates as “good pleasure” four times, “good will” twice, “seem good + 1096” twice, and “desire” once. **1** will, choice. 1A good will, kindly intent, benevolence. **2** delight, pleasure, satisfaction. **3** desire. 3A for delight in any absent thing easily produces longing for it [Strong, J. (1996). *The exhaustive concordance of the Bible: Showing every word of the text of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order.* (electronic ed.) (G2107). Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship]

offers in the midst of troubles is literally “*rest, relief, and satisfaction.*”¹¹

1. This idea of “*peace*” is dynamically associated with the Hebrew concept of “*Rest.*” Rest is related to satisfaction (God “*rested*” on the 7th Day; the Promised Land for the Jews). Satisfaction is pleasurable.
2. But “*pleasure*” is also associated with God taking our pain, tears, and mourning and transforming them into joy, fullness, and satisfaction. This is also pleasurable (John 16:20).
3. Lastly, in the eternal state, we will be in God’s presence in an Edenic-like condition. Revelation 21:22-22:5.

Now having a better understanding of the nature of our inquiry, let us now spend the remainder of our time examine three spheres of pleasure. To be sure, our inquiry will not be exhaustive; there will always be other spheres of pleasure we could and perhaps should include. But time and the loss of energy does not always work in our favor. At least we will be able to say that our inquiry into pleasure examined three central themes that find expression in our lives: The perils of pleasure, the purposes of pleasure, and the problems of pleasure. We will begin with the perils of pleasure:

II. THE PERILS OF PLEASURE:

- A. What do you believe is the greatest obstacle to the Christian faith?
- B. For many it is the problem of evil. How can you reconcile the reality of evil with the existence of an all-powerful, all-loving, all knowing, all-good God? In fact, I know of no Christian scholar who interacts with societies across this world who says that this is not the greatest obstacle to the Christian faith?
- C. But I would like to suggest that there is a greater difficulty, one that touches each of us in our every day lives. From my studies of Blaise Pascal and listening to Ravi presentation, “the Problem of Pleasure,” I’ve come to agree that the greatest obstacle is not so much the problem of evil as it is the problem of pleasure.
- D. In the July/August 2011 edition of *Imprimis*, the President of Czech Republic, Vaclav Klaus, makes an astute observation in his article, “The Crisis of the European Union: Causes and Significance. The President writes:

In Europe, we have witnessed a gradual shift away from liberalizing and removing barriers and towards a massive introduction of regulation from above, an ever-expanding welfare system, new and sophisticated forms of protectionism, and continuously growing legal and regulatory burdens on business. All of these weaken and restrain freedom, democracy and

¹¹ See Paul R. Shockley’s article titled, “Am I experiencing God’s peace” under the tab, “Spiritual Life” on my website, www.prshockley.org for a closer examination into John 14:27.

democratic accountability, not to mention economic efficiency, entrepreneurship and competitiveness.¹²

Why has this happened? President Klauv goes on to say:

Europeans today prefer leisure to performance, security to risk-taking, paternalism to free markets, collectivism and group entitlements to individualism. They have always been more risk-averse than Americans, but the difference continues to grow. Economic freedom has a very low priority here. It seems that Europeans are not interested in capitalism and free markets and do not understand that their current behavior undermines the institutions that made their past success possible. They are eager to defend their non-economic freedoms-the easiness, looseness, laxity and permissiveness of modern or postmodern European society-but when it comes to their economic freedoms, they are quite different. ¹³

- E. Think about it! What most often governs your actual daily decision-making?
1. A feeling of happiness or satisfaction?
 2. Gratification of the senses?
 3. Recreation, relaxation, amusement?
 4. Some source of happiness, joy, or satisfaction?
 5. Somebody's desire or preference?
- F. In many ways we are intoxicated by the pursuit of pleasure and it has led us to places we never thought we would go.
1. So often this hits home with me when I see people I love follow a path of illegitimate pleasures, reaping a whirlwind of negative consequences. Yet our culture somehow diminishes the reality of those consequences yet our support groups are growing and more and more people need therapy.
 2. So many young students have come into my office looking for hope... crying out for restoration...wishing they had made better choices. With their stomachs tied in knots, they wish they could go back in time and change things. The weight of regret these young people carry is staggering. One Christian student came up to me at A&M with tears running down his face wanting help. After a while, we finally got to the bottom of the issue: "Professor, I've committed the abominable sin. I met a girl, we got pregnant, and I talked her into having an abortion. I committed murder! How can God ever forgive me?"
 3. Think about it this way... how many people do you know who carry a life time of pain, regret, and remorse due to the pursuit of worldly pleasures? But when tragedy hits them late in life, for some, their values gain clarity.

¹² *Imprimis* (July/August 2011): Volume 40, Number 7/8, pg. 5. Cited in Vaclav Klaus, "The Crisis of the European Union: Causes and Significance," 1-5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5.

However, they came to the realization too late. The best years of their lives were spent and the pleasures they lived for have vaporized like steam from a hot cup of coffee.

4. Still there are others who are restless... always moving from one pleasure after another because they haven't found what they are looking for. But somehow they hold onto the false idea that the grass is greener on the other side. So, they move from one person to another...one location to another... one home to another... one hobby to another...always searching yet never finding meaningful satisfaction.
 5. What is the common denominator is that their decision-making was governed by pleasure.
- F. Then for some, it is not too much pleasure, it is a disapproval of all forms of legitimate pleasures.
1. Somehow we are called not to enjoy this life. It is only the here-after! We are pilgrims passing through this land... so they downplay pleasure and judge others for experiencing feelings of happiness, delight, or satisfaction in this life. So, they lower their glasses, they squint their eyes, they raise their eyebrows.
 2. Then when pastors enjoy certain pleasures, well, you better watch out! They've become worldly. For example, I've been chastised from everything such as celebrating a couple of café mochas; enjoying a memorable meal, or going on a cruise with some friends. "Your money should be spent doing the Lord's work! Thus, they question my priorities!

So, where do we draw the line? Where's the balance? Our first examination into the pursuit of pleasure will take us to Proverbs 5 where we the perils of pleasure emerge.

- G. In summary, in Proverbs 5 Solomon warns his son about the dangers of adultery. Adultery is a good example. While we may never have personally experienced adultery, what we see here is that Solomon personifies two types of pleasure that we all encounter:
1. The first is what we may call false pleasure. False pleasure is an illicit or illegitimate pleasure that goes outside of God's purposes. This is seen in verses 2-14 when Solomon warns his son about adultery. Adultery is an example of false pleasure.
 2. On the other hand, true pleasure is a pleasure that is in keeping with God's purposes. This is seen when Solomon exhorts his son to be satisfied with his own wife.
 3. Listen to Solomon's words about the false pleasure of adultery from verses 3-6:

³For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, And her mouth is smoother than oil; ⁴ But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword. ⁵ Her feet go down to death, Her steps lay hold of hell. ⁶ She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths are crooked, but she knows it not.¹⁴

- a. Here we have an adulterous lady who possesses seductive powers. Her sweet words are compared to dripping honey. Her alluring words are smoother than olive oil: She speaks seductively appealing to the desires of men.
- b. The young man has the God-given desire to experience intimacy. But she capitalizes on that God-given desire with her seductive powers.
- c. But in the end, that is, the final result is that after you have a relationship with her, when it is all over and done, when you are finished with her, you will find that that she is poison. Wormwood is usually a symbol of suffering.
- d. Then Solomon extends the metaphor by stating that she is as sharp as a two-edge sword. What follows from being with her is not only being poisoned, but she cuts like a knife. She will wound you, causing you pain. Because she is a two-edge sword, you are guaranteed to be hurt.
- e. If that is not enough, Solomon says, “her steps lay hold of hell.” In other words, her feet refer to her way of living. She takes her victims, step-by step, in the direction of death. In other words, “Her conduct drags you down to death, her steps lead straight to the grave.” One scholar translated it this way: “This kind of woman will take you straight to the place of dead people.”
- f. Solomon goes on to say in verse 6: “She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths are crooked, but she knows it not.” The bottom line is that this woman’s lifestyle is the road to death; she has no regards for living life well. Solomon is not saying that if you give in to her, you will not be blessed. He is saying that if you give into her, she will ruin your life. These are real consequences for a life of debauchery.¹⁵
- g. What we discover is that false pleasures extract the best parts of ours lives.
 1. Loss of strength: which may involve, one’s health, self-respect, or both (vs. 9);
 2. Loss of a long life (vs. 9);

¹⁴*The New King James Version*. 1982 (Pr 5:3-6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁵ *The Expositors’ Bible Commentary*, “Proverbs,” 927.

3. Loss of money (vs. 10) (cf. 6:26; 29:3b). Why the loss of money? In the case of adultery or such things as premarital sex, it may mean paying the adulteress, pay her husband, or paying child support. We can broaden it to include loss of resources.
4. Verses 11-12 reveal that falling prey to false pleasures also brings great regret, remorse, and disgrace:

¹¹ And you mourn at last, When your flesh and your body are consumed, ¹² And say: “How I have hated instruction, And my heart despised correction! ¹³ I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, Nor inclined my ear to those who instructed me! ¹⁴I was on the verge of total ruin, In the midst of the assembly and congregation.”¹⁶

- h. Verse 11 is particularly poignant: You will groan! And when Solomon uses the words “flesh” and “body” he is “underscoring the fact that the whole body is exhausted.”¹⁷ You can see from this passage that false pleasures like adultery generate emotional baggage which can take a toll on your life.
- i. But when Solomon contrasts the false pleasure of adultery with the true pleasure of marital intimacy in verses 15-20, we discover that true pleasures can satisfy with us. For example:
 1. Like a cistern, well, or fountain, a wife can satisfy one’s desires.
 2. This is God-given! This is God-purposed! This is how intimacy is supposed to be enjoyed!
 3. Said differently, your wife is like a spring of pure water. Drink from that spring! Or we could word it this way: Calm your thirst with the water that flows from your own well.¹⁸
 4. So, spend your energy with your wife; don’t share yourself with strangers.
- j. When you think about true pleasures, not only are they able to satisfy you, but they reveal another principle: *The price of true pleasures is paid before hand.* ¹⁹

¹⁶The New King James Version. 1982 (Pr 5:9-14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁷ *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 928.

¹⁸Ibid., 927.

¹⁹ This particular insight first came to my attention in Ravi Zacharias’ presentation, “The Problem of Pleasure.”

1. For example, abstinence should be practiced until you married. Then, you can fully enjoy marital intimacy. No regrets, no remorse, no brokenness, no ruin, and no shame.
 - k. If we look at verses 18-19 again we realize in the imagery of a loving deer and graceful doe, Solomon illustrates the exquisite gracefulness of a loving wife. Thus, we should be captivated by the love of our wives...intoxicated always with her love.
 - l. Then in verse 20 he is basically raising the question, "Why be enraptured with strangers who give no time for intimacy?" There is no selflessness with an adulterous woman, no true love.
4. So, in sum, not only do true pleasures exist, they are God-given. True pleasures are God-given! They are to be enjoyed in the manner He intended them to be enjoyed! If you will follow the path God has purposed, then you will be blessed. A committed marriage, a healthy home life, the results of hard work, recreation, & deep friendships are gifts from God, meant to be enjoyed. Once again, you will have no regrets, no remorse, no ruin, & no shame.
1. The price of true pleasures is paid before hand whereas the price of false pleasures is paid afterwards.
 2. To help us sort out what is a true pleasure from a false pleasure, we need to cultivate biblical wisdom (Prov. 5:1-2).
5. Verses 20-23 bring chapter 5 to a close. And it is here Solomon offers three concluding points:
1. Verse 20 states: "**For a man's ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths.**" The Lord sees and examines everything we do. Moreover, he knows all our ways. In other words, when Solomon says he examines all his paths, "the idea is that the Lord takes into account, thinks about, what a person does, whether it is good or bad.
 2. Verse 22: "**The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast.**" Your own sins will entrap you! In other words, you will be caught in your sins like a bird in a net. What tangle webs we can weave.
 3. Verse 23: "**He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly.**" The inability to say no to false pleasures will lead to a shortened life and premature death. One scholar translated it this way: "They get lost and die because of their foolishness and lack of self-control."²⁰ Another person put this way: "They die because

²⁰ *Handbook on Proverbs*, 132.

they have no self-control. Their utter stupidity will send them to their graves.”²¹

6. Here we come to another truth about true and false pleasures:

It is your responsibility to choose between false pleasures and true pleasures. But if you choose a false pleasure you will be ensnared, that is, trapped, by our own sins. But whatever choices you make, know this, absolutely nothing escapes God's attention; he examines everything.

III. THE PURPOSES OF PLEASURE:

- A. Now having inquired into the perils of pleasure, let us now direct our attention to the purposes of pleasure. In Proverbs 9:1-18 we come to discover the purposes of pleasure.
1. In this passage we see three major units of thought with two invitations to dinner. First, we have an invitation from Wisdom to attend her banquet (vv. 1-6). If we accept her invitation, a number of beneficial consequences will follow (vv. 7-12). But if we respond to Folly's invitation to her banquet, some horrific responses will follow (vv. 13-18).
 2. In summary from our inquiry what we discover by way of application is that true pleasures point you to God whereas false pleasures take you away from God.
 - a. When you encounter a true pleasure as personified by wisdom, enjoy it, but do not exclusively focus on it. Rather, follow the pleasure along to its ultimate source. Why? True pleasures are designed to take you to God. For example, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." You will be tremendously blessed if you embrace this true pleasure.
 - b. As personified by Folly, false pleasures are designed to captivate you. But they are not merely meant to captivate you; they are also meant to capture you. But they are not merely meant to capture you; they are meant to slay you both physically and spiritually (e.g., addictions).
 - c. Since false pleasures can mimic true pleasures, how can we sort out a true pleasure from a false pleasure? Adapting and revising an insight from Suzanne Wesley regarding sin, we can carefully discern whether a particular pleasure is a true pleasure or a false pleasure by asking ourselves whether this pleasure:
 1. Weaken your ability to think rationally;
 2. Impair the tenderness of your consciousness;

²¹ Ibid., 131.

3. Obscure your sight of God;
 4. Diminish your thirst for spiritual things;
 5. Increase the authority of your body over your mind.
- d. Remember, false pleasures are not only a problem “out there,” but they are also a problem “within.” False pleasures appeal to the dark aspects of our lives.
1. Interestingly, I find it so curious that we are sensitive to false pleasures but insensitive to true pleasures.
- e. Nevertheless, the “flesh” can never be improved or reformed. Our hope is in Christ. Practice vivification and mortification. Abide in Christ; yield to God; intimately know His Word and earnestly pray. When you are intimate fellowship with Christ, you are immediately experiencing a true pleasure; you are in the presence of God.
- f. False pleasures are “agenda” driven by counterfeit sources. Are you struggling? Ask yourself why? Be observant, careful, and sober.

IV. THE PROBLEMS OF PLEASURES:

- A. Having examined the perils of pleasure and the purposes of pleasure let us now to direct our attention to the problems of pleasure.
- B. In Solomon’s search for fulfillment he records in Ecclesiastes that he attempted to...
1. Find fulfillment in acquiring more knowledge. But Solomon discovered that the result of knowledge was grief and increased sorrow.
 2. He sought fulfillment in pleasure, laughter and partying, but only found that all earthly pleasures were vaporous.
 3. He tried to find fulfillment in accomplishments (2:4-6) (e.g., buildings, agricultural endeavors, and engineering experiments) but discovered that they were also vaporous (2:11).
 4. He also tried to find fulfillment in possessions (2:7-17) such as large numbers of servant, herds of cattle, wealth in gold and silver (1 Kings 10), choirs and orchestras, and seven hundred wives (1 Kings 11:3). Here he realized that there was “no profit under the sun” (2:11).
 - a. In fact, instead of satisfaction, hatred for life emerges (2:17). Thus, Solomon concludes his pursuit of fulfillment and the meaning of life by stating in Ecclesiastes 2:13-14

“Fear God and Keep God’s commandments, for this is man’s all. ¹⁴For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.”

- C. What can we glean from Solomon’s extraordinary insight? We are able to discern that there are earthly pleasures and spiritual pleasures.
1. Earthly pleasures are temporal pleasures (e.g., car; home; money).
 2. Spiritual pleasures are eternal pleasures.
- D. Where is the problem? We confuse these pleasures in our everyday experience. Earthly pleasures are not designed to last whereas spiritual pleasures are satisfactory because they promote intimacy with God.
1. This insight requires special attentiveness. All too often we have been taught that earthly pleasures are “sinful” whereas “spiritual pleasures are “good” and “right.” While spiritual pleasures are honorable, earthly pleasures are too when they fall within God’s intended purposes. Like James 1:17 states:

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadow.”²²
 2. Once we abuse the earthly pleasures God has given us (e.g., food; home; resources; relationships), the earthly pleasures become corrupted. Like leaving food that is intended to remain in the refrigerator, once we go beyond the intended instructions for enjoying an earthly pleasure, an earthly pleasure becomes a false pleasure.
- E. Spiritual pleasures allow us to be used by God in ways we never thought possible-all for His glory. When we follow hard after God by conforming ourselves to His commandments, precepts, and principles by means of the Holy Spirit, our lives becomes vibrant and exciting, reverberating in eternity.
1. Since we will be held accountable and rewarded for our faithfulness to Him at the Judgment Seat of Christ, spiritual pleasures become even more dear to us (1 Cor. 3; 2 Cor. 5:9-10).
- F. Remember that earthly pleasures will not fulfill the spiritual longings of our heart.
- G. Enjoy appropriate earthly pleasures like marital intimacy, laughter, and having a good time, but we are to hold on to them loosely for they will evaporate, fall apart, and be taken from us.
- H. Ask yourself how God earthly pleasures can be used to promote God’s priorities for earthly pleasures can contribute to spiritual pleasures (1 John 3:16-17).
- I. Once we take earthly pleasures and go outside God’s design for them, earthly pleasures become false pleasures. For example, the use of money can become an idol in our lives once we place a higher priority or value on it than God does.

²² Notice the tense of the verb, “coming down from the Father.”

- J. Build our lives upon spiritual pleasures, not earthly pleasures. See, don't focus on the looking at to the neglect of following it along to the ultimate source of pleasure: God Himself.

V. CONCLUSION:

- A. if we take the seven-fold criteria and apply it to our existential investigation into our pursuit of pleasure, looking at the perils, promises, and problems of pleasure, we discover an enriching apologetic insight:
- 1P. A very natural innate desire has a real object that can fulfill it.**
 - 2P. Human beings have a natural, innate desire for ultimate pleasure**
 - 3C Therefore, ultimate pleasure exists, namely, God.**
- B. Therefore:
1. Do not allow false pleasures to rob you of the best parts of your life.
 2. Just as the world is watching us, probing our hearts, minds, habits, and choices, so is God.
 3. Do not become immobilized by earthly pleasures. Earthly pleasures, once corrupted unto a false pleasure, by means of misdeeds such as abuse and idolatry, can keep you from being all that God has called you to be. Rather, treat earthly pleasures as God intended them be treated. Use earthly pleasures for good, honorable, and noble purposes-all for His glory.
 4. Experience true and spiritual pleasures by intimately fellowshiping with the God of the Bible. Turn to Him in the moment-by-moment details of life and you will experience a dynamic relationship that will transform your life that no other pleasure can provide. You can experience His true pleasure in the "now."
 5. If you have no idea what I am talking about, then I invite you to consider the claims of Scripture about the Nature of God. You will discover as I have in my own personal life that when you place your trust in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died on the cross for your sins and rose bodily from dead, that the spiritual reality of incompleteness you have long been experiencing will be transformed by a God-given peace that surpasses all our understanding. God takes our pain, our regret, and our emptiness and offers the grace that He can only provide.
 6. But if you are a believer and you are struggling with your past, holding onto grievance and or regrets, look upon Jesus Christ. In Christ we discover forgiveness. Surely if God has forgiven us, we can forgive ourselves or those who have deeply hurt us. At all points God knew every sin we would commit, yet He still desires to have a relationship with you that will last for eternity.

7. We have heard too many confessions by those who wish they could go back in time and make different choices. But rarely do we see someone who will rise up with wisdom and seize God in the manner that He has seized us. Will you be that daring?

Dear Heavenly Father:

Too many of us have enjoyed the false pleasures of this world, energized by the counterfeit kingdom. We wear the scars; we carry the pain; we feel the weight of years of regret. We have become short-sighted. Our understanding has grown dim. Our thoughts and activities are too self-centered. But Father, we humbly ask that you would mightily work in us like you did with Jacob's son, Joseph, and enable us to turn away and flee from every false pleasure, trusting you no matter how difficult the circumstances become. Remove from us those false pleasures that are keeping us from being all that you have called us to be. Give us a dislike for false pleasures and help us to choose pleasures that are properly legitimate. Exchange our bad habits for godly virtues. Give us a new disposition to live for you, new eyes to gaze upon your person, a new mind to intimately know you, and a new heart that is passionately inflamed for you. There is no greater pleasure than intimately walking in fellowship with you (John 15)! We turn our lives over to you and pray that our life's ambition would be to glorify you in the moment-by-moment decisions we make.

This we ask in the precious name of Jesus Christ. Amen.