

TODAY IN THE WORD®

A ministry of Moody Bible Institute

FEAR OF THE LORD



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Putting God First

From the President of Moody Bible Institute

“Whatever you value most, whatever you make decisions around, can become your idol. There is no substitute for God.”



When I married my wife, Dee, I stood before the pastor (my father), our family and friends, and vowed that I would be faithful

to her and to her only. There would be no one else. It would be an exclusive relationship.

That is the way it is in our relationship with God. He is to have supreme importance in our life. The first commandment states this clearly: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Deut. 5:7; Ex. 20:3). It is first for a reason, because if we don’t get this commandment right, we get all the rest wrong. It’s like buttoning your shirt. If you fasten the first button correctly, the rest will line up. If you get the first one wrong, the rest is a mess.

What happened next, in Exodus 32, shows how quickly we all tend to stray. Moses was on the mountain with God, for 40 days and 40 nights. The people were waiting. A week went by and still no sign of him. After 30 days, they grew restless and went to Aaron, Moses’ brother. They asked him to make them a god to go before them.

So, Aaron melted their gold jewelry and formed a golden calf, similar to the gods they had left behind in Egypt.

Maybe you’ve done something similar. You’ve said, “God, I want only You, I consecrate my life to You alone.” And then, when trouble comes, you quickly forget that promise and turn to cheap substitutes. We worship something *instead* of Him. We give something or someone else priority in our lives. We put things in *front* of Him. Or we place something or someone else on the highest altar of our lives. We prioritize this “god” in *addition* to Him.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf.’” (Ex. 32:7–8).

What is our golden calf? Did you know you can make your job an idol? Your boyfriend? Your car? Your children? Whatever you value most, whatever you make decisions around, can become your idol. There is no substitute for God. We are His, and His alone. Keep us, Lord, from turning away. ■

Love and Fear

by Dr. John Koessler

“When John observes that there is no fear in love, he cannot mean that those who love God never experience fear in His presence. There are too many examples to the contrary in both Old and New Testaments.”

The Bible’s repeated emphasis on the fear of the Lord may seem inconsistent with its teaching about the love of God. After all, we don’t typically want those we love to be terrified of us! Love’s characteristic is to draw near rather than shrink back. “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18).

John describes the characteristic of a “perfect” or mature love, a love for God that is marked by three important features. First, it is a love that grows. That this love is “made complete” implies progress or development (v. 17). Second, this love does not originate with us but is a response to God’s love for us. Verse 19 explains, “We love because he first loved us.” Third, it is a love that is not only directed toward God but also toward those whom God loves. In this way, God causes our love for Him to mature: “. . . if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (v. 12). However, when John observes that there is no fear

in love, he cannot mean that those who love God never experience fear in His presence. There are too many examples to the contrary in both Old and New Testaments.

John’s assertion that perfect love “drives out” fear is an implicit acknowledgment that fear is a common reaction for those who experience the presence of God. Such fear springs from our awareness of guilt and the knowledge that we deserve punishment (v. 12). But Jesus has transformed this natural fear into something else by taking our punishment upon Himself. It is what Psalm 19:9 describes as a “pure” or “clean” fear. Only those who know Christ by faith can fear God in this biblical sense. It is a holy reverence that is grounded in faith. They can pray that God’s name will be hallowed (Matt. 6:9). By the power of Christ at work in them, they strive to be holy (Heb. 12:14). God is their Father. Jesus is their Friend. The Spirit is their Helper (John 14:16, 26). Anyone who trusts in Christ’s righteousness can fear God without being terrified. ■

For Further Study

To learn more, read *Rejoice & Tremble: The Surprising Good News of the Fear of the Lord* by Michael Reeves (Crossway).

TODAY IN THE WORD®

Fear of the Lord

*Let all the earth fear the Lord;
let all the people of the world revere him.—Psalm 33:8*

What does it mean to fear the Lord? Godly fear is not the same as human fear. Our human fear makes us want to run away, while the fear of the Lord draws us closer. Human fear feels like dread, anxiety, or vulnerability, while the fear of the Lord feels like love, faithfulness, and security.

Godly fear gives us a proper view of God. He's not our "good buddy" or "co-pilot." His ways and thoughts are incomparably higher. We approach God with awe and reverence. This is why not even Moses could enter the tabernacle when God's presence filled it. As we study this month, I pray you will not only understand what it means to fear the Lord but also draw even closer to Him.

Your devotional author,



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A Call to Fear the Lord

Read Psalm 33:1–9

*Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the people of the world revere him.—Psalm 33:8*

A rich French horn call opens one of my favorite classical music pieces, Piano Concerto No. 2 by Johannes Brahms. As the horn call rises, the piano's notes meet it in the air, and we are drawn into the beautiful first movement.

That's how a good call to worship works as well: we are drawn in by poetic words to praise the Lord. Psalm 33 is a call to worship, which is also a call to fear the Lord. Do we think of these two actions as joined? Today's verse calls all the earth to "fear" Him, which in the second and parallel line becomes "revere" Him (v. 8). To fear the Lord means to worship Him in awe and reverence.

What does fear of the Lord look like? You might be surprised. It looks like joy, singing, and praise (vv. 1–3). God is worthy of worship because He is righteous, just, faithful, and loving (vv. 4–5), as well as creative, powerful, and sovereign in authority (vv. 6–7, 9).

Ordinary human fear makes us want to run away, like the victim in a horror movie. The fear of the Lord, by contrast, makes us want to draw nearer to Him. He is awe-inspiring and infinitely greater than us, but at the same time He faithfully loves us. One source therefore defines "fear" in verse 8 as "to demonstrate respect for the Lord's power and authority by worshipping him and obeying his commandments" (see Prov. 14:2).

This month, we will study what it means to fear the Lord. We will learn the implications for our spiritual lives. And we'll look at biblical examples that show what it means to fear (or not fear) the Lord. As we grow in our fear of the Lord it will deepen our relationship with Him.

Go Deeper

What does it mean to fear the Lord? How and why can godly fear exist alongside love, joy, and hope (see also Ps. 33:18)?

Pray with Us

Dear God, as we begin this study, we pray that You will deepen our understanding of the true, godly fear and reverence. We want to know You and worship You in Spirit and in truth.

Fear and the Messiah

Read Isaiah 11:1–5

He will delight in the fear of the LORD.—Isaiah 11:3

In C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Susan and Lucy were preparing to meet Aslan, the Christ-figure in the *Narnia* series, for the very first time. "Is he quite safe?" Susan asked. "I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion." "That you will, dearie," replied Mrs. Beaver. "And make no mistake, if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly." Mr. Beaver added, "Of course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king, I tell you!"

This in a nutshell is the fear of the Lord, a fear that is also respect, awe, and—for believers—love. Isaiah 11, a Messianic prophecy, points out that the Messiah will be full of the Holy Spirit, meaning "the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord" (v. 2). In fact, "he will delight in the fear of the Lord" (v. 3). Additional qualities include wisdom, understanding, power (v. 2), penetrating insight (v. 3), righteousness, justice—especially for the poor and needy, but judgment

on the wicked (v. 4)—and faithfulness (v. 5).

If this sounds like God, you've correctly understood that the Messiah is also God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity. Part of the Messiah's purpose and God's plan of redemption is to inspire fear of the Lord and to bring about worship in the fear of the Lord. Typically, in Scripture, when people see a vision of God they fall flat on their faces (see days 24 and 28). This makes the Incarnation of the Messiah even more incredible! The eternal God the Son, the Word made flesh, walked around Israel like any other man. His disciples were (mostly) not overwhelmed but interacted with Him as they would with any other man.

Go Deeper

Isaiah 11:6–9 describes what will happen when the fear of the Lord fills the earth. What will that day be like and why?

Pray with Us

Father, teach us what it means to "delight in the fear of the LORD" (Isa. 11:3) and show us the way of understanding, wisdom, insight, justice—the way of Israel's Messiah, Jesus Christ. We eagerly await His Coming. Keep us ready!

Good vs. Bad Fear

Read Isaiah 41:8–14

Do not fear, for I am with you.—Isaiah 41:10

Good fear, according to theologian Michael Reeves, is marked by reverence and awe. Bad fear is marked by anxiety. “Sinful fear hates God and therefore acts sinfully. Right fear loves God and therefore has a sincere longing to be like him. . . . I want you to rejoice in this strange paradox that the gospel both frees us from fear and gives us fear. It frees us from our crippling fears, giving us instead a most delightful, happy, and wonderful fear.”

This contrast between normal human fear and the fear of the Lord is the background for today’s Scripture reading. When God says not to fear (vv. 10, 13–14), He’s referring to normal human fear—the feeling of being afraid when threatened or in danger. Why should they take courage? Because God is on their side. He calls them “friend” and has a covenant relationship with them (v. 8). He’s called and chosen them (v. 9). He will strengthen, help, and uphold them (vv. 10, 13). He is

their Redeemer (v. 14). Thanks to Him, their enemies will be defeated (vv. 11–12). There’s absolutely no reason to be afraid!

As we’ve already seen, the fear of the Lord is quite different. Because of God’s love and promises, His worshipers can draw near to Him in faith. It’s their enemies who should run away, not them! When God calls Israel His “servant” (vv. 8–9), this is a special title, even an affectionate term, especially in light of the four “servant songs” in Isaiah 41–53.

This drawing near, though, is not like drawing near to another person. God is infinitely greater than us. Our knees should knock a bit. Faith-filled fear and trembling in our worship is a very appropriate response to the awesomeness of who He is (Ps. 119:120; Jer. 5:22).

Go Deeper

What is the difference between good and bad fear? In what ways do we show that we fear God?

Pray with Us

We admit, Lord, that often we treat you as our “buddy” who is there to fulfill our requests. May it never be! May we draw near to You with awe and faith-filled fear, recognizing You as a righteous Judge, Almighty Creator, the great I AM.

Learning God's Ways

Read Isaiah 55:6–13

*As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways.—Isaiah 55:9*

Not only do most Americans lack a proper fear of the Lord, but an increasing number also don't even believe He exists. Through the 1960s, Gallup polls found that 98 percent of Americans believed in God. Now that number is down to 81 percent, and only 68 percent for young adults ages 18–29. That might sound okay, but only half of the total thinks God hears or responds to prayers.

Why is it appropriate to fear the Lord? Because His thoughts are far above our thoughts, and His ways are far above our ways (vv. 8–9). This is illustrated in His providential care for creation (v. 10). God's greatness is therefore not a scary but a faith-inspiring reality. He's not greater in a distant, uncaring sense, but rather governs the earth in a way that results in "seed for the sower and bread for the eater."

God's greatness means that His word does not return "empty" or ineffective (v. 11). It "will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Only the sovereign

Lord of the universe could make such a guarantee. Such power is far beyond our comprehension.

Should we flee from such an amazing Being? No. We should draw near and worship. We should seek Him and call on Him (v. 6). Specifically, because God is holy and loving, we should repent of sin, turn to Him, and accept His mercy and forgiveness (v. 7). Because He is who He is, the people of Israel could trust that their exile would one day be over and there would be a homecoming (vv. 12–13).

God's awesome attributes (such as power) and His personal attributes (such as love) are *all* infinitely greater than our comprehension. This is why a right fear of the Lord stirs up fear and trembling alongside love and trust.

Go Deeper

Are we uncomfortable with God's greatness? Do we try to reduce Him to our level with slogans, such as "God is my co-pilot"? How and why do we do this?

Pray with Us

Jesus, give us a heart that is willing to hear Your truth and learn Your ways—an open and obedient heart. Yes, Your power is beyond our comprehension, but Your love and mercy change hearts of stone and open blind eyes.

How Great Is Our God

Read Job 40:1–14

*Will the one who contends with
the Almighty correct him?—Job 40:2*

The Israelites were trapped between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea (Exodus 14–15). There seemed to be no way out, until God parted the waters. Then, the people walked through on dry ground, while their former enslavers drowned. Moses and Miriam led a spirited song of rejoicing: “Who among the gods is like you, LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?”

Fear, praise, and worship are a fitting response to God’s greatness and power. Job responded to God’s first speech properly. He put his hand over his mouth, indicating that he would stop complaining and accusing God of wrongdoing (vv. 1–5). More was needed, however, so God made a second speech (vv. 6–14). Here we read of God’s greatness and power, framed as a challenge to Job. God hammers home the point that human beings are nowhere near qualified to hold an opinion on the activities of the Almighty. It’s like a six-year-old Little Leaguer critiquing Hank Aaron!

What can God do that Job cannot? He adorns Himself with glory, splendor, honor, and majesty that He richly and solely deserves (v. 10). He unleashes the fury of His righteous wrath against proud evildoers (vv. 11–12). He has the right, authority, and power to judge, indeed, He holds in His hands the power over life and death (vv. 13–14).

If Job can do any of these things, God will concede the point (v. 14). “Would you condemn me to justify yourself?” He demanded (v. 8). Job was not remotely qualified to critique God’s justice. How did he respond the second time around? Much more humbly and worshipfully (Job 42:1–6). One might say that he’d finally grasped the fear of the Lord.

Go Deeper

Do we take seriously the sin of grumbling or complaining? When is it legitimate venting or lamenting? At what point are we calling God into question? How might we tell the difference?

Pray with Us

Lord, generations of believers marveled at the mystery and depth of the book of Job! Help us learn from today’s passage in humility and insight. Help us trust Your love and justice in all circumstances, without doubting and complaining.

God's Justice

Read Psalm 64

All people will fear; they will proclaim the works of God and ponder what he has done.—Psalm 64:9

Have you ever heard it said that someone has “no fear of God”? This type of person will recklessly break laws and pursue criminal activity. They seem to have no fear of authority and no regard for justice.

In the Bible, the “fear of the Lord” is closely connected with God’s justice. Psalm 64 opens with a prayer for protection from unjust enemies (vv. 1–6). The “conspiracy theory” in this case is in fact true—they’re plotting against the Psalmist (v. 2). His enemies’ words are turned against him like deadly weapons, sharp and cruel (v. 3). Their actions are similarly unfair and cowardly, as they “shoot from ambush at the innocent” (v. 4). They work together to refine their evil plans and to design and hide their wicked traps (vv. 5–6).

David’s prayer is answered in the second half of the psalm (vv. 7–10). The wicked may be “cunning,” but they’re not nearly clever enough to outsmart the Lord. He will act justly and punish them. They shoot the innocent from ambush, but God

will shoot them with His arrows (v. 7). They use words as weapons, but God “will turn their own tongues against them and bring them to ruin.” Everyone will see their downfall and understand that He has worked justice upon them (v. 8).

What is the final result? First: “All people will fear; they will proclaim the works of God and ponder what he has done” (v. 9). Everyone will fear the Lord, in the sense of the opening illustration. Second: “The righteous will rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in him; all the upright in heart will glory in him!” (v. 10). They, too, fear the Lord but have gone beyond simple respect to loving reverence and obedience.

Go Deeper

Have you ever thought about writing your own psalm? Using this psalm as an example, write a prayer for help in a tough situation. Then in faith express what will happen when God intervenes!

Pray with Us

Father God, thank You for the reminder in today’s reading that You are our protection and strength, that we can run to You and be safe. “The righteous will rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in him” (Ps. 64:10).

Fear and Obedience

Read Deuteronomy 6:1–9

Fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands.—Deuteronomy 6:2

In *A Treatise of the Fear of God* (1679), John Bunyan explained: “[God] will be either our Saviour or Judge, [so] we are in reason and duty bound to give the more earnest heed to the things that shall be spoken, and be the more careful to receive them, and put them in practice. . . . For there is no duty performed by us that can by any means be accepted of God, if it be not seasoned with godly fear.”

In other words, godly fear leads to careful obedience. Deuteronomy 6 teaches the people of Israel to fear the Lord as long as they live (vv. 1–3). The most obvious way to do so is “by keeping all his decrees and commands.”

Once again, we see that godly fear is connected with emotions and actions very different from the human emotion of being afraid. It’s connected with worshipping the one true God (v. 4). It’s connected with wholehearted love of God and others (v. 5). It’s connected with integrity and obedience, our hearts and

actions in one accord (v. 6). These commandments are so important that we’re to put them, and by implication the fear of the Lord, at the center of our households, teaching them to our families and discussing and meditating on them constantly (vv. 7–9). These verses (vv. 4–9) are called the *Shema*, the Jewish confession of faith.

The assertion, “The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (v. 4), contrasts strongly with the typical polytheism of the Ancient Near East. The *Shema* highlights God’s incomparable power and greatness. Truly there is none like Him (Ps. 86:8; Jer. 10:6)!

Living in the fear of the Lord thus means to live as if God is God. In thought, word, and deed, we love, worship, and obey our King.

Go Deeper

How can we “write God’s law” upon our hearts? How might we consistently fear the Lord through the ups and downs of life? How can we teach our families to do the same?

Pray with Us

Who is like You, God? Today we pray the beautiful *Shema* prayer You gave to the Jewish people—“The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4)—and acknowledge our desire to love and worship You in thought, word, and deed.

The Covenant Relationship

Read Deuteronomy 10:12–21

*Fear the LORD your God
and serve him.—Deuteronomy 10:20*

In biblical times, the relationship between the idol and the worshiper seemed like a competition for control. People tried to manipulate the idol with gifts and flattery. In turn, the idol would keep people in line with perceived threats of punishment or disaster.

The covenant relationship between God and His people was much different. Its central feature is God's lovingkindness or "unfailing love." His people are to love Him in return. Alongside it, as a covenant obligation, is to fear the Lord, acting in service and obedience (vv. 12–13).

These are fitting responses both in terms of who God is—Creator and King—and in terms of Israel's being God's chosen people (vv. 14–15). The Lord is not a local god or idol. He doesn't really *need* anything from His people. They didn't deserve Him. They hadn't earned His favor. He freely willed to "set his affection" on them and chose them to be His own.

So they should act like it! Instead of being stubborn and "stiff-necked,"

they should circumcise their hearts (v. 16). Circumcision was a mark of the covenant identity and of consecration to the Lord. It thus carried the sense of purifying or rededicating themselves.

These arguments repeat in the rest of the passage. God is mighty, awesome, and just. There's no comparison with other "gods"—He alone is God Most High (v. 17). He's just and generous in that He upholds the cause of those with the lowest social status, such as orphans, widows, and foreigners (v. 18). Since this is the case, being rebellious or prideful is absurd and childish. They must not take oaths in His name and then act in ways that dishonor Him. The only appropriate response is worship, fear of the Lord, and grateful obedience (vv. 19–21).

Go Deeper

To fear the Lord is the same as to put our hope in His unfailing love (Ps. 147:11). What is the meaning of hope in the Bible? How might it affect our lives in the present moment?

Pray with Us

Father, help me follow You all the days of my life in obedience, gratefulness, and service to others. Help me remember every day that You've already won the spiritual war, and I can live in light of Your victory, fully committed to You.

The Ten Commandments

Read Exodus 20:1–20

*The fear of God will be with you
to keep you from sinning.—Exodus 20:20*

Psalms 112 says: “Blessed are those who fear the LORD, who find great delight in his commands.” This means that people who fear the Lord are, by definition, people who also delight in His commands. Once again two feelings, fear and delight, that we would not pair in ordinary life, are united in biblical worship.

The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 are famous throughout the world. They were the foundation of the Law of Moses and reflect God’s righteousness. If we desire to “find great delight in his commands,” this is the perfect place to start.

First, they remind us that we must worship God and God alone (v. 3). Second, the Israelites were not to make any images of God (vv. 4–6). This could easily lead to the idolatry practiced by nearby nations, as the Israelites themselves proved in the episode of the golden calf (Ex. 32). Third, they warned God’s people not to misuse God’s name, for example, by swearing or making false oaths, for such misuse is effectively

calling God a liar (v. 7). Fourth, they taught Israel to find rest in God (vv. 8–11). This principle reaches back to Creation when God rested on the seventh day. Fifth, we’re to honor our parents, a command that includes both respect and practical care (v. 12). Commandments six through ten deal with our social relationships (vv. 13–17): Murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting are all forbidden.

When they received these commandments, the Israelites “trembled with fear” (vv. 18–19). They recognized God’s greatness and power manifested and knew they were unworthy. Moses told them, “Do not be afraid” (the human emotion) while at the same time assuring them that the fear of the Lord would keep them from sinning (v. 20).

Go Deeper

Read the Ten Commandments again. How is the fear of the Lord connected to each one? How do these commands show what respect for God might look like?

Pray with Us

Almighty God, as we read Your Ten Commandments, we are in awe of Your love and mercy. Thank You for establishing from ages past these foundations of morality that still hold true today. Guide our walk with You today!

Fear and Justice

Read 2 Chronicles 19:4–11

*You must serve faithfully and wholeheartedly
in the fear of the Lord.—2 Chronicles 19:9*

Have you ever heard a political candidate on the campaign trail? Or seen a video of one on TV? Sometimes it seems like they will say anything to get elected! In today's reading, King Jehoshaphat was on the "campaign trail" for a nobler purpose: He "went out again among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim and turned them back to the LORD, the God of their ancestors" (v. 4).

Leading a spiritual revival didn't come easy. The king had to work at it! Part of what he did was to appoint civil officials, including judges and administrators, with the goal of nurturing the revival and keeping the nation close to the Lord. To reach this goal required godly leaders. When the king selected judges, he admonished them: "Now let the fear of the LORD be on you. Judge carefully, for with the LORD our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery" (vv. 5–7). Oftentimes, then and now, power is used in corrupt ways to benefit oneself rather than others. To resist this temptation, the new judges

needed the fear of the Lord. They represented Him and would be held accountable by Him.

Similarly, when the king appointed administrators in Jerusalem, he told them: "You must serve faithfully and wholeheartedly in the fear of the LORD" (vv. 8–10). Again, they were not to use their power and authority to enrich themselves, but instead to faithfully serve God's people. They should seek justice and righteousness and guard against sin in all matters, or risk God's wrath. Presumably these new leaders shared the king's vision for spiritual revival.

Despite being the king, Jehoshaphat did not claim total authority, but rather made it clear to his officials that the chief priest would oversee religious matters (v. 11).

Go Deeper

Do we think of justice in association with partiality or favoritism (see James 2:1–4)? Modern English uses these terms somewhat differently. How and why does the Bible connect them?

Pray with Us

Lord, we like to think of You as a God of love and mercy. May we never forget that You are also a God of justice! You punish sin and avenge the injustice! We come to You today, our Creator, in awe, reverence, and fear.

Fear and Purity

Read Psalm 19:7–14

*The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever. — Psalm 19:9*

According to the *Journal of Food Research*, blowing out the candles on a birthday cake multiplies the number of bacteria on the frosting by 1,400 percent! This varies by person—the “top blower” in the study increased bacteria by 120,000 percent. Although most experts don’t see these results as a serious health risk, I wouldn’t blame you for choosing cupcakes or ice cream, instead, on your next birthday.

In the Bible, the word “pure” is not referring to being germ-free but is associated with righteousness and goodness. In Psalm 19:9 we read, “The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.” In this case, the phrase “fear of the Lord” is used as a synonym for God’s Law or God’s Word. We know this from the context. The first half of Psalm 19 (vv. 1–6) presents the witness and praise of God by creation, while the second half (vv. 7–14) presents the witness and praise of God by the Scriptures. Specifically, in the parallelism of verse 9, the “fear of the LORD” is equated to the “decrees of the LORD,” meaning His Word. This makes

sense, since the Scriptures clearly teach the fear of the Lord.

What qualities does God’s Word show? And what can it do? It’s perfect, refreshing, trustworthy, and right (v. 7). It gives wisdom, joy, light, and truth (v. 8). It’s pure, eternal, stable, and righteous (v. 9). It’s precious and delightful (v. 10). It warns us that we have choices to make and that those have consequences (v. 11). It provides an objective and infallible moral standard, helping us fight temptation and prompting repentance when we stumble (vv. 12–13). Without God’s Word, we wouldn’t even realize our errors. We can live in the fear of the Lord by thoroughly immersing our minds, hearts, and wills in the truths of Scripture.

Go Deeper

How has God’s Word shaped your life? Can you give a recent example? For individuals and churches, in what ways does inward knowledge become outward obedience? How can we pray more toward this end?

Pray with Us

Lord Jesus, our risen Savior, show us how to live in the light of Your Word. Thank You for giving us God’s Word, thank You that You are the Word who removed the separation between God and us, so that we can live in the truth of Scripture.

Fear and Righteousness

Read Psalm 34:8–16

*Fear the LORD,
you his holy people.—Psalm 34:9*

To be “righteous” means to be morally upright, to be without sin. Of course, holy perfection is an unreachable goal. Romans 3:10 tells us: “There is no one righteous, not even one.” How then do we “pursue righteousness” (2 Tim. 2:2)?

Psalm 34:9 guides us: “Fear the LORD, you his holy people.” The Psalmist explains that righteousness does not come from us but from God. Fearing the Lord is commanded for “holy people” (v. 9). By drawing near to God in love and respect, we are able to control our tongues and in general “turn from evil and do good” (vv. 13–14).

As we pursue righteousness, the fear of the Lord is comforting and even pleasurable. Why? One reason is that we’re perfectly safe in Him as our refuge (v. 8). Drawing near to God or “tasting” His presence brings genuine pleasure and delight. In addition, “those who fear him lack nothing” (v. 9). God is our Provider. He cares for us. We can trust Him. Even lions, the

kings of the jungle, might get weak from hunger, but not us. By relying on God, we “lack no good thing” (v. 10).

Verse 11 is a summons: “Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.” And what does he advise? Control your tongue, do good, and pursue peace, and the loving eyes of the Lord will be upon you (vv. 13–15). But be warned. The opposite is also true: “The face of the LORD is against those who do evil” (v. 16).

The implication is that we cannot live in this way—righteously—without the fear of the Lord. If we draw near to Him in awe and reverence, however, and depend wholly on Him, the relationship is a blessing beyond imagining!

Go Deeper

As James 3:1–12 teaches, controlling our tongue is a major challenge. How can we bring our words under God’s control, including everyday speech and social media?

Pray with Us

Too often our words are unloving and hurtful. Remind us today, Lord, that as Your people we have to control our tongue and let the Holy Spirit guide our speech. Give us a holy fear and a heart of thankfulness.

Fear of the Lord, Wisdom, and Shalom

Read Proverbs 2:1–11

*Then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.—Proverbs 2:5*

When our children were younger, we designed “treasure hunts” for them. One clue would lead to another as they scampered through the house and yard. At the end, they would find candy, coloring books, art supplies, or some other reward. They were as thrilled as if they’d found a chest of pirate gold!

In the book of Proverbs, we learn that wisdom is far more valuable than any treasure. We should search for it, like those children, with expectant eagerness (vv. 1–4). We need to be teachable, open-minded, and attentive. We should also be responsive and ready to apply whatever we learn. Eagerness is seen in the crying aloud and in the comparison to searching for hidden treasure.

What will we find (vv. 5–8)? The fear of the Lord and related blessings. In this passage, the fear of the Lord, knowledge, wisdom, and understanding are all intertwined and interrelated. All of them come from the Lord. He also blesses the upright, is a shield to the blameless, guards the way of the just, and protects the way of

the faithful. When God gives wisdom, these blessings come with it. When we seek wisdom, we’re seeking the fear of the Lord as well.

How will we benefit (vv. 9–11)? In addition to the above, we’ll gain discretion and the ability to make wise decisions. We’ll understand which path is the godly one. Wisdom, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord will be “pleasant to your soul.” Why? Because it is delightful to be in close communion with the awesome Giver of all wisdom. We call this *shalom*, a word meaning peace, blessedness, and overall well-being.

No wonder Proverbs says that the fear of the Lord is a “fountain of life” (14:27) and further teaches: “The fear of the Lord leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble” (19:23).

Go Deeper

How does peace *with* God (Rom. 5:1) bring us the peace *of* God (Phil. 4:6–7)? In what other ways does the good news of salvation have an impact on our daily lives?

Pray with Us

God, keep us from pride and false beliefs that we can attain anything without You! Proverbs tells us that true wisdom, knowledge, understanding, and godly fear are found only in You. Help us give You the rightful place in our lives.

The Beginning of Wisdom, Part 1

Read Proverbs 1:1–7

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.—Proverbs 1:7

“Two people may possess essentially the same knowledge,” wrote author Jerry Bridges in *The Joy of Fearing God*. “One person views this knowledge as a means of acquiring position, power, or possessions, and uses it to that end. The other person sees it as a gift from God and as a stewardship to be used to serve Him.” What makes the difference? “The fear of God must be the foundation upon which knowledge is built. It is the fear of the Lord that gives us the right perspective and prompts us to use it for the right end.”

That is to say, the fear of the Lord is the necessary condition for all true knowledge and wisdom (v. 7). What this basically means is that to start learning wisdom, we need to seek a close relationship with the Lord. The only way to do that, of course, is on His terms. This is why one source defines the fear of the Lord as “a loving reverence for God that includes submission to his lordship and to the commands of his word.”

To learn wisdom is to grow and mature (vv. 2–6). We gain insight into the realities of life, including good and evil. We become more able to do what is right and just. Our behavior becomes more prudent, which is the virtue of governing oneself with reason (especially in terms of planning for the future) and is thus related to self-control. We increase in discretion and good judgment. We become lifelong learners, always ready to learn more and to keep growing.

The opposite of wisdom is foolishness (v. 7). Only a fool would despise the benefits of wisdom. Only a fool would want to stay immature, proudly refuse to learn, be gullible or “simple,” and keep choosing poorly or wrongly.

Go Deeper

How familiar are you with the virtue of prudence? Biblically, what does this mean? How can we grow in it? How can we better put it into practice?

Pray with Us

How do we attain wisdom? The first step is the fear of the Lord. Father, we ask You for wisdom, understanding and knowledge. Keep us from foolishness! May we walk through every circumstance and every trial with dignity and wisdom!

The Beginning of Wisdom, Part 2

Read Psalm 111

*Great are the works of the LORD;
they are pondered by all who delight in them.—Psalm 111:2*

A *Pickles* cartoon by Brian Crane shows an older gentleman named Earl hunched over a typewriter. When his wife, Opal, asks him what he's doing, he responds that he's writing a memoir and thus passing on "the wisdom that I've acquired over my long lifetime." A bit skeptical, Opal asks how long this might take. Just then, he proclaims "All done!" "Wow," she observes, "almost a whole page!"

Psalm 111:10 expresses wholehearted praise founded on the fear of the Lord: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise."

We praise God for His attributes. He's glorious, majestic, and eternal, as well as righteous, gracious, and compassionate (vv. 3–4). He's also faithful, just, trustworthy, and upright (vv. 7–8). He is further to be praised for His deeds, especially in Israel's history. He powerfully freed them from slavery and brought them to a new land. He miraculously provided food (manna) along the way. He

remembers His covenant, even when His people forget and disrespect it (vv. 5–6). The bottom line: "Holy and awesome is his name" (v. 9).

How should we respond? We should praise and worship our God! These truths should delight us and inspire awe-filled gratitude. We should continually ponder them and marvel at God's greatness (v. 2). This is how we learn the fear of the Lord, grow in godly wisdom, and can begin to seek His glory as our life's purpose.

The word "beginning" in verse 10 means "start" or "precondition," and it indicates that tenacious commitment and faith will be required to move forward. One translation renders this word "foundation," also indicating the first step in a lifelong process.

Go Deeper

Where are you in your journey to wisdom? One way to find out is to make a list of God's attributes that you especially praise Him for and of things He's done for you that you're especially thankful for.

Pray with Us

How do we grow in wisdom? Praise and worship our God, says Psalm 111. Lord Jesus, give us every day the desire to pray, to ponder Your truths, to study Your Word, to marvel at Your greatness, and to seek Your glory. Increase our faith!

The House of Wisdom

Read Proverbs 9:1–11

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.—Proverbs 9:10*

On the road to the Celestial City in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian stops to rest at the Palace Beautiful. There he meets four sisters—Discretion, Piety, Prudence, and Charity (that is, Love). They listen to the story of his journey and teach him valuable spiritual truths. They also encourage him with a vision of the future (Immanuel's Land) and outfit him in the armor of God, which he will soon need for his battle with the demon Apollyon.

Similarly, in Proverbs 9, we are called to visit the House of Wisdom (vv. 1–4). This house is a welcoming place. Wisdom has set her table for a banquet and sent out invitations. The meal will be delicious. The “seven pillars” of her house symbolize perfection. Who is especially invited (vv. 4–6)? The “simple,” meaning those who are young, naive, or immature. They lack sense, but they can grow and eventually learn to “walk in the way of insight.”

Who is more likely to accept or reject Wisdom's invitation (vv.

7–9)? Those who are humble enough to accept instruction, correction, and rebuke will probably accept the invitation to learn more. Those who are unwilling, however—the mocker and the fool—will reject the invitation and even respond to it with insults and abuse. Frankly, how we respond to the invitation indicates which category we belong to or desire to join.

The rewards of wisdom are clear (v. 11). Wisdom leads to long life and blessing (see Prov. 10:27). By contrast, for those who enter the House of Folly, “her guests are deep in the realm of the dead” (v. 18). Where does the journey to wisdom start? The answer is the same as we've seen in recent devotions: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (v. 10).

Go Deeper

Verses 13–18 give a contrasting invitation to the House of Folly. In what ways does this invitation differ from the first? Which features of both stand out to you and why?

Pray with Us

Our Father, how we want to reach the House of Wisdom, to eat at the Wisdom's banquet! We want to “walk in the way of insight” (Prov. 9:6). Guide us to this House every step of the way, we pray, and keep us away from the House of Folly.

The Key to Wisdom

Read Isaiah 33:2–6

The fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure.—Isaiah 33:6

Losing keys is a common experience at our house. Did we leave them in the laundry room? With the groceries? In a coat pocket? Might they still be in the car? In any case, when we do find them, we are relieved and joyful!

Isaiah 33:6 says, “The fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure.” Without a key, the “treasure” or “rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge” remains locked away.

Chapter 33 begins with a prayer for God’s presence, grace, strength, and salvation (v. 2). For Isaiah’s original audience, the threat of Assyria loomed. The phrase “every morning” reveals God to be the ultimate renewable resource. His mercies are indeed “new every morning” (Lam. 3:22–23).

The prayer goes on to express faith in God’s power (vv. 3–4). The Lord can easily defeat any army. Nations flee before Him. The plunder of powerful countries which have looted their victims will vanish as if devoured by locusts, that is, the tables will be turned

and the conquerors conquered. God is going to battle on behalf of His people!

The prayer then goes beyond the immediate circumstances to express faith that God has even bigger and better things planned for Israel and for the world (vv. 5–6). His plan is about much more than one solution or one victory. It’s about His glory! He Himself is the only “sure foundation for your times,” the only hope for a just and righteous world. He is indeed a priceless treasure!

Wisdom is more than a quality or a virtue. It’s a Person, God Himself, specifically the Second Person of the Trinity (see Proverbs 8). So the fear of the Lord is first and foremost a relationship. If we are in a right relationship with the Lord, then we know the key to the treasure!

Go Deeper

What is the key that Isaiah describes? What does it unlock? Why do you think the fear of the Lord leads to wisdom?

Pray with Us

What is the key to wisdom? In Isaiah we learn that it’s the fear of the Lord. God, give us this key to Your beautiful treasure chest—of wisdom and knowledge and salvation. May we find joy in communion with You through Jesus Christ.

Where Is Wisdom Found?

Read Job 28:12–28

*The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom,
and to shun evil is understanding.—Job 28:28*

One of the most famous riddles in history is the “riddle of the Sphinx” found in a Greek tragedy: “What walks on four legs in the morning, on two legs at noon, and on three legs in the evening?” The answer, as you may know, is: “Human beings. Infants crawl on all fours. Then adults walk on two legs. Finally, elderly people walk with a cane, hence three legs.”

Riddles like this join humor with wisdom. These are often the kind of “riddles” found in biblical wisdom literature as well. The riddle in Job 28 is “Where can wisdom be found?” (v. 12). Job chapter 28 is an interlude in the book. The anonymous author is responding to Job and his friends’ failures to reach a valid or wise understanding of Job’s suffering.

The preliminary finding is nowhere in human experience (v. 13) or the natural world (v. 14). Human technology can delve the depths of the earth but cannot find wisdom (vv. 1–11). Although the rich and powerful can usually obtain whatever they want

with money, wisdom is not to be had at any price (vv. 15–19).

So the question is renewed: “Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell?” (v. 20). The riddle’s solution is hidden not only from nature (v. 21) but also from elemental forces like Death and Destruction (v. 22).

The answer: “God [alone] understands the way to it” (v. 23). Not only does He know what no one else knows, He controls and commands everything. His wisdom runs the world!

This conclusion anticipates God’s speeches beginning in chapter 38. If the fear of the Lord leads to wisdom, then the answer to Job’s questions about suffering, the answer to the larger “riddle,” is to learn more about God by drawing worshipfully nearer to Him.

Go Deeper

Where is wisdom found? How does that answer help us better understand suffering and evil?

Pray with Us

Where can we find wisdom? Again, Scripture points to the fear of the Lord (Job 28). Lord, we rejoice that true wisdom is found only in You. You control and guide our world. You show the way out of hardships and suffering!

Abraham's Fear of the Lord

Read Genesis 22:1–14

Now I know that you fear God.—Genesis 22:12

In the Marines, new recruits learn to obey their commanding officer quickly and without hesitation. When responding to a command, they say, “Sir, yes sir!” Why? Because in the heat of battle, there is no time to debate. The commanding officer knows the best action and cares about the safety and success of the troops.

Genesis 22 tells about Abraham and his son Isaac. Abraham’s actions clearly demonstrate his fear of the Lord, a fear that responded with complete and unquestioning obedience. The key that unlocks today’s story, is God’s words to Abraham: “Now I know that you fear God” (v. 12). He didn’t mean “fear” in the sense of fear of punishment but in the sense of awe and reverence.

When God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son, Abraham’s obedience was prompt. Though he had lots of time to think during the three-day journey to Moriah, his faith didn’t waver. And even though Isaac was his only son and the next step in God’s promises and covenant, Abraham’s

faith extended to believing that God would raise Isaac from the dead if necessary (Heb. 11:17–19).

Abraham trusted God to keep His promises. He figured that whatever God commanded must be right—He had His reasons and a sovereign plan. Abraham staked everything on his absolute belief in God’s loving faithfulness. His obedience was rooted in his reverence and love for the Lord. In doing so, he passed God’s test. He withheld nothing from the Lord. He valued the Giver above His gifts, even the precious gift of a son. “His faith was made complete by what he did” (James 2:21–23). He lived wholeheartedly in the fear of the Lord.

God’s provision of the ram for the burnt offering is a hint of what is to come when He gives His own son to die on our behalf (John 3:16).

Go Deeper

How did Abraham respond to this difficult task? What does it look like for us to obey God without question and holding nothing back?

Pray with Us

Lord, we confess that often we don’t want, or don’t know how, to obey. Thank You for Abraham’s example of wholehearted obedience. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for Your obedience unto death that gave us a way to salvation and freedom.

Midwives Who Feared the Lord

Read Exodus 1:11–21

*The midwives, however, feared God . . .
they let the boys live.—Exodus 1:17*

Sara McKinney was born without hands. One day she came home from school and announced she wanted to play a musical instrument. Settling on the trombone, she learned quickly and practiced hard, using prosthetics with myoelectric fingers. She ended up in the regional Honors Band. She also participated in gymnastics, swimming, and horseback riding. Sara achieved beyond what anyone expected, including the doctors who told her mother that her daughter would have a “miserable life.”

Every human being is made in the image of God, and so every life has value. The Israelite midwives feared the Lord and thus believed this as well. When Pharaoh decreed that Israelite boy babies should be killed at birth, these courageous women disobeyed. The historical context was the Israelites’ slavery in Egypt (vv. 11–14). Though they were worked “ruthlessly,” they multiplied because God blessed them. God’s favor only increased the Egyptians’ fear and dread. They responded by making the slaves’ lives

even more bitter. The Pharaoh’s order to murder the Israelite baby boys was a strategy of extermination (vv. 15–19). If they could get rid of the men, the women could be absorbed by force. The brave midwives resisted, however. Why? They feared the Lord (vv. 17, 21). They knew all life is sacred to Him as the Creator. Unlike false gods, the true God does not delight in death, especially the slaughter of the helpless and the oppressed.

The midwives obeyed God from a position of weakness, that is, they risked their own lives to honor God and save the babies’ lives. Their fear of the Lord had practical implications, and God gave them a practical reward. The Israelite population continued to increase, and the midwives were given families of their own (vv. 20–21).

Go Deeper

What are some practical ways the fear of the Lord might impact your life? How would this play out in your personal life, your church, or your community?

Pray with Us

Dear God, we want to live as Your worthy followers. Help us to stay faithful and obedient, walking humbly before You every day of our lives. Keep our eyes focused on You and on the truth of Your Word. Guide our steps today.

Kings Who Feared the Lord

Read 2 Samuel 23:1–7

*When he rules in the fear of God,
he is like the light of morning at sunrise. — 2 Samuel 23:3–4*

Watching the sun rise is a worship-filled experience. God paints the morning sky daily with spectacular shades of purple, red, and gold. If we're watching the sun rise over the ocean, a woodland lake, or a snow-topped mountain, the effect is even more breathtaking.

David said that a godly king is a beautiful blessing to his people, like a sunrise after a rain on a cloudless morning (vv. 3–4). Such a king “rules in the fear of God,” that is, he governs righteously and in trust and dependence on the “Rock of Israel.” He knows that he, the human king, is not the bottom line. The real Ruler is God. If he remembers and acts like this, then he's the blessing described above. These were David's “last words,” meaning the most important thing he wanted to say before he died, and the most important legacy he wanted to leave for his son Solomon (vv. 1–2).

David also reminded Solomon that God made a covenant with their house because they'd been “right with God,” not because they deserved it

(v. 5; 2 Sam. 7:16). God received all the credit and glory, even, and especially, from the king. This, too, shows his fear of the Lord.

Evil kings, on the other hand, are like thorns, to be cast aside and burned in the fire (vv. 6–7). They do not fear the Lord and are not a blessing to their people. They disappear without a trace. Sadly, the books of Kings and Chronicles are mostly a downward-spiraling record of such men. Godly rulers, such as Hezekiah and Jehoshaphat, stand out by contrast.

Fear of the Lord in leadership, then, includes faith, dependence, and submission to Him, as well as awe, reverence, and obedience. Authority is a responsibility to be stewarded for the good of others.

Go Deeper

What kind of legacy do you hope to leave behind? Why? What life choices are you making to help make this happen? Where is the fear of the Lord in all this?

Pray with Us

As we learn about the kings who feared the Lord, let's pray for our national, local, and church leaders. Lord, we pray for the godly fear to rule in their lives, their deeds, and their decisions. You can change the heart of every leader.

Fear of the Lord and Protection

Read 2 Chronicles 17:1–11

The fear of the LORD fell on all the kingdoms of the lands surrounding Judah.—2 Chronicles 17:10

In 1985, the Texas Department of Transportation started an anti-littering campaign that, as we would say today, went viral: “Don’t mess with Texas.” Since then, this well-known slogan has become a distinctive indicator of Texan pride and swagger.

“Don’t mess with Israel” might be a good summary of today’s reading. This is what the fear of the Lord feels and looks like to non-worshippers (vv. 10–11). The Philistines and other enemies of Israel did not worship God. They did not respond to His greatness with awe and reverence. But they also weren’t blind. They saw God clearly present and working among His people. What remained, then, was simply fear, or literally, “terror” (v. 10). They were afraid to attack Judah because they knew God was protecting them. In fact, they paid tribute to stay on good terms with them.

For King Jehoshaphat, living in the fear of the Lord, and leading his people to do the same, meant trusting in God’s protection. This didn’t mean he sat on his hands. He made strategic

military decisions as well (vv. 1–2). His heart, like David’s, was devoted to the Lord (vv. 3–6). He did not seek idols, and he removed many places of idolatry from around the country. He sought the Lord and followed His commands. He also sent court officials and Levites on a Scripture teaching tour (vv. 7–9). In all of this, the Lord was with him and helped establish his kingdom (see April 10).

The fear of the Lord has a flip side. From the inside, it means awe, reverence, love, obedience, and worship. We draw nearer to God. But from the outside, it means only fear—seeing God at work, but choosing not to worship Him. One day these unrepentant, terrified people will call the mountains to fall on them (Luke 23:30).

Go Deeper

Jehoshaphat removed the idolatrous high places, but they came back later (2 Chron. 20:33). In light of this, how can we make positive, lasting changes in our spiritual lives?

Pray with Us

Jesus, we praise You today as our shield and protector! “The name of the LORD is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe” (Prov. 18:10). When we encounter obstacles and opposition in our lives, may we run to You.

The Wife Who Fears the Lord

Read Proverbs 31:10–31

*A woman who fears the LORD
is to be praised.—Proverbs 31:30*

A good woman is priceless! Nonetheless, Salary.com recently tried to appraise the financial value of a stay-at-home mom. Based on the market value of the skills she needs and uses daily, their analysis estimated that her annual salary should be \$184,820.

But, according to Proverbs 31, her inward character is even more valuable than outward factors. We need to understand that the “wife of noble character”—or literally, “a woman of valor” (v. 10)—is an ideal, not an individual person. The climax of the description is found in today’s verse: “Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (v. 30). This brings the Book of Proverbs full circle from the first chapter (1:7).

What virtues and actions are associated with her fear of the Lord? She works hard (vv. 13–15, 17, 19, 27), plans wisely (and so “can laugh at the days to come” because she’s not anxious, v. 25), and has good business

sense (vv. 16, 18, 24). She’s strong (v. 17), dignified (v. 25), and wise (v. 26). She’s generous toward the poor (v. 20; Prov. 14:31). She takes good care of her family (vv. 15, 21–22, 27), including teaching her children and guiding them toward maturity (v. 26). She supports her husband and he in turn has full confidence in her (vv. 11–12). He’s respected in the community, in part because of her (v. 23). She, too, is respected in the community and praised by her family (vv. 28, 31).

Such a woman’s outward actions flow from her inward virtues, and these in turn flow from her overall orientation of fearing the Lord. The “wife of noble character,” then, is an ideal we can all learn from!

Go Deeper

How might we, men and women, cultivate our inward orientations and virtues? Our culture pushes us toward outward appearances, our brand, our image. How can the fear of the Lord help us resist this?

Pray with Us

Lord, if we are honest, the Proverbs 31 woman seems unrealistic and often intimidating. But, like her, we follow the same God who guides and gives gifts. Help us, men and women, to become people “of noble character” (Prov. 31:10).

Ezekiel's Fear of the Lord

Read Ezekiel 1

Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.—Ezekiel 1:28

Why did Rahab betray the city of Jericho to the invading Israelites (Joshua 2)? She told the two spies: “I know that the LORD has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. . . . When we heard of it [Israel’s victories], our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.”

Because the people of Jericho stood against God, fear of the Lord was just plain fear. But when Rahab switched sides, she chose to worship the one true God. Her fear turned to awe, reverence, and delight. Ezekiel felt similarly in today’s passage. While initially overwhelmed by his visions of God, he later felt strengthened and called to ministry (see chapters 2–3).

At first, Ezekiel saw what looked like a windstorm, with clouds and flashing lightning. When it came closer, he saw four angels (cherubim) with otherworldly appearances (vv. 5–14,

22–24) and the wheels-within-wheels by which they moved (vv. 15–21). They were impressive, but they were only God’s messengers, or attendants.

Finally, God is described indirectly by way of a vaulted sky, a throne, and “a figure like that of a man” (vv. 25–28). His appearance like glowing metal and fire represents God’s power and glory. He’s also compared to a rainbow’s appearance after the rain. The passage informs us that this was only “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.” A direct description or vision wasn’t possible.

When he saw this vision, Ezekiel “fell facedown” in extreme awe, humility, and respect (v. 28). Many others in Scripture have also done so, including Abram (Gen. 17:3) and the three disciples during the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:6).

Go Deeper

What exactly is holy fear? How can the fear of the Lord overwhelm us and yet at the same time draw us nearer to Him?

Pray with Us

Ezekiel saw only “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD” (Ezek. 1:28). Thank you, Lord, for speaking to us through Your Son who is “the radiance of God’s glory” (Heb. 1:3).

Peter's Fear of the Lord

Read Luke 5:1–11

*Go away from me, Lord;
I am a sinful man!—Luke 5:8*

Fat Bear Week is held every year at Katmai National Park in Alaska. Twelve bears are entered into a bracket-style competition, with online viewers voting based on the bears' success at fishing for salmon from the Brooks River. The winner in 2023 was a female bear named 128 Grazer. The National Park Service has been tracking her since she was a cub and called her one of the most skilled anglers in the region.

Luke 5 contains another good fishing story. Jesus boarded Peter's boat so that He could put out from shore a bit and better teach the crowds. Sadly, Peter and Andrew hadn't caught any fish all night. When Jesus gave the word, though, they let down their nets and miraculously caught so many that the nets were near breaking and the boat near sinking (vv. 6–7). They had to call James and John to help!

Peter knew he was in the presence of a Man who could do the impossible. He felt "astonished" at

Jesus's awe-inspiring display of power over creation, as well as a strong sense of his own sin and unworthiness. He fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (v. 8; see Isa. 6:5). In short, he felt the fear of the Lord. Though Peter had turned in the right direction, toward Jesus, the Lord still had to tell him, "Don't be afraid" (v. 10). All four fishermen responded in faith to this miracle and to Jesus's compelling and somewhat humorous call, "From now on you will fish for people" (vv. 10–11).

In this episode, Peter and the others felt God's power and authority. They sensed that Jesus was the Son of God. They felt a fear that pulled them toward Him, and they left everything to become His disciples.

Go Deeper

How firm is your loyalty to being Christ's disciple? What are you willing to do or endure? Compare your answers to the cost of discipleship outlined in Luke 14:25–27.

Pray with Us

Dear Lord, help us better understand the true cost of following You, of sacrifices and rewards of discipleship, and what it means to die to ourselves. Thank You that we can experience You through Your Word the way Peter and others did.

Ananias and Sapphira Did Not Fear

Read Acts 5:1–11

How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord?—Acts 5:9

Many these days have been wondering if we're too casual or "flip" with God. We livestream church for our convenience. We check our phones during the worship service. We wear very informal clothing and judge a church by the quality of its snacks and coffee. God is our "good buddy."

The story of Ananias and Sapphira gives us fair warning of what can happen when we lack the fear of the Lord. We're including this negative example to underline the seriousness of the issues involved. Taking the fear of the Lord lightly is not a chuckle-worthy mistake but rather a fatal error in our relationship with God.

Ananias and Sapphira did not have the fear the Lord. Their gift to the church from their land sale was not an act of worship. Rather, they put on a show to be admired for their "generosity" and to earn status in the eyes of others. Apparently, they viewed "church" as just another social ladder to climb. In pride, both told a premeditated lie (vv. 3–4, 9). They

must have had a pretty low opinion of God if they thought they could fool Him in this way. Unsurprisingly, Satan was behind their actions.

Ananias and Sapphira were punished with death for their pride and lies. Among other things, they didn't understand that "Humility is the fear of the LORD" (Prov. 22:4). God is not to be tested or trifled with (v. 9). "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events" (v. 11). As God's name had been dishonored by the couple's actions, so their deaths brought Him glory. The church and a watching world learned a memorable lesson: Everyone was reminded of God's greatness and power and that He absolutely must be approached with awe and reverence.

Go Deeper

What are your motivations for giving or for doing good deeds? Are there deeper layers that need exposing? If applicable, ask the Spirit to help you confess any sins in this area.

Pray with Us

Sin is powerful and destructive. As we read of Ananias and Sapphira, we are reminded of the dangers of pride and lack of the fear of the Lord. God, search our hearts and keep us humble! Reveal to us any hidden sin we should confess.

The Early Church Feared the Lord

Read Acts 9:26–31

Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.—Acts 9:31

Saul had inspired much fear in the early church by pursuing and persecuting believers in Christ. When Christ met him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–19), he found the true fear of the Lord and did a complete turnaround. But when he arrived in Jerusalem, the original disciples remained afraid of him (v. 26). They didn't trust him. Was this another trap? How could an outspoken enemy like Saul become a believing friend?

In faith, Barnabas took a risk and became Saul's advocate with the apostles (v. 27). Barnabas probably felt a bit afraid, like Ananias when he was told to go and heal Saul (9:13–14). It would have been normal, even sensible, humanly speaking. By obeying God in faith, they put the fear of the Lord ahead of their own human fears.

The church's former greatest enemy had become one of them (vv. 28–30)! The believers perhaps watched with amazement as Paul evangelized boldly in Jerusalem, debated successfully with the Hellenistic Jews, and aroused their enmity to the point

where they even tried to kill him. The believers then sent him to Tarsus for his own safety.

Otherwise, with Saul the persecutor transformed into Paul the apostle, the church enjoyed a time of relative peace and growth. "Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers" (v. 31).

John taught, "There is no fear in love" and "Perfect love drives out fear." He meant the fear of punishment. That fear is gone for us because Christ took the punishment for our sins (1 John 4:16–18). The apostles, Barnabas, Paul, and all the believers did not fear punishment or persecution. They did, though, fear the Lord and on this basis the church grew and was encouraged.

Go Deeper

As the apostles' behavior toward Paul illustrates, it's difficult to change fearful habits. How can we retrain our hearts away from human fears and toward holy fear, that is, the fear of the Lord?

Pray with Us

Jesus, You saved us into a community. In You we have our family of faith, our brothers and sisters who walk this road of faith alongside us. We are grateful that we can journey together in courage, support, and godly fear of the Lord.

John's Fear of the Lord

Read Revelation 1:9–18

Do not be afraid.

I am the First and the Last.—Revelation 1:17

Fear of the Lord is an important part of worship in the book of Revelation: “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” (14:7). “Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed” (15:4).

This truth is seen and the tone set at the very start of the book, in John's vision of the risen Christ. When he saw Him, he “fell at his feet as though dead” (v. 17). A mere man like John *should* feel overwhelmed upon seeing a vision of the incarnate and glorified Christ. Awe, reverence, and a sense of God's greatness literally knocked him out!

What did John see (vv. 12–16)? Christ appeared “like a son of man,” a Messianic allusion (Dan. 7:13) and Jesus's favorite name for Himself in the synoptic Gospels. His robe with a golden sash indicates His role as both

priest and judge as well as His kingly status. His white hair signifies wisdom, dignity, and eternity. His eyes of blazing fire represent penetrating insight and omniscience. His feet of glowing bronze symbolize victorious strength. The two-edged sword in His mouth is the Word of God (Heb. 4:12). His face shining like the sun suggests God's glory.

Christ placed His hand on John and reassured him, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (vv. 17–18). How incredibly comforting! The eternal Lord of the universe has won the victory and is on our side.

Go Deeper

John experienced his vision on the Lord's Day, that is, Sunday (v. 10). In what ways have you experienced the fear of the Lord during your church's Sunday worship services?

Pray with Us

Dear Jesus, You told John, “Do not be afraid” (Rev. 1:17). What comforting words! We praise You for Your victory over death, for bringing us freedom from sin, for taking away worldly fear, and giving us godly fear. Bless Your holy name!

A Fearful Conclusion

Read Ecclesiastes 12:9–14

*Fear God and keep his commandments,
for this is the duty of all mankind.—Ecclesiastes 12:13*

When a judge or jury renders their final verdict in a trial, it's a significant event. People stand and pay attention. Reporters might be present in the courtroom. Everyone wants to know the outcome. Which way did the evidence lean? Which arguments were most persuasive?

In Ecclesiastes 12, we read such a verdict. King Solomon had experimented with “life under the sun”—the meaning and purpose of human life on its own, without God—and he was now ready to present the “conclusion of the matter” (v. 13). He'd already called everything “meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (Eccl. 1:14). Is there any hope?

Yes. “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind” (v. 13). Earthly wisdom is not sufficient to be its own end. Only godly wisdom, which begins with the fear of the Lord, gives meaning and purpose to life. To say this another way: Loving worship of the one true God is the foundation of all true wisdom. Without God, human endeavors are

empty and end in death. But with God, in the context of a right relationship with Him, human endeavors can take on meaning for His glory.

Why? Because the bottom line of everything is God (v. 14). At times we act as if it's all about us—our beliefs, our choices, our actions. But it is God who will one day “bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (see Rom. 2:16). To his verdicts there will be no appeal.

The Teacher (Solomon) communicated his conclusion in “just the right words” (v. 10). But the right words can be irritating, “like goads” (v. 11). These are sticks with embedded nails used for prodding straying animals back to the right path. May God's wisdom have that effect in our lives!

Go Deeper

In what ways is the fear of the Lord a foundational aspect of following Christ? How can we make it a fundamental dimension of our daily discipleship?

Pray with Us

Lord, enable us to live in light of Your future coming, when everything will come under Your judgment. As we look forward to the Second Coming, teach us to live by the guidance of Your Spirit, with hope, love, joy, and peace.

All Nations Will Fear the Lord

Read Revelation 15

*Who will not fear you, Lord,
and bring glory to your name?—Revelation 15:4*

The Israelites spent a good part of the book of Exodus building the tabernacle according to God's specifications. When it was time for the dedication, the nation rejoiced (Ex. 40). Everything was consecrated. The priests purified themselves. "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (vv. 34–35).

The "cloud," as a manifestation of God's glory, was a beautiful and fearful thing. It filled the tabernacle in a way that excluded all else. In a similar scene (v. 8), Revelation 15 introduces the book's third sevenfold cycle of God's judgments—first seven seals, then seven trumpets, and now seven bowls of God's wrath. On such an occasion, the prophet Habakkuk said, "The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him" (Hab. 2:20). Silence here signifies awe, reverence, humble submission, and worship. Before God's perfect justice, there is nothing to be

said, from one perspective. Yet from another perspective, shouts of praise are also appropriate.

For those who love the Lord, the outpouring of His wrath means that justice is at last being done to the wicked. The God who has redeemed us has now come to reign! The day has finally arrived when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9–11).

In today's reading, "those who had been victorious over the beast . . . sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb" (vv. 1–4). In the end, all will show the fear of the Lord and glorify His name. "For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you."

Go Deeper

Where do you stand with Christ? Will you rejoice when He returns (see 2 Thess. 1:7–10)? If in doubt, make your peace with God today by calling on the name of Christ our Savior (John 3:16).

Pray with Us

Father, we await the time when everyone will glorify the name of Your Son, when all nations will come to Your throne and will know the fear of the Lord. As we conclude our study, give us wisdom to walk worthy of Your kingdom. Amen!

Questions & Answers

by Dr. Valencia Wiggins, PhD, L.P.C.,
Associate Professor and Director of Clinical Training

Q Our daughter returned home from college, and we noticed she has been skipping meals, over-exercising, and has lost a considerable amount of weight. Besides praying about this, what else can we as Christian parents do?

A Thank you for your question and concern about your daughter. As parents, we care about all aspects of our children's wellbeing: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. While this may be harder to do from a distance, it is important to carefully observe any changes in mood, or health, when your child returns home. You can be assured that God hears your prayers. Psalm 91:15 says: "He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him."

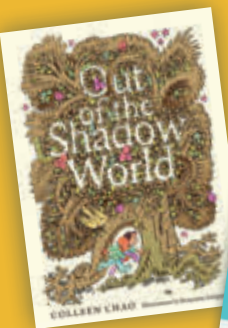
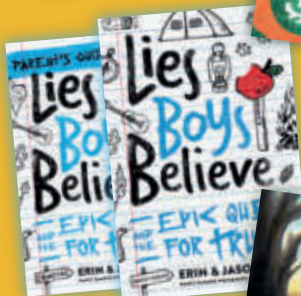
The symptoms you mention could be signs of an eating disorder. This disorder is identified by a preoccupation with food, body weight, and disturbance in thoughts and emotions. Eating disorders often occur in isolation, but there are warning signs: refusing or limiting food, binge eating, preoccupation with body weight and size, over-exercising, and changes in mood (irritability, sadness, or increased anxiety). Common eating disorders include anorexia nervosa

(restriction of food intake), bulimia nervosa (excessive bingeing and purging), and binge-eating disorder (recurrent episodes of eating large quantities of food).

Parents are often the first to notice when their loved one is struggling. One of the most important things to watch for is changes in eating habits. At family meals, observe changes in food intake or restriction of food. Does your child leave the table early? Excuse themselves to eat in another room during meals? Establish a foundation for truth-telling and sharing concerns with your child. Speaking the truth in love is biblical (Eph. 4:25)! Set aside a time to talk with your child without judgment and show concern for their health (Matt. 7:1-5). Your child needs the love of parents who care about their well-being (1 Cor. 13:7). Do not focus on weight or appearance. Acknowledge signs of growth and maturity (Eph. 4:22). Finally, for additional support, consider professional counseling to help address specific needs.

One final encouragement for your family. Rest assured that God sees and responds to our needs and the needs of our children. He is concerned for everyone, and no one goes unnoticed in His love and care (Ps. 40:1; Prov. 15:3; Ps. 33:13; Ps. 34:15). ■

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A Family Study from Today in the Word

Fear of the Lord

This Family Study is a companion to the *Today in the Word* devotional *The Fear of the Lord* (April 2024). The whole family can learn from God's Word together. In each of the four lessons, you will:



Read

Read a passage
in the Bible



Understand

Understand the biblical
text in a deeper way



Imagine

Imagine the lesson
with hands-on activities

About Our Awesome God

The Bible tells us that we are to fear the Lord (Prov. 9:10). How do we explain this concept to our children? Even though it may be challenging, we believe teaching children to fear God is important. Fearing God means we are in awe of Him and recognize His greatness. He is all-powerful. But fear goes beyond just knowing about God, it demands a response. When we fear God, we not only are in awe of Him but also obey Him. We should explain to our children that fearing God is not the same as being scared. In fact, knowing God helps us not to be afraid.



Download the complete Family Study for free at todayintheword.org

This *Today in the Word* family study was written by Moody Bible Institute students Haylee Grindal and Ashleigh Hildebrandt under the direction of Elizabeth Smith, Program Head and Associate Professor of Moody's Children and Family Ministry program.



Read Psalm 111

When you think of fear, you might think about scary things like the dark, thunderstorms, or maybe monsters. Fearing God is completely different! Instead of being afraid of God, fearing Him means to respect and obey Him, because we are in awe of Him. Being in awe of God is experiencing how amazing, wonderful, and beautiful God is. We can't help but say "WOW"! When we fear God by obeying Him and we are in awe of God, we worship Him. And that is the very best, most wonderful way to live, ever.



Understand

1. What makes you afraid?
2. What does it mean to fear God?
3. What does fearing God NOT mean?
4. Why does the Bible tell us it is important to fear God?
5. Read Psalm 111 again. What do we learn about God?
6. What does it look like for us to fear God? (See verse 10.)



Imagine

Parents, help explain the fear of God to your children by using a lighter or match and lighting a candle. Or, if you have an outdoor firepit, start a campfire and sit around it for this conversation. Show them the flame and let them admire it. Explain that while we might love to watch a flickering flame or a campfire, we also have to respect fire. If it is used in the wrong way, it could burn us or become dangerous. In a similar way, we admire and enjoy God, but we need to also respect Him. Disrespecting and disobeying His commands is harmful and dangerous. God made rules for our safety and protection.

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