

The Joy of Fearing God

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[0 : 00] Well, you have a quote on the screen there, The fear of the Lord is the soul of godliness. And in his book, Jerry Bridges writes a little expansion of that quote in explaining that the fear of God is the animating and invigorating principle of a godly life.

It's the wellspring of all godly desires and aspirations. So there we have the fear of God, that invigorating, that motivating, he says principle.

I wanted to make it something a little bit more personalized, that motivating personal realization and belief and ultimately response to God, the fear of God, that moves the child of God to want to know God more and to keep in step with God's Holy Spirit as that Holy Spirit leads the individual, empowers that individual to live according to what is true knowledge and wisdom and counsel from the sovereign Lord, the gentle shepherd to his people.

So that fear of the Lord is the soul of godliness. It's what Paul was encouraging the people in the church of Corinth to pursue.

2 Corinthians 7.1, he writes, Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

[1 : 51] Those promises that he mentions here come prior to this chapter in chapter 6, verses 16 through 18. So let me read those. They're taken from different Old Testament scriptures and Paul is reminding the people, again, wanting to move them in this direction of the pursuit of godliness and holiness, taking them back to God to see God, who he is in truth and his promises.

And so take note as I read these promises, what God reveals himself to be to his people. I'll make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people.

Therefore go out from their midst and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing. Then I will welcome you and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.

So going back to our other verse now. So since we have these promises, and God's people do, those are the promises that we have.

That's reality of this relationship that we have with God by faith in Jesus Christ. Since we do have these promises, beloved, now it moves us.

[3 : 15] It's the soul of godliness. It moves us in this new direction with a new purpose and longing. Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

So Paul's encouraging the people here to a fresh contemplation of who God is. What God has promised to his people.

He's pointing the people back to God. What is impressive about God? What is precious about God and the promises that he's made to his people?

And God is revealing something about himself and his relationship with those who are his. He will dwell and walk among them.

I mean, that's the way it was back in the garden with Adam and Eve. We think of that, how beautiful and wonderful that must have been for them to have that kind of fellowship with God.

[4 : 19] Those tender times of communion and fellowship and learning from God. Paul is encouraging these people.

This is what you have in this relationship with God. He will dwell and walk among them and be their God, and they shall be his people.

And he will be a father to them, and they shall be sons and daughters to him. And all that's spoken by the Lord Almighty. We have this mix of these different facets of God and the character of God,

this one who is their father.

And so as they contemplate and meditate on these things, there's to be this whole person response to God, really, in fearing God.

They think and they contemplate God's revelation of himself, his promises, his promises, really his extreme generosity to them.

[5 : 23] The fact that, who are they? That they would be ones chosen of God, that God would make his dwelling among them. It was like back in the Old Testament. It was not because in Deuteronomy 7, because there was something special about you, because you were greater in number than anybody else that I chose.

You know, I just chose you because I loved you. And so it's the same with these people that Paul is writing to, and same with those of us here this morning, who have him as our father.

Doesn't that really impress you at times, and just come upon you as, I don't even know how to explain it, just, man, how could this be?

And we just say with the apostles, well, by grace you're saved, nothing in and of myself, that I would be loved to God in that way. So that's what they're meditating upon.

And he'll be a father to them, and they shall be sons and daughters to him. Well, they think about that, and as a result, there's an emotional response of awe, reverence, honor, adoration of God.

[6 : 37] They have a fear of God. And all of that moves the individual to willingly turn away from every form of inner and outer sin.

Not that there's not going to be a struggle with that, but we have this new longing now with this God who loves us and has turned our hearts from hearts of stone to hearts of flesh with a desire to know Him and love Him as well.

There certainly follows that inner and outer pushing away of anything that would not be pleasing to Him.

They willingly turn away from every form of inner and outer sin and instead pursue holiness in the fear of God. So, excuse me, I think my collar is just hitting this a little bit.

They're really in agreement when he says bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. The idea here is they're on the same page as God is in this whole matter of pursuing godliness.

[7 : 48] They have a new pursuit in life. We saw in the past in Romans 8, God's desire, His plan for His people is to transform them into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

And so in the fear of the Lord, they're going to do that same thing with their meditations, their attitudes, their outer actions, everything that they're pursuing that would stand against that purpose, they're going to push that aside and instead pursue those attitudes and outer actions that would contribute to that transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ, the holy character of Jesus Christ be developed in our lives.

Jerry Bridges in his book identifies the fear of God as a lyle fear and not a servile fear. And in his book, he provides a quote from Sinclair Ferguson, and I provide one from R.C. Sproul, who quoted Martin Luther.

And they're all so much the same that I think they all got it from Martin Luther. But at any rate, this is the one from R.C. Sproul, from Martin Luther, in regard to what servile fear is.

Servile fear is a kind of fear that a prisoner in a torture chamber has for his tormentor, the jailer or the executioner.

[9 : 18] It's that kind of dreadful anxiety in which someone is frightened by the clear and present danger that's represented by another person. Or it's the kind of fear that a slave would have at the hands of a malicious master who would come with a whip and torment the slave, to torment the slave.

Servile refers to a posture of servitude toward a malevolent owner. Sometimes I wish I could write like these guys, but they do such a good job in helping us understand really the fullness of what this actually means.

But that's not the kind of fear that we're talking about when we talk about fearing God. He goes on to identify and explain a little bit more what filial fear is.

Luther distinguished between that, servile fear, and what he called filial fear, drawing from the Latin concept from which we get the idea of family.

It refers to the fear that a child has for his father. And that's what we just saw in some of these scripture quotes that God, I will be a father to them and they'll be sons and daughters to me.

[10:37] That's the relationship that God has worked toward in the lives of those who come to him through Jesus Christ. In this regard, Luther's thinking of a child who has a tremendous respect and love for his father or mother and who dearly wants to please them.

He has a fear or an anxiety of offending the one he loves, not because he's afraid of torture or even of punishment, but rather because he's afraid of displeasing the one who is in that child's world the source of security and love.

And then Bridges, in his book, goes on a little bit as well and says, filial fear is the loving fear of a child toward his father. That indefinable mixture of reverence, fear, pleasure, joy, awe, which fills our hearts when we realize who God is and what he has done for us.

When we realize who God is, there's that combination again, that contemplation of God, the truth, as God has provided that truth and his word for us to see, to see him with greater clarity, not left it up to us to make God into our own image and that's what we have to be careful of as we move through our days, our weeks, and difficulties come upon us.

All of a sudden, we're wondering, how come God is not working the way I think he should be working? And now we're transforming God into our image, the image we want him to be and how we want him to work in our lives.

[12:20] But no, no, in those times we go back to the word, draw from the word what God has graciously revealed for us to know about himself and draw upon that.

So it's when we realize who God is and what he has done for us, we fear him and move in that direction of wanting to do that which is pleasing to him.

And that's what motivates us in this pursuit of godliness. And that fear of God, the filial fear of God, also includes a real healthy respect for God's discipline which also motivates us toward godliness. I think all of us who have grown up as children can identify with that whole matter of respect for authority who has the position and authority to discipline us, a mother and father, although it may not have been exercised at times in proper degree and proper way, still we can understand the respect that we would have for that authority.

And so we bring that, again, in this relationship with our loving, wise, heavenly father who does, in faithfulness, discipline us.

[13:45] And it's with this filial fear that the Christian really does have a genuine, reverential respect for his father's loving authority over him, again, that motivates us to holy living.

1 Peter 1, 17-19. Let me read this section of verses and then just come back and make a few comments about it.

And if you call on him as father, and it could be since you call on him as father, who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the feudal ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

So since they understand that they're in the position of children and God is their father, and since they can call on him as father, and they could, we know this from other passages, many have received him, to them gave he the right to become and to be called sons of God, children of God. Romans 8 speaks of now in their relationship to God by faith in Jesus Christ, and they now have the privilege of calling upon God as Abba, Father.

[15:13] So they have that right, that privilege, relationship, and he is the one who judges impartially according to each one's deeds. Our Heavenly Father does see what's going on in our lives, how we are living this out in our daily walk, the inner attitudes that we have, the outer actions that we have, and he is in the position of judging each man's deeds impartially, and we give thanks that he will do that without partiality, but he does see, and he will judge.

He is in the process of judging presently, and in the future as well. There will be judgment upon those who have denied him, those that aren't related to him as children, eternal judgment.

They will have to pay the wages of their own sins, eternal death and hell. Those who are his children, deeds will be judged in loss of reward.

So, he is judging impartially. So with the understanding, with that understanding, that realization, what does it move them toward? What's the direction that that moves us toward?

Well, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, recognizing these realities about God and what he has authority, loving authority, to do in our lives.

[16 : 41] Let that motivate us to pursue godliness and pride. But not only that, he brings in what God has done through Jesus Christ.

Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

So the combination of God, the reality of who God is and what God has done on our behalf through Jesus Christ. And so that's what we bring to our minds on a regular basis.

Thankfully, the Holy Spirit will be there to bring these realities, these truths to our minds when we're faced with a time of temptation to turn away. No, no.

Let's remember the truth that we have a Father who judges each man impartially. And in truth, because we were purchased from that former manner of life, not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

[17 : 55] God has paid the ultimate price in Jesus Christ that we would not go that direction. So let us take that into our minds and our hearts and let it move us.

Let that be the soul of godliness. that which invigorates us and animates us in this direction of godliness, which is the best thing for us anyways.

The time of temptation there is just trying to convince us to do otherwise. Adam and Eve, Eve, the new voice that came to Eve saying, no, you won't die. It really won't work out that way.

In fact, you will actually be in a better situation in life if you actually do this. But in reality, she wasn't. And it's the same for us today. Now let's combine this passage with the Hebrews 12, 1 through 11. And as I read this, this is an extended passage to read here. But notice some of the similar themes that show up in this chapter in Hebrews 12.

[19 : 02] And the realities of who God is and Jesus suffering and our turning from sinful living and orienting our lives in this new direction of godliness and holiness.

So let me start reading Hebrews 12. Therefore, since we're surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let's also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely.

And let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. I just want to stop here.

I know it loses your train of thought as I'm reading it here. But we have this great cloud of witnesses, people who were martyrs in their faith.

So we're understanding here's a group of people who had God as their contemplation. And at the time of greatest temptation to turn away from being followers of Jesus Christ, the cost of their life, it had to be their contemplation of God during that time.

[20 : 14] And so when we think of the lesser times of temptation, let that be our contemplation as well in our struggle so that we run with endurance the race that's set before us.

Let's learn from their example and lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely to us and fix our eyes on Jesus and author and perfecter of faith.

He was the one, let me pick it up now, who despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him, there it is, who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or faint hearted.

In your struggle against sin, you've not yet resisted the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves. There we see it. He's being a faithful father to us. understanding, no, no, it's not good for my child to go in that direction.

[21 : 31] It's better for that child to go in this direction. I need to come alongside. Do that which is necessary that would help motivate that child to turn away from that which is destructive in his life toward God, loving God first.

He disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives. It's for discipline that you have to endure. God's treating you as sons, just being faithful as a loving heavenly father.

For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you're left without discipline in which all have participated, then you're illegitimate children and not sons.

That should be sobering to us. My goodness, if I'm not being disciplined, that's strange that you would be going through that and it never happens to me.

Well, it's a reason for you to be concerned. You may not even be a son. Besides this, we have earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them.

[22 : 38] Shall we not much more be subject to the father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness.

There it is. That filial fear of God, that relationship that we have with the heavenly father in faithfulness, he disciplines us and as we respond to that discipline, we pursue, we progress in holiness.

For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. So there's so much in both of these passages that God has revealed to us about himself and Jesus Christ and it's, again, these truths that we need to consider and think about as we move through our week and our days ahead.

Each truth really has been provided to us that might nurture within us this fear of God, this reverence of God, that we might know God in truth and he has, Deuteronomy 29, 29, revealed all that we need to know, to know him and to walk in his ways.

Knowing that about God is that which motivates us to respond well to him, to respond humbly, obediently to his discipline.

[24 : 14] So again, we can share his holiness and live this peaceable fruit of righteousness. Now we as God's people and children, that's what we have to value.

You know, when we lose sight of the value of holiness and righteousness, something else becomes attractive. That's when we've been deceived.

In reality, life becomes hard. life becomes a struggle, not peaceful. You don't receive any of that fruit of the Spirit that comes from that pursuit of Christ and God, obedience.

So let us respect our Heavenly Father. Let him carry out his fatherly discipline and respond to it in obedience and love and thankfulness.

Well, in the coming weeks, we're going to take a look at other reasons to fear God, his majesty, his power, his great wisdom, his holiness, his love, and on we go and we're doing this again and Bridges does it in his book because that's the key for fearing God, knowing God in truth.

[25 : 34] So make that your prayer. Last week, you mentioned that we hope that this time ends up being a time when we are nurturing this fear of God, growing in this understanding, this love of God, this fear, this reverential awe of God, understanding.

This will affect decisions I make every single day. And so let's be praying for one another. You see somebody sitting in this room, I'm going to pick out Jim Lip and pray for Jim Lip these next few weeks that he would grow in a reverential awe of God.

Or Kevin O'Keefe, you know what I'm saying here, picking out different ones that, and in that way, you become a servant of God in that person's life.

Helping them become a follower of Jesus Christ. Just simply through praying for that individual. Let's make that our aim. But let me finish up this morning.

we'll be delving deeper into the knowledge of God in weeks ahead, but let me give a little introduction here this morning as well as Jerry Bridges ends up this chapter with this exhortation or encouragement of let's just fear God simply because He's God.

[26 : 58] He provides three different examples in the scriptures of individuals who did just that. First was Jacob. And God speaking to him in Genesis 28, 12 through 15.

And he dreamed and behold there was a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven and behold the angels of God were ascending and descending on it and behold the Lord stood above it and said I am the Lord the God of Abraham your father and the God of Jacob so there is Jehovah Yahweh God is again identifying Himself who He is a proper perspective of again who God is.

The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring now there are some promises that are coming here. God's identified who He is. Jacob now realizing and understanding there are some promises coming from God.

God well able to fulfill those promises. He says your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

Behold I am with you and I will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land for I will not leave you until I've done what I promised to you.

[28 : 31] All these reassurances again what I am promising I am well able to perform for I am Jehovah I am the sovereign God. And what is Jacob's response in verses 16 and 17?

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it. And he was afraid and said how awesome is this place.

This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven. Again it says he was afraid this isn't the servile fear it's not that malicious master that we see here but that filial fear that awesome reverence of Jehovah God that Jacob has experienced here.

he was awestruck to be in the presence of God. Bridges says in the book the reason for Jacob's fear was the realization that he had somehow been in the very presence of God.

It was not the consciousness of his sin but his consciousness of his creaturehood and the presence of deity that created his sense of awe. And that's what needs to be nurtured in each one of our hearts.

[29 : 50] when we were apart from God no faith in Jesus Christ no regard for God at that time. I mean that's what had to happen to each one of us come to the place to realize that I'm not God but God is.

And I need to turn away from my independence and submit to God by faith in Jesus Christ. Peter was another one. He had a similar reaction as Jacob.

The events recorded in Luke 5 1 through 11 the miracle we're familiar with so I'll summarize some of it. The crowd of people were pressing in on Jesus Christ as he was teaching and so he entered Simon's boat.

He pushed out into the water and continued his teaching from the boat. and after he was finished speaking he said to Peter put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.

And Peter told Jesus that they had already been toiling all night and they didn't catch anything. But in respect to the master he did set the boats out into the deep and let the nets down.

[31 : 01] As soon as they did so their nets enclosed a huge number of fish to the point that the nets were beginning to break and filling the boats others came to help another boat came alongside Peter's boat and both boats were filled to the point of sinking.

And Peter's response in verse 8 is this but when Simon Peter saw it he fell down at Jesus' knees saying depart from me for I am a sinful man oh Lord.

this wasn't the first miracle that Peter saw. Jesus had already healed his mother-in-law but there was something different that happened here that affected Peter differently.

Was it because of Jesus' authority over the fish of the sea? I mean that would have been pretty impressive to me but it affected him differently.

He realized that he was in the presence of God himself. He fell down at Jesus' knees in worship of Jesus Christ.

[32 : 14] And we need to be making that our prayer as well as we move through the week that we again would have this kind of awe of God as we move through our day.

The third individual was John Revelation 1 9-18. John was about to receive some of the greatest revelation from God ever about God himself God's rule over all the final victory of Jesus Christ judgment upon men and women ushering in of new heaven and new earth much much revelation and prior to receiving all that revelation from God John describes what he saw and how he responded to what he was about to see or what he saw.

He saw the glorified Lord Jesus and he describes again what he saw. Verses 12-17 says, then I turned to see the voice. He'd already heard the voice speaking so he just turned to see where the voice was coming from or who it was that was speaking.

I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me and on turning I saw seven golden lamb stands and in the midst of the lamb stands one like a son of man clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

The hairs of his head were white like white wool like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire his feet were like furnished bronze refined in a furnace and his voice was like the roar of many waters.

[33 : 58] In his right hand he held seven stars and from his mouth came a sharp twinged sword and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

The sight of the glorified Christ for John was just something so beyond anything that he experienced before it was really impossible for him to give a literal presentation of what he was seeing.

It's like like. You see that was repeated so many times there. He's having great difficulty communicating what he is really experiencing there because it's far beyond anything he had ever known before.

And so we read that we too as we read it can be transported to an elevated awareness of that which is magnificent about Jesus Christ.

That's what we're praying for and looking for. Not that we're going to have a vision like John had. But certainly this is the reality and truth of what John saw in the person of Jesus Christ.

[35 : 13] This is the one that we know personally. The one who offered himself up as a sacrifice on our behalf. And so John's response in verse 17 was when I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead.

To be in the presence of the glorified Christ was just so overwhelming to John that again he fell at his feet as though dead. Now that's what awesome is all about.

Reverential awe of God. You know that song I could hardly imagine. You know it's somewhat of a good song but I just can't imagine dancing before his presence.

You know I can't imagine anything other than this falling at his feet as though dead but then him again giving some reassurance and that's what happened in these verses.

In all of his awesomeness Jesus reached out and laid his right hand on John and said fear not I am the first and the last and the living one.

[36 : 32] I died and behold I am alive forever more and I have the keys of death and Hades. His recognition of Jesus Christ awesome the transcendence of Jesus Christ he didn't have to have a fear of his imminent destruction being cast out of the presence of Jesus Christ.

We understand he was already a child of God a servant of God and Jesus had the keys of death in Haiti. I'm sure John was rejoicing to be a recipient of the gentle touch of the sovereign Lord one who gathers his sheep in his arms and carries them close to his heart who gently leads those that have young.

This was John's Lord. He was pleased to hear the comforting words of fear not and for those of us who are the children of God through faith in Jesus Christ we can understand that joy in fearing God now and in the future as well.

Let's close in prayer. Father this morning we do give thanks again for you revealing yourself to us in your word but even going beyond that opening our hearts to receive it to believe it to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and to be able to pursue godliness pursue that which you're seeking to work in us be transformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ help us this morning even as we enter morning service to have a real clear understanding John had a quite a vision of Jesus Christ help us to enter into that richer fuller understanding of Jesus Christ so that the songs we sing would be songs of just awe of who you are and what you've done thankfulness humility reverence and then open our minds again to your word as it comes to us again to receive it with gladness in Jesus name amen thank you many