

Gratitude & the Fear of the Lord

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[0:00] At the beginning here, I'm going to be asking you to participate a lot, so just be ready for that. I don't want a lot of dead time here. If you know an answer, just speak it out. Don't be afraid.

Last week we looked at 12 symptoms of awe, amnesia, of forgetting God's glory, of living in a world that is shouting that God is glorious, that He's wise and good and holy.

We're living in that world, but forgetting it. Or having received the gospel and heard it and believed it and forgetting that, the goodness and the glory of the gospel.

It is the glory of the gospel, the glory of Jesus Christ. But we can forget it and we can miss it and it doesn't weigh anything on our hearts. We don't remember it. And so we talked about 12 symptoms. And so what happens when we forget God's glory, when we don't live in the fear of the Lord, the greatness of God?

We saw 12 things. What were they? What was the first one? Self-centeredness. So life becomes all about you. You become all about you. And everything that goes along with that.

[1:19] What's the second thing? Or in any order, we don't need them exactly. Entitlement. I deserve, I have rights, so awe of God is replaced by awe of self. And when I'm in awe of me, I feel entitled.

So are you living an entitled life where you think good things are just yours because you deserve them? What else? Discontentment. Not satisfied. Discontented with your life, with your job, with your spouse, with your children, with your parents, with your gifts, with your church, with people, with Christians, with God. Discontented.

What else? Relationship problems. Yeah. Of course, when your life becomes all about you and you're feeling entitled and discontent, you're probably not a very unagreeable person and you're probably going to have problems getting along with people.

Especially when there's two or three of you in that state. You're all going to be fighting. So relational dysfunction. What else? Keep going.

Yeah, you're trying to control things. You'll want to control the things that you can't control. You'll be frustrated at those things. You'll be angry at God for those things that you can't control.

[2:45] What else? Control issues. Fear. You'll be afraid. You'll either revere God and have a big God or you're going to be afraid of everything.

Because the world's going to seem out of control. People are going to seem out of control. Life is going to seem out of control. The future's out of control. You'll be afraid. Because your God isn't big enough to handle all of those things.

What else? Keep going. Anger. Anger. Anger. You'll be angry at others. Angry at God. Because you'll want people, you'll want God to do certain things.

And of course they're not going to do it. And you'll become angry. Keep going. Envy. Envy. I'll want what other people have.

In a way, it really is me replacing God. Because I'm going to wish that I could distribute things the way I want them distributed.

[3:50] And when I see someone having something from God's hand that I don't have, I'll be envious. It's another way of wishing I was God. And not being happy with where God is at.

Or who God is. Envy. Keep going. Drivenness. And what I meant here is not a good ambition.

Or a good work ethic. I meant taking it too far. Where you can't rest. It's all up to you. You have to do it or it's not going to get done.

And so instead of praying, instead of prayer, you'll try to do something on your own. Driven people don't pray. Driven people just find another way of trying to work on it on their own.

And they never can rest. They never can let God be God. Number ten was exhaustion. And you can imagine if you're feeling self-centered and entitled and discontent.

[4:56] And your relationships are broken down. And you're afraid and angry all the time. And you're driven. You're going to be tired. You're going to have a hard time resting. It's an exhausting way to live when you don't live in the fear of the Lord.

It's not the blessed life to be at the middle. Number eleven. What was number eleven? Doubt. And we talked about how that works.

When I think God should give me certain things. And he doesn't give them to me. Then I'm going to doubt his goodness. I'm going to doubt his love. When I start defining God's love by meeting my particular desires.

And then he doesn't do that. Then I'm going to think, oh, God doesn't love me. So I'm going to doubt God's goodness. Doubt God's love. And it's not a matter that God is not doing what he promised. It's a matter that God is not doing what I want. And if he doesn't do what I want, he must not love me. And then how it all ends is spiritual coldness.

[6:04] So if I doubt God's love. If he's not big. If he's not good. If he's out of. If things are out of control. And so if I'm living in this world.

Where God functionally isn't there. He's not ruling. He's not wise. He's not good. He's not loving. I'm not going to have any reason to worship him. We worship God out of the particulars of our life. What I mean is. Just like our memory verse said. Call upon me in the day of trouble. So you have a day of trouble. And you call upon him. And he delivers you. And then you honor him. But if that never happens.

Then you're going to be left cold. If you don't call upon him in your day of trouble. Because he's not big enough. Wise enough. Good enough. Loving enough. To take care of me. Then I won't call upon him.

And even if he does deliver me. I won't honor him. I'll just think. Oh. Circumstances. Luck. Just happened. So.

[7:04] Spiritual coldness. Now. We have that list. Of those 12 things. That's what awe of self looks like.

That's how awe of self gets translated. And interpreted. Into real. Everyday. Life. Where I am big. And God is small. And so. I want to ask you.

What happens then? I want you to think about that list. Let's. Let's flip it. Let's flip everything on its head. Let's do everything. Backwards.

So to speak. What is the fear of the Lord look like? What is the fear of the Lord look like? What is it going to look like? In your. In your life.

If. If awe of self looks like this. What is awe of God? What is the fear of the Lord going to look like?

So. Instead of self-centered. What am I going to be?

[7:59] If I'm fearing God. God-centered. Other-centered. Those aren't mutually exclusive.

Are they? Love God with all your heart. And love your neighbor as yourself. God is calling us to. Live outside of ourselves. So. Instead of self-centered. Other-centered.

God-centered. Instead of entitled. How am I going to feel? Thankful. Humble. Grateful.

Instead of discontented. How am I going to feel? Instead of discontentment. Contentment. Rest. Satisfaction.

Peace. Thankfulness. Instead of relational dysfunction. What am I going to have? Good relationships. Healthy relationships.

[8:58] Fruitful. Flourishing. Relationships. Instead of needing control. What am I going to do? Do. Trust. Trust God.

I'm going to rest in God's control. In his sovereignty. Instead of fear. Courage. Boldness.

Hope. Conviction. Instead of anger. Anger. joy. What am I going to have? Love.

What else? Joy. Patience. Happiness. Thankfulness. Instead of envy.

Gratitude. How am I going to feel? How is that going to work in my life? Gratitude. Joy.

[9:58] And what others have. Can you be just as happy that people are enjoying something as if you're enjoying it yourself? Drivenness. So instead of drivenness.

There's going to be what? A balance. Between work. And rest. I'm going to trust God who has promised to provide.

Who said my grace is sufficient for you. Instead of exhaustion. What am I going to have? Rest.

Um. Thriving. Flourishing. Um. I mean.

Just think about it. People that are stressed out all the time. We know what stress does to a person's physical body. Don't we? Um. People who are pessimistic.

[10:56] Uh. Who are. And what I mean by that is. They're viewing things as the worst. They're tired. They don't think things are ever going to work out. Um. Those kinds of people.

Statistically die earlier. Stress obviously contributes to a great degree. Uh. To our health. To our spiritual well-being. Um. And what I'm saying is.

Instead of exhaustion. The fear of the Lord leads to long life. Leads to health. It leads to what the Bible is talking about. It's. It leads to thriving. Uh. Instead of doubt.

Eating away at you. I'm not sure if God loves me. And then. How do you. How can you live the Christian life really. If you're always afraid. Like. I don't think God loves me. I don't think God's going to care for me.

I don't know if God is for me. You. You just limp through the whole Christian life. But instead of doubt. What are you going to have? Faith. Hope.

[11:52] Zeal. Instead of spiritual coldness. Love. And excitement. And zeal for God. Um. So.

Just think about that. God-centered. Humble. Thankful. Good relationships. Joy. Rest. Hope. And so on. That's the thriving Christian life.

Isn't it? That's the healthy Christian life. Remember. John Murray's quote. That the fear of the Lord. The fear of God. Is the soul of godliness. It's the driving.

The driving. Force. Of godliness. And do you see how that works in your life? That when. You are fearing God. You start to exhibit.

All the fruit of the spirit. Of love. And joy. And peace. And patience. And kindness. And goodness. And faithfulness. And all the rest. You start to live a healthy.

[12:47] Productive Christian life. When. When God is big. And you are small. Now. I was struck. By that. At Elsie Herbst's memorial. One of her sons stood up.

And read Proverbs 31. And I'm going to ask you to turn there. Proverbs 31. One. Excuse me. Now. We're going to read. This description. Of a noble. A wife of a noble. Of. A wife of noble character. Because really what this is.

Is it turns out to be. A good description. Of what the fear of the Lord. Looks like. In a person's life. And in this case. It's a woman's life. But.

There's definitely principles. And lessons here. For men. Women. And everyone. You'll notice. Look at verse 30. Charm is deceptive. And beauty is fleeting.

[13:53] But a woman who fears the Lord. Is to be praised. So how does Proverbs end? Proverbs ends with. The fear of the Lord. Here's a. Here's a person who's. Who fears the Lord.

Remember. How does Proverbs begin? The beginning of wisdom. Is the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord. Is the theme. That ties Proverbs.

All together. And so. Let's just read it. And get this description. Of. What does the fear of the Lord. Look like?

And as we do. Use those. Twelve. Symptoms. Or those. Twelve. Things that we even. Just looked at. To see. Look at. Look at her character.

A wife of noble character. Who can find. She's worth. Far more than rubies. Her husband. Has full. Confidence in her. And lacks. Nothing of value. She brings him.

[14:48] Good. Not harm. All the days of her life. She selects. Wool. And flax. And works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships. Bringing her food from afar. She gets up.

While it is still dark. She provides food for her family. And portions for her servant girls. She considers a field. And buys it. Out of her earnings. She plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously.

Her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable. And her lamp does not go out at night. In her hand. She holds the distaff.

And grasps the spindle with her fingers. She opens her arms to the poor. And extends her hands to the needy. When it snows. She has no fear for her household. For all of them are clothed in scarlet. She makes coverings for her bed. She is clothed in fine linen and purple. Her husband is respected at the city gate. Where he takes his seat among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them.

[15:45] And supplies the merchants with sashes. She is clothed with strength and dignity. She can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom. And faithful instruction is on her tongue.

She watches over the affairs of her household. And does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed. Her husband also. And he praises her.

Many women do noble things. But you surpass them all. Charm is deceptive. And beauty is bleeding. But a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned. And let her works bring her praise at the city gate. Now that's the fear of the Lord. In action. Is she a thriving, flourishing woman?

She is. So think about how much of her life reflects some of the things that we've talked about already. She's God-centered.

[16:47] She fears the Lord. She's other-centered, isn't she? How much of her life is directed outward? She's not bent in on herself.

Is she afraid? She's not afraid. She's doing all sorts of things that require boldness. She's buying fields.

She's doing all these sorts of things. She's not afraid. She's generous. She's bold. She's kind. She's wise. She's energetic. She's ready to work.

She's not exhausted and burnt out. She's generous. She's not entitled. She has healthy relationships, doesn't she?

Her husband respects her. Her children respect her. And she loves them in return. So Proverbs 31 is what having a big God and a little me will do to our lives.

[17:48] It's not just a description for women. It's a description for all of us to take to heart. This is what the fear of the Lord looks like. Now, this is the question I have, and this is the topic I want to talk about today.

We've read this chapter. You're familiar with this woman. You've seen her picture. You know her. Let me ask you, from what you know of the Proverbs 31 woman, is she a complainer?

No. Can you imagine her being a complaining woman? She's not a complainer. I was in the library this week, and I saw a librarian, and she met a woman she must have known.

And the woman said, oh, how are you? And Debbie, the librarian, said, oh, I'm doing well. And that caught my attention because she used good grammar. That was good.

And the librarian said, and how are you? And this is what the lady said, fed up, angry, and ticked off.

[18:59] And that caught my attention. She must, and the librarian said, oh, having a bad day? And the lady took a breath, and she started in on how terrible her life is.

Now, first of all, let me say, I hope none of you do that. I sincerely hope none of you go around complaining like that.

And I can't imagine any of you do. But if that's you, I would beg you to please stop. No one, complaining is a terrible way to witness. It doesn't make Jesus Christ look attractive at all.

It's never won a convert. And complaining has never done anyone any good. Complaining is a virus. Did you know that? And it spreads from person to person so easily.

How many times have you been caught up in a complaining contest? We can be the worst kinds of toppers. Complaining toppers.

[20:01] Woe is me. No, woe is me. Well, now, that's what I want to think about this morning. That complaining is a fear of the Lord matter.

It's a fear of the Lord issue. And on the other hand, gratitude and thankfulness is a wonderful fruit of the fear of the Lord. We looked at some of the opposites of those 12 symptoms.

And how many times did we run across gratitude and thankfulness? So, complaining and gratitude. Now, first, let's talk about why do we complain?

Why do we complain? Well, let me tell you why we're not complaining. You don't complain because you have a lack of resources, a lack of money or a lack of time or a lack of anything.

It's not a resource problem. You don't have a location problem. You're in the wrong place. You don't have a situation problem or a people problem or a suffering problem or a physical health problem or a church problem, a marriage problem, an employment problem, a parent or child problem, or just a fallen world problem.

[21:11] Now, do we all have those problems? Yeah. Those, in some way or other, we all have some of those problems. We're all facing some sort of mixture of those problems.

But that's not why we complain. We complain because of our attitude toward those problems. We complain because of our attitude towards life and our attitude towards God.

We're complaining because in the middle of all those problems, we don't have the fear of the Lord. God isn't big to us, at least in that moment.

We're not seeing a big God in the middle of those problems. And so when we complain, we're missing one or probably all of some of those things that we started the Sunday School series with, with the holiness of God, the greatness of God, the wisdom of God, the love of God, just the presence of God.

We're complaining because Jesus Christ and his cross isn't weighing anything to us at that moment on our hearts. God isn't big in our eyes. And so his salvation is in the rearview mirror.

[22 : 29] And it's behind us and we're not thinking about it. And it doesn't have anything to do with our lives. And that's why we are complaining. Now, what I, this is quite easy to prove.

Think about Israel in the desert. Israel in the desert. And you remember how they murmured. They complained. Just listen to what they said.

Because the Lord hated us, he has brought us out of the land of Egypt to give us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us. If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt.

There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted. But you have brought us out into the desert to starve this entire assembly to death. Why did you bring us up out of Egypt?

To make us and our children and our livestock die of thirst. And then Moses said what moms and dads have said for eternity. What am I to do with these people?

[23 : 25] Well, why did they complain? They didn't complain because they were out in the desert. They didn't complain because they were thirsty. They didn't complain because they were hungry.

They complained because of their view of God. They complained because they forgot God's love. They forgot God's salvation. They forgot the Red Sea.

They forgot the ten plagues. They went from a God who had loved them. And single-handedly destroyed Egypt for them.

They forgot that. And they turned God into a cold-hearted brute. You heard what they said. You hate us. You brought us out here to destroy us. You just led us into the desert to destroy us.

Because they complained, not because of the circumstances, but because God at that moment wasn't great. He wasn't kind. He wasn't wise.

[24 : 23] He wasn't loving. He wasn't holy. In other words, they didn't fear him. And so we don't complain because of our circumstances. Those are the occasions for our complaint.

They're not the reasons. And just as easily, they could become occasions for thanksgiving and faith as occasions for complaint.

The circumstances give us a chance to either complain or a chance to say thank you, God, and trust him. And it really comes down to how we answer five questions.

And that's what we want to talk about, these five questions. And the way we answer these five questions that I'm going to give you decides whether I, when faced with hard circumstances, I complain and I murmur and I'm like, God doesn't love me.

And he's brought me out here to destroy me. This is it. This is the final time. He's not going to help me this time. Or I say thank you and I trust him. How we answer these five questions depends on whether we complain or we trust depends on how we answer these five questions.

[25 : 43] And the first question is, is God good? Is God good? Is God good?

Now we need to be clear right from the beginning. God's goodness can be confusing. Because sometimes what looks like good from God's all-wise, eternal perspective doesn't look good to me at ground level.

Does it? Doesn't look good to us from ground level. And sometimes it's hard to accept that in that moment God knows better than we do. And that's where we have to be sure that our idea of good is what God's idea of good is.

This goes back to that one question of how do I define God's love? Is God's love defined by him giving me what I want at that moment? No. And here is God's goodness defined by what I've defined as good.

And so if we're all honest with each other, just naturally, what's my idea of good? My life is predictable. My life is predictable.

[27 : 07] My life is comfortable. My life is easy. My life is pleasant. That's good.

Things that help me live that life are good. Things that take away from that are bad. But is that how God defines good?

Is that how God defines good? Is that what's good for us? No. What's good for us is what's eternally good for us.

What's good for us is what will be good for us two million years from now. What's good for us is what will make me more like Jesus. What will make me more wise?

What will perfect me and make me more holy? What will glorify God? That's what's good. What's for my ultimate good is the good life. So, if I've defined good by the pleasant life, then you see how dangerous that is.

[28:17] Then when bad things happen to me, what am I going to say? Is God good? No. He's not good.

If he was good, he wouldn't let this happen. But if God's definition of good is, this will make you more like Christ.

This is ultimately for your good. This is ultimately to make you more like Jesus. This is ultimately to help you. If that's good, then when hard things happen, how am I going to answer that question?

Is God good? God is good. God is good. His commands are good. His plans are good. His ways are good. And so, if God is good, and I believe it in that moment, am I going to complain?

Am I going to complain? No. Instead, when those hard things happen, what am I going to do if I really believe that God is good? When the hard things come, what am I going to do?

[29:23] Praise Him. I can say thank you. That's incredible. And that's not unbiblical. Just think about James. Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.

It is possible to be thankful and happy in the middle of trials if we have the right perspective. If we can answer this question, is God good?

And we look at our circumstances, and we look at our circumstances, and we know God's character, and we say, yes, God is good. And so I can say, thank you, Lord, for this trial. Because I know this trial is developing in me perseverance.

And perseverance is working in me so that I can be complete, not lacking anything. Or Romans 5 talks about perseverance leading to character, and character leading to hope.

This trial has come so that I can be a more hopeful person. And so I can say, thank you. And so we're not going to be saying, without lady, I'm fed up, angry, and ticked off.

[30:28] We're not griping about things because God is good. So the reason we complain is because we don't think God is good in that moment.

I mean, yes, theologically we'll say he's good. But at heart level, at street level, we'll say no. Now the second question, we're going to have to keep moving through this.

The second question is, is God faithful? Is God faithful? Will his promises stand? Will he do what he has promised? So if I answer this question, yes, I will say thank you.

And if I answer it, no, I will find a reason to complain. So is Romans 8.28 true or not? Is it true or not? I lose my job.

Is Romans 8.28 true or not? Is God near or not? Can we call upon him in the day of trouble and he will deliver us or not?

[31:33] Is he faithful and just and will forgive us of all of our sins? Will he do that or not? Does he care for us more than many sparrows?

Or not? Does his love last forever or not? See, God's promises are for real life. God's promises don't come to us in the middle of the perfect life.

They come to us in the middle of a hard life. And they are meant to sustain us through the hard things of life. And so we can't say with our mouths, God is faithful.

And then the moment we run into problems, turn around and complain. Because faith holds on to the promises in the middle of the hard things. And by faith we can say thank you.

So if something bad happens, I still have a reason to say thank you. Because God has lots of promises that are true. So I can say thank you, God, for these promises.

[32:34] Third question. Is God in control? Is God in control? That lady in the library apparently, I mean, I don't really know her and I'm not picking on her. Maybe she had a bad day. But it just seems like she didn't have a God who was in control of her life.

She didn't have a loving father who was mixing good and bad in her life together. Because from what came out of her mouth, after she said all that, it sounds like she was just this person who's a

victim.

And bad things are always coming, always showing up. All this bad stuff comes her way. That's the way it is. And so I have to ask myself, is God in control? Is God in control of my life?

Is God in control of the circumstances or is he not? Is he sovereign or not? And so we say we believe in the sovereignty of God. God in control of God. And we need to show it with our thankfulness.

Not just with our formal confession. With our thankfulness that acknowledges his sovereignty. Our God is so big.

[33:47] He rules over all heaven and earth. He has even the devil himself on a leash, on a chain. And that means that I can say thank you in the midst of all of life.

Doesn't mean I do. But it means I can. It means I should. And we can thank the Lord that he is in control. And he's good. Number four, is God strong enough?

Is God strong enough? Is God strong enough to help you? That's the difference between complaining and gratitude. And we don't know exactly what Paul's thorn in the flesh was.

A thorn in the flesh probably means it was painful. And it was something physical. We don't know exactly what it is. It was hard.

It was painful. And from Paul's perspective, it would have been better if he didn't have it. And it wouldn't have been better just because he wanted to live the pleasant life.

[34:54] I don't think that's what Paul... He didn't come into the presence of the Lord three times. Take this away from me. Just because he wanted to live a pleasant life. From Paul's perspective, he was saying, My ministry, my mission, would be better served if this wasn't a part of my life.

If I didn't have to deal with this, I could be so much more effective. I could be so much more useful. But what did Paul do? He ended up rejoicing in his weakness.

Why? Why could he be thankful and rejoicing in his weakness? What made the difference?

Because what did Jesus say to him?

Yeah, my grace. Right. It was a matter of power. It was a matter of grace. Was Jesus strong enough?

Was the question. Was his power made perfect in weakness? So Jesus' strength, not Paul's strength, was the question. And so, can you thank God and rejoice in your weakness in the face of your failures?

[36:10] Your inability? Your constitutional inability? Your constitutional weaknesses? Your personality weaknesses? Your foibles? Can you?

Can you say, You know what? This is where I am. This is how God has made me. This is what is in my life. And this is a reason that I don't have to be omnipotent.

God is omnipotent. And he's going to share his strength with me. He's strong enough for me. And so, awe of God. Recognizing God is strong enough. In the middle of life.

In the middle of my weaknesses. It produces what it produced in Paul. Courage. And boldness. And perseverance. So, timidity and fear and denial and hiding and excusing and running away from things.

Because we're afraid. Afraid to start something new. Afraid to do something different. Afraid to go somewhere. Afraid to talk to certain people. Those are not, first of all, weakness problems.

[37:17] Problems. They're awe problems. Because in that moment, I'm not believing what Jesus said.

That his power is made perfect in weakness. So, is God strong? Complaining your gratitude? The last question. Does God care about me? Does God care about me?

If you're a single young lady. If you're a divorced older man.

If you're an unequally yoked. An unequally yoked marriage partner. If you're a parent to a rebellious child.

You're asking the question. Does God care about me? Does God see me? Is God here? Does God love me? Does God care about me? It's what the widow is asking.

[38:14] It's what the elderly person is asking. It's what the sick person is asking. And it's so important how we answer it.

Is he for me? Is his promises for me? See, if he's for me. If he cares about me. If he loves me. Then his promises are for me.

And if he cares about me. Then all of his attributes are for me. He's going to exercise his control and his sovereignty for me. He's going to exercise his love for me.

He's going to exercise his power and his justice for me. All of God's attributes. All of God's attributes. Even his wrath. Even his wrath. Is for my good. If he cares about me.

And so the question is. Does in that moment. Does God care about me? That's going to decide whether I say thank you or I complain.

[39:14] So can I complain? Do I ever have the right? Am I ever entitled? Do I ever have even a reason to complain?

No. Instead give thanks to the Lord. His love endures forever. And so this week.

And even today. You're going to be challenged with circumstances. You're going to be challenged with trials and temptations. Where you will be tempted to complain. I wish I wasn't this way.

I wish I wasn't facing this. Everything else. And so instead of immediately complaining. Ask yourself these five questions. Is God good?

Is God good? Is God faithful? Is God in control? Is God strong? Does he care for me? And after you've answered those questions.

[40:14] Instead of complaining. And if you really answer them. Instead of complaining. You're going to have every reason to say thank you. You're going to have a reason to have gratitude.

And that's what the fear of the Lord looks like. That's what it produces. When you have a big God. A little me. It produces gratitude. Even in the hardest of situations.

Well. We are dismissed.