

Dependence on the Lord

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[0:00] We are speaking about the fear of the Lord in the Sunday School series. And today what we want to look at is to live in the fear of the Lord is to live in the fear of the Lord.

Is to realize, to know how great He is, how holy He is, how good He is, how loving He is. Those things that we've already talked about in this class. But it's also to say He's loving and I need Him. I need Him for everything.

I need Him for right now. I need Him for today, tomorrow. So to live in reverence is to live with that realization.

That's the mental house that you live in. That's the world that you live in. That when I'm fearing the Lord, I'm leaning on Him.

[1:04] I'm leaning into Him for everything I need. So I am weak. He is strong. I am vulnerable, but He can protect me. He can make me stand.

And so a man, a woman, a boy or a girl who lives in the fear of the Lord is living in the conscious, in conscious dependence on God.

They have a big, they have a good, they have a present God. And that they're looking to Him to help them. To give them everything they need.

So conscious dependence. Now we are all living in dependence on Him. Whether we realize it or not. Whether we see it or understand it or think about it or not.

We are actually all depending upon God every moment of our lives. But the man who fears the Lord realizes it. He sees that.

[2:04] So he sees that about himself. And he sees that about God. Again, that's the mental, that's the spiritual world he lives in. And just how contrary that is to our culture.

Independence. Self-sufficiency. Are really very much the hallmarks, the trademarks of our culture. And it's not every culture in the world that has such an emphasis upon that.

But it is particularly in ours. In Africa, if you go there, you don't hear coaches telling their athletes to dig deep and to find courage and strength to win the game.

But that's what you would hear here. You don't hear adults telling themselves that I just need to believe in myself. Now, they might do that.

But it's not such a part of their culture. It's not such a part of the way they think about things. Even in the spiritual realm, in our culture, when we talk about, when our culture talks about spirituality and where does spiritual strength come from, where do they direct themselves?

[3:20] From to within. I need to go within. I don't need to go out. I need to go in. If I'm going to find spiritual strength, it's not out.

It's in. And I need to break through and find the spiritual strength that is in myself. In the movie Chariots of Fire, Eric Little, after a race, he is standing in front of an audience.

It's raining. And he's giving an evangelistic message. And this is his message. And this is what I want you to listen for. And it's almost tricky because it sounds almost good.

But you're going to hopefully see that it's not quite right. So this is what the character, Eric Little, says. So who am I to say, believe, have faith in the face of life's realities?

I would like to give you something more permanent, but I can only point the way. I have no formula for winning the race. Everyone runs in her own way or his own way.

[4:24] And where does the power come from to see the race to its end? From within. Jesus said, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

If with all your hearts you truly seek me, you shall ever surely find me. Well, first let me say, that wasn't actually Eric Little or his words. The actor who played Eric Little improvised that speech on the spot because he thought the script was too sanctimonious.

But what he says, it sounds sort of true. He uses some Jesus words, doesn't he? He uses some quotes from Jesus. But where does he say we end up finding the kingdom and the power? Well, from within. And where do we find the Jesus that he says that we need to seek? From within. And so though it sounds good and it seems almost right, or it could be maybe right, it ends up directing us into the wrong place.

[5:38] Because while the kingdom of God is within us, and yes, the spirit of Christ is living in us. His idea was that we're somehow the Christ, the Christ that is within us.

It's not really, he's directing us within. It's not really to trust in the Christ who is out there, who's different from me, who has something I don't have, who's standing apart from me.

It's me, it's Christ in me, or something like that. Or the Christ in me. It's an inward focus. With some spiritual overtones put to it.

Now, the fear of God is not an inward directed focus. I guess that's what I'm trying to say. It's not an inward directed focus.

It's an outward, it's Godward. It's conscious dependence on God. Who's not within me, so to speak, but he exists apart from me.

[6:43] He's different from me. The fear of God, this is what John Murray says, the fear of God means that God is constantly in the center of our thought and apprehension, and life is characterized by an all-pervasive consciousness of dependence upon him and responsibility to him.

So, it's not inward directed. It's outward. It's, I'm dependent upon him. I'm responsible to him. Again, that's my whole life.

It's all-pervasive consciousness. And so, it's not an attitude that we take on from time to time. It's not just an attitude that we have during a crisis. But it's here throughout our whole life, the routine of our life, the walk of our life.

So, remember, living in the fear of the Lord is living quorum Deo. It's living before him. So, life is not segregated into pieces, into different drawers, so to speak, where I have my ordinary life drawer, and then I have my spiritual life drawer.

There's no two-drawer living. It's living our whole life in the presence of God, in the reality of God, in dependence upon God.

[8:09] It means we don't forget about him. And it means when hard things come, we don't complain. Because complaining is a two-drawer kind of life.

It's a fear of the Lord issue. And so, when hard circumstances happen, we think about those five questions that we talked about last week.

And all five of those questions were questions about God. They were theological questions. They were directing us to think about God. And so, instead of complaining, we think about those five questions.

Do you remember what they were? So, when hard circumstances come, I said, we need to think about these five questions. What were they? Is God good?

Is God good or not? If he's good, I say thank you. If he's not, I'm going to complain. What else? There are four more.

[9:14] Just speak them out. Say them out. Is God faithful? Is he faithful? Is he going to keep his promises?

Those promises that I know, are they for this moment or are they not? That's going to decide if I'm full of gratitude or full of complaining. Is God in control?

Or not? If I see my life out of control, out of God's control, then I'm going to complain. But if he is in control, then I'm going to say thank you.

Is God strong? Does God care for me? Those were the last two questions. Does God care for me or not? Now, those questions are just another way of thinking about our dependence on God.

Those questions are just another way of us thinking about what God has to do with our lives. And so when we think of those questions and we answer those questions, we're living all of life with God in light of who he is.

[10:26] And it also means that in those moments when we answer the questions, is God good? And we say, yes, he's good. He's faithful. He's in control.

He's strong. He cares for me. What those questions are going to lead us to then is to depend upon him, to trust him, to rely upon him, to conscious dependence upon him.

And that's what we want to talk about today, this conscious dependence. So what do we need God for? Well, I want you to turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 17.

And this is a passage that we looked at just a couple of weeks ago in the Sunday morning service. Acts chapter 17.

And hopefully we don't need to give much of the context. Paul is in Athens. He's on the Areopagus. He's defending. He's explaining the gospel.

[11 : 27] He's talking about who God is. And I want you to look at verse 24 and 25. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.

And he is not served by human hands as if he needed anything because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

life and breath and everything else. Now let me ask you, what did the Athenians think? Who did the Athenians think needed who?

Who needed who in the Athenians' mind? The gods needed them. The gods needed them.

What do the gods need them? The gods need the people. What do the gods need them for?

Temple. Temple. The gods are homeless without us.

[12 : 37] They need a house. What else do they need? Will. They needed, yeah, they needed food to keep these gods alive. Food.

Service. He's served by human hands. But that's not God. That's what Paul's point is. They had it completely backwards.

God does not need people. People need God. Listen to Psalm 50. And this is where last week's memory verse came from. And this is what the Lord says in Psalm 50.

I have no need of a bull from your stall or goats from your pens. For every animal of the forest is mine.

And the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains. And the creatures of the field are mine.

[13 : 37] If I were hungry, I would not tell you. For the world is mine. And all that is in it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls?

Or drink the blood of goats? Sacrifice. Thank offerings to God. Fulfill your vows to the Most High. And call upon me in the day of trouble.

I will deliver you. And you will honor me. So Psalm 50 is an exact opposite of what was going on in Athens. What does God need from his people?

Nothing. But what do they need from him? Everything. Food. All the animals are his.

They need him to do something. And so when he does something, they are going to sacrifice thank offerings. And they are going to fulfill their vows to him. They need help in the day of trouble.

[14 : 44] And God says, I will deliver you. And you will honor me. So Acts 17. Psalm 50. What are they teaching us? That God doesn't need us. But we need him.

And we need him for life. And breath. And everything else. Life. So we are going to talk about life and breath and everything else.

What do you need God for? Life. Whether you live or die is in God's hands.

The Lord gave. And the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised. Psalm 31.

David says, My times are in your hands. So how dependent upon God are you? Well, your life is in his hands. He gives you life at this very moment.

[15 : 41] He breathed life into the clay and made Adam a living being. Life comes from God. God is the living God.

And he gives life to all that have it. In Daniel 5, Daniel rebuked the proud king Belshazzar. He said, You did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.

And that proud king didn't last the night. The fear of the Lord is the heart attitude that says, I need God. He doesn't need me.

My life is in his hands. My life is in his hands. But then Paul says, Life and breath. Now there's obviously a lot of overlap there.

But I want to think about this breath. I don't know if I have a morbid streak or something. But my last breath is something I think about sometimes. Because there's going to come a time when I breathe out for the last time.

[17:02] And my breath out is not going to be followed by a breath in. And I will lie there. And no breath will come.

And I will die. Sometimes I even act it out. Just imagining breathing out. And then sitting there as long as I can without breathing in.

But I always breathe in. But there's going to be a time when I breathe out. And then I don't breathe back in. And thinking about that makes me thankful for every breath.

Because it's a gift from God. I'm dependent upon him. I need him to make my diaphragm and all the muscles strength.

I need them to be strengthened. I need them to have the nervous direction to breathe. I'm dependent on him to give my brain and my nervous system the ability to send messages to those muscles.

[18:11] Isaiah says, Stop trusting in man who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he?

So, it looks like we all have a different amount of things. From a certain perspective, we do.

Some rich, some poor. But Isaiah is saying, Just think about how poor we really all are. What do you have that's really, really yours?

One breath. And it's the one breath that's in your nostrils right now. The full amount of what you can say is really mine.

Is that one breath that God gave you that's in your nose right now. And so, you have a bit of air. And that's why Isaiah says, Of what account is he?

[19:16] Of what account is man? You put all of what is really his on the scales. And what does he really have? Just one breath. That's the full strength.

That's a full account of what is mine. And God gave me that. And so, go home and meditate on that. Go home and focus on your breath. Think about breathing in. God gave you that breath.

And he's going to give you the next one. Think about how you need it. And how one day God will close his hand. And that next breath he won't give you.

And you will die. And if you really think about that, something will happen. Fear. And awe. Will come into your heart. About how little you are.

And how much you need God. And it will really dry up pride and self-sufficiency. And when that happens, that gives you wisdom.

[20:17] Teach us to number our days aright that we might have a heart of wisdom. To just think about how fragile and short-lived we are. So, what are we dependent on God for?

Well, life and breath. And then what? Everything else. Everything else. That's a big category.

Everything else that we have. God gives life. God gives breath. God gives everything else. The Athenians had it all backwards. So, we have to build a house for our gods.

We have to build a house. But it's not man who decides where God lives. That's what Paul ends up saying. It's not man who says, okay, we're going to build a house so that God can live here.

God determines the time set for them and the exact places where they should live. God decides where each one of us lives. And it's not man that brings food to God so he can eat.

[21:20] It's God opening his hand for man so that they can eat. And so, when was the last time you prayed, Give us today our daily bread.

That's, I dare say, that's a prayer that sometimes, I don't pray very often in the morning.

Lord, I need to eat today. Will you please give me something to eat? Because I have a kitchen. I have a grocery store. I have all this, everything there. But Jesus is teaching us, You need to pray, God, give me my bread today.

And so, is that just a prayer for ancient people who didn't have a long, complicated, redundant food supply system? Well, I think we can stop praying, Give us today our daily bread when we can stop praying, Lord, forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors.

Give us today our daily bread. It's a genuine request from God that we genuinely need to ask.

[22:36] Psalm 104, let's turn there. Psalm 104, verse 14 and 15. Verse 14, He makes grass grow for the cattle and plants for man to cultivate, bringing forth food from the earth, wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.

So life and breath and everything else, and part of that everything else is food. Food for us. Food for cattle. The wine that gladdens the hearts of men.

The oil that makes our faces shine. The bread that sustains our hearts. The chocolate chip cookies that cheer you up after a hard day.

Those are from God. And without him we starve. We forget that so easily. Listen to the book of Amos. I gave you, and listen to all the I's, I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord.

I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town and withheld it from another. One field had rain, another had none, and dried up.

[23:57] People staggered from town to town for water, but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord. Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards.

I struck them with blight and mildew. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord. So who's in charge of the food?

The rain, the drought, the locusts, everything else. I gave. I withheld. I sent.

I struck. So it's not just food, it's the weather, but it's not just those. Deuteronomy 8, Moses says, Remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth.

Life, breath, everything else. So your job, your career, your calling from God.

[25:02] Your ability to do those things from God. And He can take those things away from you. Just as He did in Amos. Where did all those gifts come from?

To go to work? Well, it's the Lord who gives the ability to produce wealth. What about your sanity? Your mental health, so to speak.

What about your freedom from crippling depression or overwhelming paranoia, dementia, schizophrenia, anything like that?

Why aren't you wandering around downtown out of your mind? Sick. Insane. Well, the Lord gives everything.

And the Lord can take away. Can you think of a place where the Lord took away someone's sanity? This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar.

[26:03] Your royal authority has been taken from you. You'll be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals. You will eat grass like cattle.

Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes. And immediately, what had said, what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled.

He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. And a few verses later, Nebuchadnezzar says, those who walk in pride, he is able to humble.

So what are we dependent upon God for? Everything. So how do we practice that dependence? That's what we want to talk about.

How do we practice that dependence? How do we show that dependence? Well, what did King Nebuchadnezzar need to do? Seven times will pass over you until you acknowledge the Most High.

[27:15] See, that was Nebuchadnezzar's problem. When he looked out on his city, on his kingdom, where was God in that picture for King Nebuchadnezzar? He wasn't there.

He never acknowledged him. He didn't acknowledge that God gave Nebuchadnezzar the kingdom. He didn't acknowledge that God gave Nebuchadnezzar the power and the gifts to have such a kingdom.

God wasn't in the picture. It was all King Nebuchadnezzar. And so, how do we practice this dependence?

First of all, in all your ways, acknowledge him. Proverbs chapter 3. Remember? Remember Proverbs, it begins and ends with the fear of the Lord.

In that pivotal passage in Proverbs 3 where it's talking about what does this wisdom really look like? It says, in all your ways, acknowledge him.

[28:16] And so, we need to acknowledge him. And what I mean is we recognize his place. We recognize who he is.

We count that. We take account. We notice that. If I walk into a room and I acknowledge you, what am I doing?

I'm saying, you're there. You're present. You count. You matter. If I don't acknowledge you, I'm effectively cutting you off from the scene.

So, if I acknowledge someone, I walk into the room and I see them there. I see them as present and having a say. I don't sideline or silence them.

That's how we practice this dependence that I'm talking about. In all your ways, acknowledge him. Not just the big things. In all your ways, acknowledge him.

[29 : 20] We acknowledge that he rules over all. That he is here. That he is speaking. That he has something to say. I have responsibilities towards him.

He's present. I acknowledge that he rules over all my plans. He's going to decide if my plans come to pass or not.

Now, plans are good. The plans of the diligent lead to profit. planning is something that God did. God had plans. I know the plans I have for you. Paul made plans. Planning is a way that we image God in this world. That we're like God in this world.

When you plan, you are acting like God does. Because God is a planner. But there is a kind of planning that does not acknowledge God.

[30 : 22] Can you think of somewhere in the New Testament where it talks about that kind of planning? Where I have plans and they're even good plans. Okay, tell me about that one.

Yeah. Tonight your life is required of you.

So much for that plan. Cindy. Paul planning his missionary journey. He planned to go different places in that. Okay.

That wasn't bad planning. But it was definitely where here's Paul making good plans. And the Lord determined his steps, didn't he? Can you think of a place in the New Testament where there were good plans but they were done in the wrong way?

They were done without acknowledging God. James. James. What is it? You can go here and there and make plans good plans. I'll read it for you.

[31 : 37] James chapter 4. Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city spend a year there carry on business and make money.

Is there anything wrong with that? No. There is a problem though because there's something missing at least in the heart of the person that's saying this.

And James says, why, you don't even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

Remember Ecclesiastes? Your life is Havel. It's just gone. You're a mist and vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, if, if, is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.

Now, is the difference between just saying those words and not saying those words? No. It's the heart that's behind those words of saying, if the Lord wills, Lord willing, this is what we're going to do.

[32 : 47] Because with those two words, Lord willing, and with the heart that's behind those two words, I'm acknowledging God. God, I'm saying, He has a say in my plans.

He's ruling over my plans. He's ruling over me. I'm dependent upon Him to help me carry out my plans. It's not just going to be me doing whatever I want. Because my life's a mist.

I don't even know what tomorrow's going to bring. Remember, what's the full amount of strength that I can bring to something to carry it out? The breath in my nostril. So, it's the heart behind those two words, if the Lord wills.

That's acknowledging God. I make my plans and that's good, but my plans and my ability to carry them out are all dependent upon God. Man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.

So, we acknowledge Him in our planning. He is here. He's Lord. That's fearing the Lord. That's giving Him the respect and the honor that He is due.

[33 : 53] And, then we acknowledge Him as we pray to Him. Prayer is an act of dependence. Prayer is us, how we actively rely on Him.

And so, we pray, give us this day our daily bread. And in prayer, we admit our weakness. In prayer, we admit our need.

We admit His riches. We confess His riches. We confess our dependence. But it's not just prayer. It's continual prayer.

Because remember, what we're talking about here is not just dependence sporadically. It's a continual dependence upon the Lord. And continual dependence means continual prayer.

1 Thessalonians 5, pray continually. Now, that has two aspects. It means persevere in prayer.

[34 : 50] Don't give up in prayer. Keep praying. Pray continually. Don't give up on this matter of prayer. But it's also talking about a spirit of prayer that goes on throughout the day. Those short, silent prayers that I send up to God saying, I need you.

Thank you. Help me. You remember in the book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah was sad in the presence of the king.

And the king, Xerxes, I believe, says, or King Darius, says, what's wrong? And he says, how can I be happy when my city's destroyed? And then the king says, what do you need?

And this is what Nehemiah says. Then I pray to the God of heaven and I answer the king. Prayer, answer the king.

That's what we're talking about. That's continual dependence. If you read Nehemiah, Nehemiah actually knows what he wants to say. He wasn't caught flat-footed. He had been thinking about, what do I need?

[36:00] What is the city going to need if it's going to be rebuilt? And he had already thought it through. At least, I think it's clear that he probably did because right then he's able to give a really clear, good answer to the king.

A very thorough answer. It wouldn't be an answer that you could just probably think of on the spot generally. But he'd been thinking about it, but he wasn't trusting.

He wasn't relying on his strength. In that moment, he prayed to the Lord and he answered the king. He's saying, Lord, help me. Give me favor. Here's my chance.

Lord, help me. So he prays. What do you think about Paul before Caesar or Felix when he's giving a defense? Do you think Paul was praying through that whole period? Yeah, he was praying continually.

I need help. I need wisdom. Help me to know what to say. That's acknowledging God in all of our ways. You know, I wonder if there was some way that prayers were visible.

[37:01] people, just imagine that. You know, a beam of light or something came out of the top of my head every time I prayed. How often would we see each other praying?

So you're out in the foyer talking. Would we see prayers going up? Lord, help me have the fruit of the spirit. Lord, help me to listen. Give me wisdom.

Give me grace. I need kindness. Bless this person. When we're driving, prayers for safety. At work, prayers for wisdom. And what about prayers of thanksgiving?

Ephesians 5 says we should always give thanks to God for the Father for everything. If he gives everything, then we're going to be receiving a lot.

And if we're receiving a lot, we should be thanking God. Always praying means always giving thanks. That's living in conscious dependence on him.

[38:08] Now, that's living with God. It looks like continual dependence. It looks like continual gratitude. That's the fear of the Lord in action. That's living with a big God and a little me.

Now, I want to end with just two very practical suggestions to help you grow, to help us grow in our sense of dependence. To practice these very things. And the first is to begin each day by asking God to give you your food for the day.

And the reason I'm starting there is because that's one thing the Lord taught us to pray for. He said, you need this.

Ask for it. So, just putting yourself there. Lord, I need food today. Will you please give me food? food. It's amazing then when you ask for it, how when he gives it, it helps you to say thank you. It reminds you to say thank you. So, we acknowledge our dependence on him when we just pray, Lord, please give me my food today.

[39:16] And the second is work on developing this habit of continual prayer. Short, silent prayers that acknowledge God. We're not talking long.

we're not talking beautiful and wonderful. We're talking about the heart of a man going out to God saying I need you. Thank you. Having dealings with him. And, just one practical thing that I have found helpful is, is physical markers.

And, all I mean by that is you're, you're walking somewhere. You're walking around in your normal life. You're walking around school and work at home.

And, whenever you pass by something or you look at something, that is a signal to you to pray. So, maybe every time you walk through the front door of your house, or maybe every time you walk through the front door at your school or at work, you pray.

Front door is your chance to pray. Maybe it's every time you walk by something. I remember at IUSB there was a certain like traffic concrete pillar that was between the, the, the parking garage and the building I was walking to.

[40:37] And, every time I pass that pillar, that was my reminder. I need to pray. Maybe it's every time you go to the bathroom, say, I will pray. Maybe it's a sticky note on the kitchen cupboard. Maybe it's a watch that beeps every hour, and on the hour that's your reminder to pray. Asking God to help you in what you're doing. Thanking Him for the help that you had in the last hour. That's what the fear of the Lord looks like. It's living with God. It's acknowledging Him in all your ways. It's active, conscious dependence upon Him. And then it's continual gratitude for everything He's given you. Well, our time's up. We're dismissed. Thank you.