

The Fear of the Lord in Parenting

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[0:00] Well, today we are turning a corner in our study on the fear of the Lord. For the next three weeks, Lord willing, we are going to be thinking about three concrete!

situations, three concrete topics, areas, where we need to think more deeply about the fear of the Lord, or we need to bring this doctrine of the fear of the Lord into certain aspects of our lives. We are going to be talking about parenting, we're going to be talking about work, and we are going to be talking about worship. Now, I hope that so far this has been a practical class, that the fear of the Lord is a very practical subject. I hope it has been a practical class. We have talked about complaining and praying and learning to live on independence on God, and those are all very practical things. But for the next three weeks, we do want to bring these in into the areas of our lives where we are at right now, where at least a lot of us are.

And so today we're going to be talking about the fear of the Lord and parenting. Of course, this hits me right where I'm at, because Steph and I are in the trenches, as are many of you.

In parenting, this is the stage of our lives. And I understand that some of you are in the grand parenting stage. So the direct parenting, or the intensive parenting, so to speak, is over. You still have some influence on your children, but not like you used to. Maybe some of you are not there yet. You're single, or you're married and you do not have kids yet, but you hope to someday. But in any case, this is a relevant topic. It's either where you're at, it's where you've been, or maybe it's where you are going to be, where you want to be. And so we want to talk about this, the fear of the Lord and parenting. Now, do they go together? Does the Bible say anything about parenting and the fear of the Lord? And I guess, first of all, I'll open up that question to you.

[2:22] Can you think of any passages or any places in the scriptures that show us that the fear of the Lord and parenting are topics that are holding hands? They go together.

They speak to one another. Can you think of any passages? Peter quotes one. I can't remember the text, but he says, listen, my children, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

Okay. Very good. Anyone else? Yeah. Yeah. We're actually going to get to both of those passages. Well, Psalm 34, 11. And I don't know if Peter quoted this, but this is where I found it. Psalm 34, 11. Come, my children, listen to me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

So David, in Psalm 34, is talking to his children, even his spiritual children, to the people that are coming after him, to the next generation. And he says, listen to me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

[3:29] This is on his fatherly heart. This is something I want to pass on to you. I'll teach you the fear of the Lord. A lot of us homeschool.

But all of us, all of us as parents, whether we homeschool or not, or we choose something else, we are all responsible for our children's education, to oversee it.

And so the question is, is the fear of the Lord in your curriculum? David says, come, it's time for me to teach you the fear of the Lord.

So much of the book of Proverbs is written especially to young people. Listen, my son, to your father's instructions.

My son, do not forget my teaching. Do not be wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and shun evil. And we know the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

[4:28] And so those poems, or however you want to call them, at the beginning of Proverbs, where the father is pleading with his son, those are fear of the Lord passages, where he's saying, my son, listen to me.

Listen to me. I have something to say. Moses, in Deuteronomy 6, verses 1 and 2, These are the commands, decrees, and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land

that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children, and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all of his decrees and commands that I give you, so that you may enjoy long life.

So there's three generations in Deuteronomy 6 in mind. There's you, your children, and then their children.

And the reason that Moses is saying, here are the commands that you are to learn. Here's the commands that you are to teach. Is so that they may fear the Lord.

That they might fear the Lord. Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 78. Psalm 78. And in this passage, Asaph, according to the heading, this is from Asaph, and Asaph is sort of going, he's acting as a history professor, or a theology of history professor.

[6:13] And he is teaching. And I just want to read the first eight verses of Psalm 78. And if you'd follow along. Oh, my people, hear my teaching.

Listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter hidden things, things from of old. What we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us.

That's interesting, isn't it? This is something Asaph has learned from his father. What our fathers have told us. And we will not hide them from their children. We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done.

He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children. So the next generation would know them.

Even the children yet to be born. And they, in turn, would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God. They would not forget his deeds, but would keep his commands.

[7:24] They would not be like their forefathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.

Now, Asaph is on a mission here. He wants to teach the next generation to fear the Lord. It doesn't say fear the Lord in so many words.

It doesn't say those exact words. But I hope you're beginning to understand that the fear of the Lord encompasses all of the things that he is talking about here. He's talking about trusting God, not forgetting his commands, having hearts loyal to God, undivided hearts.

That's the fear of the Lord. He's giving, and what he's going to do in the next, in all the rest of the psalm, all through the next 72 verses, he is going to present to them a God who is big, who is strong, who is loving, who is faithful to his words, who is present, who is active, who is available.

And he's going to do it not by saying those exact words. He's going to do it through a history lesson, by showing Israel and the next generation that illustration after illustration after illustration, story after story of this is what God is like.

[9:00] And this is who he is, and this is who he can be for you. So, the fear of the Lord has everything to do with parenting.

It's a theme, it's a string, that ties, that should tie all of our parenting together. So think of, maybe you do this, maybe you don't.

On your Christmas tree, you string popcorn together, popcorn and cranberries or whatever you do or don't do. We did it one time, and it's about the most tedious thing you've ever done.

But, you can imagine your parenting as a big pile of popcorn, all disconnected. And, it needs a unifying theme.

It needs something that brings it together. And the fear of the Lord is what I believe the Bible teaches should be the overarching idea, the main theme, the melody that runs throughout the whole symphony of our parenting and our parenting endeavor.

[10:18] And so, if I were to ask you to take out a piece of paper, don't do this, but if I were to ask you to take out a piece of paper and write down what God's job description for a parent, for a family is, what would you write?

And that's a good exercise. That's a good exercise. Could you concisely write in a few sentences, this is what God wants me to do as a parent.

And so, you're not going to get bogged down. If you only have a few sentences, you're not going to get bogged down in the minutia, the ideas, the whole bunch of different things that you're called to do.

But what's the main thing? What's the driving thing? What's the big overarching purpose that you could fit down in one or two sentences? Anymore, a lot of people, a lot of churches, a lot of

organizations, what they like to do is they like to write a mission statement.

And the idea is the mission statement is this is the purpose, this is what we're trying to accomplish as a company. And it's not five paragraphs long.

[11:39] It's generally one or two sentences long to say, this is what we're trying to do. This is what we want to do. So could you do that for your parenting?

What goals should you have for your children? What should you, when you reach Saturday night and you look back over your week and you look forward to the coming week, what would you say, looking back, that was a good week?

That was a good week. I accomplished. We moved towards our goal. What's a productive week going to look like coming up? So what are we trying to do with all those conversations, parents, that we're having?

All those late night conversations, all those early morning conversations? conversations? What are we trying to produce with the lectures, the mini lectures? If you had to paint a portrait of the child that you are trying to produce, what would that portrait look like?

Maybe a lot of us have never thought of it that way. I think we all have general ideas. And you could probably list them fairly quickly, things that you would like to accomplish.

[12:55] But maybe you're saying, or maybe you're saying, well, I don't know what I'm looking for, but I'll know it when I see it. A lot of us don't parent with a unifying theme, an overarching plan, a mission statement, a grand agenda.

We don't have big 15 to 20 year goals. And trust me, I get that. I really do get that. Parenting is like being dropped into a race car that's already going 120 miles an hour.

You've never driven before. And you're in the race. And you're going. And it's day one. And it's day two. And it's day three. And you're just trying not to crash the car.

You're in survival mode. And, of course, the terrible secret is that 120 miles an hour is as slow as it's going to go. The car's going to pick up speed.

And so babies are hard. And, of course, all of us who have had babies were past that stage. We look at it and think, oh, it would be so easy just to have a baby again. Of course, that's not where they're at. The point is, all along the way, you're facing challenges you've never faced before.

[14:08] And you're getting smacked in the face with everyday life. And I understand that. The car isn't slowing down. The car is speeding up. The challenges keep coming. New problems.

New thoughts. New issues. New things that you have to think through. They come along. It was the comedian Jim Gaffigan. He has five or six children of his own.

He said, what's it like having a sixth kid? People ask me. And he says, it's like drowning and then someone hands you a baby. And that's what parenting can be like.

Parenting is hard. It's hard to get out of survival mode. To get our brains, our hearts, our minds above just surviving.

But, and sometimes, and I put this in my notes, sometimes surviving is the wonderful grace of God. So, if that's where you're at, my heart's right there with you.

[15:12] I totally understand. We've been there plenty of times. But I still think we need to have an overarching goal. A unifying theme.

A string that ties our parenting together. Because that's the only thing that's going to keep us from just settling for reactive parenting.

Where you're just going from situation to situation and you're reacting. Piecemeal parenting. Like popcorn, not connected parenting.

And so, where we're more like the ball in the pinball game rather than the person playing the pinball game. and so many parents have lost their way or they've never had their way in the first place.

And so thousands of Christian parents have begun to think, you know, I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know where I'm going.

[16:15] I don't know why I'm doing what I'm doing. And so they lack the big picture. They lack what God's overarching job description is for parents.

And so, yes, they want their children to believe. Yes, they want their children to obey. Maybe, you know, we hope they'll be good athletes and we hope they'll be good musicians.

We hope they'll have extra talents. We want them to get good grades. We want them to find a good spouse. We want them to move out. And get a job, a career.

But on a day-to-day level, what happens so easily is that we just start reacting in all those situations. We react to what's in front of us.

We say and do things for our children and we're sincere about their spiritual lives. We want them to sit up and we want them to try to obey and we want them to speak up and we want them to eat their vegetables.

[17 : 16] But it's all reactive. It lacks the big picture and it doesn't have the full biblical perspective of what God is after and what God wants us to do.

And what tends to happen is when you're in that reactive stage or when you're just trying to manage and control things, well that's when it can lead to problems.

It can lead to disillusionment to just doubt all sorts of things. Let me just give you an example. Frank was a good father.

He was conscientious. He was diligent in his discipline. While his kids were at home they submitted to his authority. They obeyed him. In almost every way his children were model children.

And he took them to church and he taught them to obey, taught them to sit up, to speak out, to eat their vegetables. And while people at Frank's church looked on they thought he has his act together.

[18 : 34] This is a family that's doing it right. He's a good father. But now he doesn't look, he doesn't feel like a good father anymore. And he looks back and he says, what was the point?

And why is he saying that? Because, well, as soon as his son and his daughter got into college, they moved away. They quit going to church.

They quit the faith. They don't have a relationship with God and their relationship with their parents is barely there. Now, like, we can't simplify the situation into three easy explanations of why this happens.

Children have their own hearts and their own responses. We could, I mean, Adam and Eve had God as their father and they still managed to rebel.

They have their own hearts. They have their own responses to God. They have their own responses to their parents. Children aren't machines. They aren't computers that you put in the good stuff and you're going to get out the good stuff automatically.

[19 : 47] It doesn't work like that. They have fallen hearts. They need saved. They have their own attitudes and their own thoughts. But, in Frank's case at least, he didn't have the big picture.

What he did have was a neat system of control. What he did have was a neat system of controlling them and their behaviors and modifying them.

And he had it down really well. He was like an external thermostat. He was able to govern their temperature because he was there.

He was available. He was present. He was able to move them up and down. But when they left home, they didn't have an internal thermostat anymore. They didn't have an internal thermostat. Because in all of his control and all of his discipline, he never taught them the fear of the Lord or they never came to know the fear of the Lord. They themselves didn't have an internal thermostat to keep them at the right temperature.

[20 : 58] And so with the system of control gone, their lives showed what was in their heart the whole time. Now, every year it happens.

Suppose the Christian young people, they go off to college, they forsake the faith, they go to church for a few weeks, then it's one excuse after another, then it's no excuse at all.

And the question is, are they really forsaking the faith or do they never really have it to begin with? They grew up with all the right ingredients.

They grew up with the right thermostat, the right external thermostats. But when all those outside factors are gone, their hearts reveal themselves. Now, that's a common problem with just reactive parenting, where you're just trying to control, you're trying to manage and you're trying to handle the situation, but you don't have an overarching perspective, you don't have a big goal in mind.

Reactive parenting, it always goes down to the lowest common denominator of trying to manage the situation. And so it's content with behavior, because behavior is the squeaky wheel, isn't it?

[22 : 19] And the squeaky wheel gets the grease. If you have three kids and one's the one who's always misbehaving, they are getting a lot of the undue, or they're getting a lot of attention, aren't they?

And so the question is, is your parenting, is it, was it, will it be reactive? Will it be about control and behavioral regulation?

Or are you going to have a big picture of I want to instill in them the fear of the Lord? I want to impress upon them. I want to pray.

I want to do everything that I can do to give them that internal thermostat, that wisdom that Proverbs 1.9 is talking about, the fear of the Lord.

Do I want to pass it on to them as much as I am able, and do I want to pray for that? The other problem with reactive parenting is, and every parent can look in the mirror and see this in their own faces, that it's much more dependent on how I feel on any given day than something external to me.

[23:36] So much of it can end up being decided by my mood, where I'm at emotionally, what's going on with me that day as a parent.

And so, what was okay yesterday is all of a sudden not okay. And what made dad angry yesterday, he doesn't care about today. And kids will start having conversations saying, mom's really on it, or dad's feeling it today, or whatever.

They're going to be talking among each other to find out what's the parental weather like out there. How do we navigate today? Because today is different. You want to stay away from mom today, you want to stay away from dad, you better not leave your shoes out today, or dad's going to be all on top of you.

Is that what God wants, for our children to live in homes where it's always Hurricane Matthew, but we don't know where it's going? We don't know what's it going to be, sunny, good, bad?

Is that what God wants? Emotionally driven, behaviorally, just behavior, controlling behavior, that misses the heart, that has the veneer of Christianity, that takes them to church.

[24:51] So, there can be church, there can be all the rest, where the heart of the gospel is missing, where an insight into the child's heart is missing, where the fear of the Lord isn't there in a meaningful, powerful, productive way.

So, the parents aren't working out of the fear of the Lord. They're not working out of what we just talked about like the last eight or nine or ten weeks of a big, holy, righteous, loving, wise, great God who is present, who is good, who is faithful, who loves.

He's not the reality that they're working out of. Instead of that, what is there? Well, it would just be all the God's substitutes, the idols, love of ease, love of money, control, peace, accomplishment, appearance.

So, God isn't driving the family car. There's a whole little series of idols that take turns driving the family car. There. So, what is the big picture?

What's the big picture that we need to have? What's the theme? Well, we need to realize that our children don't just have behavioral problems.

[26:23] And I know I say that, and I know everyone here probably says, yes, I know that, but I also know from my own experience that a lot of times when it comes down to it, I think that's all it is. I react like it's just a behavioral problem.

And so, we need to realize that our children don't just have behavioral problems, they have heart problems, that the core of who they are is not a law problem, it's an awe problem.

That's how Paul Tripp puts it. Every child is controlled by his love and his loyalty to something. And we all come into the world with our love and our loyalty and our hearts given to ourselves, to me, and not to God.

And that's their biggest problem in life is that. The biggest person in their life is them. The biggest person in our child's life is them.

We'd like to think it was us, we'd like to think it was God, but by nature, the biggest, most influential person, the person they listen to and love and are loyal to, by nature is themselves.

[27:43] And that's why we need Ezekiel 36, 26, a new heart. And they believe two very seductive lies. The first is autonomy.

I'm autonomous. I'm self-ruling. I'm independent. independent. I have the right to do what I want. I have the right for my life to be the way I want my life to be.

I'm entitled to what I want. You see that in a toddler. You see that in an eight-year-old. You see it in a teenager. And it's not just a child problem.

You see it in ourselves. They think everyone owes them. Life owes them. The problem is only God is entitled. Only God is entitled to something.

But they aren't in awe of God. They're in awe of themselves. And so it's a matter of what's convenient for them. When it's best for them, they'll obey. So it's not a law problem.
[28:49] It's not merely they're not conforming to the law, although they aren't. It's deeper than that. It's an awe problem because the reason they're not conforming to the law is because their heart doesn't want to.

Their heart is governed by greater powers than God and his law. Their heart is governed by the power of themselves. They're autonomous. The second lie is they're self-sufficient. I have everything I need in myself.

And what I mean by that is I'm smart enough. I don't need you to teach me. I know the situation. I understand the situation. That's why we have such a hard time correcting some of our children. That's why we have such a hard time being corrected ourselves because we just by nature think I'm smart enough. I see the situation clearly. I'm strong enough.

I can do what I'm supposed to do and I know what it is. I don't need help understanding the world. I understand the world just fine. I understand myself just fine.

[29:53] I understand God, other people just fine. I'm not spiritually powerless. I can save myself. It's really in my back pocket. I can do it. I can pull the ticket out any time I want.

Every child is a Pelagian by birth, a Pharisee, thinking salvation is in their back pocket. They just need to punch the ticket. Again, what are those two things?

In four words, it's big me, little God. Parents aren't just up against behavioral issues. It's not just a matter of authority.

They aren't up against an authority issue. They aren't up just against ignorance. Children aren't just ignorant. How often we think their misbehavior is a mental problem, a forgetful problem.

So, we think for them it's just a matter of knowing it. And if they just knew it and they remembered it, they would do it.

[31:05] The question I have for all of us is, does that work for us? is it good enough to just know it and remember it? Does that automatically come to I'll do it?

Well, a lot of us know the right thing to do, but knowing it isn't enough for us to do it. So, they need more than the right law system.

And let me be absolutely clear. They need, I mean, Deuteronomy 6 is obviously super clear. What do they need? They need to know the law. They need to have it impressed upon their hearts.

They need to know what is right. It's for their own good that they do it. It's for their own, it's their wisdom to do it. And they need rules. They need the enforcement of those rules.

They need God's rules, and then they need our rules that reflect God's wisdom. They need to know your authority. You need to practice your authority in a godly way.

[32:16] God has given it to you. And you need to exercise it. You need to not be afraid of using it. But use it in a godly, Christ-like way. And this is what I want to say, though.

It's all necessary, but it's not sufficient. It's all necessary, but it's not enough.

And if it were enough, Jesus wouldn't have had to live a perfect life. He wouldn't have had to come and die and rise again.

See, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the fact that God had to send his own son, and that son had to live a perfect life under the law, obeying every part of it, and then dying and rising again, that gospel, the reality of that, pokes a hole in the kind of parenting that is just about behavior and rules and authority.

as good and necessary as they are. They are necessary, but they aren't enough. Because if they were enough, then Jesus would not have had to come.

[33:31] So they need more than parenting that addresses their mind and their behavior. They need parenting that is always directing them to the fear of the Lord, God, to living with God, to understanding who God is, to living in the light that God is big.

He's Isaiah 40 great. He is gracious. He is present. And he is a saving God. You can count on him. You can rely on him. They need that impressed upon them.

They need that modeled for them. And so what is the big agenda, unifying theme, the melody that should tie all of our parenting together, it's the fear of the Lord that the gospel teaches us.

It's the fear of the Lord that the gospel teaches us. It's the fear of the Lord that the created world is shouting, that the lightning and the thunder and the rain was speaking this morning to us.

That's what they need to see. But they need to see the creation, but they need to have it interpreted for them. Who is the God that rides upon the thunderclouds? Who is the one that sends the lightning on its way?

[34 : 49] They need to have their world interpreted for them in light of the gospel, in light of what the Bible teaches. is they don't need little band-aids on their misbehavior.

They need a full, they need a complete physical therapy, so to speak. A deep, profound, continuous treatment of their hearts, of their awe problem.

Because they're always making that substitution, they're always living in light of someone is great, and usually it's them, but we need to be continually pulling down them and putting up God. And that, I think, is what Moses is talking about when he says, impress this word on their heart.

Impress it. So when you impress something, you're going to heat it up, and you're going to press it hard, you're going to make it go deep, and it's not just every now and then.

What does he say when you sit down, when you rise up, when you're at home, when you're on the road? See, there's a theme, Deuteronomy is saying, Moses is saying, there should be a theme to your whole parenting.

[36 : 03] It's God's commands, it's the fear of the Lord, it's always there, it's what the word says, and he says put the word over your doors, tied on your head, tied on your hands, and so on.

It's what Proverbs is talking about when he says, listen, my son, listen. You're grabbing them by the face, and you're saying, listen.

Those are earnest words, there's words with feeling behind them. That's not just reacting. I have a goal. I'm a blacksmith, I got a big project to do, it's going to require heat, it's going to require hammering, it's going to require diligence, it's going to require pain, that's what I need to do.

And that's what Proverbs is after, he's like, this is my son, I'm going to teach him wisdom. I've seen what folly does, I'm going to teach my son, I'm going to teach my boy, I'm going to teach my girl wisdom.

It's what Psalm 78 is about, where Asaph is saying, remember your history. There's more than one psalm that does this, and I think we should notice that.

[37 : 14] They give this anthology, this cursory view of all of history. And so, what do we need to be doing? We need to be talking about God's great wonders in the past.

What's he like? What does this teach us about God? What did he do? What does this mean that he is like for us? What he can be like for you? We're drawing the connection between who God is and who he was in the past and who God is right now for our child.

It's Psalm 145. One generation will commend your works to another. They will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty.

And I will meditate on your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works. And I will proclaim your great deeds. They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.

It's all the time. It's enthusiastic. It's joyful. They will sing. It's joyful. Joy makes learning sweet.

[38 : 38] Joy helps your children to learn. joy. We think yelling and being abrasive, that will drive it home. But God has actually made us that when we receive the command joyfully with sweetness, it goes deep.

It goes easy. Deuteronomy talks about this. It talks about eating. Deuteronomy 14 talks about eating your tithe before the Lord. Every year they were supposed to gather their tithe and then they were to take it to the house of God where he was going to show them.

He says, there you with your whole family with God you should eat your tithe celebrating. It was like this holiday. You're celebrating with God.

Deuteronomy 14. 23 tells us why. So that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always. What was the purpose of this celebration, this party?

It was to teach the children, it was to teach themselves the fear of the Lord, the goodness and the greatness and the bigness of God. Learning the fear of the Lord isn't a terrible burden.

[39 : 55] It's right at home at a party and the holidays at a feast. It's saying, this is God, he's good, he's big, he provides, we can trust him, he speaks to us, let's celebrate.

That's what the fear of the Lord looks like when you're teaching it to your children. And so the holidays are coming up. Will you teach them the fear of the Lord? Will it be about him or will it be about lesser things?

Well, I'm completely out of time here. It's every day. It's at school, it's at the zoo, it's in the kitchen, it's hiking through the woods.

It's always drawing their attention to what God has said, to who God is, who he can be for them. But you can't pass on what you don't have yourself.

Can't pass on what you don't own. So the question is, where is your heart at? Are you growing in independence? Not in independence, are you growing in dependence?

[41 : 13] Are you getting rid of complaining? Are you looking at life through the lens of the gospel? Are you looking at God through the lens of Jesus Christ and the gospel, through the cross? Are you growing in your faith?

Are you growing in your perspective that, you know what, God is big? He is great, he is good, he is present, he is here right now, and I can trust him. And so which way are you going?

Are you growing in the fear of the Lord yourself, or are you not? And then last of all, you have to realize this is something that God needs to do. This is Ezekiel 36 again.

And so if God has to put in the new heart, if the spirit of the fear of the Lord has to be instilled in their hearts, then what we need to do is we need to pray. Because we can't do that.

We can't pull the Holy Spirit down and put him in our children's hearts. We can't dive in and do a heart transplant for our own children. If we aren't praying, then we aren't parenting.

[42 : 13] If we aren't praying, if we aren't calling on God to do what only he can do, then all this is going to be in vain. He has to put the fear of the Lord in our children's hearts.

So the question is, are we going to do our part and pray? Or do we just try to do our part and don't pray? Or do we do nothing and just wait for God to do something?

The only biblical answer is that we do what God has told us to do, and we pray for God to do what only he can do. Well, our time is up.

We are dismissed.