

**“Thrive”:** Forging a Vital Faith  
From Fear to Trust  
2-24-19  
Text: Proverbs 1:7; Psalm 33:8



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**Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context...** (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

*“What do you think of when you hear the phrase, ‘fear of the Lord’? What are some qualities of those whom you would consider reverent?”*

*“Is it difficult for you to reconcile the ideas of fear of God and love for God? Why do you think they are often considered mutually-exclusive?”*

*“That’s the whole story: fear God and obey his commands, for this is the wholeness of man...” Ecclesiastes 12:13*

*“What do you think of Solomon’s epilogue? Do you hear it as a frustrated resignation or as a thoughtful admonition?”*

*“Is there a place in your life where a healthy experience of the fear of God might eliminate a fear-filled circumstance? Is there a fear that you could name as a first step toward freedom and healing?”*

**Whatever you fear establishes the boundaries in your life (both in healthy and unhealthy ways).**

*“Where is your fear of God inviting into some faith-filled risk?”*

*“Where is your fear of God preventing you from trying?”*

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**Teaching Notes...**

**When the reality of God’s love for you finally gets your attention, arouses your imagination, and captures your heart, you will have no further reason to doubt the extent of his commitment. You will no longer hesitate to abandon your way of life and trust in his. You’d be willing to follow him anywhere.**

The Christian faith has never been a static location (a decision; a doctrinal stance), but a spiritual journey (“*leave*”, “*go*”, “*enter*”, “*possess*”) which helps locate us and invites us toward a more compelling vision human flourishing.

The journey is not about **wandering**. It’s not just about ‘setting out’ but setting out in discovery: “*a land to which I will guide you*” (Genesis 12). It is to willingly and increasingly abandon our own agenda and self-directed pursuits and defer to a good God.

We are breaking free of the limitations of fear by entrusting ourselves to God and trusting ourselves with God [**Fear to Trust**]

At the epicenter of our Story is God. He is offered to us as both transcendent (uniquely other) and immanent (able to be experienced). Our understanding of him and our interaction with him always becomes distorted when we fail to embrace both sides of the paradox.

**Transcendence matters because I need God to be “other”--- “larger than life”.**

If he is transcendent, but uninvolved, I am left to assume that he is either hostile or indifferent.

**Immanence matters because I need to know that he is both aware and engaged.**

If he is immanent, but not transcendent, then he is subject to the same limitations that I face and, therefore, not worthy of awe.

In the ancient world, “order” was a central value. It’s why in the creation story, God is celebrated as having brought order out of the existing chaos. So, knowledge and wisdom were associated with seeking and establishing order.

They believed the ‘*fear of the Lord*’ was essential to this wholeness--- this integration--- because he was the one who established it. Order (functionality; wholeness) could only be realized as humanity understood God, his ways, and his expectations.

Describing someone as a ‘fool’ (or their actions as ‘foolish’, Psalm 14:1) was to depict someone who was contributing to the disorder in their lives/relationships because they were determined to find order and functionality in something/someone other than God.

*“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...”*

*“... the beginning...”* the controlling part; the headwaters. If you re-trace the river, you will eventually discover its source.

We don't really hear or read much about the *“fear of God”* because it seems antiquated. It harkens to a day of threatening tent-revivalists or Puritanical codes (rigid morality) which confirmed what we already suspected: God is generally annoyed with us and the mess we have made of his good world. So, we attempted to use religion as a means of developing a new system of God-manners that demonstrate the proper respect and get us back in his good graces.

*“For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.”* Romans 3:20

My sin was meant to frustrate and disappoint me and propel me into the embrace of grace.

*“In one sense, we are encouraged to **love** God with all our heart. In another, we are called upon to **fear** God. Are love of God and fear of God mutually-exclusive or are they necessary parallels?”*

**“Fear of the Lord” ...**

**... is the stock, biblical term for this awareness of and response to the revealing of God in your life.**

It's not some irrational God-phobia that we outgrow with maturity. In fact, it's indicative of maturing love.

**... speaks to the right posture toward him which is not simply a reaction to his “God-ness”, but a right relationship to be developed.**

If what God was after was a ‘reaction’ from humanity, intimidation and demonstrations of power were his best options.

But, if what God desired was a ‘relationship’, he would have to find a way that was more inspirational--- a way to overwhelm us with love.

**... is an “orienting awareness”.** Fear of the Lord allows us to know our place; to come to terms with both our finiteness (limitations) and our incredible worth. We are finite. Limited. Dependent. Chronically discontent. Easily distracted. Effortlessly entertained. We are holy. Chosen. Loved.

Perhaps the best singular word to describe such a posture is, **“reverence”** [‘fear’; ‘that which inspires awe’; ‘respect’; ‘deference’]

## **Reverence is...**

... the capacity to stand before something bigger and better than yourself and the experience the sense of “vertigo” which accompanies it. It forces us to “look up” because without it, we are stuck with whatever is right in front of us. We live “irreverently”.

... a kind of radical amazement that somehow draws you closer and, at the same time, causes you to feel as if you should maintain a safe distance.

## **Humans have, for centuries, had this love-hate relationship with God.**

We wanted to be close to him, but we were afraid, not only for fear of who he is, but for fear of who we are! We desire his love, but we feel that we have to earn it, which causes us to resent him, and just as there is “*no fear in love*”, there is “*no love in fear*” (1 John 4).

## **Fear of God is part of the anatomy of love itself.**

I live with a fear that I may disappoint God, but not in fear that I am a disappointment to God.

It’s a fear of violating love. A fear of not being trustworthy. It’s that kind of reverence that keeps us aware of how our actions reflect on the God we are imaging.

When we authentically love another person, we will always live within a healthy tension that we may not do justice to love. That we may disrespect another or betray their trust. This is a benevolent fear.

## **If you want to live in the “*fear of the Lord*”, here’s what you will have to forfeit:**

~ the **anxiety** which accompanies your inadequacies. You’ll need to learn to trust the God who is both “holy” and “wholly devoted” to you.

*“In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence”* (Proverbs 14:26)

~ your **frantic pursuit of life** in exchange for “rest”. Grace is God’s way of saying, “*I’m not goin’ anywhere. I won’t be content until you live in that love.*”

*“Surely his salvation (wholeness; shalom) is near those who fear him.”* Psalm 85:9

~ ‘**guilt**’ as your controlling motivation for your pursuits.

*“If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.”* 1 John 4:18

~ ‘**shame-filled**’ tendencies toward cover-up for radical acceptance; life in the wide-open light of love.

*“But you offer forgiveness, that we might learn to fear you.”* Psalm 130:4

~ **predictability and certainty** for the risky, but dependable, venture of faith.

*“The fear of the LORD leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble.”* Proverbs 19:23

~ **‘lifeless formalism’** as a strategy for pursuing God, and instead, be directed and enabled by the Holy Spirit as the lingering, loving presence of Jesus.

*“He fulfills the desire of those who fear him...”* Psalm 145:19

**Fear of God leads to love for God which results in trust of God which demonstrates itself in uncomplicated obedience to God.**

When I am motivated by ‘love’, I’m less conscious of the rules and more conscious of the relationship... which allows me to more naturally honor the rules.

Over the years, I have given myself less to trying to trust God, and more to knowing his love, which has caused me to trust God more! (1 John 4:16)

*“I heard your voice and I was afraid...”* Genesis 3:10

The most grievous statement made to God by his creation. Imagine having your own children ‘shrink-away’ from you in fear when they hear you coming in the door. It means that there is either something about you that’s producing insecurities in them, or something within themselves that is inciting such a response.

**It was not until Jesus that humanity encountered God for who he really is and our default-response was something other than fear.**

Jesus came and offered us an image of God that could be both loved and feared. He didn’t seem to use his God-leverage to control or manipulate us. He offered himself to us in such a way as to help diminish any fear that we might have about his general demeanor or his intentions toward us. In this scenario, we become less fearful of ourselves. God is likeable. I am loveable.