

**The Fear of God**  
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We are in a sermon series called Days of Awe. Last week Pastor Joe defined awe as “reverence, or fear, caused by something grand or powerful.” a very strong feeling of wonder. We seem to have lost that part of the meaning of awe.

Pastor Joe taught us that we must balance two theological concepts of God – His immanence – which means His nearness – and His transcendence – which means He is the creator who is above everything else in creation. He is a holy God who is an all-consuming fire.

So – the balance is that God is far above everything – but He is as near as our breath! God dwells in unapproachable light – but His Spirit lives within us! God calls us His friend – but He is also the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! Immanence without transcendence results in overfamiliarity with God where you treat Him like a buddy, and you have no awe of God at all. Matthew 8:23-27 is one of the best passages describing the awe of God.

*And when Jesus got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. And behold, there arose a great storm in the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves; but He Himself was asleep. And they came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing!" And He said to them, "Why are you timid, you men of little faith?" Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and it became perfectly calm. And the men marveled, saying, "What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"*

The disciples saw God display such power that they marveled at Him. The marvel was not without a great reverential fear and awe. The Amplified Bible says it like this:

*And they were filled with great awe and feared exceedingly and said one to another, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey Him?"*

No scene could have been a greater display of the power of Jesus. The darkness; the waves; the terrible winds; the ship is tossing back and forth. The disciples are afraid. And with a single word Jesus calms the storm. This was a grand and majestic at the same time. The disciples were awestruck. In fact, they had more fear of the Lord than fear of the storm.

They'd spent much time with Jesus and they thought they knew Him, but now they wondered, “How far above a mere mortal He must be!” In awe, amazement and fear, they stood in the presence of the one who must be God Himself, for none other than God could calm a storm. This is what a reverential fear of God looks like.

Today I am speaking on “The Fear of God.” You don’t hear much about the fear of God these days, even though it’s all through the Bible. I think many people don’t have a fear of God because they have so many bad fears they struggle with. For instance –

You may have a fear of failure, which hinders you from trying anything that is not completely safe. So, if God asks you to do something your bad fear keeps you from fearing God enough to do it. You fear failure more than you fear God.

Or, maybe you live with a fear of rejection and you’re afraid to do anything that might cause someone to criticize or dislike you. So, you fear man more than God.

Maybe you fear being lonely, so you choose ungodly relationships. You fear being alone more than you fear God.

The truth is that about 90 percent of the things we fear never happen. Still, I understand what it’s like to struggle with fear.

When I was younger, I worked for Southwest Airlines. In the five years I worked there, Pastor Joe and I took close to fifty trips. I loved to fly...the second I boarded the plane I would feel relaxed and I looked forward to hours of uninterrupted time. I had absolutely no fear of flying.

UNTIL...I was diagnosed with a brain tumor and had to have an MRI. Fortunately, God healed me, but somehow the MRI caused me to be claustrophobic. I’ll never forget the first flight Pastor Joe and I took after my MRI. As soon as we stepped onto the plane this gripping fear came over me. With everything in me I forced myself to take my seat.

Pastor Joe sits down next to me, opens his book, and begins to read... He had been looking forward to this moment for weeks. And simultaneously I freak out. I bolt out of my seat saying, *“I have to get off of this plane.”* He’s like *“What? - what are you doing?”*

After flying fearlessly hundreds of times...I was terrified of flying. It took me a year to overcome this fear, but I did!

Think about it...

- How many years have you wasted on fear?
- How many opportunities have you missed because of fear?
- How many people have you hurt because of fear?

Whatever your fear may be...God can set you free.

You don’t have to live your life in fear.

You don’t have to be controlled by fear.

You don’t have to give in to fear.

2 Timothy 1:7 says:

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

This fear is not from God, it's from the Devil. Satan wants to paralyze you with fear, but God wants to give you power, love and a sound mind.

The most common command in the Bible is "Fear not." If God commands us not to fear – then it must be possible to not fear.

In Bible days followers of Christ lived with the constant threat of death. Many were beaten, stoned and left to die. Jesus was very aware of this, so He said in Matthew 10:28-31

*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (This is referring to God). Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So, don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*

Jesus is saying don't be afraid those who can kill your physical body... because they cannot kill your soul. God is the only one with the power over life and death. So, fear God – because God is able to destroy both body and soul. Man may kill our body, but he can't condemn us to hell.

So, don't be afraid of those who could kill you – because that's all they can do... instead *Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

You see to die is one thing, but to die and go to hell is another. Satan does not have the power to send you to hell. God alone is sovereign over life and death and God alone is to be feared. So, we overcome all other fears by fearing only God.

The fear of God is the fear that cancels all other fear.

- The fear of God cancels fear of man.
- The fear of God cancels fear of death.
- The fear of God cancels fear of failure.
- The fear of God cancels fear of rejection.

So, we overcome natural fear with the fear of God. Yet, most of us live our lives full of fear. Instead of fearing God we fear everything else.

So, let me ask you - Are you ready to overcome fear in your life? Or better said...are you ready to overcome all other fears by fearing God instead? As I said, the fear of God is a reverential fear, or an awe and respect. The word reverential means to defer. So, to have a reverential fear of God means to defer to God...

To do what He wants not what we want. That means:

- We choose to believe His word over what Satan is telling us.
- We trust God even when circumstances seem contradictory.
- We rely on His power, His love, His grace, and His goodness.

This is how we fear God.

Listen to these verses about the fear of God:

- The fear of the Lord is to hate evil. (Prov. 8:13)
- Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth with turmoil. (Prov. 15:16)
- The fear of the Lord is sanctifying - cleansing the heart, conscience and mind. (Psa. 19:9)
- The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life. (Prov. 14:27)
- The fear of the Lord helps us worship God.
- For to those who fear Him there is no want. (Psa. 34:9)

Psalm 111:10 says:

*The reverent fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do the will of the Lord. Their praise of Him endures forever.*

Many people do not understand the fear of God, yet it is the beginning of wisdom and understanding.

Notice that the fear of God also results in obedience and worship! If we are lacking in either of those areas – it could be we aren't walking in the fear of God! Also, notice that the fear of the Lord is equated with doing His will. Psalm 128:1 says:

*Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in His ways.*

If we fear Him, we will live our lives according to His ways. But first we must know His ways. Then we must do what God says. Deuteronomy 13:4 says:

*You will walk after the Lord your God and fear Him and keep His commandments and obey His voice and serve Him and cling to Him.*

If we fear God, we will have a wholesome dread of disobeying Him.

People who fear God...

Obey Him instantly

Obey Him even if it doesn't make sense

Obey Him even if it hurts

Obey Him even if they don't see the benefit.

- Gen. 22:12 tells us that Abraham's obedience to sacrifice his only son was proof that he feared God.

- Ex. 20:18 tells us that out of fear of God Joseph obeyed God and spared his brothers lives.
- Heb. 11:7 tells us that in in holy fear Noah obeyed God and built an ark.

One of the greatest examples of this in my life had to do with my call to ministry. I've had a lot of jobs in my life, but ministry is by far the hardest. I told Pastor Joe just the other day that ministry is possibly the hardest thing I've ever done but it's also the most eternally fulfilling thing I've ever done.

In 2 Cor. 11: Paul talks about all his trials. He mentions being in prison, being beaten and stoned, facing death, being shipwrecked, being in danger, being hungry and cold and weary, and then he says in verse 28:

*Besides everything else, I face the daily inescapable pressure of my concern for all the churches.*

Paul is basically saying that all his struggles were little in comparison to his concern for the church. You see being in ministry can be really difficult. It can really hurt. It's pretty much a constant warfare. However, I have too much reverential fear of God to ever quit. I thought about it a few times, but I fear of God too much to disobey His call. So, here I am - and here I will be unless God says otherwise. I understand what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:16:

*If I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.*

So, I know what it means to obey God through the pain and difficulties. I have too much fear of God to not obey the call of God. Maybe that's why I am so grieved by the lack of obedience to God's will among God's people.

I know we all disobey sometimes, but many have a total disregard for obeying God. It's one thing when people in the world ignore obedience to God. It's still disheartening for sure, but it's to be expected. But what's really heartbreaking is when God's people have little to no awe, respect or fear of God.

- They don't want to hear truth, so they ignore the counsel of their pastor, parent or authority over them.
- They justify their behavior and call lies truth and truth lies.
- They ignore His commands and go their own way.
- They do what they want and expect God to bless them.

Then if they are blessed, they think "It's all good. I can do what I want, and God will still bless me. After all, look how blessed I am."

They think because God is full of mercy and grace that they can get away with doing what they want with little or no regard for what God wants.

They have lost the fear of God. Ecclesiastes 8:11-13 describes this mentality.

*When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong. Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.*

Listen, I want to clarify something here. The fear of God does not mean that God is this mean tyrant who is just waiting for you to disobey so He can punish you. He's not looking down from heaven ready to punish you the second you sin or disobey. No, God is love and He disciplines those He loves. 1 John 4:18 says:

*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*

We should not have a bad fear of God just waiting to punish us. If we really believe He loves and cares for us...we won't have fear. Every single thing He does – from the least to the greatest - is for our good.

I understand suffering consequences in life, but don't confuse that with a constant fear of God's punishment. God wants us to succeed, and to flourish, and to have joy, and prosperity, and health, and purpose. He wants us to live free of fear.

But we must fear Him more than we fear circumstances, or people, or situations. And that means we must believe His word and His word says He is compassionate, caring, forgiving, and loving. Even when we mess up we don't have to fear. When we have a healthy reverence and trust in God – the less we will fear anything else.

So, to overcome fear with fear we must fear God by believing He loves us and cares for us and trusting Him as a result of this. Then we must learn His ways and walk in them. Then when we do this, we will reap the benefits.

I was amazed when I did a word study on the benefits of fearing God.

Luke 1:50 – God's mercy extends to those who fear Him.

Acts 10:34-36 - He accepts those who fear Him and do what is right.

Deut. 6:24 - Those who fear Him will always prosper and be kept alive.

Job 28:28 - The fear of the Lord brings wisdom.

Ps 31:19 – He stores up goodness for those who fear Him.

Ps 25:14 - He confides in those who fear Him.

Ps 33:18 – His eyes are on those who fear Him.

Ps 34:7 - The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and He delivers them.

Ps 34:9 - those who fear Him lack nothing.

Ps 85:9 - His salvation is near those who fear Him.

Ps 103:17 - His love is with those who fear Him.

Ps 115:13 - He will bless those who fear Him.

Ps 145:19 - He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; He hears their cry and saves them.

Ps 147:11 - He delights in those who fear Him.

Prov. 1:7 – The beginning of knowledge is for those who fear Him.

Prov. 10:27 - He adds length of life for those who fear Him.

Prov. 14:27 – The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.

Prov. 16:6 - Through the fear of the Lord a man avoids evil.

When we fear the Lord, we overcome we get all these benefits, too. So, let me ask you: are you ready to overcome fear with the fear of God? Psalm 34:4 says

*I sought the Lord and He heard me and delivered me from all of my fears. Will you choose to fear the Lord above all other fears?*

You can trust Him because if He cares for a sparrow - how much more does, He care for you?

He knows the number of hairs on your head...so surely, He cares about everything you're going through.

When you fear the Lord – He will deliver you from all other fear! Not some fear or most fear or all fear except the one that's plagued you your whole life! No! Fear the Lord and He will deliver you from all fear!

You overcome all other fear with the fear of the Lord!

You overcome the fear of man by fearing the Lord who made man!

You overcome the fear of Satan by fearing the Greater One within you!

You overcome the fear of failure and rejection by fearing the Lord who said – “If God is for you, who can be against you!”

You don't have to fear fearing the Lord because, Nothing can separate you from God's love: and He works all things out for your good!!