

The Fear of the Lord

Proverbs 9:10

FEAR FACTOR

During the height of the reality TV show craze one program tested the limits of a person's phobia with challenges meant to disgust, terrify or scare them from completing their task. The reward for facing their fear was the chance to win a big cash prize. According to the NBC website description:

Fear Factor is the competition reality series in which contestants must decide if they have the guts and determination to face their fears while outpacing the competition. This hit TV series originally ran on NBC from 2001 to 2006, then returned with new episodes and even bigger stunts in 2011.¹

The normal format involved a team to complete three professional stunts to win \$50,000. The first stunt is designed to physically test each of the contestants or teams (for example, jumping from one building to the next or hanging from a helicopter and collecting flags on a ladder). The second stunt is meant to mentally challenge. Eating stunts entail ingesting vile animal parts, live bugs, or a blended concoction of multiple items; animal stunts entail immersing one's head or entire body in animals considered to be disgusting or intimidating; retrieval stunts entail retrieving items or gross objects (often by mouth) hidden in disgusting substances, or live animals (such as sit in a tub of snakes as long as they could).

The third and final stunt is usually something from an extreme type of stunt seen in an action film. Like the first stunt, it usually involves heights, water, vehicles, or some combination of the three. The player or team with the best performance this round wins the grand prize, usually \$50,000, and had the privilege of being informed by Joe Rogan that "evidently, fear is not a factor for you!"²

Fear evokes many responses from people. There are those who can face their fears, while others are immobilized. Fear can either work as a positive, inspiring motivator or negative, paralyzing deterrent. The object of the fear is what determines your ability to handle it.

GODLY WISDOM vs. WORLDLY WISDOM

Unlike the goal of a TV game show, the prize found in the book of Proverbs is **WISDOM**. *Wisdom* is used 115x in Proverbs alone. It is the book of *practical theology* where God's purpose is to teach His children how to live wisely in a broken world system. Many people view "spiritual living" as detached from "real life", that there are times to be spiritual but the rest of life is lived in the *here-and-now*. But the Bible does not separate the two, it does not bifurcate between the **practical** and **theological**. The two are inexplicably intertwined; your spiritual life and your physical life are woven together like the work of a seamstress fashioning a single garment.

¹ <https://www.nbc.com/fear-factor/about>

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fear_Factor

The book of Proverbs teaches you how the theological meets the practical. In the Scriptures it is simply called **wisdom**. But not just any kind of wisdom, it is the wisdom that James defines as “from above.”

^{ESV} **James 3:17-18** *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

Since it is from above it is Godly wisdom and stands in contrast to Worldly wisdom. Scripture distinguishes between these two types of wisdom because they are opposing worldviews. Godly wisdom understands the world from the reality of its Creator and Ruler. Worldly wisdom views life from a finite perspective that is shaped by limited personal experiences. **GODLY WISDOM HAS ITS STARTING POINT WITH GOD; WORLDLY WISDOM’S ORIGIN IS WITH MAN.**

You must *be aware* of both godly and worldly wisdom, but the God-fearing person must *beware* of worldly wisdom. This is the subtle trap in our current culture today. As society “progresses” in its policies and perspectives, there are many forms worldly wisdom takes that sound true and right, giving the appearance of wisdom. But the litmus test for wisdom is not how it “sounds” or if it *echoes* a truth. The answer key for determining godly wisdom from worldly wisdom is the: **AUTHORITY OF ITS SOURCE.**

Where does this wisdom originate from and on whose authority is this wisdom dispensed? Be careful whose “wisdom” you quote; beware of whose authority you listen to for obtaining wisdom. Even if Dr. Phil echoes biblical principles, is he your authoritative source in obtaining wisdom? **CONSIDER THE SOURCE; DETERMINE ON WHOSE AUTHORITY; BE CAUTIOUS OF THE MEANS BY WHICH IT IS DISPENSED.**

^{NAU} **1 Corinthians 3:19** *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS."*

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 1:21** *For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.*

Colossians 2:23 *These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.*

So if the goal is obtaining godly wisdom, where do we start? Simply at the beginning: **FEAR OF THE LORD.** This is where David started with Solomon, it is how Solomon constructed his Proverbs, and it is always where God begins with His children. Like the instruction manual for a new tool, a child’s toy, or exciting board game, **YOU CAN SECURE GODLY WISDOM BY STEPPING ONTO GOD’S PATHWAY CALLED THE FEAR OF THE LORD.**

I. WHAT THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS

^{NET} **PROVERBS 9:10** *The beginning of wisdom is to fear the LORD, and acknowledging the Holy One is understanding.*

Proverbs spells out very clearly that godly wisdom begins with fearing the Lord. This phrase appears 19x in Proverbs alone, including 19x in the New Testament.³ In order to make sure you are on the right path, we need to define our terms.

THE DEFINITION

- The word “fear” (יָרָא *yirah*) in the Old Testament is used to describe “dread” (Deut.1:29), “terrified” (Jonah 1:10), “awe” (1 Kings 3:28), and “reverence” (Lev.19:3). It is a biblical term used to evoke a range of responses: 1) *the emotion of fear*, 2) *the intellectual anticipation of evil*, 3) *reverence or awe*, 4) *righteous behavior*, and 5) *formal religious worship*.⁴

A poignant moment in Israel’s history illustrates the experience of such *fear*. At the base of Mt. Sinai the people were gathered together to receive God’s Law through Moses. The Lord came down onto Mt. Sinai to meet His people and give them His Law. Exodus 19:16-20 describes the Lord’s descent onto the mountain with thunder, lightning, a thick cloud and a loud trumpet blast. The scene was both awe-inspiring and terrifying! Then the Lord spoke directly to the people His Commandments. The people’s reaction and the purpose of this event is summarized by Moses.

Exodus 20:18-21 *Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die." Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin."*

The Israelite’s experience captures both the meaning and purpose of what it means to fear the Lord. Their awesome encounter with Almighty God not only left them trembling, but was to be their motivation NOT to sin.

THE PREREQUISITE

- Just like college courses have prerequisite classes before completing a degree, the fear of the lord is your prerequisite course to completing your spiritual degree in godly wisdom. The meaning of this word “fear” is used most significantly when attached to “THE LORD”. It contains both aspects of *dread* and *awe* without paralyzing your actions, nor relegating it to polite deference. “*The fear of the Lord ultimately expresses reverential submission to the Lord’s will and thus characterizes a true worshiper.*”⁵ Job, David, and Isaiah also used this phrase to lay the foundation for grasping godly wisdom.

³ Richard Mayhue, *Practicing Proverbs*, 45

⁴ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 1980

⁵ Roy Zuck, *Learning from the Sages*, 175

Job 28:28 *Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.*

Psalm 19:9 *...the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;*

Psalm 111:10 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.*

Isaiah 33:6 *...the fear of the LORD is Zion's treasure*

If the goal of Proverbs is securing godly wisdom through the development of moral skill and mental discernment, then the fear of the Lord is the starting block, the controlling principle, the essential heart of wisdom. Like a runner who positions himself at the starting line with a determined focus to finish his race, so must you position yourself in the starter's lane of the fear of the lord to run your race in securing godly wisdom.

II. WHAT THE FEAR OF THE LORD INVOLVES

^{ESV} **PROVERBS 2:1-6** *My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*

DIVINE REVELATION

- The fear of the Lord that leads to godly wisdom can only come through **DIVINE REVELATION**. General Revelation is enough to reveal the “invisible attributes” of God⁶, but only through Special Revelation is God known. God specially revealed Himself through His Son Jesus Christ and through His written Word. Only through the inspired Word of God can you understand the fear of the Lord and know God. “*Fear for God is produced by the Word of God.*”⁷

How does this actually work? It begins by recognizing His superiority as Holy, Creator God. The fear of the Lord involves seeing God as He really is, then seeing yourself for who you really are. As you learn the fear of the Lord you naturally come to a position of true humility. Like the Israelites encounter with the Lord at Mt. Sinai, learning the fear of the Lord shows that you are not the most important, nor are you in control.

*“We learn here the important lesson that humility does not arise from thinking less of myself than I ought, but from thinking as much of God as I ought. It is not a case of a six-foot tall man trying to convince himself that he’s only two-feet tall. It is a case of a six-foot tall man standing next to an enormous, towering redwood, and seeing himself dwarfed by it.”*⁸

⁶ Romans 1:19-20

⁷ Dan Phillips, *God’s Wisdom in Proverbs*, 72

⁸ Phillips, 80

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

- The phrase “fear of the Lord” uses the personal name of God: *Yahweh* (יהוה). This is the name God revealed to Moses at the burning bush, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exo.3:14). The fear of the Lord is attached, not to an impersonal idea, ambiguous spirit, or all-powerful *force*; but to a personally active God, who is present with His people while faithfully keeping His promises.

Since the fear of the Lord involves a **PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP**, it demands *reconciliation* with God. No one can truly fear the Lord without making peace with God. A proper fear of the Lord comes from acknowledging your own sinfulness and unworthiness in the presence of a holy God. You recognize how you deserve the justice of God and are truly afraid. But it also involves embracing the free gift of God’s salvation through Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:11 *Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others... vs.18-20*
All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

RIGHTEOUS RESPONSE

- The fear of the Lord also involves a **RIGHTEOUS RESPONSE**. This response comes as a result of being in a personal relationship with the Lord. While addressing the children of Israel, Moses explained the responsibility expected of God’s people because they belong to Him.

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 *And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?*

The fear of the Lord becomes your motivation to live a life worthy of the calling to which you’ve been called (Col.1:9-14). A righteous response expresses itself in:

1) *Disciplined obedience*

When the Bible speaks of “**walking**” it means your daily living. God’s requirement for daily living is to live His way, by His design. This entails *listening, treasuring* and *searching* God’s Word to understand God’s way (2:1-5). This practically means *your daily obedience*. Obedience is a simple enough command, but one of the most difficult commitments to fulfill. Yet, obedience is the measure of how genuine your fear and love for God is.

2) *Whole-hearted trust*

The themes of “fear” and “trust” are often inter-changeable in Proverbs, like two sides of the same coin. The response of trust involving the fear of the Lord means to *place yourself under the complete and utter dependence of the Lord* (3:5-6). Just like obedience requires disciplined work, trusting God does not bypass your mind, but engages all of your will, intellect, knowledge and emotion.

3) *Fruitful faith*

The fear of the Lord is evidence of true faith. Unlike the fool who *despises wisdom and instruction* (1:7), *hates knowledge and does not choose* the fear of the Lord (1:29), the God-fearing person is someone who does not seek to be wise in their own eyes, but *turns away from evil* (3:7) and *faithfully walks in uprightness* (14:2). “*It is a faithful fear, it is a fearful faith. It is the beginning and the ongoing backbone of a relationship with God.*”⁹

III. WHAT THE FEAR OF THE LORD YIELDS

^{ESV} **PROVERBS 14:26-27** *In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge. The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.*

GOD’S KNOWLEDGE & WISDOM [1:7; 9:10]

- If you are gripped by the fear of the Lord, then you are ready to learn and apply God’s instruction, while receiving His correction humbly. It is a fear that clings to the Lord, rather than recoils. “*It is a fear that grounds a relationship on submissive reverence.*”¹⁰ The fruit of fearing the Lord yields intimate knowledge of the Holy One and brings forth God’s wisdom.

FULL LIFE [3:7-8; 10:27; 14:27]

- Life is more than just blood flowing through your body, it is the totality of your being. God’s offer of life contains both physical and spiritual benefit. Since “life” belongs to God, the fullness of life God gives is one that is purposeful, fruitful and useful. “*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly*” (John 10:10).

AVOIDANCE OF EVIL [Job 28:28; Pro.3:7; 8:13; 16:6; 19:23]

- The righteous affect of fearing the Lord is disdain for evil. Proper fear produces an active turning away from being involved in evil, along with a righteous hatred toward all that stands in opposition to holiness. Simply put, those who fear the Lord will stand against evil. They do not fear what such evil might do to them, because they are more concerned (fearful) of what God can do. “*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*” (Matthew 10:28)

⁹ Phillips, 83

¹⁰ Phillips, 86

SPIRITUAL CONFIDENCE [2:6-8; 14:26]

- Personal security and spiritual acceptance are precious gifts for those who fear the Lord. If you know you belong to God, then you can rest secure in His protection. Like a young child who rightly fears their parent, but confidently clings securely to them for their protection. When you live in the fear of the Lord, you can be confident that:¹¹
 - ✓ God loves and accepts you personally
 - ✓ God is in control of all the details of your life
 - ✓ What comes into your life has been “okayed” by His sovereign will
 - ✓ Your conscience can relax, and you can live without constantly looking over your shoulder in guilty fear

PRAISE [31:30; Psa.112:1]

- Ultimately, the person (woman!) who fears the Lord is praised by God. No higher reward can be received except the approving praise of your Heavenly Father. It is fitting that the qualities God finds praiseworthy in His children are those of a gentle, God-fearing heart. This praise resonates back to the Father as He bestows His praise toward those who fear Him. Fearing the Lord is truly a motivation to bring Him praise!

CONCLUSION

ECCLESIASTES 12:13 *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*

- Solomon’s motto through *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* is the **FEAR OF THE LORD**. As Solomon summarized at the end of his life, this is the whole duty of man. A life that fears the Lord is a life that enjoys all God has to offer while trusting Him in all that happens in your life.

In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, by C.S. Lewis, the author has two girls, Susan and Lucy, getting ready to meet Aslan the Lion, who represents Christ. Two talking animals, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, prepare the children for the encounter. “Ooh,” said Susan, “I thought he was a man. Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.” “That you will, dearie.” said Mrs. Beaver. “And make no mistake, if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knee's knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then isn't he safe?” said Lucy. “Safe?” said Mr. Beaver. “Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king, I tell you!”

¹¹ Phillips, 88

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Personal Relationship

Righteous Response

- 1) Disciplined obedience
- 2) Whole-hearted trust
- 3) Fruitful faith

III. What the Fear of the Lord yields

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Full Life [3:7-8; 10:27; 14:27]

Avoidance of Evil [Job 28:28; Pro.3:7; 8:13; 16:6; 19:23]

Spiritual confidence [2:6-8; 14:26]

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