

The Fear of the Lord

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[0:00] All right. Well, good morning, everybody. Just said my name is Ellie. I'm one of the pastors here. Good to be with you. We are going to be continuing our Proverbs series. So you can go ahead and flip there in your Bible. We're going to be bouncing around a couple of verses. If you don't have your Bible, no worries. It'll be on the screen behind us. Before we start, maybe a bit of a personal note. As many of you know, my mother recently passed away.

And I just really want to extend kind of the gratitude of just all the love that you guys have shown me and my dad through that time. Obviously, it leaves a hole. But man, that is so much easier when God's people are around you.

And so, you know, there's a thousand moments in that. So this will be the first Sunday I preach with her, you know, not on this earth. But it really is one of them times when it's not just a sermon. Like it because Jesus is alive. I know she's alive, too. Right. And so I want you to know, even though, again, like I said, it is hard. I want you to know.

And frankly, I think she would want you to know that she's doing just fine this morning. So I'm going to open a little word of prayer from that. And then we'll kind of get in this series here. So, God, we come before you, again, confident of the hope we have in you.

[1:22] And God, we gather around your word each week because it helps us to remember that you are greater than whatever we face. And so, God, as we look into your scripture this morning, I pray you'll just illumine our heart and help us to see a picture of who you are that draws us to you.

And we ask that in Jesus' name. Amen and amen. So for the last few weeks, we've kind of been peering into Proverbs to see what wisdom is.

And we've kind of looked at what the Bible calls wisdom and what it calls folly. And we've also started to get this vision for how God's wisdom is really built into the fabric of the world around us as well.

And those are all really important things. That's part of what Proverbs calls us to. But the ultimate goal of the book of Proverbs isn't for you to just study and understand wisdom from afar. It's for you to actually become wise. And so what we're going to do this week is see that to do that, Proverbs says there's kind of a disposition of your heart and your mind and your soul that is required to get wisdom.

[2:35] We've seen what wisdom is as the Bible defines it. But to be able to grasp it, it's not just about head knowledge. Because we've already seen Proverbs teaches you can't get wisdom by just studying it, by just staring at it like a fence.

It is quite possible to be the smartest person in the room and still a fool as much as the Bible concerns it. So what creates that base from which you can get wisdom?

And the answer the Bible gives is pretty humbling. The Bible says, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Proverbs is littered with this.

In Proverbs 1.7 it says, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and fools despise wisdom and instruction. And then Proverbs 9.10 says, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

You know, if we're honest with ourselves, the truth is most of the time our image of God is actually pretty small. When we try to think about who God is, I have found that most of the times the things that come to people's minds really aren't that inspiring.

[3:58] We see God as maybe like just a bigger and stronger version of us, right? So you think of a human and then you think of like a better, smarter, more powerful human.

Or maybe you think of him as just kind of this good-natured grandpa or like this lovable genie, right? Like I need something and I hope there is someone there who cares about me and maybe will give

me something.

Sometimes God seems a little too out there so we kind of think of him like this unseen force, right? Like the Star Wars version, right? Where there's something out there and it's kind of silently holding it all together.

And I can't really know what it is, but that's all I get. Or maybe as a lot of people through the centuries have kind of like a watchmaker, right? So like you look at this universe and you go, man, there's no way this is random.

There's no way this is chance. But man, I just don't see God around. So you kind of resign him to. Maybe there's someone who kind of started this thing in motion and now it's just playing itself out.

[5:02] Or I've even seen people refer to him kind of like a kid with an ant farm, right? Like again, kind of putting on it what we as broken people would. Like this is some kind of simulation or experiment.

And he's just kind of going, that's interesting. That's interesting. You know, kind of tapping it along. But none of those images give you a picture of God that will draw up in you what we might call the fear of the Lord.

Let's be honest. Those images give us feelings that range from the way you feel about comic book superheroes to warm fuzzies to kind of just shoulder shrugs. None of those inspire awe.

And what Proverbs is trying to tell us is that to get to where you need to go to get wisdom, you have to have the fear of the Lord.

And so we really have to look at both halves of those statements because we don't have a good framing for it. So we're going to look at what is the fear. And then we're going to look at who is the Lord.

[6:03] Now the word rendered fear here in Proverbs is honestly one of the hardest words in Scripture to try to get at. Many of you have probably heard, it's not exactly like we think of fear in the sense of like terror you might feel at like a haunted house, right?

Like it's not like, oh, Freddy Krueger's chasing me kind of fear, right? It's given this term of like, it's more of a reverential awe that's kind of love-based versus fear that's terror-based.

And that's true, but also this word does have the connotation of some shaky knees to it. And again, we don't have a lot of picture images that get at that, so I'm going to try to help us get there.

So when my daughter was young, she used to love to look at videos of big wave surfers. So, you know, these jokers that like ride these huge waves all across the world.

And I won't try to explain to you, and frankly, I don't think I have to if you've been a parent, the levels of desperation and exhaustion that get you to a place where you're showing your two-year-old pictures of big wave riders.

[7:14] Like, I don't know why that worked. Don't ask me how we get there, but she went to sleep, okay? Like before that, it was Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy by the Andrews sisters. Like that's what she wanted.

I didn't question it. You just do what you got to do to survive, man. But if you look at big wave surfing, it isn't too long until you get to some impressive videos, and really not too long until you get to this area on the coast of Portugal called Nazare.

And so for those of you who haven't seen it and people surfing, it looks a little bit like this. I mean, look at that maniac.

Why would you even do that? And what I do know, though, is that guy riding that wave is probably closer to an understanding of what the fear of the Lord is than most of us.

Because it's not exactly terror or dread that he feels. He chose to do that. He wants to ride that wave. And he might even tell you the reason he does it is because he never feels more alive than when he rides that wave.

[8:26] He's drawn to it. But make no mistake. There is also no way you do that and you are not very aware and filled with an immense respect and awe for the power of the wave that's beneath you.

You know that in the blink of an eye, that thing could turn you to dust. God is greater and more overwhelming and more beautiful and more good than you can ever imagine.

But the one thing he is not is a shoulder shrug. If you feel like God is like this, you have probably not run into God. C.S. Lewis tried to get at this in his book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

And in those books, Chronicles of Narnia, the Aslan character is this lion that kind of represents Jesus. And so there's this point when they're going to meet him early in that story. And one of the characters, Lucy, asked, hmm, is he a man?

Aslan, a man, Mr. Beaver said sternly? Certainly not. I tell you, he's the king of the wood and the son of the great emperor beyond the sea.

[9:41] Don't you know who the king of the beast is? Aslan is a lion, the great lion. Oh, said Susan, I thought he was a man. Is he quite safe?

I should feel rather nervous about meeting a lion. That you will, dearie, and make no mistake, said Mr. Beaver. If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly.

Then he isn't safe, said Lucy. Safe? Safe? Don't you hear what Mr. 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. When you actually encounter God and you see this a lot in Scripture, it fills you with that kind of fear.

It's the kind of fear that doesn't make you terrified to go into life, but it does make you say, I can never be the same. I was something, and now I have to be something else because of what I've encountered.

[10:57] That's what the fear of the Lord is. But who is this Lord that we are to fear? Because the fear of the Lord isn't just respect for any God or reverence for religion in general.

There are all kinds of words that are translated Lord in Scripture. The word that's translated Lord here is tied to his covenantal name, Jehovah, Yahweh, the only God of Israel.

And you know, the Bible doesn't try to dispel the notion that there are powerful forces in this world that oppose God, and some of those are spiritual forces. Like there might be other things in this world that you would put the little g God behind.

But it does say, of all the powers in this universe, there is only one I am. There is only one God who defines himself in reference to nothing other than himself, who is the beginning and the end and everything in between.

You can't get wisdom, Proverbs tells us, by following any old God. You have to follow the God. And in point of fact, it is the most rational thing in the world, if God exists, if he really does exist, to say that any wisdom about this life would have to start by knowing something about who that person is.

[12:26] You also can't get wisdom by having just some vague sense of religious duty, or like a ritual that you've conjured up.

Because there is this way of looking at God as just, yeah, you should go to church, because that's what good people do. It gives you structure.

It teaches you wrong from right. It's what good people do, but the Proverbs tells you, getting a little church'd up, having respect for religion, isn't what your soul needs.

It isn't where wisdom is found. Just like Proverbs says, you can be the smartest person in the room and still be a fool, it also tells you, you can be the most church'd, most religious person in the room and still be a scoundrel.

Some of you know that, firsthand. Only the real God will do. And that's really never more evident than when you look at the other side of the coin, because while the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, the fear of anything else is the beginning of folly.

[13:43] There's kind of this popular theme slash meme that goes around the internet that makes fun of how often men spend every day thinking about the Roman Empire.

And it sounds silly, but it's also kind of true, particularly like once you're, and you notice, like once you're like a middle-aged man, it's like, what are you watching? Like the Roman Empire, World War II, Civil War, that's about it.

Like that's the scope of things that interest you, right? And it's funny because it's true. And some of that obviously isn't nefarious. A love of history, a fascination with civilizations of the past can have value.

I think that's part of how we're made. But sometimes there is something that's a little deeper there where what we're longing for is to be enthralled with something bigger and more meaningful than us.

And without God, you have to find some substitute. Like literally all of human history and philosophy and everything that the human condition has tried to figure out longs to make sense of it.

[14:53] And though they be poor substitutes, we do try to find things in this world that will give you that sense of all, that transcendence that your heart longs for.

Or maybe it is a great civilization or a moral code or scientific advancement. I mean for many, it is simply something like romantic love.

Like why are there so many movies about romantic love? Same reason there's a lot about the Roman Empire because it draws you in. It draws you into a story that feels bigger than just you. But no creed, no code, no country, no family member, no child, no spouse, no advancement can bear the weight of being the purpose for your life.

For being your why. Why? And if you try to find the fear in these places, it always leads to disappointment and ruin because even though some of those things we try to make like this, they're still like this.

[16:04] The things of the world, I think, can actually lead you into a type of wisdom. Like if you pursue those things, you can become shrewd in navigating life.

You can develop a cunning that helps you, keeps you kind of from the full force of the breakers of life. Like there's a way you can navigate it and kind of mitigate the pain in life.

But that is not what the Bible calls life-giving wisdom. The mechanics of wisdom without God leads you to folly.

To live your life without reverence to the fear of the Lord is also the beginning of all sin. Proverbs 14, 12 tells us, There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it is the way to death.

Proverbs kind of depicts, and we're going to see this in coming weeks too, it kind of depicts the world as a series of snares. That look like the right path, the right way.

[17:12] Even possibly feel like the right path, the right way. And then wind up being a trap. And I think we would expect that, right?

I mean, if there is no God, then there's really nothing to moderate how you navigate this life. It really is what seems right, what feels right. If there's no God, why not engage in any sexual behavior?

Like, restraint seems to not feel like life. If there is no God, then maybe all that matters is not what I really am, but just what people think I am.

Because that's how I navigate life. So I can cultivate an image online or in person. Like, I don't have to show the real and vulnerable parts, because why would you? If there's no God, then maybe the best we have are like, glib phrases and poems and, you know, think John Lennon's Imagine, like whimsical, feel-good imagery that kind of enticed our hearts in this place where, you know, if we could all just agree to do whatever we want, as long as it doesn't hurt anybody else, then the world would be healed.

If we could just stop all this God talk, we could have paradise, and then you pursue it, and it leads to death. Proverbs tells you that the fear of anything else will lead to death, but it also tells you that the fear of the Lord can lead you to life.

[18:44] Proverbs 14, 27 says, the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life that one may turn from the snares of death. So, again, thinking about that imagery we had, right?

It says, starting with the fear of the Lord is actually like you've put yourself in a place where you can access this inexhaustible fountain of life.

Because otherwise, it really just is what it looks like. Stumbling forward, looking at life, looking at things in life, going, is this a snare or not? Is this going to catch me or not?

Ah, seems like it might be okay, and then you step in and snap. But it says, the fear of the Lord gives you access to life you can trust, not something that just feels like life or looks like life.

And the good news is also that the Bible tells you that kind of fear can actually be taught. The fear of the Lord can be taught. In the Psalms, it says, come, oh children, listen to me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

[19:57] Which sounds like a strange thing to say, right? Because if you think back to that wave, like me describing that wave to you doesn't give you the same feeling as being on the wave, right?

Like there's some things where encountering God is just going to be more, but part of the charge given to the saints of God is to be heralds of his glory.

To in word and deed help this world imagine what is so often obscured by the gray, broken, mundane things that happen to us throughout the week.

What the psalmist is trying to tell you is don't fall into the trap of thinking only God splitting the sky will do. And don't get me wrong, God does do that. Like most people who have encountered God

can point to some places in their life where they go, I don't know what to tell you about that. God was this big. It wasn't, it was an experience of him I can't recreate, but more often in scripture what you see is just the day-to-day revelation of who he is given to this world by his people. [21:11] It's not the tidal wave, it is the thousand drips of a million saints of God declaring that there is something more than what you see in this world.

It can be taught. And it's really important that we carry on that work because the fear of the Lord is ultimately meant to lead you to the warm light of the gospel.

For casual readers of the Bible, it is often common, and I would say understandably, that it seems like particularly between the Old Testament and the New Testament, there are two different gods at work.

Like I look in the Old Testament and I find a God who seems angry, who seems overwhelming, who seems distant, who cannot be approached, and kind of seems like he doesn't want to be approached.

In Exodus 33, Moses has this interchange with God where he begs him, he says, show me your glory. And God basically says, can't handle it.

[22:29] Not going to do it. Can't handle it. And so, they have this back and forth and they kind of come up with this arrangement where he's like, alright, I'm going to let my goodness pass in front of you.

I'm going to cover you up. But you can't take all of me. As a matter of fact, he tells Moses that right after saying to the people of Israel, you know what, you are really stubborn and stiff-necked and it is best that I not come with you because you're just going to get burned up.

I mean, that's what it says. Like that's how the whole interchange starts with God saying, maybe it's not the best thing that I go with you because you're stubborn and I'm kind of tired of it and you're going to get burned up. But he gets this arrangement with Moses and that's kind of what you see throughout there, like people trying to get near God and God going, it's not the best idea.

There's a veil in between us. There's things you have to do. I can't look on your sin. And then you get to the New Testament and it seems like you're invited to draw near.

Hebrews 14, 6 says, let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace and help in our time of need.

[23:48] Seems like something changed. What was so consequential that this God who was unapproachable and said, you can't handle it, now says, no, come near.

Single word, Jesus. There's this other famous image of John F. Kennedy where his son was hiding under the resolute desk like a lot of people have seen that before and it's kind of a famous picture because you know, you've got this big important office and then this kid playing underneath of it, right?

And in some ways it's really interesting to contrast that to the picture of the wave we saw at the beginning because here you've got this picture of seated above is arguably the most powerful person in the world commanding all of the terrifying might of a nuclear superpower.

And yet this kid feels no fear in approaching. None. Why? Because that power isn't some nameless faceless abstract power it's his father.

And he is not afraid of being near his father. The good news of the gospel starts with the bad news that God is actually terrifying.

[25:17] He is awe inspiring. He is a God that can't wink at evil. If you want to know why God seems so angry in the Old Testament it's because he is.

It's because just like you when he sees wicked people doing wicked things when he sees evil forces doing awful things to the people that he has created to his image bearers he can't just feel nothing about it.

He can't leave it be. Evil and sin matters. But the Bible says Jesus has made a way for us to approach without fear.

Jesus has taken all that wrath. God has no anger left for those who are in Jesus and because of that it says that Jesus has made a way that just as he said to him father you can say to him father. So whatever other wisdom we sample whatever else we get in life whatever tricks of the trade we learn whatever we read in the Bible ultimately everything God has been doing over all the centuries all of the wisdom of Proverbs part of the purpose of that is to get you here because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom but it's a wisdom that ultimately finds its end in Jesus amen as the

band comes up today a couple of ways you can respond if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus again the Bible really pulls no punches in painting the image that coming before God is an overwhelming thing if you come before him covered in sin it says no evil can stand before him if you have some cute image like you're going to stand before

[27 : 24] God and kind of give him your resume please don't do that that is a bad plan but none of that has to be the case and if any part of you has started to catch a picture of the image of this is an overwhelming God that sin is evil and matters the good news of the gospel is it doesn't have to be that way the Bible says you can actually get to know him you can be forgiven it can be different it can be a terror that doesn't just drive you to every night worrying about your fate but instead allows you to jump up on that wave and have the adventure of your lifetime if you want to do that there will be a prayer on the screen maybe that's a way you want to express that if you are here and you're a follower of Jesus man praise God that Jesus has brought us from separation to being together it is easy to lose that picture of the fear of the

Lord to think of again Proverbs is just some kind of how to book like the posture of our heart that we need to get wisdom is the same posture that ultimately drew us to the father it is a picture it is a remembrance of how desperate a sinner I was and how great a savior he was and so this morning take a little time and just kind of pray that before him anything you think you need to talk through and then we're going to come near to that you take the elements back to your seat and again it's just a time that we get to remember each week and as it says commune with him right it was not an easy task to get it from you can't handle me to you can call me father it cost him his body and his blood and that's what the meal reminds us of is there was no there was no length he was unwilling to go through but now because of that you do get to sit at the king's table you do get to sit under the desk your daddy is not worried he wants you to draw near father we give these moments to you I pray! that you will draw us near to you as your people God I pray if anybody here needs a picture of who you are of your all that you give it to them God we testify to you but there is also something that only your spirit can do and I ask for it come and be in this place let your will be done in Jesus name