

A salesman, driving on a lonely country road one dark and rainy night, had a flat. He opened his car trunk—no lug wrench. The light from a farmhouse could be seen dimly up the road so he set out on foot through the driving rain. “Surely the farmer would have a lug wrench he could borrow,” he thought. Of course, it was late at night—the farmer would be asleep in his warm, dry bed. Maybe he wouldn’t answer the door. And even if he did, he’d be angry at being awakened in the middle of the night.

The salesman, picking his way blindly in the dark, stumbled on. By now his shoes and clothing were soaked. Even if the farmer did answer his knock, he would probably shout something like, “What’s the big idea waking me up at this hour?” This thought made the salesman angry.

What right did that farmer have to refuse him the loan of a lug wrench? After all, here he was stranded in the middle of nowhere, soaked to the skin. The farmer was a selfish clod—no doubt about that! The salesman finally reached the house and banged loudly on the door. A light went on inside, and a window opened above. A voice called out, “Who is it?”

His face flushed with anger, the salesman called out, “You know darn well who it is. It’s me! And you can keep your blasted lug wrench. I wouldn’t borrow it now if you had the last one on earth!”

Someone insightfully observed that *“Fear is the wrong use of imagination. It is anticipating the worst, not the best that can happen.”* That’s partly true. Fear has a tremendous influence on our lives. It can motivate us—like a mother bear protecting her cubs, or it can paralyze us—leaving us with a sense of helplessness. How we deal with our fears often shapes our reality, like the salesman whose fear turned to rage. For the last several weeks we’ve been working through a biblical worldview of fear: *Imaginary fear, fear for my children, Fear Of Missing Out, fear of a disaster, rejection, even death.*

The Bible teaches that there’s a good kind of fear. Proverbs 9:10, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”* It’s **The One Fear that You need.**

That phrase, *“the fear of the Lord”* is repeated over and over again in Scripture. Here are just a few: Psalms 112:1, *“Blessed is the man who fears the Lord.”* Proverbs 1:7, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”* Proverbs 14:26, *“In the fear of the Lord one has strong confidence.”* Proverbs 14:27, *“The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life.”* Proverbs 19:23, *“The fear of the Lord leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm.”* Isaiah 33:6, *“and He will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is Zion’s treasure.”* Jeremiah 32:40, *“And I will put the fear of Me in their hearts, that they may not turn from Me.”*

Though *“the fear of the Lord”* is a thoroughly biblical concept, we don’t hear much about it today, even among God’s people. In his book, *The Secret of the Lord*, Charles Crismier (**pictures**) unpacks this. He pinpoints the 1960s as the time when *“the fear of the Lord”* began to embarrass people. The expression used to be common. Today the idea is nearly incomprehensible if not repugnant to our culture and even Christians.

20th century pastor, A.W. Tozer (**picture**) lamented this shift. *“The self-assurance of modern Christians, the basic levity present in so many of our religious gatherings, the shocking disrespect shown for the Person of God, are evidence enough of deep blindness of heart. Many call themselves by the name of Christ, talk much about God, and pray to Him sometimes, but evidently do not know who He is. ‘The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life,’ but this healing fear is today hardly found among Christian men.”*

Sometimes it seems that having little fear of God is the root sin of the Church in America. Though it’s too strong to say that there is *no* fear of God, it does seem that even in the Church there’s often *very little* fear of God.

The fear of the Lord is not some archaic concept, nor is it optional. It’s **The One Fear that You need.** This morning we want to work through what God’s Word teaches about *“the fear of the Lord.”*

1. What does it mean to fear the Lord? In his book, *Running Scared*, Edward Welch (**picture**) writes: *“I had a tooth pulled recently. Afterwards, the dentist indicated that there might be problems with the bone that held the tooth—not a good thing. A legitimate cause for mild worry, wouldn’t you say? About an hour after I came home, I received a call from a very good friend. He was calling from the doctor’s office because they would not allow him to come home. His MRI showed a tumor and they had him scheduled for emergency surgery the next day.”* Welch then concluded, *“My dental woes, of course, were no longer a concern.”*

That’s the way it works with fear. Sometimes the only thing that dislodges it is a greater fear. A woman with a fear of water will lose that fear if her child is drowning. A man who fears a small investment is going sour quickly forgets about the possible loss when he hears his company might lay him off. To fear the Lord is a greater fear. When you fear the Lord, there’s not much else to fear. But let’s look first at ***what the fear of the Lord is NOT...***

The fear of the Lord is not natural fear. Natural fear is a gift from God. It's why you look both ways when you cross the street. It's why when you light a candle, you're careful to not burn yourself. Natural fear protects us.

The fear of God is not natural fear. You can't have a relationship with someone you're afraid of. When we talk about the fear of the Lord, we're not talking about being afraid of God.

The fear of the Lord is not a tormenting fear. One of my favorite verses is 2 Timothy 1:7, "*for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.*" Or, as Romans 8:15 says, "*The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'*" This fear of God is not some kind of tormenting fear.

The fear of the Lord is not the fear of man. Proverbs 29:25 tells us that the fear of man is a trap. It brings slavery into our lives if we're fearful of others and their opinions. The cure and remedy for the fear of man is the fear of God. When you fear God, you don't fear what anybody else thinks.

The fear of the Lord doesn't diminish our appreciation of the Father's heart. For example, if you've got a biological Dad you love and respect, you never want to disappoint him. The thought of his look of disapproval is enough to stop you in your tracks when you're tempted to disobey.

The fear of the Lord is a sense of awe and reverence. Sometimes the fear of God is an overpowering physical fear. Moses experienced this when he was confronted with the glory of the Lord (Exodus 3). There were several times that Moses was afraid to look upon God. That's the fear of God. Sometimes it's overwhelming and can affect you physically.

The fear of the Lord is a sense of awe. We throw around the word *awesome* haphazardly. I remember hearing Stuart Briscoe ([picture](#)) once say *awesome* can only truly describe God. There's a sense of reverence when we fear the Lord. We're awestruck by the Almighty. Only God is truly awesome!

John Piper ([picture](#)) describes the fear of God as if we were caught in a terrible storm while exploring an Arctic glacier. The storm is so strong that you fear you're going to blow over the side of the cliffs. Imagine putting yourself in that scenario, what it would be like: your heart is pounding; sweat is pouring out; your life would be flashing before your eyes.

But then you discover a cleft in the ice where you can hide and find shelter. Even though you're safe, you watch the storm go past with a kind of trembling pleasure. This is what Piper says: "*At first there was the fear that this terrible storm and awesome terrain might claim your life. But then you found a refuge and gained the hope that you would be safe. But not everything in the feeling called 'fear' vanished from your heart. Only the life-threatening part. There remained the trembling, the awe, the wonder, the feeling that you would never want to tangle with such a storm or be the adversary of such power. The fear of God is what is left of the storm when you have a safe place to watch right in the middle of it. Oh, the thrill of being here in the centre of the awful power of God, yet protected by God Himself!*"

That's a great illustration of the fear of God. If you know Jesus as your Savior, you have a safe place in Christ. We're sheltered, we're secure in our Father's arms through the cross of Christ, yet not all the fear goes away.

In that safe place, if we truly comprehend the awesomeness of the Almighty, we'll tremble. It's a kind of spiritual adrenaline rush when you're in the manifest presence of God. When we sense the presence of God, there's a kind of shrinking that comes over you beneath His awesome eye. Have you ever been moved by the fear of God?

2. We are commanded to fear the Lord. Psalms 34:9 says, "*Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints, for those who fear Him have no lack!*" God's people are addressed here. The implication is that it is those who belong to God, those who know Him are positioned to obey this command. Not only are they positioned to obey it, but they're also expected to obey it. It's not optional. It's something we must do. Yet how many of us ever really think about "fearing the Lord." It's not predominant in our minds, but it should be.

We think about receiving God's forgiveness. We think about all the good things we want from God and for Him to do for us. We look for God's comfort and guidance, but do we ever think, "I really need to fear the Lord"?

For us to grow here we must begin to understand what it means to fear the Lord. Here are some needed insights that will help us.

We will fear the Lord if we believe that He exists. The other night Jane and I watched *The Muppet Christmas Carol* ([picture](#)). I love that remake and I love Dicken's story, *A Christmas Carol*. But I'm not worried about ghosts. Not even the ghosts of Christmas past or Christmas present or Christmas future. *Why?* I don't believe in ghosts. If someone does not believe that God exists, they will not fear Him or relate to Him with a sense of awe.

Do we really believe in God? Is it more than intellectual assent? Is it more than just "Sunday stuff"? How often does God enter in to how we live?

Those are challenging questions. The bottom line is: *Do we fear the Lord?*

Many would have to admit that we live as if we're Christian Atheists. A Christian Atheist is someone who believes in God, but lives as though He doesn't exist. Believing in Him must lead to knowing Him. The way to know Him is to

study His Word and spend time with others who are doing the same. Practical atheism is when you believe God, but you fail to connect that belief to your attitude, behavior and worldview.

Hebrews 11:6, *“Anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.”* We’ll be disposed to fear the Lord if we understand that God is above all. The kind of relationship implied in fearing the Lord requires more than just understanding He exists. Isaiah 8:13 says, *“The Lord Almighty is the One you are to regard as holy, He is the one you are to fear, He is the One you are to dread.”*

We will fear the Lord if we believe that He is holy. When you think about the word *holiness* what comes to mind? Maybe something very pure? Maybe you picture a guy with a collar with folded hands, looking angelic. Most of our pictures of holiness have nothing to do with the fact that God is holy.

Holiness is the foundation to God’s being. It’s the background to everything else declared about God. That God is holy means that *“He is separated from sin and devoted to seeking His own honor.”* God is holy means that He is absolutely pure. God is free from sin, free from moral evil, free from mistakes. He’s absolutely perfect. Everything about Him is consistent. Because God is holy, He is absolutely separate and set apart from us.

When we comprehend His holiness, we’ll fear the Lord. Revelation 15:4, *“Who will not fear You, O Lord, and bring glory to Your name? For You alone are holy.”* But if we see God as our buddy, only forgiving and winking at sin, we’ll wrongly relate to Him and treat Him as another human being.

We will fear the Lord if we understand that He has the power to judge all of creation. I’m finishing up the One Year Bible and I’m in the book of Revelation. Anyone who doesn’t believe that God is the Judge and will someday judge His creation hasn’t read the end of the Bible. Someday every person will stand before God.

Many years ago, the king of Hungary found himself depressed and unhappy. He sent for his brother, a good-natured but rather indifferent prince. The king said to him, "I am a great sinner; I fear to meet God." But his brother, the prince, just laughed at him. That didn't help the king's disposition at all. Though he was a believer, the king had gotten a glimpse of his own guilt in the way he'd been living and he seriously wanted help.

In those days it was customary if the executioner sounded a trumpet before a man’s door at any hour, it was a signal that he was to be led to his execution. So this king sent the executioner in the dead of night to sound the fateful blast at his brother’s door. The prince realized with horror what was happening. Quickly dressing, he stepped to the door and was seized by the executioner, and dragged pale and trembling into the king’s presence. In an agony of terror he fell on his knees before his brother and begged to know how he had offended him.

"My brother," answered the king, "if the sight of a human executioner is so terrible to you, shall not I, having grievously offended God, fear to be brought before the judgment throne of God?"

Most people see no need for a Savior because they don’t believe they’ve done anything that they need to be saved from. They have a low view of God, a high view of themselves and an absent view of God’s holiness and justice. It’s why Jesus needed to come into this world. Jesus came to save us from the justice and wrath of God by taking our guilt upon Himself and receiving God’s justice and wrath in our place.

People today are like they were in the days of Noah. Eating and drinking, living carelessly without any concern about facing a holy God. Ignoring that upon death they won’t face the "old man upstairs" who winks at all their sins. Instead, the Bible teaches that they will face a consuming fire who will deal out vengeance and retribution. Anyone who does not have his/her sins covered by the blood of Christ should hear that and tremble!

The unbeliever should fear God when he/she hears of the severity of God's judgment and run to the cross and covering of Christ who bore God's wrath in the individual's place. They should be like the Philippian jailor who experienced God's power. Acts 16:30 says he came *"trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas, [and said], 'What must I do to be saved.'"*

3. God has great blessings for those who fear Him. Rob Cutshaw is a rock hound and owns a little roadside shop outside Andrews, North Carolina. Like many in the trade, he hunts for rocks, then sells them to collectors or jewelry makers. He knows enough about rocks to decide which to pick up and sell, but he’s no expert. He leaves the appraising of his rocks to other people. As much as he enjoys the work, it doesn't always pay the bills.

Once, while on a dig, Rob found a rock he described as "purdy and big." He tried unsuccessfully to sell the specimen, and according to the *Atlanta Constitution*, kept the rock under his bed or in his closet. He guessed the blue chunk could bring as much as \$500 dollars, but he’d have taken less if something urgent came up like paying his power bill.

That's how close Rob came to hawking this stone for a few hundred dollars. It turned out to be the largest, most valuable sapphire ever found. That blue rock that he’d stored in his closet for twenty years is now known as "The Star of David" sapphire (**picture**). It weighs nearly a pound and is estimated to be worth \$3 million.

God has rich blessings for those who fear Him. Each of these blessings could be a sermon by itself. To summarize a few of them, turn to Psalm 128.

Psalm 128 is known as a *wisdom psalm*. Wisdom passages in the Bible present wisdom to us generally, but they're not absolute promises.

Verse 1, "*Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways!*" The word *blessed* means happy. In Hebrew though the word is in the plural. You could translate it, "Happy, happy!" True happiness is only for those who fear the Lord and walk in His ways. Charles Spurgeon (**picture**) said: "*We must reverence the ever-blessed God before we can be blessed ourselves.*"

God's blessings are for those who fear Him. The ones in Psalm 128 are very personal. It's why want to work through them as we tie this up today.

If you fear the Lord, God will bless your work. Verse 2: "*You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours.*" This doesn't necessarily mean that you'll be wealthy, but that you'll find fulfillment in your work and your work will provide for your needs. God's promise to bless your work is especially striking when you remember that God put a curse upon human labor after Adam and Eve sinned back in Genesis.

If you fear the Lord, God will bless your marriage. Verse 3: "*Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house.*" This refers to both fruitfulness and faithfulness. A vine is a picture of fruitfulness. God's blessing is related to productivity. It doesn't just mean bearing children. It means having a full and productive life. The picture here is of a beautiful vine that's thriving and flourishing. And there's also faithfulness. That the vine is "*within the house*" speaks of faithfulness in marriage. What are the signs of a happy marriage? Fruitfulness and faithfulness. Who could ask for anything more? Marriage is one of God's great blessings!

If you fear the Lord, God will bless your family. Verse 3b: "*Your children will be like olive shoots around your table.*" An olive tree was a basic part of agriculture. In the Bible it's a picture of productivity and blessing. This picture of olive shoots around the table is one of a mature, established olive tree with young shoots springing up out of the soil all around it. It was a common sight in Israel. Olive shoots represent youth and energy and, above all, promise. When you sit down to eat with your family, your children are the hope and promise of the future.

This first section of Psalm 128 paints a beautiful picture of a family. A godly husband, a faithful wife and eager children full of promise. It's all a great sign of God's blessing on the home.

But while the first part presents God's blessing as His reward for those who fear Him. The second half reminds us that God's blessing is not automatic. We do not earn it from our obedience. Even God's rewards are gifts of His grace and must be received as gifts from God.

If you fear the Lord, God will bless you all the days of your life. Verse 5: "*May the Lord bless you from Zion all the days of your life.*" This is a prayer of blessing not just for a time or a season, but for the duration of your life. It picks up the language of Psalm 23, "*Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*" God is the source of all of our blessings.

Notice the psalmist prays for the Lord to bless you "*from Zion.*" Zion under the Old Covenant is the place where God dwells and where He met with His people. Blessing comes as you meet with the Lord.

If you fear the Lord, God will bless you within the community of His people. Notice the second half of verse 5: "*May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem.*" God is not only concerned with individuals, He's concerned for all of His people and we should be too. God is concerned with more than just our family. He's concerned with more than just our church. The Church is bigger than us. And God's blessing on the Church is our blessing as well.

If you fear the Lord, God will bless you with a long and fulfilling life. Verse 6 "*...and may you see your children's children.*" In the 5th commandment God promises a good and long life to those who honor their parents. Here those blessings are applied to all those who fear the Lord. These prayers of blessing not only stretch outward to the community of God's people, but also onwards to future generations.

Some of you know the blessing of having grandchildren. Psalm 128 reminds you that they're God's blessing on your life! So make sure you tell others not just that "I love my grandchildren!" but also, "I thank God He has blessed me with my grandchildren. I thank God that He's blessed me with length of life to see and know my children's children."

If you fear the Lord, God will bless the community because of you. This psalm ends with a prayer for the peace of Israel. Verse 6: "*Peace be upon Israel.*" Notice the progression from the individual (1-2) to the family (3-4) to the wider community (5-6). We must be concerned for all of God's people, not just our own family or ourselves. God wants us to be concerned for our community. Many of us are shortsighted and miss God's long view.

Conclusion: The fear of the Lord is **The One Fear that You need**. The fear of the Lord is the opposite of glib shallowness. It's another way of describing trust in the Lord. It's a total dependence on God. It's a new sense of reality with the living God, rescuing us from a merely theoretical faith. This fear is sweet, keeping us close to the Lord.

The fear of the Lord gains in appeal as we agree with C.S. Lewis (**picture**) that "*in God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself.*" If we think that we can live a single moment of our lives

without depending on the Lord, without yielding to His superior wisdom and drawing upon His endless provision second by second, we're deceiving ourselves.

As soon as we accept that we're not the *measure* but the *measured*, that we're not the givers but the recipients, and that Jesus Christ is the universe's greatest expert in all things human, we embark on a wonderful, fulfilling new journey. We're free to grow and our lives have true meaning and purpose.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of this wisdom. It's the one fear that we all need. Do you have it? Is it part of your daily life?