

Do Not Be Afraid . . . Fear the Lord!

Introduction

The Text

⁵Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. ⁷Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. ⁸It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. (Prov 3:5–8)

Fighting Fear with Fear

- A. We continue on now in our Do Not Be Afraid . . . sermon series (it may be the last, I'm not sure yet), where, you recall we've been dropping into places throughout Scripture where this idea of not being afraid shows up.
1. Now, this morning, I realize is a bit different. For today the text we have before us, rather than calling us away from fear, is actually calling us to it. "[Fear the Lord . . .](#)," Solomon says ([v. 7](#)).
- B. We try to fight fear in all manner of ways—some more effective than others:
1. Sometimes we fight fear by simple methods of distraction. We binge-watch Netflix, or scroll Facebook for hours on end, or give ourselves over to our work so we don't have to think about some other more distressing issue in our lives.
 2. Sometimes we try to numb it with drugs or alcohol.
 3. Other times we attempt to crowd it out with more immediate, albeit fleeting, pleasures—we barrage our senses with rich foods, sexual stimulation, and so forth.
 4. Others may fall victim to superstition as a way of coping. The obsessive compulsive have to do the same thing in the same way and give in to all manner of little ticks as a way of trying to bring order to the chaos and peace in the midst of the terrifying realities of life in a fallen world. It's a way of controlling what little you can so you have this façade of stability.
 5. Still others, the type-A's among us, make plans. They fight the fear with strategy sessions and scheduling and goal-setting. They are not afraid. They will be ready. They've got this.
- C. So we attempt to fight fear in all manner of ways. But I wonder, have we ever thought to fight fear with fear?
1. It sounds almost absurd at first. But, upon closer examination, it seems to be the essence of the biblical approach.
- D. The title of this morning's message is: Do Not Be Afraid . . . Fear the Lord!
1. It's a bit tongue in cheek, I know. But it gets at this idea that the big problem with regard to yours and my fear is not so much that we are afraid of things, but that we aren't afraid of

the right Thing. The issue at bottom is not that we have too much fear, but that we actually have too little fear of God. We have great regard for this or that circumstance or trial or hardship, but little regard for the Lord who stands over it all.

- a. We get all worked up with fear at the thought of failing a test, or losing a job, or shipwrecking a relationship, or putting on weight, or getting COVID-19, or letting a person down, or whatever it may be—we could sit and fret and worry and stew for hours on these sorts of things.
- b. But when we think of standing in the presence of almighty God— the God who dwells in unapproachable light; the God who has no beginning or end; the God who speaks and worlds come into being; the God who sits enthroned above the heavens; the God who calms the sea, stills the wind, heals the blind, restores the lame, raises the dead; the God who sees through the outer man and into the heart; the God to whom all men will give an account—when we think of coming into the presence of such a Being as this, well, somehow we are strangely barely moved at all. It’s a curious and troubling observation.
 - i. We have great thoughts of a great many things—great thoughts that is of everything except the only truly great thing among them all: namely, God. And that, brothers and sisters, is a great problem!

E. And it’s especially an issue for those of us who truly want peace. Because what Oswald Chambers says is true, listen closely: “The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.”

1. Mark that. It’s a bit ironic and counterintuitive, I know, but we’ll flesh this out as we go.

The Book of Proverbs

A. You see, the book of Proverbs is here to help us with this. The fear of the Lord, after all, is really the great master-theme of this book. It’s quite unmistakable.

1. Solomon, the author it would seem of the great majority of this book at least, opens straightaway in [ch. 1](#) with this famous statement that could really serve as his thesis for all that follows: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge . . .” ([v. 7](#)).

- a. The fear of the Lord is the starting point for the wise and fulfilling and peaceful life.

B. And our text this morning, one of the most famous in all the Scriptures perhaps, elaborates further on this idea. And I want us to consider it together.

1. We’ll make our way through two headings in particular: (1) What the Fear of the Lord Entails; and (2) What the Fear of the Lord Effects (brings about).

C. Now, before we dive in, we’d do well to remember that the book of Proverbs frames itself on the whole as this loving dad giving wise counsel to his boy.

1. And I just love that. Because we all want this. I don't care how old, how mature, how awesome you are. You still want a dad, someone who's gone before you and knows the way. Someone who invites you up into his lap when you're feeling scared and confused.
 - a. Listen, we all want that. We all need that. And God, through Solomon, moves towards us in this book, in these verses, and offers it. So let's listen up!

(1) What The Fear of the Lord Entails

Turning the Diamond

- A. If you noticed, in our text, we're given this sort of constellation of commands—where each one clarifies, and qualifies, and sheds light on all the others. These are distinct commands and yet they are clearly related.
 1. It's like we've got this diamond in our hand and we can turn it and check out all the various facets. And as we do we get different perspectives on the same basic thing.
- B. Well, I'm going to call this constellation or this diamond the fear of the Lord, because that's really what we're focusing on here this morning, and as I've said, that's really the central concern of Solomon, and God, in this book.
 1. And we're going to just turn this diamond about as we progress through these verses and, as we do, we'll come to learn a little more about it.
- C. So what does the fear of the Lord entail according to this text? Well, I see five aspects here. And we'll take them one by one . . .

Aspect #1: Wholehearted Trust

- A. So our text begins there in [v. 5](#): "[Trust in the Lord with all your heart . . .](#)"
- B. Now before we can really settle into this command here, we need make note of the fact that prerequisite to this idea of trusting the Lord with all our hearts is that we actually have knowledge of Him and His word in the first place.
 1. This is hinted at right here in the command itself with the name Solomon uses for God—"[LORD](#)" in all caps in our English Bibles. The Hebrew behind it is YHWH, the covenant name of God revealed first to Moses on Mount Sinai.
 - a. This is not just a generic Elohim, God. This is the God whom we know, the God who knows us, the God with whom we have a deep and personal relationship. We've got history with this God. This is YHWH.
 2. And this idea is further fleshed out in the immediate context of [vv. 1-4](#) that come just before. There we see that Solomon essentially says: "Take what God is revealing to you

here, take this law and these instructions and ‘bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart’ (v. 3).”

- a. You see what he’s saying. You’ve first got to know God and His Word. You’ve got put it in your mind and in your heart.
 - i. So that is the place to start. You cannot be trusting this YHWH if you are not reading and studying and meditating on His Word.
- C. But, as we carry on towards v. 5 we see, obviously, that that is not all we must do. For the mere knowledge of God—His will and ways—is not enough, right? After hearing and learning, binding, and writing, we then have to step back and ask: Okay, well and good, but are we trusting?
- D. In this modern age we are bombarded with information constantly, overwhelmingly so. And one of the things we’re always doing, if you notice, is evaluating that information.
 1. Aren’t we doing this all the time with the news and things? We’re sizing up the sources and trying to determine whether they are trustworthy. And now there’s this whole fact-checking industry it would seem, people dedicated to simply checking up on all that’s being tossed around as fact out there in the web and on TV. If we’re not careful, sometimes lies take root in our minds before we ever even realize they’re lies. It only comes out later, and it’s already kind of messed up our perspective on things. The damage is done.
 - a. So we’re always analyzing the source, fact-checking, and trying to determine whether we can trust what’s being said or not.
- E. And the crazy thing is we are all prone to do this with God as well.
 1. If ever there was One we should just trust wholeheartedly, it would be Him. And yet, if ever there is One we are prone to question and doubt and second guess, it is Him.
 - a. It’s kind of crazy to think that we are fact-checking God. But we often are. We size up what He is saying, the advice He is giving, and we think: “I don’t know if that sounds right or good to me. Don’t sleep with your girlfriend? Don’t cheat on your taxes? Don’t divorce and get out of a miserable marriage? I don’t know if I can trust Him. His advice seems a little backwards and outdated.”
- F. It’s a return that age-old temptation I’m always taking us back to in [Gen 3](#), where Satan approaches Eve with the question: “Did God actually say . . .?” (v. 1).
 1. In other words: “Can God really be trusted? Do you really want to listen to that old prude? He’s just trying to keep the good life from you. Reach out take and eat.”
 - a. Every time we give way to sin, it is a breach of trust. We are saying: “Yes, I know God says this, but is that really true and wise? Is that really the way to happiness and life? No. I think I know better.”
 - b. But the fear of the Lord says: “You are God, I will trust.”

Aspect #2: Shifting Weight

- A. We continue on in v. 5 and read this: [“and do not lean on your own understanding.”](#)
- B. Here the matter is put from another angle:
1. In the first, the fear of the Lord involves wholehearted trust.
 2. And now here we see that it means we are not leaning on or trusting in ourselves. It’s not my word, my will, my plans over and against His. It’s His every time.
- C. I love the image that is conveyed here with this idea of leaning, and it’s where I’m going with these words “Shifting Weight.” We lean on or we shift our weight towards that which we think can truly hold us up.
1. We went to the beach a couple weeks ago and Levi tweaked his ankle in the sand. And for a little while afterwards we noticed he was limping a little and favoring the ankle that hadn’t been injured.
 - a. And that’s the idea. The one ankle doesn’t feel strong enough to hold us up, so we shift our weight to the other. And the call by Solomon here is to say: “Stop leaning in on your own understanding as if you know, as if you and God are somehow on the same level. Listen, you are not able to bear up under the weight of your life and govern and guide it rightly. You lean in on yourself and you will tweak that ankle to the point of breaking. Shift your weight towards God. He will hold you up.”
- D. This is precisely what was happening with Job, right?
1. Over thirty chapters of wrestling and struggling and even blaming God for the hard stuff in his life and then finally, in ch. 38, God speaks: [“²Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?³ Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.⁴ “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding” \(vv. 2–4\).](#)
 2. And He just goes on and on and finally Job comes out at the end of it: “Okay, I see where this is going. I’ve spoken out of turn here. You are God and I am not. Learning our place in the universe and the one who’s really in charge, upholding things.” [“² I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.³ ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” \(Job 42:2–3\).](#)
 - a. “I was leaning on my own understanding and I realize now that isn’t going to cut it. I need the fear of the Lord.”
- E. I mean this is what God is doing with us here in America and around the world right now with this the whole COVID-19 crisis, right? We’re just catching how weak and frail we really are, how powerless we are to plan and execute and things.

1. Just the other day I was on a website of some sort and I saw a ministry announcing their conference in 2021 and my honest first reaction was: “Well isn’t that presumptuous. To act like you can plan for anything right now.”
 - a. I have been so sufficiently humbled here. I don’t even know what next week is going to bring, let alone next year. But I would never have thought like this before COVID. It was just: “I plan and I execute. Of course.”
 - i. Now, finally we’re saying things like James told us to: “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that” (James 4:15). That’s all I got.

F. God is breaking us down. He’s inviting us to shift our weight onto Him. Stop trying to hold it all up, you can’t. Fear the Lord!

Aspect #3: Ongoing Communion

- A. Solomon continues on in v. 6: “In all your ways acknowledge him . . .”
 1. The word for acknowledge here is the Hebrew word for “know.” So the idea is we should be aware of God and even interacting and communing with Him.
 2. And we all think we can do this a bit here or there, maybe at the beginning or end of our days, but the real challenging piece here is when Solomon says we should be interacting with God in this way “in all [our] ways”—in everything, all the day long.
- B. When I considered this, honestly, I just felt exposed. I can do the touch and go thing decent enough, but I realize I really live my day like a functional orphan—like it’s on me. I’m not communing and leaning and trusting in Him through it all.
- C. At this point, I thought of that old hymn by Hawks and Lowry: *I Need Thee Every Hour*: “I need thee every hour, / most gracious Lord; / no tender voice like thine / can peace afford. // I need thee every hour, / stay thou near by; / temptations lose their power / when thou art nigh. // I need thee every hour, in joy or pain; / come quickly, and abide, / or life is vain. // I need thee every hour; / teach me thy will, / and thy rich promises / in me fulfill.”
 1. When’s the last time you felt like that?!
- D. When this hymn was first published in 1873, this Bible verse was included underneath the title was *John 15:5* which, fittingly, reads: “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”
 1. We understand at once, don’t we, that the reason we so often fail to acknowledge or know or commune or interact with the Lord throughout the day is that we simply don’t believe this verse.
 - a. In truth, we think we can do a great many things. In fact, if we’re honest, we often feel like stopping to pray or seek the Lord as they say actually slows us down and

make us less productive. Far from doing nothing without Him, I feel I get a lot more done, quite frankly.

- i. And so it is that we wander from the fear of the Lord into vain labor. It may be true that we are busy doing all manner of things, but are we doing the right things? It is true that we can build and build in our own strength, but if we are building with wood, hay, and straw instead of the precious metal from God's hand, well, as [1 Cor 3](#) says, we shall find that we've truly been doing nothing in the end after all. It shall all be burned up and nothing remains.
- E. Oh how important it is that we be communing, that we be praying, that we be abiding. God is inviting us to fellowship with Him in everything. Are we taking Him up on it?! Such a thing is part of fearing God.

Aspect #4: Inviting Counsel

- A. The text continues down in [v. 7](#) with yet another command: ["Be not wise in your own eyes . . ."](#)
1. There are a number of directions we could have taken but I wanted to consider how this relates to opening ourselves up to counsel—certainly from God, but also from other people.
- B. It's the mark of a fool to simply be wise in his own eyes. He's not interested in what anyone else has to say on the matter. He thinks he's got it figured out. But everyone else can see he doesn't.
1. I remember when Matt Chandler was making a similar point in one of his sermons and he used the American Idol auditions to make his point. Every season you have those people that come on in and they're decked to the nine, and they pick up that mic and they sing their heart out, they're even throwing in dance moves and flicking the hair back and things, they are a rock star in their own mind, and everyone looking in is just like "No! Brother you can't sing. Didn't anyone love you enough to tell you that?" Maybe they did, but he wouldn't listen. Maybe they didn't and that's just cruel to let him come out before America like that. But you see my point.
- C. We need each other. This idea of being wise in our own eyes is contrasted with true wisdom and the fear of the Lord. Those people don't think they've got it. In fact, they know they don't see it all. They invite counsel from outside.
1. So [Prov 11:14](#): ["Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety."](#)
 2. And [Prov 15:22](#): ["Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed."](#)
- D. Those who are truly wise want others speaking into their life. That's actually a part of the fear of the Lord.

Aspect #5: Uncompromising Obedience

- A. Solomon goes on to say: [". . . fear the Lord, and turn away from evil . . ." \(v. 7b\)](#).

B. There really has been a sort of progression to all we've seen thus far:

1. We come to know and trust the Lord as He's revealed Himself in His word.
2. We shift the weight of our thinking towards His word and start to build our understanding and life upon that.
3. We're daily and hour by hour communing with God through prayer and soliciting His help and guidance in all things as we go about our day.
4. We're inviting God to speak to us through others in the church, recognizing that there is wisdom in many counselors. And people will see things we don't, and together there will be more clarity than apart. Sometimes my interpretation of Scripture, my sense of what God is saying in prayer, can be corrected and filled out by what other believers, filled with the Spirit have to say.
5. But then here we actually have to step out in this stuff and turn from evil and uncompromisingly obey God and walk in the fear of the Lord.
 - a. And that's what comes out here. Fearing the Lord involves turning from sin. We don't dabble with it. We don't manage it. We kill it. We run from it.

C. Two texts that make this plain. The first from a negative perspective, the second from a positive.

1. [Rom 3:10-18](#): “¹⁰ ‘None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.’ ¹³ ‘Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.’ ‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’ ¹⁴ ‘Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’ ¹⁵ ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known.’ [And he closes like this:] ¹⁸ ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’”
 - a. In other words: Why is there so much sin running rampant in the world? Because there is no fear of God!
2. Paul puts it positively in [Phil 2:12](#): “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling . . .”
 - a. In other words: What motivates obedience and the working out of salvation and sanctification? The fear of the Lord!

(2) What the Fear of the Lord Effects

Reordered Lives and Hearts

A. So, if that is what the fear of the Lord entails, here now we come to what the fear of the Lord effects—what it brings about for us.

1. And with this we come back around to what I was referring to at the beginning: namely, the irony that in fearing the Lord above all else, we come to find that we aren't afraid of anything else.

a. There's a certain peace that comes to mark us. He puts us back together outside and in. He reorders our lives and our hearts.

B. And so Solomon signals towards this in a couple of places in our text:

1. [Prov 3:6b: "\[H\]e will make straight your paths."](#)

2. And [v. 8: "It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones."](#)

a. That sounds good right? Paths are all crooked and He'll make them straight. You'll get a sense that you're walking in His will and He's with you. And what's broken in you will find healing. The longings of your soul will find refreshment.

C. Let me show you how this works. Again, first negatively, and then positively.

1. As we've said, when there is no fear of the Lord as it's been unfolded to this point, you will find there will be no peace, you will be afraid of everything. Fear will mark you, even paralyze you.

a. And this just makes sense. After all, you've been unwilling to yield to the Lord and His wisdom. It is all on you to figure it out. You're not reading His word and guiding your life by it. You're leaning on your own understanding. You're not interested in God's perspective or anyone else's. And you've cut corners to try to succeed, right? You're not uncompromisingly obedient. You've made all sorts of compromises, and now you're worried about being found out.

i. Don't you see what's happening? You're cracking under the pressure. You can't rest, you can't sleep. You're "worried sick." Could be about your career. Could be about your portfolio. Could be about your kids. Could be about your relationships. Could be about your health.

(1) Because there is no fear of the Lord, fear's got you by the neck.

2. But, on the other hand, when you know God, when you've come to see His steadfast love and His faithfulness, when You've witnessed the wonder of the cross and all that Christ went through in love for you—to forgive you, to wash you, to help you—well you're going to start to trust Him, you're going to start to lean in on Him even when you can't make sense of things, You're going to roll your burdens onto Him throughout the day, You're going to follow Him through hard stuff and live in line with His Word and will, and you're going to be standing on a rock, unafraid . . . because God, the God who is over it all, is upholding you.

a. I love what Solomon says later in the chapter: ["21 My son, do not lose sight of these— keep sound wisdom and discretion, 22 and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck. 23 Then you will walk on your way securely, and your foot](#)

will not stumble. ²⁴ If you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet” (Prov 3:21-24).

- i. Sleep is us at our most vulnerable. My boy Levi gets this. That’s why, when we leave the room at night, the first thing he does is pull his blankets up over his head. It feels a little safer under there. Sleeping exposes us helpless to the world round about us.
 - (1) It’s a fearful thing, unless we have the fear of the Lord, unless we’re trusting in the One who never sleeps, and never tires, and keeps us. Then our sleep, like Solomon says, here shall be “sweet.” We shall lie down unafraid.

Our Wise Older Brother

A. Listen, that’s what God wants for you. That’s why Jesus has come.

1. I talked at the beginning about how in God we have this wise Father who’s gone before us and speaking into our lives.
2. But I want you to understand that in Jesus we also have this wise older brother who’s doing the same.
 - a. Paul tells us that He’s the “firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8:29).
 - b. The author of Hebrews says that He’s the “founder and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2) and He’s gone before us in this race.
 - c. Even as He was headed to the cross, to face the penalty for our own God-belittling sin and rebellion, we’re told that He kept in prayer, kept crying out and leaning in upon God, and He was heard, we’re told, “because of His reverence” (Heb 5:7). In the Greek, because of His fear—the fear of the Lord.
 - d. And when He rose, ascended, and poured out His Spirit on the church, it was so He could continue to dwell with us and even now in us and teach us to live as He lived, from the inside out, in the fear of the Lord, with peace unshakeable.

- i. So we are just surrounded here by wise and loving help. Father, Son, Spirit.

B. I love this text in the book of Acts where Luke is describing what’s going in the early church and He writes this: “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied” (Acts 9:31). May God be pleased to do the same with us!