

The Fear of God - Part 2

by Jerry Bridges

The fear of God is a recognition of His infinite power and majesty, and a response of awe, reverence, and veneration.

Duration: 50:04

Scripture: Genesis 28:17, Psalm 111:10, Psalm 130:3-4, Matthew 6:33, Luke 5:4, Ephesians 6:5

Topics: "Fear Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by telling a parable about a young man in basic training who is in awe of his commanding general. The preacher then explains that he is laying the foundation for the next three nights, where he will discuss the fear of God in daily life. He references a story from the Bible in Luke chapter 5, where Jesus borrows Peter's fishing boat and teaches the people on shore. After finishing his teaching, Jesus tells Peter to go out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch. The preacher emphasizes that just as the young man in the parable was in awe of his general, we should also be in awe of God's presence in our lives.

Transcript

As he said tonight, we are going to seek to describe the fear of God. I have done an extensive study on the subject, found that references to the fear of God occur at least 150 times in the Bible. Now, if you have an NIV concordance on your computer and you pull up those, you will not find 150 of them, you will find probably 120, 125 of them.

And that is because, in a number of instances, the NIV translators have substituted the word reverence, where the actual word is the fear of God. And this tells us that it gives us a clue, a hint, as to something that is involved in the fear of God. But I just wanted to throw that in, in case that you wanted to check me out on that 150 number.

And if you add the times when reverence really means the fear of God, you will find that it is about 150 times. With that in mind, I want us to look again at this passage here, where Jacob has this dream, or this vision, in which God speaks to him. And we see in verses 13 through 15 a picture of God's sovereign grace to an ill-deserving sinner.

And in these verses, God gives Jacob five glorious promises. First of all, in verse 13, he promises to give to him and to his descendants the land in which he is at that time. He says in verse 14 that his

descendants will multiply.

And in verse 14 again, all peoples will be blessed through you and your offspring. Of course, referring ultimately to the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 15, he says, I will be with you and will watch over you.

And then again in 15, and I will bring you back to this land, and I will not leave you until I have done that which I have spoken to you of. Five glorious promises that God gives. Notice that God did not chastise Jacob.

He did not rebuke Jacob for Jacob's character or for his sin. He did not say to Jacob, you are a cheat and a liar and a deceiver. Though all of those terms would have been perfectly appropriate to have used with Jacob, because he certainly was a liar and a cheat and a deceiver.

But God does not address the deficiencies in Jacob's character. Rather, God gives Jacob these five glorious promises. And I said these are promises of grace, because obviously Jacob had done nothing to deserve them.

In fact, Jacob really was represented by ill-deservedness, not by undeservedness. Jacob had done many things wrong, and yet God gives him these promises. Now with this in view, I want to call your attention to Jacob's reaction in verses 16 and 17.

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it. He was afraid and said, How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven.

Jacob's reaction to these glorious promises was not one of joy and gratitude and thanksgiving, but rather he was afraid here, and he said, How awesome is this place! And we ask ourselves, why was Jacob afraid? Why did he speak of the awesomeness of this place? And the reason is he realized that in a very special way he had been in the presence of God. Now we're going to find out a couple of nights from now that actually all of us live our entire lives in the presence of God. But what Jacob means here is that he became very much aware that God especially made his presence known in this place through this vision, and through God speaking to him, and rather than Jacob rejoicing, he was afraid.

And he said, How awesome is this place! I want to call your attention to the word awesome. That word has virtually lost its meaning in our vocabulary today. I was in a little hamburger restaurant in Colorado Springs a few months ago, a place that specializes in a certain type of hamburger, and they also make a very delicious milkshake, the kind that is very hard to get anymore in most places, the old-fashioned kind of milkshake.

And so I had ordered a hamburger and my favorite flavor of milkshake. And as the waitress was bringing to me the milkshake, she said, I make an awesome milkshake. Now the fact is it was a very delicious milkshake, but it hardly qualified for the word awesome.

Because you see the word awesome has as its primary meaning the word fear. And when Jacob said how awesome is this place, he was really saying how fearful is this place. If we saw a tornado coming across the prairie, and we looked at that, and we would say that is an awesome tornado, that would be an accurate use of that word.

But in our hyperbole today, in our tendency to use words like awesome milkshakes, and I can remember when our daughter would come home when she was in high school, and she would say I've got a ton of homework to do tonight. And she really meant about an hour's worth. And we tend to use these exaggeration expressions.

And what the result is that some of the words lose their meaning. And the word awesome has lost its meaning. And the word awe.

And even this chorus that mostly the young people sing, our God is an awesome God. You know you listen to them, and maybe some of you young people do this, I don't know. And if I'm stepping on toes, forgive me.

Or if it's shoe fits, wear it kind of a thing. But sometimes you sing that as if you were at a high school pep rally. Rather than with the sober realization that God is indeed an awesome God.

That he is one to be feared. Let me give you a picture. And I'm not sure if I can communicate this picture in Canada.

You know the United States and Canada are so much alike. It's very difficult for me when I cross the border to realize that things are not always the same. Generally speaking they are.

But sometimes I get in a bit of trouble when I realize that there may be something that's peculiar. But we have in the U.S. the Marine Corps. And you probably have the equivalent of it here in Canada in the military services.

But we have the Army and the Navy and the Air Force and then the Marine Corps. Now as a Navy man I have to tell you that the Marine Corps is a part of the Navy. But that's an insult to a Marine.

And you don't call a Marine a soldier. Because soldiers are in the Army. A Marine is a super fighter.

They are trained to be super fighters. And the way that they train to be super fighters is when they go to their recruit training. Which we call boot camp in the United States.

It's 12 weeks of boot camp. They are treated very mercilessly. They are screamed at.

They are yelled at. They are berated. They are ridiculed.

They are generally stripped of all of their self confidence. Usually these recruits are about 18 years old just out of high school. And they are stripped of all of their teenage arrogance and self confidence.

And they are given a very, very rigorous physical training. And this sergeant that is called the drill instructor that is in charge of training them. Is just in their eyes a few steps slower than God.

And I realize that's a very dangerous expression for me to use. And that's why I say in the eyes of these young men that a drill instructor is that way. And he is very much in awe of the drill instructor.

He is very much afraid of him. He realizes that the simplest infraction, the simplest disobedience to the instructions of the drill sergeant can send him on a hundred laps around the drill field. Or a hundred push ups.

Or maybe holding his rifle out, a straight arm like this for ten minutes. Or something like that. And so they are very much in awe of the drill instructor.

But then the day comes and this doesn't actually happen in real life. But I'm sort of throwing in here like Jesus. I'm constructing this parable to make the point that I want to make.

But the time comes near the end of his twelve weeks of basic training. And the commanding general of the Marine Corps training base decides to conduct virtually a surprise inspection. That is, it's announced today that tomorrow morning at ten o'clock the general will conduct an inspection of all of the basic recruit classes.

And so our young man, our typical teenager, is in his barracks waiting for the general to come through inspection. And the party comes in the door and the sergeant barks out, Attention! I didn't do justice there. Attention! is the way it would go.

And they all snap to attention and the general makes his way slowly down the passageway. That's an aisle for you landlubbers. And he stops in front of this young man and he looks him up and down from head to toe with those cold steely blue eyes.

And he asks him a question, a simple question. And the Marine recruit can hardly get the words out of his mouth to answer. His mouth is as dry as cotton.

He is trembling from head to toe. Why? Because he is in awe of that general. You see, if he was in awe of the sergeant, the drill instructor, how much more will he be in awe of the general, the commanding general, the man who in his mind is the epitome of rank and dignity and majesty.

And that gives us a little bit of a picture of the word awe. And this is what Jacob experienced when he realized that he was in the conscious presence of God. Now we know that God is omnipresent and God is everywhere present.

But we are not always conscious of that. But in a very unique way, because of this vision that Jacob had, he realized that he was in the presence of God. And he was afraid and he said, how awesome is this place.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Luke chapter 5. And we will see another illustration of a similar reaction. While you are turning in your Bibles, let me just tell you that this is the time when Jesus had borrowed Peter's fishing boat and from Peter's boat he had taught the people on shore. And after he had finished teaching in verse 4 of Luke chapter 5, when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, put out into the deep water and let down the nets for a catch.

Simon answered, Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets. Now Peter was a master fisherman.

Jesus had been a carpenter, now turned rabbi. And Jesus supposedly, as far as Peter is concerned, knows nothing about fishing. And Peter knows that the time for catching the fish, which was during the dark hours of the night, the time is over, it's now probably mid-morning, the sun is shining down on the water, the fish will not come to where they can be picked up in the nets, enclosed in the nets.

And Peter, I can just imagine that Peter is a little bit irritated. And he says, Master, we've fished all night. I mean, don't you realize I'm a master fisherman? And we've fished all night and we didn't catch anything.

And now you tell us to put the nets out in the worst time of the day for catching fish? But, just to humor you, I'll let down the nets. And when they had done so, verse 6, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them.

And they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, Go away from me, Lord, I am a sinful man. For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken.

And so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, Don't be afraid. From now on, you will catch men.

So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed him. Now, notice again Peter's reaction. Jesus had not said anything that would make Peter afraid.

In fact, Jesus had just demonstrated his ability to locate the fish in a way that Peter had never, ever experienced in all of his life, growing up probably as the son of a fisherman and now as an adult fisherman. And we would think that given those circumstances, that Peter would, so to speak, sort of pull out the contract and say, Jesus, I'd like to make you a partner in the business. And you don't have to do any of the grubby work.

You don't have to watch the nets or anything. You just be the fishing guy. You just tell us where to go, and we'll split the catch with you 50-50.

But Peter doesn't react that way. Peter says, Get away from me, Lord. And the word that he uses here is the Old Testament equivalent for God.

He is recognizing that Jesus, this person in front of him, is indeed God, and he is very much afraid. Because you see, he recognizes that he is in the presence of God. Both Jacob and Peter exhibited the fear of God.

That is, they were in the deepest awe of God. And this awe of God, which has this element of fear in it, is the only proper response to the transcendent majesty and the holiness of God that I spoke about last night. It is a recognition of God's infinite power and sovereignty and majesty and splendor, his righteousness and his holiness and his justice.

And when any human being is confronted with the presence of God to the extent that Jacob and Peter and others in the Bible, and I've just selected two of about a half a dozen instances that we could have looked at tonight, of people who responded in this way when they recognized that they were in the presence of God. It is the recognition that God is the infinite, eternal, and unchanging creator and sustainer and ruler and judge of the universe, before whom all the nations are no more than just a drop in a bucket, as we saw last night. It is a recognition of the infinite chasm that exists between God and his creatures.

John Murray, the theologian of earlier in this century, said, It is the reflex in our consciousness of the transcendent majesty and holiness of God. It belongs to all created rational beings, and by that he means both human and angelic beings, all created rational beings, and does not take its origin from sin. That is, we do not fear God because we are sinners, but we fear God because we are creatures.

Then he goes on to say, although our sinfulness does add a dimension to it. And we saw that last night in the case of Isaiah, when he recognized his sinfulness in the presence of God, and he said, woe is me, and that is another expression of the fear of God. That's another illustration, shall we say, of the fear of God.

And so we have now three, if we include Isaiah, who we looked at last night. But having said that, I want to emphasize to you that fear, as we normally think of that word of being afraid of the tornado, or afraid of, you know, the child who is afraid of the dark, fear, in the sense that we normally use that, is not the dominant theme, or not the dominant element in the biblical concept of the fear of God. It is there, it is very much there, it is very real, but it is not the dominant concept.

The word awe itself, if you look it up in the dictionary, you will see that it is an emotion in which fear, and reverence, and veneration, and wonder are variously mingled. That is, any one of those four, fear, or reverence, or veneration, or wonder, will sort of be the dominant emotion at any one time, and it changes depending on the situation. Now I've used the word veneration that's not a part of our everyday vocabulary.

We don't, you know, venerate people so much. But let me explain to you again what the word veneration means. To venerate someone, that's v-e-n-e-r-a-t-e, to venerate someone is, and listen carefully, don't try to jot these down, but just listen to these synonyms that come right out of our secular dictionary.

To venerate is to revere, esteem, respect, honor, admire, adore, cherish, extol, glorify, worship, hallow, and all of these attitudes raised to their very highest level. In Japan, especially before World War II, the Japanese people deeply venerated the emperor. You know, they basically worshipped him.

And so to fear God is to venerate God, and it includes all of these, reverence, and esteem, and respect, and honor, and admiration, and adoration, and so forth. Now, it is undoubtedly these more positive aspects, that is of reverence, and veneration, and honor, that were present in Jesus when it is said of Jesus in Isaiah chapter 11 and verse 3 that he will delight in the fear of God. It's a messianic prophecy there.

It starts out that the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, and so forth, and the Spirit of knowledge, and the Spirit of the fear of the Lord, and then it says, and he will delight himself in the fear of the Lord. That is, Jesus in his humanity delighted to fear God his Father. Obviously not to be afraid of God his Father, but rather to revere him, and to honor, and admire, and adore, and cherish, and extol, and glorify, and worship him.

And all of these words together make up this biblical concept of the fear of God. So it does consist to some degree in this awesomeness, this recognition of the awesomeness of God, and of being afraid as Jacob was, and as Peter was. And it consists of humiliation before God, as was the case of Isaiah, when he said, woe is me, I'm a man of unclean lips.

But as I mentioned last night, there is still another element that we need to consider if we are to fully understand the biblical meaning of the fear of God. And I gave you that passage of scripture last night, but I want to give it to you again. It's Psalm 130, verses 3 and 4. If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? Now let me just stop at that point, that's not all of the passage.

If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? And there we can see that element of fear, that element of recognition that we are accountable to God. And if God actually keeps a record of our sins,

we are of all men most miserable. But then the psalmist goes on and he says, but with you there is forgiveness, therefore you are feared.

God is to be feared because he is a forgiving God. In the physical realm, that is in the realm of natural physics, there are two opposing forces called centrifugal and centripetal. Those of you who remember your high school physics will remember these two terms.

And centrifugal tends to pull away from the center of rotation. For example, tonight if I had in my hand a string and on the end of the string I had tied a weight and I was twirling this around, the weight would be exerting a centrifugal force on the string and on my hand. It would be pulling away from the center of rotation.

At the same time, my hand would be exerting a centripetal force pulling back on the string, pulling back on that weight out there. As you twirl this, we have the centrifugal force pulling out, the centripetal force pulling in. These two oppose one another.

Though the thing I want you to see from this illustration is that both of them are necessary to sustain the other. That is, if you take away the centripetal, if I just let go of the string, the centrifugal immediately disappears. If the string breaks and the weight just flies off, the centripetal disappears.

Both of those have to be in existence for the other one to be in existence. Now, I'd like for you to think tonight of that illustration as representing the fear of God. The centrifugal forces would be such things as God's majesty and His sovereignty and His holiness and His righteousness and His justice and His power.

Those forces which cause us in our natural selves to sort of want to back away from God. That was what Jacob saw. He saw the centrifugal elements, the greatness of God, and he was afraid.

But the centripetal is God's grace and mercy and His love. So, on the one hand, the centrifugal holds us reverently distant from God and keeps us from becoming overly familiar with Him. And today, most concerned Christians would agree that there is a dearth of the fear of God among Christians today.

And usually, this is the element that we're concerned about. That there is a lack of reverence for God, that there is a lack of veneration of God, that there is a lack of adoration of God. And even in our worship times, so often times our worship is sort of routine and anemic and this kind of thing.

And I cannot tell you how many times in the last year when I've told people that I was either studying, preparing to write a book on the fear of God, or actually in the writing that I've been encouraged, you know, go to it, you know, we really need this. We've lost this sense of the fear of God and that's absolutely correct. And it's this centrifugal force, so to speak, which we have lost.

But on the other hand, the fear of God also includes the love of God and the humble gratitude of a person who, conscious of his own sinfulness and his own exposure to divine wrath, has experienced the mercy and the grace of God and the forgiveness of his sins. And this is that centripetal. And we saw this last night in the experience of Isaiah when he said, Woe is me, for I am undone, for I am man of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

And there we see this centrifugal, this sort of pulling him away from God. And then that seraph comes and touches his lips and he hears those words, your iniquity is taken away and your sin is atoned for. And he experiences God's mercy and grace in his forgiveness of his sin.

And then he responds when he hears God saying, whom shall we sin and who will go for us? He responds, hear my Lord, sin me. He's not afraid of God. He's not in dismay because of his sin.

And he has recognized his sin, but now he has experienced God's forgiveness, his mercy, and his grace. And now he is drawn to God. And the thing that I want you to see tonight is that both of these forces, so to speak, the centrifugal which causes us to back away and to be in awe of God in the sense of fear and a healthy respect and so forth, that has to be in the life of a growing Christian.

But at the same time, there has to be this recognition of his love and his mercy and his grace and the recognition that if you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, therefore you are feared. And my observation is that most Christians tend to have one or the other of these. You've got a lot of people today who really focus on the grace of God, and I've written two books on the grace of God, and I'm here tonight by the grace of God.

My life verse is Ephesians 3.8, where Paul said, Unto me, whom less than the least of all the saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. And I'm here tonight by his grace. But you know that there are people who abuse the grace of God.

We have a whole element of cultural Christianity in a certain part of the United States that has the slogan, once saved, always saved, and what they mean by that, so it really doesn't matter how you live. You see, they focus strictly on the grace of God. And then we have those who focus strictly on the law of God.

And sometimes we can give people the impression that you better be good or God's going to get you. You better fear God. It's amazing to me how many people have said to me, Well, when you write this book on the fear of God, be sure you tell them that it really means to fear God.

Be afraid of God. And we tend to sort of get off the road. You know, it's like down in Louisiana in the southern part of the United States.

And they have the swamplands and the bios down there. And they're going to build a highway. They have to come in and move in a lot of dirt and build it up above the swampland.

And so you're driving along this highway, and you want to be very careful because you don't want to go off on either side because you'll be in the swamp. And so the fear of God is like that highway. And on one side is the swamp of just being afraid of God.

And on the other side is the swamp of God is just a gracious God. He loves everybody. He's not going to do anything to you.

We're all going to get there somehow. But the fear of God is that roadway that's built up above the swamp. And it keeps us moving along.

And the thing I want us to see is that we not only need to be in awe of God's sovereignty, in God's holiness, in God's justice, but we also need to be in awe of God's mercy and his grace. That great hymn of Charles Wesley, And can it be? You know the words of that hymn. Wesley was in awe of the grace of God.

And can it be that God should die for me? Now, we might ask another question. Is the fear of God an emotion? Or is it an attitude? And the answer is, it is both. What we have seen tonight in the two

illustrations we looked at, we would say that in those two instances, the fear of God was a spontaneous reaction, an emotional response to realizing that they were in the presence of God.

But the Bible also tells us that it is an attitude, that it is a settled state of mind. Turn with me, if you please, to Genesis chapter 22. This is the instance when God told Abraham to take his son Isaac to the region of Moriah and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering.

And you know the story very well, how that Abraham was ready to slay his son, but in verse 11, the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, Abraham, Abraham, here I am, he replied. And then God said through the angel, whether this is actually sometimes when he says the angel of the Lord, it's the Lord himself. But he says, do not lay a hand on the boy, he said.

Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son. Here God is not speaking to an emotional reaction that Abraham had, but rather he is speaking to a settled state of mind.

And when he says, now I know that you fear God, he's saying, now I know that I am first in your life. It is an attitude of life. It is a settled state of mind, which causes a person to behave in a certain way.

Certain characteristics and predominant among those is the willingness to obey God in whatever God tells us to do. In fact, if you look in the book of Deuteronomy, and I'll get into this a little bit tomorrow night, but if you look in the book of Deuteronomy, almost invariably when the term or the expression, the fear of God is used, it's in connection with obedience. That you fear the Lord by keeping his commandments.

And here God said, I know that you fear me, because you've not withheld your son, your only son. I know that you fear me because you have demonstrated your willingness to do whatever I tell you to do, regardless of the cost. It is a settled state of mind.

Turn back a page to chapter 20. And here another incident, you remember that Abraham on two different occasions lied about his wife, and said that she was his sister rather than his wife, because she was afraid first of all that Pharaoh would kill him in order to take his wife, and now he's afraid that this little regional king by the name of Abimelech would do the same thing. And you know the story how that God appeared to Abimelech in this dream and said, you know, don't touch this woman because she's this man's wife.

And so Abimelech goes to Abraham and he confronts him, and in verse 16 Abimelech asked Abraham, what was your reason for doing this? And notice Abraham's reply. I said to myself, as Abraham said to himself, there is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. And here Abraham assumed, rightly or wrongly, but nevertheless he assumed that these people did not fear God, consequently they would not obey God.

Consequently they would take another man's wife if they pleased. And here again we see that Abraham is referring to what we would call a subtle state of mind, or a certain attitude with respect to God. So on the one hand Abraham feared God, on the other hand he assumed that Abimelech did not fear God.

But the thing I want you to see is that in both of these instances it would express itself through conduct. A subtle state of mind, a controlling state of mind, if you please, that determines one's actions. In fact, if you turn with me in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 3 and verse 22, and this is one of those instances when the NIV uses the word reverence, where in the original it's the fear of God.

But in Colossians chapter 3, and Paul is giving rules for Christian households, wives submit to your husbands, husbands love your wives, children obey your parents, fathers do not embitter your children. And then we come to verse 22 and 23. Slaves obey your earthly masters in everything, and do it not only when their eye is on you, and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

Or you could read that, with sincerity of heart and in the fear of the Lord. That's what it is in the original. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.

It is the Lord Christ you are serving. But the point I want to make here, and I want to call your attention to, is that Paul is referring to the most mundane, ordinary duties of life. Now today we would take the principles that Paul used for the master-slave relationship, and we would apply those to the employer-employee relationship.

And if Paul were writing to us today, he would say, Employees, work heartily, not only when the eye of your supervisor or your boss is upon you, but with sincerity of heart and in the fear of the Lord. In other words, you are to do your daily duties, your ordinary duties, in the fear of the Lord. A subtle state of mind, an attitude, if you please.

And it is, as I said a minute ago, it is a determinative attitude. That is, it determines our conduct. It determines our behavior, the way we act.

A person who truly fears God is going to seek to obey God in the most ordinary, mundane, routine duties and activities of life. The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks the question, the very first question is, what is the chief end of man? And it answers, man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. As I concluded my studies on the fear of God, I concluded that this is the epitome, this is the highest element, this is the ultimate expression of the fear of God.

But I want to call your attention to the fact, and I'm going to speak to this again on Thursday night and elaborate on it, but I want to call your attention to the fact that the framers of the Westminster Shorter Catechism did not say the chief ends, plural, but rather the chief end, it is a singular word. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That is to say, you really cannot glorify God unless you're enjoying Him, and you cannot enjoy Him unless you're glorifying Him.

It is two sides of one coin. The point I want to make tonight is this. That answer from the catechism, man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, is really a description of the fear of God, because a person who fears God seeks to glorify God, and a person who fears God enjoys God.

You cannot have the one without the other. You cannot have the centrifugal force of the awesomeness of God's majesty and His sovereignty and power and holiness without at the same time having the awesomeness of God's grace and His mercy and His love and His forgiveness and His compassion. We have to have both of these, and we have to hold them in balance and intention, if you please.

And when we have these in tension and in balance, then we have the biblical concept of the fear of God. Tonight, this has been basically a teaching session. I've not given us an application, something to take home and begin to apply immediately, because I'm laying the foundation in the next three nights, actually, there's going to be application of this.

In other words, the next three nights, we're going to look at the question, what does the fear of God look like in daily life? Or, how does a person who fears God conduct himself or herself? And so, if you're wondering where is the application for tonight's message, the answer is, it's in the messages of Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday nights. But on the other hand, all that I say by way of application the next three nights has to be based on this foundation, which I have tried to establish tonight, that we understand what it means to fear God. May God help us to understand this.

May God help us to pray this. May God help us to pray as David himself prayed in Psalm 86 verse 11, give me an undivided heart that I may fear you. And the good news of that is that God answers that prayer beginning with our regeneration.

In Ezekiel 36, I'm sorry, not Ezekiel, but Jeremiah 32. These are sort of parallel passages and I got them confused here. I used the Ezekiel passage one time and the Jeremiah passage another time.

But Jeremiah 32, beginning with verse 38. They will be my people and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them.

I will make an everlasting covenant with them. I will never stop doing good to them and I will inspire them, and probably a better translation would be I will move them to fear me so that they will never turn away from me. God creates the fear of God in principle in our hearts at the time of regeneration.

If you are a believer, if you have been regenerated by the Spirit of God, you have in your heart at least the principle of the fear of God. That's the good news. God does this.

He gives it to us. We cannot make something grow if it's not there in the first place. We've got the beautiful corn fields out here, and whether you're a farmer or not, you know that you can't get corn to grow if you don't plant the seed.

But it's also true that you can plant the seed, and if you don't do the right things after that, the corn will not grow at least in a very healthy manner. It won't produce its crop. God has planted the seed of the fear of him in your heart at the time of regeneration.

But I'd like to borrow a phrase from Paul when he addressed Timothy, and he said to Timothy, Fan into flame the gift of God that is within you. In other words, Timothy, fan into flame your spiritual gifts. Improve that which God has given to you.

And I'd like to borrow that phrase tonight to challenge you and me to fan into flame that principle of the fear of God which he planted in your heart at the time of regeneration. And pray with David, give me an undivided heart that I may fear you. And then we will see in the next three nights how this works out in daily life.

Shall we pray? O our Father, we lift our hearts to you, and we do want to honor and reverence you. We do want to, in our hearts, bow in awe before you as we consider your holiness and your greatness that we looked at last night. And we know, Father, that we could spend an entire week just talking about those attributes of you which would cause us to be in awe of you in the sense of your greatness and your majesty and your sovereignty and your holiness.

Father, we're also thankful that we have seen the cross. We have seen your love to us demonstrated in sending your Son. And in your mercy and your grace, you made us who were dead in transgressions and sins alive in Christ Jesus.

Father, help us to hold both of these views of you in a balanced biblical tension. And fan into flame that fear of you which you planted in our hearts at regeneration. And we ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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