

# The Fear of the Lord

Various Proverbs

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Good morning, and welcome to the Four Lakes congregation! If you are visiting this morning or joining us online or on the phone, we are glad to have you with us. We'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card online if you can, or you can use one of the cards from the pew in front of you. Whatever works for you, we would love to hear from you, and we invite you to pass along any questions or prayer concerns.

We are here this morning to thank God for saving us and to share this salvation with the world around us. God loves us so much that he sent Jesus to die in our place. He was buried, and he was raised up on the first day of the week. We obey this good news by being buried with him in baptism, and by rising out of the water to live a new life. And we do have several examples to share this morning, starting with an update from Nepal. All we know is that the man's name is Rajib, that he was baptized last month, and as he came up out of the water he said, "I have so much joy in my heart to praise the Lord." I don't remember having an update like this from Nepal, so this one was rather unique.

And speaking of unique, we also have an update from Okello Ambrose Bob, who preaches the gospel in Uganda and recently traveled to the Obongi District, which involved sailing on the Nile River. He and his team did some preaching in the Morobi Settlement, which ended with the Lord gaining 31 souls to his side. I love the inflatable pool, but I also love this man teaching God's plan of salvation by writing in the dirt with a stick. Jesus also wrote in the dirt, but it makes me thankful for our facility here in Madison. A week or two ago, I mentioned to Silas that our projector was making some weird noises early in the morning, so a new projector may be on the horizon here, but these people are writing in the dirt, and souls are being saved. So, this post was rather unique.

Maybe they are all unique this week, but we also have an update from the Lord's church down in Poplar Grove, Tennessee. They say that "Preston and Shelby Lancaster were baptized for the remission of sin and added to the Church tonight!!!! The Church of Christ at Poplar Grove is rejoicing!!!" Some of you know that I have a thing for flashlights, and I am impressed by whatever is going on right here! It looks like the picture taker is perhaps on a bridge looking down into the river, but somebody has a great flashlight. I think back to the baptisms we had in the dark up in Silver Lake in Portage many years ago. But good news from Tennessee this week! There are many others we could have shared this morning, but we share these by way of encouragement: If you would like to study God's plan for your life, if you have any questions or concerns,

please get in touch using the contact information on the wall up here (or on your screen at home). If you are joining us on the phone, you can send a text or give me a call at 608-224-0274.

This morning, we return to our ongoing study of Proverbs. As I've explained over the past few weeks, we have looked at Proverbs 1-9 on a chunk by chunk basis, and in those first nine chapters, we have King Solomon giving some advice to his sons, and there is some context to it. However, starting in Proverbs 10, nearly every sense of context disappears, and we have these seemingly random nuggets of wisdom. One author suggests that Solomon transitions to a "shotgun approach." In my earlier years, I pictured a shotgun as spraying pellets over a large area, perhaps destroying everything in an area the size of the wall over here. After all, that seems to be the way it happens in the movies – you don't even need to aim, but just point in a general direction, and the enemy gets thrown back 10 feet, no matter where they were standing. Now, over the past ten years or so, I've learned that this is not the case at all. I've learned that there is some aiming involved, and I've learned that the pattern is much smaller than I imagined – from here to the back wall, shooting OO Buck, those 9 pellets will spread out to an area roughly the size of a large dinner plate. On my home defense shotgun, I have a light with a hot-spot or a bulls-eye that's roughly that size. So, wherever that light falls, 9 holes are soon to follow. But the point is: While it doesn't cover an entire wall, the point is definitely made over a wider area than a single shot. So also with the rest of the book of Proverbs. Starting in Proverbs 10, Solomon isn't just making a single point, but he is throwing some advice out there to his sons over a much wider area. Therefore, as we work our way through the rest of the book, we are grouping the remaining proverbs by topic, in no particular order. So far in this ongoing study, we've looked at a question concerning not gloating when our enemies fall (based on two verses in Proverbs 24), and last week we looked at 28 of the proverbs on the value of listening to wise counsel.

This week, I want us to continue by pulling out the remaining proverbs that mention "*the fear of the Lord.*" Most of these will outline the BENEFITS of fearing the Lord, but before we get to the benefits, we need to define some terms. We need to back up a bit and try to define what it MEANS to fear the Lord. In Proverbs 15:33, King Solomon says, "*The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, and before honor comes humility.*" And we've seen this before in Proverbs, in Chapters 1-9: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; the fear of the Lord is where wisdom starts; the fear of the Lord involves realizing who we really are before the Lord – he is God and we are not, or, as the good king says, "*before honor comes humility.*" Fear starts by realizing that God alone is truly wise. All wisdom comes from God, and we would be wise to seek it.

The fear of God, then, is a deep respect for who God is, a deep respect for commandments, and this fear causes us to want to please God in everything we do. This fear allows us to take correction (as we learned last week), and it motivates us to confess our faults and to change, with all humility seeing ourselves as God sees us. The fear of God, therefore, is not just an Old Testament concept, and it is certainly not the idea of God following us around with a lightning bolt, ready to smite us at any moment. Now, if we are doing something that we think God might smite us for doing, then we should probably stop doing that thing! But the fear of God is the willingness to submit to God because of the respect that we have for God. It's the awareness that God is always with us and that we are always accountable to God. We might think of young Joseph, far away from home, who was propositioned by his boss's wife and said, "*How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?*" Joseph feared God more than he feared for his job or even his life.

So, with this as our definition (respecting God and wanting to do what he wants us to do), I'd like for us to spend the rest of our time together this morning by noting some BENEFITS to fearing God in this way. And unlike the 28 points we had last week, there's really only one point this morning: Fear God! And we'll note the BENEFITS to fearing God in a series of nine little proverbs.

1. And we'll just jump into these in the order they come in Proverbs, starting with Proverbs 10:27, where Solomon says that ***"The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened."***

So, King Solomon explains to his sons that one benefit of fearing the Lord is that it has a way of prolonging life. And obviously, most of us would prefer to live a long life instead of a short life. In fact, the experts are always giving advice on this, aren't they? Wherever you go for news, we're always seeing updates on the latest research. Doctors and scientists have discovered that this, this, and this will help you live longer. On the other hand, these things over here may shorten your life. And the assumption here is that living longer is a good thing! Now, we think about this in terms of the Law of Moses, and surviving in the wilderness was pretty much the point of many of those rules and regulations: In the days before instant-read meat thermometers, they had rules like, "Don't eat pork," and "Don't eat an animal that dies on its own for no apparent reason." And in the days before microscopes and hundreds of years before they knew anything about germs or infectious diseases, they had rules like, "If somebody gets leprosy you need to kick them out of the camp," and so on. And if they followed these laws, the people would live longer. And even today, I think we understand that living a God-fearing life has a way of being good for us. Out of respect for God, we avoid the sin of drunkenness, we realize that our body is a temple of God's Holy Spirit, so we take care of it, we avoid the sexual sins that may bring with them various diseases. For the most part, God-fearing people will avoid many of the self-inflicted dangers that come from robbing banks or driving under the influence. I haven't looked into it lately, but I remember reading that those in prison live, on average, about ten years less than those who are not. Hard living has a way of taking a toll.

However, although long life is associated with fearing God, we must also realize that this is a proverb. This is not necessarily an iron-clad guarantee, because we realize that there are often exceptions to the rule. Genetics will play a role in how long we live. We also realize that accidents do happen. We had a healthy young man get run over by a guy in a work van on his way home from work a week or so ago, just north of here. Terrible things will sometimes happen to good people, for no apparent reason. You can live a God-fearing life and get killed by an earthquake or some other natural disaster. Or, we might suffer and die BECAUSE we fear God. We think of Abel who was murdered by his own brother, just because he offered an acceptable sacrifice. Stephen was killed for preaching the gospel. Jesus himself only made it to 33, and he was more righteous than any of us. So, there are exceptions, but Solomon, though, is making an observation: Generally speaking, those who fear God do have a way of living longer than those who don't.

2. In Proverbs 14:26, we have another proverb on fearing the Lord as King Solomon says that ***"In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge."***

We normally think of fear as being the opposite of ***"strong confidence,"*** and yet here, Solomon says that fearing the Lord will give us ***"strong confidence."*** The solution to fear is to fear! We might think of the twelve men who were sent to spy out the land in the book of Numbers. Ten of those men were terrified and came back with an awful report, "There's no way we can do this." Two of those men, however, feared the Lord, and they came back with ***"strong confidence."*** They knew they could do it, because God said that they could do it. Or we might think of King Saul, a tall and good-looking man, but a man who really didn't fear God. He basically hid from Goliath, while David (even as a young man) put his trust in God and approached that challenge with ***"strong confidence."***

And those who fear God are confident, because they know that God is their ***"refuge."*** We think of Noah and his family who feared God and found refuge in the ark. We think of the Hebrews who demonstrated their fear of God through obedience and found refuge in those dwellings that had been covered by the blood of the Passover lamb. We think of the prophet Daniel who feared God more than he feared his own government, and

he found refuge in the lions' den. As we learned in our study of Hebrews last year, since the Lord himself has said, ***"I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"*** we can say with confidence, ***"THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?"*** (Hebrews 13:5-6). The fear of the Lord, then, gives us ***"confidence"*** and a place of ***"refuge."***

3. Our third reference comes in the very next verse (in Proverbs 14:27), where Solomon continues and says that ***"The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death."***

So again, fearing God leads to life (as we learned back in 10:27), but the new information here is that the fear of the Lord helps us ***"avoid the snares of death."*** We have two references to ***"snares"*** today, so that's why I've brought both a snare and a trap this morning. Years ago, we had a neighbor who tried to solve his rabbit problem by catching them in a live trap; however, he would release them in the drive-thru at the McDonald's down in Verona. I have no idea what happened from there, but we know how a trap works. The trap appears to be open – from one end, you can see through to the other side – and there is bait in the middle, usually bird seed, but when the critter heads in to get that bait, the door closes, and there's no way out. The other option is a snare, and it doesn't end well for the critter, but it is usually very quick. A snare is basically a wire, fashioned into a slip-loop. You usually put this in a narrow path of some kind, and as the poor creature is making a run for it, their head goes through the loop, it tightens, they panic, and it's over very quickly. But here's the illustration: When we fear God, we ***"avoid the snares of death."*** A creature that is wise will see the bait for what it is and say, "Nope, that's a trap!" So also, a wise creature who encounters a snare will stop and back away slowly. So also for those who fear the Lord. There are traps all around us, but those who fear the Lord have a way of avoiding those snares. This doesn't mean that we will never die; all of us will die, but it means that we don't need to die before we die. We don't need to die twice.

4. The next reference is somewhat related and comes in Proverbs 16:6, where Solomon says that ***"By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil."***

In the first part of this, we pretty much have a summary of the gospel! ***"Lovingkindness"*** is a reference to God's faithful or covenant love, sometimes referred to as ***"mercy"*** or ***"grace,"*** and to atone for sin, this ***"lovingkindness"*** is combined with the ***"truth"*** of his word, "law and love combining," as we sometimes sing. To have ***"lovingkindness"*** without ***"truth"*** will not atone for sin, and to have ***"truth"*** without ***"lovingkindness"*** will not atone for sin. John refers to the coming of Jesus by saying that ***"...the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."*** Truly, sin is atoned for through the application of grace and truth.

But the second part of this proverb is the reminder that ***"by the fear of the Lord one keeps away from evil."*** And this gets us back to the picture of a snare or a trap. When we truly fear the Lord, we avoid the bait and the trap altogether.

5. The next one is found in Proverbs 19:23, where Solomon says that ***"The fear of the LORD leads to life, so that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil."***

We've already discussed the ***"life"*** part of this, so I want to focus on this idea of the fear of God allowing us to ***"sleep satisfied."*** Have you guys every lost sleep over something? Like in a serious ongoing way? Like some of you, I have as well, and it is miserable! About a year and a half ago, I met a guy in a hot spring in the middle of nowhere Idaho. We had hiked in, and when you're soaking with a few strangers in a 107 degree hot spring in the wilderness, you have a way of opening up to each other. But this guy had not slept through the night for weeks, if not months, and he was absolutely miserable. This guy was on the verge of completely losing it.

Sleep is so important, and if we aren't sleeping, nothing else goes well. I listened, and I told him I'd be praying for him, and I have – that day and a number of times since then. I hope he's found some relief.

But let's notice: Those who fear the Lord can ***"sleep satisfied, untouched by evil."*** Isn't that a pleasant thought! We live in a world where we are surrounded by evil, and it can be unsettling if we let it, but when we fear the Lord, we can ***"sleep satisfied, untouched by evil."***

6. The next proverb comes in Proverbs 22:4, where Solomon says that ***"The reward of humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, honor and life."***

This may overlap with some of the proverbs on humility (we will get to those eventually), but let's notice in this passage that humility and the fear of the Lord are rewarded by ***"riches, honor and life."*** And aren't these things what everybody's looking for? Or to turn it around, nobody wants poverty, dishonor, and death! Solomon, then, is describing the good life. It's almost like "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Everybody wants ***"riches, honor and life."*** And this, by the way, is pretty much what God gave King Solomon. Solomon, then, has some experience with this.

7. The next one comes in the form of a double proverb in Proverbs 23:17-18, where Solomon says, ***"Do not let your heart envy sinners, but live in the fear of the LORD always. Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off."***

So, there's a contrast. On one hand, we may be tempted to ***"envy sinners,"*** but the alternative is that we ***"live in the fear of the Lord always."*** First of all, let's note the danger of ***"envy"*** here. We may not be caught up in a sin right now, but there's danger in always wishing we could do what others are doing. But again, the alternative to this is to ***"live in the fear of the Lord always."*** Do not envy, but fear God at all times. And let's also note the importance of the ***"always"*** in this passage. We may fear the Lord more at some times and in some places more than in others, but it's important to fear the Lord ***"always,"*** in every circumstance. And the reward here is that we have a ***"future"*** and our ***"hope will not be cut off."***

8. **\*\*PPT\*\*** The next proverb comes in Proverbs 28:14, where Solomon says, ***"How blessed is the man who fears always, but he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity."***

And I know it doesn't specifically refer to the "fear of God," but that does seem to be what's going on here. The blessing isn't on those who just run around terrified, but the blessing is on those who fear the Lord. We've seen this already today, but let's pay special attention to the second half of this, ***"but he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity."*** So, there's a contrast between the heart that fears God and the heart that is ***"hardened."*** To harden your heart is to ignore what God says to the point where we really don't care anymore. And it's a very real danger. When we are faced with a temptation, we face a choice: We can fear God and resist it, or we can ignore what God says and give into it. Giving in is obviously a problem, but the real problem comes later. The next time we face that temptation, we've already given in, so it's just a tiny bit easier to give in a second time, and then a third, and then a fourth, and so on. And eventually, we get to the point where we have no fear of God whatsoever and we don't really care what God says. We don't care what some ancient document has to say to us.

So, what we learn here is that when we face a temptation, we fear God, we take it seriously, and we make a choice to turn away from it. Otherwise, Solomon says that we are putting ourselves into the path of ***"calamity."*** If we try to ignore the Lord, we are putting ourselves in danger. One author has said that "you

cannot reject God's word without causing yourself harm." If we harden our hearts, we are headed for disaster. Nothing good will come of it.

9. Well, the last proverb describing a benefit that comes from fearing the Lord is found in Proverbs 29:25, where Solomon says, ***"The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted."***

We've already looked at the second part of this, but we have a contrast here that comes in the warning that ***"the fear of man brings a snare."*** And I'm including this one here, because once again we have a choice: We can fear man or we can fear God. In John 12, many of the chief rulers believed in Jesus, but they refused to confess their belief because they were afraid of the Pharisees, ***"...for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God,"*** John says. In Matthew 26, Peter feared those around him at the fire, causing him to deny knowing Jesus. In John 19, Pilate the governor feared the people and feared for his relationship with Caesar, causing him to send Jesus to the cross. In this passage, King Solomon describes the ***"fear of man"*** as a ***"snare,"*** as a trap. The solution, then, is to fear God more than we fear those around us. Don't take the bait. Don't fall for it. Or, as Jesus says in, Matthew 10:28, ***"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*** Fear God!

### Conclusion:

This morning, we've looked at the proverbs that encourage us to fear the Lord, and we have seen a number of benefits. We've seen the warnings about the alternatives, but we've also seen the advantages. As we close today, I've saved one more of these Proverbs for the very end. It comes in Proverbs 14:2, where King Solomon says, ***"He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, but he who is devious in his ways despises Him."*** We close, then, with a description of what this looks like. The one who fears the Lord ***"walks in his uprightness,"*** but the one ***"who is devious in his ways despises him."*** The foolish man says, "You can't judge me! You don't know my heart!" The wisest man who ever lived, though, tells us what a fear of the Lord looks like: It looks like someone who ***"walks in his uprightness."*** This week, let's be people who fear the Lord and walk like we should.

Before Josh leads us in a song, let's go to God in prayer.

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the God that we fear. You alone are worthy of all glory and praise, and we come to you this morning asking for your mercy and love. We pray that we would be able to see the sin in our lives for what it really is, and we pray for the courage to turn away from it.

Father, thank you for saving us. Help us to always remember who you are, and help us to always live the way we should. Give us humble hearts that are always willing to turn back to the right way. We come to you this morning through Jesus our savior. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)