

The Joy of Fearing God

Psychologists assert that all human beings possess fear, albeit in diverse forms. We encounter a wide spectrum of phobias. It's evident that any experience of fear feels like an adversary to be confronted and vanquished. What fears do you harbor? When do you experience fear?

Psalm 34:4 proclaims, “I sought the Lord, and he answered me, delivering me from all my fears.” However, just three verses later, King David writes, “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him. . . . Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints”. David writes that trusting God dispels fear. Consequently, he commands, **“You who would be free from your fears, fear the Lord.”** It's evident that the first fear is distinct from the second. Today, we delve into the concept of fear of God.

When David penned Psalm 34, he had just emerged from more terrifying circumstances than most of us will ever encounter. The most formidable man in the land, consumed by intense and violent jealousy, relentlessly pursued David like a hunted animal (1 Samuel 20:33). King Saul's determination to eliminate David was so unwavering that he even attempted to kill his own son Jonathan, who stood in his way.

Desperate to escape, David fled to the Philistines, his long-standing enemy. Upon entering their town, rumors spread rapidly: “Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, ‘Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands’?” (1 Samuel 21:11) David realized he had sought refuge from harm only to find himself in equally perilous hands. Terrified by the potential consequences of facing the Philistine king, David feigned insanity, drooling saliva before King Achish. Imagine the intensity of fear! This was only one terrifying encounter among the numerous harrowing situations David faced.

He bravely fought off lions and bears with his bare hands, defied the giant when no one else would, and even fled and hid in caves from his own king for years. He endured a betrayal and rebellion led by his own son. David's fear was untamed, persistent, and desperate. And God used these fears to teach him and us the fear of God.

The psalm teaches us “If you would be free from your fears, fear the Lord.” Obviously, they are different fears. Psalm 34:11 states, “Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord” The first one is the spirit of fear, and the second one is fear of the Lord. The fear of God is mostly translated as reverential fear, godly fear, or holy fear. These interpretations are far too limited.

Why fear of God? Where does this fear originate? **Isaiah 40 proclaims, “Who else has held the oceans in his hand? Who has measured off the heavens with his fingers? Who else**

knows the weight of the earth, or has weighed the mountains and hills on a scale?” When you stand at the ocean beach, you witness the vast expanse of the ocean before you. The visible part may only be a few miles from the shoreline, but imagine it extends endlessly for thousands of miles, meeting another landmass on the other side. And there are other oceans. God holds all the water in his palm, and He controls the flow of the oceans. It’s breathtaking. And think about the entire universe being contained within God’s palm. Our solar system, the Milky Way galaxy, is just one of billions of galaxies. Our imaginations can’t comprehend the true nature of God. Even with our wildest imaginations, it surpasses our ability to comprehend.

Our God is awe-inspiring. The realization of a glimpse of His divine nature instills a profound sense of holy fear. Those who love God gradually experience this holy fear as God reveals Himself. **Holy fear has a captivating, not repulsive, effect. There is captivating beauty and joy in his holiness.** To fear God is to reverence and be utterly humbled by His divine and sovereignty over all. It is an admission of God’s worthiness of our admiration, devotion, reverence, and awe - but it is far more than that. It is a trembling-in-the-soul, all-of-life submission to that God. A recognition of how small, sinful, and undeserving we are in His presence, yet still dares, in Christ, to draw near to Him. By the sacrifice of Jesus, we are covered! God loves us as He loves Jesus! What a gracious, infinite love it is!

When we fear God, our hearts align with his. We share his passions and detest his detestation. What holds significance for him becomes significant to us, while what doesn’t holds no weight in our lives. To fear God is to despise sin and injustice. It means forsaking evil in all its forms—thought, speech, and action. It involves refraining from uttering deceitful words. It entails walking in authentic humility before God and humanity.

Holy fear is the greatest force of confidence, comfort, and protection available to any being in the universe. It provides us with safety from all other fears and gives us freedom. As we journey onward, we will discover this truth. However, holy fear can be broken down into two major categories: trembling at the joyful presence of God and obeying His Word.

We preach a lot about the love of God. It is right and true. However there is a danger of forgetting that the Bible reveals not first the love of God but the intense, blazing holiness of God, with His love at the center of that holiness. We can hardly conceive of a God who is both dreadful and yet compassionate, severe and yet gentle, just and yet forgiving, wrathful and yet approachable, exalted and yet available.

The presence of God brings immense joy! Observe how closely Psalm 34 intertwines the fullness of happiness with the weight of godly fear: “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is *good!* *Blessed* is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, *fear the Lord*, you his saints, for *those who fear him* have no lack!” (Psalm 34:8–9) The Lord’s glory, power, wisdom, justice, and mercy are all bestowed upon those who fear Him. Fear God, and you will find joy in Him! How paradoxical it sounds! But it is never so.

This fear-filled joy and joy-filled fear are not confined to just one psalm. Isaiah prophesies that Jesus' delight lies in the fear of God. (Isaiah 11:3) Holy fear and the most intense joy are inseparable. We cannot experience the fullness of joy and abundance of life if our hearts do not tremble before his greatness.

Have you experienced greater happiness in God? Do you have greater intensities of intimacy with God? Do you think sanctification is hard and slow? It might mean that we shielded ourselves from aspects of him that makes us uncomfortable. Are you approaching him as the consuming fire that he is?

Being in God's presence is essential for the spiritual well-being of every believer. In my past, it was challenging for me to enter God's presence during prayer. By chance, I began to contemplate the awe-inspiring and holy nature of our God. Almost immediately, I was enveloped in His presence. This experience continued the following day and the day after. I recalled Jesus' teachings to His disciples in His prayer: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name..." Jesus instructed His disciples to approach God with holy awe and reverence.

Whenever you face fear, calamity, disaster, or any other painful situation, remember to worship God, praise Him, and sanctify His name as you would in the Lord's Prayer. You might wonder how you can worship in such challenging times. One of my closest friends shared a powerful testimony with me. "I was battling severe depression. During prayer, God spoke to me. *Praise me!* I answered, God, *how can I praise in this state of depression?* God spoke to me again, *Praise me!*" When you worship Him and sanctify His name, His presence and love will draw nearer to you, and God will lift you up from all the situations you are fearing.

God is calling us today, "My child, lamb's blood has gone before you. I laid aside my robes of glory to purchase you with my blood. Come into my glory! I am greater than you are. I am more powerful than you are. Rely on me. Expect supernatural encounters in your life, for I have opened heaven's gates for you. The joy of my presence awaits you. I offer you throne room encounters. **Rest your weary soul, cease from striving to enter, and simply come. The festive celebration of joy awaits you! Come into my glory!**"