

## Free From the Fear of Man – Proverbs 29:25

My name is Jason Taylor. I am the Biblical Soul Care Pastor here at Coram Deo. It is my privilege to share the Word of God with you today.

Please turn with me to **Proverbs 29:25**

If you need a Bible, the ushers are walking up and down the row and are happy to give you one of ours.

**Proverbs 29:25. “The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.”**

There was a high school boy who said, “For a long time, I didn’t have any self-esteem, the only time I felt good was when I had \$200 shoes. If I didn’t have them, I didn’t want to go to school.” He was a notably strong, tough football player who also won many fistfights. But who knew that his strength was in his shoes? Take his shoes and you conquer the man.

His shoes weren’t the real issue. The problem was his reputation, what people thought of his shoes and by extension, him. If he wore expensive shoes and people complimented them, he felt invincible. If he wore cheap shoes and others devalued them, he was nothing. His shoes were his kryptonite. His life was controlled by other people and how they viewed him.

The Bible calls this **“The fear of man”**.

- It is a fear of people, not just men. The word, “adam” is used which can be translated “man” or “person”. The fear of man is common to all.
- It can be a fear of physical harm. Those who have experienced physical trauma and abuse at the hands of another person can be tempted to place their self-worth and safety in the hands of others. This fear of physical retaliation can keep them from doing what is biblically right to please an oppressor.
- It can be a mental or emotional experience, a deeper anxiety of losing the favor, approval, and acceptance of others. “People will see me,” or “people will reject me” are common thoughts of those who fear man.
- We need other people or we need something from them.
- This is the only place in the Bible where the phrase, **“fear of man”** is used, but the concept is shared in living color all through the Scriptures. You will find that even the most godly in the Bible can struggle with fear of man. Abraham, Paul, and Peter are just a few who had to learn how to be free from this fear. So, relax. Take a deep breath. You are in good company. Many of us must be sanctified in this area.

### 1) The fear of man leads to snares and bondage

**The fear of man lays a snare...**

Snare is a trap. (See Picture) It is typically used to capture animals by using a noose or loop that constricts around the animal’s body part when it walks through. It is a savvy way to catch an animal. Once they are caught, there is no way to get out. The harder it pulls, the tighter the snare gets.

The same is true for you when you fear man more than God. The snare puts you in bondage, at the mercy of the hunter. You feel trapped because you are trapped. And no matter how hard you try, it is difficult to get out on your own. The more energy you exert, the more discouraged you become. The harder you pull, the tighter the snare gets.

This powerful imagery portrays real life experience.

Fear of man traps you in the snares and bondage of:

- Shame (Feeling exposed and worthless)
  - Have you ever dreamt that you were in a crowd of people, but you were naked? Shame is like that.
  - We fear people because they can expose and humiliate us. So, we feel worthless.
  - Feeling worthless because of sin. Adam and Eve, Genesis 3:7 “The eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked.” This exposure due to sin left them ashamed and aware of their own sin. This sin-shame is something we bring upon ourselves.
  - Feeling worthless because of being sinned against. Victims feel embarrassment, humiliation, and disgrace. They feel unclean, naked, and exposed. They feel under the all-knowing gaze of others, and as a result, they fear people. This victimization-shame is something done to us.
  - We cannot free ourselves from the snare of shame. The harder we try the tighter the snare gets. We need someone to set us free. We need God.
- Isolation (Withdrawing from others)
  - Generally, we are a people behind walls
  - We isolate and protect ourselves from the gaze of others. They see us, we are ashamed, so we hide ourselves because it is easier and less painful.
  - We want to have our felt needs met, but we don’t want to be exposed.
  - We get caught in a game of “Hide and Peek”.
  - We hide ourselves because of the fear of painful relationships, we often create fantasy relationships in their place. We create our own version of community, a fantasy relationship where our felt needs can be met and we aren’t exposed. That is one reason that pornography is so attractive. Not only is a place to lust and find release, but it is a place to escape, isolate, and comfort. No one will express disapproval. No one will reject. No pain. It’s not hurting anyone. It is in secret.
  - We peek out from behind our wall hoping that we will see the vulnerability of others. Disgrace loves company. We hope that they are not different than us.

- It is a continuous cycle of peek out from behind our walls, look at others around us, become aware that they notice, and hide again. “Wash, Rinse. Repeat”. Trapped in the snare of isolation.
- We cannot free ourselves from the snare of isolation. The answer is found in God. We need God.
- People-pleasing (Needing the approval, affirmation, and acceptance of others)
  - Maybe the most common of the snares, rejection-fear.
  - We are controlled by others because they might reject, ridicule, or despise us.
  - We are not invited to the party. We feel ignored. We are confident they don’t like us. We aren’t pleased with our work because they don’t value our contribution to the organization. We are called unkind names. We are criticized, unloved, and unaffirmed. Rejected.
  - When we feel rejected and unvalued, we tend to pursue those who we think are valuable. We seek out those who have more money, popularity, influence, power, education, or attractiveness. Our connection to these people makes us feel better about ourselves.
  - The very definition of who we are is written by other people. We become who they think we should be. We do what they think we should do. We believe we are who they think we should be.
  - But, let’s recognize that we cannot do this on our own. We cannot free ourselves from the snare of people-pleasing. The answer is not found when I stand in front of the mirror each morning and tell myself how great I am. We need to remember how God loves us so much that He even sent His own Son to die for us. This is the greatest approval—God’s love which casts out all fear. We need God.
- Peer-pressure (Conforming to others’ beliefs)
  - The praise of others is like a fresh breeze. At times it can seem so refreshing, but it only lasts for a moment, and it can seem more glorious to us than the praise that comes from God.
  - So, we follow other’s lead. We compromise our own biblical values. We change the way we dress, where we spend our time, and what activities we are willing to try. We change the way we think and act so we can briefly be refreshed by the words of people we value.
  - While this is common for students in junior and senior high schools, it is also common for college students and adults in the workforce. Generally, we want to fit in. We want to belong. We want to be a part of something with others. We want the praise of men. So, we conform.
  - We cannot free ourselves from the snare of peer-pressure. It is a powerful influence over us that can keep us from believing truth found in the Scriptures. We need God.
- Conflict-avoidance (Failing to speak the truth)
  - When we fail to speak biblical truth because we fear that we are going to cause unnecessary conflict, that people won’t like us, or we might look foolish.
  - So, we avoid correcting our children, defending the church’s biblical stance on a controversial current issue, or sharing the gospel with someone who doesn’t know the Lord as Savior.
  - Now there are some occasions where conflict-avoidant people become brave. The first is on social media. But this is another game of “Hide

and Peek”. Their confidence is found in distance and never having to talk to someone face to face. So, they write incredible things in social media posts, then they hide.

- The second is in anonymous emails from an unknown address. Pastors receive these kinds of emails periodically and they are full of criticism and opinion. They are often very pointed and very brash.
- The third is when you have peer support. When 3-5 are all in agreement it is interesting how the mildest of person can become courageous. But their confidence may be misplaced. It may be found in the opinion and support of the group rather than the Lord.
- The fourth is when we want to be heard but not engage in a conversation. We drop the mic and walk away. “Just saying!” is their mantra. Most times these folks are sharing their opinion on some disputable matter but may or may not be speaking the truth of God’s Word in love.
- Can we gently but boldly love people enough to speak biblical truth? For most of us this is very difficult. We need to trust God enough that even if people reject, criticize, get angry, we can be loving ambassadors for God. It is a snare that we cannot be free from on our own. We need God.
- Codependency (Enabling others because you need to be needed)
  - We do naturally depend on other people, but codependency is when that dependence goes to far. It will often result in enabling behaviors that are blamed on your desire to help.
  - We love to be needed. It makes us feel valuable.
  - Ultimately it is a rejection-fear.
  - Some descriptions of codependent people include: 1) thinking and feeling overly responsible for other people, 2) feeling compelled to solve others’ problems, 3) feel unappreciated, 4) do things to put themselves in a position to be needed, 5) feel like martyrs, 6) feel ashamed of who they are (never enough for others), 7) they can threaten, bribe, and beg, 8) worry whether or not people like them, 9) get angry often, and 10) be either extremely responsible or irresponsible
  - We cannot free ourselves from the snare of codependency. We are trapped in the bondage of needing others so that we feel valued. We put people in the place they were never meant to be, and we give them power and authority over our lives. We desperately need God to be free.
- Idolatry (Replacing God with people)
  - This may be the most difficult snare to understand because it messes with preconceived notions.
  - First, we often think that an idol is a statue made from wood, stone, or precious metal, and it is. That is correct. I drove by a house in my neighborhood and there is a statue of Buddha out front. But it is less important what the idol is and more important that we recognize an idol as something that is worshipped.
  - Worship is an exaltation and recognition of their perceived power as god. Attributes given to God alone are passed on to idols in our life. We believe that the idol can see us—they get us. We are understood. An idol can fill our imaginary emotional tank with esteem, appreciation, love, admiration, acceptance, respect and so on. An object of worship

isn't just something we give our attention to, but rather we believe that it has the power to bless us thereby making us feel valued, supported, and meaningful. We perceive that an idol can give us something we need.

- In the Bible it is common to focus only on Baal or money as idols, things that are man-made creations. Rarely do we consider that our spouses, children, parents, friends, bosses, or pastors could be an object of worship in our life.
- When we fear man, we make people our god. **"You shall have no other gods before Me." Exodus 20:3** This is a matter of personal unbelief. We simply don't believe that God is enough for us, we need someone else to meet our needs, keep us safe, and make us feel important.
- But idolatry is a path to slavery. The idol becomes large in our life and rules us. It tells us how to think, act, and feel. We become slaves to people, and we never see it coming. This bondage is oppressive.
- There was a girl who was a three-sport star athlete in college. Captain of all three teams with high academic marks. She had high expectations for herself. She wanted to be the best girlfriend, best athlete, and best student." But, the expectations of others were even higher. She wanted to quit one of the sports to alleviate some stress in her life, but she couldn't bring herself to disappoint her teammates. Saying, "No" to any friend was out of the question. "She wanted to please everybody and couldn't stop," one friend observed. She needed other's approval and friendship. She felt suffocated by possible disparaging opinions. She could only think of one way out. She put a gun to her chest and shot herself. She was a slave to her idol. She saw no other way to freedom.

These snares highlight the bondage experienced when we fear man, but Proverbs 29:25 gives us a path to freedom...

## 2) Trust God to be free and safe

*But whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.*

Trust—put your confidence in God in such a way that your life depended on it. Like a trust fall. He is your help. He is your shield. He is your safe place.

He is trustworthy because he's...

- Personal (God is for you)
  - God makes himself known in the Bible
  - God is aware of and concerned about the details of our lives
  - He is neither aloof nor disinterested
  - It is his nature to be active and involved with his creation
  - He cares so much about your pain and struggles
  - **"You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not written in your book? Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?" Psalm 56:8-11**

- Two questions to help you put your trust in God into action
  - When do you resist making yourself known because of a fear of rejection?
  - How does being personal (self-disclosure) open-up conversation toward God and the gospel?
- Faithful (God will do what he has promised)
  - God will always do what he has said and fulfill what he has promised.
  - God is faithful to his promises.
  - God's words about himself, found in the Bible, completely correspond with reality. God always speaks truth when he speaks because he is faithful and true.
  - **"For the word of the Lord is upright and all his work is done in faithfulness." Psalm 33:4**
  - God's creation displays his faithfulness.
  - God's covenants display his faithfulness.
  - God is not affected by trends or changes in culture.
  - God is not affected by man's opinion.
  - God does not age or slow down.
  - God is faithful and able to complete all that he said he would complete.
  - God will do what God said he would do.
  - Two questions to help you put your trust in God into action
    - How consistent are your expectations of other people?
    - How does God's faithfulness open up conversation toward God and the gospel?
- Sovereign (God is ruler over all)
  - God owns everything. First by right of creation. Second, by purchasing it with Jesus' own blood on the cross at Calvary.
  - The universe is his. The galaxy is his. The solar system is his. Earth is his. The United States of America is his. Iowa is his. The Quad Cities is his. Your family is his. You are his. All things are his and he rules over them all by right and by power.
  - **"The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules overall." Psalm 103:19**
  - God is by position and power, ruler over all creation.
  - He has full authority.
  - But God is not an abusive, power-hungry oppressor. It may feel that way from time to time but our feelings can be deceptive as they come from wrong, unbiblical thinking.
  - God gives mankind a relative sense of freedom to do good or to do evil. To live for God's glory which leads to our joy or to do evil and be in the snares and bondage thereof.
  - While he is ruler overall, he grants mankind freedom within his rule.
  - Theologians call this mankind's freedom of inclination. This means that we are free when we choose according to our strongest inclination or deepest desire... We are free when we do what we most want to do.
  - God providentially governs or directs all things in order that they accomplish his purpose. He allows man freedom to do what he wants to do but works in that freedom to accomplish God's own desires.
  - This is an amazing God that we serve. We can be sure that we have freedom to obey his Word and accomplish his sovereign purposes.

- God is a ruler over all who is faithful and for you.
- Two questions to help you put your trust in God into action
  - Do you feel cheated that life is for God's glory, not yours?
  - How does joyfully submitting to God's sovereignty open up conversation toward God and the gospel?
- Just (God is right and does right)
  - "The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart." Psalm 19:8
  - God displays moral equity and does not show favoritism.
  - God treats people according to what they deserve.
  - God's moral standard and enforcement of that standard are perfect. He provides justice. Every penalty for moral injustice is paid in full, either at Calvary or in hell.
  - He delights more in repentance as a means to restoration (Calvary) than in punishment as a means to moral satisfaction (hell).
  - Two questions to help you put your trust in God into action
    - Do you find yourself showing favoritism to the wealthy, attractive, talented, and influential?
    - How does being just open-up conversation toward God and the gospel?
- Good (God is good and does good)
  - God is the ultimate standard of what it means to be good
  - All that God does is worthy of approval. (His being and actions are actually worthy of his own approval.)
  - What is good in the world? Good is what God approves.
  - We should do good which means we should do what God approves.
  - "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!" Psalm 34:8
  - Two questions to help you put your trust in God into action
    - Are you embarrassed when your actions coincide with God's good more than culture's cool?
    - Can you let go of fear of man and begin to trust God?

It is difficult to trust anyone, so how can I let go of fear and start moving toward trust.

- Grieve.
- "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death." 2 Corinthians 7:10

The fear of man leads to snares and bondage but trust God to be safe and free.

Let's pray—Lord God thank you for giving us eternal life that in hope we know will come if we have repented of our sins and believe in Jesus. Also Lord, thank you that will commend faithfulness. We can wait on You, we can trust You, and You will not disappoint. We don't have to let the opinions of others discourage us. Rather we can have confidence in You and Your approval. Not only will we be approved one day at the Judgment Seat of Christ, but right now You have given us Jesus Christ's righteousness. You have already spoken Your approval of us. Now we don't have to let failure or success drive our self-worth. Our confidence is found in Your approval.

## Benediction

- Text Talk
- Guest Central
- Tatmans available for prayer
- Memorial Day—Thanking God for those who gave their lives