

life groups discussion guide

series: Big People – Little God



Step 4: Understand and grow in the fear of the Lord. The person who fears God will fear nothing else.

Isaiah 33:6 He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure.

Psalm 33: 8-9 Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

The word fear has multiple meanings. Fear can be described as an involuntary instinct that occurs naturally without time to premeditate a response. This type of immediate reactionary fear is a great indicator of the health of our heart because it shows us our true initial response to situations. However, this discussion will focus more on fear that means reverence (as described in the Psalm above). When we have time to process our initial emotion, and formulate an action, our response becomes a matter of respect or devotion. *“A mature fear of the Lord is more akin to awe, devotion and worship. It is a response that says, ‘your glory is irresistible’...It is not simply a passive devotion; it follows Christ in obedience. It searches out His will and can’t wait to do it” (Ed Welch).*

Activity: What We Fear (Scenario and Discussion)

Imagine a woman trying to progress at work. This woman perceives that her employer will fire her unless she acts unethically. She has a visceral reaction to this situation. 1) She fears her boss and the ramifications on not being employed. 2) She fears God and knows acting unethically is contrary to his will. How does she determine which fear is greater?

**Discuss what areas in your life you find yourself fearing man more than God.
How do we rationalize obeying men before God?**

Life often presents situations similar to the example above, and so many times the fear of God is trumped by the fear of man. We think, God is more willing to grant forgiveness than whoever we are dealing with, so time after time, God is mocked and we take advantage of the grace that he has given us. But remember what Paul said about the abuse of grace in Romans 6, “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” If you find yourself on a continuous pattern of revering man above God, you need to examine your heart to see if you have truly, “died to sin.”

A lie has seeped into the church. A lie that says, “Once you say you’re a Christian, you’re all set. You don’t need to change.” This lie removes sanctification from the spiritual journey and produces stagnate followers

that have no fear of God because they perhaps “said a prayer once.” Instead, Paul challenges us in 1 Cor 13:5 to, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” We cannot merely pray a prayer, set our lives to auto pilot and live without a fear of God. As Charles Spurgeon wrote, *“Those eyes which have no fear of God before them now, shall have the terrors of hell before them forever...”*

As humans with finite minds we have a hard time understanding the size and perfection of God. We often want to understand God’s balance of grace and justice, and miss that it is not a balance, but that he is perfectly full of grace and wholly just simultaneously. Because of this flaw in our logic, we emphasize one or the other characteristic. The trend in American Christianity for the past two decades seems to focus on God’s grace, and minimizes his justice, which has removed much of our healthy fear of God. As Ed Welch says in the book, *“Sometimes, I confess, I speak more about the ‘how to’ than about God...the result is that our goal can be self-improvement rather than the glory of the Holy God. We need more sermons that leave us trembling.”*

Discussion of Biblical Examples:

Read Acts 5:1-11 - How is this applicable to the discussion of fearing God?

Read Luke 22:54-62

Read 1 Sam 17:21-26 --- Ed Welch says, *“Anything that erodes the fear of God will intensify the fear of man.”* How is this quote evident in the text? Discuss the difference in the reaction of those with a fear of man versus David, who had a fear of God.

These three examples are great illustrations of the point Welch makes in this chapter: *“All experiences of the fear of man share at least one common feature: people are big. They have grown to idolatrous proportions in our lives. They control us. Since there is no room in our hearts to worship both God and people, whenever people are big – God is not. Therefore, the first task in escaping the snare of the fear of man is to know that God is awesome and glorious, not other people.”*

Discussion point: What do you need to do to restore God back to his rightful place in your heart?

Closing Prayer from When People are Big and God is Small

“Lord, teach your church to fear you. Your grace is not always amazing to us. We are slow to hate our sin. We are more concerned with what someone thinks about our appearance than we are about reverential obedience before you. We want to delight in fear. We want to treasure in it and give it to the next generation. Amen.”