

Walking in the Fear of God

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[0 : 00] Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, we are now going to look at your word written. And Lord, as always, in some ways, your word comforts us.

In some ways, your word convicts us and confronts us. And Father, we ask that, we just ask that we would trust Jesus more and that we would trust the Holy Spirit to do his work and that your word would come deeply in our lives to speak into us and to form us so that we might, Father, grow in knowing you and the Son and the Holy Spirit and that we might walk in the fear of God.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated. So, I was in Calgary this week for some meetings, three days of meetings.

One day to spend with my son Jacob and his wife and kids in Calgary. And then due to airplane turmoil, Air Canada let me stay an extra day in Hal, Calgary.

I guess that's how you could look at it positively. But on the day that I spent with my son, his wife went to work. He took the day off. And his three boys and I went and did some exploring around Calgary.

[1 : 20] And one of the things he wanted me to see, and if you've never been to Calgary and you go, you should go see their main branch of their library. It's really, it's a beautiful building inside and sort of interesting place.

And Jacob's boys, my grandsons, they love going there. They love going to the library for all the things that kids can do. Anyway, I have a coffee addiction, as some of you know.

And so we get to the library about one o'clock and I need a coffee. So I cut across the street to the city hall where there's a cafe, get my coffee and I'm walking back across the street.

And you sort of, from that place where you're getting into the main door, there's probably about 25, 30 steps up to the plaza that allows you to get into the library.

And I'm up about, I guess I'm about 20 steps from the top. And there's a guy beside me, about, he's like, you know, a few feet beside me. On the other side of the rail, about 15 stairs from the top.

[2 : 24] So he's five stairs ahead of me. And all of a sudden, out of the blue, I see this, I'm thinking it's a young guy, all dressed in black, with a hoodie on. And the hood's coming up to about here.

And he has a mask on his face up to here. And he comes running this way to a group of two guys. And he sprays them with bear spray. Like he has a big container like this.

It's a huge cloud of bear spray. It covers these two guys who start screaming. People start running. And then he comes running down the stairs.

And, I mean, this is a terrible thing. I'm glad it wasn't me. But he bear sprays the guy five stairs ahead of me on my right-hand side. Because he comes down about five stairs.

Gives him a full blast. A huge cloud of bear spray. I get sort of caught in the side of it because the wind's blowing. You know, my eyes start to sting. My nose hurts. My mouth hurts.

[3 : 20] I wish I could tell you that I was so courageous that I went to try to tackle him. But I didn't. I run down the stairs. I'm worried that he's going to come after me. And I'm running down the stairs.

I turn and see that he's gone back up the stairs and has gone somewhere that way. And I go to the bottom of the stairs and sort of the other side. And I'm standing there. My eyes are watering, you know, my tongue, everything.

And I decide that the safest place, the sanctuary, so to speak, is in the library. So I hold my breath, run up the stairs. And by this point in time, there's about three security guards, four security guards barring the door on their radios, I guess, to the police.

And I run up the stairs holding my breath, trying to keep my eyes, like, to slits. And they let me in and ask me if I'm all right. And I say, well, I mean, I was fine.

I mean, it takes a while to get that out of your system. But I see the library as a sanctuary. There's security guards there. They're manning the door.

[4 : 21] They have, you know, their walkie-talkies or their radio systems to the police. And there's this random bear spray attack. It's, like, really weird.

But I run in to the library, and the library is a place of sanctuary. Now, I mention this because it dawned on me that this is actually a very helpful way for you to understand what's going on in the book of Nehemiah.

That in the book of Nehemiah, the Jewish people have been cast, brought in. They've been defeated by the Babylonians. Babylon's now been defeated when Nehemiah's been written by Persia.

But they're a distant empire controlling everything. When Babylonia came, they depopulated the whole region. They took most of the Jewish people away. So lots of the countryside, they brought in some other people as well, but lots of the countryside just became wild and unkempt.

Think of an abandoned house and what happens to the nice gardens if you abandon them for a long period of time. It's not that the place becomes more fruitful. It becomes less fruitful.

[5 : 28] And the city is in rubble, and the other towns are in rubble, and a group of Jewish exiles come back. And first they establish the altar so they can worship God, then the temple.

But what they want is a sanctuary. Sanctuary. That's what he's trying to do by building the wall. That's what the book of Nehemiah is about, is that Nehemiah and the people understand they need a sanctuary, a place where they can worship God, where they can start to develop economics and other types of things, rebuild houses, have some type of prosperity, and something that helps them to be safe from their enemies that have encircled them and hate them and want to kill them. They don't just want to bear spray them. They want to kill them, and they need a sanctuary. So in many ways, what's going on in the book of Nehemiah speaks very deeply to the longings and desires of lots of people in Canada today.

Many people in Canada, what they want is a sanctuary. But we're caught in Canada because often, well, first of all, certain places we just think aren't going to be sanctuaries whatsoever, but there's also, in a sense, almost like this utopian idealism that a certain place will be a sanctuary, yet a skepticism and a cynicism as to whether you can ever find a sanctuary.

Because, as we know, families let you down, friends let you down, institutions let you down, people who support you let you down. I don't know how many of you have watched any of the testimonies testimonies of people who've detransitioned, but they have a very common theme, how their heart is broken, that the psychologists, the psychiatrists, and the doctors that have been so affirming and giving them lots of time, the second they say they want to detransition or they want to stop the procedures and they want to detransition, they're abandoned.

[7 : 21] They're just abandoned. No more favorable time and counsel. They just abandoned them. They're just dropped. Nowhere to go. And so it's important to see that the book of Nehemiah, in some ways, it's not just about a wall.

It's like me and the bear spray attack. I want to go to a place of sanctuary where I'm not going to be sprayed. That's what I want. That's what's happening in the book of Nehemiah. But now we see here, in a sense, the fears of our culture that sometimes the place that we think of as a sanctuary isn't a sanctuary because evil is there.

And that's what we see being addressed in Nehemiah 5. It's a very, very contemporary story. In some ways, it touches our deepest fears.

The place of sanctuary isn't a sanctuary. So let's look at what happens. If you have your Bibles, it's Nehemiah 5, and it's good if you do have your Bible so you can follow along. And once again, I'm going to use some of the imagery of scenes as if it's a Netflix production to help us go through it. So scene 1 is verses 1 to 4, and the title of the scene is a good, positive title, Poverty, Oppression, and Slavery.

[8 : 34] And that's what this first scene is. Look at this. Now, chapter 5, verse 1, Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers.

Now, just sort of pause here for a second. Brothers is the literal accurate word. But there's two things here we need to understand. First of all, it doesn't mean, like, I have one brother.

His name is Stephen. It's not talking about that, you know, sense of biological connection. It's really we see the entrance into human consciousness. That's literally what's happening.

It's the entry into human consciousness of the idea of human beings being brothers and sisters to each other. Many people in Canada think this is a secular idea, but it's not a secular idea. It's a Christian idea. It's not something that just comes from mere human reasoning. It's a Christian idea. And in this particular case, they haven't quite understood that all human beings are brothers, but they're talking now of their fellow Jews in the community.

[9 : 37] And all the way through this story, that's what's being referred to almost always. Okay? So read it again. Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers, the Jewish community.

For there were those who said, here's part of the outcry, with our sons and our daughters we are many. So let us get grain that we may eat and keep alive.

There were also those who said, we are mortgaging our fields and our vineyards and our houses to get grain because of the famine. And there were those who said, we have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards.

Now just sort of pause there. We're going to see in a moment that what's this causing is slavery and oppression. And there's a combination of famine and some type of crop failures.

And maybe because of the encircling armies, there's not been able to get, you know, the food. But what happens is the people, we're going to see it now in the next couple of verses as it makes it very clear.

[10 : 40] There's this combination of illegal and illegal things that the well-off are doing. And what they're suffering under is the price of things is going up and up and up.

Food is scarce and taxes are going higher. Nothing any of us can relate to with a cycle of things costing more and more, less economic opportunity and taxes going higher.

We can't relate to that at all. It's just, this doesn't happen in Canada, obviously. Just as an aside, never mind, I won't do it. Years ago, we had a person who was the admin person, and her name was Amy Van Hemmen.

And I would say things in staff meetings, and she'd always look me right in the eye and say, that's why we're not going to ever allow you to have a Twitter account. So, anyway, let's see what happens.

So, what we're going to see next is, just as I said, this idea of brothers is the entry into human consciousness of this idea of human beings being brothers.

[11 : 53] It's definitely not a pagan idea. For the pagans, human beings aren't all equal. They're not the same. The emperor is a god. The king is a god, or a semi-god, and human beings are slaves.

This is a radical new idea. If you talk to our friends here who are from India, they will tell you that they might believe that all human beings are equal. But because of the strong belief in karma, if you're poor, if you're starving to death, well, that's just bad karma.

Like, sucks to be you. I've had good karma, you had bad karma. You have to all just work it out. And this next cry is part of this entry, how the Bible has changed the world.

Listen to what it says. The next chapter is just one verse. It's scene number two, and it's called equally human. Listen to verse five. Now, our flesh, this is what they're complaining.

Our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, the other Jewish people. Our children are as their children. Yet, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves.

[12 : 54] And some of our daughters have already been enslaved. But it is not in our power to help it. For other men have our fields and our vineyards. Now, I mean, the fact of the matter is, is that at a purely scientific level, human beings aren't equal.

Some of us are smarter than others. Some of us are stronger than others. Some of us are old and close to death. And some of us are young and hope we have decades left. And at a completely objective scientific level, human beings aren't equal.

But this is a Christian idea that has changed the world. Listen, we're all human.

We're all human. And why is it that in this situation, that there's these terrible things that are going on, that are forcing some of us into poverty, and some of us into slavery, and some into death, because of a lack of food?

Now, it's very, very interesting that one of the common things of people outside of Christianity would say that Christianity is oppressive, without realizing that actually, even their understanding, even your understanding of what oppressive means, is actually something you learn from the Bible.

[14 : 12] And the Bible, rather than just having an idealistic view of sanctuary, it understands our need for sanctuary. But it also understands that humans being humans, if it's going to be a sanctuary, steps have to be taken to make it a true place of sanctuary, because things keep going wrong.

And that's what we see next, in the next scene. Scene number three, verses six to eleven, and I've called it, Good Anger. Good Anger.

Look at what it says. I was very angry when I heard their outcry, and these words. I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials.

I said to them, You are exacting interest, each from his brother. I'm going to explain what that means in a moment. And I held a great assembly against them, and said to them, We, as far as we are able, have bought back our Jewish brothers, who have been sold to the nations.

But you even sell your brothers, that they may be sold to us. They, that is, the people who are guilty of this, were silent, and could not find a word to say. Because it's true.

[15 : 24] They got confronted with the truth. So I said, The thing that you are doing is not good. Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God, to prevent the taunts of the nations, our enemies?

And I'm going to come back at the end to look at this. This is a very odd thing. He explains his concern to deal with the hungry, and oppressors, and economic injustice, that what, in a sense, motivates and grounds that is the fear of God.

Verse 10. Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest. Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the percentage of money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them.

Now, what's going on is this. The Old Testament has two different types of categories of low-income people, and two different ways of dealing with them.

And I can't remember the politician who said that the best welfare program in the world is a job. Well, that's actually a Jewish and Christian idea. So the first group that are dealt with in the Old Testament law is that it's told that when, let's say, I owned a grain field and I owned, I owned, you know, an olive orchard.

[16 : 52] And when I and my workers go and harvest, we're not allowed to keep going over the field and over the field and over the field until we get every last speck of grain and every last olive.

You do a, you know, you do a, you go through it, but you intentionally leave some of the grain and some of the olives that are there. And if you have a vineyard, some of the grapes. And if you have a fig tree, some of the figs.

And you intentionally leave some of it there so that those who don't have land, those who are displaced, those who are poor, they can go and harvest it.

They have to work, but it's left there intentionally for them to take. And the Old Testament doesn't forbid interest. The medieval church was wrong about this.

They were wrong. The Old Testament doesn't forbid interest. What it does say is that for low-income people, you don't charge them interest. That's what it says.

[17 : 49] It's part of the two-pronged attempt to help low-income people. So in other words, you know, one of you folks, you have a chance to maybe get a field. If I was to lend you the \$50,000, and, you know, later on, if you look in all the notes, they're probably charging about 12% interest a year, which in those days was very, very, very high.

But if they have to pay me 12% a year, it's going to be unaffordable for you. Once again, young people want to buy houses. Nothing here we can relate to.

Nothing here we can relate to at all. But the interest is going to kill you. And so that was part of how they helped the low-income. The other aspect of the low-income were those who, because of age or infirmity, couldn't work.

And there it was required that your heart would be moved to have compassion and give alms, give them money. But two different classes. And so what's going on here is that there's something both elite or improper, and, but, you know, two things are going on.

First of all, they're not helping their low-income people because they're charging them interest. And the other thing what they're doing is they're seizing, when they miss a payment, they seize the collateral or they seize part of the property so that they get their interest, so to speak.

[19 : 08] And so what that's doing to them is we now have a cycle of poverty going on. They're trying to work the land, but they can't work the land because they have less land. And because they have less land, they can't make the payments.

And when they can't make the payments, the people take more land. You see the thing? And so there's this downward cycle that's going on for the people, and Nehemiah hasn't been aware of it. And so he's fighting about it, and he just confronts them.

And the other thing he's saying is, listen, it sounds as if they've been pulling their resources to buy people out of slavery. And he said, listen, you've been pulling money to buy people out of slavery only so you can make them a slave?

Like, how does that make any sense? How does that make any sense? Like, how can that possibly be good? And so he confronts them. He has good anger.

You see, the fact of the matter is you should be angry at injustice. You should be angry at oppression. You should be angry at the poor being, you know, having things taken from.

[20 : 05] We should be angry about that. That's good anger. But it's not, he's not driven by anger.

He's driven by justice. And, you know, in many cases, the best thing is to have a person's heart pierced so they desire repentance and amendment of life.

And that's what Nehemiah's goal is. He wants to see the suffering relieved, a change of heart of the oppressors, and something costly happen.

And that's what we see. Look at what happens in the next scene, verses 12 and 13, which I'm calling true repentance. And it goes like this. Find verse 12.

Then they said, this is the people who are the rich, we will restore these and require nothing from them. We will do as you say. And I called the priests and made them swear to do as they had promised.

[21 : 09] I also shook out the fold of my garments and said, so may God shake out every man from his house and from his labor who does not keep this promise. So may he be shaken out and emptied.

And all the enemies, all the assembly said, amen and praise the Lord. And the people did as they had promised. This is a very, very important text. What he's doing here is, when he's shaking out his garment, is he's saying, this is a symbolic prophetic act to show that this is what God thinks of them.

You see this, you know, once again, in the world of their time, God is the God of the powerful, the king, and the higher you get towards, in a sense, the hierarchy of the culture, the more God-like or semi-divine you are, and the people are slaves.

And so in a sense, oppression is built right into the system. Just as in a sense, all Marxist system of thought builds within it, tragically, a type of oppression.

Because in all types of Marxist thought, it's completely and utterly valid to do whatever you want to the people who happen to have power. You can be as evil as you want towards them, and the end justifies the means, and that creates profound hardship.

[22 : 24] And it doesn't matter whether it's full-on Marxism or whether it's other types of soft Marxism. I'll say it, like you see in critical theory. It always ends up furthering the cycle of oppression.

And what Nehemiah wants, he obviously wants things to be just, but what he's getting out of these people is even better. They see that it's wrong. They see that God, in fact, hates oppression.

And they give everything back. And they promise that they will start going back to not doing right to the edge and lending loans to money, giving people loans and not exacting interest so people can work their way out of the cycle of poverty and work themselves back into a place so that within the walls, when the walls are finally finished, because this is going on while the walls are still being built, that this can be a sanctuary.

sanctuary. This can be a sanctuary. But you know, that by itself is still not going to create a true sanctuary.

And what you see in this next bit are two beautiful illustrations of the beautiful life. The next section is A Beautiful Ambition. A Beautiful Ambition.

[23 : 42] Scene 4, verses 14 to 16. Now, this is just Nehemiah talking. It's part of his memoirs. Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, this is now where we discover that he's actually the governor of the area.

He hadn't revealed it earlier. Sorry, be their governor of Judah from the 20th year to the 32nd year of Artaxerxes the king, 12 years. Neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor. The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration 40 shekels of silver.

Even their servants, that's the governor's servants, lorded over the people. But I did not do so, and note here again the second reason. Why is he going to do something like this? It's because of the fear of God.

I also persevered in the work on this wall and we acquired no land and all my servants were gathered there for the work. Now, just sort of pause there. This is a beautiful ambition.

[24 : 51] It's not anti-money. As we're going to be able to see in a moment, Nehemiah obviously had some means, some financial means, and he did own some fields. And as we're going to see in a moment, he obviously was quite well off.

And so this isn't an anti-money text. But what it's doing is showing something which is very, very significant. So the Bible doesn't want to dishearten you. If you're younger and you'd like to have a steady job and you'd like to have some promotions and you'd like to be able to have some day where you own a house of your own, you'd like to complete your degree, the Bible doesn't say shame on you.

You shouldn't have those ambitions. But it wants to warn you and it warns you in a very, very subtle way that once you go down that path, it can end up leading you to oppress people. That in fact, the goal shouldn't just be that I come to that point in time when I have, let's say, 10 fields, but I always want one more field.

I always want one more field. I always want one more field. That there comes a point in time when you should, in a sense, just also be content. And it's not that owning fields are bad. If nobody owned fields and nobody were farmers, we wouldn't be able to eat.

Like, we should pray that lots of people want to become farmers. We should pray for full employment in our economy. These are good things for us to pray for.

[26 : 10] We should pray that our government doesn't do monetary policy and taxation things and other types of things that hampers productivity. We should want productivity.

There's nothing wrong with productivity. It's a good thing. But it's not the end all. There's a point in time when you can just say, you know, I'm not going to lord it over people and I see, you know what, I don't have to look at the world and say, you know, I have this \$100,000 car but if I just worked a little bit harder, I could have a \$150,000 car because I know people have \$150,000 cars.

And then once you have that \$150,000 car, you're not satisfied with it because you see people with \$200,000 cars and you see, I'd like to have that \$200,000 car. And you know what, then you're not satisfied with that because you see somebody who has a \$300,000 car and a \$250,000 car and you see, I've got to work harder and harder to get that.

Well, that's just, that's just a trap. And so he does with less. He forgoes, in a sense, a raise. What? He forgoes a raise. Why? Because he could have that raise, that tax, but it would just add to the burden of all the other people. And he chooses not to do it.

[27 : 35] He chooses to have less. Let me tell you, I think the Bible calls people who are followers of Jesus, if you're not a follower of Jesus, you can just listen to this and file it away, probably not going to surprise you, that we don't want to have money rule our lives and we don't want to have power rule our lives.

We want to be characterized by generosity and we want to be characterized by compassion. And you can't be characterized by generosity if you don't give up some of your power and if you don't give up some of your money.

To think that you're generous and you only want more money, you never give money away, I hate to tell you this, but you're actually not generous. You're generous in your mind, you're a legendary generous person in your mind, but you're actually miserly and consumed with a love for money.

I hate to say that, but I'm going to say it because that's true. And if you're generous to the cause of the gospel and if you're generous to the poor, you're going to have less money.

It might mean that you can't drive the latest Lexus, you have to drive a Lexus which is five years old because you're going to have less money.

[28 : 58] But you know what? It's a lot better to have Jesus as Lord of your life than money and power as Lord of your life because money and power doesn't care a hoot about you and will only leave you discontented and unhappy, always looking for more.

And it's not just that Nehemiah forgoes some money and some financial opportunities. He's also actively generous.

Look at the final scene. A beautiful life, scene six, verses 17 to 19. Here's what it says.

Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations who are around us. He practiced costly hospitality.

Every day he'd feed over 150 people at his own expense. Now what was prepared at my expense for each day was one ox, six choice sheep.

[30 : 05] You vegetarians have to block your ears for this little bit, by the way. Six choice sheep, a variety of birds, and every day and every 10 days all kinds of wine in abundance.

Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor because the service was too heavy on this people. In other words, the taxation was too heavy. Remember for my good, oh my God, all that I have done for this people.

Just one last thing before we try to, I tie it up with the fear of the Lord. One of the problems we have in this country is that we want, see what Nehemiah does is he confronts people, but he himself personally cuts back to help other people live.

We want the government to fix things with other people's money. That's what we want. The average, not the average, almost all Canadians think the government should do something about that and I think, the government should do something about that and I think you should take the money from all these people to do that.

Me, I want all my money. That's how Canadians think and the gospel is a very, the Bible is confronting us. If we want a sanctuary, if we want to have a place, not just where there are walls where enemies can't attack us, we need to deal with oppression, we need to see that we put in place things that allow people to be prosperous and we need to hate oppression and we need to have a heart for those who are weak and those who are poor and most of all we need to be generous.

[31 : 51] It's not going to be a sanctuary if we're not generous. It's just not going to happen. Now what's all this stuff about the fear of God? Like that just seems like the weirdest idea in the world and you'll see that what motivates him in both parts is his fear of God.

What motivates him to confront oppression and deal with the cycle of poverty and what confronts him to be content with less and not only to be content with less but within his wealth and he's a wealthy man, only a wealthy person can feed 150 people every day.

So he's wealthy. It's not an anti-wealth text but it's a pro-generosity text and it's a pro-cycle of prosperity rather than a cycle of poverty text but it's the fear of God that motivates this.

So it's very counterintuitive. It sounds terrible. I'm going to do this briefly but here's the prayer. I'm going to say this at the beginning and the end and it's a prayer that I hope you will want to pray by the end of the sermon. Father, first point, Father, please make the person of Jesus, his completed work and his words ever more precious to my heart so that in the power of the Holy Spirit I will walk free in the fear of God.

Notice it's Trinitarian. By the way, it's Trinity Sunday. I made it as a Trinitarian prayer. All real good prayers should be Trinitarian. Father, please make the person of Jesus, his completed work and his words ever more precious to my heart so that in the power of the Holy Spirit I will walk free in the fear of God.

[33 : 27] Now, so what's going on here with the fear of God? Well, to understand the fear of God we have to understand something about the human condition and that is that as human beings we are sinners.

We sin and the Bible doesn't use sin just to talk about sex as if all sex is bad. It's talking about something more objective that we see in the world and it's a unique doctrine of Christianity.

It's the only, it's an empirically proven doctrine that all human beings do things which are evil and here, if you could put up the second point, it's this. Sin is an ever deeper descent, descent, going lower, into the vain and ruinous belief that you are God.

Sin is an ever deeper descent into the vain and ruinous belief that you are God. Now, one of the things that we understand as Christians is that God in his common grace doesn't allow sin to consume us.

That it's part of his common grace that we sin in areas but we still have some human freedom. we don't come completely and utterly consumed by sin and in fact, in both the Old and the New Testament, there is a whole other sermon but sometimes what God does to try to wake us up is he,

in a sense, he removes part of his restraints from us so that we experience the full tug of our desires, our evil desires.

[34 : 56] but what happens when this takes place in a human being, this type of pride that we are God, it's a vain belief, it's self-flattering and it's something which is never going to come true and it's ruinous to us, is this becomes more real to us than a human being becomes an equivalent of a black hole.

A black hole is a star where the matter has become so dense that the gravity is so strong that life can't escape from it and it sucks in a sense the life and everything else back into its mass making its mass even more dense and that's in a sense what can happen to human beings and as we, in a sense, become just more consumed with being, you know, seeing ourselves almost like God then what that does is it makes the whole universe out of order for us because we become so important, people have to become less important, the more important we feel we need to be, we deserve to be, we have to be, you know, the more concerned we are about manifesting and about the secret and all of this stuff, that's all just stuff that furthers our pride and then when that happens, people become, seem like they're farther away, they become, they seem like they're smaller, it becomes easier to hurt them, it becomes easier to say a hard word to them, it becomes easier to oppress them, we can get away with saying whatever we bloody well want about other people and it's because we just, the world becomes weird, when I was in Calgary

I went and spent a day with my son in Airdrie, we went into Calgary and then went back to Airdrie and if you've ever been to Calgary or to Airdrie, when you're coming along the road there comes a time when you can see the big skyscrapers in Calgary off in the distance and if you were the passenger don't do this while you're driving, keep your eyes on the road and both hands on the wheel but you know you could put your fingers like this and you could put your fingers like this and they're bigger than the buildings.

Of course that's not really, the buildings are 30, 40 stories tall, they're not this big, you're not so big that you can put your fingers around them but the buildings seem far away, you seem so big and it's just a matter of perspective and that's what pride does to you, makes things, other people, makes the real world seem small, other people and their needs real small, it becomes effortless to slide into oppressing them.

So what is the fear of God? Well the fear of God is this, the fear of God is an ever deepening existential knowing of the difference between the triune God and you so that there is no confusion or imagined commingling on your part.

[37 : 34] I'll say it again, the fear of God is an ever deepening existential, like a knowledge at the level of your existence, that's what I mean by it, knowing of the difference between the triune God and you so that there is no confusion or imagined commingling on your part.

How does this work out? Well, it's very easy for a parent to think that what's good for them is going to be good for their kids. Well that's not always true. It's very easy for a parent to think that what makes me happy is going to make the kids happy.

Well that's not always true. And it's not only just true with our kids, it's true with the spouse, it's true with our neighbors, it's true with our society. We consistently confuse what I desire for what others desire.

And in particular that what I desire obviously is what God desires. What's going to make me happy, well obviously that's going to make God happy. What I think is good is obviously God is going to think that's good.

What I think is just, obviously God is going to think that's just. What's, you know, and that's what happens is we lose sense of our boundary with others and our boundary with God.

[38 : 40] We just lose those things. We don't have a sense of those boundaries. Sin constantly is confusing us about these things. And so the fear of God, and here we see Christians understand that God in his common grace gives all human beings a certain degree of this.

And maybe even some people an exemplary degree of this, but it's this growing knowledge that this is George and these are my boundaries.

And this is Louise and those are her boundaries. But more than that, this is God. And God is, God begins and ends here and George begins and ends here and George is not God.

He's never God. He's always different than God and God is always different than him. And that is good and that is necessary and that is important. And I have a, the fear of God is a growing horror that I would ever transgress and start to think that somehow my happiness is God's happiness, that

that would be a horrible thing to me.

It would be repulsive. And it's why in the Bible you get all these weird texts about how the fear of God is connected with an intense longing and yearning for God and a love for God.

[39 : 51] And that can only happen if you understand that God is different from you. And when he's different from you, then you can long for him. You can yearn for him. You can delight in him because he's different than you.

And it also starts to mean that it's without the fear of God, without understanding the difference between God and you, you can never know yourself and you can never know other people. And so that as you grow in the fear of God, people become right-sized.

You see people in the world and you realize God's heart that he's different from you. You realize his standards of justice, his concern for the weak, his concern for the powerless, his concern for people to come to know his son.

And that heart becomes your heart as part of the fear of God. That's why it's the fear of God that motivates Nehemiah to fight oppression.

It's the fear of God that motivates him to be content with less. It's the fear of God that motivates him to be generous. I want to fear God.

[40 : 54] I want to grow in that. I want our church to grow in it. I don't know.

It would be the world's most repulsive mission statement, but maybe our mission statement is we want a people who walk in the fear of God. You can't do things like that.

You have to be a little bit more winsome. And here's the thing. The life-giving grace of God, the fourth point, in Christ Jesus changes everything. It's all part of God's grace that human beings have, whether they're conscious of it or not, some sense of that.

But it's the life-changing grace of God in Christ that changes everything. It's, you know, when you hear Jesus say, I came not to be served, but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many.

That's why he came. Not so that he would be served. Not so that people would see themselves as slaves. He came to free people. That's what ransom means. Free them from oppression and slavery.

[41 : 55] When we hear 2 Corinthians 8, verse 9, and it says, though he was rich, he became poor, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.

And we think of 1 John 4, verse 10, where it says, this is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be a propitiation for our sins, to put away God's proper wrath at the things that we've done that are wrong.

And when we understand that in Christ, we're poor, but he makes us rich. When we understand that in Christ, he came to serve and lead me into freedom, and he's the one who paid so that I could be free.

When we understand that he's the one who turned aside God's wrath, and it's all about so I can dwell and know his love, this becomes a firm and solid place where I can say, God, forgive me for the ways that I mistake my happiness for other people's happiness.

Forgive, Father, the ways that I impose my senses of justice, which is really a type of injustice on others. Thank you, Father, that you are different from me. Help me, Father, to grow in the fear of God, that I might know that you are God and that I am not, and that this difference is good, and that I might delight in you, and I never want to transgress on that.

[43 : 21] The grace of Christ, him crucified, provides this basis, and when we walk in this fear of God because of the grace of Christ, it will make us hate oppression.

It will form us to care for the weak and the disadvantaged. It will form us to be content, still have ambition, but not have money and power rule us, and to be content and be willing to have less so that others can be blessed, and actually consciously give of our resources to bless others.

Friends, I hope you want the fear of God. I hope you want to know Christ. The love of Christ in the cross changes everything.

Please stand. If you could put the final point up, Claire, that would be good. The final point was the first point. Father, please make the person of Jesus' completed work and his words ever more precious to my heart so that in the power of the Holy Spirit I will walk free in the fear of God.

I invite you to pray this prayer with me now, and then I'll just pray a short blessing. And by the way, if you're watching this online, if you have not given yourself to Christ, this is your conversion prayer.

[44 : 40] This would be how you give your life to Christ. Pray this prayer as your prayer of conversion. And for all of us who are in Christ, this is a prayer of sanctification. Please join me in praying together.

All, Father, please make the person of Jesus, his completed work, and his words ever more precious to my heart so that in the power of the Holy Spirit I will walk free in the fear of God. Father, seal these words and this prayer into our hearts that we might live them. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please take a posture of prayer as we enter into a time of...

Oh, I guess, no, there isn't intercession right now. There's announcements. Actually, you know what? Let's just bow our heads for a couple of moments of prayer, just extemporaneous. prayer. Let's pray.

Father, we commend into your hands for our tribe, our denomination, the Anglican Network in Canada. Father, we commend into your hands the discernment process underway as to who should be our next assistant bishop.

[45 : 52] And Lord, we ask that you would have mercy on us and that you would raise up a man who's a godly, wise, courageous, servant leader who walks in the fear of God.

That that's the man that you would raise for us and help us to recognize who you would have us be as our assistant bishop. And we ask this in the name of Jesus. We also remember, Father, those that are struggling with mental illness, those who are struggling with unemployment or underemployment, those who are struggling with food security in many parts of the world.

Father, we commend them into your hands and we ask that you help us to know how you would have us as individuals or as a church make a godly difference. We especially commend into your hands the missionaries that we support in Angola, directly involved with medical care of the poor. We commend into your hands the missionaries we support in Colombia, directly dealing with the social and other needs of the refugees from Venezuela.

we commend into your hands our churches here in Ottawa that partner with churches in Guatemala to make a difference in the lives of children and families for their good and for the glory of Jesus.

[47 : 08] And Father, we commend these endeavors into your hands. We ask this in Jesus' name. We lift before you those who are sick in particular, Father, we think of Bishop Charlie and his journey with cancer.

We ask that you heal him body and soul, comfort and strength in him, and we lift before you others that we know are struggling with sickness. And we commend into your hands, Lord, our other congregation in Messiah West, the church plant that we're encouraging in Charlottetown.

We encourage before you Dave Dauber and Brockville and his hope and belief that there's a church to be planted there for Matthew in Thunder Bay, for Aaron in Seoul, South Korea, Father, we commend them into your hands.

We ask, Father, that them with us, that you would reform us by the Bible, you would revive us by the Holy Spirit, that you would use us in evangelism and in making a difference for the name of Jesus.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Just a couple of announcements. Shannon's going to come up right now to make a main announcement. just as she's making her way here.

[48 : 19] When it comes time for communion, the red is wine, the light-colored is grape juice. Please remember the financial needs of the church and please pray for us that we will be a congregation after God's heart.

And actually, one other thing. This is our brother Shashir's last Sunday with us. Chris, God wasn't listening to your prayer that he'd get a job here in Ottawa.

He was listening to somebody else's prayer. We know that you're going, Halifax is a rich mission field. We need people who will make a difference for the gospel there. It's been such a great delight to have you as part of our congregation.

It's been a delight just to slightly get to meet your wife and your two sons. They would have been wonderful here, but they'll be wonderful in Halifax. And maybe just before Shannon gets up to make her announcement, let's just pray God's blessing on Shashir and Sonia, right?

I have that right? And the boys. So let's just, in fact, why don't we, could you just stand, the four of you or one of you, whoever wants to stand, we're just going to pray God's blessing on them. Let's pray. Father, it is so good that we have brothers and sisters in Christ around the world, including India.

[49 : 34] And Father, we give you thanks and praise that you led Shashir to come to Canada to have a new life, hopefully a better life for his wife, Sonia, and the two boys. More opportunities.

And Father, we thank you for bringing him here to get a master's, for providing with him this good job in Halifax. Father, we are sad that we are losing him, but we are happy that you have provided a good job for him, for his gifts and his skills.

I ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would bless him and his wife and his two sons, help them to thrive in Jesus, thrive physically and spiritually in Jesus, that you would just be with them as they sort out accommodation and adjust to a new job.

May you bless them thoroughly and may you lead them to a good church in Halifax. And Father, we ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.