

# A Proper Ending to This Year

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[ 0:00 ]    So, allow me, if I may, just to open with a quiz.  
While I preach, God's people should do what?  
Pray. And listen, it's a multitasking opportunity. And I trust that you will continue in that habit and that biblically informed pattern for the remainder of your lives.  
I sat on the front this morning, and it has been my habit. I have never come to this pulpit without a certain amount of trepidation.  
I've often thought to myself, if the time would come that I would no longer have a little amount of anxiety at the approach to the pulpit, that I probably should go sell used cars.

[ 1:23 ]    The thing that has remained a consolation for me in those moments is a thing that I remind myself of.  
It's this. I believe in the sufficiency and the authority of the Word of God. That's what I'm here to preach.  
I believe in the efficacy. That's a fancy word for the effectiveness of the praying of God's people. That's your part.  
And I believe in the work of the Holy Spirit. That being said, let's pray and dig in. Amen. Amen.  
Our gracious Father, this morning we are thankful that you have given to us your Word. Lord, you have given to us eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 2:21 ]    You have given to us the indwelling Spirit. And this morning we as your people are here depending upon you to work in our hearts, to hear, to frame our thinking, and to effect our living for the glory of God.  
And we, in advance of that work, declare that we trust you and give you credit for what you will do even this morning in and through us.  
And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, the end of the year is an interesting moment in a church's time and in our time.  
And it's appropriate for us to kind of stop and think, okay, so what are some thoughtful things that we can glean from this text in relationship to the time we find ourselves in?  
And I'd like us to look at several different passages this morning to kind of frame our thinking. First, I want you to turn in your Bible to 1 Samuel 7, verse 12.

[ 3:26 ]    1 Samuel 7, verse 12, finds the nation of Israel at a very interesting moment in their history.  
1 Samuel, actually the book of Joshua and Judges and 1 Samuel, if you kind of give yourself a little bit of a history quiz, you would have to admit is not one of the brightest moments in Israel's life.  
If anything, you kind of follow the pattern of Israel and you recognize that the songwriter put it well, prone to wonder, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.

And you track the history of Israel and you find kind of up and down, up and down from one crisis to another and just kind of floundering spiritually in many cases. In this instance, the nation had struggled for quite some time and eventually they'd ended up in a real conundrum and they'd cried out and asked Samuel to pray for them and following his prayer, the nation had received a great victory over their enemies, the Philistines.

And in that context, we find that Samuel sets up a stone of remembrance. And here's what he says there in verse 12. Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer.

[ 4 : 50 ] How many of you remember singing the song, Here I Put or State My Ebenezer? Remember that? How many of you are old enough before they changed it in the hymn book and nobody could know what Ebenezer was and so they wrote it out, Stone of Remembrance, okay?

And so here is Samuel saying, this stone we're going to set up and we're going to call it Ebenezer. Why is that? There in the text it tells us, Till now the Lord has helped us.

And what Samuel was doing in that case was he was... Someone, get me a glass of water, please.

Thank you. I am going to cough and drive myself nuts. I don't know about you, but it wasn't planned. Thank you, Donna. So here we are. Israel is reminding themselves of what they had received in the way of blessing.

And I'd like us to kind of take that thought from 1 Samuel and carry it over and think a little bit about what God has done in 17. It's behind us. For all practical purposes, less than 24 hours from now, we're going to be in a new year.

[ 6 : 00 ] And it's appropriate for us as we kind of think about what God has done to kind of track some of the particulars. And I want to say in advance that I'm not going to cover all the things that God has done in our fellowship.

But it is appropriate for us to stop and think of some of the things that He has helped us to accomplish. For one, I walked down our 200 wing this morning and looked at the lights.

And I have to tell you, I thought to myself I was on a runway. Someone popped through the doors in the Sunday school wing, and I could actually see their face.

It's the first time in 31 years that I could see from one end of the hall to the other. And it's like, Stephanie, that's you. It's amazing. And I actually stopped and thought about the blessings of watching this fellowship for the last several years go through the remodel process.

Now, there are some of you here that don't remember the paneling that we cherish for about 31 years in the lobby. But I walked in this morning, and I looked around, and I thought, man, there are so many things that we are thankful for that have happened because of God's people working together and prompted by a desire to make things right, we're seeing progressive improvements in many different areas.

[ 7 : 23 ] And I want to say thank you. Thank you very much, Donna, for that. That's a servant's heart. You know what? Thank you for that. There used to be a bottle here, but someone has absconded with it.

Was that you, Seth? Okay, just checking. Kathy said no, so I believe it. Okay.

But it's appropriate for us to say thank you to the Lord for what he's done. I have to tell you another little thing that I'm tickled pink with is in our bulletin this morning, if you notice our bulletin on the back, it says caring for your children.

There are no blanks in that, and there haven't been any blanks for quite some time. You may not think that's very important, but it is. And I'm thankful for that.

And I don't mind saying thank you to Jesus for it, right? It's a blessing that people that have gifts and determination have worked to bring some of these things about.

[ 8 : 31 ] It's just neat to see the way in which God has helped our fellowship serve so willingly across such a wide scope of things.

I realize that this morning there's snow that we didn't plan on. But I have to tell you, yesterday there were seven or eight different people here that were helping clear the snow, volunteers.

Just clearing it privately, quietly, without any fanfare. And coming again this morning, in fact, I am tasked as part of my job of building the grounds or whatever else.

I would take care of snow on Sundays, and it's normally when I'm not preaching, it's fairly easy. But when I'm preaching, I'd prefer not focusing on snow and the sermon. Two S's at the same time.

Someone said, Pastor, I've got it covered. You don't worry about it. And sure enough, cared for, and I appreciate that. So many different things.

[ 9 : 31 ] The way in which you as a fellowship, prompted by the Spirit of God, willingly serve across the wide range without a lot of duress and pressure.

I look back over the summer ministry that our fellowship had. I think about VBS. And by the way, I don't think it's too early to say that VBS is coming in 18, Lord willing, and there's already work that is going on in putting the artistic part together.

All hands on deck type of thing. We're working on it. But I think about VBS. I think about youth missions trip. I think about TLC. And I look in retrospect and really am thankful for the fact that our senior pastor-elect, Pastor Shearer, God kind of opened up the opportunity for him to just be directly involved in so much of what was happening in our youth ministry.

And it's been a blessing to us to have his involvement, his leadership in that. And we're blessed, blessed, blessed by that. I look also at what has happened this year in neighboring.

And I have to tell you that I really appreciate the tenor and spirit with which we've approached the matter of neighboring. And instead of taking it as just a single event that we're going to do this and done, it's kind of being woven into our fiber and our thinking.

[ 10 : 54 ] It's a matter of our prayer life. It's something that engages us in serving the people that we're around on a regular basis, not for the sake of an incident, but for the sake of the heart of Christ and caring for other people.

I'm encouraged when I hear the fellowship talking about neighboring, not as something that they're kind of beating their chest on, but it's just part of their life and their interest. And that's progress.

I am encouraged to see that the issue of neighboring has not been driven towards, I want one single opportunity to share the gospel, and after that, I check the box and move on.

Now, I've got to tell you, if you don't know me, you should know that I care about having an opportunity to talk to people about Christ. But it's not to be a once-and-done event.

It's something that the ongoing love for people draws us into giving us the opportunities for that. I have to tell you, I look back across this last month in particular, and I think about the Christmas program and the wonderful ministry that our fellowship had with music and weaving the gospel in in such a clear and pronounced way throughout the entire program, bringing it together and just making Christ and the gospel stand out clearly.

[ 12 : 11 ] The luncheon, over 60 people, I think, attended that and very thankful for that. And I think it's the first year we kind of push at that, but I look forward to us continuing to make progress in that and very thankful for that.

It's very interesting for us to recognize that we are about seven months away from the conclusion of our transition period. And I remember actually beginning the planning for that about eight years ago.

It's hard for us to think about that far back. But there were those that began thinking about this that far back, and we slowly moving towards that. I can tell you with confidence that God has had His hand in this facet and this movement, and it's a blessing to see it happening the way it has.

We are a week away from having a candidate come to serve, or at least be considered to serve on our pastoral staff. And I know that in the last year, we've been praying and praying and praying for God to provide the right man.

And here we are, again, thanking Him for His hand and His provision and His direction. And so here we are, looking back across the year, and it is right for us to do what Samuel instructed the nation of Israel to do, namely, in setting up a stone and saying, hey, this is what God has done, and this is how far He's brought us, and thanking Him for that.

[13:40] And I trust that as you walk away from here this morning, one of the things that will be on your heart is a spirit of thanksgiving that you have been able to see God at work in a body of believers, producing the fruit of righteousness and producing ministry that is to His glory and to His name.

Now, I want to come to another passage that I want us to focus on, and turn over in your Bible, if you would, to Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiastes chapter 12.

Ecclesiastes chapter 12. We look backwards. Now, I want to come and focus on how do we look forward in a fundamental way and a very, very simple way.

Ecclesiastes chapter 12, if you will follow with me as I begin reading there in verse 10. The preacher sought to find words of delight, and upright he wrote words of truth, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

The words of the wise are like goads and like nails. Firmly fixed are the collected sayings, and they are given by one shepherd. Question.

[14:52] How many of you have been goaded before? Raise your hand if you have been goaded. How many of you know what a goad is?

A goad is something that you poke with. Okay? You can goad sheep. You can goad cows.

You can goad husbands. You can goad children. You can goad... You get my point? Goads are things that you use to sometimes gently move people in the direction they need to go in.

I mean, you remember what the Scripture says about Paul when he says, it is hard for thee to kick against the goads, if you remember it in the King James, more or less.

The idea is that, hey, something's pushing you, prompting you in a certain direction. And here it says, the words of the wise are like goads. They're valuable.

[15:56] They're helpful. And they're like nails. What you hang things on and depend upon. Now, look, if you will, in verse 12. My son, beware of anything beyond these, of making many books.

There is no end. And much study is a weariness of the flesh. Now we come to 13. The end of the matter all has been heard.

Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. I want us to think this morning about the importance of believers focusing on Him.

Focusing on Him. Here we are at the very end of a very broad survey put together by Solomon relating to the issues of life. And he is bringing things down to the absolutely essential matters.

I remember literally decades ago when the holiday season was graced by just about only one bowl game, right?

[17:01] Remember the Rose Bowl and that was pretty much it. And you had one channel to watch it on. And now how many Rose Bowls are there? I mean, how many bowl games are there? I remember looking the other day and I thought, you know, I could kill myself watching all these football games.

It's just too much. I did watch one, though, last week. And I remember watching in particular as a receiver ran a perfect route.

The blockers in front of him made perfect blocks and opened up a lane for him to run as soon as he caught the ball. And Barrett threw a perfect strike. It was coming right at his numbers.

And he made one fatal flaw. Do you know what it was? Before he caught the ball, he planned where he was going. And you could see his eyes shift and look down the field.

He took his eyes off the ball. And as a result, when the ball got there, his eyes weren't focused on the ball and he dropped it. I mean, it was an easy play. And he failed at the essential thing.

[18:06] And I bring that up because here is a very simple statement about an absolutely essential spiritual truth. I'm not going to give you a Bible survey about the fundamental value of fearing God.

You can do that later in your own studies. But I want you to understand that fearing God is fundamental for us in our walk. I do want us to recognize on a negative aspect that true God fear, godly fear, is not just a habit or a ritual.

I want you to look at Isaiah. Keep your finger there in Ecclesiastes and turn over to Isaiah just for a moment. Isaiah 29, verse 13.

Isaiah 29, verse 13. And the Lord said, Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men.

Okay? So here is something that I want you to recognize. It's very easy for us to kind of pick up the vocabulary of fearing God and even go through the motions and not have it make any difference whatsoever in our daily life.

[19:25] Some of you grew up in liturgical churches. And by that I mean churches where everything was ritualized. When you walked into the sanctuary, there were certain things you had to do.

You would genuflect. You would dip your hand and put water on your head or whatever. It was all a matter of ritual. One thing after another. It was all taught. Read from a book of prayer, and there was a time to kneel.

There was a time to stand. Everything was kind of packaged together, and it was taught. You know, it's easy for us to get caught up in some of the same habits here as believers who know Christ and yet can kind of let our relationship kind of become just a matter of habit and ritual rather than a sincere and intimate communion with the living God.

You can sometimes show up and just be sad. Well, I went. Did it make any difference in your life? Are you different as a result of hearing the Word of God and worshiping with God's people and being in His presence?

Maybe not. Let me give you a classic illustration of something else that can become just mere habit. What about praying for food? How many of you pray fairly consistently for your food if it's over 50 cents?

[ 20 : 42 ] I know if you're eating fries at McDonald's, you don't have to. It's a value meal, right? But we have certain lines that, you know, okay, we've got it here. But really, sometimes we become just caught up in a habit, and it's not really making any connection that we're saying, you know, Lord, if it weren't for you, I wouldn't have this.

And I'm thankful for it. But we can very easily become very habitual in our practice of faith, and we can go through the routine, and it's just a matter of habit rather than an affection of the heart.

And so here we find that Ecclesiastes is telling us we've got to fear God. And I'm telling you this morning that fearing God is not just a matter of habit, but it's a discipline of the heart that thinks carefully and seriously about who God is on a consistent basis.

So when we think about fearing God properly, what does that involve? Well, for one thing, it means that we do give other people good reason to trust us.

I want you to turn back in your Bibles just for a moment to Genesis chapter 48, 42 rather, 42 verse 18. We find there in Genesis chapter 42, Joseph interacting with his brothers, and you'll remember that Joseph's brothers had been rather unkind to Joseph, and now they are living with a high degree of anxiety that payback is imminent.

[ 22 : 25 ] They're afraid he, remembering the way they had treated him, he's now going to get even with them. But listen to what he says there to comfort their hearts.

42 verse 18. On the third day, Joseph said to them, Do this and you will live, for I fear God. What a summary he was giving them of his life.

You do not have to worry about the way I'm going to treat you. Why? I fear God.

I fear God. And the outflow is this, is that when we have a right view of God, the people that are around us don't have a reason to be afraid of us, do not have a reason to distrust us, because we, in our relationship with God, are going to treat them the way we should.

Why? Because God's there. What in particular does it mean to fear God? I want you to ask yourself that question just for a moment. Do you know what it means to fear God?

[ 23 : 37 ] Well, let me give you a couple different things to hold on to. For one, it means to have a sense of his presence. It means to have a sense of his presence. When was the last time that you found yourself tempted to do something and looked around to see if anybody was going to see you do it?

You ever do that? You're thinking about doing something, and one of the things that you do in factoring in the probability of you doing it, is you kind of like, I wonder, is anybody going to see me do this?

What you're reflecting on is that you're wondering whether or not you're going to get caught or whether there are any consequences. And when we fear God, we have a sense of his presence, and that colors our thinking consistently.

I'll give you an illustration of that. Children, younger ones in particular, more readily observed in this, can be a little nasty to each other in the absence of parents.

How many of you noticed that? You as parents are upstairs, and something's going on in the basement, and you can hear the conversations, right? And they're being a little sarcastic, a little critical, a little sharp, and then all you do is let them know that you can hear them, and what happens?

[ 25 : 06 ] They have an epiphany. They have a change of heart. They're suddenly softer and kinder in their tone. Oh, I... Why? They know you're present.

And the characteristic of a person who fears God is that there is a consistent sense that God is present, and you know he's there. You know he's there.

Furthermore, a fear of God is a reflection of a biblical view of God, and it's informed by Scripture. In other words, I know who God is, and I believe in him because of what I have been told by the Scriptures.

That means that our thinking has been influenced and led by what the Bible tells us about our God. Let me give you some of the things that we all here together would hold on to and say, in principle, we entirely agree with that God is sovereign.

He's in control of all things. It's very interesting that I hear people hold on to Romans 8, verse 28 pretty consistently, and yet they can get caught up in a high degree of anxiety when things aren't going their way.

[ 26 : 20 ] If God is sovereign, are there accidents that he has completely neglected to pay attention to, and you are left to your own devices, and you are floundering because he's not paying attention?

What's the answer? No. No. Furthermore, if we believe that God is holy and just, and he's tracking things, is there a reason that we need to become exercised and demand judgment and people be dealt with according to proper pattern?

I'll give you an illustration. The other day, I was driving, actually coming back from West Jefferson with the snowblower in the back of my truck because I was going to clean the lot here, and there was an individual driving down the road at a very rapid pace, came up right behind me, and I could see his irritation in the rear view mirror.

And I thought, well, you know, the appropriate thing for me to do was just pull over to the side and let him pass me. I mean, he was in a hurry, and I didn't want to lose the snowblower out the back or around whatever, and I thought, you know, the righteous thing would be just to get over, and I was not irritated.

I pulled over, didn't wave, I just pulled over to the side of the road, put my blinker on, good driver, you know, put my blinker on, got over the road, and he zips around me. I mean, it was snowing, you know, but good tires, I guess.

[ 27 : 45 ] He zipped around me, and the next thing he did was he gave him the hand signals. And I thought to myself, where are the officers when you need them?

And then I thought to myself, that's God's problem, it's not mine. You know, if we believe that God is sovereign and God is just and we believe that he's holy, it should play out in the way in which practical theology leads us to behave when things don't happen our way, right?

His justice, his grace, his love, his immutability. And to fear God is to think consciously and deliberately about the nature of God regularly in our life and let it have a part in the way in which we structure our daily living and our attitudes.

A sure reflection that we do not have a right view of God is that when we allow anxiety to occupy the same space that belongs to him and we confess is part of trusting him.

Or, a self-righteous insistence on our own glory and having things our way and easily offended. Well, there's another thing that is an indication of our genuine fear of God and that is a strong desire to please him.

[ 29 : 14 ] Not out of a fear of being punished, but out of a desire to satisfy and please him. Martin Luther, in one of his exhortations on the subject of the fear of God, made a distinction between, I'm going to use a little fancy word here, servile, kind of a serving fearfulness of judgment, servile fear and filial or fatherly fear.

He said that godly fear is a fear that is interested in pleasing God and satisfying God, not a fear of his judgment and his condemnation. Over in 1 John, it says, first, his love, perfect love, casts out fear.

It's saying that our relationship with him tamps down that fear of judgment. We know, as it says in Romans 8, there's no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. We have no reason to fear him.

And so, what does a fear of God do for the believer's heart? For one, it tells us in Proverbs that it is the beginning of wisdom. It is the beginning of wisdom.

And you stop and think, just how valuable is wisdom? Can you put a dollar amount on the value of wisdom? Let me give you some illustrations that help you do that.

[ 30 : 32 ] Several weeks ago, I was involved in helping an individual in a rather difficult predicament. And as we were going through the process of helping him, it came down to he needed help with making a payment on a car that was three months behind.

doesn't have a job, but he has a Lexus. You got that? And the income that has come in sporadically has gone to pharmaceuticals that are not off the shelf.

Now, here's my point. Is there cost to a lack of wisdom? And the answer is there's high cost. Here is the scripture that tells us that fearing God is the beginning of wisdom.

It helps, when we fear God, our hearts and our lives are governed by instruction from him and we don't drift to the left or the right and we keep ourselves in a place of safety with him.

Furthermore, a fear of God opens our eyes to see things that we would not see apart from a right view of God. Turn in your Bible to Psalm 25, verse 12 through 14.

[ 31 : 50 ] Psalm 25, 12 through 14. Fearing God gives us understanding that we would not have otherwise.

Who is the man who fears the Lord him will he instruct in the way that he should choose. His soul shall abide in well-being and his offspring shall inherit the land.

The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him and he makes known to them his covenant. Stop and think about what that passage is saying and its value to us.

It says, the man who fears the Lord is the one that God is going to instruct. How does that play out? When we have a right view of God and we long to know him, our heart is an open vessel to receive the truth of who he is.

When we in our stubbornness and our resistance have no interest in God and no fear of God, we're not going to learn the things he has for us. There are some of you sitting here this morning that are thinking to yourself, why is it that my relationship with God in 17 has not been more vibrant and marked by greater growth?

[ 33 : 24 ] Ask yourself the question, do I fear God? Am I governed in my thinking about God by what the scriptures tell me is true about God or am I demanding that he be like I want him to be, kind of a guy up there that gives me what I want, in any case, in any case that I have a desire?

I want us to recognize that a fear of God also checks our natural selfishness, our irritability, our pride. A fear of God checks our natural selfishness, our irritability, and pride.

Interestingly enough, I remember a conversation not too long ago with an individual and I made the statement, hey, I'm still working on my pride. The person looked at me, it wasn't in our fellowship, everybody knows I'm working on my pride here, but you know, you're working on your pride?

Yeah, I am. I've had a lifelong battle with it. Really? Yeah. A fear of God keeps that in check by reminding you of who you are and where you are.

Furthermore, a fear of God keeps us from sin. Keeps us from sin. I want to plead with you this morning that a protective nature of a fear of God is a wholesome desire to not sin.

[ 34:49 ] A fear of God keeps us from sin. When was the last time that you found yourself consciously and deliberately debating doing something that you knew was wrong, you knew nobody else was watching, and you reminded yourself that God was present and He was paying attention to your heart?

A fear of God will keep us from sin. For the sake of self-diagnosis, let's just ask ourselves a couple quick questions here to kind of help you evaluate whether or not you have a fear of God.

So here we go. How easily are you offended when people mistreat you or say unkind things about you? How easily are you offended or irritated when people mistreat you or say unkind things about you?

A reminder, remember when Shimei threw stones and dust at David and David's friends wanted to hack the guy to death and David said, what, what, what? Are you not paying attention? He's doing this because God's allowed it and God may do something in my favor as a result where I respond.

That's kind of a free rendition. Okay. How often do you allow, listen carefully, how often do you allow anger or moodiness to put ugly marks on your relationships?

[ 36:29 ] Let me say that slowly. How often do you allow anger or moodiness to put ugly marks on your relationship? relationship? How many of you know what I mean?

It's where you wake up and you know you got a bad attitude but you think your wife ought to have a part to play in that and let her know you have a bad attitude, right? How often do you let anger or moodiness put an ugly mark on your relationship?

Here, how quickly do you ask for forgiveness when you've sinned against someone else? Yes. Everybody, I have a little theology quiz. Any of us in here sin free?

Raise your hand. No one sin free. How many of you have sinned in the last 24 hours? Didn't have to raise your hands, okay? How many of you having sinned, a lot of our sins happen to other people.

Do you follow what I'm saying here? Other people are affected by our sin. So who did you go to last and say, listen, I am grieved that I've sinned against God and you have also been the recipient of that.

[ 37:37 ] Will you forgive me? How often do you ask other people to forgive you? When you do find yourself tempted, do you stop to think that God knows and sees?

How quickly do you remind yourself that God's present and He's paying attention? So, to summarize it this way before we step to one other piece, ask yourself this question practically, do I fear God?

Check the box, yes, not like I should. Let's come to the last part of Ecclesiastes and close.

In the passage, the writer says this, the end of the matter, in other words, hey, this is it, this is the whole part, fear God and keep His commandments for this is the whole duty of man.

In the end, we're talking about applied theology here, namely, keeping His commandments, in the end, the way we think and act is a reflection of what we believe about our God.

[ 38:50 ] God. Do you follow me? The way we think and act is a reflection of what we believe, what we think about our God.

Let me give you an illustration just off the top here. When we steal, what are we saying about the God who we believe provides?

us? Hmm? When we disobey a clear command and instruction, what are we saying about God's wisdom?

I want you to understand that the passage that tells us keep His commandments is telling us in practical terms, show what you actually believe about God in behavior that honors Him.

Practically speaking, our obedience affirms our love. John chapter 14, verse 15, by this shall all men know that you are my disciples, He said elsewhere, because you love one another.

[ 40 : 01 ] But in 14, 15, He says, if you love me, what? What? Keep my commandments. Keep my commandments. Our obedience is also one of the means of grace, in that some of the blessings that we stand to receive do not fall apart from obedience.

What do I mean by that? no farmer was ever blessed with a good crop apart from dogged obedience to getting up and going to work on a daily basis.

Does that make sense? Obedience is one of the means of grace. And when you obey Him and do that which pleases Him, it means you are in the place where blessing happens.

Let me close by asking you a couple very practical questions at the end. First of all is this, have you come to the place where the fear of God has taught you and drawn you to the cross?

grace. The song Amazing Grace has a line in it or a few lines in it that apply to this. It says, "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved." You know what it's saying?

[ 41 : 31 ] It's saying that the grace of God brought me to realize the absolute moral bankruptcy and darkness of my heart and led me to realize I couldn't save myself and I needed Jesus.

Have you come to that place? Have you come to that place where the grace of God has brought you to a place of fear of God and you in humility have cried out and said, "Jesus, I need you to be my Savior." Second question is for you who are believers here this morning, how often does a fear of God affect your daily thinking as a believer?

How often? I want to appeal to you that if you took time to study the New Testament in particular, you would find that the fear of God occupies more space than we are inclined to think.

God is not just some nice old companion up there that gives us what we want. It says in scriptures, it's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

In Revelation, it speaks about fearing Him. And so I want to encourage you who are believers this morning as you think about 18, that what you will do is this, is that you will say, Lord, you being my helper, I want you to stir my heart that I will have a fear of you that honors your great name.

[ 43 : 17 ] Let me close with a simple verse for you to hold on to. 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 9. It wouldn't be a bad one to memorize.

Certainly it wouldn't be a bad one to underline. And so I'm going to ask that you turn to it to give you the chance to frame it in your own thinking. 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 9.

So whether we are at home or away, so whether we are at home or away, whether I am here or there, we make it our aim to please him.

This is my desire. I want him satisfied with my life. Let's close in prayer.

Father God, this morning as we take your word in hand and we remind ourselves first of blessing and then counsel and instruction, we want to be a people that fear you, that obey you, that delight in you, and give you delight.

[ 44 : 41 ] We ask that you would work in us to that end, to the glory of Christ. And we pray this in his name. Amen.