

Fear of Man—Harm

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Date: 15 February 2026

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Whoever comes back in is going to have to sit in the front row if anybody shows up.! Well, thanks for coming. I feel like we peaked last week and this is just going to go downhill. So I hope you're ready for that.

I'm kidding. Well, my name is Ben Finch. This morning we're continuing our series on the fear of man. And so just to kind of introduce this today, I thought about this time I was in Washington, D.C. And I was there for work one weekend and I had an old friend. He kind of works one of those jobs that he can't tell you about, you know, and being in Washington, D.C.

And I said, hey, man, like I was trying to get him to tell to tell me what he did, what he does for a living. And he said, you know, Ben, how did he say it? He said, how do you know that some other country isn't going to send a missile into the U.S.

and destroy our cities? And I was like, man, I don't know. I know that our defense budget for the U.S. is pretty high. I said, I guess I just trust that our military is going to handle it. And he said, well, Ben, I'm the guy who makes sure it doesn't happen.

[1 : 12] And I was like, that is the coolest thing I've ever heard. I mean, I don't know about you, but I don't I don't spend a ton of energy thinking about being physically harmed or being in a country that's attacked.

We live in a country that for the most part has felt safe. When I first started out my photography business, I got to used to get to travel to the Middle East and I've been like near Gaza.

And every time I would go there, people would say, did you feel safe? And I was like, man, I've lived in Memphis. I feel safe anywhere. Nothing's got anything on Memphis.

I'm kidding. But so today we're talking about the fear of harm. So as an extension of the fear of man, we're going to talk about the fear of harm.

I think everybody's got an outline. Again, I'm going to try to go the way that I had to submit this like three days ago. You know, a lot changes in three days when you're trying to develop a message.

[2 : 16] But let's start by saying this. Being afraid is not wrong. We should be afraid at times. The problem is when our fear forgets God.

The goal of all this is to identify where the fear of man is in our hearts. Then turn to the Lord, hear God's word and hold on to them until they are actually effective in loosening the grip other people can have on us.

So that's where we're headed this morning. So that I put like the big idea of this chapter. So this content is based off of a book called when when man is big and God is little or something like that. I think I missed that a little bit. But the and I put in here the fear of physical harm is not merely about safety. It is about who we believe ultimately controls our lives.

When fear of suffering, danger or loss dominates us, it reveals a diminished view of God's sovereignty and care. You ever been afraid?

[3 : 23] You might have been afraid this morning. I don't know, but it's we understand that fear is a part of life, right? Fear of being hurt or or or being in situations that we wish we were not in.

But the goal of this is to help us trust the Lord in that. So number one, fear of harm is a real fear. Let me define what is the fear of harm when I say that.

The fear of harm is fear of pain, injury, suffering, loss of life or loss of physical security. That grows into a belief that people or circumstances can ultimately destroy us.

Which is, in fact, a belief that subtly says God may not be enough here. So, kind of as an outline, I want to address really two questions this morning.

Number one, why is fear of harm so powerful? And number two, how can the fear of man lose its grip on me? Number one, why is the fear of harm so powerful?

[4 : 31] Well, simply put, it attacks our natural instinct for self-preservation. I'm a survivor. Just kidding. Which, in turn, makes obedience feel unsafe, which can lead to temptation.

It can tempt us to compromise truth for protection. So, we don't want to dismiss this, right? Fear is real.

In many cases, it is not imaginary or simple, but it's a true threat. Examples of this are front lines of war. For police and firefighters fighting crime and fire.

Sexually and physically abusive relationships. We want to acknowledge there's legitimacy there. There's legitimacy of fear. The fear of man is a certain threat to those who have been hurt or abused.

Left unattended, the power of perpetrators only increases. So, at the end of this, I'm going to provide a footnote about physical abuse.

[5 : 34] And kind of put that in its own category as part of this. But, I want to say this. Scripture never denies danger, but it constantly reorders fear.

Scripture puts fear in its correct place, right? So, it's saying, hey, the Lord knows that we're fearful. Here's the place for it, right? And so, today, I think, is about alignment.

And fear grows when we believe people, rather than God, have the ability to control our future. You ever felt that way? You ever felt like somebody, or a person, or some entity has more control over your life than the Lord?

I think we've all felt that way. I don't know about you, but I can certainly relate. So, let's look at some biblical examples. So, I would love to, if you have your Bible, to break it out to Genesis 12.

We're going to look at Abraham. So, for even those we consider like heroes of our faith, fear of man is common.

[6 : 47] Let's look at Genesis 12. Did I say that already? So, to give you a little bit of context. So, God has promised. He goes by Abram at this point.

Abram, to make him into a great nation. And he was on his way to Egypt because of a famine. So, that's where we kind of pick up in Genesis 12. We'll start in verse 1.

It says, Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation.

And I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you. And him who dishonors you I will curse.

And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. And that's sounding good. Right? That's like a, I mean that's, you can live off of that right there. If you had that every morning, if you felt like the Lord was saying that to you, that would give you a lot of courage, wouldn't it?

[7 : 52] So, let's get down to verse 10. Now there was a famine in the land. So, Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.

When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarah, his wife, I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance. And when the Egyptians see you, they will say, This is his wife.

Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you're my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.

When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house, and for her sake he dealt with Abram.

And he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels. But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarah, Abram's wife.

[8 : 54] For Pharaoh called Abram and said, What is this that you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say she's my sister, so that I took her from my wife?

Now then, here is your wife, take her and go. And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had. I read that, and I'm like, Abraham, God prepared the way for you, man.

Like, what happened? I mean, like, did you forget? Did you not read the verses you were in a few moments before? Do you remember what God said?

Why did you freak out? Well, it seems like Abraham was scared. He feared for his life. And he made accommodations for himself that God never called him to make, right?

And sometimes fear of man does that for us. It causes us to make decisions, and we forget what the Lord has told us, and things get messy, right?

[10:04] Let me ask you this. Do you remember as a child, or do you have children that have lied to get out of the discipline? Or is it just me? Of course you have.

Of course you have. We've all done it and are still tempted to do it. The ultimate reason is we aren't trusting God's ordained way and are trying to make our own way, which will likely end up messy. So many times I've said to my kids, parents, I think you can relate, I wish you would just trust me, right? I mean, I think I said it yesterday.

I know I said it yesterday. It's like a common thing, like, would you just trust that I know what is good for you? And quit trying to do things your own way. That's my dad voice.

Actually, it's probably much more aggressive. But I think the Lord would say that to us too. Would you just trust what I said? Would you just trust that I know the plans I have for you?

[11:10] Another example is in Numbers 13. We won't turn there, but a group of Israelite scouts were commissioned by Moses to explore the land of Canaan, right?

A land God had promised to give to them. If you recall, it was the land of milk and honey, which sounds very nice. The scouts came back with a report. In Numbers 13, it says this, It does not sound like a very promising report.

And I said, you know, when I read that, I think, well, what did they expect? Like, I think sometimes we think, oh, well, the Lord's calling me to do this. It should just be paved so pleasantly.

It's like riding down a hill on a bike. You don't even have to pedal. But that just seemingly is not the way that the Lord works, right? On the way to, Joy and I were in North Carolina this weekend.

They're still there, the family. But she said, what's been something a counselor has told you that has forever impacted your life? And I thought about it, and I was like, a counselor once told me that God never promised our lives to be pain-free.

[12:39] And I thought that was so helpful. And God, when He calls us to things, doesn't always say, this is going to be pain-free, right?

He just promises to get us into the land. In Numbers 14, a little bit later, it says, They grumbled against Moses and Aaron and said, let us choose another leader and go back to Egypt.

They were willing to forsake a promise that God had given to them and just go back to slavery. They got scared and they grumbled.

They didn't trust things to go the way God instructed them and they lost the opportunity to even enter the promised land. They were fearful of the inhabitants of the land. An entire generation would die as desert nomads without getting to enter the land intended to them.

So it seems like, you get the front row, buddy. Yeah. I have to be disruptive. Let's welcome Paul, everybody.

[13:43] Hey. Hey. When did so many people start coming to me? At first, it was like me and four other people. I was like, this is going to be amazing.

No, thank you, everybody, for coming. But you see in this situation that fear won and a whole generation lost.

Lack of trust can seemingly mean sometimes lost opportunities. But I get it. I've been there. I've been there.

I've been fearful. And I've been paralyzed to act. You ever been in a situation like that? You felt like you knew what you were supposed to do. And then all of a sudden, it's just like this lack of courage, this fear of man that comes over you.

And you just don't do it. Is it just me? As we continue with this story, I thank the Lord for Joshua and Caleb, right?

[14:50] Joshua and Caleb trusted God. And to Joshua, God reinforced his faith by saying this later in Joshua 1. It says, Have I not commanded you, Joshua?

God asked Joshua, Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened. And do not be dismayed. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Write that on your mirror at home. And you know what? God was with them. If God says it, it's true. And they entered the land. Often what people fear overtakes them. We can normalize fear without surrendering to it. Let's look at some of God's people who were people just like us and recognize that fear is normal.

Here's a few other examples. So I put in here David, right? I mentioned this before, but like David's son wanted to kill him. You know, it's not like you go, most of us don't go home and think we're scared of our kids.

[15:57] Right? I hope not. Let's talk afterward if you are. David was pursued. He was threatened. He had to hide in caves. Elijah in 1 Kings 19, it talks about he has to flee Jezebel after victory.

He's fearful for his life. Let's look at the disciples. Let's look at the disciples. Me too, buddy. They were, uh...

The disciples were beaten, imprisoned, threatened. The majority of them lost their lives because of their faith. Yet they feared God more than their lives.

I've got a list of how these men died. Peter, the very one who would deny Jesus three times as he feared for his life, was eventually crucified upside down in Rome.

Andrew, Andrew, crucified on an X-shaped cross in Greece. James, the son of Zebedee, beheaded with a sword in Jerusalem.

[17:03] John died of natural causes in Ephesus. Philip, crucified in Hierapolis. Bartholomew, Nathaniel, he was flayed and beheaded in Armenia, tradition says.

Thomas, pierced with a spear. Matthew, killed by a sword in Ethiopia. James, son of Alphaeus, stoned or thrown from the temple pinnacle. Thaddeus, killed with arrows or an axe.

Simon the Zealot, crucified or sawn in half. Matthias, stoned and then beheaded. I would encourage you to read these stories. As they drew nearer to God, as they learned more about who he is and what he's truly like, the fear of man lost its grip on their lives.

And their fear of the Lord grew. So I think the central takeaway of that is fear of physical harm loses its grip when the fear of the Lord grows.

So as we go into this third section, we answer the second question that I pose, which is, how can the fear of man lose its grip on me?

[18:22] Or how can the fear of the Lord grow? Let's let Jesus teach us about fearing the Lord. Number three there, Jesus radically reorders our fear.

My fear of the Lord grows when I recognize, and I just put a few bullet points here. Number one, we realize that God knows and sees the smallest losses. Nothing is outside of his sight.

Number two, nothing touches us outside of his care. Number three, physical harm cannot undo eternal security.

Jesus reminds us that we are valuable, and that there is more to life than what we see and feel. Jesus does not minimize danger. He relativizes it. That's a hard word to say. He puts it in perspective, right? Right? When Jesus sent out the disciples, he reminded them that they would encounter a number of problems.

[19:36] They would be rejected, turned over to town councils for public humiliation and harm. Their ministries would be divisive, angering more people.

You don't think they were tempted to fear people? It's like, hey, I'm going to follow Jesus, and I'm going to end up in the worst situation is imaginable. But Jesus says in response, do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul.

Rather, fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Jesus' exhortation focuses specifically on the fear of physical threats, similar to the ones that faced Abraham.

But he takes the worst scenario, being killed, and says that even the threat of death should not cause the disciples to fear other people.

If such a severe threat can be countered with the fear of the Lord, then threats such as rejection would not be lethal blows. Does that make sense?

[20:43] If the worst that can happen, Jesus provides for, then anything less. You don't think he'll provide for that too? Right.

The disciples were like us. They wanted people to like them. Don't you want people to like you? I mean, I do. But sometimes that desire to be so like can just be as dangerous.

God doesn't call us to comfort. Rather, he calls us to faithfulness. Right? So here's a few examples I put that the fear of harm thrives in.

Number one, it's when we believe that God's sovereignty is just theory. It's like, I know in my mind this is real, but it's not functional in my life.

We have an idea, speculation, possible belief that God is in control, but we're failing to see it as practical. We forget how he has proven it throughout history.

[21 : 46] This is when fear of harm thrives. Number two, God's promises feel distant. Like it's easy, I think sometimes to read scripture and say, you know, it seemed like it worked for them, but I don't know about me.

I don't, I don't know if that still works today. You should check yourself when you're having those thoughts. Number three, our comfort becomes more valuable than God's faithfulness. We're actually talking about this on our drive the other day, Joy and I, and it just concerned me how powerful the desire for comfort can be in our lives. It can tempt us to do all sorts of things or not do all sorts of things at the same time.

If this life becomes ultimate, fear will dominate. If God's glory is ultimate, courage becomes possible. In Luke 12, it says this, are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?

You are of more value than many sparrows. Though this world may offer many things to fear, the world beyond it, where we are already citizens, is permanently secure.

[23 : 11] So the gospel declares this. Number one, Christ faced real physical harm. Number two, Christ did not escape suffering.

He entered it. And number three, Christ's resurrection proves harm is not final. You see how when we look at this, it's like Jesus is reorganizing how we should see fear.

I call it like, it's almost like putting on glasses. I can't see things clearly without mine. It's a real problem. But like when, when we read this and when we see how Jesus reorders fear and puts it into like an eternal perspective, it's like putting on your gospel glasses, right?

And sometimes you need to put on your gospel glasses. Always. We should put on our gospel glasses, but Jesus reminds us how we should be viewing this.

Martin Luther said, even if they take our life, our goods, honor, our children, our wife, God's kingdom is forever.

[24 : 32] Fear shrinks when we believe that nothing happens randomly to God's children. I think as I was studying this, I know that there, I'm trying to not overlap different sections that, that everybody will talk about on the fear of man.

And it's kind of hard because I feel like sometimes it just goes together a little bit, but I just thought about how often we, it's almost like we believe this randomness to life as though that there is no sovereignty of God.

And, and it's tempting to just trust what we see and feel. But fear shrinks when we know that God is ultimately in control.

And he's got a plan for your life. We can counter our fear of man and his opinion with the fear of God who made us and who made our enemy. A God we can trust because he was unafraid of death and face the fear and reality of death for us.

I woke up this morning with the lyrics of a song today. We used to sing it a good bit and it's, it's been a while, but I wanted to just read you some of the, the lyrics of it.

[25 : 55] I probably listened to it probably eight times this morning, but it says this, it reminds us about the Lord's faithfulness in our lives.

It says, morning by morning, I wake up to find the power and comfort of God's hand in mine.

Season by season, I watch him amazed in all of the mystery of his perfect ways.

All I have need of his hand will provide. He's always been faithful to me. I can't remember one single regret and serving God only and trusting his hand.

All I have need of his hand will provide. He's always been faithful to me. This is my anthem. This is my song. The theme of the stories I've heard for so long.

God has been faithful. He will be again. His loving compassion. It knows no end. All I have need of his hand will provide. He's always been faithful.

[27 : 14] So sometimes you need to hear that to let the fear of man lose grip on your life. Let's talk through some practical application.

I think sometimes I assume that we read this or we listen to this and we just know what to do. But I wanted to provide some very practical tips to help us.

So number one, think hard, but name your fears honestly before God. I think that's why a journal is so helpful.

Talking to a friend. But find a quiet place. Talk to the Lord and say, Lord, these are real fears of mine. I don't know about you.

I'm not always that self-aware. And so sometimes it takes somebody to say, oh, do you know what that is? That's fear, man. That's anxiety. Oh, I just thought it was stress.

[28 : 27] Yeah, it is. But like, this is why. So get before the Lord and name your anxieties. Name your fears before God. And then also, like, realize that fear.

Realize that we all have our own tendencies. One thing I read was it said that we tend to be controlled by things we want.

Or need. Right? So we have this need for approval. We have this need for comfort. We have this need for fill in the blank.

And then we organize our lives around making that happen. Right? I never want to hurt, so I'm going to pursue comfort. I never want to be fill in the blank, so I do this.

So you've got to realize your tendencies. Is the fear of man in your life causing you to reorganize your life in an unhelpful way? For approval, for safety, for comfort, whatever it is.

[29 : 37] Number three, refocus on God's love, His past provisions, power, and future grace. Like I said a minute ago, find a place to get quiet.

Listen to songs about God's faithfulness. Journal. Let the Lord minister to your soul. I've been thinking about this a lot.

I just have gone through probably the most difficult month and a half of my life. That's no underestimate. It has really been the worst.

And I know you have your own situation. But like I had to go back to this. Right? I had to go back to how do I do this?

What's the next step? It's like how do you breathe? And so with the Lord it's been how do I find a quiet place?

[30 : 49] How do I listen to songs that remind me of the truth? I'm going to start crying if I look at you, Jenna. So quit. How do I do this?

How do I get around people who remind me what's really important? Walt asked me three days ago, man, how's your time with the Lord?

It's not great. But I'm trying. Right? Because I'm having to remember how to do it in this way. It just feels fresh. You know what I mean? But you've got to refocus on that.

God's love, His power, His past provisions, and future grace. Do whatever it takes. Number four, choose obedience even when afraid.

Remembering that Jesus obeyed and my eternal future is secure. Remember. The right thing is to do the right thing.

[31 : 50] Right? So even when you're afraid, remember Jesus and His work. And then number five, trust outcomes to God, not people.

One of the things I've learned in my work is that all I can do is try to do the best I can.

Try to be faithful. And then leave the outcomes up to the Lord. And that's all of us in all of our work, right? It's us in our parenting. It's us as spouses.

It's us as friends. It's us in our jobs. It's like we just need to be faithful and trust the outcomes to the Lord, whatever may come. Psalm 27.1 says, The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Whom shall I fear? So courage is not reckless. It's obedient trust. I want to read a little section that I thought was helpful.

[32 : 58] This kind of walks through one of our kind of favorite men of faith, Martin Luther. Martin Luther. The kids dared me to get a haircut like Martin Luther.

Just not quite that committed. Have you seen pictures of Martin Luther? I mean, yeah. It's a blessing. Martin Luther developed a robust fear of the Lord through meditation and study of Scripture.

But he would soon be tested. The monk is best known for his reaction against the Catholic Church's way of raising money. They sold indulgences.

Essentially saying, hey, you give us money and we give you God's favor. Right? That's kind of what they set it up as. If you gave money to the church, then you could release yourself and your loved ones from purgatory, they said.

Being convinced this way was wrong and violated the principles of justification by faith, Martin Luther responded by posting 95 theses on the door of the church.

[34 : 07] This, along with dozens of additional publications, would put him in severe odds with the Roman Catholic Church. His life was constantly in danger and he assumed death was inevitable.

He thought they were going to assassinate him or that they would burn him as a heretic. The church demanded he recant and that he should humbly submit to them.

At one point he said, I was wrong. I admit it when I said that indulgences were the pious defrauding of the faithful. But I recant and I say, indulgences are the most pious fraud.

And imposters are the most rascally pontiffs by which they deceive the souls and destroy the goods of the faithful. He had a gift for sarcasm. I love it. The result would be a public trial.

They didn't permit him a chance to lecture or debate or to explain how he had arrived at such conclusions. While being intimidated by some of the most powerful men ever assembled in that area, and when put on the spot to defend all of his writings or to reject a part, he requested time to think about it.

[35 : 20] Think it all over. So it kind of seems like he was teetering between the fear of man and the fear of the Lord. He would come back the next day to defend his writings and respond, I must walk in the fear of the Lord.

My conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything. For to go against my conscience is neither right nor safe.

God help me. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. Amen. Amen. Here he demonstrated that it is possible to fear the Lord while being afraid of physical threats on your life.

And what a wonderful example to us. So I think this chapter asks of us, will we trust man or will we trust the Lord? The road leading to the fear of man may be expressed in many ways.

And we'll get into some more of that in the next two weeks. When we do not combat these fears with the fear of the Lord, the consequences can be devastating. But when we give God his rightful place in our lives, fear of man can be shattered.

[36 : 39] The fear of man can lose its grip on me because Christ conquered death. Fear of harm no longer has ultimate authority.

As I was finishing this up, it reminded me of one of my favorite quotes. I actually named my firstborn after this man, Brennan Manning.

And he says, whatever God does not protect you from, God will use to perfect you through. And it's with that lens, I think we have to look at the fear of man.

It comes in many different sizes and many different ways, but I think you should check your heart.

Because it creeps up on you. And so, do you love your life so much that the fear of man rules in it?

Or are you going to trust the Lord, right? I have a few quotes that I, I have so many, I was just like, I ran out of room. So, but Proverbs 29, 25 reminds us that the fear of man is a snare.

[37 : 52] It's a trap. I don't know if you've ever caught a wild animal on a track, but they don't like it. But the fear of man is like that. It catches you when you don't expect it. But whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.

And then John Calvin says, we are never truly safe until we rest in God's providence. You think your life's secure. You think your work's secure.

You think that 401k is secure. Well, you've got to trust the Lord. It's not always. I want to end with a special note.

Put on here a note for, about abuse and oppressors. For those of, who've been abused or tragically victimized, the fear of harm from man may seem more powerful.

Shame and fear might chase you throughout your life. And I want you to know it will take regular work to fight them off. Yet there's more for you.

[38 : 58] This doesn't define you. God draws close and cleanses you and stands against those who have oppressed you. Your abuser or oppressor will have to stand before God.

The abuser's power wanes and it isn't permanent. When eternity descends to earth, their deeds will burn away with everything else that is unclean.

And life is not found in staying in an abusive relationship. Jesus is the only one who can free you from shame and fear. The Lord understands your shame.

He grieves over it. He grieves over the victimization of His children and does something about it.

We may not see it, but God does not abandon those who have been harmed by other people.

And I want to end on this verse. In Isaiah 54, 4 and 5, it says, Fear not, for you will not be ashamed.

Be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced, for you will not forget the shame of your youth and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.

[40 : 13] For your maker is your husband. The Lord of hosts is His name and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth He is called.

The Lord sees you. So, let's pray together. Lord, today we just ask for Your help.

I know that it is the evidence of the grace of God in each of these people's lives that they're here today.

That means they want to trust the Lord. And so, I pray that You'd help us to trust the Lord. None of us have it figured out, God. We need Your help.

And so, just like a trap is set before us, and we know that we have an enemy. Would You protect us? Would You help us? May the fear of the Lord keep us from the trap of the fear of man.

[41 : 28] And God, may we not love our lives so much that we would pursue comfort or acceptance or any of these security above You. May we love and fear the Lord today.

So, help us, God, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.