

Learn to fear the Lord

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[0 : 00] Amen. Amen. All this is for you, for your glory and your fame. It's not about me, as if I should do things my way.

For you alone are God, and I surrender to your way. Lord, and that's our prayer this morning, that you would refocus us, that you would refocus us on what is truly, truly important in our lives.

Lord, there's so much to distract. There's so many things that would steal away our hearts. There are so many things that would compromise us and entangle us.

But Lord, our prayer is that you would just free us from those things this morning, and take us into a new place with you. Amen. New record.

Well, welcome. Welcome. Welcome to a new series of talks that we're going to be doing together on a Sunday morning, called Life Skills to Live By.

[1 : 22] John makes these up, you know. Lessons from the Book of Proverbs. I've got all Proverbs there, but never mind. Lessons from the Book of Proverbs.

And this morning, well, we'll talk about Proverbs a little bit later. I've got to be honest. Proverbs is not one of my favorite books, which is a bit strange, isn't it, really? And I guess it's because it's a lot of short statements, a lot of nuggets, as it were, which seems sometimes, if you're just reading Proverbs off on its own, it seems to be a bit like, well, that's a bit random there.

Why has he gone there? So you can't see the story. And I like a good story. We all like a good story, don't we? But the truth is there's some dynamite fundamentals of truth to explore and to equip us for the life that Jesus wants us to lead by his Holy Spirit.

So let's have a quick look at what Proverbs as a book is meant to do for us. This is slide two, Josh. Oh, is it you, Shelley?

Are you on duty this morning, don't you? So say Shelley then instead of Josh. So Proverbs one then. It says, The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel, for gaining wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight, for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, for doing what is right and just and fair, for giving prudence to those who are simple.

[2 : 51] Probably me. Knowledge and discretion to the young. Slide three. Let the wise listen and add to their learning and let the discerning get guidance.

For understanding Proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. And then the verse that we're going to be focusing on to start with anyway.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. So the first six verses of Proverbs set the scene of how we are to use this book.

And then verse seven starts to elaborate on the first life skill that we're going to be looking at. The fear of the Lord. Whoopee.

We all have a bit of fear, don't we? But it's not quite like that. The phrase the fear of the Lord is something that you might find a bit confusing because, I don't know about you, it might come across a bit negative.

[4 : 07] After all, do not fear crops up again and again in the Bible. Just been doing the storytelling in there, coming up to Christmas. Do not fear, Mary, the angel said.

Okay. Do not fear, for I bring you good tidings of great joy. Fear not, for I have redeemed you. Perfect love casts out all fear.

Little bits of fear in the Bible there. Well, this fear of the Lord is obviously not the same kind of fear. God can't say to us, right, I'm going to get rid of fear in your life.

Do not fear. No, it is a bunch of fear. It wouldn't do that to us. Though I'm supposed to be looking at the benefits that practicing this fear will lead to, I feel we need to briefly distinguish godly fear we practice from all the other kinds of fears that we're subjected to.

So, in Easton's Bible dictionary, yes, I do do some preparation, the fear of the Lord is defined as, in the Old Testament, it's used as a designation of true piety.

[5 : 20] Well, that's a mouthful, isn't it? This is the bit I like, though. It's a fear conjoined, think about conjoined twins I'm thinking of, which is probably not a great thing to think about, but conjoined twins, things that are together, okay?

Conjoined with love and hope. That's our fear of the Lord. And it's therefore, and this is important, not a slavish dread, but rather a filial reverence, filial loving, if you like, a love reverence for God.

Then it says, God is called the fear of Isaac because the God, the God whom Isaac feared, because he's the God whom Isaac feared. So, in the New Testament, this is, next slide, shall we, a holy fear is enjoined in the New Testament as a preventative of carelessness in religion.

In other words, for you to keep on your toes, to be on your game, to keep your spiritual antennae up, to make sure that you're heading down the right path and you're not getting entangled or distracted by other things, if you like.

Next slide. So, the idea, I think this is the best definition of where we're going to get to with the fear of the Lord. And it's really the definition of reverence.

[6 : 55] It's the proper sense of awe, respect, and wonder that is inspired and demanded by an encounter with or meditation upon the character and activity of the living God.

And that's linked to awe, devotion, or being devout, the fury of God, as we've said, godliness, reverence, veneration, and wonder.

There's a lot in there, isn't there? This is not just a simple, you know, goodness me, God's going to get me kind of thing, at all. In fact, it's quite the opposite.

It's a loving reverence. It's a knowledge of God. A knowledge of the awesomeness and the wonder of God. So, it perhaps hints then, this reverence, hints at the enormous supremacy of God.

His total, awesome power. What he's done in creation, in sustaining the existence of everything we know, and in his plans and purposes for the redemption of mankind and the future into eternity.

[8 : 13] We should always be conscious that we are where we are now by the grace of God. Next slide. For we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, Romans 23 tells us.

It says, we're all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way. And the wonderful thing, the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53, 6. And in Ephesians 2 it says, as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us who lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires, doing our own things, and thoughts.

Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

[9 : 37] It's by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

For it's by grace you've been saved through faith. This is not from yourselves. It's a gift of God. Not by works so that no one can boast.

For we are God's handiwork. Created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Next slide. Now whether the fear of the Lord is a negative thing or a positive thing depends on where you're standing. As a Christian who's accepted Jesus' gift of forgiveness through his suffering I'm not saying we don't wobble and we don't have difficult times but if we've accepted his forgiveness through his suffering and death on the cross and asked him to be our Lord the fear of God is a positive thing.

It keeps us on the straight and narrow. It keeps us running the race. And you know it helped me a little bit here to do a bit of visualization. You might want to do the same thing and close your eyes and think.

[11 : 17] As we look at this great big God who created the whole universe and sustains it by the word of his mouth of his mouth we have the relationship with the one who made the mountains who made the hills and the valleys the sea and then moving outwards to the planets that we struggle as human beings to reach and then the stars beyond that and a thousand galaxies beyond.

the wonderful thing is we know that this God is our friend and we have an assurance we know where we're ultimately going.

we know we're going to be with him one day. We know that even while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

Charles Spurgeon puts it like this it is a fear that leans towards the Lord because of his very goodness the sort of fear which has in it the very essence of love and without which there would be no joy even in the presence of God without this love.

Fresh slide please. In his book What Does It Mean to Fear the Lord and this is I've got to be honest this is a book that I've only partially read so you'll have to have a look at it it's really worth having a look at I think to give you an idea of what the fear of the Lord really is.

[13 : 27] Michael Reeves says the nature of the living God means that the fear which pleases him is not a grovelling shrinking fear he's no tyrant it's an ecstasy of love and joy that senses how overwhelmingly kind and magnificent good and true God is and that therefore leans on him in staggered praise praise and faith it's almost like the word fear is not appropriate but I think the idea that it's called fear is that it's about the intensity of our response to God as we see him more clearly through our growing relationship with him and the continued revelation of the Holy

Spirit do you know I think that as that happens as we progress in our relationship with him it can only cause one response that's common to all types of fear and that is trembling just thinking for a minute when we look at out I don't know whether you've ever been on a boat out on the ocean and you can't actually see land and you just look out and you think wow this is so much bigger than me this is awesome this is almost scary yeah you ever seen a big structure Sue was talking about this this morning actually like a big civil engineering project where they're building massive bridges or underpasses and lots of roads and you look at it and you think wow this is awesome what an awesome job or a structure that takes your breath away because it's so big so this trembling is not for fear of punishment or for fear of the glare of light of God's truth truth on our lives like it might be if you're not a

Christian because God's truth will illuminate and reveal the true state of our lives and that is that is actually quite negative for a non-Christian feels a negative although it can have a positive effect because it can drive us to where God wants us to be and that's in full relationship with him we can have the security of knowing that it's all been dealt with in Jesus by his death and through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives our response must surely be as we look at God our God is an awesome God he reigns in heaven above with wisdom power and love our God is an awesome God you might not have that standpoint this morning this might all be alien to you maybe the next slide but Michael

Reeves again says quite simply our culture has lost God as the proper object of fear the fear of God was a happy and healthy fear that controlled our other fears this fear of God controls our other fears and frees us from those reigning in anxiety with our society having lost God as the proper object of fear our culture is necessarily becoming more neurotic and anxious in ousting God from our culture other concerns from personal health to the health of the planet have assumed a divine ultimacy it's not these things aren't relevant but they become ultimately the most important thing the entire focus in our minds God has been forgotten good things have become cruel and pitiless idols and thus we feel helplessly fragile feel helplessly fragile this morning and society fills with anxieties next slide for you it could be this morning that the very existence of God is to be questioned if not denied you may carry guilt that you feel there is no answer to you may question events in the world and looking around you while you look at the news sometimes you may feel there is no hope and no answers if any of that speaks to you this morning can I just tell you that in this church you will find a good number of people who have had an encounter with Jesus through his

Holy Spirit and it has given them all the assurances that we have already mentioned Jesus is waiting for you this morning to step from negative fear of the world and what's going on and ultimately death into a loving reverent fear of God who is ultimately over all things if that's spoken to you this morning please see somebody after the service have a chat with them you'll be amazed what God can do in your life so hopefully we have a clear picture of what this fear is now of what fear of the Lord is let's have a look at the benefits then now that the proverbs tell us about so let's have a look at the first benefit back to proverbs 1 verse 7 next slide

[19 : 40] I think it is oh that's first benefit thank you so the fear of the Lord it says is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and instruction once we step into proper reverence and fear of God his Holy Spirit is available to guide us into all wisdom I've got to be very careful I don't stamp all over John's talk for next week in here in John 13 verse 12 to 14 Jesus on leaving disciples before the crucifixion shares with his disciples sorry I don't think I've got my right teeth in this morning before the crucifixion shares with the disciples and talks of an advocate a comforter the Spirit of Truth I have much more to say to you more than you can now bear verse 13 but when he the Spirit of Truth comes he will guide you into all truth he will not speak on his own he will speak only what he hears and he will tell you what is yet to come he will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you the Holy

Spirit is the continuation of Jesus work in this world through us he will glorify he will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you all that belongs to the Father is mine that is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you I'm not going to spend long on this because I might jump all over what John will speak about in Proverbs 9 verse 10 but I'd like to put the emphasis on one word in this phrase and I've underlined it and made it bold in the heading there beginning to bring someone to relationship with God there has to be a revelation of the Holy Spirit about themselves their need of Jesus and God's forgiveness this is meant to be the beginning of knowledge you know so many of us who have been in the church a long time do you ever look at yourself and think what have I been playing at yeah you ever do that or is it just me put your hands up if you've ever done that see I'm a teacher so I've got to do that from time to time so I feel uncomfortable if I don't yes what's that Eve sorry but I feel I sometimes think what have I been doing what have been doing in life how much have I actually learnt here at this

Christian walk it's a challenge isn't it to see that beginning that's the beginning point folks and we should be moving on you know my prayer is my prayer is that this year God will reveal more and more to me that I will receive fresh and deeper revelation of who he is you know let's not settle for the fact that God has saved us and we're going to heaven on some kind of gravy train but let's commit ourselves to working in partnership with God to touch other people's lives with the hope and the comfort he's given us to really be with Jesus become like Jesus and to do what

Jesus wants us to do amen let's have the next slide Proverbs describes those who don't fear the Lord as fools here quite heavy isn't it at least by implication but those who have access to a resource that will meet their needs or others needs and refuse to use it are foolish if we don't use the Holy Spirit in our lives we're being foolish we need to make sure that we're in communion with him regularly regularly so that we can hear what God's will is what God's purpose for our life is that day because God has purpose in each day for us so there's a lesson for us as a church there isn't there let's remain teachable humble and able to receive and act on instruction from God let's not be unteachable let's not reject instruction let's not reject correction when it comes whether it comes directly from the

Holy Spirit whether it comes through a brother or sister let's remain thirsty for the knowledge of God let's have a look at benefit two then Proverbs 8 verse 13 says to fear the Lord is to hate evil I hate pride and arrogance evil behaviour and perverse speech it says we might say well that's not really a benefit well to spend time in loving reverence of God in his fear and awesomeness brings challenge to us which is good in spending time with Jesus we become more like him less tolerant of our own independence our own pride our own arrogance and more likely to open the doors to the knock of the Holy Spirit in those areas of our lives that are like shut up rooms where God never goes because we don't let him those areas where he wants to make

[25 : 44] Jesus Lord fear of the Lord we want to make him Lord of every area in our life it says in Revelation 3 verse 20 I've still got a picture of this my mum's old picture she had this picture on the wall of Jesus standing at the door perfectly white with white blondish hair that's how we perceived that was just the way it was in those days and a lamp we now know of course that Jesus is in reality knocking on the doors of our lives here I am I stand at the door and knock if anyone hears my voice opens the door I will come in and we will share a meal together as friends that's what Jesus wants to do in the areas of our lives in the rooms of our lives that we want to keep shut up that we would normally stay in without him the longer

I go on the more I'm convinced that I am sorry I've lost my place there the longer I go on the more convinced I am that Jesus wants to continue to challenge and change us and we need to be willing to keep opening the doors as the Holy Spirit promises benefit three Proverbs 10 27 the fear of the Lord adds length to life but the years of the wicked are cut short I think there's an element here of living well and living sensibly you know of not getting too excessive in any way we live and allowing God to challenge the areas of our lives that damage us either mentally physically or spiritually this doesn't mean to say that everyone who has a short life doesn't fear the Lord or in some way wicked God knows the time span we have on earth he knows that and he knows the purposes he has for us to fulfil says in

Jeremiah doesn't it for I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord plans to prosper you and not to harm you plans to give you a hope and a future we have to believe that God knows what he's doing and this isn't an empty promise whether we see what we consider longer life on this or not whether we consider we see longer life or not this life is an infinitesimal I know I'd struggle to say that infiniti it's a very long time infinitesimally oh there we go infinitesimally oh I'm not going to do this anymore it's a very very small part a tiny part an insignificant part actually in the eternity in terms of length that we will enter into

I'd hate to think that there was nothing after this life what would be the point what would be the point if there was nothing after this life likewise if we fail to look for the real meaning of life or grasp the plans that God has for our lives why would we expect him to keep granting us the blessing of each new day we need to be aware that we have plans and purposes on our lives yeah we have to believe in this promise benefit four proverbs 14 2 whoever fears the Lord walks uprightly but those who despise him are devious in their ways if you seek to apprentice Jesus and that's what we are we're apprentices of Jesus we will become more like him as we ask him what he wants us to do through his

Holy Spirit we will be more likely the more we do it to obey to listen to what he wants and more likely to repent more quickly when we get it wrong because we will get it wrong since the beginning of time in the garden of Eden Satan has been telling us that the best thing when we screw up and make a mess is to hide ourselves from God God has always wanted a loving relationship with his people to allow them to discern good and evil through his Holy Spirit not through their own intellect or independence when you begin to live by the spirit of the fear of the Lord people will notice you walking uprightly and righteously the alternative lifestyle will challenge them and you may get challenged back by the way because it's not very pleasant is it when you see somebody's getting it right and you're getting it wrong sometimes it makes you feel a bit edgy but be ready to give an account to them of why you do this remembering though to give him because it's his enabling that enables us to walk uprightly and righteously remember to give him the glory not yourself nearly there now benefit 5

[31 : 40] Proverbs 15 verse 16 better a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth with turmoil now it's two for one this one but I don't get one free because there's two benefits in this as far as I can see the first benefit of this proverb is that it focuses the value of your life on your spiritual standing not on your wealth or position we're obsessed these days you only have to look in society in the world we're obsessed these days by are worth being measured by the things we have or own or possess whether that be a position at work or position of power the latest gadget or beautiful model partner I've got one anyway had to say that since then you've been raised with

Christ then set your hearts on things above since you've been raised with Christ set your heart on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God set your mind on things above must be important because he said it twice not on earthly things for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God when Christ who is your life appears then you also will appear with him in glory wow we will appear with him in glory Colossians 3 that's verse 1 to 4 do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moths and vermin destroy where thieves break in and steal but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moths and vermin do not destroy where thieves do not break in and steal for where your treasure is there your heart will be also Matthew 6 19 to 21 that's the fourth benefit the fifth benefit is this one the fifth and final benefit is implied the fear of the

Lord brings the opposite of turmoil yeah now I looked I actually typed in the opposite of turmoil and this doesn't always work on Google because I put the fear of God in and I got a load of sort of hoodies and tracksuit bottoms when I put the fear of God in I thought what's going on here apparently that's a make but I put in this time I put in the opposite I thought I'll not jump the gun here I'll put in the opposite of turmoil do you know what it came out with this is what it came out and I think this is lovely the opposite of turmoil is defined as the opposite of a state of great disturbance well I think that's great peace or peacefulness the opposite of confusion which is clarity the opposite of uncertainty which is certainty the opposite of restless so a state of resting uneasy or nervous the opposite of that which is calm that wonderful that the fear of

God can bring all those blessings into our lives the opposite of turmoil in fearing God and following his commands there will be trials and tribulations I don't want to paint it falsely for you we know that life is tough many of us are facing in this church at this moment in time difficult situations but you know what Jesus wants to deliver he wants to bring peace he wants to bring clarity he wants to bring certainty he wants to bring rest calm and he wants to bring calm calm calm calm calm calm calm calm!

2 corinthians 4 verse 16 and i'm going to finish with this says this therefore we do not lose heart though outwardly we are wasting away yet inwardly we are being renewed renewed we are being renewed day by day for our light and momentary troubles they might not feel very light momentary but they are in the context of eternity are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all so we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen since what we have seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal believe it this morning what we see are just the porter cabins and the construction project that the temporary buildings will disappear and we will spend eternity with Jesus

[37 : 38] Amen