

The Fear of the Lord

is the Beginning of Wisdom



Introduction

Level 1- Read through the Bible passage prayerfully. As God speaks to you through his word, respond back to him in prayer. What can you praise him and thank him for? What sin do these scriptures prompt you to confess? What do you need to ask God for? How do you need to yield to what God is saying in his word?

Level 2- Read and pray as in level one and do the numbered questions (that follow along with the Bible passage) in the study.

Level 3- Read and pray as in level one. Do the numbered questions as in level 2, as well as the Discussion questions and the Digging Deeper for more in-depth study.

The *fear of the Lord* is the theme of *The Writings*—the portion of Scripture we will be studying—which includes Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. These books are also known as *Wisdom Literature* because of the way they show us how to seek wisdom in all areas of life. In this introductory lesson we will explore what it is to fear God and how this relates to wisdom.

Day 1—What does it mean to fear the Lord?

Father, please give me your Spirit of wisdom and revelation to know you better and to understand more deeply what it means to fear you.

Scholar's Note: *The Writings* are filled with Hebrew poetry so we must read them differently than we read prose or narratives. "In most Old Testament genres, when the speakers or authors express themselves poetically, they use the dynamic of parallelism.

Essentially in parallelism the author states an idea in the first line, then repeats it in a different way in the second line or in additional lines."¹ Keeping this in mind as you read the poetry of *the Writings* will aid in your understanding of it.

1. The following verses show different aspects or nuances of what it means to fear God. After each verse write what you see about what it means to fear God. (We are not looking for the result or benefit right now.) The first one is done for you. (Look back at the scholar's note for help.)

Psalm 33:18 Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love...

To fear God is to hope in his steadfast love

Psalm 112:1 Praise the Lord! How blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in His commandments.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

Psalm 128:1 How blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways.

Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil; Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and the perverted speech I hate.

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

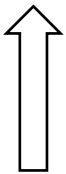
Isaiah 50:10 Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.

Proverbs 28:14 Blessed is the one who fears the LORD always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity. (What is the opposite of hardening your heart?)

Psalm 31:19 Oh how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you,

Psalm 33:8 Let all the earth fear the Lord; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

Revelation 15:4 Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.



Father help me not only to obey your commands, but to delight in obeying. Help me not only to hate evil, but to hate it in myself and turn away from it to you. Help me not only to be in awe of you, but to testify to others of your glory.

2. To *tremble* in the Bible indicates fear. Next to each verse write more nuances of fearing God that you see in the following verses.

Psalm 96:8-9 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness, tremble before him, all the earth!

Isaiah 66:2b But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite and trembles at my word.

Psalm 2:11 Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling.

Philippians 2:12b-13 ...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Day 2— To fear or not to fear?

3. In the book of Matthew, Jesus tells us what to fear and what not to fear. *Matthew 10:28 (Jesus speaking) And **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.*

a. Why is this fear of God a healthy fear?

Similarly in Luke 12:4-7 we see what to fear and what not to fear— *I tell you, my friends, **do not fear** those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. ⁵ But I will warn you whom to fear: **fear him** who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell Yes, I tell you, **fear him!** ⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. ⁷ Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. **Fear not**; you are of more value than many sparrows.*

b. What else does Jesus say we are not to fear in this passage?

c. How does fearing God lead to not fearing in verse 7?

Picture and Ponder

“We can hardly conceive of a God who is both dreadful and yet compassionate, severe and yet gentle, just and yet forgiving, wrathful and yet approachable, exalted and yet available. The one who fears God refuses to forfeit what unsettles him about God, because he wants to know, enjoy, and serve the true God.”²

4. In the 5th chapter of the gospel of Mark we read about the ruler of a synagogue, whose daughter was desperately sick, who came to Jesus and asked him to come and heal his little girl. As they were going Jesus was delayed by another person who needed healing. Read what happened in verses 35-36. *While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?” But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, “**Do not fear, only believe.**”*

- a. What is it Jesus does not want the man to fear?
- b. How is *believing* (we could also say *faith* or *trust*) the opposite of (bad) fear, and part of what it means to fear God?

In Exodus 20 God has just given the Ten Commandments to his people. Verses 18-21 say, *Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die. Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the **fear of him** may be before you, that you may not sin."* The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

- c. How does fearing God help us not to fear him?



We all know that there is good, healthy fear and there is bad debilitating fear. It's wise to be afraid of a tornado; it's debilitating to be afraid to go outside your house. Good, healthy fear of the Lord draws us near to him (like Moses) and extinguishes bad debilitating fear that causes us to stand far off (like the Israelites). As believers we can draw blessedly near to God and approach his throne of grace with confidence through Jesus our Savior and mediator (Heb. 4:16).

- ◆ As Christians what are we wise to be fearful of?
- ◆ Ask God to show you if you have any fear that causes you to stand far off from him.

Day 3—How are fear of God and joy in God compatible?

5. Read the following verses. After each verse write what you see about how fearing God brings joy or goodness.

Proverbs 14:27 The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death. (NASB 20)

Proverbs 19:23 The fear of the Lord leads to life, So that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil. (NASB 20)

Psalms 25:14 The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him and he makes known to them his covenant.

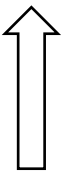
Nehemiah 1:11 O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name.

Psalms 128:1 Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways!

Psalms 34:8-9 Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!

For Discussion

How would you explain the relationship between fearing God and finding joy in God?



Lord only in your presence is there fullness of joy and at your righthand, pleasures evermore! (Ps.16:11) Forgive me for looking for joy in other places, for thinking other things can satisfy me. Help me to know the fear of the Lord brings ultimate and lasting joy.

Picture and Ponder

“What if we haven’t experienced greater happiness in God because we’ve resisted anything that might make us fear him? What if we have forfeited greater intensities of intimacy because we’ve shielded ourselves from aspects of him that make us uncomfortable? What if love has been harder and sanctification slower because we have subtly made God smaller, nicer, and more accommodating instead of approaching him as the consuming fire that he is?”³

Day 4—What is Wisdom?

6. Read Proverbs 1.

We find out in the first chapter that the purpose of Proverbs is to teach wisdom. We also see different facets of wisdom presented in verses 1-5.

Write the definition or your own description of each of these facets of wisdom.

Discipline/instruction/training-

Understanding/insight-

Wise dealing/good sense-

Righteousness/justice/equity-

Prudence-

Discernment-

Knowledge/learning-

For Discussion

Are wisdom and knowledge the same? Can someone be full of knowledge, yet not full of wisdom? Can someone be wise, but not have knowledge?

Digging Deeper

Read James 3:13-17 below. What else can we learn from this passage about what wisdom is?

¹³ *If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom.* ¹⁴ *But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying.* ¹⁵ *For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind*

of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. ¹⁶ *For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.* ¹⁷ *But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. (NLT)*

For Discussion

How is the wisdom of the world different than the wisdom of God?



Proverbs 1:32 says that two things lead to destruction—turning away from wisdom and being complacent about wisdom. Rebellion or laziness—both lead to destruction. Rather than turning away from wisdom or being complacent about wisdom Proverbs 4:8 urges us to prize wisdom highly and to embrace wisdom.

- ◆ In what ways do you turn away from wisdom, or are you complacent about wisdom?

- ◆ What would it look like to prize wisdom highly?

Day 5 — ...the beginning of wisdom.

7. Read Proverbs 2. What do verses 2-5 tell us about how to get wisdom?

8. What do verses 6-10 say about attaining wisdom?

9. Read the verses below. Who exemplifies and personifies true wisdom?

1 Corinthians 1:24 ...but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 1:30 And because of [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption...

Colossians 2:3 Christ,³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

- a. If Jesus is true wisdom, how then, should we understand how to seek wisdom?

Digging Deeper

Read Proverbs 8. We see in verses 22-31 how Wisdom assisted in creating the world. What do we learn from the New Testament passages below about the creation of the world?

John 1:1-3 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.² He was in the beginning with God.³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Colossians 1:15-17 Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,

¹⁶for through him God created everything

in the heavenly realms and on earth.

He made the things we can see

and the things we can't see—

such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.

Everything was created through him and for him.

¹⁷He existed before anything else,

and he holds all creation together.(NLT)

- a. How does verse 30 in Proverbs 8 point to Jesus?

- b. Read Proverbs 8:32-36. What claims are made in these verses that point to Jesus?

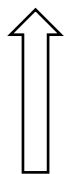
Picture and Ponder

“The wisdom of God, who ordered the cosmos, and can teach us the right path, took on flesh in Bethlehem (John 1:14). If you want to be wise in daily life—if you want to know how the world works—then you must be in a relationship with him.”⁴



James 1:5 says, *if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.* There is no true wisdom apart from Jesus. The wisdom that created the world and holds it together is the same wisdom needed to operate rightly in this world.⁵

- ◆ If you don't know Jesus as your King and Savior, all you must do is ask God to reveal him to you and then seek him in his word and you will be on the path to knowing him.
- ◆ If Jesus, the true source of wisdom is living in you, then you have only to ask God for the wisdom you lack in any situation, and he will give it to you.



Father thank you that in Jesus is everything I need for life and godliness.(2 Peter 1:3) How amazing that Jesus—the wisdom of God— lives in me! Help me as I study your word, to gain your wisdom for living in your world in a way that brings glory to you.

¹ Russel, Walt. *Playing With Fire, How the Bible ignites Change in Your Soul.*p. 138 Navpress 2000

² Segal, Marshall. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/let-fear-deliver-you-from-fear>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Akin, Daniel I. and Akin, Jonathan. *Exalting Jesus in Proverbs.* P. 91. B&H Publishing 2017

⁵ Kidner, Derek. *Kidner Classic Commentaries, Proverbs,* P. 74 Tyndale, 1964