

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Fear of God

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Well, hey, it's good to be back, Ryan and I were gone for several weeks. Part of it was being with a team from NCC an NCC mission's team to Nashville, Tennessee where we worked with Bridges Church. For those of you that have been around for a while, you know, that a couple of years ago we launched Pastor Curtis to Nashville and his family to plant Bridges Church. And so I come back this weekend with a good report. Thanks to your generosity and your faithfulness for helping to plant that because they are doing well, they are strong, they're serving their community and they have an incredibly gifted team of volunteers. And so if I could just ask us as a church family to be praying for that extension of our family in Nashville as they go into a new season in the fall.

And then right after that, Ryan and Sawyer and I got on a plane and we went to Lake of the Woods, Oregon. Now I brought a little video to show you because I'm a proud mom and as proud moms do, we hold people captive to their pictures and their videos and things like that. And so this is my four year old Sawyer in a Kayak for the first time paddling. And believe it or not, I'm going to come back to that in a moment.

If you have your bibles with you this weekend, we're going to be in Proverbs chapter one and in verse one we read this,

*1 The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:*

*2 for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight;*

*3 for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair;*

*4 for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young—*

*5 let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance—*

*6 for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.*

*7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

Now that's where I want to focus today; the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Now we actually see this phrase show up and this idea show up a number of times of in the book of Proverbs. In fact, I've got a list, we'll throw that slide up and if you want to do a deeper dive into these places where it talks about the fear of the Lord in Proverbs, you can just take a quick snapshot of that and take it home with you. But it's not just Proverbs; it's throughout the wisdom literature. Now, we've been in this series 'Get Wisdom', we've been mainly talking out of the book of Proverbs, but Proverbs is one book in a collection of wisdom literature in the collection

of books that we would call the Old Testament it includes Ecclesiastes and Job. And all of them come at life with a little bit different angle and so they're meant to be read against one another, intention with one another. So for instance, the book of Proverbs would assert that the world is an orderly place that operates by a certain set of good rules and in order to live a good life, you should follow those rules. The book of Ecclesiastes says, well that's all well and good, but we're all going to die in the end anyway, so what's the point of a good life? And then Job shoots back with, I don't know what you guys are talking about, there's nothing orderly or good in this life bad things happen to good people all the time. And so it's important to read those books, intention with one another but what's fascinating, the point where they are all in unison where they all sing off the same sheet of music where they're all in agreement is about this idea of fearing the Lord. Ecclesiastes he writes this whole book and then he ends it with this, now all has been heard. Here is the conclusion of the matter; fear God and keep his commandments. And then Job 28 28 states, *"The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding."*

Now, if you're like me, this phrase fear the Lord is a little bit problematic. Like it's hard for us to square this idea of fearing the Lord with what we know to be true about the Lord, that he's good and he's merciful, that he's loving and he's gracious and he's faithful. In fact, when my kid gets scared of the dark, I reassure her that she doesn't have anything to be afraid of because God is with her. But we have a problem if God is one to be feared, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, of wisdom, of instruction. It gives you long life and reward and riches and honor. So how do we understand this idea of fearing the Lord that shows up 435 times in the Old Testament? Well, I think one place we have to start is we have to dig into the language of the Old Testament writers. Whenever we find this phrase, fear of the Lord or the idea of fearing the Lord throughout the Old Testament scriptures it is often coming from a group of words that stem from the root word *yara*, it means to fear, to honor, to worship. Listen to this definition; it carries with it an appropriate respect for one in authority and an expectation for obedience. See, in ancient Near Eastern literature, not just the Bible, not just Jewish or Christian writings, but in Near East literature, this idea of fear and love are both connected to covenant loyalty. So for instance, to fear God and to love God must go hand in hand.

Now I bet that if we think about it, we could all come up with something that we love more when we bring a healthy fear to it. Let's go back to Sawyer in the kayak for just a moment. Now, after I saw how quickly she was excited about paddling and how she picked it up so quickly I realized that I quickly had to move to another lesson to teach her about the fear of water because my kid thinks she can swim and she most certainly cannot. And if she doesn't have a healthy fear of the water it will end in a really bad place. So I as a parent intentionally let her sink a couple of times so she would appropriately fear the power of the water knowing that she will love the water more if she has a healthy fear of it. But not only that, she needs a greater respect for the sport of paddling. She only knows like the most basic strokes. She can go forward and she can do a little bit of a sweep to turn the boat. She thinks she's an expert, she thinks she knows now all there is to know; she went all the way out in the middle of the lake, I had to send a rescue crew after her. If she does not find a few more reference points, she won't be able to fully enjoy the sport or worse, she will have a problem when she has to navigate waters that she's not prepared to do and it will end in a disaster.

Now those of you that know me know that I've developed a healthy fear for the power of nature a number of times in my life. I fell into a sinkhole in the sidewalk. Please note I did not say that I fell into a hole that was in the sidewalk the sidewalk literally swallowed me up. I once got sucked into a storm water drainage culvert and pulled under a street. I once caught on fire. I recently was in a plane that flew into the wake of a 747 and I have chaperone PK three field trips.

The first time I remember really developing a healthy fear for the forces of nature was also on a paddling adventure. I was a senior in high school and I had gone on a hiking and paddling trip with some of my high school friends, and this was a section of the Ocoee River. Now I had been down that section of the river a couple times before none of my friends had and some of them were scared to death to do it. And in fact they decided they weren't going to go they weren't even gonna get in the boat. Well, I was really cocky about it. I was like, guys, I've been down this river before, I've never seen anybody fall out of the boat, you're going to be fine. And I get in the front of the boat, we start going down the river, well a few rapids in and we come and everything's fine but then we come to this class three rapid called a Broken Nose. And I'm not sure exactly what happened, but we hit a rock in a really weird way and I mean, I launched out of the boat. I don't know how much air time I had, but it was quickly scary because when I hit the water I was immediately sucked in. And then without any kind of warning I would pop back out of the water only to be sucked back in again and pop back out of the water and sucked back in again and basically went through the entire rapid that way until we hit a calm place and the boat showed up. And then I was met with stairs of terror and our guide had to row the boat to shore to let two more people out. I realized that day I needed to have a little bit healthier fear of the water. It was something I loved, it was something good, it was something I enjoyed doing.

And as I thought about this, I actually reached out to a couple of NCC'ers they go to our Lincoln Campus, Steve and Alynn, and they are avid whitewater kayakers. And I was just thinking like, I wonder how they would talk about fear of the water and how that impacts their faith journey. And this is what Alynn said back to me; she wrote, I've never been fearless around a river. I feel drawn to white water, but also afraid of it. It's a good metaphor for how I feel about God. And then she also said this, dancing in the rapids is exhilarating, but there's no guarantee. Sometimes the river beats you down. I fear getting beat down, but I fear more not having the chance to dance in the water.

One of my favorite definitions for the fear of the Lord comes from my mentor Dave Buehring, and he says this, he says, walking in the fear of the Lord means reverencing God and referencing God in all that we do to walk in the fear of the Lord means that we reverence God. Reverencing God means that we recognize and acknowledge and respect and honor who he is because he the king. And referencing God means that we seek him, we trust him, we obey him because he is also our compass, reverencing God and referencing God in all we do.

When Alynn and Steve are Whitewater rafting, they reverence the water. They love it, they enjoy it, they see the good in it, but they also honor and respect the power of it, but not only that, they reference it. They think about things like variables like volume and temperature length and flow to figure out how they're going to run the river. They think about how different seasons impact the flow of the river. Sometimes they get out of their boat and onto the shore and they scout out

what they're about to run so they know what dangerous to anticipate so that they can know what pre decisions they need to make. They reference the river in order to enjoy it.

Reverencing and referencing him in everything we do. Let's just take a moment. Unpack that first one. Reverencing God and what does that mean? I think reverencing God begins with knowing who he really is. A W Tozer said that what comes to mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you. So what is it that you know about God and how do you know it? Where did that come from? Can I suggest that a starting point for knowing who God is is reading the words, the pages of this ancient text because it's people talking about their experiences and their understandings of who God is and it spans multiple historical context, cultural context, even spiritual contexts, and it tells us what he is and what he's like and who he is.

Now, a lot of times I'll tell people, when I read the pages of scripture, I like to mark in circle and highlight any time I see a name of God mentioned because on one hand it allows the character of God to come screaming off the pages of scripture at me every time that I read it, but also because it allows me a greater opportunity to see who God really is because I'm not allowed to just accept a God that has been handed to me by my southern American cultural upbringing. I have to hold intention things like the God who is grace and the God who is wrath, the God who is jealous and the God who is love, the God who has mercy and the God who is justice. It moves my pursuit of who God is from a two dimensional, monochromatic understanding to an omni-dimensional, full light spectrum pursuit. It keeps me from believing in a God of my own creation.

But beyond just knowing about God it's also about taking him seriously to reverence God means we know who he really is and then we take him seriously and I think taking him seriously means that we live in a way that demonstrates that we really believe who he says he is, that we live in a way that brings him glory, that we live in a way that makes his ways irresistible to others. You think about verses like Colossians 3:17 that says *whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do all to the glory of God.* Colossians 3:23 that says *whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as unto the Lord.* First Corinthians 10:31 that says, *so whatever you do, whether you eat or drink or anything you do do all for the glory of God.*

Are we taking him seriously? Because at the end of the day, it doesn't really matter what people think about you, but it matters what they think about Jesus because of you. I think taking God seriously means that we walk in obedience to his commands, but I think it also means we've got to shift our perspective a little bit about what that actually means, that his commands perhaps are not just rules to live by, but a calling to live for. Let me just take as an example the first set of commandments, the first big set of commands that we're probably all familiar with, the Ten Commandments, it wasn't the first commands he gave, but it's the ones that are maybe the most famous. I think it's helpful to remember that when God gave them the Ten Commandments, it was not prior to their deliverance from Egypt. It wasn't prior to their deliverance from slavery. It was not something that was meant to be a prerequisite for their deliverance. It was given to them after they had already been delivered. The 10 Commandments were not given to them as a way for them to earn their salvation. Rather they earned the 10 Commandments being given to them because they had been saved and I think that just as much as they were commands, rules to live

by, they were also, if not even more so revelations of God's character. For instance, when God says,

- When God says, don't have any other gods before me, he's declaring I am sovereign.
- When he says, don't make a graven image he is declaring his transcendence of above all created things.
- When he says, don't take my name in vain, he's saying, I am the God who is holy,
- Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy, I'm a God of creativity and rest.
- Honor your father and your mother, I am the God who is love and I created you for community and place you in community.
- Do not murder, I am the God of life that gives life abundantly.
- Do not commit adultery; I am the God who is faithful.
- Do not steal; I am the God who will provide for your needs.
- Do not bear false witness, I am the God of truth and a truth that will set you free and
- Do not covet; I am the God who was sufficient to cover all of your needs.

His character is behind every command and reverencing God means walking in obedience because he is the king and because taking him seriously means that we give our lives as a window into who he really is to the world and the way that we walk reverencing God in everything that we do.

The fear of God is also referencing God. Reverencing God recognizes, acknowledges honors who he is, that he's the king. It also means referencing him, seeking him, trusting him because he's our compass. You know when we navigate life, when we navigate the wilderness of life, what are our reference points? What are our guideposts? What are our anchors? What is our map? What are we referencing?

In 1879 lieutenant George De Long set out to discover the North Pole. He had a crew, he had a ship, had all of the preparations, and they were led by a map that assumed that at the top of the world at the North Pole was an open polar sea. It wasn't accurate, but this crew continued to trust that map and every time they would hit ice, they would try to plow through it believing ardently in an open polar sea. In fact, every time they hit a problem, they refuse to change course, they refused to change strategy because they were trusting in a map that was faulty. And that faulty map eventually led to the demise of the mission and even the death of several crew members, including De Long himself. Several years later in 1908 Frederick Cook became the first man to reach the North Pole using a different map, a map predicated on the idea that at the North Pole it was not an open polar sea, but ice, solid ice. They succeeded not because they were braver or smarter or had more stamina, not because he had a better crew, he succeeded simply because he had a better map. I think the moral of these two stories is that it doesn't matter how courageous you are, if you're following the wrong map, that you can be the bravest person in the world and still be wrong about the wilderness that you're navigating.

What are our reference points? How do we ensure that we're not only pointed to true north, but we know the way to get there? I mean, we're in D C for some of us, it's our political party. It might be the traditions of your cultural background or the uniqueness of your ethnicity or the values of your family of origin. It could be your education that gives you foundation. It could be

your life experiences that have given you insight that you trust the most. What are your reference points? What shows you the way?

You know, I might submit that the most consistent and pervasive reference point we all have is this thing that sits in our pocket. I literally referenced this all the time. I mean, I literally referenced my phone to tell me where to go. I don't know how I got anywhere before I had maps on my phone and someone talking to me, telling me where to go. I mean, I reference my phone to tell me how to do stuff. I reference my phone to tell me what to think about things. For instance, yesterday Ryan was at the beach with Sawyer and he texted me and said, hey, can dead jellyfish sting? And literally in two minutes I was able to get him an answer back that yes, according to kidshealth.org and New York Times, dead jellyfish can still sting you. I referenced the calendar app to tell me where I'm supposed to be and who I'm supposed to be with. I reference my parent cue app to tell me what verse Sawyer is supposed to memorize. I reference my weather app to tell me how I'm supposed to dress for the day and all of that can be extremely helpful and beneficial in my life. But I have to be careful because this little device can become the primary window to my world and mirror of my life. It can become my sole source of information and affirmation. I can reference it to see who's doing what with whom and how my life stacks up against it. It can become a very poor reference point, especially because we lie to our phones and our phones lie to us every day.

I was reading a book this week, *This Is Our Time* in that Trevin Wax, a story about some teenagers that were interviewed about their phone usage and a young lady by the name of Sophia said that sometimes it takes like 70 tries to get a selfie worth posting. And then she said this, she said, you know, it's funny; it's called a selfie because half the time it doesn't even look like you. So you're getting people to like this picture of you that isn't even real. We lie to our phones.

Now, some of us come on Gen Xers, boomers, you're feeling real good about yourself right now because you're not even on social media, you don't know what I'm talking about. And you can just judge the other generations. But it's harder to escape the reality that your phone is also lying to you because with all the information that exists, there has to be a way to channel it to us. And in order to channel the information that our phone thinks that we want to get, it looks at our preferences, our interest, our education, our relationships, our most trusted sources and it curates that information for us. But here's the problem, curated information leads to curated consciences. So even though globalization and technology and our phones have given us access to more information, to more perspectives, more opinions, more worldviews, more ideas than ever before, the algorithms of our phone have taken the variety of voices and shrunk them to a very narrow band, which has then turned up the volume of the echo chamber. And so instead of our phones providing us a reference point of information that we should consider, it actually becomes just an affirmation of what we already believe. It's a poor reference point.

There are other reference points in our culture, some of them are directional. And I've got some pictures that thankfully our media team put together so you didn't have to see my original drawings. But I'm going to generalize a little bit, but typically in western culture there are three directional reference points and there's inward, outward and upward. And in the West we begin by looking inward to discover who we truly are and to discover what we're supposed to do. And after we take that first step of looking inward, then we go outward to seek the affirmation and the

encouragement from people around us. And then if we're a person of faith, we might look upward usually for the support or the guidance to live out what we have discovered about ourselves. And typically in this mindset, what we are most after, what we most prioritize and what we're most praised for is living out our own truth. Now, my problem with that, personally, I'm not putting this on you, but personally I don't trust my own heart or thoughts for a moment. The Prophet Jeremiah says that our hearts are deceitful above all else. Proverbs 28:26 says that those who trust themselves are fools and the book of Judges shows us the growing depravity and eventual downfall of a culture that continues to do "what seemed right in their own eyes".

Okay, let's flip it for a moment. In Eastern culture, again, there's generalizations here this isn't everybody but the mindset that you would often see in eastern cultures flips the first two directions. First, you look outward, your identity, your expectations of what you're supposed to do, it's not something you discovered for yourself but it's handed to you by your family, by your community, your neighborhood, your culture, it is received externally. And then you look internally for the affirmation and the resolve to live out those expectations. And then if you're a person of faith, you might look upward for guidance and support. Now, the problem with that particular mindset is that when outside culture becomes rigid and static, then you have no imagination and you have no pioneers. Mulan never fights her battles and Mulan never sails her seas and Coco never writes his music.

What if there's another way? What if there is a different way? What if there is a fear of the Lord mindset that references God and everything we do? And so this is kind of how I see this one. When we reference God, the fear of the Lord mindset means that we look to God first and foremost to tell us who we are and who we're supposed to be and what we're supposed to do. And then we simultaneously look inside for conviction, for peace of heart and mind to bear witness with our spirits. And we look outside for accountability and encouragement and affirmation. And then we take all of that back up to God so that he is both the first say and the final say and the filter for what everyone else says. That's referencing God in all that we say and we do. And so as we walk this out practically first, it means that we understand what God is saying about us through the scriptures. What has God already revealed in scripture? What is God revealing to us through Godly people that are speaking into our lives? What bears witness in our spirits? Where are we being led by peace referencing God in all that we do?

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and instruction. According to this verse, we can either live fearfully or foolishly. Here's what's interesting about the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the only thing that liberates us from other fears. It's only in the fear of the Lord that we're delivered from the fear of man, the fear of the future, the fear of the unknown, the fear of death, the fear of our enemies. Only the fear of God can obliterate the lesser and crippling fears of our lives.

Now, look, there are some of you here this weekend and this all sounds crazy to you and I get it. It sounds backwards. It sounds naive. It probably sounds foolish. It might sound dumb and I get that because this is a different story. This is calling us to a different perspective. It's a different narrative. It's a different worldview and there are some things about it that are counterintuitive and don't make sense until you swim in it. But It's like the whitewater rafters talk about there's

only so much you can know about the river by studying it, examining it. At some point your knowledge about the river is limited until you get in the river.

And so what I want to invite you to do this weekend is wherever you are on your faith journey, whatever you think about Jesus, whatever you think about the church, whatever you think about religion or faith, there's a point at which you just have to jump in a little bit. That your decision about what to do about Jesus is going to be limited by what you know about him and will only be better informed when you take a crazy daring, maybe it makes no sense risk step into him and you dance with the rapids and you dance with the water. And that's what I want to encourage you, invite you in this weekend. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, it's the beginning of wisdom it's the beginning of instruction, it's the beginning of reward and riches and honor and its reverencing God and referencing God in all we do and I just want to invite you to jump in and dance in the waters.

Father, we thank you this weekend for who you are. I pray that you would help us know more of who you are, who you really are, that we would take you seriously, that you would give us the courage to walk in obedience to you so that we can show a picture to the world of who you really are and what you're really like. And God, I pray that you would be our true north, that you would be our compass, our rudder, our map, our guideposts that we would reference you that we would have the ability to seek you and trust you and walk in obedience to what you're calling us to do. Father, for anybody that is here this weekend across all of our locations listening to us by podcast, that needs to take another step to jump in the water, to dance with the rapids I pray that you give them courage. I pray that you'd give them the resolve, the strength that you would bring people into their lives to help them to take that step and pray your blessing on them. Thank you for who you are, for what you've done for us. In Jesus name. Amen.