

Is Fear Healthy??

Proverbs 9:7-12

We generally do not regard fear as a beneficial emotion or experience. We would wonder about a mother who declared that one of her goals as a parent was to instill fear in her children. We would worry for the son or daughter who claimed to be afraid of their father. So, we are naturally a bit ambivalent about this idea of fearing God.

Isn't our Christian faith supposed to do away with fear? Aren't the angels that show up as messengers of God always saying, ***"Don't be afraid"?*** Doesn't Jesus Himself, on resurrection morning, risen from the dead, tell the women who meet Him and fall down trembling, ***"Don't be afraid"?*** Doesn't 1 John 4:18 say, ***"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear"?***

That's all true. The goal and end of our faith is living with God and enjoying His love perfectly, without fear. Remember that Jesus did not get an "Advance to Go," card allowing Him to skip over all the trials and temptation, suffering and even the fear of death. Like Jesus, you and I don't get to skip to a fearless eternity without enduring the fears of this life. Nor do we get to bypass the fear of God and just go for the friendship and love of God. If we try that, we end up with a faith that may be very positive, very happy, even fun, but it will not be true faith.

The Bible talks about the ***"fear of God,"*** from Genesis to Revelation. In Genesis 22:12, God praises Abraham for offering up Isaac saying, ***"Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."*** Then in a very strange couple of verses in Genesis 31, Jacob names God, ***"the Fear of his father Isaac."***

Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy all speak of fearing God. Deuteronomy mentions it as often as Proverbs does. In fact, as Jesus answered Satan's final temptation in Matthew 4:10, ***"Worship the Lord your God and serve him only,"*** He quoted Deuteronomy 6:13 which literally reads, ***"Fear the Lord your God, serve him only..."***

Joshua told Israel to fear God. So did Samuel. King Jehoshaphat warned the Levites and priests to fear God. Nehemiah said it, Isaiah said it, Jeremiah said it. The Psalms sing about it. Hop over to Psalm 33:8 proclaiming, ***“Let all the earth fear the Lord!”*** Even as Job suffers the loss of his family, his health, his home, he says it in Job 28:28, ***“The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom.”***

Turn to Matthew 10:28 you find Jesus saying, ***“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”*** In other words, fear God.

In Acts 9:31 we see the early church enjoying a time of peace, ***“It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.”*** In 2 Cor 5:11, Paul says knowing what it is to fear the Lord is the motivation for his mission. In Phil 2:12 we find his familiar words, ***“continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”*** 1 Pet 2:17 sums up Christian duty to others as ***“Show proper respect to everyone, love your fellow believers, fear God, honor the emperor.”***

And even as the whole story of salvation and this world is coming to a close in Revelation 19:5, we read, ***“Then a voice came from the throne, saying: ‘Praise our God all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!’”***

If it was only in Proverbs, we might safely tuck ***“the fear of the Lord”*** away in some back closet of theology and ignore it. But fearing God permeates the Scriptures. It’s an essential emotion for God’s people. We are supposed to fear God. If we quit fearing God, that’s when we really ought to become afraid.

Yet we are so often unafraid. We come, and I include myself, to church blithely, carelessly, unprepared and without any caution. We toss off prayers casually, not really joining our self to the One we are addressing. We read the Bible like we might read the newspaper, seeking out the comics and the sports page, skipping over depressing stories and editorials that generate a little worry.

We hang the Cross on our ears and around our necks and on our walls, forgetting what a terrible and frightening truth that symbol conveys.

Why do people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour? Do we even consider the AWESOME power we are dealing with regarding almighty God?? When we say, “our Father in heaven...” we are not just speaking, we are summoning the creator of all into our presence. He is omnipotent; omniscient; omnipresent. Think of that and put that into perspective. We are specks in this vast universe, and we are approaching He who created it all with a word!! That should cause us to have **REVERENCE** (fear) of God.

In our culture, people dare to become angry with God and voice it!! Where is the reverence for God when we blame Him for problems that are of human origin?? Where is the reverence for God when we refuse to accept His decision in matters that affect us in this life? Where is the reverence for God when we lose someone we love? We brought death into this world – not God! Satan is God’s enemy as is death according to Paul in 1 Cor. 15. The holy God, who sets said let there be light and there was our Sun and moon. He is among us. Let us be, at the least, reverent.

We do not fear God like we fear someone who might threaten us. God is no bully or a sadist who delights in watching helpless victims cringe trembling before the hurt He dishes out. God asks us to fear Him for our own sake. Such fear is the beginning of wisdom. It adds years to our life, the next verse says. It’s the root and soul of an attitude that saves us from all kinds of foolishness and failure. To fear God is to put yourself in touch with His awesome, incredible, incomprehensible power, and to begin to experience that power in your own life through Him.

Why do we seek out fear? Why do we go to horror films or read thrillers by Stephen King? Why do we leap from the high dive or drive cars too fast or dangle from hang gliders? Why do we gamble everything on a risky investment or back-talk the traffic cop or the boss? We experience something in the fear of those moments, something that feels missing from our lives.

A surge of adrenalin, a feeling of enormous strength, an exhilarating thrill of living on the edge. It's empowering, it's energizing.

That thrill of fear is so much better when what we fear is truly worth fearing. To fear God is to experience real power, real life, real strength. I Peter 3:14, the apostle tells Christians, ***“Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.”*** We're not to fear what everyone else fears, not sickness, not loss of a job, not terrorists, not economic recession. Those aren't worth fearing. Peter goes on, ***“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.”*** Fear the Lord. That's the true energizing fear that works.

I remember standing one afternoon under an umbrella as rain pelted down like gravel from a dump truck in the sky. Lightning was leaping to the hills and to the trees all around us. Thunder rolled over us like an endless freight train. I was cold, I was wet, and I was really frightened. We were on the 13th hole of a golf course in a tournament – the furthest place from shelter we could be. If the lightning struck a tree by us, we might be fried. I was as scared as I've ever been in my life, but I was also coming alive. I sensed the power of God was in that storm. I was afraid, but I was filled with a terrible and terrific sense of being in His hands, of being completely and gladly in the care of the Lord.

When the last crack of thunder rolled away, and the raindrops turned to mere dripping from branches above us, I walked away as energized and as hopeful as I've ever been. I hit my drive with a fresh and wonderful strength and confidence in the power and, yes, the love of God. I had prayed during that sudden horrible storm and to this day I believe God heard me and kept me safe.

I have had more than one experience like that in my life as a Christian and it has reinforced within me the tremendous power of God, but more importantly, the tremendous love that God has for ME! As small and valueless as I may perceive myself to be God does not see me that way – He sees me as having tremendous value in His sight. Because of these experiences in life I come to worship God and live for God with a refreshed sense that I am ALWAYS in God's presence because he allows me to be there with Him. He does this for you too.

So, as we live daily, we should remember daily to fear God and love Him for what He has done for each of us. Reverence God because He is Holy. Reverence God because of His power. Reverence God because of His great love for each of us.

Like Thomas meeting Jesus after His resurrection, fall on your knees before Him and confess Him for who He is. Like Abraham offering up his son Isaac, fear the Lord enough to give up everything for Him. And like Jacob and Hannah and David and Mary and Paul, bow before God in devotion and worship in a saving, energizing blend of fear and love.

Ecc. 12:9-14 *“Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. My son beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”*

It is our duty to fear that is to REVERENCE almighty God in this life.