

Core 52 Week 14 Wisdom

Spend just a few minutes on social media and you'll see a highly filtered picture of some supremely fit person who's just climbed to the pinnacle of some mountain right at sunrise and thrusting her arms into the air triumphantly, and then some person from the comfort of their cushy office chair put a few words on this inspirational photo to make some meme spouting pseudo-profound nonsense to change your life.

Amidst the cute cats and targeted ads, social media has become a highlight reel of quote photos, inspirational pap, and philosophical rubbish dispensing so-called wisdom one meme at a time.

You'll see such nuggets as "Slow down and savor the moment" immediately followed by "Hustle like you're Beyoncé." How are you supposed to do both? Other supposed wise proverbs include "Start visualizing what you want, then say no to anything that isn't it," and this genius advice, "Buy the plane ticket, quit the job, plan the trip, wander into the unknown, open your heart, take the leap." Do you know what would happen if you actually said "No" to everything you didn't want to do? Is it really a good idea to take a big trip with no income and no plan?

There was this buzzword filled baloney." embrace your expansion." What's that supposed to be? Post Thanks-giving dinner advice? If you want real wise proverbs the place to go isn't Instagram. It's the biblical book of Proverbs.

Introduction to Proverbs

And Proverbs is where we'll find this week's core verse. Like Psalms, Proverbs is a book of poetry. But Psalms was a book of songs, a book of worship. Proverbs is a book of wisdom. It is a collection of wise sayings and truisms that are immanently applicable to life.

Proverbs was written by Solomon, the son of David, heir to his throne and the third king of Israel. He has the reputation of being the wisest man to ever live, and for good reason. God offered Solomon a blank check, "Ask *what I shall give you,*" God asked Solomon in 2 Chronicles 1. Solomon could have asked for anything he wanted. Wealth, power, fame. Anything. But what he asked for was wisdom. In 2 Chronicles 1:10 Solomon says, "*Give me now wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before this people, for who can govern this people of yours, which is so great.*" 1 Kings 4:29 tells us that indeed, "*God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore.*"

Out of that wisdom, and out of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, comes the book of Proverbs. And Proverbs itself is a master class in wisdom, and tells us how the principles of wisdom can lead to success and mastery in all the major arenas of life such personal relationships, business, family life and community life. Solomon opens his course on wisdom by telling us what the true source of wisdom is. Proverbs 1:7, our core verse this week says,

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

This statement serves not just as an introduction to the book of Proverbs, but all the Bible poetry books. This thought is repeated two more times in Proverbs, as well as in Psalms, and in the book of Job. This is why all the books of poetry in the Bible are together sometimes called “wisdom literature.”

What is Wisdom?

Two key words here- *knowledge* and *wisdom*. *Knowledge* is more than just book smarts- getting the answers on a test right. The Hebrew word used here has to do with insight and understanding. The word used for *wisdom* means wisdom, skill and shrewdness. My Bible dictionary defines it as “the ability to judge correctly and to follow the best course of action, based on knowledge and understanding.”

Biblical wisdom should not be confused with education or intelligence. In fact, you could have a very high IQ, yet still be a fool. The focus here is on the practical use of knowledge. Biblical wisdom is knowing what to do with what you know.

Wisdom is the knowledge and ability to make the right choices at the right time. Many of us are really good at making the right choices, but way too late for them to do any good. Others of us are good at picking the right time to make a choice, we just keep making the wrong ones.

Sometimes biblical wisdom is simply the right skills to manage life effectively. We might call it street smarts. Ecclesiastes 10:10 says, “*If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success.*” Abraham Lincoln put it this way, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the ax.” This brand of wisdom falls in the work smarter, not harder category.

Biblical wisdom however, goes much deeper than just practical life lessons to moral life principles, understanding how life and relationships really work and making the best decisions based on a proper understanding of the spiritual and moral realities of life.

Theologian J.I. Packer says, “Wisdom is the power to see and the inclination to choose the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it.”

But perhaps the best definition of wisdom is this, “Wisdom is the quality that keeps you from getting into situations where you need it.”

The Fear of the Lord

But this proverb isn’t so much about what wisdom is, but where wisdom is to be found. Where does it start? If I can paraphrase Proverbs 1:7, “*The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.*”

If you asked most people to complete this sentence: The beginning of wisdom is

_____. How would they fill in that blank? Chances are they wouldn't say, "*Fear of the Lord.*" Notice, it doesn't say the beginning of wisdom is knowledge, or education or intelligence, or reading the right books, or or Google.

Even as Christians we might want to say, "The beginning of wisdom is the love of the Lord," "the knowledge of the Lord," or "the obedience of the Lord," but not fear.

Why does Solomon tell us that wisdom springs from the fear of God? We tend to see fear as a bad thing. We dismiss fear as a weakness. We don't want to be fearful. We try and avoid that ever-tightening knot in the pit our stomach. We want to be fearless.

But the truth is we are hard-wired for fear. God created us with a healthy sense of fear. An entire section of our brain is devoted to our fear response. The problem, like everything else, is that sin has twisted this healthy fear into something that is harmful and destructive. Simply put, we too often fear the wrong things.

Fear is good when we have a fight, flight, or freeze response to a genuinely life-threatening situation, but what about when we are overcome by fear of something merely unfamiliar or uncomfortable? Fight or flight is not a healthy response then, but that is still what we often do.

There is good fear and bad fear. We learn at a very young age not to touch hot stoves. A healthy sense of fear keeps us from doing lots of stupid things. A healthy sense of fear lets a husband know everything is not fine when his wife says it's "fine." That's good fear.

But some of us carry unhealthy fears that are way out of proportion to the actual risk posed. I remember one girl I dated in college who was very smart, but harbored a secret fear. We'd gone out to see *Home Alone*. We got to the scene where Kevin's brother's spider got out, she about jumped out of her skin, went into a full-on panic attack, and completely lost it.

Another time, we had a baby sitter watching our girls when a bumble bee got in the house. Just one little bee. Full on meltdown. She called her dad who had to come over to our house to kill the bee. A lot of us have these hidden fears of elevators or relationships or dentists and these fears can be debilitating.

Good fear you want. Bad fear you don't.

Good fear places respect where it should go. Bad fear, though is afraid of things it doesn't need to be.

Good fear asks, "What can I do about what is happening?" Bad fear asks, "What if this thing that I can do nothing about happens?"

Good fear drives you. Bad fear stops you. Good fear moves you. It gives you the extra adrenaline needed to act in a time of crisis. Bad fear paralyzes you so you can't act when you need to.

Good fear inspires self-motivation. Bad fear crushes you with self-doubt.

Good fear helps you do a good job; Bad fear keeps you from doing the job at all.

Good fear focuses you on what matters most; Bad fear distracts you from what matters most.

Good fear makes you more aware of what is going on around you; Bad fear blinds you to what is going on around you.

Good fear helps you in the short run. Bad fear hurts you in the long run.

Even in the corona crisis, we've seen both good fear and bad fear. Good fear is taking proper precautions, washing your hands, keeping your distance. Bad fear is hoarding 30 cases of toilet paper, or buying so much food that it goes bad before you can use it.

Understanding the difference between good fear and bad fear is crucial to understanding the fear of the LORD.

The truth is we all fear something. I'm not just talking about the phobias and dreads that haunt us like some horror movie serial killer— needles, flying, enclosed spaces, and things that go bump in the night. I'm talking about fears like never being significant, living a life that doesn't matter, or always being alone. Some of us carry a deep-rooted fear of losing our health or the loss of our wealth. Some of us are deathly afraid of how we will die.

When fears like these get moved to the top of the fear food chain, we begin to be bad life-decisions. We make un-wise, or foolish choices.

This is where the fear of the Lord comes in.

The fear of the Lord is one of the most repeated phrases in Proverbs appearing 14 times altogether. It appears 13 more times throughout the rest of the Bible. Let's be clear about what we mean by "fear of the Lord." There is more than one Hebrew word that is translated into fear in English.

For instance, there is *Pachad*, which is projected or imagine fear. That is not the word used here. The word used here is *Yirah* which contains the ideas of reverence, fear, worship and awesomeness. It could be defined as, "what we experience when we suddenly find ourselves in the presence of considerably more power than we are used to." And when you apply it to God, it is a holy fear.

Derek Kidner in his commentary on Proverbs calls this fear "a worshipful submission." Keil and Delitzsch likewise call it a "reverential subordination." Dave Bland calls it "an apprehension in the presence of an awesome power."

We experience something similar whenever we are in the presence of something awesome and overwhelming. You ever met a personal hero, maybe a sports star or an artist whom you greatly

admire, and then immediately find yourself tongue-tied? You're afraid of saying something stupid. You're afraid of embarrassing yourself. The same thing might happen if we meet the president or someone in a very powerful position. I experienced this the first time took the wheel of a NASCAR Cup stock car. I'm sure Terry knew this "holy fear" the first time he worked on a line with 300,000 volts of electricity flowing through it. It is to touch the presence of a great power, and know that if you do not respect that power, that power could destroy you.

The closest comparison I've ever experienced to this sort of holy fear is when I visited the Grand Canyon. You may have experienced the same feeling if you've ever gone rock climbing, or hiked to the top of a mountain and walked to edge of several hundred foot ledge.

From a few yards away, the view is breathtaking in its beauty and immense in its grandeur. You want to get closer but with each step you take your heart rate increases, your knees begin to shake, but still you step because you want to take in all you can. By the time you get to edge, your stomach is doing somersaults, your head begins to swim, your mouth is dry and your palms are sweaty. You're drawn to it, but want to run away at the same time.

A proper view of the presence of God is kind of like that, just multiply a bunch of times, beautiful and scary all at the same time. You love Him for who He is, but you fear Him for what he could do.

A proper fear of the Lord doesn't cower in the corner, trembling in terror, but make no mistake there is trepidation there. Even though because of God's mercy in Jesus Hebrews 4:16 says we can "*approach God's throne of grace with confidence,*" Philippians 2:12 still cautions us to "*work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*"

Let me give you three reasons why the fear of the LORD is where wisdom starts.

Fearing God Opens the Door to God's Love

First, fearing God opens the door to God's love. You will never properly experience God's love, if you don't also fear Him.

That might sound counterintuitive at first. It is true that 1 John 4:18 says, "*perfect love casts out fear.*" But that's talking about an unholy fear, the fear that comes when we fear others things more than we fear God. It's the irrational, phobia kind of fear.

The bible also talks about a holy fear and a godly love working hand in hand. Love and fear aren't on opposite ends of the spectrum. They can work together.

Psalm 33:8 says, "*Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love.*" Notice how our experience of his love is precipitated by our holy fear of Him. This doesn't mean that God doesn't love us unless we fear him, but it does mean that we won't feel and experience that love until we do.

Likewise, Psalm 103:11 declares, *“As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear Him.”* Here again the experience of love preceded by fear.

A holy fear of God is a key that unlocks the door to our experiencing his love. If you have no fear of God, his love and kindness will mean little to you. The higher our reverence and awe and respect and fear, the greater our experience of love.

This is the great truth so easily missed by parents who just want to be their kid’s best buddy, but aren’t willing to be the authority figure to offer them discipline and structure. They forget that healthy fear fueled by respect and awe must precedes the experience of love.

The Bible uses the father-child relationship to describe this dynamic. Psalm 103:13 says, *“As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear Him.”* Mark Moore uses the same image in the Core 52 book, “Remember when you were a kid and your father threw you to the moon? The very strength that launched you into the air also comforted you in the dark.”

A God that isn’t big enough to fear, isn’t big enough to save. Think of the dad throwing their child several feet into the air. It terrifies mom, but delights the child as she cries, “Again! Again!” The child is delighted, because she trusts in her father’s power completely and respects his strength fully. Her trust in daddy’s strength is greater than her fear that he’ll drop her.

And this is why mom is terrified, because she knows daddy isn’t perfect. She knows he could drop her baby. She knows about the old motorcycle injury in the shoulder, and she has her own scar on the back of her head from when she was dropped by her own father.

That same baby that loved being thrown sky high by her daddy, experiences a strange psychosis, though, by the time she turns 16. For a few years, anyway, she has lost all respect for her dad. He’s gone from, “He can do no wrong” to “He can never be right.” And as long as she has no respect or healthy fear of her father, she will also be numb to his love and kindness, and will receive no delight in him.

The same is true of our relationship with God. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom because it opens us to his love.

Fearing God Make You Fearless

Secondly, Fearing God makes you fearless. The fear of God keeps all of our other fears at bay. When fearing God is at the top of your fear list, then all your other fears fall into place.

I find it interesting that with all the times the Bible tells us to fear the LORD, the most oft repeated command in the Bible is, “Fear not,” or “Do not be afraid.” Some 70 times we are commanded to not be afraid. When you fear God, you will fear nothing else.

Do you realize that most of our struggles with fear come from the fact that we fear the wrong

things? Our fear priorities are all messed up. Overcoming fear isn't about not fearing the wrong things, but in learning to fear the right thing. When you realize God is bigger than everything else you're afraid of, there's nothing to be afraid of anymore. Fearing God makes you fearless.

Fearing God Fosters Holiness.

Thirdly, fearing God fosters holiness. It inspires obedience. When we fear someone, we obey them? What do you do when you see a police car in your rearview mirror? Chances are, you don't wave, or speed up. Most of us instinctively hit our brakes. You double check your speedometer. You make sure you are obeying the speed limit. Fear inspires obedience.

Now, I know some of you are objecting at this point saying, "But shouldn't we obey God because we love Him, not because we fear him." Yes, ultimately, as we grow in our faith, love becomes the prime mover, but remember, fear and love work together. They are partners.

Being motivated by fear, doesn't exclude also motivated by love. This is something married people understand quite well, assuming, of course, you actually love your husband or wife. There are a lot of things I do for my wife, that I'd rather not do, but I do them anyway, because I love her.

But, let me be honest here, husbands know I'm speaking the truth. I'm not doing it only out of some pure, unfiltered love, but I'm also motivated by fear. I fear hurting my wife's feelings. I fear disappointing her. I fear letting her down. I fear the argument, if I don't do it. I do it because I love her and because I fear her. Wives, I'm sure, do the same thing.

Also, remember, that it says "*the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.*" It's where wisdom starts. Fear isn't the whole story. It isn't all about fear. It doesn't begin and end with fear. But it is the start, and one thing fear certainly does is foster holiness. It motivates us to do what ought to do. And when we obey, we make wise choices. That's the beginning of wisdom.

The fear of the Lord isn't something we need to downplay or run from. We need to embrace it. It's how we enjoy his goodness. Psalm 34:8-9 makes this clear. "*Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good. (We love this verse.) Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! (Still loving it.) Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!*" Did you hear that? Experiencing his goodness, his refuge, his supply stem from fearing him.

There's a lot of things in life that I fear, and because I fear them, I can enjoy them. I enjoy the electricity that flows through my house. I enjoy just being able to flip a switch and enjoy room filling illumination, and yet, when I had to rewire some switches in my house, I turned off the power, I use proper wire and the appropriate connectors, because I also fear the power that flows through those wires."

I enjoy my car. I enjoy being able to go where I want, when I want. But I also know that more than 1 and ½ tons of steel, glass, and plastic powered by 200 horsepower at more than 60 miles

per hour could kill me at a moment's notice. I fear that power. I respect it immensely. It's why I stay between the lines, keep my hands on the wheel, watch where I'm going and don't text and drive. And because of that healthy fear, I love driving. I enjoy it.

So, fear the LORD, live wisely and enjoy God and enjoy life.