

SPECIAL PREVIEW

JOHN BEVERE
BESTSELLING AUTHOR

The
Awe
of
God

THE ASTOUNDING WAY
A HEALTHY FEAR OF GOD
TRANSFORMS YOUR LIFE.

The Awe of God: The Astounding Way a Healthy Fear of God Transforms Your Life

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*My magnificent wife, best friend, and
cherished love, Lisa Bevere.*

“A woman who fears the LORD will be greatly praised.”

PROVERBS 31:30

*I wrote this book in our fortieth year of marriage.
Each year with you only gets better, and if given the
chance, I would marry you again in a heartbeat.*

*No words can express the delight and
joy you bring to my heart.*

*I would not be the man I am today had it
not been for your love and support.*

*You are wise, fun, delightful, strong,
adventurous, and gorgeous.*

I love you forever.

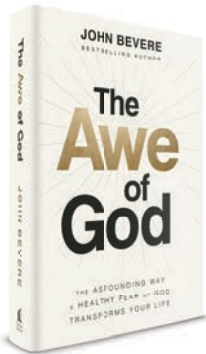
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This is a free preview of The Awe of God book.



To read chapters 5–42, get the full book on JohnBevere.com, on Amazon, or wherever books are sold!

HOW TO JOURNEY THROUGH THIS BOOK

Dear Reader,

This isn't just any message; it's a life message that, if believed and acted on, will transform you forever. I am confident in this because these truths have changed my life and countless others'. Whenever I'm asked for advice—whether it's about marriage, family, or ministry—my immediate go-to is what's contained in this book.

Due to its importance, a lot of time and contemplative prayers have gone into how to present it. Considering the ebb and flow of our lives today—the demands of our schedules and the rapid pace at which we move—I felt the need to adapt and present the truths in bite-sized chunks so that you will be able to deeply ponder these small bits.

At first glance you may think this is a devotional, but I assure you it's not. Let me explain. A devotional often has different topics for each day that don't necessarily build into a concise and systematic message. Even though this book may look like a devotional, each day builds on the previous day's chapter to form what is typically found in a full nonfiction book. The advantage of this is that you can decide how to read it. It certainly can be read in a day or two, if that is your preference; however, I strongly recommend you read it in either a six-week period (a chapter a day) or a three-week period (a chapter in the morning and another in the evening).

At the conclusion of each chapter, you will find five tools to help deepen the benefit of its content—we'll call this section "Making it Personal," and it contains the 5 Ps:

How to Journey Through This Book

1. **Passage:** I will include a passage from Scripture that is crucial to that day's message found in the body of the text, or one that was not brought up in the main body of that chapter but adds strength to what was presented. I highly recommend memorizing these passages.
2. **Point:** This is a main thought contained within the chapter to drive home its importance. Seeing it again will strengthen its effectiveness and give you a quick reference when coming back and reviewing the chapter.
3. **Ponder:** This is crucial. The psalmist states, "I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways" (Psalm 119:15 NKJV). We meditate by rolling over in our minds how the Word of God applies to us in our present state. In doing so we are told our ways will be prosperous and we will have good success (see Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1, and 1 Timothy 4:15).
4. **Prayer:** There will also be a prayer that reflects the teaching of the chapter. It's so important that God hears our voice and that we give Him the permission to change us according to His Word.
5. **Profession:** We are told that *death and life* are in the power of what we say (see Proverbs 18:21). In speaking what He declares over us, our spirit, soul, and body come into alignment with His will for us, which is the proven way to experience life to the fullest.

Again, I encourage you to take your time going through this book so the truths from God's Word penetrate your heart and mind. Spending the coming weeks dwelling on these truths daily will help them to sink in and take root in your life. This is more than mere information; it is the path to growing closer to our God. I also recommend that you read the chapters and go through each of the 5 Ps in "Making It Personal" with a journal alongside you. Put your thoughts and prayers into the journal each day so that when you return to it later you can refer to what the Holy Spirit revealed to your mind.

A few more recommendations: First, with your smartphone or watch, time how long it takes you to read a chapter, go through "Making It Personal," and journal. Don't rush; it's not a race. The reason for the timer

is so that after several chapters you will be able to wisely plan for the future chapters based on your average time.

Second, try to develop a habit, and don't allow anything to interfere with your set time each day. It's my prayer and hope that what God has done in me over the past forty years He will do with you as you go through this book.

Third, a message always brings the greatest benefit when I teach it or go through it with a group of friends. Choose some close friends and work through this together. After you complete the chapter on your own, with just you and the Holy Spirit, get together with your friends to share what He showed you. Do this on a regular basis.

If you'd like a group format, we've also developed an *Awe of God* Bible study with video curriculum and study guide that you and your friends can go through together on a weekly basis.¹ It offers even more tools to discuss the Word of God. Scripture says, "Then those who feared the LORD spoke with each other, and the LORD listened to what they said. In his presence, a scroll of remembrance was written to record the names of those who feared him and always thought about the honor of his name" (Malachi 3:16).

Finally, we have 42 short videos that highlight the core truths from each chapter. To access them, go to Appendix A and scan the QR code. There you'll also find information on video curriculum for small group study and other bonus content.

I pray you grow more intimate with God as you journey through *Awe of God*. It's important to read the introduction rather than skipping to chapter 1, as it opens our hearts to what we will be discussing. And when you've finished the book, I'd love to hear from you how your faith and life have been impacted through a holy fear of God.

Sincerely,
John Bevere

P.S. Just a reminder to not skip the introduction. It is my prayer that it will ignite a fire in you to cultivate a holy awe and dive headfirst into this message.

INTRODUCTION

Fear. For years people have strived to eradicate it. Many have researched it, fought it, and campaigned to remove its influence from our lives. Even the famous quote by President Franklin D. Roosevelt calls attention to it: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Voices across all platforms shout that we need to find ways to overcome fear, and we can find hundreds if not thousands of self-help books designed to do exactly that. Since the late 1980s people everywhere have worn clothing with the words “No Fear” printed boldly across it. We seem adamant in our quest to eliminate all fear from our lives.

This crusade seems sensible, noble, and prudent; and while on many fronts it is, the truth is, *not all fear is bad*. So why the obsession? I believe it stems from lumping all fears into one big category under the label of “harmful.” But is this assumption accurate?

First, it is important to acknowledge that there are indeed *destructive* fears, even when they seem sensible. If we fear losing all our money and possessions, we will likely obsess over them and become misers and hoarders, worshiping our money and assets over everything else. If we fear losing a spouse, we will cling to that person too tightly or be suspicious of their every action. Either way, it leads to resentment and eventually damages the relationship. If we have a deep fear of missing out—FOMO—it might cause us to chase new excitements and new experiences, but it will be at the expense of healthy community, real connection, and the beautiful peace that accompanies commitment. If we fear for the safety of our kids, we will likely

Introduction

thwart their growth by smothering them or by fostering prodigal behavior. The list is seemingly endless.

On the other hand, *constructive* fears produce beneficial wisdom. The fear of falling two thousand feet off a cliff gives us the wisdom not to step too close to the edge, where we might slip. The fear of a grizzly bear's power gives us the wisdom not to threaten the mother bear's cubs. The fear of a third-degree burn gives us the wisdom to put protective mitts on our hands when removing a pan from a hot oven.

And yet, constructive fear, although beneficial, can also be perverted and diminish our lives. Left unchecked, the fear of falling can keep us from getting on a plane, thus grounding us. The unrestrained terror of that grizzly bear can deprive us of a pleasant walk in the woods, and the fear of burning ourselves could keep us from turning on the oven and enjoying a home-cooked meal.

The real question we should be asking is, *What do we fear most?* This is a much better inquiry than focusing on how to annihilate destructive fears or manage constructive ones. It's a wise question, and if properly answered, it puts all other fears into perspective and enhances our lives—both now and eternally. It illuminates the path to a good and fulfilling life. The Bible has much to say about fear, and the building block is this: the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7), and not just any wisdom, but God's wisdom. That's not a bad place to start.

So consider this: What if fear—rightly aimed—is a *virtue*? What if the fear of God is the paradoxical path to an authentic relationship with Him? And what if this holy fear is what truly opens us up to the fullness of life that Jesus followers have experienced throughout the centuries? What if this fear eradicates all other fears—the fear of starting your own business, the fear of what your government will do, the fear of what will happen to your children, the fear a hypochondriac suffers from, the fear that causes mental illness or depression (a list that could continue endlessly)?

As we begin our journey, please allow me to make four statements of truth:

1. We are human, and we will fear.
2. The awe and fear of God is way deeper, more beautiful, and more intimate than many dare imagine.
3. The fear of God swallows up all destructive fears.
4. The fear of God is the beginning of everything good.

Some folks will rightly remind us that the Bible tells us—about 365 times—to “fear not,” and this leads many Christians to conclude that God does not want us to fear. But these verses refer to *destructive* fear. Additionally, I can point out almost 200 verses in the Bible that encourage us to “fear God.” And here’s the unfortunate part: in our quest to try to eliminate any fear in our lives (including the virtue of fearing God), this area of our faith has been left unexamined, untried, and without benefit.

The fear of the Lord is more glorious, more awe-inspiring, and even more joyous than we could ever imagine. As we continue, I want to show you how rightly directed fear—specifically the virtue of fearing God above all else—opens up the path to a life beyond what you have ever imagined. And it’s only then that we are able to boldly address anything that life may throw at us. In the words of Charles Spurgeon, “The fear of God is the death of every other fear; like a mighty lion, it chases all other fears before it.”¹

My hope as you read this book is that you will dive headfirst into this virtue, peel away the religious façade of what it is not, and uncover the goodness of how it sets our feet on solid ground. Yes, fear no evil—but discover how the misunderstood virtue of fearing the Lord will cause your life to blossom into something wildly beautiful.

Let’s start with an exploration of how awesome our God is.

We’ll call it the “Awe of God”!

An Awesome God

WEEK ONE

*Fear of the Lord is His
treasure, a choice jewel,
given only to . . . those who
are greatly beloved.*

—JOHN BUNYAN

1 | GOD'S TREASURE

What if you were told of a hidden virtue that in essence is the key to all of life? It unlocks the purpose of your existence and attracts the presence, protection, and providence of your Creator. It is the root of all noble character, the foundation of all happiness, and provides needed adjustments to all inharmonious circumstances you may face. Firmly embracing this virtue could lengthen your life, procure good health, ensure success and safety, eliminate lack, and guarantee a noble legacy.

Sound too good to be true? You might be wondering, *Is this book I hold fiction?* I assure you it's not—what I've stated is truth.

If presented with this reality, most might sneer and retort, “No such virtue exists!” Yet every promise above was written by undoubtedly one of the wisest men to ever live, and even more, he wrote these words under the inspiration of our Creator—and His words are infallible!

However, prior to Solomon's departure from this life, he fell from the bliss he scribed because his heart deserted the Source of his wisdom and he consequently strayed from the path of living well.

Allow me to give a brief account of his story. As a child Solomon was trained in and embraced this virtue. He grew strong in noble character

and developed keen insight. He excelled quickly in leadership and eventually became ruler over millions. After his request to God, he possessed astounding wisdom; in fact, very little was difficult for him to understand. He wrote thousands of wise sayings and composed hundreds of songs: “He could speak with authority about all kinds of plants, from the great cedar of Lebanon to the tiny hyssop that grows from cracks in a wall. He could also speak about animals, birds, small creatures, and fish” (1 Kings 4:33).

This wise man achieved a level of success, fortune, and fame that was unmatched before and has not been experienced since. Kings, queens, ambassadors, and high-level leaders would travel great distances to be in his presence, hear his insights, witness the excellence and unity of his team, and be impacted by the innovation that produced his nation’s great strength and wealth. He was so impressive that one queen didn’t believe the reports she heard prior to her visit. However, after spending time with him, she exclaimed, “I had not heard the half of it! Your wisdom and prosperity are far beyond what I was told. How happy your people must be! What a privilege for your officials to stand here day after day, listening to your wisdom!” (1 Kings 10:7–8).

From what we read, the people he led were happy and effective in their endeavors. Poverty was nonexistent; every family in his kingdom owned their own house and garden. History reports the people “were very contented, with plenty to eat and drink” (1 Kings 4:20). They lived in peace and safety.

As time passed, however, this notable leader eventually stepped away from what fueled his achievements. He became wise in his own eyes and deemed it no longer necessary to heed the wisdom of this virtue. He lost his way and eventually became a bitter cynic. He was not the only one to suffer from his misjudgment—so, too, did those he led.

To him, life became meaningless. He wrote disparaging statements such as, “Everything’s boring, utterly boring—no one can find any meaning in it,”¹ and “History merely repeats itself as there is nothing new under the sun.”² Even more dramatic, he stated, “The day you die is better than the day

you're born,"³ and "What is wrong cannot be made right. What is missing cannot be recovered."⁴ In fact, he wrote an entire book depicting the scope of life's pointless existence; to him, all was vanity. This one man, in a relatively short time, plummeted from the highest heights of success to the deepest recesses of a flagrant pessimism. Many psychologists today would diagnosis him as suffering from a severe case of manic depression. How could one man span such extremes?

The good news: His story doesn't end in the depths of despondency. He eventually returned to life's most important virtue. We don't know how many months or even years he spent writing his dismal book, but his final chapter gives a glimpse into his recovery. He begins by writing seven⁵ times in one form or another, "Remember your Creator," with his final words being:

All has been heard; the end of the matter is: *Fear God* . . . and keep His commandments, for this is the whole of man [the full, original purpose of his creation, the object of God's providence, the root of character, the foundation of all happiness, the adjustment to all inharmonious circumstances and conditions under the sun] *and* the whole [duty] for every man. (Ecclesiastes 12:13 AMP)

The prized virtue is none other than *the fear of God*. The writer, King Solomon, declares it as the prerequisite to a fulfilling, abundant life. We read in Scripture, "Who are those who *fear the LORD*? He will show them the *path* they should choose" (Psalm 25:12). This path is uncommon because, sadly, many believe, as King Solomon did in his dark hours, that their own wisdom is what brings success and happiness. Holy fear keeps us connected to the wisdom of our Creator—the only One who knows what enhances us and what undoes us.

Holy fear's importance so vastly trumps all other virtues that Scripture identifies it as Jesus' *delight* (Isaiah 11:3 NKJV), and just as incredible, "The fear of the LORD is His [God's] *treasure*" (Isaiah 33:6 NKJV). Stop and ponder this for a moment: it's God Almighty's *delight* and *treasure*. Astounding!

An Awesome God

We'll dive deeper into this amazing reality shortly, but first back to King Solomon.

Why would I open this message with his success, failure, and ultimate recovery? In my first few years of ministry, a wise leader made an attention-grabbing statement that's stayed with me for decades. He declared, "I've made it a general principle to refrain from promoting anyone to a place of authority whose record is perfect."

When asked why, he answered, "I learn more about a person's character by their response to failure than anything else. Did they own responsibility, repent, and grow from the experience? Or did they justify their behavior and delegate the blame? It shows if he or she is fit for responsibility." What I learned from that was: *it indicates if wisdom is what he or she prizes above all else.*

Solomon didn't fully realize the value of godly fear, even though he taught it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit! Therefore, it was possible for him to be drawn away from it. Prior to his fall, godly fear wasn't his *treasure* or *delight*; it wasn't an immovable foundation for his motives and actions. In stumbling, experiencing folly, and finally recovering, he more fully grasped the magnitude of its power.

In a similar light, the apostle Paul wrote:

I buffet my body . . . and subdue it, for *fear* that after proclaiming to others the Gospel and things pertaining to it, I myself should become unfit [not stand the test, be unapproved and rejected as a counterfeit].
(1 Corinthians 9:27 AMP)

Paul understood the importance of treasuring the wisdom entrusted to him by God's Spirit and of not making the same tragic error as King Solomon. The hidden truths of God's covenant were revealed to him, which would free multitudes, but if he didn't see godly *fear* as invaluable and firmly embrace it, he too would also end up a hopeless cynic—unfit, unapproved, and rejected as a counterfeit.

Embracing godly fear as our most prized treasure empowers us to

remain under submission to truth, and in so doing, it keeps us on the path of life, which brings remarkable rewards.

In a time when most regard fear as detrimental or damaging, to declare the *fear of the Lord* as a beneficial and prized virtue seems counterintuitive. However, based on the authority of Scripture, I assure you that when we embrace it, we will be empowered to remain on the path of life. Here we will experience true intimacy with God and life-altering benefits—one of the greatest of which is being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. So let's commence our journey of discovering the awe of God.

Making It Personal

Passage: And there shall be stability in your times, an abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the reverent fear and worship of the Lord is your treasure and His. (Isaiah 33:6 AMPC)

Point: Holy fear is God's treasure; it should be ours.

Ponder: What does it look like, practically, to treasure holy fear? How should I approach it? How should I handle it? How do I not lose it?

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, I ask that on this journey of discovering the fear of the Lord, I will come to know it, live by it, and delight in it. May it become my treasure, as it is Yours. May it give me the wisdom and knowledge needed to live a fulfilled and successful life, one that is pleasing in Your sight. Also, may those who are dear to me be enlightened, and may all who interact with me recognize its value. I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, amen.

Profession: I choose to value holy fear as life's great treasure, and in doing so I will be strengthened to remain on the path of living well.

*Fear God, yes, but don't
be afraid of Him.*

—J. A. SPENDER

2 | CONTRASTING FEARS

In the summer of 1994, I was asked to minister for a church conference in the Southeastern United States. It was a large congregation that two years earlier had experienced a powerful four-week awakening led by a world-famous evangelist. The revival emphasized God's goodness, love, and joy; it affected many lives in a beautiful way. But sadly, the church remained fixated on the experience of the revival and didn't continue to further know the heart of God. In essence, they'd become stuck and out of balance.

At the time, I was on a journey to discover holy fear. I could see its importance but was still growing in my knowledge of it and was therefore hesitant to share on it publicly. Even so, I strongly sensed the need to lay aside this apprehension and minister on the fear of the Lord in the first evening session.

I took the platform and began to speak from my limited understanding to the congregation. It didn't help my confidence that the people stared at me with blank looks on their faces, completely unresponsive. It seemed my words were falling on deaf ears. As it happened, I was correct, and I would learn why soon enough.

The next evening after worship the head pastor took the platform for

what I assumed would be a routine introduction, but this wasn't the case. For fifteen minutes he corrected what I had spoken about the previous evening. He confidently stated, "The fear of the Lord only applies to Old Testament times, but as Christians, we've not been given 'a spirit of fear,'" referencing 2 Timothy 1:7.

I sat in the front row utterly shocked and felt I was in the middle of a nightmare. The longer he spoke, the more uncomfortable it became. He continued, "We are told in the New Testament, 'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear' [1 John 4:18 NKJV]. So, what John taught last evening is error, and I want to protect you from it." His elaborate correction of my message continued for several more minutes.

Once he finished, to my surprise, he introduced me to the platform to minister. I still remember walking up and thinking to myself, *How can I minister to these people after what he just did? This can't be happening.* But it was happening, and I had to pull myself together when all I wanted to do was run. It was difficult to keep a thought, let alone speak a life-giving message to the people attending the conference.

As I spoke, my mind kept reverting back to his correction; I couldn't shake his words. The experience felt both surreal and horrific. I had to harness my thoughts several times while speaking to stay on track. I fought off feelings telling me, *Forget this, stop speaking, and get out of here.* It was miserable. After a short message, I turned the service over to him, returned quickly to the hotel, and went to bed utterly bewildered and feeling like an outcast.

The next morning, I found a quiet construction site near my hotel; there were no workers on the jobsite. I prayed earnestly, anticipating God's correction. With sincerity, I asked, "Lord, have I hurt Your church? Have I taught something untrue? Am I putting Your people in bondage?"

I continued for quite some time, and as I prayed, what I uttered began to change. I stopped doubting my message from that evening and found myself passionately asking for more understanding of holy fear. It was a plea coming from deep in my heart, and I was surprised by what was happening. I didn't sense God's dissatisfaction but rather His pleasure in what I had

done. He began to bring to my remembrance numerous scriptures in the New Testament regarding the fear of the Lord. In time I found myself no longer befuddled but now crying out in a loud, passionate voice, “Father, I want to know the fear of the Lord, I want to walk in it!”

The New Testament writers did write the words the pastor quoted, but they also penned other statements:

- The apostle Paul writes, “Work out your own salvation with *fear* and *trembling*” (Philippians 2:12 NKJV).
- Again, he instructs, “Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in *the fear of God*” (2 Corinthians 7:1 NKJV).
- The writer of Hebrews pens, “Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with *reverence* and *godly fear*” (Hebrews 12:28 NKJV).
- The apostle Peter writes, “If you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here *in fear*” (1 Peter 1:17 NKJV).
- The apostle Jude declares, “Save with *fear*” (Jude v. 23 NKJV).
- And Jesus urges us, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28 NKJV).

I could continue, and certainly will as we progress, but I hope you get the point: *Holy fear* is a New Testament truth. These are but a few of the scriptures the Lord brought to my heart as I prayed.

I realized that morning the pastor had confused the “spirit of fear” with the “fear of the Lord.” There is a huge difference, and it is illustrated by what took place when Moses led the nation of Israel to Mount Sinai to meet with God.

Once the entire nation arrives, Moses goes up for an initial private meeting. The Almighty reveals the purpose behind His powerful deliverance:

An Awesome God

Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and *brought you to Myself*.” (Exodus 19:3–4 NKJV)

The chief reason for God’s mighty deliverance was to gather *all the people* to Himself. He longed for them and desired a meeting so they could know Him as Moses did. However, three days later, when God comes down on the mountain to introduce Himself, the people respond by quickly retreating. In terror they cry out to Moses, ““You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die”” (Exodus 20:19 NKJV). In an attempt to console them, their leader replies, ““*Do not fear*; for God has come to test you, and that *His fear may be before you*, so that you may not sin”” (Exodus 20:20 NKJV).

At first glance it seems Moses contradicts himself: “Do not fear” because God has come “that His fear may be before you.” Is he speaking out of both sides of his mouth? The answer is no. Moses is merely differentiating between being “scared of God” and having “the fear of the Lord.” Again, there is a huge difference.

Someone who’s scared of God has something to hide. Recall, in the garden, once Adam sinned, he and Eve hid from the presence of the Lord. Their reaction wasn’t unique to them; similar behavioral responses exist throughout Scripture in those who venture into darkness.

However, the person who fears God has nothing to hide. He or she is terrified of being away from God. This is illustrated by the fact that while the people drew back, Moses simultaneously drew nearer to God. The person who fears God doesn’t say within themselves, “How close can I get to the line of sin and not fall in?” No, he or she says, “I want to be so close to God, and so far away from that line, that I can’t even see it.”

So, before defining what holy fear is and discussing its benefits, let’s first clarify what it is not. *It is not being scared of God and therefore withdrawing from Him*. How can we enjoy intimacy with someone we’re afraid of? Pulling away is the opposite of what He desires. In Psalms we read, “My heart has heard you say, ‘Come and talk with me.’ And my heart responds,

‘LORD, I am coming’” (Psalm 27:8). Do you hear the call to intimacy? He desires for you to come close, to interact, laugh together, share together, and do life together. The psalmist also writes, “The LORD is a friend to those who fear him” (25:14). The firm reality is this: God wants to be close and intimate with you. So rest assured, holy fear does not quench intimacy; it does just the opposite—it enhances our interaction with God.

Making It Personal

Passage: “Don’t be afraid. God has come to test you and instill a deep and reverent awe within you so that you won’t sin.” (Exodus 20:20 MSG)

Point: Holy fear is not to be scared of God and thereby withdraw from Him. It is to be terrified of being away from Him.

Ponder: What was the main purpose for God delivering Israel out of Egypt? What is the main purpose for God delivering me from slavery to the bondages of the world?

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, thank You for delivering me from a spirit of fear through my Lord Jesus Christ. I ask You to instill in me holy fear that I may not sin against You, for this would take away from the intimacy You desire with me and I desire with You. I ask this in Jesus’ name, amen.

Profession: God has called me to be intimate with Him; therefore, I’m not scared of God, but I do desire to fear Him so that I may not sin.

*To fear God, is one of the
first and greatest Duties
of his rational Creatures.*

—CHARLES INGLIS

3 | WHAT IS HOLY FEAR?

It's impossible to define holy fear in a single sentence, paragraph, or chapter. It's no different from attempting to explain the full breadth of God's love in the same space. It will take chapters, and even then, we'll be far from proficient in our understanding. In fact, I believe we'll continue to discover the depths of both holy love and holy fear throughout eternity.

With that said, let me offer a general outline of holy fear's definition. Think back to your childhood when you were given a coloring book and crayons. You opened the book, picked out a page, and found an outline waiting to be filled in with color. In a similar way, this chapter will give us the borders, but it will take the rest of the book to fill in the colors. If you were to read only this chapter, you'd get a broad idea of holy fear but would miss out on its transformational truths.

In the previous chapter we established that the fear of the Lord doesn't drive us from God's presence—rather just the opposite. A good and wonderful fear draws us close to Him, and laying this firm foundation is vital before we continue.

Some say that the fear of the Lord only means to reverently worship God. I've heard these very words spoken by well-known ministers from the pulpit, in conversations, and over a meal with leaders. While this definition

is a start, it's far from the complete picture. It could be compared to merely defining the love of God as being "patient and kind" (1 Corinthians 13:4). But if we leave it there, we fall short and miss the mark completely.

When Lisa and I were in our early forties, the son-in-law of a well-respected leader visited our house to share an opportunity to invest in his company. We met for a couple of hours, and I distinctly remember the kindness and patience he showed us. If you observed his behavior, you too would affirm he's a loving man. However, after several days of prayer, Lisa and I didn't feel led to invest. Now, years later, I'm glad we didn't, because he spent many years in the penitentiary for running a massive Ponzi scheme.

Was the man patient and kind? Most definitely. Did he walk in love? Absolutely not. Why? Because Scripture tells us, "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3 NKJV). Stealing is selfish and breaks God's commandment of love (Ephesians 4:28). A child molester can be kind, and even patient, while at the same time destroying a young person's life. Does he love that child? Of course not!

In the same way, limiting holy fear to only reverent worship can cause us to miss the mark and be misled. So let's draw up the outline, and later we will add the color with the teachings, examples from Scripture, and stories in the chapters ahead. Before we begin, I want to warn you that in defining holy fear you will hear words that could be frightening, but I assure you the opposite is true. Stay with the message through its entirety, and you will discover that holy fear is a gift of love and protection from our Creator, who deeply cares and longs for us.

There are many New Testament scriptures we can start with, but I believe this one sets the tone:

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with *reverence* and *godly fear*. For our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:28-29 NKJV)

If you look closely, you'll observe there are two terms that are referenced: *reverence* and *godly fear*. This immediately shows that godly fear cannot be

limited to only reverence; otherwise, the writer is just repeating himself with the second term. These are not only different words in English but also two different Greek words: *aidós* and *eulábeia*.

Reverence is an excellent translation of the first Greek word. The *Complete Word Study Dictionary* defines *reverence* as “profound adoring awed respect.”¹ I love these four words joined together; stopping to ponder each one takes our understanding to another level!

The second term, *godly fear*, carries the meaning of *awe*. For *awe*’s definition I looked at the original 1828 edition of Noah Webster’s dictionary. Here’s what I found: “fear, dread inspired by something great and terrific; to strike with fear and reverence. To influence by fear, terror or respect.”² Don’t be alarmed by the words *dread* and *terror*. Though the Greek dictionary also uses these words, remember, holy fear has a drawing, not a repulsive, effect. So we must ask: Is there a positive and healthy aspect of these words? I believe Scripture shows there is, and we’ll see this as we add the color later.

Let’s begin by listing our definitions. To fear God is to *reverence* and be in complete *awe* of Him.

To fear God is to *hallow* Him. *Hallow* is defined as “to respect greatly.”

To fear God is to esteem, respect, honor, venerate, and adore Him above anyone or anything else.

When we fear God, we take on His heart. We love what He loves, and we hate what He hates. (Notice it is not to “dislike” what He hates; rather, it is to “hate” what He hates.) What is important to Him becomes important to us. What is not so important to Him becomes not so important to us.

To fear God is to hate sin.

To fear God is to hate injustice.

To fear God is to depart from evil in every sense—thought, word, and action. It is to refrain from speaking deceitfully. It will not say or put on an appearance that is untrue to one’s heart and thoughts. It keeps our outward behavior congruent with our inward thoughts, motives, and beliefs.

To fear God is to walk in authentic humility before God and mankind.

An Awesome God

To fear God is to give Him the praise, adoration, thanksgiving, and worship He deserves.

To fear God is to give Him all that belongs to Him.

To fear God is to tremble before Him in wonder and awe. It is to give His Word and presence our full attention.

To fear God is to obey Him. It's not just a desire but an inward force determined to carry out His will, no matter the cost. We eagerly, willingly, and immediately obey—even if we don't see a benefit or it doesn't make sense—and we carry it out to completion.

To fear God is to abstain from any form of complaining, murmuring, or grumbling.

To fear God is to respect, honor, and submit to His direct and delegated authority. It is also to obey the delegated authority, with the only exception being if the authority tells us to sin.

The fear of the Lord shapes our intentions, thoughts, words, and actions.

Now let's partially list the benefits of holy fear. Here are some of the many biblical promises made to those who walk in it.

The fear of the Lord is the starting place for an intimate relationship with God. We become His friends, and His secrets are made known to us.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. It gives foresight and clear divine direction.

The fear of the Lord is how we mature in our salvation and are conformed to the image of Jesus.

The fear of the Lord is clean; it produces true holiness in our lives.

To abide in the fear of the Lord is to secure an eternal legacy.

The fear of the Lord produces confidence, fearlessness, and security. It swallows up all other fears, including the fear of man.

The fear of the Lord gives us identity, makes us productive, and empowers us to multiply.

The fear of the Lord provides angelic assistance, fulfilled desires,

enduring success, nobility, influence, longevity, productive days, enjoyment in life, happiness, pleasure in labor, healing for our body, and so much more.

The fear of the Lord endures forever—it will never fade. The fear of the Lord is a treasured gift from our heavenly Father.

Making It Personal

Passage: Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:28–29 NKJV)

Point: The fear of the Lord is to love what God loves and to hate what God hates. What is important to Him becomes important to us. What is not so important to Him becomes not so important to us.

Ponder: What does it look like, practically, for me to esteem, respect, honor, venerate, and adore God above anyone or anything else?

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, please teach me how to fear Your name, Word, presence, and all You are. May I love and take pleasure in holy fear. Holy Spirit, as I continue this journey, teach and impart God's ways in me; let what I read not merely be informational, but may the words transform my life into the image of my Lord Jesus Christ. I ask this all in Jesus' name, amen.

Profession: May my words and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in God's sight.

*His whole character
commands our reverence
because it is superlatively
holy, and his name is
to us a word of awe
never to be mentioned
flippantly, and never to
be quoted without earnest
thought and prostration
of heart before him.*

—C. H. SPURGEON

4 | GOD'S TANGIBLE PRESENCE

As mentioned before, the fear of God seems counterintuitive. When hearing the word *fear*, our minds associate it with a detrimental or even damaging state. But I assure you, the fear of God is actually the greatest force of confidence, comfort, and protection available to any being in the universe. We will discover this truth as we journey onward. But first, holy fear can be broken down into two major categories:

1. to *tremble at the presence of God*, and
2. to *tremble at His Word*.

We will discuss both, but let's begin by highlighting the first. The psalmist declares, "God is *greatly to be feared* in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in *reverence* by all those around Him" (Psalm 89:7 NKJV). Notice it does not state merely "feared" but rather "*greatly*" feared. Here's a

firm truth: you will never find God's wonderful presence in an atmosphere where He's not revered and held in awe.

This became reality to me in January 1997. I was asked to speak at a national conference in the capital city of Brazil. I was elated to travel to this great nation for the first time.

The plane landed in Brasilia early in the morning, and I had the day to pray, prepare, and rest in my room. That evening, as we drove to the arena, I couldn't help but notice the numerous vehicles lining the streets before we even arrived. As expected, the parking lot was packed, indicating this conference would be well attended.

I was escorted into the arena, and after meeting a few leaders, I went directly onto the platform. I was ecstatic to worship God with what I anticipated would be thousands of hungry believers. However, my excitement didn't last, as I soon noticed the presence of God was missing from the atmosphere. I was baffled; this was a believers' conference, and the worship team was among the best in the nation, so why the absence of His presence?

Before I continue, let me clarify a few things about God's presence. Scripture identifies two types. The first is His omnipresence. David testifies, "I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there . . . Even in darkness I cannot hide from you" (Psalm 139:7-8, 12). This is the presence of God that promises, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5 NKJV).

The second is identified by Jesus' statement, "I will love him and *manifest* Myself to him" (John 14:21 NKJV). The word *manifest* is the Greek word *emphanízō* and means "to make apparent . . . to let oneself be intimately known and understood." This occurs when God reveals Himself to our mind and senses. Jesus states, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20 NKJV). He's obviously not referring to the everywhere-presence of God, because why would He need to make this statement? Rather, He speaks of His manifest presence. This presence was absent in the arena that night. Keenly aware of this, I closed my eyes and asked the Holy Spirit, *Where is Your presence?*

I opened my eyes, and within moments I noticed something I had missed but was now obvious. Most of the people were not engaged in worship. Some, with hands in their pockets or arms crossed across their chest, were gazing around nonchalantly or looking bored. Women fumbled through their purses; many people milled around the auditorium or went out to purchase snacks at the concession stands. Numerous attendees were laughing and talking to one another. Their behavior was no different from a crowd waiting for a show to begin. I thought to myself, *Surely this will cease, and people will engage in worship.* But that wasn't the case.

To my amazement, once the songs of worship were ended and one of the leaders of the movement got up to read from Scripture, nothing changed, except now, with the absence of music, I could hear a low murmur of people engaged in conversation. Anger mounted in my disbelief of what I was witnessing.

I then heard the Spirit of God whisper to my heart, *I want you to directly confront this.*

Once introduced, I walked up to the podium with my translator beside me. I decided not to say anything but only stare at the people. I concluded that the only possible way to get everyone's attention was to cease all activity from the platform. It worked, as a full minute of silence arrested everyone's attention. People's movements ceased, heads turned toward the platform, and the atmosphere fell silent. At this point, I knew every eye was on me in the arena.

I didn't open the evening message with, "It's great to be in Brazil" or "Thank you for having me." Nor did I introduce myself. Rather, I sternly asked this question: "How would you like it if, while you speak to someone sitting across the table, they ignore you, stare at the ceiling as if disinterested, or carry on a conversation with the person next to them?"

After a moment of silence, I answered my own question, "You wouldn't like it, would you?"

I probed further: "What if every time you knock on your neighbor's door you are greeted with a disinterested look along with a monotone voice saying, 'Oh, it's only you.' Would you continue to go to their house?"

An Awesome God

Again, after a pause, I answered, “No way!”

I then stated, “Do you think the King of the universe is going to manifest His presence or speak in a place where He is not honored and revered?”

This time I answered the question firmly: “Never!”

I continued, “If the president of your nation stood on this platform, he would have been granted your full attention and respect. Or if one of your favorite soccer players stood here, most of you would be on the edge of your seats with excitement, anticipating every word. Yet while God’s Word was being read a moment ago, you paid no attention to it; it was white noise to you!”

I then spoke to the people for the next ninety minutes on the fear of the Lord. You could hear a pin drop. It seemed they were a bit stunned by the confrontation but nevertheless listened intently.

Once finished, I gave the call, “If you are a believer, but you lack holy fear, and you are willing to repent, stand up!”

Without hesitation, 75 percent of the people stood to their feet. Within moments, before praying with them, the manifest presence of God filled the arena. People started sobbing and crying as the wonderful presence of God touched their lives. The holy fear did not scare them away from God; it drew them in close.

What happened next is one of the most awesome experiences I’ve had in forty years of ministry. But before we get to that story, let’s close with these words:

When I heard the sound of his voice, I *fainted* and lay there with my face to the ground. Just then a hand touched me and lifted me, *still trembling*, to my hands and knees. And the man said to me, “Daniel, *you are very precious to God*, so listen carefully to what I have to say to you. Stand up, for I have been sent to you.” When he said this to me, I stood up, *still trembling*. (Daniel 10:9–11)

Daniel was very precious to God, yet he was overwhelmed and fell to the ground. Even as he was assisted to his knees, then to his feet, he trembled

the entire time. If this happens in the presence of a messenger—an angel—what happens when God Himself comes?

Making It Personal

Passage: God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around Him. (Psalm 89:7 NKJV)

Point: We will only find God's manifest presence in an atmosphere where He's held with the utmost respect.

Ponder: What does it mean to tremble at God's presence? How is this practically lived out when I'm alone? When I'm with friends? When I'm in public places? When I'm in a church service?

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, I ask Your forgiveness for the times I've entered an atmosphere of worship with a casual, irreverent attitude. I repent for taking Your presence for granted, for treating it as common. May the blood of Jesus cleanse me. I humble myself before You and ask for grace to change. I want to be aware of and respect Your presence no matter where I am or what I'm doing. I want to live in reverent awe of You at all times. I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Profession: I will always give full attention to God's Word and honor His presence in all I say and do.

*Before prayer, endeavor
to realize Whose Presence
you are approaching and
to Whom you are about
to speak, keeping in mind
Whom you are addressing.*

—TERESA OF AVILA

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