

WINTER

A Season of Examination & Purpose

Winter can be a season of dormancy, inactivity or resignation. Animals hibernate, birds migrate, trees and brush shed. Sometimes it takes the weak and worn. All looks cold and barren except in AZ! The winter season of life slows us down, illness pervades, or we just grow weary. Take heart though! It has a purpose.

2 Cor.4:16—Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

We may be wrinkled but we're not ruined! In the Christian life we need to press on through the challenges of life and look to the Lord to grant us new vision and purpose. This is the season we learn what it means to persevere, press towards the mark of our high calling, watch with expectancy, pray without ceasing and grasp the hope of the Gospel more frequently. Winter is not for sissies!

Our overall topic has been related to Ecc.3:1-8 where it speaks of the seasons of life. God appoints these times and they have purpose for our good and His Glory (Rom. 8:28-29). They are unprofitable, if we choose them as the chief goals of our lives. Our lives or circumstances are not meant to be our focus, but to watch God work through them and learn from them. The beginning of Ecc.12 describes getting physically old. It's often quoted by my beloved husband as he salts his food because his taste buds are diminishing, or he looks for his glasses because the windows of his eyes are growing dim, etc. But Ecc. does not leave us to our meaningless life without hope. It is actually quite an evangelistic book. The reader is directed towards God intermittently through

out the book, but the author also gives us the conclusion of life that sums it all up. (Ecc. 12:13-14):

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FEAR GOD?

Pro.9:10- The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Pro.1:7- The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Wisdom and knowledge are not the same thing. Jerry Bridges in his book *The Joy of Fearing God*, defines knowledge as not just the accumulation of information in Pro. 1:7, but to include the ability to view it with the right perspective and to use it for the right end. Paul speaks of knowledge that “puffs up” (1Cor.8:1) and knowledge that “leads to godliness.” (Titus 1:1). The same knowledge but used two different ways. Consider two sisters raised simultaneously in a Christian home. One fears God and teaches her children right from wrong along with the love of God and endeavors to plant the gospel in their hearts. The other sister also teaches her children right from wrong but she is motivated by her schedule and her desires and by what other people think about her as a mother with behaving, or not, children; she is not really concerned about what pleases God. The fear of God must be the foundation of knowledge: it gives us the right perspective and beckons us to use knowledge for God’s glory, our ultimate goal.

Wisdom is often defined as good judgment or the ability to develop the best course of action in response to a given situation. The book of Proverbs, the wisdom book, is a practical book for life but more importantly, it is also an ethical book. The two qualities

are never separated. Wisdom in Proverbs is more concerned with righteous living than with shrewd judgment; more about the focus of the heart and less about the action.

James 3:17- But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

The fear of the Lord is often described as reverential awe. Even though it is the best description, the problem with that is our culture does not understand the true meaning of “awe”:

- an emotion in which dread, veneration (worship) and wonder are variously mingled
- submissive and admiring fear inspired by authority
- a fearful reverence inspired by deity

Can you truly describe that dinner at a fancy restaurant as awesome? Or a specific scoring football play? Or even a beautiful drawing from your child done just for you?

Once I was doing duty private duty in a home in Kentucky for a little girl on a ventilator.

As her mother came running in from the driveway, we saw a huge black funnel cloud touching ground and heading straight for the house. We gathered up the little girl and all her equipment to the bathroom. While sitting in the tub with the little girl in my lap and a mattress on top of us (by her mother), Mom then ran to the window to check the progress of the tornado! The wind was deafening and most frightening, but I had to concentrate on the little girl's safety and well being. The tornado passed and the whole house was unscathed. We got everything back in place and were able to calm down.

However, on the way home, only a block away were several brick houses with roofs and walls blown away, debris everywhere, trees resting on cars, flooded roadways, etc. The mighty power of God was evident in technicolor all around me that day. That was when the reverential awe of the Lord really struck. Dread, veneration (worship) and wonder

along with thanksgiving that no one had gotten hurt, all commingled within me as I traveled home. No hot fudge sundae can compare to any of that to be called “awesome”.

This type of “fear of the Lord” must yield adoration, love, honor and worship not only for His fiery splendor and absolute purity but also for His grace and mercy to us. We must revere His infinite worth and dignity, admire His glorious attributes and stand in amazement of His infinite love.

Jer.32:38-41—“They shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good and for the good of their children after them. “I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me. “I will rejoice over them to do them good and will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul.

Our source of fear of the Lord is from God Himself. He gives us a singleness of heart and action so that we will fear Him and inspires us with His promise of never turning from us and planting us firmly in His land. As He has planted this seed, we, like farmers are to be involved in the growth of our fear of the Lord. Our response should not be slavish as the slave in Matt. 25:24,25 who viewed his master as a hard man. If we don't understand God's grace and acceptance of us through Christ, we will believe we have to perform for him and He is a hard taskmaster. We will not have assurance of our salvation. It will be based upon our works. Our relationship with God is as a son (daughter). Our loving fear should be that of a child toward his father, an indefinable mixture of reverence, fear, pleasure, joy and awe that fills our hearts as we realize who God is and all He has done for us. We will have the comfort of knowing who we are and will obey out of our responding love. Read the stories of Jacob's dream of ascending

and descending angels on a ladder (Gen.28:12-15) and of Peter's fishing trip near shore with Jesus after catching nothing all night (Luke 5:1-11); put yourself in their shoes. Take note of their response to God did not include their personal circumstances nor did the Lord confront them of their sin.

Does your fear of God tend to be that of a slave with a stern taskmaster, never satisfied?

Or is your fear of Him overly familiar failing to show the reverential awe due to Him?

Do you sometimes indulge in sinful actions, thoughts, or words because you do not properly regard for God's fatherly discipline?

The most important knowledge of all is to know the only true God and His Son, Jesus Christ, who He sent. This is where true knowledge begins.

SELF EXAMINATION FOR SAVING FAITH

2 COR.13:5- Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you— unless indeed you fail the test?

Not all church goers are authentic Christians. Scripture says there will be false brethren (2Cor.11:26; Gal.2:4) and tares among the wheat (Matt.13:25-30; 36-42). Unless you are spiritually alive, you cannot truly repent, accept discipline, or submit to authority. Therefore it is essential to examine yourself and determine your true spiritual condition. Winter can be a very short season or may never come; do not waste anytime on this evaluation no matter the season you are in.

KEY MARKS OF SAVING FAITH

1. What is your heart attitude towards your sin?

True faith produces an overwhelming sense of sinfulness, which causes believers to mourn over their sin, to be humble and acknowledge and confess their transgressions. David was a man who knew his sinful heart; you can hear his repentant heart towards his forgiving Lord throughout the Psalms. Our self-righteousness and self-sufficiency interferes with our growth of fearing God. Be honest about your sins — not just the big ones. Include those “respectable sins”— frustration, jealousy, discontentment, anxiety, impatience, irritability, ingratitude to name a few. Developing a mindset of great thoughts of God and how He views sin will bring realistic thoughts of ourselves and how we can become pleasing to Him. As we process our lives and think thoughts “through God’s eyes”, we will be able to freely trust Him in all things, no matter the circumstances. True believers desire what is right and pure but also recognize the force of sin in their nature is still at work.

We first need to ask God to stimulate this growth within us. We can pray with David daily:

Psa.86:11—Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name.

An united heart denotes singleness of purpose, aim and affections. It comes from praying unceasingly throughout each day as we strive to please Him. It comes from praying His word back to Him in praise or request.

2. Do you desire righteousness?

EXTERNAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

- does not murder
- does not commit sexual sin
- cleverly avoids false vows while deceiving others
- limits its vengeance to that prescribed by the Law
- loves its friends and hates its enemies
- parades itself before men

INTERNAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

- does not hate
- does not lust
- does not lie
- does not retaliate at all
- loves its friends and enemies
- longs to be perfect like its heavenly Father
- abstains from wickedness

Along with prayer we need consistent exposure of our minds and hearts to His word. It involves reading it for ourselves, hearing it taught and studying it.

Dt. 4:10—...Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.'

We should also pray the teaching we hear to also stimulate our growth in the fear of the Lord. Saul of Tarsus was a zealous Pharisee and persecutor of the early church. On the way to Damascus, he was confronted by our glorified Lord Jesus and he fell to the ground in fear in response. In Acts 22:8,10, Paul demonstrates his fear of the Lord at his conversion by first asking, "Who are you Lord?" and secondly, "What shall I do Lord?" after hearing it was the Jesus who he had been persecuting. Would we not be wise to take note and to ask ourselves those same questions as we hear the word being instilled into our hearts and minds? Do we pray for ourselves as we listen to the sermon for open ears, heart and mind that we may seek the Lord in that lesson and respond with intentional application to our lives? Do we take notes to refresh our memory and

then review them? Pray the prayers along with the Puritans from the Valley of Vision. Always praise God for who He is and what He has done, confess your sins with true humility and repentance. Offer thanksgiving for all things, even when they don't seem so good.

Regular, prayerful, personal reading of Scripture is the most effective means of growing in the fear of the Lord:

Dt.17:18-19—“Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. “It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes,

Plan your Bible reading. There are so many different reading plans available. A chapter of Proverbs according the date. Topical devotionals. Chronological or harmonys.

Commit to a specific time of day. The OT will best show all God's attributes in His interaction with the Israelites: His sovereignty, His holiness, His might, His unfailing love, His faithfulness, His justice, His grace. In the NT look for the gospel on every page: His grace, His mercy, His forgiveness, His love. Don't just read it as though it's a thing to check off the list for the day but take time to comprehend it and take a nugget to meditate on throughout the day. Audio readings are a great reinforcement but they are not the same as visual reading. Reading the Bible gives us breadth of knowledge, but study of the Bible gives us depth. If you don't know how to study Scripture or it is not a well disciplined area of your life, a practical way is to join a group Bible study of solid teaching and instruction. You will not only be able to learn how to study the Bible there, but benefit from what the others are learning and have a measure of accountability that to reveal what He wants you to learn, and a diligent spirit to apply what you learn. Also

encourages prior preparation. Go with a teachable spirit, a dependable spirit on the Lord read books from recommended authors. Jerry Bridges, John MacArthur, John Piper, puritan writers, etc.

3. Do you willing submit to God's authority?

Jesus made it clear that His disciples must submit unreservedly to Him no matter what the cost. (Luke 14:25-35) But the rich young ruler refused to submit to Christ's authority and turned his back on Him (Matt.19:16-22). To live under God's authority means to live under the authority of His word. It is the expression of His instruction and commands. It means to live as Scripture directs even if it hurts. An example is promising to do something that you find later to be inconvenient or too expensive or even unwise. Scripture says we are to honor our vows no matter what.

Submission is not a profane word. It is only difficult because of our sinful nature and wanting things our way. But it's required as a response to God's word if we truly desire to please Him in all we do. If we filter all we do through His word, He has promised a life of blessing no matter the circumstances. Decisions made according to His word will also lead to blessing. So if you are deciding to purchase a pink car or a pink dress, Scripture can help you make a wise decision. You may not find a verse to address your decision directly, but you can discover principles to help you make the right one. Go the word with a teachable submissive spirit, not one looking to support getting your way.

THOSE WHO DESIRE FORGIVENESS AND HEAVEN AT ANY COST GLADLY
SUBMIT TO HIS WILL WHATEVER UNFOLDS FOR THEM.

4. Do you obey the Lord's commandments?

Deu 6:1-2 "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it, 2 so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.

According to Jerry Bridges, about one fourth of the verses on fear of the Lord are linked to the requirement of obedience. Obedience of God's word is evidence of fearing God.

We can fall into a moral lifestyle but morality is not a biblical obedience springing from a fear of the Lord. We are to obey God because we love Him. (1John 5:3; John 14:21; Deut.6:5).

Deu 10:12-13 "Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to keep the LORD'S commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?

We can only conclude that fearing God and loving God are also strongly linked in His requirements of us. We are given in actuality only two commands: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and love your neighbor as yourself." All other commands are instruction to fulfill these two commands. In Romans 12 alone we commanded to: love sincerely (9), be devoted to one another in brotherly love (10), honor others above yourself (10), share with others in need (13), practice hospitality (13), bless those who persecute you (14), rejoice with those who rejoice (15), mourn with those who mourn (15), live in harmony with one another (16), do not be proud or conceited (16), do not repay evil for evil (17), seek to live at peace with everyone (18), do not seek revenge (19), and overcome evil with good (21). These are not just moralisms but commands from God. Go through the list again and add "in the fear of

the Lord” at the end. That is how we are to practice each. Can it be done without cost? No. But remember our forgiveness came at a great cost! Can we do it on our own mere determination? I suppose it’s possible but not in the fear of the Lord. It would only be a work of the flesh at best. Even though we are fully responsible, we are to depend on the Holy Spirit to do the work in us to obedience in a God honoring manner. When we pray for change or strength in our lives, do we also do what is necessary and obedient to accomplish that answer, or are we expecting the Holy Spirit to do all the work?

Verses to understand the importance of obedience:

Luke 6:46- Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?

Matt.7:21- Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

John 8:31- So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine

John 14:15, 23-24- 15 “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

... 23 Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. 24 “He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me.

1Jo 2:3-5 3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:

1Jo 3:24 The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

1Jo 5:2-3 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

James 1:22- *But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*

SELF EVALUATION QUESTIONS:

1. Is my obedience little more than human morality, or is it done in the fear of God?
2. Do I obey God only out of a sense of duty, or because I love Him and fear Him?
3. Do I define sin primarily in terms of the gross sins of society, or do I first recognize my own personal sins of pride, selfishness, judgmental attitude, gossip, discontent, etc?
4. What is my greatest interpersonal need from the Romans 12 passage at this time?
5. Am I seeking to teach my children what it means to obey in the fear of the Lord, or am I simply instilling human morality in them?

GENUINE FAITH PRODUCES A DEEP LONGING TO OBEY GOD FROM THE HEART.

IF YOU LOVE GOD, YOU WILL OBEY HIS COMMANDMENTS.

5. Is your life characterized by love for God and other people?

Another discipline necessary in growing to be godly, or god-fearing, is to train yourself to have great thoughts about God. Meditate on your Bible reading for the day, even if it's only one verse. Observe creation as you drive or work in the yard and see what beauty He has created for you. Instead of everything being created grey, it's all magnificent color! Consider the Grand Canyon. Even in His wrath against sin, His grace is so evident in the beauty! When you are waiting in the doctor's exam room, look at the details of the anatomical pictures and marvel at God's design. Even when the day may not be going your way, look for His providence in it. What is He teaching you? Think on the gospel everyday and you can only have hope. Reflection and remembering is a pretty daily thing in the days of "winter". They can be full of regret or they can be

cherished when you realize how God brought even the storms together for blessing. The latter will increase your love for Him and your reverential fear of Him. Be aware of His presence in every moment of your life; He knows what you are doing and even your thoughts. Live accordingly to please Him as your Father.

James 2:5- Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

1Cor.2:9- but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND which HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."

1John 5:2- By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments

John 5:42 cf 8:42- but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves.

John 8:42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.

James 4:4- You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

1John 2:15-16- Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

1John 3:14- We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death

1John 2:9-11 - The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. 10 The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

IT IS YOUR LOVE THAT WILL SHOW CHRIST'S LOVE.
BE BRUTALLY HONEST WITH YOURSELF; YOUR ETERNAL LIFE DEPENDS ON IT.

Remember winter is the season we learn what it means to persevere, press towards the mark of our high calling, watch with expectancy, pray without ceasing and grasp the hope of the Gospel more frequently. Focus on your internal attitudes of your heart, not external behavior or religious activities. Christ knows our true heart and will sort the goats from the sheep. “Fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person.” It matters not your age or the season of your life. You have no excuse before our great and awesome God. “For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”

Finally, we all need someone to encourage us or we will most likely fail to progress.

Ecc.4:9-10— Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.

Biblical mentoring is a special relationship. There are many examples in the Bible of mentoring: Jethro and Moses, Moses and Joshua, Paul and Timothy, Naomi and Ruth, Nathan and David, Samuel and David, Aquillo and Priscilla with Apollo, and of course, Jesus with the disciples. It is not a one sided relationship but one that allows growth and accountability for both sides. It's filled with encouragement, joy and deep bonding that stimulates prayer for one another as they walk together in the Lord. It needs to be based on Scripture and how it applies to everyday life. It needs to be such a strong knowledge of Scripture that we can find the verses to apply in all we decide and all we do when we purpose to live to please our Lord God. If you are in the winter season and God has enriched your life with His word and given you resulting wisdom, then I would

exhort you to obey Him in becoming one to walk along side a weaker sister to benefit from all God has bestowed upon you.

A word of encouragement and hope:

1 Cor.15:57-58 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

The Lord bless you.

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