

**Pastor Tom Mortenson**

**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**May 16, 2021**

**The Fear of God is the Beginning of Wisdom**

**Proverbs 9:10**

**Prayer:** *Father, we just come before you this morning. We thank you for this beautiful day, this opportunity that we have to come together and offer up corporate worship to you. Lord, I just pray that the worship we have offered has been accepted. I pray for your Holy Spirit's presence as we again open up the gift that you've given to us of your word. Father, once again we need your Holy Spirit, we need you to accompany us, we need you to make this make sense and to make it of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name.*

Well we have been looking at the concept of wisdom. The last time we got together we took it up for the first time and we started out looking at *John 15* at the passage where Jesus tells his disciples "*If the world hates you, remember it hated me first.*" We talked about this dialogue that Jesus had with his own disciples about how hated he was by this world and how hated they could expect to be if they too identified with Christ. And we pointed out that there's this ongoing spiritual war between two different kingdoms: There's

the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness and until Christ returns victorious there will be an ongoing continuing battle in an ongoing enmity between both parties. We noted Jesus prayed a prayer and he prayed it not just for his disciples but for all believers down through the ages. This is what Jesus said, he said: *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word."* Since we believers are being transformed into the very same image of Christ, then we too can expect the same level of hatred that Jesus experienced. In fact Jesus said, *"Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."*

And so we spoke about the solution that Jesus gave to handling this world's hatred. If you remember what it was, he lays it out in *Matthew 10*. He says this, he says: *"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."* He said the solution to handling the world's hatred is wisdom. And furthermore the way to acquire wisdom is that three-fold process that's laid out in *James 1*. Number one, you have to lack it; number two, ask for it; number three, you have to believe that he's going to give it to you. *James 1:5* says: *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*

So the solution we said to handling the world's hatred lies in acquiring God's wisdom, and today we want to examine just what God's wisdom is and where it comes from. I pointed out that the need for wisdom is great because our culture is literally collapsing in front of our eyes. So we find ourselves just as Jesus said we would, as sheep surrounded by wolves. It's amazing how aptly Jesus' analogy ties into one I heard many years ago that's even more timely today and you may have heard it, the analogy's of the gospel as a roaring campfire. And when the gospel fire was bright and it's warm and it's healthy, its light drives away the darkness, it drives away the wolves, you don't even see them. But as the gospel presentation begins to weaken, the fire begins to dim and you begin to just start to see the outline of red eyes that are out there in the peripheral darkness. And as the gospel flame grows dimmer and dimmer those eyes get bigger and bigger and bolder and they come closer and closer. Those eyes represent the collapse of a culture. And we can either draw our wagons tighter in a little circle and dive into our own Christian fortresses or we can wade right into the thick of it knowing that there are still sheep to be had among those wolves. Again Jesus said it: *"I send you out as sheep among Wolves therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves."*

So if you remember we defined last week wisdom in two words, it was

"skillful living." We also suggested it's doing God's will God's way. Yet another example was choosing the best and noblest end at which to aim along with the most appropriate and effective means of achieving that aim. Well as good as those definitions are, the Bible has its own definition of wisdom, and over and over again it states one theme and one key ingredient along with one absolute essential for acquiring wisdom. Do you know what it is? It's the fear of God. *Psalm 111* says: *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.* If God pointed out that this fear produces wisdom, if he did that once it would be noteworthy, if he did it twice you would know its importance. God repeats over and over and over again, literally dozens of times, that the key to wisdom is found in fearing God. Doing God's will God's way has only one starting point and it is the fear of God. Just listen. This is a catalog of verses that describe the importance of fear as the source of wisdom. This is *Psalm 112*, it says: *Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!* *Proverbs 15:* *The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor.* *Job 28:* *"And he said to man, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.'" Isaiah 33:* *And he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is Zion's treasure.* *Micah 6:9:* *The voice of the LORD cries to the city -- and it is sound wisdom*

*to fear your name: "Hear of the rod and of him who appointed it!"*

In the book of Ecclesiastes we have Solomon's compilation of wisdom gathered by the wisest man who has ever lived. This is a man who was given every single thing a human being could possibly want. And after spending his entire life tasting everything this world has to offer he concludes his book with one final admonition in *Ecclesiastes 12:13*. He said this: *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.* Solomon boils all of life down to just two things: *Fear God and obey his commandments.*

Now you may be noticing at this point that all of these quotes that I've taken biblically are from the Old Testament. You may be thinking, well, isn't that the place that kind of emphasizes the fear of God isn't that the place where we find the fearful, hard-hearted Father God as opposed to the kinder, gentler Son of God that we find in the New Testament? Jesus wouldn't have us fear God, would he? Well how about *Matthew 10: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."* Who do you suppose is the only one capable of destroying both body and soul in hell, I mean, that would be God and God alone. Those are not my words, those are Jesus's own words, and this is what he says: *Fear God.* *1 Peter 2:17* gives us a list of commands: *Honor everyone. Love the*

*brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.* There it is again, *fear God.* We have *Hebrews 10:31: It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* So we hear these verses and we begin to wonder are we worshipping God or are we worshipping a bogeyman? Well here's where we have to examine our own pattern of thinking our own paradigms. We have to really look at what shapes our minds. Is it God or is it the world? See, the world tells us over and over again that our only real enemy is fear. From FDR to JFK we're told that we have nothing to fear but fear itself. Today we shorten that to two words: No fear. But there's plenty of things in this world that it is right to fear. If you have no fear of things like electricity or gravity or viruses, you're not fearless, you're foolish. I mean you may even get away with it if you're not confronted with live wires or heights or sickness. But unlike those things, God is something you can't avoid forever because eventually all of us are going to have to stand before him. God says *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

You see the god of this world Satan, that is the enemy of our souls, has spent a great deal of time and a lot of effort destroying man's capacity to fear God because he knows that once we lose that fear, literally all hell is going to break loose and that's exactly what we're seeing today. I mean think about how

cleverly the enemy has manipulated us into rejecting two pillars of the Christian faith. Number one is the conviction of sin, number two is the fear of God. Those have become dirty words in our culture. The enemy has succeeded in eliminating the fear of God by suggesting that God and religion is like everything else, it's evolving. It's evolving from some kind of primitive fear-driven state to an enlightenment non judgmental state. So we're told that primitive man was fear-driven, he was terrified of the unknown. Things like lightning and thunder and eclipses demanded an explanation, and so he invented gods to allay his fears. Well eventually in time he became enlightened. The need for God began to diminish. We found out that thunder really wasn't the voice of God, it wasn't Thor rattling his hammer; actually it was air masses colliding. And once we learned that, there really was no need for a thunder god. As man's knowledge grew, we were told man began to see that the only thing that really drove us to God was this primitive fear. The more we learned, the less we feared, the less we needed God. It was a very clever and very effective attack on who God really is. And what we actually succeeded in doing is we created a brand new god that we never even realized. This new god was called "science." And one thing was for certain, if it didn't have all of the answers we needed, it assured us it's really just a matter of time and eventually it was going to come up with any answer you need and this knowledge is going to eliminate fear and

without fear, who needs God? Well this century is seeing the effects of that thinking. We found that instead of becoming enlightened we become impoverished. In fact we've actually entered a state of spiritual decay such as I spoke about last week. It's described by *Romans 3:18*. Clearly it says: *There is no fear of God before their eyes*. Now do you really think that all of those Christians in the past, that they genuinely feared God because they were primitive? Or did they understand something about God's character that our culture now forbids us to think? Has our enlightened information, has that redefined who God is so that he's no longer a bogeyman? The reality is, God is no bogeyman, he never was. Well then why should we fear him? Well let me answer that by taking something from creation itself. Let me just look at something like the sun.

One thing that nobody ever does is stare at the sun. We can't do that because we respect its power to blind us. Another thing that we don't do is we don't go out in the sun unprotected because it will burn us to a crisp. Now because of those two things can I say that we fear the sun? Is the sun a bogeyman to us? Well, no. Do you respect the sun's power? Of course. I mean you recognize that if you're careless and treat the sun as if it's inconsequential, you're going to pay a physical price. But here we're just talking about the sun. We're just talking about something that God spoke



into existence. We've since learned that as suns go, this one isn't that impressive, that God made suns ten thousand times more powerful than ours and he set this one in place just to uniquely power our solar system. Now if one tiny aspect of his creation demands that kind of respect, what would the entire creator himself demand? He demands awe. He demands respect, not as a means of mollifying a bogeyman but simply out of a right understanding of the order of things. Go through scripture, I mean, look at the reaction of folks who actually got near to God. You'll see that respect translated into pure unbridled terror as they actually got close to God.

Abraham enters into a covenant with God and as God's presence comes near, terror ensues. Look at Abram's reaction in *Genesis 15:12*. It says: *As the sun was setting, a deep sleep fell on Abram, and suddenly great terror and darkness descended on him.* Well that terror and darkness was God. The same terror described Israel's reaction to God's presence on Mount Sinai. I mean when God reached down and touched that inanimate mountain, the mountain itself began to shake. It looked like it was enveloped in smoke and fire and a trumpet began to sound. I thought about that. We're used to sirens; we hear them all the time. They were not. Just picture the sound and picture it starting to get louder and louder and louder until it sounds like it's never going to stop and picture

the terror that that would induce. Well it finally reached a point where the people themselves, they begged for God's voice to stop. *Exodus 20* says: *Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die."*

Those words "lest we die" really resonate with me because 48 years ago this month, I met the living God in a living room in Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan, and I was a complete pagan at the time. I was an unbeliever who had prayed only hours before for God to show me if he was real. And I was involuntarily stuck in the middle of a prayer meeting at a house church when God chose to reveal himself to me in a way that I least expected, confronting me in such a way that I was convinced, just like these Jews were, that if I hadn't responded right then and there he would have killed me. I believe that with all of my heart. And to this day I cannot begin to describe the beauty and the terror of meeting God. I resonate with that New Testament book of Hebrews where it describes Moses' reaction to God's presence this way. It says: *The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."*

Understand, I'm not putting myself in Moses' place. I identify, however, with being absolutely terrified and blessed at the same

time. I mean I'm a nobody that God chose to reveal himself to in a rather dramatic fashion, and I'm just convinced that it was as dramatic as it was because God knew that's what I really needed to have. I mean after all I wasn't named "Thomas" for nothing.

Trembling and terror often seems to accompany a meeting with God. I mean look at Isaiah in *Isaiah 6*, he's ushered directly into God's presence. This is what he says, it says: *In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and His robe filled the temple. Seraphim were standing above Him; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another: Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Hosts; His glory fills the whole earth. The foundations of the doorways shook at the sound of their voices, and the temple was filled with smoke. Then I said: Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts. Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said: Now that this has touched your lips, your wickedness is removed and your sin is atoned for.* You have to understand here, Isaiah, the person we're speaking of right here, was God's chosen prophet. He was the most righteous man of his day. This prophet's not saying Woe is me like

you are in Winnie the Pooh. This is no clinical observation. This is a desperate cry of someone who's literally disintegrating. I mean different translations have him crying out: Woe is me, I am lost! I am ruined! I am undone! I am destroyed! He's trying to say I'm coming apart at the seams in the presence of God. And you have to note that this terror before the face of God is not limited to the Old Testament. In Matthew 17:6 we have the mount of transfiguration. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain where they hear the voice of God speaking of the love that God has for his son. This is *Matthew 17*, it says: *After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and his brother John and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. He was transformed in front of them, and His face shone like the sun. Even His clothes became as white as the light. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it's good for us to be here! If You want, I will make three tabernacles here: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."* While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said: *This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him. Listen to Him!* When the disciples heard it, they fell facedown and were terrified.

Mark's gospel tells us why Peter spoke about building the tabernacles. What Mark tells us is that Peter was so terrified

that he just started babbling. *Mark 9:6* says: *For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.* Again we have goodness and terror combined. The fear of God is the reverential awe that God's revealed presence always produces. Probably the best example of that occurred in the life of Job. And we all know the story. Throughout the book Job questions why this unspeakable evil is happening to him. The more he looks at his life the more convinced he is that his punishment is undeserved, and so he grows increasingly anxious to argue his case before God and finally he gets his chance. This is *Job 40*. It says: *The LORD answered Job: Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? Let him who argues with God give an answer. Then Job answered the LORD: I am so insignificant. How can I answer You? I place my hand over my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not reply; twice, but now I can add nothing. Then the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind: Get ready to answer Me like a man; When I question you, you will inform Me.* God goes on to describe his power and his might and then without answering Job's dilemma at all, God simply begins to reveal himself to Job. In chapter 42 Job concludes his revelation from God by saying: *"Surely I spoke about things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, "Listen now, and I will speak. When I question you, you will inform Me." I had heard rumors about You, but now my eyes have seen You. Therefore I take back my words and repent in dust and ashes."* Job

perhaps more than any other man understood the fear of God.

In Mark 4 we have Jesus calming a storm. The disciples are in a boat, there's a great tempest that's howling, the boat is filling with water; Jesus is fast asleep. It says: *A fierce windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking over the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But He was in the stern, sleeping on the cushion. So they woke Him up and said to Him, "Teacher! Don't You care that we're going to die?" He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Silence! Be still!" The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. Then He said to them, "Why are you fearful? Do you still have no faith?" And they were terrified and asked one another, "Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey Him!"*

Finally we have John of Patmos taken up to heaven itself in Revelation 1:17. There he sees Jesus. It says: *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last."* This is the same Jesus he spent three years with on earth. At the sight of the risen Jesus he's literally dying of fright. So we have Moses and Abraham and Isaiah, Peter, James and John, they all have the exact same reaction to God: It's one of goodness and terror. And what stands out incredibly in this list of people is that virtually all

of them were beloved of God. Just think about that for a second. I mean if God's chosen servants were all terrified in God's loving presence, what do you think the response is going to be to those who put themselves squarely outside of his love? We only get vague hints at what God's judgment will be like, but those hints are filled with unspeakable terror.

In Revelation 6 we find the people of earth, all the people of earth begging for mountains and rocks to fall on them. It says: *Then the kings of the earth, the nobles, the military commanders, the rich, the powerful, and every slave and free person -- that's everybody -- hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, because the great day of Their wrath has come! And who is able to stand?"* Just try to imagine, just try to think about what kind of terror would make being buried alive seem attractive? Well that terror is the unleashed fury of the wrath of God. And whether it's Job repenting in dust and ashes or Isaiah proclaiming, "Woe is me! I am undone!" or John of Patmos falling down as though dead in fear, they all share the same realization, that is we are dust and he is infinite majesty. That's what the fear of God is all about.

So what does fear have to do with wisdom? I mean remember, this is what this whole discussion started about. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.* Well the fear of the Lord is nothing more than an attempt to grasp just who God really is and who we really are in relation to him. And I say "attempt" because we humans are incapable of knowing God on our own. I mean I've said it before, the distance between God and man is way too vast for man to bridge. The only bridge that we have is really revelation from God. That's what scripture is, it's revelation from God. It's God revealing himself to us. Jesus Christ is God revealing himself to us in a person. *Hebrews 1 says: Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. God is the one whose taken the initiative to reveal himself to us through these different intermediaries such as his word, his flesh and his church, and the reason why is because his actual presence would kill us.*

Moses asked God to fully reveal himself, God at first refused. This is *Exodus 33: Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to*



whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by." So God eventually relents and he tells Moses that he himself would put Moses in the cleft of a rock to protect him from who? From God, from God's unvarnished presence to enable him to stand before God without completely disintegrating. That rock that Moses hid behind symbolically represented Christ, because it was Christ who willingly bore God's wrath and justice on the cross. See, God was perfect and we are not and only Christ could restore our perfection by paying the price of our imperfection. So it's Christ that we are hidden in which allows us to see the glory of God without disintegrating because it is Christ who agreed to accept the cup of God's wrath for our sin. Christ said to his own Father: "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." See, Father, Son and Spirit all agree that our only hope of ever being able to abide in the presence of God was in Christ fully drinking the cup of God's wrath. And please don't think of this as a vengeful father punishing his son. Rather think of the whole Godhead committing to seeing perfect justice kiss perfect mercy at the cross so that the

fearful wrath of perfect holiness could be perfectly satisfied. Saul summed up in one line from Isaiah, he said: *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* See, that iniquity was the source of our fear. Before Adam fell, fear didn't exist. Adam and Eve walked with God in the cool of the day.

Fear of God is a concept that you don't hear much about in church today. It is in fact an anachronism. It's something from another age that doesn't belong here in the 21st century, certainly not in the "enlightened days" of today. We've spent the last hundred years disavowing the notion of the fear of God even though the scripture presents it. The Old Testament combines the fear of God with the love of God; the New Testament combines the love of God with the fear of God. Both aspects in both testaments are there because they belong there because God is in fact scary business. And we've simply intentionally or unintentionally forgotten that. I personally, I cringe when I hear God referred to as "the big Kahuna" or "the man upstairs" or "the big guy in the sky" or "my co-pilot." Hebrews 4 tells us to come boldly to the throne of grace but we have pop-theologized those scriptures to the point where we think that God's got this infinite warehouse of red carpets that's just waiting to be rolled out when we arrive. That's not boldness, that's arrogance. You see, coming boldly

before his throne is daring to believe the Lord's shed blood has allowed us to accomplish the unthinkable. It's believers alone who understand that we stand before God only because we are clothed in someone else's righteousness, not ours. In fact it's the righteousness of Jesus Christ that he laid down for us at the cross that we pick up by faith that alone enables us to stand before a holy God. So our attitude should be one of absolute wonder at the grace of God. Instead it often seems to border on the sacred religious. Yo, God, what's happening? I mean a lot of people think, well, you know, look at 1 John 4, it gives us a reason to have no fear. This is what 1 John 4 says, it says: *There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears has not reached perfection in love.* Folks think well, you should have no fear of God because, after all, perfect love casts out fear. But that's only half the story. 1 John 4 tells us that perfect love casts out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and the only reason we have no fear is because God's punishment, it's not because it's not terrifying, it's because someone else took it for us. The fear of God is what makes the cross so awful and so wonderful at the same time. All the fears that Moses and Abraham, Isaac and the disciples got tiny little tastes of, Jesus got the full brunt of. All the holy rage of that pent up divine fury contained in the admonitions to fear God fell not on us but on him. Jesus told us

to fear him who was able to destroy both soul and body in hell and yet he who did no wrong, who was totally innocent was the one on whom that fearful warning fell. There's no words to describe the terror of being totally rejected by man and then willingly offering yourself up to the unbridled fury of a just and holy God. But this is what Isaiah tells us, it says: *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.* I can't begin to fathom that without understanding the fear of God. And the reason why the fear of God is crucial is because we never truly fathom the grace of God until we understand the fear of God, because it takes us to a place where God is high and lifted up, it takes us to Mount Sinai where a terrified Moses receiving the law to God's own throne room where Isaiah is screaming out that he's disintegrating in God's presence. It takes us in God's holy rage, which is nothing like human anger, to the flood of Noah's day, to the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah where both flood and fire consumed every living thing outside of God's protection. But then it stuns us with the wonder of grace because this very same God in the New Testament is now clothed in flesh. *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.* Do you get that? God speaks Jesus to us. The very same God who made Mount Sinai tremble. And he's now sitting because he's exhausted and he's sitting with a woman at a well in

Sychar. And you see this same high, holy, lifted up God, he's now hot and he's tired and he's thirsty and he's asking this woman who's had five husbands for a drink of water. I mean the whole concept is scandalous. How could a God that high stoop that low?

Right here I want to also, I just want to take a time out to just give a shout out to a show that Janice and I have been watching, binge watching actually. I don't know if you're familiar, have you ever heard a show called *The Chosen*? It's a show that -- I knew very little about it, it's been on, this is its second year. The very first crowd-funded movie of its sort. They never went to Hollywood. It was crowd-funded by Christians. You can get it by you go on Google and you just do "The Chosen," and watch it on Vimeo. And Janice and I have been watching it, we've been astounded. True confessions, I'm not a big fan of Christian stuff, of Christian movies. We watched this, the first two, I said, hey, these guys can act, these guys are good. I mean I've just been amazed at how incredible it is because it does a marvelous job of showing Christ delight in being a human being. His delight around children and he's always giving them a hard time and ribbing them, having just a wonderful time with them, his love of people comes across so wonderfully. And we see him, he's dining with whores and wine bibbers and tax gatherers and fisherman and all the while we realize this is the same God that terrified Isaiah and frightened

John to the point of death. And right here we have the very beginning of wisdom in the fear of God.

You know why that fear is the beginning of wisdom, why it's the foundational principle on which all of wisdom rests? Because it's knowing that he's the creator and we are the creature. It's knowing that he is infinite and that we are vapor, dust, that he is all-knowing and we are ignorant children. It's knowing that we are helpless, and he is omnipotent, that we are blind and he sees all. That we're lost, and he is the way, the truth and the life. Fear of God is nothing more than knowing who God is and who we are in relation to him. It's the beginning of wisdom because it's the first order of reality. It's the first principle that sets the course of our understanding, just like a mason's first course when he starts a building. If you get that first course understanding correct about who he is and who we are, then you can go on to great wisdom. Get it wrong and there is no way to correct it without starting all over again.

It all goes back to a seesaw that we often talk about. Picture God and man on a seesaw. The higher man sees himself, the lower he's going to see God. The higher he sees God, the lower he's going to see man. It is literally an inverse proportion; you can't raise the one without lowering the other. Fear of God is knowing who is

up and who is not. That's where wisdom comes from. Jesus is still sending us out as sheep among wolves with this impossible task to be the aroma of Christ to a world that no longer knows or cares about the fear of God. This is a fear that only the wise possess because it's a knowledge only believers can know. The apostle Paul summed up how he put this wisdom into practice. I conclude with his words. He says: *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.* Let's pray.

*Father, I want to have that whole picture. I want to have that first course laid down just like a mason building a building. I want to understand who I am verses who you are to the extent that we can understand your magnificence and our dust. I just thank you, Lord, for your willingness to be the same God that terrified Mount Sinai and is asking a woman with five husbands if he can have a drink. I just thank you, Lord, for your willingness to be that God, to love us enough to become one of us, to live among us, to offer your life in our stead. I just praise you and thank you, in Jesus' name. Amen.*