

**FEAR GOD.**

**EXCERPTED FROM**

**BASIC.WHO IS GOD?**  
**FOLLOWER'S GUIDE**

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BASIC.WHO IS GOD? FOLLOWER'S GUIDE

Published by David C Cook  
4050 Lee Vance View  
Colorado Springs, CO 80918 U.S.A.

David C Cook Distribution Canada  
55 Woodslee Avenue, Paris, Ontario, Canada N3L 3E5

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Eastbourne, East Sussex BN23 6NT, England

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ISBN 978-0-7814-1013-7

Also available as a trade book:

Trade ISBN 978-1-4347-0085-8  
eISBN 978-1-4347-0292-0

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First Edition 2010

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the *BASIC.WHO IS GOD? Follower's Guide*. This workbook is designed to help you think through the material that you will be watching in the *BASIC.WHO IS GOD?* films and then discussing as a group. I'm sure that you'll be challenged as you watch the three films (*FEAR GOD*, *FOLLOW JESUS*, and *HOLY SPIRIT*) that make up *BASIC.WHO IS GOD?*, the first half of the BASIC film series. And I'm confident that your small-group discussions will help you process the material in those films. But if you stop with those two things, I think you'll miss out.

That's why we've included this *Follower's Guide*. As challenging as the films are, I'm afraid that once the reality of everyday life sets in, the conviction you feel will be drowned out by a tidal wave of distractions. This workbook offers you the opportunity to take what you've seen in the films and what you've discussed with your small group and sit with it. My prayer is that you will approach each of the sessions in this workbook patiently and prayerfully.

A *Follower's Guide* like this isn't effective unless you're prepared to examine your heart and open up your life to the truth of God's Word. You could read through each of the sessions in just a few minutes, but I hope you won't move that quickly. I've built in times for prayer, thoughtful meditation, and Bible study. The more you allow the material to soak in, the more you'll get out of this process. I challenge you to meditate on the Scripture presented, honestly examine your heart, and push yourself to apply what you're studying to your everyday life.

The material in these sessions will lead you to think about who God is. We all have ideas about God, but those ideas are often formed more by our own experiences with the Christian life than by the way God describes Himself. My prayer is that you will see God for who He truly is and that your life will be changed as a result.

# The BASIC Process

For each of the first three films in the BASIC series (*FEAR GOD*, *FOLLOW JESUS*, and *HOLY SPIRIT*), we've created two *Follower's Guide* sessions for individual study, along with a bonus session included in *HOLY SPIRIT* to help you put into practice what you've explored. The sessions in this *Follower's Guide* are designed to be worked through *after* you've watched the corresponding BASIC film. The process for getting the most out of these three *BASIC.WHO IS GOD?* films goes like this (see the text after these steps for an abbreviated approach):

1. View the film *FEAR GOD* with your small group. Discuss impressions of the film, and write down any questions the group has.
2. Make sure each person in the group has a copy of this *Follower's Guide*. After your initial discussion of *FEAR GOD*, go home and take about an hour on your own to think and pray through the questions for *FEAR GOD* Session 1 in this guide. Write down your thoughts, answers, and questions. This is your chance to decide if you are truly on board with what God is saying to you in *FEAR GOD*.
3. Gather with your group for your next discussion. If you would like to refresh your memory, watch *FEAR GOD* again. Address the questions that came up during your first meeting, and share any insights or questions from your personal reflection time with *FEAR GOD* Session 1.
4. After your second group discussion, go through *FEAR GOD* Session 2 individually. Again, write down your thoughts, answers, and questions.
5. Meet again with your group, and discuss your thoughts on *FEAR GOD* Session 2. Also during this time, brainstorm and record some ideas on how the messages in *FEAR GOD* can make your life look more like Christ's and your group more like the church God intended.
6. Repeat this same process for *FOLLOW JESUS* and *HOLY SPIRIT*.
7. After you've finished discussing *HOLY SPIRIT*, go through the bonus session (BASIC.LIVING) individually. Then meet with your group to share your thoughts and to further discuss your brainstormed ideas from step 5.

If you want to shorten this study, simply combine Sessions 1 and 2 and their corresponding activities after you watch each film for the first time. If you're leading a discussion group through *BASIC.WHO IS GOD?* check out the Tips for Leaders section at the back of this guide.

## FEAR GOD

### Session 1

Every person who comes into contact with God falls to the ground in fear. Maybe that statement surprises you a bit. We have become so familiar with the thought of God that many people can't imagine being afraid in God's presence. It's not uncommon to hear someone say, "When I get to heaven, the first thing I'm going to do is ask God why \_\_\_\_\_." And while the thought of having all of our questions answered is appealing, I think these statements reveal an overly casual view of God.

Personally, it makes perfect sense to me that we should be terrified in God's presence. The thought of coming face-to-face with an infinite, holy, all-powerful, all-knowing Being is disconcerting to say the least. But how often do we actually think of God like this? For most of us, it is difficult to consistently see God for who He truly is. And I think that's why we have a difficult time understanding the fear of the Lord.

On rare occasions, people in the Bible found themselves standing before God. They were going about their lives as usual, and then suddenly they were in the presence of unlimited power, of pure holiness. They didn't have to think about what it means to fear the Lord—they were absolutely terrified and fell on their faces as if they were dead. They didn't have to conjure up a feeling of fear, because fear is the natural response to God.

But we rarely see this type of fear in the church today. There are probably some good intentions behind this: It is important to understand God's love for the world and to view God as a caring Father—but in many cases, I'm afraid that we either don't understand who God is or, worse yet, we're embarrassed by some of His attributes.

Perhaps you've never really thought about fearing God. Or maybe you're a person who actually strives to understand and live with a healthy fear of God. Either way, God is who He is, and it is absolutely essential for us to come to God for who He is, not for who we'd like Him to be.

Psalm 111:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." There are many things that we could and even should study about God, but the fear of the Lord is foundational. The psalmist tells us that we can't even *begin* to live wisely until we come to a place of fearing God.

1. Why do you think the psalmist calls the fear of the Lord "the beginning of wisdom"?

Though the fear of the Lord is foundational, finding Christians who obviously fear God is the exception, not the norm. I think we've downplayed God's power and greatness on a broad scale for a long time. But rather than trying to correct the problem generally, let's start with you personally. Think about your own life. Consider the way you view God, and then answer the following questions.

2. As you examine your life, do you actually fear God? What evidence is there that you do or don't fear God?

3. We all have basic assumptions about God. Some of these are scripturally based; many are not. Try to honestly assess your view of God. Jot down a brief description of some of the ways you view God, and give a short explanation of why you've come to see God in these ways. (For example, "I picture God as patient and forgiving because my father is very kind.")

4. As we talk about God being terrifying, all-powerful, and in charge, what is your natural response? Don't think about how you'd like to respond; instead, tune in to the mental pictures, emotions, and bodily reactions that stir within you as you think about these things. How do these thoughts strike you? (For example, do you find yourself tensing up? Feeling peaceful? Growing defiant? Picturing God in a specific way? Remembering a scary person in your past?)

5. While we can't change God, it is helpful to tune in to our reaction to Him. What do your natural responses tell you about your view of and relationship with God?

Regardless of the degree to which we do or don't fear God, the people in the Bible who encountered God were terrified. A great example of this was the apostle John. Late in his life, John was sent to an island called Patmos as an exile because he was a follower of Christ. While on this island, he received a vision and saw the resurrected Jesus in all of His glory.

Read Revelation 1:9–18 slowly and carefully. We can be so quick to read right past important details. Try to get the feel of what John was experiencing. Throughout the book of Revelation, I get the impression that John is struggling to capture in human language a full sense of what he is seeing, hearing, and feeling. Yet his language is vivid. Allow yourself to experience this scene along with John. After you've spent some time reading and meditating on the passage, answer the following questions thoughtfully.

6. Try to picture what John was seeing. How does he describe his vision of Jesus?

7. Try to place yourself in John's shoes. Jesus suddenly appears before you as described in Revelation 1. How do you respond? What goes through your mind? (Try to be descriptive.)

While it's helpful to learn from John's experience with God, at some point you need to experience Him yourself. Granted, visions and face-to-face encounters are rare, both in the Bible and in our everyday lives, but we can't get around the fact that this Jesus who moved John to fall on his face is the same Jesus we worship, pray to, and love. Just because God has not allowed you to see Him in His full glory does not mean that you shouldn't fear Him. This is a part of what it means to walk by faith, not by sight. I have never seen God as Isaiah or John did, but I am absolutely certain that God is someone I should fear.

8. Take some time to consider your relationship with God. As you read these words, this all-powerful God is with you, right now. Rather than imagining what it would have been like for Isaiah or John to be in God's presence, meditate on the fact that you are in His presence right now. Spend ten to fifteen minutes in prayer as you immerse yourself in the reality of God's presence. Be careful not to revert to a more comfortable image of God at this point—see yourself in the presence of the fear-inspiring God who showed Himself to Isaiah and John. Talk with Him about what it's like to be

in His presence. Don't worry about what you think you ought to feel—this time of openness and honesty before God is invaluable. Write down any notes from your prayer.

9. After spending some time meditating on God's presence, write down a few thoughts. How does this understanding make you feel? How does it change the way you view God?

When John encountered Jesus, his vision was startling—he turned around and saw Jesus with bright white hair, fiery eyes, glowing skin, thundering voice, swordlike tongue, and face shining like the sun. I'm not surprised that John fell at his feet like a dead man. What surprises me is Jesus' response. I don't know what I would expect Jesus to say in a situation like this, but I certainly wouldn't expect Him to say, "Fear not."

Not until we come to grips with the fearful reality of who God truly is can we understand the security that comes from belonging to Him. In the next session, we will begin considering the impact of hearing Jesus' reassuring voice telling us to "Fear not." In the meantime, push yourself to maintain a strong sense of the fear of the Lord, and watch for ways that this fear can affect your daily thoughts and actions.

***Note: If you come from a traumatic background, such as growing up with an abusive parent, you may struggle when it comes to the principle of fearing God. You may have transferred some images onto God that don't belong to Him, our perfect Father. Now you need to hear the good news of session 2: God is scary but not abusive. This all-powerful God loves you without using you. God isn't tame, but He is trustworthy, and He says, "Fear not." God deals with each of us uniquely, and learning to fear Him will look different for those who have been abused.***

*If you come from trauma and you're inclined to panic or run away from the Jesus of Revelation 1, find someone to talk to about this. God's ultimate goal is to heal your heart so that you can embrace this Jesus. Healing takes time, and often the help of a mature believer who can bear your burden can keep you grounded in the Word.*

## FEAR GOD

### Session 2

The fear of the Lord leads to life. We all naturally pursue life and happiness, but who would think to start with fear? Initially, fearing God seems like it would make us unhappy and lead us away from life. After all, the fear of the Lord led John to fall on his face like a dead man. When we talk about fearing God, things can get emotional, but happiness is one emotion that usually doesn't come into play. And I think that's why the fear of the Lord has become so unpopular. We are a people who want to "think happy thoughts."

But what do we do with a statement like Proverbs 19:23 (NASB): "The fear of the LORD leads to life, so that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil"? We are prone to pursue life and satisfaction by avoiding fear, but Solomon tells us that fear is actually the place to begin. When we encounter God, we can't help but fall over in fear. But God is the source of life and satisfaction, and until we come to God as He is, we will never find what we're looking for.

Consider the apostle John. We've already read of his encounter with the risen Jesus in Revelation 1. While in exile on a small island, he heard a voice behind him. As he turned to see who was speaking, he saw Jesus in all of His resurrected glory. His hair was bright white, His eyes were aflame, His voice roared like the ocean, His open mouth produced a sharp two-edged sword, and looking into His face was like staring at the sun. John's response was simple: "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead" (Revelation 1:17).

Though John's encounter is much different from the way most people typically think about Jesus, this was reality. In an instant, all of John's speculations about what it would be like to see Jesus again became irrelevant. There was no time to think about how one ought to respond to Jesus—no chance to find answers to life's nagging questions—there was just Jesus. And having seen Him for who He truly is, John fell at His feet like a dead man.

In the last session of this guide we considered what it would be like to stand in John's shoes. This is an important step in coming to terms with Jesus-as-He-is, rather than Jesus-as-I'd-like-Him-to-be. We can't pick and choose aspects of Jesus that fit our needs and agendas. He is who He is. And just like John, we must face reality and come to that place of fear. Only then will we begin to understand who God is.

Once again, read Revelation 1:9–18 slowly and carefully. Try to place yourself in John's shoes—experience what he experienced. Last week we focused on the fear that John felt. This week, however, focus on Jesus' response to John. When John falls over like a dead man, how does Jesus respond? Be careful not to rush this. After you've spent some time reading and meditating on the passage, answer the following questions thoughtfully.

1. It's clear that John found himself in a terrifying situation. So why do you think Jesus told John to "Fear not"?

John rightly understood that he could not stand in Jesus' presence. I don't know what John was thinking when he "fell at his feet as though dead," but I'm certain that what came next was a shock to him. John says it so simply: "But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not'" (Revelation 1:17).

2. Place yourself in this moment. You have just seen Jesus in His full glory and have fallen on your face in terror. What is it like to feel Jesus' hand on your body and to hear His reassuring voice say, "Fear not"? (Try to be descriptive. Imagine yourself in the scene. How do you respond emotionally? Physically? Cognitively?)

The fact that this wasn't John's first encounter with Jesus makes this passage even more fascinating. Remember that John was one of Jesus' twelve apostles. He spent three years living closely with Jesus. He was there when Jesus was crucified. He even spent time with Jesus after His resurrection. John was very familiar with Jesus—he went as far as to refer to himself as the "disciple whom Jesus loved." After Jesus ascended into heaven, John remained a devoted follower. In fact, that's why John was on the island of Patmos—he had been sent into exile for ministering on Jesus' behalf.

So when John encountered Jesus, I would picture it being a warm reunion. The fact that John fell on his face shows how overwhelming it is for a human to stand in God's presence. But Jesus' response demonstrates His continued love for John. John couldn't control the fear he felt, but Jesus was reassuring. John was still loved and accepted.

Sometimes we downplay the fear of God because we want to make sure people know that God loves them. We want them to feel secure in their relationships with Him. But why can't God be terrifying and loving all at once? Doesn't the fear of God amplify His great love for us? That's exactly what John experienced. He didn't need Jesus to hide His glory and majesty from him. Jesus showed up, John was terrified, and Jesus gently laid His hand on John and told him not to be afraid.

As counterintuitive as it may seem, when we remake Jesus into a more "palatable" version of Himself, we actually diminish the greatness of His love. We would expect a cuddly Jesus to tell us not to be afraid (though He probably wouldn't need to). But when we hear those same words from the mouth of this all-powerful Jesus whose words are like a two-edged sword, there is a profound difference.

3. Why does it mean more to hear "Fear not" from the real Jesus, rather than a tamer version of Jesus?

4. What is the difference between being loved by a toned-down, lovable Jesus, and being loved by this Jesus who appeared to John in all His glory?

Allow Jesus' words to John to really sink in. After telling him not to be afraid, Jesus said, "I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Rev. 1:17–18). Spend some time thinking about what these words mean. John knew that Jesus had died—he witnessed it. These words that Jesus spoke to John must have carried a lot of meaning.

5. Why would the words "I am alive forevermore" have been a huge comfort to John?

6. Though Jesus said these words directly to John, they carry profound meaning for us as well. Spend some time meditating on His words: "Fear not. I am ... the living one.... I am alive forevermore." What difference should it make to your everyday life that Jesus is alive forevermore?

Until we come to the point of fearing God, our relationship with Him will be superficial and distorted. But once we come to that place of fear, we will find that there is nothing else to fear. Seeing God in all of His power and glory allows us to see beyond ourselves, to see that this life is all about Him. And when we understand that this fear-inducing God loves us unconditionally, all other fears subside. As Paul says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

7. What things in your life right now are sources of fear?

8. How does fearing God change the way you view these fears?

Fearing God opens up a new depth in our relationship with Him. This is one of those important truths that serve as a foundation for the Christian life. When I first began to truly fear God, I found that it changed many things about the way I viewed and followed God. We will explore some of those aspects in the weeks ahead.

9. Spend some time in prayer. Take some time to picture Jesus as He appeared to John. Picture Him laying His hand on you and reassuring you that you don't need to be afraid. And then pray to Him. Talk to Him for who He is—high and exalted, yet gentle and loving. Ask Him to continue to use these truths to change the way you think and live.

***Note: When we talk about God as a loving Father who defends and protects His children—when we say that there is nothing else to fear—a very important question comes up. The question looks a little different to each of us, but it sounds something like this:***

*If I have nothing to fear as a child of God, then why did \_\_\_\_\_ happen to me?*

Where was God when I was raped? Why are Christians martyred for their faith? There are answers to these questions, but we simply won't know all of the reasons behind our suffering on this side of eternity. One thing that we can say with confidence is that God often uses horrific events for a greater purpose. The Bible includes many examples of this, in addition to what God still does on a daily basis.

Consider Joseph, for example. His brothers sold him into slavery. From there, he was falsely accused and imprisoned. But God had a greater purpose for Joseph's suffering. From the rock bottom of an Egyptian prison cell, God raised Joseph up to rule over all Egypt. He even used Joseph to preserve human life in the midst of a famine. And when Joseph's brothers apologized for selling him into slavery, Joseph replied without hesitation: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

Or consider Job. After all that God allowed him to go through, God never explained Himself. Job simply had to trust that God had greater purposes behind his suffering.

I don't know the reasons behind the intense pain in your life. But I know God is good. I know pain and suffering exist in this world because we have rebelled against God. God created a perfect world, but from the moment that we sinned against Him, this world has been filled with suffering and death. The incredible truth of the gospel is that Jesus died to restore the world to what He intended it to be. As Paul says, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18).

Though we will have suffering in this world, we can still look to God as a loving Father. And when we see Him in this way, we really do have nothing to fear. This world still has people and situations that can inflict terrible pain: rape, the death of a child, war, excruciating illness, unemployment, cruelty (to name only a few). Jesus knew that people can and often do harm us physically and emotionally. But He pointed us beyond these things to a deeper reality: "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" (Matthew 10:28). Sometimes it's hard to believe that the things people do to us in this life can't kill the soul, but it's true—they can scar it, but they cannot destroy it.

In preparing His disciples for the suffering that they would soon endure, Jesus said, "You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives" (Luke 21:16–19). There is something so beautiful about Jesus saying, "*Not a hair of your head will perish*" in the midst of explaining that some of His followers will be killed. We are not promised health, wealth, or the American Dream, but Jesus loves and cares for us as His children.

These answers can come across as glib or uncaring—but only if we try to use them as quick fixes. Ultimately, these answers don't point us to a method or even a state of mind. Rather, they point us to a Person. They point us to the only Person who truly understands what is happening in this world. Only He has an eternal perspective on what we encounter every day. And that Person is our loving Father, our friend, and our husband who gave up His life for us, His bride. Don't trust an answer; trust God. See Him as the only one to fear, and as the only one who can truly love and care for you in the midst of any and every circumstance.

*If you are suffering now, or have suffered in the past, or are facing suffering in the future that causes you to question whether God is really keeping you safe from ultimate harm, take some time to talk with Him about it. Tell Him what has hurt you and what scares you. Talk to the Jesus who has been through profound suffering and death and came out the other side. Talk to the Jesus who claims to hold the keys of death.*

# Tips for Leaders

A good discussion leader doesn't need to have all the answers. Who has all the answers about following Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit? Only God. You will probably learn more about following Jesus in the power of the Spirit than anyone in your group, because you will have a chance to practice depending on the Spirit each time you lead.

## Discussion Leader's Job Description

Your job is simply to:

- Prepare for each meeting
- Keep the discussion moving so that it doesn't get stuck on one question
- Make sure everyone has a chance to talk and no one dominates (it is not necessary that every person respond aloud to every question, but everyone should have a chance to do so)
- Bring the discussion back on track if it veers off on a tangent
- Decide when to move on to the next question
- Make sure the discussion remains respectful

## Preparing for the Discussion

If you decide to follow the suggested sequence in the "BASIC Process" section at the beginning of this guide, study it and make a clear schedule for the group. Be sure to go through each study session yourself, and review the questions before each meeting. Also, if you can, view the film before the group sees it for the first time.

It may be helpful to arrange chairs in a U shape around the television so that everyone can see the screen and one another. You'll want to dim the lights in the room somewhat so that the screen is clear, but provide enough light so that people can see one another's faces. (You could darken the room to view the film and then turn on a light for your discussion.)

Pray before each meeting for the Spirit's leading. Ask Him to help you sense His guidance as you lead the discussion. Also, spend time praying for your group. You can't talk anyone into fearing God or being filled with the Spirit. Pray that the Spirit of God would fill your lives and do the impossible in and through you. In the book of Acts, the human actors were just ordinary, weak people, but the Holy Spirit accomplished unbelievable things through these ordinary people as they prayed and submitted themselves to following His leading. May that be the case with your group.

## Guiding the Discussion

A few ground rules can make the discussion deeper:

- *Confidentiality*: Whatever is said in the group stays in the group. Nothing is to be repeated to those who weren't there.
- *Honesty*: We're not here to impress each other. We're here to grow and to know each other.
- *Respect*: Disagreement is welcome. Disrespect is not.

The discussion should be a conversation among the group members, not a one-on-one with the leader. You can encourage this with statements like, "Thanks, Allison. What does everyone else think?" or "Does anyone have a similar experience, or a different one?"

Don't be afraid of silence—it means group members are thinking about how to answer a question. Trust the Spirit, and wait. Sometimes it's helpful to rephrase the question in your own words. Then wait for others' responses, and avoid jumping in with your own.

Be honest with the members of your group. If you desire to grow and change, you will motivate others to do the same. Be open about areas in which you welcome the group's prayer and support. Allow people to challenge your thinking.

Answers that are true to biblical teaching are important, but the BASIC series is most concerned that people may study God and never *know* Him, never be *changed* by Him. With every session, keep asking yourself and your group: "How should this change us? If we really submitted our lives to God and opened ourselves up to His power, what would He have us do? Where would He have us go?" At the end of the day, it's about following Jesus in the power of the Spirit in order to accomplish what God has placed us on this earth to do. It's about advancing the kingdom of God. It's about His will being done on earth as in heaven.