



The Fear of the Lord

Fear Not #4 | October 1, 2023 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Preached by Steve Howell

Opening



Back in the late 80s and early 90s, Contemporary Christian Music included some classic tunes, and perhaps none was bigger at the time than a song by the late Rich Mullins.

[Ask the worship team to come back up for this one]

The song was called “Awesome God.” Some of you might know it. Some of you might love it; others might not. It has a few awkward lines, it can get repetitive, and the poetry isn’t the best...but the content is biblical, and it presents an important concept. Let’s sing it together...and please consider the lyrics as you worship!

*When He rolls up His sleeves
He ain't just putting on the Ritz*

Our God is an awesome God

*There's thunder in His footsteps
And lightning in His fists*

Our God is an awesome God

*The Lord wasn't joking
When He kicked 'em out of Eden
And it wasn't for no reason
That He shed His blood
His return is very close
So you better be believing that
Our God is an awesome God*

*Our God is an awesome God
He reigns from Heaven above
With wisdom power and love
Our God is an awesome God*

*And when the sky was starless
In the void of the night*

Our God is an awesome God

*He spoke into the darkness
And created the light*

Our God is an awesome God

*Judgment and wrath
He poured out on the Sodom
Mercy and grace He gave us at the cross
I hope that you have not
Too quickly forgotten that
Our God is an awesome God*

Chorus (x2)



“Our God is an AWESOME God.” We can sing that together and agree that those words are true, but let’s make sure we know the **seriousness** of what we are singing.

The word “awesome” just doesn’t have the power it used to. It is a term that has been watered down. Thanks to decades of pop culture use, “awesome” now simply conveys approval (*it’s great, it’s cool, it’s excellent, it’s...awesome*). It’s associated with Ninja Turtles and surfers and the LEGO movie (*“Everything is awesome!”*). But the real meaning of the word is much deeper.

“Awesome” means something that inspires *awe*, and *awe* is an emotion that combines wonder and worship...but also terror and fear!

To say that our God is “awesome” is to put him in a category that should make us cautious. It connects Him to the concept of “fear” that we have been discussing recently in our sermon series!



Review

Over the past few weeks, we’ve explored “fear” as it applies to us as followers of Jesus. Through this series we wanted to help you **recognize** fear, **face** fear, and **fight** fear.

- So, in the first sermon we **explored and defined** fear. While fear is a natural human **emotion**, you and I have an **obligation to master** that fear by **CHOOSING to trust God** in the face of it.
- The next week, we explored the **anti-virtuous sin of cowardice**, and concluded that focusing on what we “**ought**” to do is the best way to avoid being a coward.
- Last week, we were **curious** and looked at the **biblical commands** to be **courageous**, answering all the **pressing questions** to help us **encourage** one another.

We’ve learned that fear is the wrong CHOICE, cowardice is the wrong ACTION, and courage is the right RESPONSE. I feel pretty good about our approach to the topic...but we can’t have a sermon series about fear without addressing the idea of God’s “awesomeness.” We can’t ignore that one of the most frequent biblical uses of the term fear is in connection with God Himself: “the *Fear* of the Lord.”

You’ve heard it in Scripture. It shows up prominently in places like Proverbs:

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7, ESV)

You'll see the full phrase more frequently in the Old Testament than the New Testament, but the concept is present in both. Those who worship God are to *fear Him*.

I want us to worship God at TCC, so I want all of us to know what it means to fear the Lord...and I want all of us to embrace that fear. I want the Fear of the Lord to be obvious to anyone who sees us!

Now, I know what you're thinking. "Steve, you've spent three weeks trying to get us to *avoid* and *overcome* fear...and now you want us to *embrace* it?"

Yes. Yes, I do!

I shared several of my own fears in the course of this series (blood drives, heights, kissing pigs). Those fears are ones I wish would disappear. But the kind of fear we'll discuss today? I want it to be something I remember every day. I want it to be my attitude and approach to God. I want to know that my God is awesome and to have the appropriate kind of fear in response!!

And I want you to join me.

So, brace yourself as we look at this final aspect of Biblical fear. Let's be in awe together!



Fear God (The Verb)

The Bible makes it clear that we are to fear God. It is often presented as an action or a choice. "To fear" is a verb. It is something we do.

In the first sermon on fear, we said that "Fear Not" was a *choice* to focus on God instead of the thing that causes dread. The same applies here. "Fear God" is a *choice* to focus on God...not "instead of" the thing that causes dread, but because HE IS the thing that causes dread.



To Be Afraid of God

There are good reasons to be afraid of God!

Afraid of God's Power

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus said:

"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." (Matthew 10:28, ESV)

You should absolutely be afraid of God's power! Last week, we talked about God's infinite quality of "omnipresence." He is everywhere! But this is only one of his infinite qualities. God is also:

- **Omniscient.** He has the ability to know everything that can be known.
 - o *"Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit."* (Psalm 147:5, NIV)



AFRAID OF GOD'S POWER

"Don't let men threaten you, who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28, ESV)

AFRAID OF GOD'S POWER

• Omnipresent
• Omniscient
• Omnipotent

- There is no limit to God’s knowledge – he knows everything past and present and future. He knows everything that can be known, from the number of atoms in the universe to the thoughts of every person who has lived. God may choose to ignore some knowledge (such as “forgetting” the sins of the saved), but this does not take away from His complete knowledge of everything.
- **Omnipotent.** He has the ability to do anything that can be done.
 - “Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”” (Matthew 19:26, NIV)
 - There is no limit to the power of God. Objections to this idea usually stem from proposing a logical impossibility (such as a five-sided triangle, or the creation of a rock too large for an all-powerful God to lift). But if something can be done, God can do it. The concept of omnipotence does not require that God HAS to do everything he is able to do, but simply that he has the ABILITY to do all of these things.

These “omni” qualities of God are doctrinally true, and they should be scary! Certainly, a God who is all-present, all-knowing, and all-powerful can be a terrifying Being.



Example: Even a less-powerful, less-knowing, and less-present source of authority is scary enough. As a child, you knew this truth well. Your mom or dad could inspire fear when you disobeyed or did something wrong. He had *the look*; she had *the tone*.

As a dad, I am thankful that I don’t have to slip into “dad mode” very often, but if I have to I can inspire fear.

** By the way, Dads (and moms), you have this power but you need to be very careful how you wield it. Do NOT use it excessively – not all the time, not over the top, not out of control, and certainly never in a manner that could be called abuse!*

There must be goodness and love that restrains that power and keeps it in context.

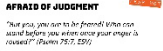
If you’ve been the victim of someone abusing that power, it may be hard to think positively about God in this way. But...God is better.

God’s other qualities – his love, his justice, his goodness, his mercy – restrain His power and keep his infinite qualities from being used improperly or capriciously. He is a good Father! But knowing that He has the ability to go into righteous “Dad mode” with all possible power, knowledge, and presence makes God frightening and awe-inspiring!

You *should* fear God because of His power.

Fear of Judgment

You should also fear God because He will USE that power.



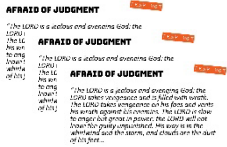
“But you, you are to be feared! Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused?” (Psalm 76:7, ESV)

Scripture shows us a God who is patient and restrained in judgment. He is slow to act. But we should never mistake patience for inaction. God is willing to act when He determines that the time is right.

God’s moral qualities – his love, his justice, his goodness, his mercy – restrain His power, but they also guarantee that God WILL act!

- A God who is perfectly “just” is aware of sin and WILL do something about it (maybe not in the timing we wish, or in the manner we wish, but He WILL act).
- A God who is perfectly “good” will work to eliminate evil, and He will succeed when He chooses to.

If you are on the wrong side of God’s justice and goodness, you have every reason to fear the wrath of God! Listen to one of the prophets of the Bible, Nahum, as he receives and declares God’s message of judgment to Israel’s enemies, the city of Nineveh and the Assyrians:



“The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and vents his wrath against his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger but great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and dries it up; he makes all the rivers run dry. Bashan and Carmel wither and the blossoms of Lebanon fade. The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it. Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him. The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into the realm of darkness.”
(Nahum 1:2–8, NIV)

That is not a weak, impotent God! That is a frightening God, terrifying to wrongdoers!



To Revere God

Because of these qualities, we can’t view God as many do...as a tame or benevolent deity to approach casually and flippantly. We must worship Him in full awareness of His majesty and power.

“Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.” (Psalm 2:11, ESV)

The attitude you choose to have isn’t one of cowardice with God. It isn’t terror; it is **reverence**.



Ex: Some of you in this audience are gun enthusiasts. You love to use your guns! We’re in a part of the country where that can be said without much worry of violence (unless you’re a deer or a goose). You are excited to own them and use them for hunting or for sport.

How do you train someone to handle that firearm? You teach them to respect its power and danger! You help them know what could happen if they are careless or reckless. Keep the barrel pointed down, keep your finger off the trigger until you're ready to shoot. Never point it at anything you don't intend to kill. Yes, you can marvel at its beauty and power, but you handle it with care.

That's how you need to handle God – with reverence and fear. Knowing what you know about His power, you must show AWE and FEAR while you LOVE and OBEY. That choice is crucial and important. Scripture even frames it as the most important choice in life:

TO REVERE GOD

"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind." (Ecclesiastes 12:13, NIV)

"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind." (Ecclesiastes 12:13, NIV)

"Fearing God" is a *choice* to revere a powerful, amazing, and righteous God.

And that choice – the VERB "to fear" – leads to a NOUN.



The Fear of God (The Noun)

As Scripture continues to use fear in a positive sense, it moves beyond just the choice or action...it moves to something more. Fear isn't just a verb; it is a noun: THE Fear of God.

The Noun-Verb Connection

NOU-VERB CONNECTION



Language is full of important subtleties. One is the connection between nouns and verbs. Some verbs (actions) can be done in such a way that "doing" becomes "something."

- **Love.** I can love (verb) someone. But in the process of *doing* loving things, my actions become the thing itself. They become love.
- **Joy.** I can choose to rejoice (verb) in something good. But in the process of celebrating and remembering and rejoicing those good things, my actions become the thing itself. They become joy.
- **Patience.** I can choose to wait (verb) for something that hasn't happened yet. But in the process of sitting there day in and day out, my actions (inactions?) become the thing itself. They become patience.

The habitual practice of an action or choice can become the thing itself. It becomes your disposition.

A Fearful Disposition

Habitual actions create a disposition or attitude that aligns with those actions. Such is the case for fear.

If I habitually "fear God," I develop a fear-ful disposition or attitude that we call "the fear of the Lord." This is a quality that Scripture celebrates!

A FEAR-FUL DISPOSITION
"And he said to man, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.'" (Job 28:28, ESV)

A FEAR-FUL DISPOSITION
"The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death." (Proverbs 14:27, ESV)

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*"**The** fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death." (Proverbs 14:27, ESV)*

*"So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in **the** fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied."*
(Acts 9:31, ESV)

The "Fear of the Lord" appears both as a personal quality and as a corporate (whole congregation) quality. It is something followers of God should aspire to have; it is a mindset that a church should have as we worship Jesus.

The Fear of the Lord helps us to see Jesus for who He really is.

- Jesus isn't just the little baby Jesus in the manger we picture at Christmas.
- Jesus isn't just the great teacher and moral instructor we envision among the crowds.
- Jesus isn't just the suffering Savior we envision on the cross as he takes the penalty for our sins.
- Jesus is also the conquering, heavenly King of Kings we see revealed in the last book of the Bible.



"I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." (Revelation 1:12–18, NIV)

We should have a disposition of fear, awe, and reverence when we remember this Jesus!



The Fear of Isaac (The Identity)

My prayer for us is that this fear isn't just a singular choice or action...that it isn't just habitual and regular action that becomes a disposition...

My hope is that it becomes more than a noun – that it becomes a PERSONAL NOUN. The Fear of God should be an identity!



Ex: I was getting Deb a drink from her favorite tea shop the other day and the cashier was wearing a shirt that said "Fear of God" as the emblem. I was excited! She's a cute

girl, super nice, and I was thinking, “My son needs to find a woman like this! Someone who’s unashamed about declaring her awe of God!”

But before I did anything awkward and try to set him up on a blind date or anything, I did a little research. As I was waiting for them to finish making Deb’s drink I discovered that the label wasn’t a declaration...it was a brand. There’s a clothing line of streetwear called “Fear of God” that has luxury hoodies and sweats in muted colors and plush textures. It wasn’t a theological statement...it was a fashion statement!

The Fear of God (sadly) was not her identity. But the Fear of God IS the identity for some people!

In the book of Genesis, we find a statement that has one of the coolest off-hand references in the Bible. It’s a statement made by Jacob (who you might know as Israel). He’s in the middle of some family drama, and he’s angry with his uncle, Laban. I won’t get into the details, but as Jacob talks to Laban he points out God’s help in his situation:

GENESIS 31:14
“The God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, has not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night.”

*“If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the **Fear of Isaac**, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night.”* (Genesis 31:42, ESV)

Did you hear that? As he describes his God in relation to his God-honoring ancestors, he calls God “The Fear of Isaac.” It’s a description found only in this section, but it speaks volumes!

God is known in relationship to this man. Isaac (the speaker’s dad) had such a disposition of reverence toward God that everyone knew it. It was so much a part of his identity that his own son describes God through that relationship.

God is the God that Isaac *fears*. He is the God that Isaac *reveres*. He is the God that Isaac knows is *awesome*!

Don’t you want your relationship with God to be known like that?

- Like Job, who is described in Job 1:8 as “blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” (Job 1:8, NIV)
- Like Cornelius, who is described in Acts 10:2 as “devout and God-fearing.” (Acts 10:2, NIV)

I pray that your own devotion to God would lead me to call Him “The God Cindy Fears,” or “The Awe of Larry,” or “the Fear of Derek.” I pray that we all hold God in such esteem that true fear/reverence/awe is our ongoing, habitual choice!

I want the following description to apply to us:

HEBREWS 12:28-29
“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”

*“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with **reverence and awe**, for our God is a consuming fire.”* (Hebrews 12:28–29, ESV)



Closing

In this series, we learned that fear is the wrong CHOICE, cowardice is the wrong ACTION, and courage is the right RESPONSE.

But the FEAR OF GOD is the RIGHT CHOICE, whether you are cowardly or courageous. I pray that our discussions have helped you begin mastering and dissipating your other fears...but don't let this one fade! Hold on to the fear of God in every circumstance.

- Choose to fear His power and judgment.
- Revere His name.
- Practice that trembling worship...all the time!
- Make it your habit, and make it what you're known for.

In other things, "Fear Not..." But in response to your Creator, "Fear God."

Prayer

Invitation

For our invitation today, I want us to revisit the song we started with: “Awesome God.” I hope that it has deeper meaning for you after considering the Bible’s teaching on “the Fear of the Lord.”

As we sing, I invite you to take whatever posture you find most appropriate. You can stand tall, arms raised in worship; you can sit in contemplation; you can kneel in respect. Choose your posture to honor and revere our God as truly “AWESOME” while we sing this final song today.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Notes

(Proverbs 1:7)

Fear God (The Verb)

To Be Afraid of God

Afraid of God's Power *(Matthew 10:28; Psalm 147:5; Matthew 19:26)*

Fear of Judgment *(Psalm 76:7; Nahum 1:2-8)*

To Revere God *(Psalm 2:11; Ecclesiastes 12:13)*

The Fear of God (The Noun)

The Noun-Verb Connection

A Fearful Disposition *(Job 28:28; Proverbs 14:27; Acts 9:31; Revelation 1:12-18)*

The Fear of Isaac (The Identity) *(Genesis 31:42)*

(Hebrews 12:28-29)

Sermon Discussion ?s

Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- Who is the most intimidating person you've ever respected? What makes them intimidating? What makes them respectable?

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- When God is described as “awesome,” what other adjectives come to mind? Are they more connected to amazement or to dread? Explain your answer.
- How is the fear of God different than any other type of fear?
- Read Matthew 10:28. Why is it right to fear God? How often do you consider this life-ending power of God's? How does it motivate you to share the gospel?
- What are the three “omni” words that describe characteristics of God, and what do they mean? (Start typing “God is omni” in a Google search if you need help). Why might these qualities make God terrifying? What qualities of God keep them from being terrifying?
- Read Nahum 1:2-8. How do you feel after reading this description of God's wrath? Should the Christian fear God's judgment? Why or why not?
- Read Proverbs 14:27. Explain what it means in your own words.
- Read Revelation 1:12-18. Is this the image of Jesus you regularly picture? How is it similar or different? Does it cause you to have more fear or less fear (awe/reverence) of Him? Why?
- How can the fear of God motivate you to serve others better?
- Would your family or friends think about your reverence for Him when thinking about God? How can you build up your awe for Him?
- What have you learned from this sermon series? Share your biggest takeaways from “Fear Not!”

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Pray for your respect and awe of God to increase. Ask Him to remind you of his awesome power this week, and then praise Him for it!