

Ancient Wisdom for Today: Relating to God The Wise Person Fears God

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7).

The word fear has two very distinct definitions. The most common use is that of anxious concern or dread – being afraid. The other is to venerate – to have reverential awe.

These two forms of the word fear occur throughout the Bible and frequently in the book of Proverbs. The foundational principle for Proverbs is the fear of God. Proverbs 1:1-6 tells why the book was written. The next verse describes how all wisdom begins – with the fear of God.

Although God deserves our reverential awe, disrespect toward Him abounds. As if He is on call to do our bidding and supply our every desire, He is often referred to as the Man Upstairs or the Great Father in the Sky. Worse still, His name often comes in front of a curse word.

A.W. Tozer, who wrote *The Knowledge of the Holy*, states, “the essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts that are unworthy of Him.”

Anyone visiting the President of the United States, the Queen of England or any other national head of state would first be taught the proper protocol to exercise while in their presence. This would include how to dress, what to say and what not to say. No one would expect otherwise.

Yet many argue that God’s protocol is unjust. Anyone wanting to stand in His presence must come with clean hands and a pure heart – obtained only through Jesus Christ. In His parable of the wedding feast, the man without the proper wedding garment was cast away into darkness. Access to God came at a high price – the price of His Son. Jesus provided the pure white garments for us.

God knows our hearts and whether we respect Him. *By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy and before all the people I will be honored (Leviticus 10:3 NAS).*

The wonder of a proper fear of God is that it results in removing fear of everything else. If you fear God, you need fear nothing else. John Newton, who wrote *Amazing Grace*, put it this way, “’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.”

For further study:

Underline “fear of the Lord” throughout Proverbs and discuss the verses.

Compare the two types of fear in the following verses: Psalm 27:1, Proverbs 3:24, Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Peter 5:7, 1 John 4:1

The Wise Person Strives to Understand

The knowledge of the Holy is understanding (Proverbs 9:10).

Knowledge without understanding is like a car without gas. The possibility is great, but the missing element is essential.

At some point in every person's life, there are questions to be answered. Who is God? Who am I? What is the purpose of my life?

The wisdom book of Proverbs states its purpose from the very beginning. In the first six verses of chapter one, the word understanding appears three times. There are only five chapters in the book (Proverbs has thirty one chapters) where understand or understanding does not appear. In the chapters where it does appear, many have multiple entries.

Understand or understanding is used either in the positive as a wise person who understands or the negative as in a foolish person who lacks understanding. It is clear that it takes work to understand life. The easy, lazy way of life leads to a lack of understanding.

Ordinarily, we associate understanding with our mind – our intellectual discernment. However, God examines our hearts, knows our hearts and judges our hearts. In the Bible, the heart is equal to the seat of our emotions, our inner being, who we really are. Often in Proverbs, the wise person is instructed to *apply your heart to understanding*. If our understanding were only intellectual, we might not apply the principles we have learned for service.

In order to answer the questions of life, we must get to know the one who created us. We need to get to know God. There is no one like Him.

There are some excellent resources to help us understand the nature of God and His attributes. My favorites are *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A.W. Tozer and *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer.

The primary source is God's Word itself. Tozer advises us to throw away every comparison word like trait, characteristic or quality when we think of God. We cannot know everything about God, but we can discover those things He has chosen to reveal about Himself. Then, and only then, can we answer the questions, "Who am I" and "What is my purpose?" Those answers are tied to who God is, what He has done for us and what His plan is.

For further study highlight every time "understand" or "understanding" appears in Proverbs discussing the positive and negative implications.

The Wise Person Obeys God

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17).

One of the first words most children learn is “no.” Human nature resists rules. For his own good, however, parents need to set limits for their child. Playing in the fenced yard is OK. Playing in the street is not.

A parent’s responsibility is to help God mold the character of his child. A compassionate parent is also one that is in control. Even when a child does not yet understand the rules set by his parents (never touch a stovetop, don’t run with scissors), he should be confident that there is good reason for them.

The child can trust his father to know what is best. Rules are boundaries for character development and protection.

Laws in society are similarly put in place for protection. When they are no longer in place, human nature often takes over with disastrous results. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans gave us a glimpse of what that was like.

Jesus is the only human being who obeyed His Father’s commandments completely. He willingly submitted Himself to our human limitations. As a Man, He learned obedience (Hebrews 5:8) and set an example for us.

His perfect life and sacrificial death released us from the bondage of the law. The law itself is good, but since we are incapable of obeying it perfectly, it was a bondage to us. Jesus’ gift of grace made reconciliation to God possible.

As Christians, we should trust God. We see in His laws His hand of guidance and protection. Jesus fulfilled the law for us and summarized all that it represented in His new commandment to love one another as He loves us.

Believers are to be in submission, not under bondage. There is a difference. We are free in Christ. Submission is voluntary. Bondage is not.

We should look at the commandments of God like a child views the instruction of his parents. The boundaries and guidelines are for our protection and our growth.

For further study, highlight all the passages in Proverbs concerning law and commandments. Compare the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) with these passages in Proverbs. Examine how disobeying the commandments can harm your Christian life and witness.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2)

The Wise Person Accepts Discipline

For whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights (Proverbs 3:12).

Discipline and punishment are often used interchangeably, but they are not the same. When someone sees a child acting rudely in a public place, you might hear her say, "I wish his parents would discipline that child." What she often means is that she expects the parent to punish them for their bad behavior.

Punishment carries the idea of inflicting a penalty for an offense. Discipline is training someone to obey a code of behavior. Discipline may include a spanking after an infraction if that is needed, but never with the intent of harm or with anger. Correction and instruction are the goals. Depending on the child's personality, a conversation about the offense or removal from the store may have the same effect as a spanking would for another child.

The root of discipline is also the word for a follower of Christ: disciple. Aids to spiritual growth are often called spiritual disciplines. Discipline is the voluntary mental and active submission to God's will. A disciplined Christian can disciple other believers.

Richard Foster, author of *Celebration of Discipline, the Path to Spiritual Growth* says, "The classical disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths." He lists spiritual disciplines as: inward disciplines (meditation, prayer, fasting, study); outward disciplines (simplicity, solitude, submission, service) and corporate disciplines (confession, worship, guidance, celebration). He carefully warns against turning any spiritual discipline into law.

Spiritual discipline is connected with the idea of guidance and correction. Just as a loving father corrects his child in order for him to develop a good character, God lovingly guides, corrects and instructs, knowing that when one of his children has willingly received his correction, he is able to help others.

The disciplined believer is:

- Loved of God (Proverbs 3:11-12, 13-13).
- Living according to God's standards (Proverbs 6:20-23).
- Listening to God speak (Proverbs 1:1-7; 13:1; 15:5, 31; 25:12)
- Learning every day (Proverbs 9:8-9; 10:8; 12:1; 13:18; 15:32; 25:12)
- Leading others to do the same. *Patently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching (2 Timothy 4:2 NLT).*

Hear counsel, receive instruction, and accept correction that you may be wise in the time to come (Proverbs 19:20 Amplified).