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Proverbs 1:7 "Fear of the Lord" November 4, 2018

Proverbs Chapter 1 verse 7. It's our intention on Sunday mornings to go through a group of Proverbs that we may just take a couple of verses each time, but the Proverbs kind of repeat themselves and they'll give us different aspects. So we're only going to look at verse 7 this morning, but this verse and what's attached to it is repeated a dozen times in this book. It is an easy book to lay out. In fact, we will go through until Christmas or so. I intend, if the Lord allows, to teach II Corinthians on Sunday mornings, verse by verse, starting next year.

But like I said, this is an easy book to lay out. Verse 1 tells you the primary author; verses 2 through 6 tell you the purpose for which it is written; verse 7 is the principal that drives it. The motto of this book is that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Verse 10 of chapter 9 says it is also the fear of the Lord, the beginning of wisdom. From verse 8 forward through the end of Chapter 9, it is a bunch of letters that Solomon wrote to his son to give him advice. From Chapter 10 through the middle of Chapter 22 they are a compilation of Proverbs written by Solomon, and they are recorded for us one or two verses at a time. From the middle of Chapter 22 to the end of Chapter 24 they are described as the wise sayings of Solomon, but they weren't compiled by Solomon. They were compiled by King Hezekiah, and so he put these together and made these available for us. And then by the time you get to Chapter 30 and 31, just a couple of more -- one written by a fellow named Agur, one written by King Lemuel that his mom taught him. But they are mostly Psalms of Solomon, wisdom that God gives to him.

If you've been with us going through the Old Testament, Solomon was a child of David. He followed his dad to the throne. He ruled from 971 through 931 B.C. He built the temple, the first temple. He wrote the book of Ecclesiastes that you also have in your Bible. What was interesting about Solomon early on was that when his dad died, the Lord came to Solomon and said, "What can I do

for you as the new king?" And Solomon said, "Well, my dad was a pretty good ruler. He walked with you all the days of his life. You gave him a lot of insight and wisdom. That's what I want, because I have no idea what I'm doing. There's all these people. I don't know what to do with them. So if You could just give me the wisdom to make good judgments and to care for Your people, I would be happy." And the Lord was pleased with Solomon's request. In fact, He said to him, "Because you didn't ask for riches or long life, but you asked for wisdom, I'm going to make you wiser than any man." In fact, the Bible describes Solomon's wisdom as a wisdom that no man before him had ever had, nor would any man after him. So the smartest guy in the world, ever, aside from the Lord Himself, was Solomon. So that right away you want to read everything he has to write, don't you?

We are told in I Kings Chapter 4 that he wrote 3,000 proverbs -- we don't have 3,000 of them, but that's what he did; that he wrote 1,005 Psalms; that his wisdom was known worldwide. When the queen of Sheba came to meet him, she said, "In my country, I've heard about your wisdom and your prosperity and the words that you spoke, and I never believed it until now I've come to see you. And they didn't tell me half the truth about the wisdom that you had." Solomon describes himself in Ecclesiastes Chapter 12 as the preacher who is wise, who went to teach the people knowledge, that he pondered and sought out many Proverbs and acceptable words, words of truth that he could set out before the people, and like -- like goads, the words of scholars were like well-driven nails by one shepherd. So Solomon is a man that is very unique in the world, and certainly in the context of the Bible, and we are given by the Lord his writings to be wise by.

The word proverb, "mashal" (maw-shawl) in Hebrew, means parable, or if you will, comparison. Most of the proverbs are either written in terms of contrast with something else, or by comparison with something. Something that you understand clearly, to try to help you understand things you don't maybe understand so readily. The Proverbs are more practical in living application than they are doctrinal. There's doctrine, but that's really not their emphasis. What we will learn, I hope quickly, is knowing a proverb, saying it or memorizing it is certainly not enough. Solomon will write in verse 8 and 9 of this chapter to his boy, "Here's the wisdom that you can live by, but you got to wear it like a jewelry

around your neck. You've got to live it out if it's going to help you." So only a fool would know the truth and not follow it.

Imagine Solomon -- we read in Ecclesiastes and other places as well, that Solomon for a while in his life did not follow the advice that he knew he should follow. That's got to be the worst. You know better; right? Did your parents ever say to you, "You know better"? Solomon knew better. In fact, he knew better than anyone. He was the wisest guy that ever lived. And he ignored his own wisdom, spent years chasing after a life without God. It's the subject of the book of Ecclesiastes. Married a lot of women who turned his heart away from the Lord. Fortunately, at the end of his life he came back to the Lord. Fully expect to meet him in heaven. But he made some pretty bad choices around the latter portion of his life.

And so it is our intention to pick various topics out of the Proverbs that are covered in a lot of chapters and try to cover them in 35 minutes with you, which will be interesting.

I heard a story a couple of years ago of a fellow that got a flat tire out on the road right next to an insane asylum. And there was a gate up and one of the inmates was running around. And the fellow got out and he had a flat and he was upset with himself, and he was kind of grumbling. And he got down and took the lug nuts off the tire. He threw them into the hub cap. As he went to stand up, he stepped on the hub cap, and all the lug nuts went rolling into the street and they went right down the sewer drain. And he just went, "Oh, you've got to be kidding me." And he looked over and the guy kind of just watching him. Didn't know what to do. And finally, he -- the inmate said to him, "You know what I would do if I were you?" "Yeah, what?" "I would just take one lug nut off each of the three remaining tires, put that tire on there tight, go slow, and get to a gas station." The guy went, "Wow. You're in there and I'm out here. That's brilliant." He said, "Well, I might be crazy, but I'm not stupid."

All that to say this: Why do we as Christians so often, like Solomon for a portion of his life, have such availability to information and wisdom and knowledge, and so foolishly set it aside? Why do we ignore what God has

to say when we fully know what God has to say? It's not like we can claim ignorance. I would say this to you in terms of our church: 99 percent of the people that come in for counseling here do not come for information. They have it. They come for inspiration. They don't want to do it. And so they'll -- they'll even want to bounce around. "Is there anyone else I can talk to? Like maybe you'll tell me to do something different than that guy will tell me." They know the Bible. In fact, most of the time you can say to people in for counseling, "What do you think the Bible says?" And they'll get it right. But it's in doing that then becomes the problem. So we fancy ourselves to be living outside the fence, so to speak, in terms of sin and being lost and living in darkness, and yet we're stumped to find solutions for our life when we have the Bible to go by and God's word to follow.

We read in verse 7 here, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and only fools would despise the wisdom and the correction that it brings." In Chapter 9 verse 10 it says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Wisdom is nothing more than the application; right? Knowledge is information; wisdom is what to do with it. What do I do with what I know? So our greatest concern, as Christians should be to maintain a relationship with the Lord, because the minute my fear of the Lord goes away, my whole life is messed up. If the vertical goes, the horizontal doesn't stand a chance.

And you'll find this little term "fear of the Lord" well over 100 times in your Bible, and if you write them all out, and you'll have four or five pages of information that adds to your understanding of the fear of the Lord. What is it and how should we have it? In fact, let me ask this of you: What today do you not do because you fear the Lord? If someone said, "Hey, let's go to --" "No, no. I can't. I fear the Lord." And what things do you do, even if you don't want to do them, but "I should do those, because I fear the Lord"? What does the fear of the Lord do in your life? Do you have it? And does it move you?

Well, let me tell you what it isn't. The fear of the Lord is not some superstitious kind of servile, fearful dread of God. I grew up in a house with a father, at least when I was young, that seemed to think that running his household by fear was the best way to go. I think

his intention was good. But he could put the fear of God in you. And it was a hard place to grow up. There was always this apprehension that I'd do something that dad wouldn't be happy with. You add that to parochial school for 12 years, and an algebra teacher with a paddle, and I was pretty much messed up. Hardly what the term "fear of the Lord" has in mind.

When the Lord spoke to Israel, His people, He said to them, "I'm not like the god of the Canaanites, and you shouldn't be like the Canaanites in your ways of life." If you go back just historically and look at the Canaanites' way of life, they served horrendous gods. They were taught that they always needed to be sure they were pleasing their gods. If not, you had a price to pay. These gods demanded you put your children in the fire as sacrifice. And the people lived in dread of these gods. Driven by the devil, their perception was just depraved. That's not the kind of fear of the Lord God wants for you. If you look at the life of the Greeks -- I mean, the Greek gods were -- and the Greeks ruled the world for years. They were infantile, they were hostile. And the Greeks, bar none, dreaded their gods. They were told that they had to placate them. They weren't even told how. They were just told when things went bad, "Oh, you probably made one of the gods mad." "Which one?" "I don't know." "What do we do?" "I'm not sure." When Prometheus, one of the Greek gods, took pity upon the humans when they were cold and it says that he gave them fire, when the big dog Zeus found out about it, angry that one of his underling gods would be so kind to the humans, Greek mythology said he chained him into the middle of the Adriatic Sea and then sent vultures to eat out his liver piece by piece. Welcome to Greek mythology. Can you just see reading that to your kids at bedtime? "And then he ate his liver."

You may have heard people say sometimes when you say, "Hey, how are things with you?" And they'll go, "Oh, we're fine, knock on wood." That's a dumb thing to say. Don't say that. It comes out of a German belief that the gods lived in the trees. And the gods don't want you to be happy and if they find out you're too happy, they'll take away from you what you have, so people began to say this: "I'm good," and then knock on wood, so they don't listen to what I'm about to tell you, how things have been going good for me. Those are misrepresentations of the Lord. That's not the way God is.

We had a pastor, you might remember, 15 years ago in Tulsa, Oklahoma, who went into a prayer tower and he said this to his congregation: "God is holding me hostage. I can't come down until you give me \$8 million." That's a misrepresentation of God. And I remember hearing it and thinking, gosh, I hope he stays up there forever. May he never come down.

I went this week and looked online, because there's a lot of churches now that broadcast their study, like we do, all over the world. We get the nicest letters from people in parts of the world we probably would never get to. But I went and looked and I had looked at 300 church sermons this week to see what the topics were. None of them were fear of the Lord. There were studies on -- let me try to remember what they were -- "Finding Peace and Keeping It," "A New You" -- a new you! You need a new you -- "Faith and Your Way to Success." There was some silly stuff. And I thought, really? If you go back to the 19th century -- and I realize we're reaching -- the number one sermon topic in the church was the fear of the Lord. The sermons, the articles, the books, the publications were all written about the attitude of the church and their relationship with God.

We live in a consumer mentality church today. People want to hear about the love of God and the mercy of God or the long-suffering of God, as long as you don't go too long in telling them about that. They want forgiveness messages and blessing messages and healing messages, but they don't want to hear about the justice and the holiness of God. That's something they don't sit still for very long. I have a theory, I'll run it by you: I don't think the average unbeliever has any problem with the love of God. I think if you talk to most unbelievers, they will say stuff like, "Well, I know God loves everyone." They're right. That's not the problem. The problem is God is going to judge sin. That they have a hard time with, the justice of God.

I had a friend, a Calvary Chapel pastor, maybe seven or eight years ago had a couple come to his church. Came and introduced himself after the sermon, said it was their first time there, and he said, "What brought you here?" And the guy said, "Well, I know and I've heard that you're a loving church, and that you'll allow us to just live the way we want. So my girlfriend and I have

decided to move in together. We're just kind of that progressive couple. We don't believe in marriage. But we know that you won't require anything of us and that we can just come here and be loved by the people." Good luck, Pastor, with that. He said, "Well, you're right, God does love you, and you can come to church just as you are, but you should know this: He loves you enough to not leave you that way. And if you come here, you're going to be very uncomfortable in the decisions you make that are contrary to God's Word." You see, fear of the Lord is more than a pat on the back and a permission to do what you please. And if you sacrifice truth at the altar of love, then you make everyone sick.

So fear of the Lord. When Paul wrote to the Romans in Chapter 3, he said in verse 18, "There is no fear of the Lord in their eyes." He described the world as a place where a fear of the Lord doesn't exist. Can't be found. Skip Heitzig years ago called it an Oprah Winfrey relationship with God. She was, at least on her show in those days -- and I have no idea. I've never seen it -- but pointing to people and saying, "God loves all of these people." And she didn't mean like God loves man, she meant God loves these abhorrent lifestyles and the love of God was a justification that they could live the way they wanted.

If you jump just to the end of this chapter, verse 29 of Chapter 1 you read the Lord saying, "Because they hated knowledge and they did not choose the fear of the Lord, and they didn't want any of My counsel and they despised My every rebuke. Therefore, they will eat the fruit of their own way, they'll be filled with the fullness of their own fantasies. And the turning away of the simple will slay them, the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever would listen to Me can dwell safely, and be secure without fear of evil." So good to know that the fear of the Lord brings life.

My personal persuasion is that what the church today lacks more than anything else is a true fear of the Lord. I think we've worked really hard at bringing the bar as low as possible. We want to fit in, we don't want to be different, we don't want to be persecuted, we don't want to be criticized. And so we just keep pulling that bar down so slow that pretty soon we can't tell you from the world. And so my life is lived the way I please, and I can find people in the church even who feel the way I do.

If I like gossip, I got gossipy friends, and I won't say to my gossipy friends, "Would you knock that off? That's not pleasing to the Lord." Because that would cause friction, so I'll just find gossipy friends. I can just find that bar. This is where I'll live. But that's not life, at all. And God will deal with us because of that. God does love all of us, but He wants to change us so we'll be more like Him.

We read in Hebrews Chapter 12 about the Lord saying, He's a Good Father because He chastens His children. What is the fear of the Lord? Well, first and foremost, it is a position you take when you've discovered God's love and who He is, and you get an occasion to respond. The word fear, "yirah," (yir-aw) when it is applied to God always is translated compassion or reverence or awe or respect. It is a position that you take that says to you -- to your heart and you say to the Lord, "You're God, I'm not. You saved me. I didn't save me. I owe You my best. I am convinced that You're right." It's not a sentimental feeling, but it is an understanding of God's love. It's not cowering in fear; it's giving God a proper place in your life, because one day you and I are going to stand before God and give an account.

So let me ask you again, what will you not do today because the fear of the Lord drives you? I don't mean the fear of your dad or mom or your friends. Just -- it's the fear of the Lord. "Hey, buddy, you want to go with us over here?" "No, I can't." "Why?" "Because I fear the Lord."

When I was young, as a young Christian, I had a brother -- in fact, he's recently come back to church here now to haunt me. And I'll introduce you to him sometime. But he took me under his wing as an 18-, 19-year-old boy, and he stayed with me for four or five years and just drove home the need for me to know God through His Word. The best help I've ever had. I'm so glad that he's here helping some of the folks that he's working with. But in any event, he said to me one day, he said, "Where are you going this weekend?" I go, "Oh, I got a party going Friday night. Yeah, it's going to be great. I'm looking forward to it." And then he said this: "Do you think the Lord will be happy with that?" I go, "I don't know." He said, "Would you take Jesus there?" And I thought, shut up, man. You ruined my whole weekend. I haven't even gone out yet. Will you just knock it off? But that

stayed with me. It bugged me for years. I remember leaving the house sometimes and saying as I went out the door, "Lord, if you could just stay here. I'll be back by like 11:00." "Bless me, watch over me, but really, I don't think you're going to like where I'm going." And it bugged me.

The fear of the Lord is a spiritual mind-set that says everything that I do or think or act or want to be should be filtered through the question, Would this please Him? Does He like this? Does this honor the Lord? Would He approve of this? Would he sign off on this movie I'm going to; with these friends I'm hanging around; to the things I'm about to say in secret or whisper in somebody's ear? Would the Lord be happy with that? Because the Lord is love. He loves you. But He's also just and fair and righteous and holy, and there are things He doesn't like. And it is the fear of the Lord that will keep you from doing those things. A true fear of the Lord.

There are things I could not do because I'm terrified of my father's reaction. I had a party once where my parents went to Vegas. They were supposed to be home Sunday night. They came home Saturday afternoon. There were 200 people at my dad's house. He was not happy. I never did it again. And he knew I would never do it again.

The fear of the Lord is such a humbling kind of influence that causes me to submit my life to Him. He knows better. He's got it figured out. He knows how to fix things. I have all of the information I need. He has my best interest in mind. He deserves my best. We read in Proverbs Chapter 8, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil." But if I fear the Lord, it's the beginning of knowledge for me. It's the beginning of wisdom for me.

So do you fear the Lord? Or are you moving the bar wherever you seem to be comfortable with? I'd love for you to be able to say to someone as a response to "Why are you doing that?" "I'm doing this because I fear the Lord." Why are you getting your Bible out at lunch and reading it at the counter? I fear the Lord. Why are you sharing with someone that hardly wants to listen to it? I fear the Lord. I have a respect for, in my heart, the things of God.

There's a good story, if you've -- I don't know if any of you -- you probably have read the Chronicles of Narnia. It's an allegorical tale. It's not the easiest thing to read. C. S. Lewis made a great book though in illustrating our relationship with the Lord in kind of allegorical sense. But he tells the story of two girls, Susan and Lucy, who were being taken by Mr. and Mrs. Beaver to meet Aslan. Aslan is a lion. He's a type of Christ in the allegory. And Susan said to the couple, "So he's not a man, he's a lion? Is it safe to see him? I don't think I've ever met a lion. Kind of scares me." And Mrs. Beaver responded and she said, "Well, you're right, Susan. No one that I know of has ever stood before Aslan without their knees knocking, unless they were fools and didn't even realize who He was." And Lucy chimed in and she said, "Well, then is it safe?" And Mr. Beaver said, "Who said anything about safe? But I'll tell you this: He's fair and he's good. And after all, he is the king of the jungle." It's a pretty good illustration.

You can't just live on the love of God without the fear of God. He can't just be the big guy upstairs, who gives me a high five and puts up with everything I do. He's also a holy God, a just God. And there needs to be that balance between the two.

When David wrote Psalm 34, he wrote, "Come and taste and see that the Lord is good, that every man who trusts in Him would be blessed." You know, oh, that's what I want. The very next line says, "And fear the Lord, you His saints! There will be no lack to those who fear Him. Come and I will teach you the fear of the Lord." Come and taste and see. God's good. He's a blessing to be around. He's got a lot of things for you, but learn to fear Him.

The word "beginning" here is a word that means preeminence in Hebrew. It doesn't mean just do this first and then do something else. It literally means in everything you do, let this be the first thing you do. Let it take first place. Let it be the controlling interest. Let it be the principal thing. Start here. Have a fear of the Lord.

When Solomon came to his senses, having spent years of time and millions of dollars and using all of the power that his office provided for him, and he ran down every

rabbit trail to find life without God, he came up to the end of Ecclesiastes in Chapter 12, and he wrote, "Let us hear the conclusion of this kind of life, the end of the matter." Here's what I've learned: You should fear God and you should keep His commandments, and that's really all your job is. If you can develop a healthy fear of the Lord, you already know of His love, you'll be fine. It'll be the step towards maturity that you want to take.

When Moses stood up there in Deuteronomy and delivered that 30-day message to the children of Israel sitting right on the borders of the Promised Land, and he gave them all kinds of instructions. In Chapter 10 he said to them, "Now, Israel, you know what the Lord your God requires of you, and this is what He wants from you: He wants that you fear the Lord your God, that you obey Him, you love Him, you serve Him with all of your heart and soul, that you follow His commandments and embrace His statutes, which He gives you today for your own good." That's what He wants from you, a fear of the Lord. We need to find that in the church, where people will say to their neighbors and friends, "I'm not doing that." "Why?" "Because I fear the Lord. I'm not afraid of Him, I respect Him. I stand in awe of Him. I bow my knee to His wishes. I owe Him my life." It's the first step towards maturity.

A fear of the Lord will keep you from evil. It kept me from evil with my dad, I'll tell you that. Proverbs Chapter 16 -- again, back to the book of Proverbs -- that says this: "In mercy and truth atonement has been provided for your iniquities; and by the fear of the Lord one will depart from evil. And when a man's ways bless the Lord, even his enemies will be made to dwell with Him in peace."

A fear of the Lord will keep you from evil. You remember the story of Joseph in -- way back there -- Genesis 39, and Joseph was given a charge in Mr. Potiphar's house. He was in charge of his household, his checkbook, his businesses. But Mr. Potiphar had a wife that was on the prowl, and she liked that young guy, Joseph, good-looking guy in the house, and so whenever Mr. Potiphar was out of the house, she'd knock-knock and wink-wink, and "Hey, baby. How you doing?" I'm pretty sure that's right there in your original Hebrew, "Hey, baby, how you doing?" Pretty sure. You take a look. Anyway, one day she grabs him and she says, "Hey, go to bed with me. Lie

down with me." And he -- young guy. Most young guys would have gone, "Yeah!" Proud of himself. Joseph said this: "There's no one greater in this house than me. Nothing has been kept back by your husband from me except you. And how could I do this great wickedness, sinning against God?" This young man was kept in check by his fear of the Lord. A fear of the Lord will keep you from evil.

When you begin the book of Job and God begins to describe to you this remarkable man, He starts by saying of him that he was blameless and upright. He was a man who feared God and who hated evil. Because those go together. If you have a fear of the Lord, you're going to hate evil. You're going to go, I think I'll just -- oh, I shouldn't do that. The Lord said not to.

When Nehemiah came to power in Jerusalem, became their governor, in Chapter 5 of Nehemiah he begins to describe the government that he was running, and he said, "You know, the governors that were before me, they laid a lot of heavy tax burdens upon the people. They took wine and bread at their cost. They demanded 40 shekels of silver from every household. They let their servants run amuck and serve themselves. And it was just -- the people were being abused. And then he -- then there's this comment, it says, "But I could not do so because of the fear of the Lord." Nehemiah had every right, or every position, every power, to just serve himself, to take advantage of the situation, to use people for his own benefit. But what stopped him was a fear of the Lord. He was absolutely in charge. No one else could have stopped him.

Fear of the Lord will keep you from evil. Fear of the Lord will add depth to your spiritual life. In Chapter 14 of Proverbs we will read, "In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence, and His children by the fear of the Lord will find a place of refuge." I like that. So often when I go to do something I believe God wants me to do, there's always critics that will tell me otherwise. "Well, dude, this is the 21st century. Come on now. You're dreaming." No, no, no. I'm just fearing the Lord. They want to discourage me from doing the right thing, but I can have strong confidence. You know, people say, "Well, this is the 21st century." It doesn't matter what century it is; God's word doesn't change. It wasn't written this century, just useful to this century.

Wasn't written last century. God said it once, He goes, "That's perfect." No eraser when He was writing.

It gives me strong confidence. It gives me a place of refuge. If somebody says to me, "Man, you're always going to church." I like it in church. It's safe in church. I don't ever cuss in church. You'd hear me and get mad at me. "Hey, did you hear what the pastor did?" "Yeah, yeah. He used that word." Now, if I'm out by myself, you never know, but with you, awesome, man. Safety in the presence of God's people.

It says in Proverbs Chapter 14, verse 27, that "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life." A fountain of life. People go, "Ah, so restrictive." No. It's intended to bring life to you. Not restraining, it's liberating. You do what God says, life comes your way.

I mentioned the example before, but if you've never been to New York City to the R.C.A. building, there is a metal work out front of the R.C.A. building that has Atlas holding the world over his head. And it's a beautiful work, but you can tell it's a lot of weight. Atlas has got, like -- well, he's one of those guys; right? So he's got, like, every sinew straining and his face is all grimaced, "I got the world." But if you look just down the street you can see, and it's only a block and a half away, St. Patrick's Cathedral where they have the Lord holding the world, and He doesn't seem to be sweating at all. "Yeah, I got it right here." He's smiling. Everything's good.

Fear of the Lord. No strife, man. Confidence and refuge and joy and blessing. In fact, in Proverbs 10 it says that the fear of the Lord will prolong your days, while the years of the wicked will be cut short. I think you'd be foolish to try to convince yourself you're going to live as long as the Lord intends if you are living against His will. A lot of people who cut their lives short, that God has good plans. But if you walk with God and you make the right calls, you're going to avoid all those things. You're going to live every day that God has planned for you. There will be no burning out, no fizzling out, and no checking out.

I always think about Noah. The Lord says, "Build an ark to save your family. It's going to rain." It had never rained. He'd built for 120 years. Everyone laughed at

him. He built in the middle of the desert, miles away from water at all. And he stayed with it. And here's what we read: "Noah moved in fear." He respected what God had to say more than anything else. He respected what God had to say more than the criticism of his contemporaries. And what did he do? He prolonged his days and that of his family. In fact, they're the only eight that got prolonged days. Everyone else on the day of the flood checked out.

You can read in the book of Acts, and we've been going through that on Wednesday nights, but Luke is good at, like, along the way putting these summary statements where he'll tell a story and he'll go -- and then he'll kind of summarize. In Chapter 9 of Acts at the end, verse 31, it says that the churches in Judah and in Galilee and in Samaria had peace. And then it says this: "As they were walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplying." It's one of the first times that you read the church growth being a multiplication factor. Before then it was just adding, now it's multiplying. And the only description of this church in that summary statement was, they walked in the fear of the Lord.

I think if you and I walk in the fear of the Lord, life will change and it will start with us. You'll not do a lot of things that you allow for now, because you'll have to say, "I wonder if the Lord's into this." Let what bothered me bother you: Is the Lord going to be able to go with you? You suffer with it for a while. I had to do it for a long time. It's a great question though. Would God say that? Would God go there? Would God hang out with these people? Would God go to see that movie? Or spend money in this place? What has the fear of the Lord done for you and what can you let it do for you from this day forward? Because it's the beginning. It's the most important thing you can do. Amen?