



A resource to spark biblically-centered conversations with your kids about the issues they face in today's youth culture.

# FEAR OF THE LORD

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*God's power commands holy fear. He is not "safe" as the world defines it, but He is sovereign and mighty. This fear isn't terror that makes us want to hide from God, but a holy reverence that draws us near to Him. When we have a proper understanding of God's character, our fear moves from terror to awe and intimacy.*



WORLD



## What is Happening?

- Teenagers are interesting creatures. On one hand, it is a time of self-exploration and rebellion against authority. On the other hand, it is a time of confusion and frustration as they learn what it means to navigate life as separate beings from their parents. In my experience of working with teenagers, you end up with a mix of "I do what I want" and "please tell me what to do."
- Teenagers want to be their own person and express their independence, but at the same time, they are desperately afraid of doing it wrong.
- For kids who have been raised in the church, this leads to one of two ways of viewing God. They are either so terrified of him and his judgement that they seek to earn their favor through obedience like a slave with their master (servile fear), or they see him as the old man in the sky who is just trying to ruin their good time with all his rules and restrictions. This often leads to a flippant or superficial view of God where they don't understand that God's commands come out of his love for us and are always for our good.
- Unfortunately, neither of these is a biblical way to view the Lord. If we want our children to have a biblical view of God and live in light of that, we must help them understand what it means to live with a filial fear of the Lord, where they are in awe of who God is and seek to grow closer to him.



WORD

## What Does God's Word Say?

**The gospel reveals to us what it means to fear the Lord.** Because of what Christ did, we no longer need to be afraid of God and his judgment. Thankfully, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven. The punishment God requires for sin—death— was satisfied by the substitutionary death of his own Son in the place of sinners. In rising from the dead, Christ defeated the power and penalty of sin so we no longer stand condemned before God. We who were once God's enemies (Romans 5:8), living in fear of the holy God who demands we be punished for our sin (Romans 3:23), are now reconciled to God and can pursue a relationship with him. Instead living with servile fear, terrified of God and his judgment, we can move towards filial fear. Christ's death and resurrection took away the need for servile fear as God's judgment has been satisfied for those who trust in Christ. As God's adopted sons and daughters, we no longer need to be afraid of God in the servile sense, but should live with filial fear by seeking to honor our heavenly Father and protecting our relationship with him through obedience and worship.

**God's character gives us reason to fear the Lord.** If you are a Christian, you are called to walk in the fear of the Lord, respecting his authority over you as your Creator with a desire to please him with the way you live. This is part of your identity in Christ. When we read the Scriptures and see who God really is, we read that He is a God of holiness who demands righteousness, but also a God who is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love, so much love that he saved his people from their sin with the sacrifice of his Son. We should be so in awe and so filled with gratitude that we are moved to worship and obedience.

**Walking in wisdom requires that we fear the Lord.** The book of Proverbs reminds us several times of the connection between fearing the Lord in a biblical way and walking in wisdom. If we want our teenagers to be wise, to have the ability to apply the truths they've been taught with discernment in order to live a life in accordance with God's will, we must help them understand what it means to fear the Lord. Proverbs 9:10 says *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."* Proverbs 15:33 says, *"Wisdom's instruction is to fear the LORD, and humility comes before honor."*





**WALK**

## Conversation Starters and Questions:

**A good place to start is asking your teens what how they understand what the Bible says about God. Do they view God as a distant, uninvolved being? Do they view God as a grumpy old man trying to kill their fun? Do they view God as so loving that he couldn't possibly punish them for their sins? Ask them how they arrived at their conclusions.**

If your child does not have a proper biblical view of God, spend some time helping them correct their thinking. The Bible, along with the creeds and confessions of our faith, have a lot to say about who God is. In order for our children to live in fear of the Lord, they need to have a biblical understanding of God that reflects his full character, not just the attributes we tend to focus on. Read these passages with your child and challenge them to compare their current view of God with what is taught in these texts.

***Here are just a few places you could turn:***

- Genesis 1-2
- Psalm 139:1-18
- Psalm 145
- Romans 11:33-36
- 1 John 4:7-12
- Westminster Shorter Catechism Questions 4-12
- Heidelberg Catechism Questions 26-28
- Apostles' Creed

Once you've helped them establish a biblical view of God, you can talk to them about how their view of God should shape the way they respond to God. If your child only sees God as love and not just, they may be using his grace as a license to continue in sin. If they are so terrified of his judgment that don't see his grace and mercy, they may fall into legalism. If they see God only as a rule giver without a proper understanding of his sovereignty, they are likely to buck his authority.

**Learning to walk in fear of the Lord is a lifelong process. We will never do it perfectly this side of glory, but it is only when we have a proper view of who God really is that we will be motivated to worship and obey Him as only he deserves.**



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*“And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, **conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.**”*

**– 1 Peter 1:17**