
¹ Praise the LORD!

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practise it have a good understanding.
His praise endures for ever!

Psalm 110:1-10 (ESV)

Have you heard of ‘FOMO’? ‘FOMO’ is an acronym standing for ‘fear of missing out’. It's a modern-day catch phrase with a similar meaning to "the grass is always greener" idiom that has been around for ages. FOMO is basically an anxiety or apprehension around the idea that others might be experiencing something that you're not. It's the fear that your experiences aren't good enough when compared to those of others. Social media definitely doesn't help anyone who experiences FOMO.

Fear is simply a part of life. God equipped us with it so we would be wise enough to protect ourselves from the unexpected. So fear can be good, but fear can also be bad. Life can be risky and it is therefore filled with opportunities or reasons to fear or have anxiety. When we use the word fear, we mean all levels of fear from general apprehension and worry to dread and terror. Fear starts out when we are very young with fears of things like darkness, monsters, etc. and it continues into our teenage years with fears of things like rejection, humiliation and failure. Adulthood is also filled with possible fears such as fear of disease, death, financial problems, broken relationships, loved ones being hurt, storms, failure, aging, crime, etc.

Fear has many uses. It can be used as a warning to keep you from entering into a situation that might hurt you. It can be used to motivate you away from something, such as a harmful relationship or a dangerous situation. It can also be used by others to control you.

Courage doesn't mean you're never scared. But it helps you control your response to what scares you. We as Christ-followers are told to have another kind of healthy fear and this one is spiritual. We are told to “fear the Lord.”

The Psalmist (along with many other people in the Bible) says this: “*The fear of the LORD* is the beginning of wisdom.” The question is, “Is wisdom in fearing God?”

As we reflect on these words through the Psalmist, it is also important to remember their context. This will help us understand how to respond to ‘fear’, and to have a healthy and proper ‘fear’ in our lives...

The author of Psalm 111 begins by saying, "Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly" (Ps. 111:1).

Psalm 111 is one of the dozen or so alphabetical psalms in the Bible. Each of the 22 lines in the Hebrew poem begins with one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Psalm 111 and Psalm 112 are also 'twins' in that each verse from each Psalm parallels one another, with Psalm 111 focusing on God and what He has done (with Ps.11:10 speaking of a proper response to what God has done), whilst Psalm 112 speaks of how we may respond to these various things (cf. Ps.112:10 and how those who do not believe in God do not respond in the 'proper way').

Psalm 111 begins with "hallelujah," initiating a whole series of psalms (Psalms 111-118) in which the word "hallelujah" reverberates, occurring eight times at the beginnings and endings of these psalms.

Verse 1 of Psalm 111 suggests that its words are those of an individual worshiper giving thanks to God in a public setting of worship; the council of the upright and the assembly. While some scholars suggest that these two terms imply different groups of people, the first a small group that gathered around the worshiper and the second the entire congregation of worshipers, most make no distinction between the two.

The words "I will give thanks (yadah) to the LORD" tie Psalm 111 to the psalms that precede it in Book Five (Psalms 107-150). In Psalm 107, the reader encounters the words "Give thanks to the LORD" in verses 1, 8, 15, 21, and 31. They occur as well in Psalms 108:3 and 109:30.

Verses 2-4 of Psalm 111 describe God's "works" and "wonderful deeds." The Hebrew word translated "wonderful deeds" is *niphla'oth*. It means "something that I simply cannot understand," or "something different, striking, remarkable; something transcending the power of human intelligence and imagination." The word is used many times in recounting the events of the exodus from Egypt. We find it in the stories of the ten plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, the manna, the provision of water in the desert. All of these are referred to as "wonderful deeds," things transcending the power of human intelligence and imagination.

Verses 2-4 culminate in verse 4b's refrain "the LORD is gracious and merciful." These are two of the self-declarative attributes of God given to Moses in Exodus 34:6. God declares, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." In Psalm 111, the word order is reversed ("merciful and gracious" in Exodus 34; "gracious and merciful" in Psalm 111) because of the constraints of the acrostic structure of the psalm.

In verses 5-9, the psalmist outlines the wonderful deeds of God. In verse 5, God gives "food," a reference perhaps to the giving of the manna and quail in the Wilderness (Exodus 16 and Numbers 11). Verse 6's "the inheritance of the nations" suggests God's giving of the Promised Land to the Israelites (Deuteronomy 6-7). The "precepts" of verse 7-8 are part of the Torah, the instruction of God given at Sinai (see Psalm 119:27, 104, 173). And verse 9's reference to "deliverance" summarizes the actions of God in the Exodus and Wilderness wanderings.

Verse 9 concludes with the words "he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name." With God described as "awesome" in verse 9, the proper response of the worshiper in verse 10 is to "fear the Lord." The word "fear" (yara') appears in the Hebrew Bible as a synonym for "love" (Deuteronomy 10:12); "cling to" (Deuteronomy 10:20); and "serve" (Deuteronomy 6:13; Joshua 24:14). The Hebrew word for "fear" is powerful in meaning, but it has more to do with feelings of awesomeness. It is more about being in the presence of the holy other with cautious reverence than it is about the sweaty-palmed, shaking, gasping for breath kind of fear we often experience. When we enter into a relationship with the God of the Bible, it is a high calling. It is a dangerous, a reverent, a fearful relationship.

What does it mean to fear God? Some may say this means to have a 'healthy respect' for God and His ways, and this is true. Just like we can have a healthy respect for fire which warms us when we are cold (or the sun, which gives life to the world), so we respect God for who He is. At the same time, we need to be afraid of fire because it can be so terribly destructive (and the sun is a great big nuclear reaction).

The Bible says that God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:28-29 says, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire'."

But this 'fear of God' is not so much being afraid of God.

Again and again the Bible says we may approach God with confidence [Heb.10:19], and 'God is for us' [Rom. 8:38-39], and 'He will never leave us or forsake us' [Heb.13:5]). Fearing God means having such a reverence for Him that we acknowledge the great impact He has on our lives. At the same time this 'fear of God' leads to respecting Him, submitting to His discipline, and worshipping Him in awe.

The Psalmist says: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His precepts have good understanding. *To Him belongs eternal praise.*

Regarding 'Wisdom' the Apostle Paul says this (1 Cor.1:30): "You are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." St. Paul goes on to say (1 Cor.1:31): "Therefore, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Jesus is 'wisdom from God'. His 'wisdom' brings us 'righteousness, holiness and redemption'. In relation to Psalm 111:10 we may say that the wise person is not only the person who heeds God's word about how we are to live (His various commands), but the person who also recognises God's deeds of salvation for us, and thus is a person who seeks to worship Him, and their foundation in life is in Christ, and in Christ alone...

Remember this: in all the trials and challenges of life Jesus Himself is 'Wisdom' from God. Yes – Jesus has many words about the 'way to live life'. But Jesus also speaks about *being* life itself (John 6:35; 11:35; 14:6).

Every day we may meet people who are afraid. They fear the loss of health, loved ones, money, jobs, reputations, and dreams. We know how this feels, but we also know that our lives don't belong to us as much as they belong to God. Everything we have is a gift. We don't have to worry about controlling anything, because we are not the ones who rule the universe. Thus, we 'fear God'.

We don't fear God because we worry He will hurt us, but because He loves us so incredibly much. If you don't fear God you'll fear everything else in life. If you do fear God you won't fear anything else because nothing in the past, present, or future is beyond the power of God who loves you.

True wisdom consists of not knowing how to live life itself, but to know life itself. Jesus is life. The wise still worship Him. To Him belongs eternal praise. Amen.