

# *A Holy Fear*

Trading Lesser Fears for the Fear of the Lord

Christina Fox



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*A Holy Fear*

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To my mother-in-law, Judy,  
*who taught me the joy of fearing the Lord  
in the face of lesser fears*



## SAFE IN HIM, OUR TALL TOWER

*The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.*

—Proverbs 18:10

When fear rolls in like a storm cloud  
and overshadows my mind,  
I freeze and cower like a prey,  
My thoughts jumbled and confined.

I quit before I ever start;  
the journey is danger-filled—  
all the unknowns, risks, and what if's.  
Life pauses at a standstill.

I live an observer of life,  
watching time pass on by me  
while my fears consume and control.  
How I long to be set free!

Then I open Your Word and read  
of one good and full of grace.  
The Great I AM who keeps and saves  
and calls me before His face.

He rules and reigns over all;  
None can thwart His will and plan.  
All creation bows before Him—  
none can snatch me from His hand.

Before Him all fear fades and shrinks  
at Yahweh's might and power.  
When we fear Him above all else,  
we're safe in Him, our tall tower.

—Christina Fox

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## PREFACE

Dear Friend,

Have you ever had a conversation with someone that you never forgot? For the other person, it may not have been remarkable, but for you it was memorable—even life changing. In my life, one such conversation took place between my mother-in-law and me.

A number of years ago, our family went to a theme park together. I spent much of my time standing at the exit to each ride, waiting for my children to come out and tell me how amazing it was. At one point, my mother-in-law and I stood beneath a ride that was high in the air. I casually commented that since having children, I found myself having difficulty with heights. As I looked at the ride towering above me, I could already feel my stomach drop.

My mother-in-law commented, “I used to have a lot of fears. But since the worst thing imaginable happened and God brought me through it, I don’t have much to fear anymore.”

It was a brief interchange and probably one I would have forgotten but for the fact that I had so many fears in my life. I couldn’t get her comment out of my mind, and it spurred me on to consider what it might look like to have less fear. It

made me think about her widowhood at a young age and her testimony of God's grace in her life over the years since—of her faith and trust in who God is and what He has done. And I considered how a person progresses from having a great fear of things and circumstances to a great trust in our great God.

And that led me to study the fear of the Lord.

This book is about fear. It's an emotion we are all familiar with to one degree or another. While this book does touch on some of the fears we experience in this life, such as the fear of harm or of the future, the emphasis of the book is on a greater fear, the fear of the Lord. The Bible teaches us that to overcome our fear of lesser things, we must replace it with something greater. And what could be greater than God?

You might consider this book a systematic theology of sorts on the fear of the Lord. I will unpack what the Bible has to say about it. I will look at what it means to fear the Lord, why we are to fear the Lord, how to grow in that fear, the fruit of such fear in our lives, God's promises to those who fear Him, and what it looks like to trade our lesser fears for the fear of the Lord.

An additional note for those who experience fear: We are not just physical beings nor are we only spiritual beings; we are both, and as such, each aspect of our being affects the other. This means that our fears can affect us physically, or vice versa. Physical conditions that influence our moods, medication side effects, hormonal fluctuations, and lack of sleep can also affect our emotions. In addition, for people who have experienced trauma in their life, their bodies remember that trauma long after the fact, often causing them to feel haunted by their past. Whatever the reason, I encourage all

who are gripped by fear to seek out proper medical care and wise Christian counseling.

No matter our circumstances, no matter what our lesser fears are, we all need to grow in the fear of the Lord. Join me on a journey as we dig into God's Word and learn what it means to fear Him.

Your fellow traveler,  
Christina Fox



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Thank you to my mother-in-law, Judy, for her testimony of trust in the Lord. It has encouraged my heart and pointed me to the goodness of God.

I am grateful to my agent, Don Gates, and his labors on my behalf. Thank you to Reformation Heritage Books and Jay Collier, who believed in this project.

I am grateful to my readers and to the many women I have met while speaking at women's ministry events, conferences, and retreats. It is a joy to serve the church through writing and speaking. I not only have the opportunity to encourage others but I always receive it as well. I can relate to Paul's words in Romans 1:11–12: "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me."

To my family—George, Ethan, and Ian—thank you for your continued support of my labors, your encouragement, and your prayers. I am grateful and love you.

Above all, I am thankful to the Lord for the opportunity to write on this topic, for it's one I have long been passionate about. I am grateful for the time to dig into God's Word and have my own heart pulled away from lesser fears to a greater and holy fear.

## Chapter 1

### A FEAR-FILLED LIFE

I remember it like it was yesterday. That tightness in my stomach and the way my heart seemed to beat loudly in my ears. The dryness in my mouth and the way my eyes started to fill with unshed tears. The way time seemed to freeze, and I had to ask the doctor to repeat what she just said because her voice seemed to come from far away.

I was at my annual physical checkup, and in response to my complaint about fatigue and difficulty regulating my body temperature, my doctor reached out to feel around the front of my neck. She said, “There’s a lump here on your thyroid we need to get checked out. It could be cancerous.” She then explained what it might mean and the next steps.

What followed were tests and visits to specialists followed by more tests. Complex statistics and facts swirled around my head. All the unknowns, the waiting, the pokes and prods kept me on edge for months. My mind was filled with thoughts of *What if, I can’t*, and *Should I do this or that?* Eventually, I ended up having surgery to remove half my thyroid because of a precancerous growth. Needless to say, the entire experience was frightening to me.

*Fear.* It's a word we all are acquainted with. It can be a temporary emotion as well as a way of life. Our fears often keep us up at night and gnaw at us throughout the day, warning us of perceived dangers around every corner. They can stop us in our tracks and keep us from living our life. Our fears can govern our choices, shape the direction of our days, and rule over our hearts. And ultimately our fears can keep us from trusting in and resting in God.

### **A Fear-Filled World**

It's hard to imagine, but there was a time when fear did not exist. There was a place where there wasn't anything to fear. In this place, there were no germs or illnesses or death. There were no enemies or violence. There was no such thing as failure, loss, or uncertain futures. If there were creepy-crawlies, they didn't creep anyone out. Because nothing bad happened, there was nothing of which to be afraid.

Where was this place? The *garden of Eden*.

When God created the world, He said it was good. Everything worked as it should. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, enjoyed perfect communion with God and with each other. They enjoyed their work as vice-regents over all God had made. They knew God and were known by Him—until the day they defied God's command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. In doing so, sin then entered the world and with it the curse of death (see Rom. 5:12). Adam's immediate response to his sin was fear. When God called out for him and asked him where he was, he responded, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself" (Gen. 3:10). From then on, this



world became a fear-filled place, and we've all responded like our first parents: we've become fear-filled hiders, covering ourselves to remain out of God's sight.

Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden and away from the presence of God. The impact of sin in the world was instant. Adam and Eve's son Cain murdered his brother, Abel. The Bible tells us that by the time of Noah, the "wickedness of man was great in the earth, and...every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). The Bible recounts story after story of the impact of the fall on people's hearts and on the created world.

The fall explains why fear exists. Because of the fall, the potential for harm, chaos, loss, and even death haunts us each day. It's a constant shadow that follows us wherever we go. And in a fallen world, there are plenty of reasons to feel fear: terrorism, assault, pandemics, incurable diseases, modern-day slavery, tornadoes, stock exchange plummets, and more. To make matters worse, we can learn about such fearful things on a 24/7 news cycle.

*Our fears can govern our choices, shape the direction of our days, and rule over our hearts.*

Before we go further, I do want to point out that fear is a helpful and important emotion when we come face-to-face with genuine danger, for it gets us to respond and flee from harm. It's what gets us out of the building when there's a fire or to head to the basement when the tornado sirens sound. The Puritan John Flavel referred to this as "natural fear": "Everyone experiences natural fear. It is the trouble

or agitation of mind that arises when we perceive approaching evil or impending danger. It is not always sinful, but it is always the fruit and consequence of sin.”<sup>1</sup> Flavel then points out that our Savior, in taking on human flesh, experienced natural fear. One such example took place the night before He was betrayed: “Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, ‘Sit here while I go and pray over there.’ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me’” (Matt. 26:36–38). Take a moment to pause and think about what it means that Jesus lived in a fear-filled world. He knew the natural fear we all know so well. In the garden of Gethsemane, He sweat drops of blood as He thought about the horrors to come at the cross. Yet “for the joy that was set before Him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). What amazing grace!

The fear we will focus on in this chapter is not natural fear, but the fear that grips and rules our hearts. It’s the kind that becomes a pattern in our lives, an immediate response to our circumstances. It’s the kind of fear that distracts us and keeps us from resting and trusting in God and His great love for us.

We will consider fears such as these:

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1. John Flavel, *Triumphing Over Sinful Fear* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 8.

- Your spouse comes home from work and shares a rumor going around the office that pink slips loom on the horizon. You begin to worry and fear about what will happen if jobs are cut. How will you pay the bills? Will you lose your home? What will you do?
- You are invited to participate in a dream project for work. It's something you've always wanted to do, yet you start thinking about how ill-prepared you are for it. It's bigger than anything you've ever tackled before. You don't know what you are doing. What if you fail? You hesitate to accept the invitation and begin listing reasons why you can't participate.
- Your child wants to go away to summer camp with his buddies. You've heard great things about the camp and know many children who have attended. Yet you hesitate. What if he gets sick while away from home? What if he gets injured? What if something terrible happens?
- Your annual blood work came back with some concerns, and your doctor leaves a message asking you to return for more tests. You immediately imagine the worst. You think of all the horrible things that could happen. You think of your children being left without a parent. Before you know it, your fears have a choke hold on you, and you can barely breathe.

Sometimes, as in the case of my cancer scare, our fears can start out as natural fear and develop into sinful fear. For example, when my older son was little, he was sick all the time. He had chronic infections that exacerbated his asthma. I spent many a late night giving him breathing treatments, wondering if he would ever get better. It seemed like we were at the doctor's office nearly every week for months.

We were sent from one medical expert to the next, and by the time he was four, the doctor said my son needed to have sinus surgery. At that time, such surgeries were rarely done on young children because of the risks involved. To be honest, I was terrified. So many things could have gone wrong. I sat in the hospital waiting room filled with fear and thinking through all the worst-case scenarios.

Then a friend called me, and I sat out in the hallway, voicing my fears to her with tears running down my face. She prayed with me over the phone, both for my heart and for the outcome of my son's surgery.

You are likely familiar with such fears. We all feel some degree of worry when a loved one faces a frightening diagnosis or surgery. We may fear the pain they will experience. We might fear losing them to their illness. But that's not the only thing we fear. Some of us might fear specific things, such as flying on an airplane or speaking in public. We also can fear being left out or being rejected by others. We can fear losing something dear to us, whether a relationship, a job, or a dream. We can fear failure. We can even fear the unknown future.

When we take a close-up look at our fears, we see that they are closely related to what we desire, cherish, and value. They are associated with our loves and longings. We often fear

losing what we hold dear. We find ourselves clinging tighter to what we have out of fear it will be ripped from us. Our fears also seem to taunt us, reminding us that we are vulnerable and weak. They reveal our neediness and point out that we don't have control over our lives. As Ed Welch writes, "Any time you love or want something deeply, you will notice fear and anxieties because you might not get them. Any time you can't control the fate of those things you want or love, you will notice fears and anxieties because you might lose them."<sup>2</sup>

Some fears seem to come and go. The frightening circumstance passes and with it our fears. But for some of us, there are times when we can't stop thinking about the things that we fear. We find ourselves fearful even when there is no reason to be. Then we start to feel our fear physically. Our body tells us something is wrong as our heart rate increases, our head hurts, and we feel nauseous. Our palms sweat and our breath quickens. Our worries and fears start to interfere with our sleep and eating habits. We have difficulty concentrating or sitting still. Over time, our work and home life begin to suffer. This is called anxiety, and it is a growing problem in our culture. About 18 percent of Americans are treated for anxiety,<sup>3</sup> making it the most common mental health issue today.

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2. Ed Welch, *Running Scared: Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest* (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2007), 28.

3. Jamie Ducharme, "A Lot of Americans Are More Anxious than They Were Last Year, a New Poll Says," *Time*, May 8, 2018, <http://www.time.com/5269371/americans-anxiety-poll/>.

*When we take a close-up look at our fears, we see that they are closely related to what we desire, cherish, and value.*

### **Responses to Fear**

In the face of fear, we often feel helpless. I don't know about you, but I hate that feeling. As a result, I tend to try to find a solution to my fears, a way to regain some control over them. I study and research all that I fear, thinking that the more I know perhaps the more I can manage and contain it. I then plot and plan and develop solutions to my fears. I put my hope and trust in those solutions; I turn to them to make my life comfortable, better, and safer.

Because of my son's chronic illnesses as a young child, I was always fearful and on guard regarding his health. I worried about him catching illnesses from other children. I feared the long-term consequences of all the medication he had to take. I feared what might happen if we couldn't manage his asthma. I found myself doing everything I could to keep him healthy. I googled and searched for solutions. I had our home inspected for mold and removed all the carpets. I faithfully used hand sanitizer and kept my son away from other sick children.

Ultimately, those solutions became my idol, what I worshiped instead of God. I placed my trust and hope in them. That's the problem with our fears. While fear is a normal emotional response to life in a fallen world, when it grips our heart, we turn our gaze away from God and to the circumstances around us. We focus on the problem instead of the One who rules over all things. We place our trust not in God

to help and rescue us but in things, methods, or even ourselves. This is idolatry.

But that's not the only way we respond to fear. Sometimes fear immobilizes us. We stand before it frozen, like a deer caught in a car's headlights. Perhaps we face a big decision in life, and because we fear making the wrong decision, we don't make one at all. Life moves on around us, and we simply stay where we are. Or we zero in on the details of something and don't move forward until we get it perfect. We go over it and over it because we want to get it right the first time. Years go by, and we haven't moved forward because we're still waiting for that all-too-elusive perfection.

Throughout childhood I played the flute. I wasn't the best at it, but I enjoyed doing it. I played in the school band and for my church. When I went to college, the music department offered individual classes for those who played musical instruments. Oh, how I wanted to take one of those classes! But fear held me back. I feared that I wasn't good enough. I feared what the teacher would think of me. I feared wasting money on something at which I could never excel. Today, I look back on that decision with regret.

Sometimes our fears don't keep us still but instead make us run away. The first sign of something harmful, and we split. We'd rather escape and live on a deserted island, far away from any danger, than to face head on what we fear. In the state of our current culture, it's hard not to respond this way. Consider all the frightening things our children face when they walk out the front door each morning: bullying and school violence, online predators, school systems that want to shape their minds, and a post-truth culture seeking

to influence them at every turn. It's hard not to fear such a world. It's hard not to want to run and hide. Yet such fear makes the world bigger and stronger than the God who holds the world in the palm of His hands.

Responses like these eventually fail us. Whether we try to control our fears, freeze, or run away from them, they still linger, mocking us. They still rule over us. They still keep us looking at what we fear rather than trusting the Lord. Hang in with me though; there's hope ahead for the fear-filled heart.

Let's look at what the Bible has to say about fear. As it turns out, it has a lot to say.

### **Do Not Fear**

While I haven't personally counted all the instances, commands in Scripture not to fear are generally considered the most common. In both the Old and New Testaments, the command "Do not fear" is given in numerous situations and circumstances. Whether facing real terror and pending harm or worries about tomorrow's provision, God's people are called not to fear. This command is often found in the context of divine revelation, such as when God's people were called to fight a battle or when a prophet warned of pending punishment for sin. Such a command is intended to comfort God's people and to encourage them to trust in Him, as in the following examples from the Old Testament:

Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever." (Ex. 14:13)



Fear not, for I am with you;  
Be not dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you,  
Yes, I will help you,  
I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.  
(Isa. 41:10)

Before we go further, we should pause and consider the meaning behind such a command. That's because words are important. We use words every day, often without thinking of their significance. In the English language, words often have multiple meanings and nuances, depending on the context. As we begin to look at the fear of the Lord, it is helpful to look at how the Bible uses words like *fear*, *worry*, or *anxiety*.

The most common Hebrew word for fear found in the Bible is *yirah*.<sup>4</sup> It is used to mean “terror,” like when the Bible describes how the men on the ship with Jonah responded when they were caught in a deadly storm: “Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, ‘Why have you done this?’” (Jonah 1:10). It is also used to mean “reverence,” specifically in the context of the fear of the Lord: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10).

In the New Testament, the Greek word used for fear is *phobos*.<sup>5</sup> It means “panic,” “flight,” or “terror.” It's where we get the English word *phobia*. For example, when the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they responded with fear: “When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out for fear”

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4. *Strong's Concordance*, s.v. “*yirah*,” <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3374.htm>.

5. *Strong's Concordance*, s.v. “*phobos*,” <https://biblehub.com/greek/5401.htm>.

(Matt. 14:26). It's also used to mean "awe and reverence," as in Luke's description of the early church: "Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles" (Acts 2:43).

*Whether we try to  
control our fears,  
freeze, or run  
away from them,  
they still linger,  
mocking us.*

Context clearly matters when it comes to the word *fear*. When the Bible tells us not to fear something, it is referring to terror or panic. When it talks about the fear of the Lord, it means having awe or reverence, which we'll explore in the next chapter.

Because excessive worry and anxiety are such close cousins to fear, it's interesting to look at the Greek word for anxiety, *merimnaó*. It is used in Jesus's Sermon on the Mount when He says not to worry or be anxious about tomorrow (Matt. 6:25–34) and also in Philippians 4:6, when Paul cautions us not to be anxious about anything. *Merimnaó* means "to be anxious, to care for." Its Greek root word means "to be divided, to be pulled apart."<sup>6</sup> This is what happens to us when we are consumed with worry about something. Our minds are distracted from everything else but our worries. These thoughts pull at and divide us. As Flavel wrote, "The sinfulness of fear consists in the distracting influence it has upon the heart, whereby it unfits us for the discharge of our duties."<sup>7</sup> Instead, God wants us to look away from our

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6. *Strong's Concordance*, s.v. "*merimnaó*," <https://biblehub.com/greek/3309.htm>.

7. Flavel, *Triumphing Over Sinful Fear*, 17.

troubles and to Him alone—to place our trust in Him to meet our needs.

While we can fear just about anything, the Bible mentions a few specific fears: the fear of man, the fear of harm, and the fear of the future.

### *Fear of Man*

The fear of man is a common fear for all of us. This can refer to fearing harm at the hand of someone else. The Bible is filled with accounts of God's people fearing other nations that were seemingly bigger and stronger than they. When the spies were sent into the land of Canaan to assess what was there, all but two of the spies returned with a fearful report about giants in the land (Numbers 13).

The fear of man also refers to the fear of what people think of us. We might fear what they say about us to others. We might fear their rejection. When we fear man, we want the approval and praise of others and will conform and change our behavior in order to receive it. When Peter refused to eat with the Gentiles, he feared what the Judaizers thought of him (Gal. 2:11–13). Ed Welch says that the fear of man sees “people as ‘bigger’ (that is, more powerful and significant) than God, and, out of the fear that creates in us, we give other people the power and right to tell us what to feel, think, and do.”<sup>8</sup>

The fear of man then becomes an idol that we worship. We seek the affirmation and acceptance of others, looking to that

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8. Ed Welch, *When People Are Big and God Is Small* (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2011), 23.

affirmation to give our lives value and meaning. But because we look to broken and fallen people to meet our needs, this idol will inevitably fail us and let us down. No wonder the book of Proverbs cautions, “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe” (29:25).

### *Fear of Harm*

Because we live in a fallen world where danger exists, the Bible also speaks of the fear of harm. When the disciples were sailing on the Sea of Galilee with Jesus, a great storm arose. Though some of them were seasoned fishermen and were used to storms at sea, they were terrified. Jesus was asleep, and they went to wake Him up:

“Lord, save us! We are perishing!”

But He said to them, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. (Matt. 8:25–26)

As we saw earlier, there is much to fear in a fallen world. Whether we fear a natural disaster, sickness and disease, or violent enemies, whenever the Bible speaks of the fear of harm, it then points to who God is and what He has done. It reminds us to turn and look to Him for help and rescue. When Jesus calmed the storm at sea, notice that it didn’t gradually calm down, like when a storm system moves on to another location. Rather, this storm stopped in an instant. Just as when the first light at creation appeared at God’s command, this storm stopped at the Creator’s voice. The Bible tells us, “The men marveled, saying, ‘Who can this be, that even the

winds and the sea obey Him?” (Matt. 8:27). In that moment, they saw that the Lord was greater than all their fears.

### *Fear of the Future*

In a sense, all our fears are fears of the future. That’s because fear likes to time travel, looking ahead to possible harms and warning us of all that could go wrong. Future fear is worried about whether there will be enough in the days to come: enough money, enough food, enough time, enough wisdom, enough strength. We fear future losses and failures. We fear not being prepared or knowing what to do in a situation. We fear the unknown.

As mentioned earlier, Jesus told us not to worry about not having enough because our heavenly Father provides for all our needs: “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matt. 6:34). As John Calvin wrote, “Believers ought to rely on God’s fatherly care, to expect that he will bestow upon them whatever they feel to be necessary, and not to torment themselves by unnecessary anxiety.”<sup>9</sup>

The Bible doesn’t teach that we are to not have any cares or worries at all. There is a certain amount of care we need to take in this life. We should have concerns about things. We should get up each morning and labor to feed our families. We should have concern about our children’s health and take them to the doctor for treatment when they are ill. Even Paul described his concerns and cares for the churches he

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9. John Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew*, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/matthew/6.htm>.

*The Bible doesn't teach that we are to not have any cares or worries at all.... It's when those cares become excessive, to the point that we don't trust God for tomorrow's needs, that our worries and fears become sinful.*

ministered to (2 Cor. 11:28). It's when those cares become excessive, to the point that we don't trust God for tomorrow's needs, that our worries and fears become sinful. Or that they cause us to rely solely on ourselves instead of crying out to God for help. Calvin commented, "He does not forbid every kind of care, but only what arises from distrust."<sup>10</sup>

What are we to do when we have any of these fears? What do we do when we hear rumors of job cuts or a loved one is seriously ill or the dream we've worked so hard for looks like it will fail? What do we do in the face of such fears? As we'll see next and unpack throughout this book, the Bible calls us to turn from our fears toward a greater fear.

### **A Greater Fear**

Have you ever voiced your fears to someone and he or she responded with a seemingly trite answer, such as "You just need to trust God more"? Inside you think, "It's just not that easy." We can read the Bible's admonitions not to fear as trite responses as well. But we shouldn't. When God tells us not to fear, He's not saying that we need to just believe more. He's not saying we just need to have faith that everything will be

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10. Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew*.

okay, and it will. Instead, He calls us to something greater—to *Someone* greater.

In addition to the command not to fear, another command in Scripture is also prevalent, and it also involves fear. But rather than a command not to fear something, this is a command to fear. It is a call to a greater fear, a holy fear—the *fear of the Lord*.

In Matthew 10, after Jesus had called all the disciples to follow Him, He prepared to send them out to preach that the kingdom of God was at hand. He told them to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons. He warned them that some people would listen to them and some would reject their teaching. He also warned them of future persecution, that they would be hated and beaten and brought to trial. It is amid these warnings that He also taught them about the fear of the Lord:

Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. (vv. 27–31)

This passage teaches us that a fear of the Lord quells and weakens our lesser fears. The disciples were to replace their fear of harm from man with a fear of the Lord. While man might harm them physically, even to the point of death, God has power over the destination of their souls. He is the

sovereign One who knows the number of hairs on their head. He cares for them more than the creatures He watches over each day. God is the one whom they were to fear.

The Bible teaches us that when we are fearful, we are to replace that fear with a greater fear, the fear of the Lord. What does that mean? We might compare it to a person consumed with worry about a job promotion she has long worked hard to achieve. She hears rumors around the office that someone else is being considered for the promotion as well. She grows fearful, thinking, "What if I don't get the promotion? It's what I've worked so hard for. I'll be stuck in this same job forever." Then she gets a call from her best friend, who just found out her company has filed for bankruptcy and she's been laid off from her job. "At least I still have a job," she thinks to herself. In this scenario, she sees losing a job as a greater fear than losing her promotion. The loss of her promotion weakened in the face of not having a job altogether. In a similar way, when we see God as bigger and greater than what we fear, our other fears grow weak. For example, let's say we face some kind of job uncertainty. In fearing the Lord, we would remind our heart that God owns all things. All we have comes from His generous hand. He is Jehovah Jireh, our provider. He promises to meet all our needs. We would remember all the times He provided for us in the past. Above all, we would dwell on His generous provision of grace for us in Christ. The more we dwell on who God is and what He has done, our fears lose their grip on us, for we'll see God as greater.

Join me on a journey to trade our lesser fears with a holy fear, a fear of the Lord. The first step is to explore just what it means to fear the Lord. That comes next.