Though Mountains Tremble

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Are you ever afraid or scared? Fear can paralyse us. The Bible tells us not to fear! Yet the same Scriptures also speak of a fear that is to be desired: the fear of the Lord. This liberates us and promises wisdom and life. In this article, I will unpack what godly fear looks like, how to walk in it, and how vital it is for us today.

Chomolungma and Healthy Fear

Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain, is reverentially called 'Chomolungma' by Tibetan locals, which means 'Goddess Mother of the World'. Climbers who have encountered this majestic mountain for the first time have said how small it makes them feel. Chomolungma is almost nine kilometres tall and reaches so high that its summit is buffeted by powerful 120km/h jet streams that encircle the globe. Along with the numbing cold, the altitude thins the air to the point that climbers need two months to acclimatise to its conditions.

Tragically, the mountain is littered with frozen bodies. It is as if Chomolungma has made examples of over-confident souls who have underestimated its volatile nature. The best climbers have a healthy dose of fear as they are drawn to climb it and savour its wonders. They are afraid of it in the best sense–with fearful respect, knowing that it can destroy them but can also

bring them great joy.

As a mountain climber approaches Everest, we would do well to have the same kind of attitude towards the Lord, the Maker of this mountain. We too should approach with fear. Scripture says, “Fear God and give him glory…and worship him who made heaven and earth” (Revelation 14:7). But what exactly is the fear of God?

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What is the Fear of God?

The concept of fear is spoken about 433 times in Scripture. Many of the verses dealing with fear are written in the context of being afraid and intimidated by hostile people and dark or evil circumstances. These are things we are told NOT to fear.

But, surprisingly, more than half of the 433 texts deal with the Lord Himself as the object of our fear. For example, the Lord Jesus speaks of God as the object of our fear by saying, “…do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). Here Jesus tells us not to be afraid of people but to fear God, who has ultimate authority over us to destroy and to save. The result is that a fear of Him helps us to overcome the fear of people, and anything else for that matter. When we see how powerful God is, every other thing that makes us afraid loses its power over us.

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Jesus isn’t telling us to crouch away in fear from God. On the contrary, a proper fear of God leads us to Him. For rebellious men, the fear of God does lead to terror (Exodus 19-20, Hebrews 10:27), but for believers, the fear of God means an overwhelming sense of reverence (Malachi 2:5), which leads us towards Him. Just as the big wave surfer sees the giant swells and longs to paddle into them. Just as the mountain climber sees the great peaks and longs to climb them. The fear of God puts in us a longing to know and worship Him. Nevertheless, we can only come to Him through Jesus’ willing sacrifice for us. If we are not covered by Christ’s righteousness, we cannot draw near to the Holy God.

Walking in the Fear of the Lord

What does it mean to walk in the fear of the Lord? I believe it begins and ends with heartfelt obedience to Him. If we see Him as the rightful King and Lord, then obeying Him is our proper response. The mind-blowing promise of the new covenant is that God then puts in us the desire and the ability to obey Him. This is what the prophet Jeremiah prophesied: "And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me" (Jeremiah 32:40). In other words, God puts the desire in us to fear Him and this works itself out in obedience–that we would not turn from His ways. We fear the Lord and obey Him, not just because we must but because we want to.

So ask the Lord today for an increased desire to obey Him and to see Him as His Word describes. There are also several things that have helped to create a deeper fear of the Lord within me:

- Firstly, prayerful reading of and engaging with Scripture fuels a holy fear. This is because the Bible reveals how great God is. When I have come to Scripture with the right attitude, it has revealed to me a God who is bigger than I ever imagined. He is more majestic than I was ever taught in Sunday school. This has often disturbed me, in the best possible way.
- Secondly, being part of a church that aims to honour God, where there is worship and preaching that exalts the Lord, has instilled in me a greater fear of God and helped me to understand His vastness and goodness.
- Thirdly, church discipline administered by godly leaders creates a healthy fear through the realisation that God is holy and He disciplines those whom He loves. We think of Acts 5 that speaks of how great fear came upon the church when their sin was judged by God, along with a demonstration of His power. Rather than causing the church to shrink, it instead describes how multitudes were added to the Lord (Acts 5:14).

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What Do You Want?

Do you want God to work more actively in your life and family and church? Consider, then, how "his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation" (Luke 1:50).

Do you need greater wisdom to navigate this world and make godly choices? Then remember: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10).

Do you want to experience freedom from ongoing anxiety, dread or turmoil? Think about how

the fear of God and a revelation of His enormity (Matthew 10:28) can help you to overcome those rogue fears. I think of the many times I've become deeply anxious and have gone back to Scripture to remind myself that God is seated on His throne and has not forgotten His children.

We would do well to remember the early church, whose members flourished because they were "walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:31). What a privilege it is to love God. He is the great God above all gods who defines all that is true, since He made all things. Let us fear Him!