

***FEARING GOD — A BLESSED LIFE***  
***PSALM 112***

When I read Scripture, not only am I instructed by the words I read, but I often also have emotional responses to those words:

- ✓ Some words make me feel comforted and encouraged and hopeful and happy — like being wrapped up in a warm blanket in front of a roaring fire on a cool day (e.g., Pss. 37:4; 63:8).
- ✓ Some words make me long for intimacy and fellowship with God (e.g., Ps. 27:8 ; John 20:1-18).
- ✓ Some words challenge me and make me introspective and self-examining (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:1ff)
- ✓ Some words make me cringe.

And that is the case of the psalm before us today. For more than 20 years every time I have read Psalm 112, I have cringed. I cringed because on April 14, 1991 I preached this psalm and I did the one thing you should never do with Scripture when you are preaching or teaching. *I missed the point of the passage.* Every preacher has those days, but in my mind that sermon towers above all the other missed points that I've preached.

I remember studying that week, wondering about and wrestling over the text: “Am I getting this right?” And, “I’m not sure the direction this is going is right, but all the study and commentaries seem to be moving that way, so I guess it must be okay.”

It wasn't okay. I was wrong. I had a sense that I was wrong while I was studying. I was uncomfortable during the entire sermon while I preached it. And every time I have read that passage since then, I have cringed inwardly, remembering that sermon. And since then it has been on a list of “do-over” sermons for me. And when I planned this brief sermon series on the Psalms, there was one psalm in particular that was going to be on that list — Psalm 112.

This psalm is about the difficult theme of the fear of God. We don't know if the same writer penned both Psalms 111 and 112, but it is clear that this psalmist at least read Psalm 111 and used it as the beginning point for his song (*read 111:10 and 112:1*).

From that verse we can say that the theme of this psalm is pretty clear:

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*GOD BLESSES THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.*  
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And the structure of the psalm is pretty clear: the psalmist makes his declaration about fearing God and then offers five demonstrations of God's blessing on those who fear Him.

The difficulty (and downfall of my first sermon) is in interpreting those blessings.

Here then is Psalm 112, my do-over.

**1. The God-Fearer is BLESSED (v. 1)**

**2. HOW the God-Fearer is Blessed (vv. 2-9)**

- ✓ **The God-Fearer is Blessed in His REPUTATION (v. 2)**
- ✓ **The God-Fearer is Blessed with RIGHTEOUSNESS (v. 3)**
- ✓ **The God-Fearer is Blessed to SERVE Others (vv. 4-5)**
- ✓ **The God-Fearer is Blessed with STABILITY (vv. 6-9)**
- ✓ **The God-Fearer Avoids ULTIMATE Fear (v. 10)**

## 1. The God-Fearer is **BLESSED** (v. 1)

- This psalm is not only related to 111, but also to 113 since all three begin with the phrase, *praise the Lord*. Here the psalmist is not only calling the singers of this song to praise God, but he also is himself praising God for God's grace and blessing on his life. Specifically, he affirms that blessing comes from fearing God.
  - ✓ The phrase, *how blessed* appears 28x in Psalms; we've seen it in 32:1-2. Cf. also 84:5; 94:12.
  - ✓ The simplest way to understand this concept of "blessing" is with the idea of "happiness" or "satisfaction." And here he says that happiness comes from fearing God.
- The main thing that we must identify from this verse is, "what does it mean to fear the Lord?"
  - ✓ Generally speaking, when the Scriptures talk about the fear of the Lord there are two references:
    - There is the fear of the unbeliever: Ps. 33:8. This fear is akin to the terror that he should feel when he considers that he will have to give an answer to God for his rejection of God and he has no answer that will keep him out of Hell. What is also interesting is that Scripture also affirms that while there *should be* fear of God by unbelievers, often they will kill their consciences and not fear Him whom they should fear (Ps. 36:1; Pr. 1:29; Jer. 2:19).

*"...when we are aware of the presence of God, we become most aware of ourselves as creatures. When we meet the Absolute, we know immediately that we are not absolute....He is holy and we are not. We fear God because He is holy. Our fear is not the fear of the Lord the Bible enjoins. It is a servile fear, a fear born of dread. God is too great for us; He is too awesome. He makes difficult demands on us. He is the Mysterious Stranger who threatens our security. In His presence we quake and tremble. Meeting Him personally may be our greatest trauma." [Sproul, The Holiness of God.]*

- There is also the fear of the believer (or OT follower of God): Ps. 22:23; 34:9; Dt. 6:2, 24; Acts 9:31. This is almost always the way the term is used. This is not a fear of terror, but a fear of respect and awe.

*"The fear of God in which godliness consists is the fear which constrains adoration and love. It is the fear which consists in awe, reverence, honor, and worship, and all of these on the highest level of exercise. It is the reflex in our consciousness of the transcendent majesty and holiness of God." [John Murray; quoted in Bridges, The Joy of Fearing God, 25.]*

- Because the believer (or OT follower of God) is confident that God has graciously removed his sin, he no longer lives in terror of the God who judges, but he lives in awe of the God who has redeemed him from sin when there was no expectation that God should do so.
- ✓ What is particularly helpful in this verse is that the psalmist himself identifies what he means by the phrase ***fear the Lord***. He tells us his meaning in the next phrase:
  - To fear the Lord, in this psalm, means to ***delight in God's commandments***.
  - This is not a “theoretical” delight; it is real. He is excited not only to read God’s commands, but he is zealous to do God’s commands because he knows of their intrinsic value.
  - This very same sense is given in 111:10; 128:1 (with other manifestations of God’s blessing).
  - In fact, the fear of the Lord is often equated with obedience to the Scriptures. Cf. also Ps. 19:9; 119:1-2; Prov. 8:13; 14:2; Is. 50:10; Dt. 10:12, 20.
  - Since the fear of the Lord involves obedience to God’s Word, it can be said that...

*“The fear of God is the soul of godliness.” [John Murray] That is, the fear of God is the animating and invigorating principle of a godly life. It is the wellspring of all godly desires and aspirations. Do you desire to be a godly person? Then you must understand and grow in the fear of God.”*

*[Jerry Bridges, The Joy of Fearing God, 25]*

- So to fear the Lord means, in part, to obey the Lord and His Word. And as we obey His Word, we will experience His blessing. What kind of blessing will we have? The rest of the psalm tells us:

## 2. **HOW the God-Fearer is Blessed (vv. 2-10)**

- As we consider these blessings, these should be understood as proverbs — they are generalities, not guaranteed promises for every person who ever fears and obeys God. There may well be exceptions to one or more of these in the life of every faithful believer.
- The God-Fearer is Blessed in His REPUTATION (v. 2)
  - ✓ This verse refers to two groups of people who are impacted by the God-fearing man:
    - ***his descendents*** refers to not just his children, but his “seed,” his “posterity.” It considers multiple generations of people that will come after him. And the psalmist says that they will be strong — the inference is likely something like, “they will have long life.” It may be that the psalmist is thinking of **Exodus 20:12**. Because he fears God, he makes it easy for his descendents to honor him and because they honor him, they also have a long life — a full and satisfying life with God.

- ***the generation of the upright*** refers to the people who live in contact with this man — they are his peers, his contemporaries, his neighbors and friends and co-workers. They consider his life and they see that he is living with integrity and they are ***blessed*** (v. 2b) by him in that they are also stimulated to live ***uprightly*** because of *his* obedience to the Lord.
  - ✓ “A God-fearing man will leave a spiritual legacy with his own children and those with whom he comes in contact...The powerful influence of a God-fearing man is felt by his generation.” [Lawson, *Psalms 76-150*]
  - ✓ When someone fears and obeys God he doesn’t have to worry about defending his reputation; he is respected because no matter how carefully unbelievers examine him, they can find nothing that is tarnished (cf. Dan. 6:5; 1 Pt. 2:12; 1 Tim. 6:13-14).
  - ✓ The God-fearer is blessed with a good reputation because that’s what obedience to God’s Word does. Why should we obey God? Because it will build and preserve a godly reputation for us.
- The God-Fearer is Blessed with RIGHTEOUSNESS (v. 3)
    - ✓ This is the verse that got me into so much trouble 20 years ago. All the commentators say something like, “The righteous receive prosperity and wealth...” [Kraus] and “The Lord delights to reward also with earthly blessings all those that are true to His Law.” [Leupold] And of course there is a thin line between that and a prosperity gospel. And my memory of that day is that I didn’t balance that very well. So what does the psalmist mean?
    - ✓ First, the Psalmist is addressing the covenant people of God — this is a promise to the nation of Israel, and not the church of Christ. There is a temptation to think that all Old Testament passages are for the church *in the same way* that they were for Israel. But that is not so. God’s means of salvation — by grace through faith — has always been the same, but His promises to His covenant nation Israel and His chosen bride for Christ (the church) are different. Spurgeon noted this distinction when he wrote, “Understood literally this is rather a promise of the old covenant than of the new...” So the psalmist is reminding the covenant people of Israel of God’s intent to keep and fulfill His promises to His people, promises which would include land, seed (both progeny and an eternal King), and blessing to the nations. The generation of Israel that is obedient to God and receives the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant will experience great blessing in ***wealth and riches***.
    - ✓ Secondly, the statement is not absolute, but proverbial in nature. This is not a guarantee that God will give abundant financial provision to all his people. It means that as a general rule, God gives sustaining food and covering to His people, but some of his people still live in poverty and die of starvation. That does not mean that He has failed those who die; it means that the best means of their growing in conformity to Him was through that affliction of financial lack.

- ✓ Thirdly, while the words “wealth” and “riches” are generally used of material goods in the OT (see the same pairing, for instance, in Prov. 8:18; 13:7), there are also cautions about the attainment of such riches (Prov. 11:16, 28; 18:23; 21:17), reminders that riches come from hard work and as a gracious gift from God (not as a right for all people, e.g., Prov. 10:4, 22) and those who do not desire those riches above all else are commended (e.g., Solomon).
  - ✓ And finally, the context itself indicates that the psalmist is thinking of something far more than material wealth and riches. The second clause is linked to the first — “and his righteousness endures forever.” In other words, what is the true wealth of the man who fears the Lord? His wealth is that he has been redeemed and because righteousness has been imputed to him (an OT concept as well, cf. Gen. 15:6), both his righteousness and he will live forever in the presence of God. That is a wealth that supersedes all others and that is a wealth worth pursuing.
  - ✓ So when the psalmist says ***wealth and riches are in his house***, he is not ultimately talking about material wealth, but he is talking about the wealth and richness of an imputed righteousness. For those of us who have been saved by Christ, that is our most valuable possession. Nothing we have supersedes what we have through Christ and what we are in Christ.
  - ✓ The God-fearer is blessed by righteousness.
- The God-Fearer is Blessed to SERVE Others (vv. 4-5)
    - ✓ When someone fears God by obeying Him, the psalmist says, ***Light arises in the darkness...*** That is, the God-fearing man begins to see and understand truth. His eyes are opened to see the glory that is in the Word of God (cf. Ps. 119:18; 1 Cor. 2:9-10).
    - ✓ And because he sees the truth of the Word of God, he is increasingly transformed so that he becomes compassionate toward others — he is ***gracious and compassionate...gracious and lends...maintain his cause in judgment.***
      - Because he loves and fears God, he loves and cares for his fellow man. He is gracious to others, he lends what he has to others so that they are cared for (not so that he can make money) and he persists in giving generously so that he is just in everything he does. The final clause in v. 5 means something like, “he conducts his affairs with justice.” In everything he does, he is gracious, fair, and honest.
      - This is an implication that Jesus also talked about. There are two tests for a man’s character: does he love God and does he love his fellow man (Mk. 12:28ff)?
    - ✓ The one who fears God loves to serve others and believes that what he has been given is not for him but so that he can be a blessing to others.

*“Why does God bless us with abundance? So we can have enough to live on, and then use the rest for all manner of good works that alleviate spiritual and physical misery. Enough for us; abundance for others.*

*“The issue is not how much a person makes. Big industry and big salaries are a fact of our times, and they are not necessarily evil. The evil is in being deceived into thinking a six-digit salary must be accompanied by a six-digit lifestyle. God has made us to be conduits of His grace. The danger is in thinking the conduit should be lined with gold. It shouldn’t. Copper will do.”*

*[John Piper, Desiring God, 203.]*

- The God-Fearer is Blessed with STABILITY (vv. 6-9). The psalmist says this in several ways —
  - ✓ **He will never be shaken** (v. 6a) = He cannot be overthrown or moved from his faith. His faith will not crumble, no matter the adversity. And this is his testimony before others — long after he has died — and into eternity (**forever**), he will be **remembered** for his unshakeable character.

*“He is deeply rooted in God and his Word and, thus, will never be shaken. Temptation will not sway the God-fearing man. Demons will not move him. Trials will not shake him. He is not given to panic or overreaction in the face of adversity. Rather, he is marked by stability and strength of heart.” [Lawson,*

*Psalms 76-150, Kindle Locations 5189-5191.]*

- ✓ **He will not fear evil tidings** (v. 7a) = He is not afraid of bad news. Because he fears God, he is not fearful of bad news. Whether the bad news is about the progress of evil in the culture or of personal hardship or of sin that is committed against him, he is not fearful or anxious. Why?

*“The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else.” [Oswald Chambers]*

- ✓ **His heart is steadfast, trusting the Lord** (v. 7b) = This man does not fear evil because inwardly (**his heart**) he is immovable. His confidence in God is unshakable so that he becomes unshakeable. The word **steadfast** was sometimes used to refer to the pillars that supported a building. We would say this man has built his life on the foundation of trusting God and so he is immovable. Cf. Daniel’s friends (Dan. 3:8-30), and Stephen (Acts 7:54-60). He reveres God as the One who preserves his salvation so he is unafraid of anything else.
- ✓ **He heart is upheld, he will not fear...** (v. 8) = One translation renders this verse, “He will be joyful and unafraid while he looks upon his adversaries.” This doesn’t mean he won’t face opposition; but it does mean that whenever opposition comes, he is resolute in trusting God.
- ✓ **His righteousness endures forever...** (v. 9b) = This is the same phrase as v. 3. His confidence in God reveals that he possesses (has been given) a righteousness that is eternal. **His horn is exalted** refers to prosperity and victory. I.e., “he wins...”

- ✓ James says that the person who is double-souled is “unstable in all his ways” (1:8). Here we have the contrast of that double-souled man; the one who is singular in his devotion to God is stable and unshakable.
- The God-Fearer Avoids ULTIMATE Fear (v. 10)
  - ✓ Earlier I said that Scripture indicates two kinds of fear of God — the reverence and awe the believer has for God and the terror that the unbeliever should have. This final verse refers to the judgment of God that should produce fear in the unbeliever.
  - ✓ ***The wicked will see [God’s blessing on the righteous] and be vexed [angry]*** = The unbeliever sees the compassion of God on His people and they become heated and hostile (evidenced by their ***gnashing teeth***). But despite their indignant anger, they cannot stand before God and they will ***melt away***. They will simply be dissolved — the implication is that their objection to and fight against God are of no consequence to Him; with a little stirring of the cup of his wrath, they are simply put to death and sent into eternity separated from Him and His grace. Their ***desire... will perish*** — all of the things coveted and desired by the unrighteous will be destroyed. “The longings of the wicked will come to nothing. This means the wicked man will not achieve his purpose, reach his goal, or find his dreams. He will die a disappointed man! While the righteous will endure forever, the ungodly will rot off the face of the earth.” [Lawson] They cannot stand before God (Ps. 1:6; 34:21). If you are not a Christian, you *must* fear God...
  - ✓ There is an ultimate fear of God that the man who fears God need not fear.
  - ✓ And of course the other side of this is that while the ungodly man is enduring eternal Hell, the righteous, God-fearing man is enjoying eternal Heaven (Lk. 10:20; Rev. 7:16-17).

**CONCLUSION:** Why should we obey the Scriptures? Because obedience to God’s commands in His Word reveals that we fear (respect, honor, and are in awe of) God. And when we fear Him by obeying Him, He blesses us in many ways.

Fear God by obeying God and God will bless you with all manner of good things fitting for people who love to obey God.