

LET JESUS DISCIPLE YOU

The Fear of God

The one fear Jesus commands is the one that makes you fearless

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, September 27, 2026
PASSAGES	Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:4-7; Hebrews 12:7-9; Psalm 147:10-11; Psalm 19:9-12; Proverbs 9:10; 1 John 4:18; Ephesians 4:14
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:04:54 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The fear of God is not a beginner's stage you outgrow once you learn that God loves you. Jesus commanded it — to his own friends, in the same breath as *don't be anxious about anything*. That fear is what keeps you from being deceived, and it is how you come to love the God who is actually there rather than one you have quietly made up.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Sometimes the fear of God is the last line of defense left standing in a temptation, after your gut and your feelings have been talked out of the room. Matt's verdict on that: "That's okay. In fact, that's good."
- ◆ The argument against fearing God sounds biblical, quotes the Bible, and is wrong. Its trick is to insist you must choose between fearing God and loving him.
- ◆ Hebrews 12 assumes you can respect a father and love him at the same time — most of us have done exactly that since childhood.
- ◆ **Psalm 147:11** puts "those who fear him" and "those who hope in his steadfast love" in Hebrew parallel. They are not two groups. They are the same people, said twice.
- ◆ Perfect love does drive fear out — fear of man, fear of condemnation, fear of the enemy. What it does not drive out is reverence for God, because he is not one of those threats.

- ◆ Jesus said “fear him” to his friends, and in the same passage told them the hairs of their head are numbered. You can fear God and live fearlessly at once.
- ◆ Maturity does not move you away from the fear of God. It moves you further into it — the fool is the one who thinks he already has enough wisdom.
- ◆ You cannot love a God you invented. Fearing him means caring what he says about himself, so that the one you love is real.

► 1:04:54

Matt began where the pressure is actually felt. Some temptations are easy to refuse — what is right feels right, what is wrong is repulsive, and saying no costs nothing. Other times it is not like that at all, and you are far enough in that the only thing still holding is the fear of God.

The last line of defense

► 1:05:26

That is not a shameful place to be. “That’s okay,” Matt said. “In fact, that’s good.” When what is coming at you is anger, or crocodile tears, or passive aggression, or a flat false accusation — all of which Jesus absorbed and more — your gut is not a reliable instrument. That is a great deal of emotional and social pressure, and under it a person gets disoriented. Which is why he does not want to be a child tossed to and fro by the waves, carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning and craftiness in deceitful schemes. He wants to be anchored.

How you would talk someone out of it

► 1:06:27

Then he did something useful: he built the case against himself, on purpose, as well as he could. If he were making a movie and wanted to deceive the audience, he said, he would make the villains attractive and likeable and have them quote scripture, so that even knowing which one was the devil character you would walk out thinking, *I don’t know, though — that was a good point.*

So here is the deception, delivered in the whispery voice he admits he slips into when he teaches the new age section of his fall discipleship class. There is no fear in love. God is love. You are supposed to love God, so you are not supposed to fear him, because perfect love drives out fear. And you cannot fear people either, since you cannot love someone and fear them at the same time. Therefore: be rid of all fear.

It sounds biblical. It uses the Bible. At a gut level it makes a kind of sense, and if you had to pick one you would pick love, because love seems higher. But sit with the conclusion for a moment — a man who fears neither God nor man — and you find you have described the unrighteous judge in Jesus' parable on prayer. Somewhere the road turned.

You can do both at the same time

► 1:08:21

What the deception fudges is the premise. You can fear God and love him at once, and the two work well together.

“It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?”

HEBREWS 12:7-9 ↗

The analogy is a child eyeing a cookie with a sibling in the room who will certainly report it. You are wary of the consequence and you respect your father and you love him, all at once — and if spanking is not how it went in your house, substitute whatever discipline did happen; the shape holds. Most people in the room have been doing this their whole lives without noticing it was supposed to be impossible.

► 1:09:53

“His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.”

PSALM 147:10-11 ↗

Matt included verse 10 to show the machinery. Hebrew poetry does not rhyme at the end of lines; in English we can hardly help ourselves — roses are red, violets are blue, and then you say something that is probably true. Hebrew repeats the idea instead, once and then again in a different key. The strength of a horse and the legs of a man are the same point twice: God is not impressed by muscle. Which means verse 11 is doing the same thing. “Those who fear him” and “those who hope in his steadfast love” are not two categories. They are one people, named twice.

What the perfect love actually drives out

► 1:12:25

So what does get cast out? Fear of the world. Fear of man. Fear of condemnation, since in Christ there is none. The whole class of specific dreads about the enemy and about our troubles. None of that is reverence for God.

“I don’t want us to fear God as if he’s a bad guy, since he’s not a bad guy,” Matt said. He is not afraid that God will mistreat him, or you, or anyone, because God does not mistreat anyone. He is not terrified of God’s character, because God’s character is perfect. He still fears him. The fear survives every good thing you can truthfully say about God, because it was never fear of being harmed in the first place.

The command, and who he said it to

► 1:13:34

With both introductions finally behind him, Matt reached the command itself — this message sits in the series on the commands of Jesus, and this is Jesus’ own word on the subject.

“And 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 ↗

Read Gehenna there — a real place the prophets had already named as where God brings final judgment against his enemies. And notice what Jesus does with intensity. A body that has been killed is subject to decay, repugnant to see and to smell, in need of burial; it is gruesome enough that you might reasonably fear whoever could do that to you. Jesus takes that whole register of horror and redirects it — not at the killer, who cannot touch the soul, but at God. And he did not say it to a crowd he disliked. He said it to his disciples.

► 1:15:09

“I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

LUKE 12:4-7 ↗

► 1:16:13

Matt kept the passage whole on purpose, because the two halves are not a contradiction and Jesus has not lost the thread. “My friends,” he calls them, and then, *fear him*, and then, *the hairs of your head are numbered*. I can fear God and not fear the people who could murder me. I can fear God and not fear condemnation. I can fear God and not fear the devil, or my clothes, or my food, or a demon behind every rock.

“*You can fear God and live fearlessly at the same time.*”

► 1:17:22

Jesus himself took the full run of what people can do — the sneer that he was a Samaritan and had a demon, the charge that he cast out demons by the prince of demons, and then real harm to himself and to his friends. Those are not the people to be afraid of.

Don't be scared of the fear of God

► 1:17:58

“The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults.”

PSALM 19:9-12 ↗

The rendering Matt read says the fear of the Lord is *pure*, and he leaned on the word. “You don’t need to be scared of the fear of God,” he said. “Don’t fear the fear of God. Embrace it. It’s a pure thing. It’s good. It’s wholesome.” It fits who God is and who we are, and it lasts. The same goes for everything Jesus tells us to do: these are not bad things handed down by someone who does not know us. He made us. He

knows exactly what it takes to shepherd us, and what the shepherd of our souls says is *don't be anxious, but fear God*.

The last line of the psalm is why he opened with deception in the first place. He cannot always tell when he is being deceived — in fact, if he is deceived, he probably will not know. He does not know where his hidden faults are. Which is exactly the situation in which you want to care very much what God says.

Maturity grows into it, not out of it

► 1:20:07

The assumption Matt wanted to dismantle is that reverence is for beginners — that as you mature you drift further from the scriptures and the fear of God. He thinks the arrow points the other way. As we grow in faith we grow in trust of God, and in reverence for what he thinks about anything and everything.

The Proverbs and the Psalms keep saying it is the fool who does not want wisdom and the wise who are already out looking for it, which puts a particular pressure on anyone who thinks he has enough. His picture for it: the signs at work telling people to stop putting the wrong things in the trash are aimed precisely at the people who do not read signs. Which is why the fear of God has to be pursued actively rather than assumed. “I want to care what he thinks about everything,” he said, “because who knows what my default position is on anything? Maybe I don’t even know how wrong I am.”

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”

PROVERBS 9:10 ↗

Beginning, not entry requirement you hand back at the door. “That doesn’t mean, oh, I got a little nugget of wisdom, I’m done with the fear of God now,” Matt said. “Or — oh, I love Jesus, so I can put away the fear of God. That also doesn’t make any sense.”

Loving the God who is actually there

► 1:21:37

Then the turn that made the whole message cohere. The fear of God does not only protect you from deception. It is how you manage to love God at all.

He held up a pen. Suppose I say this pen is God, and I love this pen, therefore I love God. Someone in the congregation supplied the word before he could: *idolatry*. Right — and everyone can see it is absurd. But it is the same absurdity, further along the same spectrum, to imagine God however I would prefer him to be, love that, and call it loving God. Same dumb thing, different point on the spectrum.

“*I don’t want to love the God of my own imagination.*”

Who knows what God is like? God does. So he tells us, in what he says and in what he does. If the thing I actually want is to love God and to hold fast to his love for me, then I have to love him as he really is — which means reading the scriptures, asking him for wisdom, and caring what he has to say. The fear of God and the love of God are not rivals. One is how you get the other one right.

And the one being loved here is not a proposition. “He’s really real,” Matt said — and then he reached all the way back to his first introduction to add that this God is also *here*, present in the room. Which is where he put the whole thing in a single sentence: “I want to fear him and I want to love him, and that’s what it means to belong to him.”

Who he actually is

► 1:23:59

So Matt closed by naming him. Creator of all things. We exist by his good pleasure; he brought us out of nothing, which was our natural condition. By his power there is a universe and a planet we can live on, air we can breathe, food that comes up out of the ground. By his providence we have people near us who can help us, and by his providence we were made to be able to thrive at all. “It’s his universe. It’s his rules. We all stand before him.”

► 1:25:19

And that, he said, is what makes the gospel land. The being who could flick you away if he felt like it — the way you might idly flick something across a table — instead had the humility, as God the Son, to take on flesh, breathe our stench, befriend sinners and die for us. Set that against the God we tend to invent: the fictitious, fumbling, bumbling grandpa who winks and nods at everything. You come home late, you have done none of the things you were told to do, and he tousles your hair — “Oh, squirt. It’s fine.” Of course that one forgives; it costs him nothing and means nothing. But the wages of sin is death, and what God cares about is what the whole universe ought to revolve around. Knowing that, and then watching him come anyway, is the move Matt was after: the fear of who that God is, set beside the fact of what he has done, “helps me appreciate all the more how gentle and humble he really is.” Awe first, and then a love that answers something real — back to the God who loved us first, but rooted in what he is actually like.

“I leave you with that, friends. Fear him. Don’t be anxious, but fear him.” And then he refused to turn it into a list. He handed the room to the Holy Spirit instead and asked him to say, clearly, to each person, the one step to take in response to Jesus’ words that morning — asking for that clarity, he prayed, “as a mercy to us.” Heart ministry teams in name tags up front for anyone who wanted prayer, celebration or weeping. Then: go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Ephesians 4:14
- 1 John 4:18
- 1 John 4:8
- Luke 18:1–8
- Hebrews 12:7–9
- Psalm 147:10–11
- Matthew 10:28
- Luke 12:4–7
- John 8:48
- Matthew 12:24
- Psalm 19:9–12
- Proverbs 9:10
- Romans 6:23

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt deliberately made the strongest case he could for dropping the fear of God — and it sounded biblical. Where have you met some version of that argument, and what made it persuasive?
2. He said that deep in a temptation, the fear of God has sometimes been his last line of defense, and that this is good. When has reverence held you where your gut or your feelings would not have?
3. Hebrews 12 takes for granted that you can respect a father and love him at the same time. How does your own experience of being parented help — or complicate — that picture with God?
4. Where might you be loving a God you have partly imagined? What would it take to let Scripture correct the picture rather than confirm it?
5. Matt admitted he cannot always tell when he is deceived, and asked God for wisdom on that basis. What would change this week if you genuinely wanted to know what God thinks about everything, instead of assuming your default position is already right?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCJ2KSNpEKQ&t=3894s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.