

STORM-STRONG FAMILIES “fear” the Lord
The blessing of divinely aligned and resourced parents

Welcome back to week #2 of our Spring Gather Worship teaching series, **Storm-Strong Families**. The **objective** of this series is simple: As a large team, as Jesus body together, we want **to listen** to the Lord for His counsel and power on being disciples in families that are

- not simply tossed around in the storm of our culture,
- nor merely defined or directed by the stormy uncertainty of our culture’s influence on us,
- but **rather** strong in God, strong in knowing Him and living out His truth together in our families

Today, our families are what they are. That brings smiles to some, tears to others. We commit the past to God’s grace. What we can do *today* is lean into the Lord *right now*...and humbly ask Him to shape our future. He can and will if we give to the Holy Spirit fully cooperative hearts.

PRAYER

On Friday, Pamela and I did something we had never done before in 26 years living in Iowa. We visited Pella, Iowa during its Annual Tulip Time 3-Day festival. The 84th Annual celebration.

Yes, there was the beauty of hundreds of thousands of brilliantly colored tulips.

Yes, there as dancing in the streets (yep...in wooden shoes).

Yes, there was the crowning of the Tulip Festival Queen and her court, along with a visit from the Orange City Queen and her court (their festival is May 16-17).

The descendants of Sheriff Wyatt Earp were there to help keep law-n-order in the town. Here they had to bring in line one unruly parade watcher.

And, there was of course a medical responder team on hand – Dr. Jerimiah Honeycutt’s Travelin’ Medicine Wagon, Dr. Jerimiah himself boasting, “If I can’t cure it, you ain’t got it!”

Pamela and I sat through most of one of the more impressive small town parades we’ve seen in years. What surprised me was the parade was not about tulips. It was about people; more specifically it was about families. A large section of the parade was simply devoted to dads and moms and children walking by the crowds, smiling and waving. A celebration of what is highly valued. Goodness...they marched all of the children of the all the elementary schools and home

school around Pella's central plaza.

Quite frankly, that's how we want to worship the Lord during these weeks. And everyone--all of us here together--have a vital stake in the future of our families. Last Sunday, we began here

A storm-strong family has the humility and courage to listen to God, believe His revelation, and use His wisdom.

In so doing, the Lord will build their house, to their joy and to His glory.

Psalm 127:1 Matthew 7:24-27

Psalm 127:1

Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.

Matthew 7:37 (the Lord Jesus Christ)
“The one who hears my words and does them
is like a man who builds a house on rock.”



FOUNDATION STONE #1

**A storm-strong family
must have
Jesus Christ unmistakably
at the center**

The good news (Gospel) =
His life-saving Lordship can transform any family



“Jesus, you are my Savior and
my Lord. You live in me through
Your Spirit, powerfully in me.
What kind of person do you
want to make me to be?”

What kind of changes do you want to bring about in my
thinking, in my choosing, in my relationships? How do you
want to make my family ‘storm-strong’ through me?”

So, if we may, **let's set in place a second** foundation stone

FOUNDATION STONE #2



**A storm-strong family
fears the Lord**

-- dependent, obedient, aware --

Psalm 128 (Cf. Proverbs 1:7, 28-30)

- ¹ **Blessed** is **everyone who fears the LORD**,
 who walks in His ways!
- ² You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your
 hands; you shall be **blessed**,
 and it shall be well with you.
- ³ Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
 within your house;
 your children will be like olive shoots
 around your table.
- ⁴ Behold, thus shall the man be **blessed**
 who fears the LORD.
- ⁵ The LORD **bless** you from Zion!
 May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
 all the days of your life!
- ⁶ May you see your children's children!
 Peace be upon Israel!

Why did the Holy Spirit give us this Psalm? What does God say to us here about a storm-strong family?

You notice right “off the bat” that this Psalm is about a family that is “blessed;” the English word “Blessed/Bless” occurs 4 times. But a closer look reveals there are two distinct Hebrew words:

- Vss. 1-2 it’s the word אָשַׁרִי (ash-eree) which comes from the word for “go straight, to progress or advance” or “to set something in such a way as it should be.” Kidner suggests the translation “truly happy.” It’s the same word that begins the opening song of the Psalms (Psalm 1:1)
- But in vss. 4-5 the Psalmist uses the word בִּרְךָ (beh-re-keh), which comes from the word “to kneel down” or “do adore someone (on bended knee) and pronounce favor upon.” Here the idea is that when someone genuinely fears the Lord, the Lord God himself (if you will) *stoops down to bless* that person. (Take a moment and think about that)

Psalm 5:11-12 But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
 let them ever sing for joy,
 and spread your protection over them,
 that those who love your name may exult in you.
 For **You bless the righteous**, O LORD;
you cover him with favor as with a shield.

Psalm 115:12 The LORD has remembered us; he will bless us;
 he will bless the house of Israel;
 he will bless the house of Aaron;
He will bless those who fear the LORD,
 both the small and the great.

Second, this true happiness, this bestowing of His favor on us, is the direct result of the family members’ choice as a habit of living to “fear the Lord.” It is twice mentioned in this Psalm (vs.1,4). Will you also notice that this “fearing the Lord” *begins* with the male, the husband, the father of the family. With the one who is called to set the pace for the family. Gentlemen, would your bride say,

would your children say of you, “I have no doubt about it. My husband/dad fears the Lord.”

FEARING THE LORD – meaning?

More times than I can count I have heard this question raised, “What does it mean to *fear* the Lord?” So often, the ensuing conversation goes something like this:

- “Well, we’re not supposed to be afraid of God, right?” **To which I think**, “Really, we’re not supposed to be afraid of God? Where did you get that idea? Really...you’re not afraid of God?”
- “Well, we’re just supposed to have a healthy respect for God, right?” **To which I think**, “Really, where in the world did you get that idea? A *healthy respect*...like what you’d have for the town mayor, perhaps a police officer? Really, that’s all God gets?”
- “Well, God doesn’t expect that I should be intimidated by Him, right? He wants us to be confident in ourselves...you know, not overwhelmed or nervous or apprehensive.” **To which I think**, “Really, we are not supposed to be overwhelmed by God? Where in the world did you get that idea?”

The Hebrew word “Yah-reh” means “to be afraid, to fear, to be terrified, to dread, to stand in absolute astonished awe, to reverence, to uniquely honor.” This subject – fearing the Lord – is a huge subject, worthy of an entire teaching series. Let me offer you 5 statements on what it means **to fear the**

Lord. “To fear the Lord is to...”

Possess a deeply seated conviction that there is a Sovereign God who holds both the universe together by the word of His power and our very lives moment by moment – along with the continuing existence of all things -- are immediately in His hands.

(Hebrews 1:3, Acts 17:25)

Realize that the full expression of His presence is terrifying, overwhelming, something which no creature could survive without God’s protective grace.

(Dan 7:28, 10:17; Neh 1:5, 4:14, 9:32; Job 37:22).ⁱⁱ

His passion for holiness and righteousness is a consuming fire.

His love for what He has created knows no limit.

He has purposed to redeem, to reconcile, and reclaim what has been lost and destroyed by sin.

(Hebrews 12:28-29, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21)

Someone who truly fears Him has taken the first, correct step toward all true knowledge. (Proverbs 1:7, 29)

One who fears knows he is **DEPENDENT** that God gives him everything; that **OBEYING** Him in faith is the pathway of life, and **AWARE** disobeying him in foolishness is the pathway unto destruction.

(Psalm 1, Proverbs 28:14)

Mark Galli, in his book *Jesus Mean and Wild* (Baker, 2006) remembers what happened when a group of Laotian refugees who had been attending his Sacramento CA church, approached and asked to

become members:

They were newcomers...attending the church only a few months. They only had a rudimentary understanding of Christian faith, so Galli suggested they study the gospel of Mark together, to make sure they understood what a commitment to Christ and to membership involved. They happily agreed.

Yet despite their lack of Christian knowledge—or maybe because of it—these Bible studies were fascinating. And when they read the passage in which Jesus calmed the storm, Galli asked them what storms were they facing in their lives. There was a puzzled look on the faces of the Laotians. Galli tried to explain that “we all have storms—problems, worries, troubles, crises. This story teaches Jesus can give us peace in the midst of those storms. So,” Galli asked again, “What are your storms?”

Again, more puzzled silence. Finally, one of the men asked, “Do you mean that Jesus actually calmed the wind and the sea in the middle of a storm?” Galli replied, “We should not get hung up on the details of the miracle. We should remember that Jesus can calm the storms in our lives.”

There was another stretch of awkward silence until someone said, “Well, if Jesus calmed the wind and the waves, he must be a powerful man!” At this, they all nodded vigorously and chattered excitedly to one another in Lao. “Except for me,” Galli recalled, “the room was full of wonder. I suddenly realized they grasped the story better than I did.”

Proverbs 14:26-27 In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge.
The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,
that one may turn away from the snares of death.

Proverbs 28:14 Blessed is the one who fears the LORD always,
but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

A storm-strong family fears the Lord

-- dependent, obedient, aware --

Psalms 128 (Cf. Proverbs 1:7, 28-30)

NURTURING THE FEAR OF THE LORD – how do I nurture a family that fears the Lord?

#1 **Nurture a godly fear in your own life** – personally read and study what the Scriptures say about fearing the Lord.ⁱⁱⁱ

#2 **Invite your spouse, your children into what you are learning** – begin what the Bible’s parenting manual (Proverbs) has to say about the importance and benefits of fearing the Lord.^{iv}

#3 **Talk about** what you are discovering together while **in the pathways of life**. Deuteronomy 6 offers the template:

Deuteronomy 6:5-9 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And **these words** that I command you today **shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them** when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

You may have never hear of him, unless you are an avid reader of Christian books. But Eugene Peterson is worth knowing.^v Quietly, and most often below the radar, he was arguably one of the most influential pastors in the last 50 years. This morning, after passing in October of 2018, he is in the presence of the Lord he faithfully served.

Peterson wrote extensively. He produced a modern day paraphrase of the Bible called “the Message,” along with almost 40 other books. For my money, he is one of those few authors my hands reach for when I need an especially refreshing word.

In one of his books, Peterson wrote about **the meaning of Psalm 128**. Listen carefully:

*There is a general assumption prevalent in the world that it is extremely difficult to be a Christian. While it is true that many don't completely disqualify themselves as “Christians,” they do modify their claims. They call themselves “ordinary” Christians. They respect the church, worship fairly regularly, try to live decently. But they also give themselves somewhat generous margins to allow for the temptations and pressures put up them by the world. To **really** be on the way of faith, to take with **seriousness** all that the Bible says—well, that requires a disposition to saintliness, extraordinary willpower and an unspecified number of nameless austerities that they are quite sure they cannot manage.*

But this is as far from the truth as the east is from the west.

The easiest thing in the world is to be a Christian. What is hard is to be a sinner. Being a Christian is what we were created for. The life of faith has the support of an entire creation and the resources of a magnificent redemption.

In the course of Christian discipleship we discover that without Christ, we were doing it the hard way, and that with Christ, we are doing it the easy way. It is not Christians who have it hard, but non-Christians.^{vi}

My caution...before you dismiss Pastor Peterson’s claims...think about it. It’s the storm-strong family which fears the Lord...which is blessed.

ⁱ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150* (InterVarsity Press, 1975), 443.

ⁱⁱ John Bunyan. *The Fear of God - What it is and what it is not* (Kindle Location 52). Diggory Press (www.diggorypress.com). Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ You may easily start by using www.biblegateway.com and doing a search using the word "fear". Start with the references you find in Proverbs. Look up and read other passages for examples of how godly men and women feared the Lord.

^{iv} Here are the 20 passages in Proverbs (ESV)

THE FEAR OF THE LORD

1. [Proverbs 1:7](#) The **fear** of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.
2. [Proverbs 1:29](#) Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the **fear** of the LORD,
3. [Proverbs 2:5](#) then you will understand the **fear** of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.
4. [Proverbs 3:7](#) Be not wise in your own eyes; **fear** the LORD, and turn away from evil.
5. [Proverbs 8:13](#) The **fear** of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.
6. [Proverbs 9:10](#) The **fear** of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.
7. [Proverbs 10:27](#) The **fear** of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short.
8. [Proverbs 14:2](#) Whoever walks in uprightness **fears** the LORD, but he who is devious in his ways despises him.
9. [Proverbs 14:26](#) In the **fear** of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge.
10. [Proverbs 14:27](#) The **fear** of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.
11. [Proverbs 15:16](#) Better is a little with the **fear** of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it.
12. [Proverbs 15:33](#) The **fear** of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor.
13. [Proverbs 16:6](#) By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the **fear** of the LORD one turns away from evil.
14. [Proverbs 19:23](#) The **fear** of the LORD leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm.
15. [Proverbs 22:4](#) The reward for humility and **fear** of the LORD is riches and honor and life.
16. [Proverbs 23:17](#) Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the **fear** of the LORD all the day.
17. [Proverbs 24:21](#) My son, **fear** the LORD and the king, and do not join with those who do otherwise,
18. [Proverbs 28:14](#) Blessed is the one who **fears** the LORD always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity.
19. [Proverbs 29:25](#) The **fear** of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.
20. [Proverbs 31:10, 30](#) An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels....
Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who **fears** the LORD is to be praised.

^v In 1962, Peterson was a founding pastor of Christ Our King Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) in Bel Air, Maryland, where he served for 29 years before retiring in 1991. He was the James M. Houston Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, from 1992 to 1998. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugene_H._Peterson

^{vi} Eugene H Peterson, *A Long Obedience In the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (InterVarsity Press, 2000), 115.