The Psalms: Infallible Inspiration For Living
Psalm 111
Inspiration To Embrace The Right Kind Of Fear

Introduction: The title of the Psalm is "**Great Are the Lord's Works,"** and it sets the tone for the point: God should be RIGHTLY feared. Specifically, it makes this point from the perspective of all God has done, is doing, and will do, and what those things say about Him and how we should respond.

The Bible is dogmatically clear that there is a fear we should all have (the right kind of fear) and a fear we shouldn't have (the wrong kind of fear). But before we get into that, let me get first-time guests up to speed on what we are doing.

Since August 30, 2026, we've used my personal method of reading the Psalms to guide what we study as a church on Sunday. We determine the specific psalm we study by the month's number; in today's case, it's 11 for November, plus the last digit of the date, which is 1 (November 1)—Psalm 111. So, if I read a psalm every day in November, I will end up reading and meditating on Psalm 111 three times—November 1, November 11, and November 21.

I claim no divine authority or power in my personal psalms reading plan. It's just my way of doing it. As a matter of fact, if you know the book of Psalms, you know my plan has a fatal flaw—it accounts for only 129 of the 150 psalms! I have to fold the rest of them in throughout the year with no plan.

Now, I brought this up again not only to let those of you here for your first Sunday know what we are doing, but also to highlight an interesting coincidence in how my psalm reading plan lined up. This Sunday's psalm and next Sunday's psalm totally complement each other! This week's psalm equips us to have the right kind of fear, and next week's psalm equips us to combat the wrong kind of fear.

This week's psalm also has some interesting formatting, structure, and location in the psalms. The following are quotes from various scholars who commented on these aspects of Psalm 111:

> "The author of this psalm is unknown, as is the occasion on which it was composed. It is one of the psalms, of which there are in all ten in number, that commence with the phrase *Hallelu-jah* in the Hebrew; in our version rendered, *Praise ye the Lord*. Those psalms are the 106, 111, 112, 113, 135, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150. The use of this phrase shows that the psalms where it is found were designed for public worship. It is probable that this was one of the later psalms,—a fact that might be indicated by the very use of this phrase *Hallelujah"*[1]

[1] Barnes, A. (1870–1872). *Notes on the Old Testament: Psalms* (Vol. 3, p. 141). Blackie & Son.

> "This is one of the alphabetical psalms. In that class of psalms there is considerable variety. In some a letter of the Hebrew alphabet commences each verse in the psalm; in others, the successive letters of the alphabet begin each two or three verses in succession, or, as in Ps. 119, eight verses in succession; in others, the successive letters of the alphabet are used in the beginning of separate clauses of the *verses* of a psalm. … The peculiarity of this psalm is that the first eight verses of the psalm contain *two* clauses, beginning with the letters of the alphabet taken in their order, the last two verses, *three*. Why this arrangement was adopted, it is impossible now to determine,—as it is in regard to *many* things which are thought to be beauties in poetry. There is very much in the measure, the rhythm, the rhyme, of modern poetry, that is quite as artificial, and quite as inexplicable, as this. The psalm is a call to the praise of God on account of his *works*, and is designed to suggest grounds of confidence in him as drawn *from* those works. It is, therefore, of universal applicability; and may be used in any nation, at any time, and among any people. It is a psalm which may be translated into all the languages of the world, and whatever language men may speak, it would express in their own tongue what they have occasion to give thanks for in the various lands where they dwell."[2]

> "This poem enshrines the very heart of wisdom theology. Twenty-two lines, alphabetically arranged and intended for recitation in worship (v. 1), dwell upon the works of the Lord. They are worth pondering, glorious and right, memorable and compassionate, generous, powerful, faithful, enduring, and redemptive. Nature, history, and covenantal religion all witness to divine activity. Surrounded by evidence of an active God, it is the very starting point of wisdom to live in the fear of the Lord."[3]

> "Psalms 111 and 112 are a pair and should be considered together. In form they are similar, each beginning with "Praise the LORD," each consisting of twenty-two lines divided into ten verses, and each an alphabetical acrostic (see the comments on Psalms 9–10). In the case of these two psalms, each line begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, running from *alef* to *tav*, that is, from *a* to *z*. When it comes to content, the two psalms are complementary. The focus of Psalm 111 is on God, and that of Psalm 112 is on human beings. Taken together, they provide a picture of what the Bible says concerning *theology* and *anthropology*, especially as presented by the teachers of wisdom."[4]

As we dig into today's passage, keep this in mind. I've already said that the Bible makes it dogmatically clear that we should fear some things and not others. We should clearly fear

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[2] Barnes, A. (1870–1872). *Notes on the Old Testament: Psalms* (Vol. 3, pp. 141–142). Blackie & Son.

[3] White, R. E. O. (1995). Psalms. In *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (Vol. 3, p. 393). Baker Book House.

[4] Limburg, J. (2000). *Psalms* (P. D. Miller & D. L. Bartlett, Eds.; p. 382). Westminster John Knox Press.

the LORD, but that raises a second question. What's the right way to fear the Lord? This is where Psalm 111 is helpful. It not only explains why we should fear the Lord, but also gives practical guidance on what it means to fear Him rightly.

Let me start with a definition of "rightly" fearing the Lord.

Rightly fearing the Lord means living in total glad submission to Him for no other reason than He is <u>WORTHY</u> of it!

Now watch how Psalm 111 gives us reasons why He is worthy of it, along with practicalities for rightly fearing the Lord.

Proposition: Psalm 111 is divided into two parts that inform and equip our faith to rightly fear the Lord.

The largest part of the Psalm explains why we should rightly fear the Lord. Specifically,

Psalm 111:2-9 gives three reasons we should rightly fear the LORD.

The first reason we should rightly fear the Lord is in verses 2-3.

(1) **His works display how immeasurably <u>HOLY</u> He is! (111:2-3)**

A. **2 Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them. 3 Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever. (111:2-3)**

B. The word "great" implies accomplishments no one else could match in quantity, quality, or outcome.

C. "Full of splendor" means His works are so magnificent or stunning that you can't find anything about them that isn't.

D. Likewise, His works are so full of "majesty," another way of saying they command respect and deserve honor, that no matter how you look at them, you will never find a rational reason to think otherwise!

E. Finally, God's works forever put His righteousness on full display, that is, the perfect moral and ethical character that makes Him eternally worthy of praise and honor. Righteousness is an unending, unfading, undiluted, uncompromised characteristic of God, and it is fully in all He does, so much so that nothing in it is unrighteous! When we put all that together in a single phrase, we say that God and all His works are perfectly Holy, that is, He and His works are perfectly different and better than anything else! On the other hand, man and his works are not!

1. "The grounds of praise for Yahweh are his "works." These should be studied with loving diligence by all who delight in learning to understand his revelation of himself. All his works reveal the attributes of royal dignity with which he clothes himself; at the same time, they are the outcome of his eternal righteousness. With him there is no divorce between might and right."[5]

2. "They are great in number; great in magnitude; great in wisdom; great in goodness. … A man who loves God will have real pleasure in studying his works as well as his word; and it is as proper to find pleasure in the one as in the other,—as proper to wish to find the knowledge which the one imparts as that which the other bestows. One great error among the friends of God is the neglect to study his *works*. In doing this, men need not neglect or undervalue the Bible and the knowledge which it gives, for such studies would be among the best means of illustrating the Bible."[6]

3. "It will be found in all the investigations of his works, that he is unchangeably righteous or just. All that he has done, or that he now does, goes to demonstrate this. There are doings of men—even of good men—which will not bear investigation; but there are no such acts of God. There are things that men do which excite admiration only when there is no investigation in regard to them; but the works of God are admired the more, the more they are studied. There are things which appear beautiful, or appear sweet only when they are not shaken; a collection of perfumes will give out sweets the more it is stirred."[7]

F. I love learning about amazing things that amazing people accomplished in history. But when you look at it objectively, no matter how beneficial or magnificent an accomplishment is, you often find unintended consequences that aren't necessarily glorious or admirable.

Note: In the 1960s, the United States Department of Defense launched a project called ARPANET to create a decentralized, nuclear-resistant communication network. Its success led to what we now call the internet, a platform that has enabled global communication and trade on a level unimagined by any previous generation in human history. It has created unprecedented access to one another, education, economic advancement, and most importantly, the Gospel! However, in all the good accomplished through the internet, it has also simultaneously created an unprecedented platform to divide and destabilize free

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[5] Smith, J. E. (1996). *The wisdom literature and Psalms* (p. 401). College Press Pub. Co.

[6] Barnes, A. (1870–1872). *Notes on the Old Testament: Psalms* (Vol. 3, p. 142). Blackie & Son.

[7] Barnes, A. (1870–1872). *Notes on the Old Testament: Psalms* (Vol. 3, p. 143). Blackie & Son.

societies, make it easier for totalitarian regimes to oppress their citizens, and rapidly expedite the sexual exploitation, trafficking, and abuse of women and minors. In addition, many people point to the internet as the primary catalyst for the rapidly increasing emotional and relational immaturity in Western society.

G. In addition, you also often find out that the person you admire for whatever thing it is they accomplished had character flaws inconsistent with what you thought about them, some of which you might even find shockingly inconsistent.

1. Thomas Jefferson and George Washington are two of the most important leaders in human history. Their leadership in establishing the freest, most prosperous, most benevolent, and powerful society in human history changed the world. However, despite writing things that called into question the abysmal immorality of slavery, neither was willing to part from their slaves while they were alive nor push laws against it. Meanwhile, founding fathers like John Adams, Thomas Paine, and Samuel Adams not only refused to own slaves; they openly spoke out against it and pushed for laws to abolish it. Others like Benjamin Franklin and John Jay eventually repented of owning slaves and championed its abolition as well. The point is, Jefferson and Washington would not have stood alone if they had been willing to stand up against slavery, but neither did.

2. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a Baptist pastor, is one of the most important cultural leaders in modern American history. He had a profoundly prophetic ministry of calling America to repent of the immorality and injustice of racism and to instead treat one another as Jesus commanded! The impact of his life and ministry went well beyond America's borders and still has a deeply positive impact around the world today. However, it is also a fact that while calling America to live moral and ethical lives towards one another, he was living a grotesquely unfaithful, sexually immoral life in his marriage. He had extramarital affairs with at least forty different women!

3. Some of the greatest leaders in the Bible that God raised up and used to accomplish some of the greatest feats in human history were also men of noticeable moral and ethical shortfalls. On two different occasions, to protect his own life, Abraham lied and refused to claim Sarah as his wife, which then allowed a King to claim her as a wife. God didn't let Moses enter the Promised Land because of a faithless act of disobedience that Moses did in anger towards the Israelites for their faithlessness. David had an affair, and then in an attempt to cover it up, he arranged for the woman's husband to be killed in battle. To please his pagan wives, King Solomon built altars to false gods, which set a standard for the Israelites to compromise the most serious and consequential command God gave them—have NO other gods! Fast forward, Peter, one of the most important leaders in the first-century church and author of two books in the Bible, got rebuked by Paul two

decades after Jesus ascended into heaven for still clinging to racist attitudes and actions toward Gentiles (non-jews).

H. My point is, whenever you study the works accomplished by mankind, even the greatest, most positively impactful works, done by the greatest, most positively impactful and inspiring human leaders, you find out they always created some negative consequences and were done by somebody that at some level was stained with personal failures and weakness and in some cases at a shocking level! Every astonishing feat accomplished by a man or a woman in history was performed by someone in need of God's grace, just like everybody else. Therefore, when we all stand before God, it will become clear that even the greatest among us fell woefully short of God's glory, so much so that only Jesus will be rightly praised, revered, and feared! God alone is worthy of total, glad submission! God alone is worthy to be feared!

The second reason Psalm 111 gives us for why the Lord should be rightly feared is that,

(2) **His works are <u>UNFORGETTABLE</u>. (111:4)**

A. **4 He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and merciful. (111:4)**

B. Interestingly, how quickly we forget something, or somebody, says a lot about how important that thing or person is to us. No matter if it is a positive something or somebody, or a negative something or somebody, the fact that you still remember the thing or the person says it was meaningful to you.

C. Last year, I spoke to a group of Gen Z students who had no clue who Billy Graham was or what he did. Billy Graham reached more people worldwide with the Gospel of Jesus Christ than any other preacher in history—possibly combined! Christians and non-Christians alike respected him worldwide. If, just 8 years after his death, Billy Graham can be forgotten by people, a man who has a major highway named after him in the largest city in North Carolina (Charlotte), a statue of him placed inside the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., a sizable museum full of things that tell about his life and story, and a global ministry that still operates under his name, then I can be absolutely abundantly sure I will certainly be forgotten by people as well!

D. But when it comes to God, every conscious moment of a person's life is lived in the reality of the Lord and His work! Every second of creation's existence shouts of its Creator! We may choose to disregard the Lord's work, but we can never blot it out or blot Him out; God cannot be canceled, and to His praise, that absolutely includes the Gospel! In 1 Peter we read,

Note: **24 for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, 25 but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:24-25)**

E. Given that eternal life, love, joy, and holiness depend on living in an abiding relationship with God, how gracious and merciful is it that God's works are so awesome that, even when man disregards God, he can't erase God's testimony from creation. More importantly, every attempt of man to erase the knowledge of the Gospel from culture and history backfires. Throughout history, every person who has tried to erase the Gospel only spreads it further!

F. The point is that Yahweh cannot be forgotten, and if one can't be forgotten, they probably should be feared!

The third reason Psalm 111 gives us for why the Lord should be rightly feared is that,

(3) **His works demonstrate the <u>TRUSTWORTHINESS</u> of His commitment to us. (111:5-9)**

Note: This is a frequent theme in the psalms because we foolishly frequently choose to disregard it.

A. **5 He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever. (111:5)**

1. God promised the Hebrew people that if they would obey Him, He would supply their needs, and He did!

2. "He will never leave or forsake his people; he will be faithful to all the promises that he has made to them."[8]

3. "As Yahweh provided manna for Israel in the wilderness, so he provides for the [needs] of his people at all times. The deliverance from Egypt was a proof that Yahweh remembered his covenant with the patriarchs, and a pledge that he would never be unmindful of it."[9]

4. Jesus drove home this point. In Matthew we read, "**31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the**

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[8] Barnes, A. (1870–1872). *Notes on the Old Testament: Psalms* (Vol. 3, p. 143). Blackie & Son.

[9] Smith, J. E. (1996). *The wisdom literature and Psalms* (p. 401). College Press Pub. Co.

kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:31-33)

5. Paul wrote, **19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Philippians 4:19-20)**

6. The point is that those who are in Christ have no need to worry about their needs. God will provide everything we need to accomplish everything we have been called to do in this life. The Bible and all of church history are a big, ginormous evidentiary testimony to this truth!

B. 6 He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the inheritance of the nations. (111:6)

1. In the book of Joshua, an often-overlooked passage appears before the battle of Jericho. We want to rush to the trumpets sounding and the walls falling, or go back to Rahab's faithful, selfless act of protecting the spies, both of which are awesome and important to remember, but to me they pale in comparison to the lesson in Joshua 5. This is what happened,

2. **13 When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" 14 And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" 15 And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so. (Joshua 5:13-15)**

3. Some believe the ground was holy because the commander was the pre-incarnate Christ; others, like me, believe the ground was holy because the commander was an angel who officially represented God. As an official representative, God was technically present everywhere the angel went on God's behalf. Either way, the point is that the commander made it clear that God was in charge and had placed him in charge, and that's when Joshua bowed down in glad submission! God's representative was there to demonstrate God's power to give the promised land to a people who had wandered around for 40 years with no home after 400-plus years of slavery in Egypt. The point is that the weightiness of who and what was happening in that encounter caused Joshua to do the only rational thing possible: gladly submit!

4. The testimony of how God gave them the land He promised them SHOUTS that God is in charge in a big, big way!! From how He freed them from

captivity, to how He brought them to the land, to how He enabled them to conquer it, everything shouted of God's power and authority and trustworthiness to use His power and authority to do exactly what He said He would do, and thus why HE should absolutely be feared!

C. **7 The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy; 8 they are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness. (111:7-8)**

1. In combining "**his precepts are trustworthy**" with "**The work of his hands are faithful and just,**" we know for certain the seriousness with which we are to **perform** His laws ("**precepts"**)! Deuteronomy 28 lays out the enormous blessings God would provide the Hebrew people if they obeyed Him and the horrendous consequences if they disobeyed. The point to the Hebrew people was that God's laws and commandments are as trustworthy as His works that brought them from 400 years of slavery to the cusp of the Promised Land. God took His promises seriously, both those He made through His Law and those about making a nation, giving them the land, and using them to bring forth the one who blesses people from every nation—Jesus! Each is a promise of God, and God doesn't break His promises. God promised the Hebrew people blessings for faithful obedience and harsh discipline for disobedience. Therefore, if He could be trusted to provide food and land, He should also be trusted to provide blessings and punishment, and He is!

2. The New Testament clarifies this even more. We are not under the Mosaic Covenant, but we are still under God and, as such, under His universal law for mankind. That universal law was certainly contained in the Mosaic Covenant, but the New Testament communicates it with much greater clarity and bluntness, as well as much greater reward and consequence! To those who rightly fear God and repent and surrender their lives to God, we have the promise in Christ of eternal life and blessings forever, but to those who don't, there is the promise of eternal separation from God, His love, and His life, which is also called Hell! Jesus said,

   a. **40 Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, 42 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. … 49 So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:40-43, 49-50)**

b. 48 The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. (John 12:48)

3. The point is, if we believe God should be trusted to provide the blessings He promised, then we better also believe He should be trusted to provide the curses! But in that, God has also declared that He is a merciful and gracious God, and therefore the psalmist wrote,

D. **9 He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name! (111:9)**

1. "He redeemed them (9)—*redemption* focuses attention on paying the ransom-price: he took upon himself the whole 'cost' of their deliverance—and brought them into *covenant* with himself."[10]

2. Time and time again, God redeemed the Hebrew people from the consequences of their own sin, and in Christ we have the greatest redemption and rescue possible! The writer of Hebrews wrote,

3. **12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:12)**

4. God is so committed to us that He made a way for us to be redeemed out of the curse of sin that we justly live under, a way that cost Jesus HIS LIFE! Given His great grace and mercy, how can we do anything but fall down in glad surrender to Him?

The other part of the psalm addresses the practicalities involved with rightly fearing the Lord.

Psalm 111:1 & 10 give us three important practicalities of rightly fearing the LORD.

The first practicality in rightly fearing the Lord is that,

(1) **Rightly fearing the LORD causes us to sincerely and publicly <u>PRAISE</u> Him. (111:1 & 10b)**

A. **"1 Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. … 10 His praise endures forever!" (111:1 & 10b)**

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[10] Motyer, J. A. (1994). The Psalms. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 561). Inter-Varsity Press.

B. In North Korea, they are required to bow down and worship the man they call the "Great Leader," the one who robs them of freedom, any opportunity for personal prosperity, and any sense of personal value and self-worth. If they don't convincingly worship him with joy, they could be killed! That is not the praise the psalmist is ascribing to God.

C. In places like Iran, Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, Libya, and where Islamic terrorist groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, and Al-Shabaab are active, you find people who praise their leaders because the leaders require not only strict adherence to Sharia and inflict severe beatings, imprisonment, or execution on anyone who gets out of line, but they do the same with anyone who questions their authority or integrity! That again is not the praise the psalmist is ascribing to God.

D. The psalmist sees God's trustworthiness, the glory of His unforgettable actions, and the majesty of His holiness, and responds with sincere, joyful public praise all on his own! Even more so, if we let the Gospel open our eyes to the Lord's works, we will praise Him even more! In the Gospel, we see not only God's wrath against sin, but also His rescue, redemption, and promise in Christ, who bore that wrath for us!

The second practicality in rightly fearing the Lord is that,

(2) **Rightly fearing the LORD is the first <u>STEP</u> on the path of wise living. (111:10a)**

A. "**The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (111:10a)**

B. That sobering thought is repeated numerous times throughout the Bible. Until you rightly fear the Lord, you live in complete foolishness. It doesn't matter how many things work out for you in this life; you will one day stand before GOD! It's why we read this in the Bible,

C. **24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. (Matthew 16:24-27)**

The third practicality in rightly fearing the Lord is that,

(3) **Rightly fearing the LORD is a <u>PRACTICE</u>. (111:10b)**

A. "... all those who practice <u>it</u> have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!" (111:10b)

B. Practice is doing something with focused, intentional, disciplined excellence, regardless of how you feel or what's convenient. It's doing something knowing you will fall short, but knowing you will, you are simultaneously committed to learn from the failure, implement it into your practice, and improve even more.

C. We are called not to practice some kind of religious tradition, but to live a life that rightly fears the Lord—a life of glad submission to the Lord for no other reason than He's worthy of it. Remember, the demons FEAR God and even tremble, but only when faced with God's inevitable judgment (Matthew 8:24-34). The demons refuse to live in glad submission to God! They have no problem participating in Christian religious practices, quoting Scripture, singing Christian songs, or even preaching Christian sermons; what they won't do is live in a state of glad submission to Jesus.

D. But here's the key. Rightly fearing the Lord is not a knee-jerk response to walking around the corner and God jumping out at you to scare you. Rightly fearing the Lord comes from rightly understanding who God is, what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do!

E. Furthermore, rightly fearing the Lord is not something that happens in the moment of crisis and then goes away when the storm subsides. Rightly fearing the Lord is a posture of willing, sincere PRACTICE that may falter and fail, but the effort remains. Practicing the fear of the Lord is not a repetitive religious habit, but a sincere drive that erupts from a right understanding of God; one that once you have it, you can never again imagine a life not lived in glad submission to Jesus!

Challenge: Does the practice of the fear of the LORD in your life resemble a demonic, reactionary fear of consequence, or a sincere <u>DRIVE</u> to honor and obey the God who deserves our respect and allegiance?