

**Christ Presbyterian Church
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Lee Hanssen
Proverbs: Giver
Proverbs 2:6-9**

Good morning, everybody. My name is Lee Hanssen. I'm Director of Student Ministries here at CPC. One of the most awesome parts about my job is that I get to travel all over the country and go on all sorts of wild and fun trips. Just a couple of weeks ago I found myself in Moab, Utah, which may not sound like the best place in the world but it's actually quite beautiful. Every year we take 150 students from CPC out there on a camp called Summit and spend the week talking about God in small groups, learning and going on really fun adventures. The last day of Summit, we get up at a stupid hour, we wake up at four o'clock in the morning, and load these buses and head to a place called Delicate Arch. Our hope is to get there by the time the sun rises so that we can watch the beautiful scenery God has made for us.

We've been taking this hike year after year, but I'd never been on it before this year so I didn't really know what to expect. All I'd ever heard about the hike was that it is really easy, a piece of cake, so I didn't really prepare myself for much. My friend Lexi and I are on the back end of the hike just chatting and processing and having a great conversation at 5:30 in the morning about life and deep things. It started getting really hot. Moab is in the desert. And I'm starting to sweat. I look at Lexi, I'm like, "Lexi, this hike is really hard." She looks at me and says, "Lee, I swear this is not the way that we normally go." You can see where this is going.

As we continue, the hike is getting harder and harder and as we carry on, the path is starting to get narrower and narrower and narrower. As it did, my heart is starting to beat faster and faster. Now two things I need you to know before I go any farther. No. 1, I am deathly afraid of heights. I hate heights. And no. 2, most people like to exaggerate because it does make a good story and I'd love to tell you that I'm going to start to exaggerate, but everything I'm about to tell you is completely true.

As we are walking along this path and my heart is beating faster and faster, I start to not be able to breathe. I'm walking like this. I turn sideways and do this type of a deal and in no time at all, I completely flipped around and clung myself to this wall in a death grip. I closed my eyes and I literally begged God to spare my life. I look at Lexi and I'm like, "Lexi, we're going to die." And like all good friends, Lexi looks at me and starts belly laughing. Worst friend ever! We continued on this hike and finally got off this God-forsaken path, which I think we have a picture of, don't we? *(Slide shown.)* Don't tell me that this is safe to walk across! And don't tell me that I shouldn't have been afraid to do that.

When we got off this path, I found the widest place I could, the safest place I could, and sat down. I did not move for the whole rest of the morning. I did not go with them to the Delicate Arch. I was so afraid, I literally could not move. I was blinded by my fear and I sat there and waited for them to come back.

I don't often experience physical places like this where I find myself that afraid. I would bet that you don't find yourself in those kinds of places often either. But what I do experience and what I would be willing to bet that we experience is all kinds of other fears on a daily basis that leave us just as paralyzed, similarly anxious, and just as blinded. We cop out on having real and challenging conversations because we are afraid of what someone might think of us and of how they are going to react. We don't enter in and actually show our real selves and let ourselves be vulnerable because we are afraid we are going to get rejected. We are afraid we are going to get rejected because we are afraid we are not qualified or talented enough or wanted. We give up on trying because we are afraid we are going to fail. Again! And perhaps the most tragic thing is, we don't draw near to God because we are afraid we are unworthy.

I was with my nephews who were five yesterday and I asked them what they are afraid of. Sam looks at me and he goes, "Bloody eyeballs!" And I thought, "Yes, who isn't afraid of bloody eyeballs?" But here is the problem. Here is my problem and our problem. We fear the wrong things, and these things keep us from fully becoming who God created us to be. Fears that are right in front of our faces keep us as Christians and followers of Christ from fully being who God created us to be. We rob God of His glory and we rob ourselves and we rob other people of who God intended us to be. I'm tired of being afraid, aren't you?

A couple of weeks ago I talked about the pursuit of wisdom. I talked about how we are called to cry out for it, look for it and search for it. I talked about how the pursuit of wisdom has to start with humility. But so many of us don't have a chance to become humble because we are so afraid to fail that we never step out in faith. I talked about how the pursuit of wisdom has to engage both our hearts and our minds and that involves seeing the world differently and changing the way that we think. I talked about how the pursuit of wisdom takes time and produces obedience but we so rarely move our feet in faith because we are afraid we might fail.

If you turn with me to page 946, I'd love to conclude my message on the pursuit of wisdom. After we are urged to pursue wisdom, after we are urged to call out and search and give it all that we've got, after we have engaged in this pursuit, the text says,

5 then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God [Proverbs 2:5].

The Psalms and the Proverbs both say that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It is interesting to me that the most common commandment in the Bible is "Be not afraid." Do not be afraid. That's the most common commandment you are going to find throughout all the Scriptures. We are called to fear the Lord but what happens is, we place the fear that we know and the fear that we experience and attach it to the idea of fearing God. The problem is that they are very different things and very different fears. The fears that we experience are not the fears that God desires that we would experience. Here is what I would like to do today. I would like to talk a little bit about the difference between the fears that we experience and the fears that God desires and why that matters.

As I processed and studied and had conversations, I asked a ton of people what they were afraid of. It was interesting that I could trace back most of these fears, the root of almost all of these fears that I heard, to two big buckets. The first big bucket was this: we are afraid of

punishment and judgment. We are afraid that we are going to be punished and we are afraid we are going to be judged. In the Letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul says,

1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus
[Romans 8:1].

What a beautiful thing to know, that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, that we don't have to be afraid of fear and punishment. A few weeks ago I shared with you that I had a horrible failure in the sales world. After that a very kind man by the name of David Luther allowed me to come and sell cars for him, and I was a used car salesman for an entire year. It was awful and it was awesome, all in the same breath. I worked at his flagship store, his No. 1 store. This was a very successful store that sold a lot of cars and did a lot of volume. Very high energy. But the general sales manager had a rather unfortunate style of leadership. He humiliated people in public on a regular basis. He cut us down. He would fly off the handle at the smallest mistake so people would come to work and they were afraid. They were petrified that they were going to get yelled at and embarrassed. They were afraid they were going to be judged and punished by this dictator of a leader.

At one point I had had enough and so I sat down with the manager, we'll call him Bob, and I said, "Bob, this store is really good. You have the most successful store in the whole company out of 28 dealerships, but you could be great. Imagine if we weren't afraid to come here. Imagine if we weren't afraid to try something new and create new ideas and perhaps even to take the store to the next level, if we were excited to be here and we respected you. Imagine how great we *could* be if we weren't afraid of being punished or judged by you." I didn't lose my job after that conversation, praise the Lord. But I wanted to be in an environment and God wants us to be in an environment where we respond out of love and admiration and awe, not out of fear of punishment and judgment. A commentator, Jon Parsons, who writes for a group called Hebrew4Christians says this.

The fear of God's punishment may deter us from sin in the short run but by itself, it is *insufficient* for spiritual life since it is based on an incomplete idea about God. It sees God in terms of the attributes of justice but overlooks God as the compassionate Savior.

It is an incomplete picture of God if we fear God and only live our lives as Christians because we are afraid of His punishment and His judgment. That will only last for so long because it is an incomplete idea about God. I was in a Bible study a few years ago studying Paul's Letters. This guy named Paul wrote a lot of Books in the New Testament, a ton of them. He wrote Letters to the Corinthians, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. He wrote Book after Book, Letter after Letter, and it is so interesting that he begins almost every single one of them in a very similar way. He says, "May grace and peace be with you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ."

But then flip to a Book he wrote called Titus, a very small, seemingly obscure Book in the New Testament. It is all about doing good works and doing stuff for God and responding to God and being Kingdom-bringers in this world. Paul starts it like this. "May grace and peace be to you from God the Father and Jesus Christ, *our Savior*." Those last two words carry such a different connotation, don't they? It's not about choosing one or the other. It's about actively seeing both. It is interesting to me that 257 times in the New Testament, the apostle Paul uses the word *Lord*

to describe Jesus. Then in a very small Letter to Titus, a very short letter, he uses the word *Savior* six times out of 12 in the entire New Testament, and the entire letter is about doing good works for God. God wants us to respond and to move forward and not be afraid of His punishment and judgment, but He wants us to respond in awe of a loving, amazing Savior.

The second big bucket of fear is the fear of being rejected, the fear of not having what it takes, of not being good enough. A couple of weeks ago, I was with our coordinating team. That is what we call our group in the department at CPC. We regularly meet together and we were doing a devotion. One of the men on staff asked this question: he said, "What would you do if you weren't afraid? What are you most afraid of? What are your deepest fears?" As I sat around the room with some of the most Godly men and women that I know, whom I respect, who have lived their lives for Jesus and have left legacies of faith and done incredible things, they shared their fears. I heard them say things like "I'm afraid I'm not relevant any more." "I'm afraid I'm going to be found out that I'm really a phony." "I'm afraid I'm not good enough." "I'm afraid I'm going to fail."

I'm looking around the room and I almost can't believe the things I'm hearing because that's not how I see these people. That's not how I've experienced these people. I think about some of the questions I ask myself and perhaps you ask yourself. "I can't really tell them how much that hurt me because I'm afraid of how they're going to respond." Or "I can't stand up and share my faith right now because what if they won't be my friend any more?" Or "If I share my marriage problems with my small group in my community, is my reputation going to be tarnished?" Or "If I give my best to God and I fail, is He still going to love me?"

I think we pass on countless opportunities to engage and live our lives sold out for Jesus because we are afraid we are going to be rejected. We are afraid that we don't have what it takes. We are afraid that we're not good enough. We are afraid we are going to fail. As I think about the questions I ask myself and as I think about the fears that my friends shared, I get angry, and you know what? I think this is crap! And if I weren't afraid to lose my job, I'd use a different word because Satan would love nothing more than for us to actually believe these lies and to keep us paralyzed and blinded and anxious because of our fears. But God's Word says,

9 . . . "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" [2nd Corinthians 12:9].

I want to know God's power in my weakness, and I don't want to be afraid any more of being judged or of not being good enough or of not having what it takes. The fear that God desires that we would know is an entirely different type of fear. It's this beautiful word *yir'ah* in the Hebrew Scriptures. The fear of the Lord that this text talks about and the fear that God desires that we would know is this Hebrew word *yir'ah*. *Yir'ah* has a totally different connotation from the fear that we know and experience and live in. *Yir'ah* is fear out of respect and reverence and piety. The same commentator I mentioned earlier, Jon Parsons, talks about *yir'ah* and says,

Yir'ah includes the idea of wonder, amazement, mystery, astonishment, gratitude, admiration, and even worship (like the feeling you get when gazing from the edge of the Grand Canyon). The *fear of the Lord*, therefore, includes an overwhelming sense of glory, worth, and beauty of the One True God.

I hope that you have had these moments in your lives where you stand at the base of a mountain or at the edge of the ocean or you look at someone you love and care for deeply and you just say, "God, You're awesome!" And you're compelled to move out of that admiration and respect. That's the idea here. That's the idea of the fear that God desires we would experience and know and that we would operate out of.

As I mentioned, on that hike I was literally blinded by my fears. A couple of weeks ago I talked about how pursuing wisdom involves the heart and the mind and how that takes *seeing things differently*. It is interesting to me that as I was studying, I saw that a lot of Hebrew scholars relate this idea of fear of the Lord, *yir'ah*, to another Hebrew word meaning *seeing*. They talk about how to understand the fear of the Lord, we need to begin to see things differently. Brooke Toftoy talked recently about how God comes to us disguised as our lives. As we begin to shift our sight and see things differently, we will begin to see God in all things.

There is a story in the Old Testament about a man named Moses. I love the story about Moses' encounter with God, when God appears to him in a burning bush and says, "Moses, take off your shoes because you are standing on holy ground." Now, yes, the bush was aflame but the ground didn't change. Moses' surroundings didn't change. But in that moment Moses began to see his role in a totally different way and it changed the way that he lived. You might notice that I'm not wearing any shoes. As I had the thought to do this, I was so afraid of what you might think that I *had* to not wear shoes. But the reason that I'm not is that when you are *not* here and the sanctuary is *not* filled with people on Tuesday morning or Wednesday afternoon, I'll come down here and I will take off my shoes at the door and come in here and just sit and be with God because *I want to see differently*. I want to be so captivated with awe and respect and wonder and amazement by God's love and His grace that it changes the way that I see things. I want it to change the way that I live and love you guys and your kids and your families. I want it to change the way that I see. Because here's the deal. We can't respond to something if we don't see it. We can't respond to something that we don't see or haven't experienced.

Here's why it matters so much to understand the difference between these two types of fears, the fear of punishment or judgment and the fear of not having what it takes or rejection and the fear God wants us to have, the fear of respect, of reverence. So often you and I abandon our hopes and dreams because we are afraid.

I sent an email out to some of my best friends, some of them men who have walked with Jesus longer than I've been alive, men who love Jesus passionately, and I asked them this question. I said, "If you weren't afraid, if fear wasn't holding you back, what are the things that you would do? I want to share with you the types of things that my friends said they would do if they weren't afraid. They said, "I would pray for bigger things." "I would be more confident and secure in whom God has made me around other people." "I would invite those on the outskirts of society into my circle, and I would love them like Jesus does." "I would trust God for big things." One of my friends said he would run the Grand Canyon on September 15 and try to raise \$50,000 so that so 50 Ethiopian women could escape the horrendous life of sex trafficking. And on my list, I would call out life in other people and invite them to be more like Jesus. I would give myself away more freely. I would talk about Jesus more.

That's why it matters to understand the difference between our fears and God's fear. Because when we are not afraid of the things that are right in front of our faces and when we accurately

see God and are captivated by His awe and His wonder, when that is our propelling force, then these are the things we do. We would live lives worthy of the calling of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and be the people we talk about being, the people we want to be, the people we pray about being. That's why it matters.

A couple of weeks ago I mentioned that the pursuit of wisdom actually produces obedience and causes us to move our feet and to do stuff. I told my staff team that I want to trust God this year to the point that it's irresponsible. I don't want to be reckless but I want to trust God for big things. I don't want to be so afraid of not doing things and so carefully calculated that I end up doing nothing. I want to trust God this year to the point that it's irresponsible, and I want you to do that also.

At times in our lives, I think we are going to take those giant steps of faith where we do crazy stuff like my friend, Steve Wiens, is doing. On September 15 he is running the Grand Canyon "Rim to Rim" and raising \$50,000 so he can free 50 women from a horrendous life of sex trafficking. Sometimes God calls us to these big adventures that are awesome, but I think more often our fears are based on small daily decisions that we make. Choosing to say "I love you" first, choosing to actually stop on the street and care for the homeless person you walk by every day, choosing to invite that other person to the lunch table and not being afraid any more of what your other friends think. When we step out in faith in those small, daily decisions and see God's provision and his faithfulness, we see Him bigger and the cycle begins a response of awesome gratitude and we become more like Christ.

I want to leave you with this. There is a book going around in the Christian community that is particularly inspiring. It's called *Love Does* by a man named Bob Goff. A friend of mine asked me, "Lee, why is this book captivating so many people?" As I thought about it, it's because this book is story after story after story of an everyday, average guy who lives a life just like you and me, who says yes to God. He is a guy who chooses in the moment to not be afraid of what the norm is or what the world says but says yes to God. And God has done crazy, silly, outrageous, stupid stuff in this guy's life. This guy is changing the world for Jesus, and that's why this book is so inspiring and has moved so many of us to read it and get excited about it. In this book, Goff writes a chapter about a cartoon movie called *The Incredibles*. Maybe some of you have seen the film. It's this movie about a family of superheroes. This insurance salesman goes to work but he wears this superhero costume underneath his everyday clothes and at any particular moment, he's prepared to do awesome stuff and not be afraid and step out and be awesome. I love that chapter. Bob concluded saying, "I want to be awesome and I want you to be awesome, too." So a couple of weeks ago, I wrote *Be awesome!* on my hand because I want that to be my daily mantra. I want to be awesome, do awesome stuff, not about me. I want to step out in faith and not be afraid.

I want you to do two things this week. First thing: I want you to ask God to transform your fears into His. I want you to ask God to transform your fear into His *yir'ah*. You can do that by opening up the Word. Read a story about the radical love that Jesus provided. Talk to God. Ask Him. Live out a talent that God has blessed you with, that makes you come alive, and respond to God's awesomeness.

Second thing I want you to do: I want you to be awesome! Maybe some of you can tackle that for a whole week. Say, "I'm going to choose this week to not live in fear." Maybe for some of you

that's going to be a day. Maybe for some of you, that's going to be an hour or a minute. But whatever that is for you, I want you to be awesome this week because we don't have to be afraid. Amen!

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.