Russell Kelfer It is I Don't Be
Afraid!
(Part 1)
911-A Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs
DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC. INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO
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It is I... Don't Be Afraid! (Part 1)

The setting is the Gospel of John, Chapter 6. The scene is on the Sea of Galilee near the city of Tiberius. The time is approaching the end of the second year of the Master's ministry. Jesus has performed miracle upon miracle, healing all who came to Him. Word of the miracles has spread like wildfire throughout the countryside. Soon huge throngs of people, wanting to be healed or merely wanting to see Him, began to press upon Him. Many were not seeking HIM; they were seeking only what He could do for them. (That pattern still exists today.) So in verse 3 we see Him retreating to a mountaintop to be alone with His disciples. Verse 4 adds that it was the time of Passover. Then, as He was teaching the Twelve atop that mountain, He lifted up His eves and saw in the distance hordes of people ascending the mountain to find Him. Their privacy would be invaded once more; their Sunday School class was about to be deluged with visitors, strangers who were not part of the "inside group." What would Jesus do? Would He send them away? Would He rebuke them for coming? Would He retreat down the other side of the mountain?

No, even when Jesus desired to be alone (or even just alone with the Twelve), He always found the time for those who found Him. And He always used the crowd to teach the Twelve. So He tests Phillip by asking him by what means they could feed this huge congregation (which by now numbered some five thousand men, plus women and children.)

Well, you know the story. There were no Golden Arches then, so Jesus took five loaves and two fish, the box lunch of a little lad. He blessed it, broke it, and miraculously fed them all with twelve baskets full of food to spare. "What a miracle! What a Man!" they cried. "He's our next King!" the crowd clamored. "He will set up our kingdom!" The King He was, but the kingdom they did not understand. And so they decided to start a "Draft Jesus" movement. They conspired to take Him by force and elect Him as their King. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force, to make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain Himself alone. (John 6:15)

Jesus was pressured by the multitudes to take the same shortcut of compromise that Satan had offered Him two years before in the wilderness. Yet He did what we ought to do when we are pressured to do God's work in man's way. He retired to a mountain to be alone with His Father.

The disciples, meanwhile, having escaped the throng, went down to the seashore, got into a ship and began the eight-mile voyage across the sea to Capernaum. The sun, its last rays flashing upon the choppy sea like sparks of fire saying "goodnight", settled into its bed beyond the horizon. Then darkness settled on the sea, and accompanying the darkness came the eerie quietness of the sea at night. But verse 17 adds that still Jesus had not yet come to them. What a day those twelve had had! Hundreds had been healed (supernaturally)! Thousands had been fed (again supernaturally)! Then came this political uprising that had at its roots the drafting of the master to be the new king. And if He were Chief of State, they must have wondered, would not they be His Cabinet? Was not a Kingdom what it was all about? So they had much to ponder.

Add to their already long day the fact that it was now dark, and getting darker. There was still no sign of the Master. This verse adds the final touch:

And the sea arose *(became choppy and filled with high waves)* by reason of a great wind that blew. (John 6:18)

So now, to the day, to the darkness, and to the disappearance of their Lord, we add the ingredient of a storm.

So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, *(which was about 4 miles, or halfway across the sea)* they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: AND THEY WERE AFRAID. *(Italics mine.)* (John 6:19)

Now be honest. Wouldn't you have been afraid too?

But He saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid.

Then they willingly received Him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went. (John 6:20,21)

God lifted up that vessel of sea-fearing disciples and in the twinkling of an eye, set them at shore. To a day of miracles Jesus had added a night of miracles. A frightened band of grown men they were—frightened perhaps at the Master's absence, frightened perhaps at the day's turn of events, or a little frightened perhaps by the storm. But they were frightened to death at the sight of the Master walking atop the water and approaching the boat. They had been expecting Him, but somehow they had not expected Him to reveal Himself this way...in a storm...on the water, and they were afraid.

Have you ever experienced what those disciples experienced: the pressures of the unknown, the darkness of uncertainty, the rumble of the storms of life, and then the haunting question, "Where is the Master?" You feel so all alone. Then suddenly you see someone coming, and you know that God is about to DO something. Yet your fear deepens. What will He do, you wonder. Will He save my marriage, or teach me through it? Will He heal my loved ones? Minister to my children? Will He find me a job? Heal my own body? Then suddenly from the shadows you recognize Who is approaching. Tenderly He whispers, "It is I; don't be afraid!" Suddenly the seas are calm. Suddenly you are AT your destination. It is not the storm that matters. It is not even the circumstances that matter. All that matters is that JESUS IS HERE, and He is in control.

The literal rendering of verse 20 is,

It is I AM (who is here); be not afraid." Because He is, and because He is here, and because He is in control, THERE IS NO NEED FOR FEAR.

That is the essence of the next portion of our study on selfcontrol. We have been looking at the Four Faces of Wisdom, using as our base of operations the principles found in the book of Proverbs. The Four Faces are:

> Humility Self-control Responsibility Generosity

Or in other words:

how to lose your life,

how to control your life,

how to direct your life, and

how to give your life away.

We are in phase 2, or Face 2, if you will: "How to Gain Godly Self-control." We began with a look at impulsiveness, how to make godly decisions, and how to make choices by the Word over the objections of our emotions. Then came a look at how to choose to do away with ungodly anger by taming the temper. Last lesson we learned that there is a problem of self-control even more dangerous than anger: the enemy called envy. We realized that there are ways to "put away" an envious or jealous spirit. But there is at least one more "internal" issue of self-control to be reckoned with. There is one more enemy whose venom attacks from within and sometimes cripples the Christian. It is the enemy Fear.

We now begin that study with a lesson entitled, "It Is I; Don't Be Afraid." Our outline for this group of lessons is this:

I- The Phenomenon of Fear (The Fourth Phase of Self-control)

- A- A matter of choice
- B- The simple gospel
- C- Satan's solution is fear
- II- Facing Fear: A Personal Inventory
- III- Freedom From Fear
 - A- God's alternative to fear (Principles from Proverbs on the fear of the Lord)
 - B- God's attitudes on fear
 - 1- What not to be afraid of
 - 2- Why not to be afraid
 - C- God's answers to fear (practically replacing the fears of men with the fear of the Lord)

As we begin I feel I must remind you that we have a simple gospel and a simple plan for living a simply extraordinary life. Man wants so desperately to complicate the Christian life, to make it a religion instead of a supernatural experience with a Living God. God has a very simple plan for spiritual success. He wants us to have the mind of Christ. First, He wants us to have knowledge, to know God's ways and God's will from God's Word. Then He wants us to have understanding, to let the Holy Spirit take our knowledge of God's ways and God's will, and superimpose it on our lives so that we can see where the mind of Christ is or is not in control of our lives. Then His objective is Wisdom, choosing to let this mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus. Remember! He provides the power, but we make the choices.

In the area of self-control this simple Gospel shines in its utter simplicity. For example, impulsiveness is a choice. Decision-making is a matter of the will saying "yes" to the Word. Anger is also a choice. When provoked to anger, we must choose to exercise the second hand of choice. Anger is not an emotion; anger is a choice. Envy is a choice. We can choose to pray for those whom Satan tempts us to envy, or we can choose to accept thoughts of envy into our minds. It is a choice. And what I am here to tell you this morning without any reservations is that FEAR is a choice as well.

You have to choose to be afraid, or else you can choose to let the mind of Christ control you as Jesus whispers, "I AM is here; don't be afraid." As we will see in our next lesson, Satan is the author of all ungodly fear. It has been his goal from the beginning to make the Christian afraid. Fear is the antithesis of faith, and it cannot abide in the presence of love. So if Satan can cause you to fear anything, or anyone, at anytime, he has a noose of self-destruction around your neck. AND HE LOVES IT.

Whenever I look at any of Satan's tactics, I always like to go back to three passages of Scriptures (as no doubt you have noticed.) They are Genesis 3, Job 1-2, and Matthew 4. These are our three face-to-face encounters of God and man with Satan.

- In Genesis 3, we have Satan's conversation with man about God.
- In Job 1 and 2, we have Satan's conversation with God about man.
- In Matthew 4, we have Satan's conversation with God about God.

While we have studied them dozens of times, still they are like an eternal fountain that never ceases to flow with new truth. Take any principle of spiritual warfare back to these three passages and you will uncover additional truth. For instance, take this satanic emotion of fear. In Matthew 4, Satan used three statements to try to impart fear into the heart of Jesus. He said, "Jesus, You need food, and God may not provide." [Fear God's provision.] "Turn these stones into bread," he whispered. Next he told Jesus, "You need acceptance. Jump off the pinnacle of the Temple." He used fear of rejection. Then he raised the question of fear of failure. He said, "Jesus, You need a kingdom. You can have it here and now. Fall down and worship me."

Satan will come at you with the same kinds of lies. His purpose is to generate fear and then to have you, motivated by fear, act in your own energy apart from the plan and purpose of God. Remember: Fear comes from Satan.

For God hath not given us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. (II Timothy 1:7)

Fear comes from Satan. Therefore, every time you are tempted to be afraid, you are being confronted with a choice. You either choose to resist Satan and refuse to listen to the voice of the stranger, or you CHOOSE TO BE AFRAID, AND THAT CHOICE IS SIN!

FACING FEAR: A PERSONAL INVENTORY

The phenomenon of fear: it is no mystery. It is simply a matter of choice; and that choice illustrates and illuminates that simple gospel God has given us called the Christian life. So as we embark on our journey to uncover God's truth and Satan's lies about the phenomenon of fear, ask yourself this question: What am I afraid of? Here is a list of possibilities.

1- Are you afraid of the unknown? Perhaps you are afraid to move to that new city? Afraid to apply for that new job? Will you only shop in familiar supermarkets? Does it take all the courage you can muster to drive home a different way? Does Satan paralyze you with fear of the unknown?

2- Are you afraid of the future? Does the ten o'clock news scare you to death? Are the signs of the times all upside down to you? Do you see the Antichrist on every corner, or doom in every daily occurrence? Has Satan frozen your heart with fear over the headlines and the horizon?

3- Are you afraid of disease and pain? Does the fear of being stricken like Job haunt you? Do you have a reserved seat at the doctor's office? Do you require an anesthetic before you can take a shot of penicillin? Is the sight of your own blood somehow more traumatic than someone else's? Satan may have injected you with a lethal dose of fear...fear of sickness and pain.

4- Are you afraid of death? Does death still have its sting to you? Do you read the obituaries every morning to be sure you are not listed? Do you drive around the block to avoid passing a funeral home? Satan says that is natural; death is the end. God says that is nonsense; death is the beginning; don't be afraid.

5- Are you afraid of loneliness? of losing loved ones? of facing lonely nights? Are you afraid of loss of companionship? The concern is normal, but not the fear. Are you the one who rented a department store mannequin to sit by the TV so you would not have to watch alone? Do you play tape recordings of crowds while you eat dinner to keep you company? Is being alone with God like being alone? Then Satan has told you a lie. You can never be alone in Christ.

6- Are you afraid God will not provide? Do you fear that you will lose your job or your provider, and God won't notice? Do you store up your treasures on earth...just in case? Then Satan has sold you a lie; God will take care of your tomorrows too. Live one day at a time.

7- Are you afraid of bodily harm? Do you live in a cage of terror and fear those who can harm the body but not the soul? Do you still wear your bulletproof vest to the grocery store? Do you peer around every corner like Detective Clouseau? Ordinary precautions are wise, but paralyzing fear is sin. The angel of the Lord is encamped around those who fear Him, remember?

8- Are you afraid of rejection? Do you conform to be accepted? Do you compromise in order to be received? Do you steam up the mirror before you look so you will not have to accept yourself? Are you afraid you will always be chosen tenth on a nine-man team? So what? That is nothing to fear. Jesus was rejected too, and He says, "Don't be afraid."

9- Are you afraid of failure? Does the thought of not succeeding drive you to overcompensate, and to lose sight of your priorities? Satan uses this fear to cripple Christians. Do not let if happen to you. Remember, God builds castles out of the stones others cast aside!

10- Are you afraid of tribulation or persecution? Do you remain silent to remain safe? Do you gauge success by how trouble-free your days are? "In this world ye shall have tribulation," Jesus said. Do not resent it as an intruder, or hide behind a door in fear. Welcome it as a friend.

11- Are you afraid of spiritual warfare? Would you rather not pray, "Lord, change me", because He just might? Would you rather live life disguised as an enemy spy so you won't get shot at by his troops? You enlisted in the army. Don't fear the battle; you have already won!

12-Are you afraid of success? Does the possibility of achieving your goals frighten you to death? Do you secretly hope to fail because you are afraid to succeed? So was Jonah; he believed the devil's lie. Don't you do it!

Ask yourself, "What am I afraid of?" In whatever areas you answered "yes", that fear is a problem for you. In that area of your life Satan has a stronghold—a stronghold that needs to be broken! It is a stronghold that holds you in bondage in an area of living in which God intended you to be free! Every time Satan approaches you with a temptation to fear, he is telling you that God is not here, God is not in control, and God is not sovereign. Do not listen; turn your heart to the Word. God is saying, "The I AM is here; do not be afraid." If you listen to the Master instead, the storm will become calm. Peace will settle in your heart, and God will transport you immediately to the shore of faith.

FREEDOM FROM FEAR

You see, it IS God's will that we be free from fear. God, as always, has created an alternative to fear (as we know it.) It is an alternative that takes the occasions of life that cause us to fear and lifts them into the higher plane of meaning and purpose. God's alternative to fear is the FEAR OF THE LORD!

There is a fear we are supposed to have. It is a holy fear that supplants all other fears. I may not be able to communicate it well, but I have come to the conclusion this week that there is a direct correlation between the "fear of the Lord" and dispelling fear.

Just what is the "fear of the Lord"? Your concordance or Bible dictionary will give you a place to begin. It will tell you that the "fear of the Lord" is "reverential awe." Or it may read "God enabling man to reverence God's authority." But the words "reverence", "respect", "awe", and "authority" will most likely be in every definition you find. What I have found, however, is that many times we stop there and lose the practical reality of this quality the Scripture says is essential to wisdom. Over fifty per cent of all the times this phrase is used, it is used in the book of Proverbs. It is, in fact, one of the major themes of the book. So, let us take a journey through Proverbs, and let the Scripture be our dictionary. We will look for principles from Proverbs on the "fear of the Lord." Our secondary objective will be to finalize a working definition and a practical explanation of how the fear of man or circumstances is the actual antithesis of the fear of the Lord.

Here we go! Now, let us assume that we do not know what it is, but will look to the principles of Proverbs to define it.

PRINCIPLE 1: The fear of the Lord is the primary ingredient to obtaining the mind of Christ and is characterized by a teachable spirit.

The fear of the Lord IS the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:7)

Do you want to learn? The fear of the Lord is essential!

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom:

(Proverbs 9:10a)

For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: (Proverbs 1:29)

There is a direct correlation between fearing the Lord and learning and becoming wise. So the fear of the Lord is more than just an attitude of awe. It is an awe of God that falls at His feet as the fountain of knowledge.

PRINCIPLE 2: The fear of the Lord is a product of the Word of the Lord.

My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee;

So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding;

Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;

If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures;

Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.

For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. (Proverbs 2:1-6)

The fear of the Lord, then, is the result of exposure to the Scriptures. So the fear of the Lord is a circle of knowledge that generates wisdom. It begins and ends with the Word of God. PRINCIPLE 3: The fear of the Lord is characterized by a growing hatred of sin.

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: (Proverbs 8:13a)

...and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.

(Proverbs 16:6b)

It is a vehicle by which God delivers His child from an attachment to sin. It is more than being in awe of who God is. It is being so in awe of His character, of His holiness, that the very thought of contamination or compromise causes us to fear the consequences of disturbing that sacred bond of fellowship we have with God.

PRINCIPLE 4: The fear of the Lord gives purpose and meaning to life.

The fear of the Lord prolongeth the days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened. (Proverbs 10:27)

Or, as the Living Bible paraphrases it:

Reverence for God adds hours to each day; so how can the wicked expect a good, long life? (Proverbs 10:27 TLB)

In other words, it makes life worth living.

The fear of the Lord tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.

(Proverbs 19:23)

It gives life meaning.

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life. (Proverbs 14:27a)

It gives life continuous purpose. It is being so in awe of God's life that you become in awe of life itself!

PRINCIPLE 5: The fear of the Lord destroys envy and changes values.

Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long. (Proverbs 23:17)

Here is an antidote for envy: to have such a reverence for God's character that to want what others have instead of what God has would not so much as enter your mind. You see, the fear of the Lord is more than a mouth—gaping kind of wonder. It is the wonder of a way of life!

PRINCIPLE 6: There is a direct correlation between the fear of the Lord and humility.

Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honour, and life *(come the satisfied life)*. (Proverbs 22:4 NIV) The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility. (Proverbs 15:33)

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy... (Proverbs 8:13a)

You cannot be captivated and controlled by the sheer wonder of God's character and still be impressed with yourself! Job could not, and neither can we!

PRINCIPLE 7: This one comes from Isaiah 8:13. The Living Bible Paraphrase captures it best.

Don't fear anything except the Lord of the armies of heaven! If you fear Him, you need fear nothing else. He will be your safety; (Isaiah 8:13,14 TLB)

So the final and pivotal principal is this: the fear of the Lord, when it controls your life, roots out and casts out all other fears. That is why we have looked at it in this lesson.

Are you beset by fears? As Paul said in II Corinthians 7:5 (my paraphrase), "without was conflict; within were fears." Then you have not yet fully discovered the fear of the Lord. The sheer awesomeness of God's presence has not yet captivated your life.

So the fear of the Lord is more than a vague reverence for God. It is an all-encompassing mindset that governs all you think about. The fear of the Lord is an attitude of life so permeated by respect for God's authority, for trust in God's sovereignty and awe at God's holiness, that it is essential to spiritual growth. It hungers for the Word of God, intensifies your hatred of evil, gives meaning and purpose to life, replaces envy with contentment and pride with humility, and supplants all other fears in your life. It is a God-given quality of life that reverences God and hates sin. It fears no man; it fears no enemy; it fears no circumstances as a threat to life. For life is God's, and our only fear becomes that of displeasing God. We reverence God, and fear only the thought of offending Him. That leaves no room to fear anything else. It is an attitude of heart that makes Christ pre-eminent and leaves all fear preempted.

What I am saying (and we will explore it in detail at a later time) is that the Christian can either fear God or man, God or circumstances, God or Satan—one or the other, but not both at the same time. In Ecclesiastes the Preacher sums up all of life with this one statement: Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

In Psalms we read:

The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.

O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. (Psalm 34:7,9)

But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;

To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. (Psalm 103:17,18)

The fear of the Lord is the essential element of eternity. You see, Satan's desire is to divert your awesome confidence in God through fear of man or circumstances. Do not let him; choose to refuse. The key is to saturate your mind with God's character and God's promises that will give you the fear of the Lord. Then, when Satan rings your bell and says, "Be afraid", you can answer, "I fear the Lord, Satan, and Him only do I serve. His love is perfect, Satan, and there is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out fear. His power is awesome, Satan. The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man shall do unto me." If Satan whispers, "What about the future?" You just answer, "Satan,"

For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

Then we which are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.'

(I Thessalonians 4:16,17)

Fear the future? No, Satan, I FEAR THE LORD."

If Satan whispers, "What about death? Be afraid!", you can answer him with:

For me to live IS Christ and to die IS gain. (Philippians 1:21)

Oh death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (I Corinthians 15:55)

...there shall be no more death... (Revelation 21:4b)

Tell him, "Satan, death is the doorway into the presence of God. Fear death? Not on your life! I fear the Lord instead."

If Satan whispers, "What about loneliness?" You can answer, "No, Jesus said,

I will ask the Father and He will send you another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth. (from John 14:16,17 paraphrase) For He himself has said, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* (Hebrews 13:5c NKJV) and lo, Lam with you always over to the and of the area

and lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20b NKJV)

Fear loneliness? No, Satan, I choose to fear the Lord instead."

Satan says, "Fear rejection." Answer him, "No." Isaiah says the Master understands.

He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: (Isaiah 53:3a)

John says the Master knows.

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

(John 1:10,11)

The writer of Hebrews concludes:

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

The Psalmist adds:

When *(even)* my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up. (Psalm 27:10)

Fear rejection? Why? The more I am rejected, the more acceptance I have from God. Fear rejection? No, Satan, I choose to fear the Lord instead. Scripture says it all.

I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. (Psalm 34:4)

That's what He wants to do for you. That's what He wants to do for me. He wants to replace fear with wisdom, and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

In our next lesson, we will search all of Scripture for what God commands us not to be afraid of, and why He commands us not to be afraid. Then we will look for practical ideas on replacing all our fears with the fear of the Lord until Satan's lies that whisper "Be afraid" are never ever a problem again. In the meantime, evaluate your own life in the light of knowledge, and seek understanding. What are you afraid of? Make a list. Then as you encounter those fears this week, imagine yourself on that ship with the disciples. Imagine your fears to be the storm that rocks the boat and sends the waves careening over the sides of the ship. And just close your eyes and imagine Jesus walking on the top of the waves that threaten to engulf you in fear. Watch Him stretch out His arms to you, and listen to Him speak confidence to your heart: "It is the I AM; do not be afraid." The waves will grow still; your heart will grow calm; and He will carry you all the way to shore.

For God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore we WILL NOT FEAR, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; (Psalm 46:1,2)

We need not fear. I AM is here.

WE NEED NOT FEAR!!!

We need not fear; I AM is here! He'll never leave our side, Though storms may be a raging sea And frantically we've cried!

Life's darkest hour seems void of power We fear; and faith doth fade. Just then we hear Our Lord come near And sigh—Don't be afraid!

Fear only ME... I'll set you free. Remember, fear is sin... My Word just heed; You'll never need to be afraid again!

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