

**BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE®**

Advanced Bible Study

WINTER 2022-23 | CSB

STUDY 1:

*Putting Fear
in Its Place*

STUDY 2:

*How to Discern
the Voice of God*



WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?

It's OK to admit it: You have things you're afraid of. We all do. Some fears may be minor, and some fears cause us serious setbacks in how we live. While we may strive to overcome these fears, there is one fear we should never let go of: a fear of God.

The sovereign, all-powerful Creator of all things is holy and righteous and fully deserves our respect and fear. Because He is holy, He is fully against sin, and our sin deserves His wrath and punishment.

But the God who hates sin also loves us. "But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Jesus took the wrath we deserve, died for us, and offers freedom and forgiveness from our sin. He died the death we deserve—and in so doing, He forgives us. God raised Jesus from the dead, and His resurrection ensures that death was defeated. We can be forgiven of our sin and have eternal life! We no longer have to fear punishment or death!

To receive this gift, you must let go of your sin. Repent and put your faith in Christ. Admit to God you are a sinner and ask Him to forgive you. Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Express your repentance and faith by praying a prayer like this:

"Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died on the cross to forgive me of my sins. I'm sorry for all the wrong I've done and ask You to forgive me. I now accept Your gift of eternal life. Thank You for Your love, forgiveness, and a new life in Jesus Christ. From this day forward, I choose to follow You. In Jesus's name, Amen."

Share your decision to follow Jesus with a pastor or those in your Bible study group. Get involved in a church that will help you grow in your faith. Be baptized as an expression of your faith.

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DON'T MISS THIS!

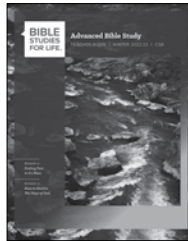
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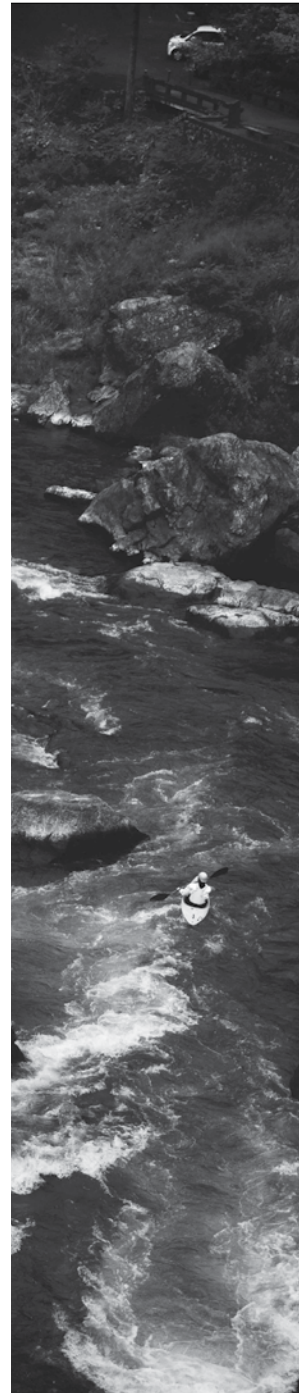
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INTRODUCTION

PUTTING FEAR IN ITS PLACE

We live in uncertain times. Whether it's a pandemic, racial tensions, political divides, health issues, or concerns for family and friends, the uncertainty of how life will play out can cause an uneasy fear. The Bible has revealed to us that God is the all-powerful Sovereign over the universe. In other words, there is no one or nothing greater than Him. God is also gracious to us, and when we look to Him in trust, we can rest confidently in Him regardless of what our circumstances throw at us.

How This Study Supports the Discipleship Plan (p. 178):

Exercise Faith. Fear can strike us in many ways, but we stand strong as we trust in the character of God. Our faith is to reside in who He is because God is greater than any of our fears.

SESSION 1**The Fear of God****THE POINT**

The fear of God gives us the foundation to face all other fears.

THE PASSAGE

Psalm 33:6-15, 18-22

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

“A healthy dose of fear.” Have you ever heard that phrase? Think about a time when you felt that way. Perhaps it was standing on a beach, peering out across the endless ocean. Did you feel small and overwhelmed? Or maybe it was looking over the edge of a waterfall, seeing gravity’s effect on cascading water smashing rocks below. The view caused you to grip tightly to the earth around you. Or a rough storm, disarming your sense of control as wind beat against your body. Such moments put us in our place. They remind us of our size, our frailty, and our position in the world. We gather respect and a sense of caution in such moments.

When we engage the Word of God, we encounter the Creator of these forces of nature that put us in our place. Ultimately, as we consider God, we are certainly put in our place. Specifically, the ancient texts of Scripture declare a sense of fear when engaging God. What does fear mean and look like in this context? We know how fear is understood in our common usage. But in terms of God, what does it mean to fear Him? Should we hide? Run far away from His presence? Or does fear of God mean something else?

In our exploration of Psalm 33 we come to terms with what it means to fear God in all His glory. The depth of what we discover will surprise and drive us closer to God.

THE SETTING

Psalm 33 is timeless in the ancient story of Israel. It was a hymn of praise declaring God as the sole Creator of the universe. This psalm played a significant role in congregational worship, specifically related to autumn festivals within Israel's annual religious cycle. Likewise, this psalm might have played a meaningful function in covenant renewal festivals. While it is hard to establish a time when this psalm was written, it clearly was leveraged in the worship practices of ancient Israel.

The autumn months of September and October, during harvest, were full of worship. The Israelites, during the seventh month of their religious calendar, celebrated the festival of Trumpets, a Day of Judgment and Memorial, as well as the Day of Atonement, festival of Booths, and Sacred Assembly. Psalm 33 was a staple of worship during these specific religious events as people lifted their eyes to heaven and contemplated their history and interaction with God.

As far as the references to earth and water in Psalm 33, ancient Israel, where the psalm was written, possessed a wide contrast of water and massive geological formations. Tectonic movement in the region meant that, periodically, the land would indeed shake or "tremble" (Ps. 33:8, NIV).

Additionally, because it stood at a crossroads for trade and military travel, the region experienced a high degree of traffic as nations to the south, north, and east would cross through. As a fertile land in between competing empires, the people of Israel knew what it meant to be exposed to both invasion and oppression from other nations. To these realities, the writer of Psalm 33 spoke.

STUDY THE BIBLE*Psalm 33:6-9*

**⁶ The heavens were made by the word of the LORD,
and all the stars, by the breath of his mouth.**

**⁷ He gathers the water of the sea into a heap;
he puts the depths into storehouses.**

**⁸ Let the whole earth fear the LORD;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.**

**⁹ For he spoke, and it came into being;
he commanded, and it came into existence.**

We fear God when we stand in awe of Him as Creator.

Imagine the world in the eyes of the ancient person. Everything was filled with wonder. Science played no part in explaining “why” things happened. People marveled at the water from the sky that would quench the earth. Ice and snow from heaven blanketed mountains to the north. From the earth came forth food for the harvest. A small seed, pushed into dirt would emerge into a glorious green plant. In the sky there was the sun that ruled the day and the moon that ruled the night. Stars sparkled. Animals of all types moved upon the terrain.

The people of Israel, like other ancient communities, couldn’t explain the “how” behind these things. Nevertheless, they depended on these forces of nature to provide and sustain their lives. They knew what it is like to go without rain and to experience drought. When the harvest yielded little food, they knew the days ahead would be difficult. Given this, their known vulnerabilities led to dependence on God for sustaining daily life. No doubt, life felt fragile and at risk. But with God, there was certainty and hope.

For the people of Israel, God the Creator was ever prominent and the source of their wonder. They felt a genuine sense of awe and trust in God who held things together. In Psalm 33, they were drawn to remember the creation story that declared

the sheer power of God who brought all things into being by His words. **By the word of the LORD**, as verse 6 proclaims, God formed **the heavens** and **the stars**—the universe.

In many ways, Psalm 33:6-7 recounts the creative force of God by His **word** as described in Genesis 1, as well as in other places, like Psalms 104 and 119:89. Additionally, we see such references in the New Testament—John 1:1-3 and Hebrews 11:1-3.

The Israelites knew that God is not chaotic and unpredictable. Instead, they worshiped Him according to His power, rooted in order and the use of **the breath of his mouth** to bring about marvelous and powerful things. This contrasted with the other nations who managed a chaotic portfolio of gods who competed for the attention of worshipers through tales of competition and force.

The psalmist emphasized this truth in the way he described God sustaining His creation. Gathering **water of the sea into a heap** was a description of God filling the **storehouses** above the earth with water which would eventually rain down to feed the earth. God carefully and lovingly sustains what He has made. The Israelites saw intentionality and order in the way God commanded the forces of creation to work in sync to sustain His people.

The reaction of **the whole earth**, as verse 8 reveals, is to **fear the LORD**, to **stand in awe**—to tremble. It is here that we come into an understanding of the reverent fear that God evokes in His creation. To fear God is to react with a mixture of overwhelming awe and submission. God is proclaimed as the King of creation.

For people of the earth who worshiped all types of gods, fear was often understood as terror. In the case of the God of Israel, the sense of reverent submission and devotion was to be directed toward the true King of creation. Everything was put into its rightful place when God's people feared and held Him in reverent awe.

Again, verse 9 points to the distinct power of Israel's God. The true King of all creation who calls all things into being by His voice. **He spoke, and it came into being.** When He declared something, it was established.

God was affirmed as the One who existed before all creation. God has the authority to rule with sovereignty over the universe. He **commanded**, and **it came into existence.** The psalmist was declaring that God stands distinct above all others. He alone is worthy of reverent fear and respect.

And this fear was rooted in trust. God was the One who created and sustained everything with His authority and power. What He established was permanent, rooted in His authority. For the Israelites who struggled to survive and faced all types of adversity, their God was firm, reliable, and worthy of respect. In a world of life or death consequences, God created stability.

The ancient reader of this passage was no different than we are today. Even with the technological advancements that humanity enjoys in the twenty-first century, people still feel vulnerable. The world can feel chaotic and people can feel one step away from financial calamity, illness, and loss.

Life is just as vulnerable today, no matter how much people try to hedge themselves with security. The God who holds the universe together provides the same sense of security and stability today that made life hopeful in the ancient world.

What are some lasting truths in Psalm 33:6-9?

- ▶ God's Word alone has the power to do remarkable things in our lives.
- ▶ Fearing God means respecting Him by being obedient to His commands.
- ▶ God's love and salvation in Christ is firm and secure.

Psalm 33:10-15

**¹⁰ The LORD frustrates the counsel of the nations;
he thwarts the plans of the peoples.**

**¹¹ The counsel of the LORD stands forever,
the plans of his heart from generation to generation.**

**¹² Happy is the nation whose God is the LORD —
the people he has chosen to be his own possession!**

**¹³ The LORD looks down from heaven;
he observes everyone.**

**¹⁴ He gazes on all the inhabitants of the earth
from his dwelling place.**

**¹⁵ He forms the hearts of them all;
he considers all their works.**

We fear God when we willingly surrender to His plans as Lord. Psalm 33:10-11 highlights what was reinforced throughout the Old Testament. Those who oppose Yahweh ultimately fail. Throughout human history God and His people ultimately prevail. Even under pressure and harassment, the people of Israel survived. Through Jesus, the same is true for Christians. They prevail! Nothing gets in the way of God's purposes. God's purposes are declared in Psalm 33 as unstoppable. The contrast was between the plans of humanity and the plans of God. Human schemes, **the counsel of the nations**, are frail. God's way **stands forever**. The call to action for people in this psalm was whether to choose their own frail ways or trust in the **counsel of the LORD**. Notice the duration of human plans in comparison to God's plans. While the purposes of people have a short shelf-life, God's plans are timeless and eternal. His plans are rooted in **his heart** and dependable from **generation to generation**. As displayed in Psalm 33:10-11, God was fully in control of creation. He had a plan. He is not surprised by the actions of humanity. Feeble attempts to stop God or His plans are always thwarted.

Happy is the nation whose God is the LORD. God declared that those who embrace Him are His **own possession**. God personally and passionately took custody of what He loved. Israel was God's inheritance! This election was a glorious gift to the people of Israel. They belonged to the One who holds the universe in perfect order, and God had a vested interest in taking care of what He possessed.

Additionally, God is not a chaotic abuser of His inheritance. Instead, He was graceful and chose what He loved. God essentially told Israel, "I choose you." In a worshipful response, Israel could declare back to God, "You chose us!" The relationship was tender, rooted in love, and founded on God's choice. This was a blessing and engendered courage, relief, and confidence in the people of God. And, what rang true for the ancient Israelite also rings true today. Believers are God's chosen inheritance through Jesus (Eph. 1:11-12). Christians experience the same courage, relief, and confidence as the God described in Psalm 33, because He is their Lord and Sustainer.

Fearing God, as the psalmist revealed, results in happiness. To drive home this point, verse 13 explains that God is not distant but present. He is close and personally involved in those who claim and surrender to His plans. He **looks down** and **observes everyone**, not only those who acknowledge Him. As this verse declared, God sees all humankind, regardless of their connection to Him. God is all-knowing and actively aware of what is happening with all people, even if they are far from Him.

As the Scriptures underpin in verse 14, God **gazes on all the inhabitants of the earth**. God pays particular attention. He is interested in the details of those He loves. The significance is huge. While God was described in cosmic terms, namely creating the universe, He was also described in terms of knowing the intimate details of people's lives. The personal and attentive nature of God is quite remarkable.

This causes a moment for pause and reflection. To those who fear the Lord, God’s attentive watch is assuring. Yet, to the one who lives apart from God, a sense of His watchful presence can evoke terror. What we know is that God yearns for all people to know Him and discover His graceful embrace. Psalm 33 reveals that God is not distant and uninterested. Instead, He is fully engaged in every human experience. He pays attention. Just as Hagar described the Lord as “the One who sees me” in Genesis 16:13, in the same way and in the spirit of Psalm 33, we understand that God sees each of us.

For the audience of Psalm 33, this was a reassuring message to those who fear God. What was unexpected was that fearing God results in happiness and assurance. This is because God is lovingly attentive to those who fear and love Him. Additionally, as Psalm 33:15 declares, God not only watches; He also gets involved in the lives of those who trust Him. He intentionally **forms the hearts of them all**. He forms the innermost beings of His people.

The psalmist emphasized God’s identity as the Creator to remind all people that God is intimately involved in the creative process of knitting together every human walking on the earth. He knows the hearts and conditions of people and **considers all their works**. The Israelites understood the heart as the “thinking” center in the human. God knows the minds, thoughts, and intentions of all people. Nothing surprises Him. He is fully aware of all human intentions, considering all the actions of humanity. This can be understood as God providing clear and accurate judgment of people, taking in all their actions in this life.

What are some lasting truths in Psalm 33:10-15?

- ▶ Human plans pale in comparison to the purposes of God.
- ▶ It is wise to base all of your life on the plans of God, which are firm.
- ▶ God is intimately involved in redeeming His children.

- ▶ God pays close attention to the details of our lives.
- ▶ God is keenly aware of all our thoughts and intentions.

Psalm 33:18-22

¹⁸ **But look, the LORD keeps his eye on those who fear him — those who depend on his faithful love**

¹⁹ **to rescue them from death and to keep them alive in famine.**

²⁰ **We wait for the LORD; he is our help and shield.**

²¹ **For our hearts rejoice in him because we trust in his holy name.**

²² **May your faithful love rest on us, LORD, for we put our hope in you.**

We fear God when we depend on Him as our Shield and Provider. Psalm 33 declared that God goes about His work with sovereignty. Those who fear Him know they are seen and understood. The nature of life and toil is hard. That was especially the case for the Israelites who strived daily to provide security and provision for families and communities. Trusting in God was a daily exercise as people sought to endure. The psalmist declared that there was unique security found in fearing God. God loves His people and invests in their well-being. Security was no small matter for people living in the land of Israel. It was a crossroad of fertile land that was much sought-after by nations and empires. Always on the defense, the people of Israel knew the stakes were high. Psalm 33:18-19 described a God who transcended military threats, providing divine security.

Verse 18 described a God who is watchful, who **keeps his eyes on those who fear him**. He is attentive of those who genuinely fear Him. For many people, the thought of God's watchfulness is a scary prospect. Here, however, the watchfulness of God

was reassuring. It reminded the people that they were not alone, isolated, or unguarded. Instead, the refuge of God was always present.

Additionally, this verse declared that God's attentiveness is deeply rooted in **faithful love**. The big question was "why does God watch?" Is it to see if His people fail or mess up? Is God's watchful eye intended for scrutiny? Psalm 33:18 made it clear. God's watchfulness is solely rooted in love. God is motivated by love and intimately concerned in His people's well-being. This is the foundation of truth that guides God's activity with all mankind. His intentions are rooted in love. People could **depend on his faithful love**.

The choice, as referenced often in Scripture, is whether we trust in ourselves or in the power of God. God was described as the only One who can truly deliver and sustain His people. As verse 19 explains, God was the relentless guard, always ready to **rescue** the people of Israel from danger and **death**.

In the context of verse 19, two of the biggest threats that people might face in the ancient world were referenced. One was the threat of death. Whether it was sickness or the reality of invading marauders, the ancient people of Israel, as well as all people living in the land, were constantly on guard and fearful of death.

The other threat was **famine**. Hunger was a massive threat and food scarcity was a constant concern in the land of ancient Israel. God's unfailing love was more than an abstract concept. It was practically and tangibly experienced as God actively loved His people by defending, delivering, and provisioning them. God actively intervened in danger, threats, and vulnerability to protect the ones He loved. He kept them **alive**.

As a conclusion to this psalm, verses 20-22 was a shift. The body of this psalm, from verses 1-19, was a declaration of who God was to the people of Israel. The final three verses, marked a shift in worship, turning toward the voice of the people.

It was a call to commitment, an invitation and altar call. Based on how God was described in verses 1-19, a commitment was called for in verses 20-22. As God displayed His love in tangible, life-saving ways, the people of God were now called to respond. Would they commit themselves to the God described in Psalm 33?

Their first declaration, in verse 20, was to affirm that God was worth placing their faith in. They would faithfully **wait** for Him. He was their reliable Source. The worshipers' commitment affirmed that God would be their **help, shield**, and warrior. As their *help*, the people of God declared that He was their Source of safety, security, and sustenance. Hunger and all types of calamity would be averted because God was their *help*.

The resounding cry was to place their trust in God. They reaffirmed, in verse 21, that God is the Source of true happiness—**our hearts rejoice in him**. In a world of great sorrow and hardship, God evoked joy within those who struggled. This defiant happiness, in the face of hardship and adversaries, was rooted in a deep fear and respect for the God of Israel.

People placed their confidence solely in God. God's name, ascribed as **holy**, emphasized that He is sacred, unique, set apart, and distinct. He is worthy of **trust**. The people of Israel reaffirmed their total commitment to Him, namely the One who had selected them. They recognized that God's **holy name** distinguished Him from all other gods. In total, the people reciting this psalm knew that God's name alone guaranteed their welfare.

The conclusion of this psalm, verse 22, summoned the Israelites and today's reader to a common call to action. To enjoy the best that God has to offer, a person must actively place his or her **hope** in God. Instead of trusting in other sources, the psalmist challenged those who heard or read this psalm to wait on the **LORD**. To trust God alone.

In fearing and submitting to God, there was rejoicing, happiness, and hope. God's promise was **faithful love** rooted in actionable care for His chosen children. This love of God would **rest** upon the people and sustain them, providing hope.

Psalm 33 is timeless. What was true for those in the ancient world is still true today. The choice is whether to place one's faith in God alone. God, as the Creator of the universe, is established as more powerful than the forces of this world. Today, we must consider what it means to surrender our plans to God and trade-up for His firm and unending purposes. We must take heart that God's eyes are upon us. He watches over those who fear Him and trust in His sustaining protection.

There is also an important action step. We must respond to the knowledge and truth about God. Fear of God is demonstrated in active faith. Actions demonstrate dependence on God, and His unfailing love is the eternal benefit. Psalm 33 calls people to a steady and daily routine of trusting God in the midst of threats and hardship. This trust, namely a healthy fear of God, gives people the courage to live life with confidence amidst daily threats! We can live securely and with hope if we truly fear God as described in Psalm 33.

What are some lasting truths in Psalm 33:18-22?

- ▶ God is always attentive to those who fear Him.
- ▶ Unfailing love is the foundation for our personal relationship with God.
- ▶ God sustains us in the midst of life's challenges and threats.
- ▶ God is a reliable source of protection, who always delivers on His promises.
- ▶ God is separate and distinct from other gods.
- ▶ We must place our hope in God to fully experience His unfailing love.

LIVE IT OUT

As you reflect on this study, respond to the following questions:

How can you look to creation for a better understanding of what it means to fear God?

What steps do you need to take to align your life around the plans and purposes of God?

Based on Psalm 33, what needs to change in your mindset and actions so you might face fears, challenges, and threats with the unfailing love of God?
