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Psalm 112
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A Healthy Respect

My latest Netflix binge has been a reality show called Alone. Ten contestants are individually dropped off at separate locations on a remote lake in British Columbia. Not too far from where I was hiking recently with my Young Life Boys. They are to see to how long they can survive in the wilderness and outlast everyone else out. For a mere \$500,000 prize.

Sounds easy, right? Wrong.

This is rugged country.

They can only take a few items with them. They must build their own shelter, hunt, fish, and live off the land from summer into winter. They must also fend off any predators they encounter. And boy are there predators. Mountain lions and bears. Big bears. Grizzly bears.

Now I have seen black bears in the wild, but only from a safe distance. Black bears you can easily scare away or fight off. Grizzly bears. Not so much. I don't do Grizzly bears. They can eat you.

I can confidently say, that I am afraid of Grizzly bears. I don't want to see one, hear one, or even be near one in the wild. I want to give them proper space. So I don't typically hike in Grizzly bear county. Until this recent trip, which according to Alone, certainly could have had Grizzly bears.

Last week, Sarah Foster did an excellent job picking up the pieces of my sermon, making it her own, and delivering an outstanding message. I so appreciate Sarah and the gifts she brings. There aren't many people I can call on last minute when I am sick to preach for me. Thank you Sarah.

But Sarah introduced this idea from last week's Psalm of the fear of the Lord. Today, in Psalm 112, we hear of it again. We will talk about what that means. Learn about the characteristics of one who fears the Lord. See who this psalm points us to as the one who did it perfectly. And also see what it means for us.

Before we dive in, however, let us hear Psalm 112 for ourselves.

Praise the Lord.

Blessed are those who fear the Lord, who find great delight in his commands.

2 Their children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.

3 Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever.

4 Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous.

5 Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely, who conduct their affairs with justice.

6 Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever.

7 They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord.

8 Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.

9 They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor, their righteousness endures forever;

their horn will be lifted high in honor.

10 The wicked will see and be vexed, they will gnash their teeth and waste away; the longings of the wicked will come to nothing.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

Psalm 112 is a Hebrew acrostic poem which means that each line begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So if I were to write an acrostic poem in English, the first word of the first line would begin with A, the second line with B, the third line with C, and so on.

We don't know who the author is, so we will just attribute it to the psalmist.

If you look at Psalm 111, Psalm 112 seems to be a natural continuation. Psalm 111 is about the greatness of God. Psalm 112 is about the person who acknowledges that greatness by having a healthy fear of the Lord.

Now to have a fear of the Lord was a confusing concept for the boys on my recent hiking trip to British Columbia. Why would God want us to be afraid of him, they asked? What does it mean to have a fear of the Lord?

This is what I told them. These mountains that we see around us are spectacular. Right? They are beautiful and majestic. They point us to the glory of God. They are also very rugged and extremely dangerous. We cannot be haphazard or careless around them. One slip on a steep snow slope could send you sliding a thousand feet downward. Not properly gearing up for foul weather could cause us to deal with hypothermia. One encounter with a Grizzly bear, well, we won't go there. But I think we get my drift.

I wanted the boys not to be afraid of the great outdoors, but to have a healthy respect for it. To enjoy it, to love it, but also to be cautious around it.

Every time I drive down the Columbia River Gorge, I am painfully aware of what happens when someone does not have healthy fear of the outdoors. It's destructive. Thousands of pristine forest lands were destroyed when a forest fire ripped through the area when a young person was careless with fireworks and

didn't fear the impact it could have on the outdoors. Yes, fireworks are fun, they are beautiful, they are powerful. But they can also be very deadly.

I think this what the psalmist is getting at when he says' "Blessed is the one who fears the Lord, who finds great delights in his commands."

Yare is the Hebrew word for fear that is used here. It means to fear, morally. To revere.

Pastor David Prince described it this way. [Fear is] 'an important word that we have to understand. You see, this fearing of the Lord is a way of describing faith. You see, this fear is a fear of faith. It's a sense of awe at the greatness of God. It's a sense of wonder at the redeeming grace of God, and you're in such awe of God for his greatness and for his grace towards you that it controls your life in every category, not part of your life.

Faith is the controlling reality of your life, the shadow of the fear of the Lord. Your faith in his greatness, his sovereignty, his might, his redeeming grace is what governs your life. It's how you make decisions. You see, the person who compartmentalizes their life has faith but it's faith in themselves not God."¹

Not only is one to fear the Lord, but they are to find great delights in God's commands.

The Book of Deuteronomy spells out more specifically God's commands and the benefits and curses that come from following them or not.

The Lord said to the Israelites, "Now what I am commanding you is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it? Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you will have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing over to enter and possess."²

In other words what the Psalmist in Psalm 112 is saying is, "Blessed is the one who has a healthy respect God and the boundaries he set forth for humanity to

¹ Sermon by David E. Prince, Be Afraid of Not Fearing posted on <https://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/sermons/2015/june/be-afraid-of-not-fearing.html>

² Deuteronomy 30:11-18

follow. If we live within those boundaries, it will go well with us, with God, with others, and with all of creation. If we don't live within them, then it won't." Simple as that.

And the impact of having a healthy fear of the Lord and his commands, we are told, has a rippling effect on our children, their children, and their children's children.

We have to be careful that we don't believe that following God's commands will necessarily result in an increase of material possession. Verse 3 which says, "Wealth and riches are in his house" is not prescribing a prosperity gospel. No, I believe what it is saying is that if we follow God's ways, we will be rich in the Lord and what is important to him...which is often very different to us.

Now let's look at the characteristics that Psalm 112 lays out of one who lives according to God's ways.

They are upright, not crooked or bent. We talked about that previously when we explored God's justice. They conduct their affairs with justice, always asking if what I am doing is the right thing before God or others? Is there any way that what I am doing could be seen as disingenuous or negatively? Or is what I am doing taking unfair advantage of others in some way?

A Psalm 112 person is generous and lends freely. They realize that everything they have is a gift from God and belongs to God. They don't own anything. They are just stewards of the gifts they have been given for a season. And because of that, they give with cheerful hearts, taking joy in sharing those gifts with others. Particularly with those who may not have been given as much as they have.

They hold on to possessions loosely and are willing to let others use their possessions, or money, without trying to profit from them. They lend freely.

They are not shaken or moved in the same way that The Apostle Paul described the stability that comes with maturing in one's relationship with Christ. They are anchored, "no longer infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of others in their deceitful scheming."

They have no fear of bad news. There is that word fear again. Yira.

But their heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. The Hebrew word for steadfast is *nakown*. It means to be erect, standing straight, or having a certainty. So when bad news comes, and bad things happen to even faithful, Psalm 112 people, they are able to walk upright, weather it well, and know that God is with them and will walk with them through the storm.

Their heart is secure, they will have no fear. They know that in all things, even the terrible things of life, that God works for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his good purposes.³

They are thoughtful and wise with regards to how they distribute their gifts to the poor. The image the psalmist uses is that of a sower, sowing ones seeds. Most of the seed is to get planted, neatly in the rows to maximize the harvest, but some of the seed is to be scattered to the edges of the field. According to Old Testament laws of gleaning, this is so that the poor can come along and harvest what is at the edges of the field in order to provide for their families. So we need to thoughtful and wise with how we are doing that. Because sometimes in our efforts to want to help people, we can actually end up harming them unless we are thoughtful and wise with our gifts.

Their horn is lifted high in honor. The Hebrew word for horn is qaran. In the Old Testament, a horn was a symbol of power and strength. The Shofar was an instrument that was made from a ram's horn, like this one that was given to me by Thelma Scoville. It was used for important religious and public occasions. In biblical times it was used in worship services and announced the Sabbath, the New Moon, the start of a battle, an alarm in the camp, and the anointing of a new king.

We hear about lifting up a horn in Luke 1:69 when Zachariah, John the Baptist's father's, tongue was unleashed at John's birth, and he offered a song of praise to God for what God was doing through the births of John and Jesus.

Zachariah said, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David."⁴

That is who Psalm 112 describes the righteous of which none of us can fit the bill completely.

So then we ask, who does? Only Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the blessed one in verse one. He alone perfectly lived within the boundaries of the law and walked rightly according to God's ways. We have each fallen short and strayed beyond those boundaries.

Jesus is the ultimate one in verse four. He displayed the perfect balance of grace and truth and compassion. He was the light of the world and in him was no darkness.

Jesus was the one of ever enduring righteousness.

Jesus was the most generous giver of good gifts.

Jesus was the ultimate of strength and power. He himself was the horn of salvation.

³ Romans 8:28

⁴ Luke 1:69

Jesus was also despised by evil people.

The Good News of the Gospel is that since we can never fully meet the expectations of Psalm 112 but Jesus could, and we who believe in him are wrapped in his righteousness. We are clothed in his perfect obedience before God the Father. So that whenever God sees us, he looks not upon our sin, but upon the righteousness of his Son. His perfect Son.

Now this does not get us off scot free. No, this Good News compels us to give it our best shot in life, living with a health respect, a holy fear of God and God's ways. We do this not to earn God's favor, but out of joyful obedience to Jesus our horn of salvation.

So in closing, let me simply say that, Psalm 112 points us to Jesus Christ, who was a perfect reflection of God. We as followers of Jesus are to be reflections of Jesus. And if we are reflections of Jesus, then it goes to say that we also are reflections of God.

Praise the Lord! And all God's people said, "Amen."