

**Rediscovering the Fear of the Lord in
Christian Spirituality
With excerpts predominately from the ministry
of Rev Dr E G Gibson
A Tribute by Mark Ingram**

2015 marks 100 years since the birth of Dr Ted Gibson my Theological Principal at the Baptist Theological College of Queensland (now Malyon College) when I studied under him 35 yrs ago.

Since 2004, I have been intentionally collecting his student notes, articles and papers from his Principalship ministries across Australia from 1949 to 1982 and those written in his retirement until his death in 1991.

Whilst studying at BTCQ in 1980, I recall one Sunday afternoon looking through Young's Concordance at the references to 'the fear of the Lord'. Whether or not my quest that day was something Gibson referred to specifically at that time I cannot remember, but he had made reference to it in student handouts that I received.

Over the following years I have enjoyed greatly the work of others on this theme, particularly Professor John Murray's masterful chapter on The Fear of The Lord in his book "Principles of Christian Conduct". Then I recall being profoundly moved

listening to a comprehensive and extensive series of cassette tapes on this theme by Al Martin. I can also remember the books by the Puritan John Bunyan and more recently Jerry Bridges.

Due to my interest in this topic the past decade has seen me collecting pertinent quotes by other scholars and preachers. Many of these have found their way into this article.

Reading through Gibson's notes again over this past decade I found myself writing down in an old diary the comments and observations he made with reference to the "fear of the Lord". This was not a conscious decision by me, though perhaps subconsciously my mind was steered to notice them because of the importance of the topic to me personally for so many years. To the best of my knowledge he never wrote a paper or article dedicated to this theme. The references by him of this theme were embedded in a variety of articles dealing with Vital Principles of the Christian Life, the life of Abraham, The Theology of Worship, The Spirit and the Eschaton in the Old Testament, Portrayal of Messiah in Isaiah, Jesus at Prayer, Loves Fellowship in the Spirit, and The Spirit and the New Covenant. These references are drawn from his ThD thesis awarded in 1954 (The Historical Development of the Holy Spirit) through to his writings in retirement.

The excerpts that I have selected from Gibson's ministry in this paper on the fear of the Lord are for your meditation, inspiration and enjoyment, so that like our Lord Jesus you too might delight in the fear of the Lord all the days of your life.

Seven years ago I had the privilege of leading a 3 session seminar on a community retreat on "Growing in the Reverence of the Lord". The organiser recoiled somewhat at the original title that I had suggested concerned that "Fear" was very negative sounding. Mid last century it was not uncommon to refer to a Christian as a God fearing man or woman. You never hear that description today and rarely hear a sermon on the fear of God either.

I sincerely believe that among Christian's today we need to rediscover the proper place of the fear of the Lord in our Christian spirituality.

Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has rightly reminded us "There is a right fear of God and we neglect and ignore that at our peril". The writer of the book of Hebrews states "It is a dreadful (fearful) thing to fall into the hands of the living God". Gibson comments "*But it is marvellous to put yourself there. You discover that you are in the hands of*

Absolute Love".¹ In this article we are looking at the reverential awe and wonder of God by his people.

Charles Simeon, for more than 50 years Anglican Rector at Cambridge University, in 1819 stated:-

"I consider the religion of the day as materially defective...I do not see, as much as I could wish, a holy reverential awe of God."

Again in 1834, two years before his death Simeon lamented:-"I have often wished there were more of holy reverence in religious people when speaking of God, and of the things which He has wrought for their salvation..." (quoted in "Secret Prayer" H.C.G.Moule pp91-93.)

These comments were made nearly 200 years ago. Has anything changed today in 2015?

The Fear of God – Its Importance

Prov 1:7 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction".

1 All quotes in italics in this paper are those of Gibson's

Prov 9:10 “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight”.

“The fear of God is the soul of godliness” John Murray

“Fear of the Lord” is the most common phrase from the Hebrew Scriptures for an appropriate life attitude, our learned response for responding adequately to God’s word and God’s ways. The stock phrase ‘fear of the Lord’, that Paul learned from Deuteronomy and Isaiah, Proverbs and the Psalms, Paul writing in Eph 5:21 amends to ‘fear of Christ’”. Eugene Peterson

“The fear of the Lord – a fear that pulls us out of our preoccupation with ourselves, our feelings, or our circumstances into a world of wonder” Eugene Peterson

Perhaps we could say the fear of the Lord is the soul, centre, and crux of the Christian life, moulding our life attitudes and enabling an adequate renewed heart response to the God who is there. And growth in the fear of God is always one of dynamic action freeing us from our crippling often short sighted preoccupations into a world of wonder where we are a sharer and active participator in the programme of God.

Or more simply we could say the fear of the Lord is the central unifying motif of Christian spirituality, shaping ones worship and witness in the enjoyment and glorification of the living God.

The Fear of God in Abraham and Isaiah

“The guiding light of [the Patriarchs] journey of faith was the fear of the Lord, the basic principle of wisdom that led to an integrated life of experiencing God” James Houston

Abraham and the Fear of the Lord Gen 22:10-14

“God does not tempt man to sin, but tests to prove the reality of our hearts. Did Abraham love Isaac more than he loved God? ...

The knife was raised. God’s call was heard. The test showed that Abraham’s obedience to God was paramount. The word “fear” (v12) is not cringing fear, but a wholehearted glad submission in self-giving love” Dr E G Gibson

“In the O.T. Abraham alone is called God’s lover (2 Chron 20:7; Isa :41.8). The translators usually use the English word “friend”. But the Hebrew word is the normal word “to love”. God calls Abraham’s

response of love as “fearing God”. (Gen22:12).Hence the requirements “to fear God” emphasised in the Psalms, in Isaiah and elsewhere, not only includes a sense of overwhelming awe, but also an attraction in response to God’s approach that combines submission(trust) and self-giving love.” Loves Fellowship in the Spirit Dr E G Gibson

“God is the only one worthy of reverential fear or trust. What makes Him worthy is that He is to be known as the “Giver” and One who gives abounding grace and hears prayer. God is seen as quite approachable, for His divine activity is dictated by a heart that can only be described as “merciful and gracious”.(Ex 34:6) But this gracious God is not a God of impulse or arbitrary will, for His will is exercised in truth or trustworthiness and constancy.

(The Spirit and the New Covenant)

“Love in God is his self-giving, initially choosing to make man so that He could give himself to man. But we need revelation to tell us of the characteristics of this distinctive love. Love is displayed as: compassionate, bestowing favours, long suffering and abundant in reliableness and constancy.(Ex 34:6). But all this is always in a

context of greatness, overwhelmingness, uniqueness.” Dr E G Gibson (Theology of Worship)

“The human response in worship is called in the O.T. “the fear of the Lord”.(Psa:19.9; 111:10; Isa 11:3). This fear is an awareness of my littleness in the presence of His bigness. R.Otto in “The Idea of the Holy”, gives two aspects of the relationship between the Absolute Bigness and the dependent littleness. He calls them (1) tremendum – the aweful manifestation of God as the Wholly Other, and (2) fascians – the attraction of drawing power of God over his creature. In worship we adore God’s splendour and fling ourselves and all that we have at His feet in glad acknowledgement of our total dependence on the free action of God who is both immanent and transcendent.” Dr E G Gibson (Theology of Worship)

Isa 59:19-21 “The Spirit above all enables the repentant to enter into the redemption Yahweh provides. For those who turn from transgression (rebellion) and cease going their own way there will be plenteous redemption. The power to redeem and deliver from sin is vested in the Spirit-empowered Redeemer. Sin and evil are like a flood of water rushing along a narrow wadi engulfing everything before it. But always the Spirit of Yahweh in the midst of the flood raises up his

banner indicating that Yahweh is still in control... the vivid description of evil v.9-15 is followed by Yahweh's action to counter it in righteousness, salvation and vengeance. v.16-18. This dramatic activity of God, will engender a world-wide fear of Yahweh because his activity is based upon the perpetual principle of divine operation – the overcoming through the Spirit of the tide of evil. And in the manifestation of the Redeemer, the seed of Abraham, Yahweh will bestow his Spirit as a perpetual endowment on those who tremble at his Word. (Isa 66:2; 59:21; Jn 14:23)". Dr E G Gibson (The Spirit and the Eschaton in O.T.)

"To have faith requires the knowledge of the will of God. Faith is a submission to God for Him to perform in you or by you what He has promised.... Holiness is based on the promises of God and takes place only in so far as the fear of God is operating in our lives....Reference is made in Isaiah 63: 7-19 to the Spirit of His Holiness in vs 10,11. The steadfastness of God is again seen against the inconsistency of Israel whose rebellion provoked God's Spirit causing His withdrawal. The prophet expresses the cry of the remnant who are given the name "the people of thy holiness"vs 18., as they plead for God's activity in renewing in their hearts the fundamental faith-attitude described as "Thy fear" v17".Dr E G Gibson (Vital Principles of Xn life (9))

Bringing together some of the key phrases used above by Gibson we see that God, because he is merciful and gracious is alone worthy of overwhelming awe for he is the “Giver” and One who gives abounding grace and hears prayer. His approachability is marked by our response that combines a wholehearted glad submission(trust) and self-giving love. We humbly bow before him with an awareness of our littleness in the presence of His bigness. God’s activity in renewing in our hearts like the saints of old is the fundamental faith-attitude described as “Thy fear”.

Our Lord Jesus and the Fear of God

The fear of the Lord as it related to the promised Messiah was predicted by Isaiah 800 yrs before his birth. In Isaiah’s Servant Songs we read that “his delight is in the fear of the Lord” Isa 11:6

“Isa 11:1-5 “ The Spirit will give penetrating diagnosis in “David’s” ministry – wisdom and discernment; the Spirit will enable him to give correct advice and the know-how or ability to carry it out; the Spirit will above all produce in “David” the knowledge of the fear of Yahweh. It will be his supreme delight to fear Yahweh – that is, to enter into that relation of absolute dependence on Yahweh which receives reciprocally a fellowship

with Yahweh, sharing together in love and united purposes". Dr E G Gibson (The Spirit and the Eschaton in O.T.)

And in time/space history this was practiced by Jesus. The prayers of Jesus were heard for his "godly fear" Heb 5:8. He delighted and revelled in awe of his Fathers character and Works making himself available in the power of the Spirit to fulfil his part in the unfolding drama of redemption progressively revealed from the heart of His Father.

"His personal life was one of faith and trust. His knowledge of God was absolute and mediated by the spirit. Matt 11:27. The "fear of the Lord" is the language of full trust and love to God. (Psa 25:14; 33:18; 115:11; Heb 5:8)" Dr E G Gibson (Portrayal of Messiah in Isaiah)

This is why Jesus often sought to be alone with His Father, eg Mark 1:35 from the intimacy of reciprocal sharing and fellowship came the awareness of his fathers plan and the actions / timing required of him to align with the accomplishment of the will of God.

Surely our desire as christians would be to follow in the ways of our Lord and humbly submit ourselves to be taught by God Psa 34:11, for Isa

33:6 “Fear of the Lord is His treasure”. God delights to be a sharer in intimacy with His people.

*There is an “essential basic prayer relation of Jesus to God His Father. Jesus was true man, hence His earthly life was completely dependent upon His Father. Heb 10:9 – a basic requirement of the creature. For Christ that dependence involved an uninterrupted awareness of the Father’s presence, empowerment and directives. There was a living ‘knowing relation’ between the Father and the Son. (Jn 10:15; Matt 11:27). This relationship involved conversation about the purposes and programme of the Father and the part the Son was to play.”*Dr EG Gibson (Jesus at Prayer)

Summarising some of Gibson’s key thoughts in this section we see that our Lord Jesus as true man demonstrated that relation of absolute dependence on Yahweh (never seen before in God’s special creation of man) which receives reciprocally a fellowship with Yahweh, sharing together in love and united purposes – Yahweh’s wisdom and discernment were imparted to him. This was evidenced in his life by the response of full trust and love to God at all times. Our Lord’s earthly life was completely dependent upon His Father, which involved an uninterrupted awareness of the Father’s presence, empowerment and directives.

We are exhorted to continue in the Fear of God:

Proverbs 23:17 – “Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day.”

How is this done?

We need to understand and act upon the following overarching principle of Christian Spirituality:-

“What God declares to be His own work in us is to be the concern of our conscious spiritual endeavours.”²

Note – Galatians 5:22-23 (God’s work) “the fruit of the Spirit is love..”

Colossians 3:12; 14 (Our endeavours) Paul exhorts “put on love..”

Which one is correct?

² For this principle I am indebted to Al Martin. When you reflect upon the principle, it holds true also in the realm of spiritual gifts. They are given by God and we are also exhorted to stir up the gifts God has given to us. c/f 2 Tim 1:6

The question is – not either/or, but both – Phil 2:12-13 “work out your salvation with fear and trembling for God is at work in you..”

God’s working does not cancel out our working, they are concurrent realities.

For our topic under consideration Jeremiah 32:40 declares “I will put the fear of me in their hearts” this expresses God’s work in us in the New Covenant context.

Prov 23:17 “Let not your hearts envy sinners but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day” expresses what is to be our conscious spiritual activity each day.

What are some of the specific directives and encouragements from Scripture to assist us to continue to grow in the Fear of God?

- 1. Be certain of an interest in the New Covenant and muse often upon our forgiveness of sins received from God in particular.**

Jer 32:40 “I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me”. c/f Jer 31:34

This is not a casual interest that we might have from time to time in certain activities or ventures, but more akin to an interest were we have a legal stake and right and our personal fortunes rise and fall with the progress or otherwise of the venture. We are covenantally or contractually joined. There are certain benefits and responsibilities that flow to us as a result of this stake.

This New Covenant saving interest that you must be certain of for yourself is the result of the direct action and initiative of our Covenant keeping God. It cannot be broken. It's a New Covenant initiated by God's love and sustained by his grace. You have responded to loves initiative by God with loves free response. This response consists of repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ.

It involves a metamorphosis of human nature with the reception of new hearts capable of acceptable moral behaviour – (Ezek 11:19-20; 36:26-29). And it involves God in cleansing the recipients by His Spirit of their sin. Forgiveness is foundational. “the blessing” of Abraham takes the form of a forgiveness of sin (Jer 31:34) and an inwardness of God's working in the heart through His Spirit.

If you are not in the New Covenant then Romans 3:18 is a descriptor of your life. “There is no fear of God before your eyes”.

Psa 130:4 "If thou O Lord should mark iniquities who could stand? But there is forgiveness with thee that thou might be feared".

If all my sins and iniquities where marked and piled up Mt Everest high before me, I would be crushed and justifiably condemned for all eternity. BUT there is forgiveness with thee.

Now one might ask how did this full and lasting forgiveness come about? It was achieved through the death of Christ on the cross at Calvary in Jerusalem 2000 years ago. In the OT our sins were covered through sacrifice. In the NC our sins are removed through Christs atoning death at Calvary.

Forgiveness of sins, the taking away of that which hindered the fellowship of man and God, is achieved by an indwelling of God Himself through the Spirit in order that the Holiness of God, or other-than-man's moral character peculiar to God, may now be reproduced from the centre of a new creation.

And it took nothing less than the very enfleshment of God to secure our forgiveness. Wonder of wonders.

Through the incarnation of Christ we are drawn into the magnetic field of the eternal world and may taste something of the sweetness of the heavenly life.

When you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, the whole of your past is forgiven; you are cleansed and purged from all sin, its shame, guilt and penalty. Have you grasped the immensity of this? I have not, though I rejoice in its reality experienced in my own heart and life.

2. Ensure that you feed your mind upon the Scriptures in general

Psa19:9 “The fear of the Lord is clean enduring forever”.

God’s Word in this Psalm is referred to as law, testimony, precepts, commandments, fear of the Lord, and ordinances. We notice in this verse that the “fear of God” is used as a synonym for the Word of God.

So whenever a vital, extensive and regular diet of meditation on the Word lapses we are eroding the roots of the fear of the Lord in our lives. Conversely a consistent and regular relation of the Christian with the Scriptures mixed with a

disposition to be obedient to all that's revealed feeds the fear of the Lord in your life.c/f Ezra 7:10

Just as the two elements of light and sight are needed to see anything in the natural realm through our eyes, this holds true also in the spiritual realm. Psa 119:105 "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"; Psa 119:18 "Open my eyes that I might behold wondrous things out of your word".

Learn..to immerse yourself in the Word of God. (Note Psa 119:9-11). Read it regularly; let its message and truth enter the mind and heart devotionally. Embrace each new truth discovered. This regular habit allows the Word to become 'hidden' in your heart. It is concealed from the consciousness very often but manifests itself in our convictions and choices.

God speaks to me as I read the Bible. It is risky to go searching the Scriptures to locate a verse for confirmation, though God may give it this way by condescension. He will speak through the daily reading that cannot be manipulated by me. It is His delight to do so.

Fruits of developing a biblical awareness:-

You will grasp God's movement through human history – the Panorama of Redemption. The Bible depicts how God who is love (1 Jhn 4:8) revealed Himself in His act of creating man, and in His confronting man in his human history. He created in love and confronts with a demand for faith and love. Everywhere in Scripture God is portrayed as dynamic, operating with purpose and as moving inevitably toward a goal of His own choosing. (Eph.1:9/10; Col 1:16/17; 1 Cor 15:22/27; Rom 8:19/23).

In all this the Holy Spirit is seen as active. He is God, fulfilling in power the programme determined by God. History is purposeful. Increasing co-operation between God and man is only possible as God gets over to man in an increasing way both: (a) His unfolding plan, and (b) His way of achieving it.

The Christian life is a developing pattern, divinely directed and divinely achieved. It is essential therefore to know the Word of God so that the Christian knows what is the "mind of the Spirit". (Rom 8:5/7)

Consider Christ in His relation to the Scriptures:

Jesus, as a boy, 'grew and was acquiring strength as he was being filled with wisdom' (Luke 2:40)...

'the grace of God which was upon Jesus involved a Spirit-controlled growth...(His) total capacities... were fully under the spirits control...From 12 onward, 'Jesus forged ahead in wisdom and maturity, and grace from God and men was upon Him'(Luke2:52). The awakening consciousness of Jesus as to His identity and relationship to his Father was the witness of the Spirit to Him as He read His sacred Scriptures.

So likewise for the Christian, the same Holy Spirit works through the Scriptures shaping us for our life of obedience set apart for God:-

For a Christian, Christ is Head and Lord (Col. 1:18) and Christ exercises His Lordship through the operation of the Spirit in our lives. We believe that the Spirit's main medium is the Word of God as expressed in the Bible.

That which was true of Christ's relationship with the Spirit now becomes applicable to the relationship, the believer and the Spirit.

The law of the mind is not abrogated. The believer is required to saturate their mind with Spirit-directed thoughts and patterns. The reactions in the emotions and body are controlled by the imaginations.

When a person becomes a Christian his ego is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. As a new creation in Christ he must live 'in the Spirit'. This means that from the redeemed heart come Spirit-directed desires and coupled with a new orientation of understanding produces a renewed mind. Thus Rom.12:2; Eph. 4:23 refers to this continuous renewing of the mind for the Christian. The developing content of the understanding comes from an increasing awareness of God's word and will (Heb.8:10). This new mind-set produces thought patterns and an alignment of God's and believer's will. This pattern is the mind of the Spirit.

As we permit the Spirit to cancel these impulses (Rom.8:13), by substituting His own revealed designs and goals, then we shall have joy in their fulfilment for it is in such a situation that we discover that it is God who energizes us in the processes of "willing" and "performing" – Phil 2:13.

What God shows me through His word, that He desires to do in my life – eg remove jealousy – He will do so by the operation of the Spirit upon my consent. As the Old Man is replaced by the New Man (Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:9; Eph. 4:22), so the principle of replacement is basic to the Spirit's law of life in Christ Jesus. Negative defects (e.g. jealousy) are dealt with by the Spirit replacing this

with a new positive pattern as indicated in Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12.

3. Feed your souls on the majestic greatness of God

Deut 28:58 "...that you may fear this glorious and awful name, the Lord your God".

Rev 15:3,4 "... Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages! Who shall not fear thy name, O Lord? For thou alone are holy..."

When reflecting upon these verses from the book of Revelation, It's as if when one considers the character of God being righteous, true and holy - ones reflex reaction is overwhelmingly automatically "who shall **not** fear thy name – the opposite reaction to this display of God's nature is unthinkable.

So we need to regularly meditate and feed our souls upon the majestic greatness of God revealed in his unchanging character in the display of His glory. In Ex 34:6 reveals:-

God is compassionate or merciful. *This is a spontaneous act by a person moved by pity to*

meet a need. There is no sense of obligation in the word. It is frequently used of God e.g. Deut 4:3; Neh 9:27. The various English translations given are; tender mercies, pity, compassion. This last word is most accurate and is always a combination of feeling and action.

God is gracious, bestowing favour. God delights to grant favours. The idea in the word is always a free will act bestowed magnanimously by a superior to an inferior. The favour may be solicited or not. It is used of God e.g. Gen 33:5, Isa 30:19.

God is slow to anger, longsuffering. In the Hebrew this is literally 'long of face', and is found e.g. Ex 34:6, Psa 86:15. It is best translated as "longsuffering" or "patience" and it carries the idea that Yahweh is not moody, nor changeable in His attitudes, and is "slow to anger". He delays judgement and is never hasty to punish. (Note Jas 5:7, 2 Pet:3.9).

God is abounding in steadfast love (chesed). This word occurs 245 times in the O.T. N Snaith translates it "covenant love". The basic meaning is "eager steadfastness", or "loyalty". In the O.T. mostly is used as steadfastness within a covenant relationship. When the covenant between God and Israel is in view, then God's chesed is His persistent determined steadfast love to Israel – a

persistence seen in spite of the fact that Israel had forfeited all covenant rights to it because of its sin and rebellion. Hence God's chesed acquired the element of pardon and forgiveness necessary for the restoration of the relationship. As God is chesed he will never write Israel off. (c/f Ex 15:13, Mic 7:20).

God is truth or faithfulness. This is a stress on changelessness or constancy. The Hebrew word comes from the verb "to stake" as used in Gen 15:6 when Abraham believed (that is staked himself in) Yahweh. The meaning is not "truth" as against "lie"; nor truth as against an error of fact; but truth as stability against unreliableness, or against infidelity; or dependability and durability in contrast to temporariness. There is no irrational impulsiveness in God Heb 13:8. Jesus is the truth (Jn 14:6).

In addition to these attributes let's look briefly at God as holy, righteous and good.

God is Holy. God is seen as Holy. He is glorious in holiness. Ex 15:11. "Holiness in Hebrew means "separateness" or "otherness". As the only time "holy", is found in Gen 2:4, we can say that God's holiness is a self-revelation given in His choosing and loving Israel. Yahweh's holiness then is the sum total of what God is "different" from man. It is

a positive quality and not merely “sinlessness”, nor mere “perfection of Being”.

To say God is holy is to declare that He is unique and that this “otherness” is in His self-dependence, in His eternalness, in His being the Creator of all. He is “spirit” and not “flesh”, Isa 31:3. God is light and in Him is no darkness. 1 Jn 1:5.

As God is in covenant relationship with Israel, His holiness is also related to that unique divine activity by which He secures His covenant purposes. God’s “holy people” are those set apart for Him, and their holiness is a display of His character and His redemptive purposes. Christians are holy because they are set apart for God and so participate in His holiness. Heb 12:10.

God is righteous Ex 9:27, Psa 7:9. The word “righteous” is a word of “conduct”, and is naturally related to the character of God who is “Holy”. The Hebrew basic idea is “straightness”, “normalness”. God’s conduct is righteous because it is always consistent with His character. In Isa 5.16 the statement is made: “The Holy God is sanctified (set apart) in righteousness”. That is, God who is holy will display that holiness in acts conforming to that holy character. Men are righteous when they live in conformity to the revealed standard dictated by God’s holiness. Fitting into God’s pattern is being

stressed. This righteousness therefore involves compassion Matt 22:33. Hence the stress on helping the needy, orphans and widows. For that is His character. (Deut 14:29, Psa 72:13, Jas 1:27).

God is good. God's goodness is asserted in Ex33:19, Psa 25:7. God's goodness is God acting in full harmony with Himself. When God said of creation that it was good (Gen1:10,31), He was saying that it is in full harmony with His character and purposes, not that it was intrinsically perfect or complete.

God promised Moses that His goodness would pass before him (Ex33:19), and this was done in the declaration of His Name in Ex 34:6. In Rom2:4 Paul says the goodness of God leads a man to repentance, that is, the acceptance of a repenting sinner is not God making an out – of – focus concession, but is in full harmony with His character. God's goodness moreover is seen in all the marvellous planning He makes for those who trust in His Son.(1 Cor2:9)

4. Seek to cultivate an awareness of God's presence

Psa 139:7 "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? We cannot move out of the scope and radius of God's presence".

Psa 33:18 "Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love".

Psa 16:8 "I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I will not be moved".

In Gen 39:9 Joseph feared not a distant and forgotten God but a near and remembered God. His actions in regards to Potipher's wife and later the treatment of his brothers when they journeyed to Egypt for food and he revealed his identity to them are summed up in his own words "I fear God" Gen 42:18.

Joseph had cultivated an awareness of God in all circumstances and situations. This includes those things most personal in secret where no one else would know, through to being unjustly imprisoned, and to those things that are part and parcel of high public office open to scrutiny by all.

The People of God have God's presence. Moses reminded God that God's presence distinguished God's people from all others (Exodus 33:16) Israel initially had the Tabernacle which was replaced by a Temple by Solomon. These sanctuaries existed that God may dwell among them (Exodus 25:8) Paul reminded the Corinthians that we individually (1 Corinthians 6:19) and collectively (3:16) are God's Temple. Jesus in the Upper Room said to His disciples: "If a man loves (chooses) me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him and we will come to him making him our home (resting place)" (Jn 14:23)

In Hebrews the 4 occasions the expression "draw near" "come near" occurs (4:16;7:25; 10:22; 11:6); they refer not to the movements through space but to the recognition that we are now in the presence of Father and Son. They are all in the continuous greek tense – recognize continually the reality of our abiding in the beloved. Our being 'in Christ' has taken us with Christ into God's very presence, Heb 9:11; 10:20. So 'to draw near' is the OT language of approach to God, and we apply it to ourselves thus, "to recognize with joy His presence".

By faith, trusting alone in Christ to introduce us to the Father, we believe that he is Sovereign in all things concerning the World and myself. And I

joyfully recognize His presence continually whereby I experience the reality of my abiding in Christ. My daily moment by moment spiritual attitude is to be conscious of Christ's achievements being aware of His presence with joy and submission to the enthroned Christ.

5. Have a consciousness of your obligations to God

That primary obligation is personal obedience to the Lordship of Christ as expressed in the Bible. It's through the Spirit's ministry that the Lordship of Christ is realised in one's life. The Spirit reproduces Christ in us and the distinguishing feature of Christ's life on earth is obedience to the Father at all times.

The angel of the Lord, observing the unquestioning obedience, called out to Abraham halting the sacrifice of Isaac Gen22:12. “. for now I know you fear God”.

“If ye continue in my Word,” if “my words abide in you” (Jn.8:31; 15:7). Knowing the will of God and the purposes of Christ does not come from human intuition, flash insights, promise boxes, sudden passionate calls upon God. It comes, on the ground of our obedience, from the revelation of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who searches the depths of God (1 Cor. 2:11) and reveals them to us. Eve had listened to the devil’s lie that man was able to determine of himself the right path. But, Rom.8:26 indicates that there are areas of divine achievement that lie beyond the human comprehension. In the availability of our obedient hearts the Spirit, who resides within, also intercedes (huperentugchanei) with yearnings which cannot be verbalised. All is being achieved in the realm of “spirit” through the relationship “in Christ” established by the Spirit’s “residential possession.” (Law of Obedience)

In 1 Pet 1:2 .the Spirit is seen as the one who is achieving the purposes of God by setting apart the elect that they might live in obedience to Jesus Christ and know the cleansing his blood affords. The work of the Spirit in a believer’s sanctification is to make the Lordship of Christ a reality in his heart and life.

Just as our Lord learnt obedience through the things that he suffered, and also each day the art

of laying down his life, so too, this applies to each believer. One can only lay down your life when you have a life sufficiently- together-enough to intentionally and deliberately lay it down in obedience to God – as an act of the will. Christ knew that no man could take his life but he laid it down of his own accord. And the voluntarily laying his life down at Calvary was not something done in his human strength or resolve but it was achieved “through the eternal Spirit”. (Heb 9:14). We are to live similarly.

6. Associate yourselves closely with those who also walk in His fear.

Psa 119:63 “I am a companion of those who fear thee, of those who keep thy precepts”.

Mal 3:16 “Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another..”

Acts 9:31 “So the church...had peace and was built up and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied”.

2 Tim 2:22 “So shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love and peace along with

those who call on the name of the Lord from a pure heart”.

The Church as the people of God are to exhibit “oneness” or “unity” in Christ. This togetherness of fellowship is exhibited in love for one another and in a fellowship of service (Eph 4:4; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 10:16; Phil 1:5; Heb 13:16; 1 Pet 4:8; 1 Jn 4:7) God’s purposes in “oneness” can be hindered by self assertiveness and sin.

7. Engage in fervent prayer for an increase in the fear of God

Prov 2:1-5 “My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God”.

1 Jn 5:14 “And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us”.

As man has been given dominion by God who has a programme, then prayer is of two fundamental types – fellowship prayer and dynamic prayer (or, creative prayer). Fellowship prayer is the enjoyment of fellowship between God and man, his creature. Dynamic prayer is related to the achievement of the divine programme in the affairs of men. Through the gospel, for those receiving Christ's salvation, the Creator-creature relationship has become father-son relationship for the Father has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

Fellowship Prayer: the enjoyment of God

*Prayer begins by an awareness of God's presence
Heb 13.5*

Prayer continues in mutual selfgiving and sharing. I speak. God speaks. The prayer relationship moves in continual awareness of our contrasts : His greatness / my littleness. His faithfulness / my weakness. His limitlessness / my finiteness. His adequacy / my inadequacy : All I am is of Him. Hence there is the sacrifice of praise. (Heb 13:15; Acts 2:47).

David is recorded as saying "take not the spirit of thy Holiness from me"(Psa 51:11). We was not here read highly developed ethical concepts into

the “Holiness”. The psalmist is obviously using it as a contrasting word. We noted that a fundamental Old Testament concept of God was His faithfulness, His constancy and immutable councils. David has seen his own fickleness in contrast to God’s faithfulness and admits that his adultery ultimately is rebellion against God and recognises that a spirit of steadfastness or stability and even a spirit of willingness or light mindedness find their source in Him who is “other”, and so can be evidenced in man through the activity of God’s Spirit. The two other references are in one passage having a similar theme (Isa 63:7-19). Reference is made to the Spirit of His Holiness. The steadfastness of God is again seen against the inconstancy of Israel, whose rebellion revoked God’s Spirit, causing His withdrawal. The prophet expresses the cry of the remnant who are given the name “the people of Thy Holiness, as they plead for God’s activity in renewing in their hearts the fundamental faith-attitude described as “Thy fear”.

Creative (Dynamic) Prayer: *our co-operation with God in getting His will manifested in earthly situations. This will enable us to “continue in the fear of the Lord all the day.”*

God's goal is that Christ might have all things headed up in Him, Eph 1:9. Five essentials of creative prayer are:

Identification with Christ's programme – in love and obedience I accept His programme.

Acceptance of God's commitment to us of the Great Commission, Mt 28:19. I accept the responsibility of the creative commitment given by God to men, hence to me personally. It is also a recognition that God is sovereign in every situation, Rom 8:29.

Availability. Psa.37:4/6, Jas.1:7/8. There needs to be a recognition of the will of God in each situation coupled with my readiness to be available to God for any participation he may require of me in that situation.

Activation. Creative prayer requires action. The action must be God-revealed and for the benefit of God's stake in the situation.

The fulfilment of one's prayer requires action in faith, hope, love.

Faith - commitment of myself to God for His fulfilment of His will

Hope - an expectation from God to the fulfilment of that purpose.

Love - a focus on the needs of others, not upon my own. Matt 6:14,33.

The undercurrent of creative prayer is "thanksgiving". This is not just saying "thank you" but is given in anticipation of answered prayer. It is the response of the heart to God's sovereignty and certainty.

Heavenly Father,

I want to thank you for your work of grace in "putting your fear" in my heart through the New Covenant fulfilled in Christ Jesus. May your Spirit give assurance to me of this fact and may I grow in wonder at the forgiveness of my sins achieved through the Incarnation of Christ and the giving of His life on the Cross for my redemption. Help me to prayerfully seek an increase in the fear of the Lord and assist me in the daily discipline of reading and meditating upon your Word. May the majestic greatness of your character be my constant spiritual diet and nourishment. Assist me to cultivate an awareness of your presence at all times and in all circumstances. Give me grace to obey all your directives and embrace all your promises and precepts. Thank you for those

believers who journey with me. May I learn to value their input into my life increasingly each and every day. I desire to grow in the fear of the Lord along with other believers as you have placed me in fellowship with them for our mutual benefit. I ask all these things humbly in the name of Jesus my Lord. Amen

Remember

Proverbs 28:14 “Blessed is the man who fears the Lord always”.

Ecc 12:13 “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man”.

Appendix (i)

ADDITIONAL QUOTES

‘Prov 9:10 Reverential fear of God is a good start on wisdom. Not till we have become humble and teachable, standing in awe of God’s holiness and sovereignty (“the great and awesome God,” Nehemiah 1.5), acknowledging our own littleness, distrusting our own thoughts and willing to have our own minds turned upside down, can divine wisdom become ours. It is to be feared that many

Christians spend all their lives in too unhumbled and conceited a frame of mind ever to gain wisdom from God. Not for nothing does Scripture say, "With the lowly is wisdom"(Proverbs 11:2) ' J I Packer

"Isaiah 6:3 When God is declared to be holy, the thought is of all that separates him and sets him apart and makes him different from his creatures – his greatness and his purity. The whole spirit of Old Testament religion was determined by the thought of God's holiness. Sinful creatures must learn to humble themselves and be reverent before God. Religion was "the fear of the Lord"- a matter of knowing your own littleness, of confessing your faults and abasing yourself in God's presence, of sheltering thankfully under his promises of mercy, and of taking care, above all things, to avoid presumptuous sins." J I Packer

"Fears the LORD." *Reverence* might be a better word. Awe. The Bible isn't interested in whether we believe in God or not. It assumes that everyone more or less does. What it is interested in is the response we have toward him: will we let God be as he is, majestic and holy, vast and wondrous, or will we always be trying to whittle him down to the size of our minds, insist on confining him within the boundaries we are comfortable with, refuse to think of him other than in images that are convenient to

our life-style? But then we are not dealing with the God of creation and the Christ of the cross, but with a dime-store reproduction of something made in our image, usually for commercial reasons. To guard against all such blasphemous chumminess with the Almighty, the Bible talks of the fear of the LORD – not to scare us but to bring us to awesome attention before the overwhelming grandeur of God, to shut up our whining and chattering and stop our running and fidgeting so that we can really see him as he is and listen to him as he speaks his merciful, life-changing words of forgiveness.” Eugene Peterson.

“Where does the fear of God arise? From the knowledge of our own sinfulness and a sense of the presence of God. Isaiah had an acute experience both of his personal uncleanness and of the awesome presence of Jehovah: the two were more than he could stand. On his face he cried out a confession of his own sinfulness, made all the more intolerable because his eyes had seen the King, even the Lord of Hosts.” A.W.Tozer

Prov 1:7 “A respectful submission to the word and will of God, in full knowledge of his great power”
Alister McGrath

“Through the fear of God, the human person has the most profound means of communicating with

the divine Creator. Yet this communication does not simply mean the maintenance of a static relationship. It is rather an ongoing dynamic process towards a moral end, and integration of the human personality, which lasts until the final moment of our biological life.” Archbishop Stylianos (Harkianakis)

“Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long. Keep under the light that beams from Jacob’s ladder, and you will always have a Bethel – fear”
Andrew Bonar

Appendix (ii)

Something of the author’s personal testimony:-

Between 1999 and 2004 I was not attending Church and had let the disciplines of the means of grace slip out of my life. No Bible, no prayer, no fellowship.

Then slowly and ever so painfully God was drawing me back to Himself. Truly I did not even realise this was happening. I went through some deep personal times. I ended up with no job. Then Rose came into my life. Her love and devotion to Christ wooed me slowly back to embrace the love of God for myself. I started to attend Church with

Rose rather reluctantly at first in Oct 2004. The minister at the time really knew Christ and during his messages from time to time tears began running down my cheeks.

Earlier in mid June 2004 I went into my garage at Bedford to discover the old broken down cardboard box of College notes with those of Doc Gibson's. I read all night to 5.45 am then decided to see what writings of his were still around. So my journey of collecting commenced and I also started reading everything what was coming to me from his pen. Slowly and almost imperceptively the Word was starting to grip me and shape me again. I wasn't just dealing with gathering these writings, I was having dealings with the living God! I was beginning to read the Word more and pray. One of Doc Gibson's ministry emphasis was the "Chesed" (steadfast love) of God.(God's covenant faithfulness – he will **not** write off Israel, no never!)

Well, Doc has a wide margin RSV Bible which I have at home and everywhere "chesed" is used in the OT he has written the Hebrew word next to it. Yes, the whole 245 times it occurred throughout the Scriptures!!.

In Psalms 23:6 "chesed" is translated "mercy". God graciously let his two sheep dogs loose on me. Their names are 'goodness' and 'mercy'. When I

was drifting off in one direction 'goodness' would run out and lead me back. Then when I was taking off in another direction 'mercy' would run out and stand or crouch down before me at a distance – with eyes of love fixed upon me. God would not give up on me. He didn't write me off as a hopeless case. And so ever so skilfully and patiently, the Great Shepherd of the sheep drew me slowly back to himself and into the rich fellowship of the flock. I just stand amazed at the grace of God to me. Words fail me. How stupid of me to ever have drifted away from such a gracious and loving God. He truly does restore my soul. May he continue to preserve me all the days of my life.

Then I was able to refocus on Philippians 2:12 "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for God is at work in you" and see this fulfilled in my life not completely, but at least a little somewhat authentically by the grace of God.