

Fear That Draws You Closer

Connect Group Guide - 3.15.26

Opening Prayer

Begin your time together by inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and help you understand what it means to truly fear God and experience His manifest presence.

Icebreaker

Have you ever had a moment where you felt you "left something on the table" with God—like there was more available in worship, prayer, or His presence that you didn't fully experience? Share briefly.

Key Scripture References

- **Psalm 139:7-10** - The omnipresence of God
- **John 14:16-17** - The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit
- **2 Chronicles 5:13-14** - The manifest presence of God
- **Isaiah 33:6** - "The fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure"
- **Exodus 20:20** - God's purpose in revealing His holiness

Message Overview

This message challenges us to examine whether we have settled for less than the fullness of God's presence. It highlights the difference between God's omnipresence, His indwelling Spirit, and His manifest presence, urging believers to pursue deeper intimacy with Him. Using the contrast between Israel longing for Egypt and Moses never wanting to return after encountering God, the sermon reveals that those who truly experience God's holiness value Him above every earthly comfort. Rooted in Isaiah 33:6, the message teaches that the fear of the Lord—a reverent awe that guards our intimacy with God—is the key to His treasure. It calls believers to cultivate an atmosphere through worship, humility, obedience, faith, unity, and honor that welcomes God's manifest presence rather than pushing it away.

Key Takeaways

1. Three Dimensions of God's Presence

- Omnipresence: God is everywhere at all times
- Indwelling: The Holy Spirit lives within every believer
- Manifest Presence: When God's power becomes visible and tangible

2. The Fear of God is Not Being Scared of God

The fear of the Lord is a reverent awe that:

- Protects what is important to God
- Keeps us from sin
- Opens the door to intimacy with Him
- Makes us unafraid of anything else

3. What Invites God's Manifest Presence

- Worship and unity
- Obedience
- Humility
- Faith
- Honor for holy things

4. What Pushes Away God's Presence

- Pride
- Disobedience
- Unrepentant sin
- Division and strife
- Dishonor (treating holy things casually)

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Message

1. Pastor Mike described three types of God's presence (omnipresence, indwelling, and manifest presence). Which one were you most familiar with before this message? Which concept was newest to you?
2. How does the illustration of electricity in a building help you understand the difference between God always being present and experiencing His manifest presence?
3. The message contrasted the Israelites wanting to return to Egypt with Moses never wanting to go back. What made the difference? How does encountering God change our perspective on our past?

Going Deeper

4. Read Exodus 20:20. Moses told the people not to be afraid, yet he also said "the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." How can both be true? What's the difference between being scared of God and fearing God?
5. Pastor Mike used the marriage illustration to explain intimacy with God. How does understanding that sin breaks intimacy (rather than just breaking rules) change your view of holiness?
6. Discuss the story of Uzzah touching the Ark (2 Samuel 6:6-7). Why was treating God's holy things casually so serious? What are "holy things" in our modern church life that we might be treating too casually?

Personal Application

7. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your current sense of reverence and holy fear when you come to church or approach God in prayer? What might need to change?
8. Pastor Mike mentioned that we often give more respect to people God created than to the One who created them. Can you think of examples from your own life where this has been true?
9. Moses took the Israelites to Mount Sinai first (where he met God) before taking them to the Promised Land. Who in your life needs you to "take them to the mountain" to encounter God rather than just pointing them to blessings?

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge:

Choose one or more of these practical steps to take this week:

Option 1: Prepare Your Heart for Worship

- Before next Sunday, intentionally prepare yourself like the Israelites were told to wash and prepare before God came down on Sinai
- Confess any known sin
- Set aside distractions
- Come with expectation for God's manifest presence

Option 2: Create Space for the Burning Bush

- Set aside 15-30 minutes of uninterrupted time with God
- Remove distractions (phone, computer, etc.)
- Ask God to reveal Himself to you in a fresh way
- Journal about what He shows you

Option 3: Honor the Holy

- Identify one "holy thing" you've been treating casually (church attendance, worship, prayer time, Scripture reading, etc.)
- Make a specific plan to honor it this week
- Share your plan with an accountability partner

Option 4: Examine Your Fear

- Make two lists: "Things I Fear" and "Ways I Fear God"
- Compare them honestly
- Ask God to increase your fear of Him and decrease your fear of everything else

Leader Notes

- Be sensitive to people who may be carrying deep shame or feeling unworthy
- Emphasize that this is a safe space where everyone has a seat at the table
- Consider having communion together as a group if appropriate
- Follow up during the week with anyone who shared something particularly vulnerable

Prayer Requests & Closing