



Womanhood & the Wisdom of God

The Story of Scripture – Part 14

I want to give due attention today to honoring not only the moms, but all the women in our midst. I say that, because I remember when Heather and I were struggling through heartbreaking years of infertility, coming to church on Mother’s Day was not easy. To be honest, emotionally we almost wanted to avoid the day altogether. I don’t want any woman—or man, for that matter—to ever think that way about any day gathering together with the church.

Mother’s Day is obviously a joyful day in many ways, but it’s also a hard day for many people and I always want to be sensitive to that. I was praying out in the lobby with different couples who are struggling with infertility here. So I want to honor moms, but at the same time we want to acknowledge that there’s hurt on a day like this too.

I want to take us to a text that will actually appear in our Bible reading a couple weeks from now, but I thought it would be appropriate to jump ahead to a chapter that’s pretty well known, especially when it comes to Mother’s Day, but a chapter I think is often misunderstood. This happens in part because the way the Bible talks about womanhood is so different from the way the world around us today talks about womanhood. So I’ve titled this journey we’re going to take through God’s Word today, “Womanhood and the Wisdom of God.”

I find it really interesting that this book of wisdom—Proverbs—culminates specifically in the portrait of a woman who reflects God’s wisdom, not the world’s wisdom. So let’s read the last part of this chapter together and think about what God is saying to us in this culture, specifically on Mother’s Day. Let’s start in Proverbs 31:10. This is the Word of God.

- ¹⁰ *An excellent wife who can find?
She is far more precious than jewels.*
- ¹¹ *The heart of her husband trusts in her,
and he will have no lack of gain.*
- ¹² *She does him good, and not harm,
all the days of her life.*
- ¹³ *She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands.*
- ¹⁴ *She is like the ships of the merchant;
she brings her food from afar.*

- ¹⁵ *She rises while it is yet night
and provides food for her household
and portions for her maidens.*
- ¹⁶ *She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.*
- ¹⁷ *She dresses herself with strength
and makes her arms strong.*
- ¹⁸ *She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
Her lamp does not go out at night.*
- ¹⁹ *She puts her hands to the distaff,
and her hands hold the spindle.*
- ²⁰ *She opens her hand to the poor
and reaches out her hands to the needy.*
- ²¹ *She is not afraid of snow for her household,
for all her household are clothed in scarlet.*
- ²² *She makes bed coverings for herself;
her clothing is fine linen and purple.*
- ²³ *Her husband is known in the gates
when he sits among the elders of the land.*
- ²⁴ *She makes linen garments and sells them;
she delivers sashes to the merchant.*
- ²⁵ *Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laughs at the time to come.*
- ²⁶ *She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.*
- ²⁷ *She looks well to the ways of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.*
- ²⁸ *Her children rise up and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:*
- ²⁹ *"Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all."*
- ³⁰ *Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*
- ³¹ *Give her of the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the gates.*

Now, as I read the end of this chapter, the first thing I need to do is pause and point out something really important. This is a picture of a perfect woman. Literally, in this proverb, we hear nothing about any imperfection in her at all. Think about what we just read. We read about how godly she is, how wise she is, what a wonderful wife she is. She's a homemaker. She's a great cook who makes food for her family. She makes clothes for her children with her own bare hands. She gets up before everyone else gets up and goes to bed after everyone else goes to bed. She actually doesn't sleep. Her light never goes out. She is strong. She's humble. She's confident. She's a servant and a leader. She's an entrepreneur who's out in the world making good business deals and buying property for the benefit of

her family. And on top of all of that, she loves and cares for the poor. I give you a picture of Wonder Woman...in the Word of God!

I point this out because I think some, maybe many, women can easily hear this passage and instead of being encouraged are tempted to come away discouraged. They're thinking, "I can never be that." Or single guys might read this passage and think, "I want to find a wife who's perfect like that." Married men could read this passage and think, "I wish my wife was perfect like that." All of these thoughts are obviously unhealthy responses to this picture of womanhood in God's Word. But this is where I want us to realize we have an ideal, perfect picture of this woman for a reason.

We may look at this more in depth when we get to Proverbs in our Bible Reading Plan, but for today, like everything else in the story of Scripture, the point of Proverbs is to point us to Jesus and the wisdom that can only be found in Him.

So what we have here at the end of the book of Proverbs is a picture of a woman who perfectly displays God's wisdom in her womanhood which is a good thing for us to have. It should not drive us to discouragement or unrealistic expectations. Think about it. When we turn the pages of the Bible to the New Testament, to the life of Jesus, we behold a perfect man. He was a man who perfectly displayed the wisdom of God.

As followers of Jesus, we don't look to Him and say, "I'm so discouraged by His perfection." No, we're encouraged. Christian men—men who follow Christ—don't look at Jesus and get discouraged, saying, "I'll never be like Him." Single women don't look at Jesus and think, "I want to find a husband who's perfect like Him." Nor do married women say, "I expect my husband to be perfect like Jesus."

Instead, we are to look to Jesus and say, "He's a perfect picture of the wisdom of God," so we want to look like Him more and more and more, for our good and for God's glory. So I want to encourage us to approach Proverbs 31 in a similar way. This is the portrait of the wisdom of God in a perfect description of womanhood, which we need to see amidst a very confused culture—and I would even say church culture—that we live in. We live in a world where what it means to be a woman is twisted, cheapened, perverted, distorted and redefined at every turn.

Women: Be and become Christlike women.

In the midst of this culture, we desperately need to hear what God says about womanhood. My hope is that studying this passage in God's Word will encourage many today to be and become Christlike women. For women today, I pray this passage will drive you to look more like Jesus in your life—not just generically as a person, but specifically as a woman, with a wonderful picture of a woman who is in a sense Christlike.

Even as I say that, I know that as we walk through this portrait of a Christlike woman in Proverbs 31, there will likely be areas of your life where you think, “I’m so far from that. I’ll never be that.” Or maybe you’ll even think, “I’ve messed up so much, there’s no hope for me in this or that area—or all of these areas.” Before we even get to the point where that thought creeps into your mind and heart, I want to remind you that as a follower of Jesus—for every woman who is trusting in Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life—God’s grace covers your past.

This is the gospel at the center of this Book. Yes, you are imperfect. You have sinned against God. You are separated from God as a result of your sin. But God loves you and has pursued you. Like a husband pursuing a wife, Christ loves the church. God has run to you and has made a way for you to be forgiven of all your sin. Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for all your sin, so that no matter how much you have messed up in the past, *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death”* (Romans 8:1-2).

No matter how dark or dirty your past, no matter how many times you have messed up, no matter what you have said or done or failed to do, know that in Christ you are clean and forgiven. You are a daughter of God. So don’t for a second let guilt over the past keep you from becoming the woman God has designed you to be in the present. If God has forgiven you, then it would be foolish for you to keep on remembering your faults from the past and letting them keep you from what God in His love has for you today.

This leads to the second part of this exhortation to women in Christ, because you may also be tempted to think, “Regardless of my past, I can’t be this type of woman in the present.” But that’s the beauty of what I want to show you and call you to. In and of yourself, with an imperfect heart stained by sin and weakness in this world, you cannot be and become the Christlike woman. But you are not left to yourself. You are in Christ Who has conquered sin and death. He has sent His Spirit to live in you. He has filled you, woman of God, with His very Spirit to enable you to live the life you were created to live as a woman loved by God and led by God in this world.

So God’s grace doesn’t just cover your past; God’s grace empowers your present. It empowers you today as a woman, tomorrow when you wake up, then the next day and the next. God’s grace empowers your present and God’s grace guarantees your future. So don’t think, “There’s no hope for me to become this kind of woman.” Sister in Christ, based on the resurrection of Christ, there is absolute guaranteed hope for you to become this kind of woman. One day you’re going to be free from sin and suffering and weakness in this world, fully redeemed, fully restored to the complete woman God has created you to be. So lean on God’s grace today, grow in God’s grace today and trust in God’s grace today as you look forward to that Day.

Married men: Love and nurture a Christlike wife.

This passage beckons women to be and become Christlike women. It also beckons married men to love and nurture a Christlike wife. This chapter in God's Word compels husbands to love and nurture their wives in Christlikeness. In the words of 1 Peter 3:7, "Show honor to your wife." Listen to these words from God in Ephesians 5:25-28:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives....

Did you catch that? This is the Bible commanding men to love our wives like Christ loves the church. So how does Christ love the church? He lays down His life for the church. So husbands, we love our wives by laying down our lives for them, so that they might become Christlike as a result of our love for them. Husbands, love your wife. Nurture your wife toward that end. This is the Word of God. Too many marriages are falling apart because men are not laying down their lives in selfless love like this. Husbands, let this Word be a charge to you to recommit your life today to serving your wife, so that she grows in Christlikeness. Love her, honor her, pray for her, build her up, encourage her and help her grow more and more and more into the likeness of Jesus, so she might experience all God has designed for her life.

That's how this chapter speaks to married men, but here's where it gets really interesting. There's one primary audience in this chapter and it is actually not women, as much as this proverb talks about women. The primary audience is not married men, as much as there is for married men to learn here. Instead, the primary audience in this passage is actually single men. Single guys! Let me show it to you.

In Proverbs 31:1-2 it says, "*The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother taught him: What are you doing, my son? What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vows?*" Any mom in this room knows what it's like to say, "What are you doing?" to a child. Then King Lemuel's mom continues to address the way he approaches women. She says what the book of Proverbs says over and over again. When you read this entire book, she basically says, "Don't pursue the wrong kind of woman."

If you read all through Proverbs, you see warnings against the adulterous woman (chapter 7), the unfaithful woman (chapters 2 and 30), the woman who neglects her family (chapter 7), the woman who bankrupts her family (chapter 6), the contentious woman who is like a constant dripping on a day of steady rain (chapter 27). Proverbs says, "*It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house*

shared with a quarrelsome wife” (Proverbs 21:9). You’re even warned against the physically beautiful woman who is not wise. Proverbs 11:22 says, *“Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.”*

So after all these warnings in Proverbs, we get to the end and find a mom saying to her son, *“What are you doing?”* She says in Proverbs 31:10, *“An excellent wife who can find?”* Then she goes on to describe her. So the message of Proverbs 31 is clearly for single men to pray for and seek out a Christlike wife. In the words of Proverbs 19:14, *“House and wealth are inherited from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord.”*

In this passage, God is saying, “Single men, seek a Christlike wife.” It’s the Word of God. Seek her out. Take the initiative. Unless the Lord has called you to singleness in a 1 Corinthians 7 kind of way, similar to the Apostle Paul, work to find an excellent wife. And just so you know, brothers, there are tons of them in this church. The Word of God is saying to you today, “Stop waiting, brothers. Get to work.” The world is telling you to wait. The world is telling you, “Get a job. Be successful. Build a career. If a wife comes along, that’s great.” But God’s Word is telling you, “Get a wife—an excellent one.”

So unless the Lord calls you to singleness, find a wife. Resist the ever-increasing trend and temptation in our day to prolong adolescence into your 20s and 30s. For some of you, it is time to stop playing video games and start dating. Stop running after the things this world says to run after; start initiating and seeking out a Christlike wife. Don’t wait for her to ask you out. It’s your responsibility to lead out. If she rejects you, then make that as easy as possible for her. You humbly bow out and seek elsewhere. And when you seek a wife, stop seeking after what the world tells you to seek after. Seek after what the Word of God tells you to seek after, which is very different from what the world says is important in a wife.

Who would have thought studying Proverbs 31 for Mother’s Day would actually lead me to realize this passage is primarily aimed at single guys—but it is. So hear the Word of God, brothers, and don’t just be hearers of the Word, be doers of the Word (James 1:22).

Church: praise Christlike women as we promote Christlikeness in women.

So let’s put all this together. When women, single and married, are being and becoming more and more Christlike, when married men are loving and nurturing Christlikeness in their wives, and when single men are praying for and seeking out Christlike wives, then the result is a church that is glorifying God through Christlike women. This is what God’s Word is calling us to today. As a church, let’s praise Christlike women as we promote Christlikeness in women. Proverbs 31:30 is clear. *“A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”*

Obviously, that doesn't take away praise from God. This is not an exhortation to idolatry. But when you praise women for the grace, goodness and wisdom of Christ you see in them, Whom are you ultimately praising? Christ, the God Who is molding them into the image of Christ for their good and for His glory. So let's praise and honor Christlikeness as a church, as we promote Christlikeness in woman across the church.

Church, we are filled with sisters in Christ who are tempted at every turn to confusion in the culture around us about what it means to be a woman in the image of God. Every sister here needs this church pointing her to the beauty of God's design for women. Younger women need older women doing this in their lives (Titus 2). Every woman needs other women spurring them on toward Christlikeness. Every woman, single or married, needs men at some level speaking truth and showing love in their lives. So as a church, let's praise and promote Christlikeness in women.

With that set-up, what then are the characteristics of a Christlike woman that God calls us to promote in the lives of women across the church. Women, what does the Word call you to be and to become? Husband, what does the Word call you to nourish in your wife? Single brother, what does the Word call you to seek out in a wife?

The answer Proverbs 31 gives is unique, because in the original language of the Old Testament, this is actually an acrostic. Every verse in this poem, starting in verse ten all the way down to verse 31, begins with a different letter of the 22-letter Hebrew alphabet. It would be like a poem where the first word in the first verse begins with the letter A, the second verse with B, and so forth all the way to Z. It's written like that so it would be easier to remember. The author—King Lemuel whom we don't know a lot about—writes this down in the form of an acrostic so he and others could more easily memorize the characteristics of this woman.

This means the arrangement of this poem is not like Paul in Romans, for example, where he's developing an argument in which each point builds on the previous points. Here, there's a list of one thing after another—some of which are similar and some of which are different. Some things are mentioned in one verse and then are repeated ten verses later. So I thought I'd do the same. Based on this passage, I want to give you an acrostic today. I won't be using the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which I don't think would be very memorable for you. Nor will I use the letters of the English alphabet, which is basically saving you from a 26-point sermon.

Instead, I want to take the word WOMAN and think about the wisdom of God with that acrostic, hopefully in a way that will keep these characteristics of a Christlike woman hidden in your mind and heart. We'll start with W.

W is Wise

The Christlike woman is wise. It works out pretty well that W is our first letter, because wisdom is the overarching theme, not only of the portrait of this excellent woman, but the entire book of Proverbs. Proverbs 1:7 sets the tone for the entire book when it says, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”* Later in that chapter and throughout the book, Wisdom is even personified as a woman. Look at Proverbs 1:20: *“Wisdom cries aloud in the street; in the markets she raises her voice.”* And Proverbs 3:13: *“Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels.”*

That’s how Proverbs starts out. Then when you get to the end of this book, the same words used for Wisdom are now used for this woman. Proverbs 31:10: *“She is far more precious than jewels.”* Why? Verse 30, because she fears the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom. Fear in Scripture is to have a reverence, awe, respect for God; not being scared. So the Christlike woman has Christlike wisdom, because she fears God. And because she fears God, her value cannot be fathomed. It cannot be fathomed. The fear of God, the love of God, the worship of God in a woman is a value that cannot be fathomed. It stands over and above looks, education, personality, accomplishments, likes and dislikes or any other characteristic. A woman who fears the Lord is more precious than the finest of jewels.

Women, be this. Be a woman who fears, reveres, worships and loves God supremely. Husbands, nurture this. Single men, look for this. Church, promote this: women who fear God. And because she fears God, her future has no fear. Two times in this text this mother says, “Because she fears God, she’s not afraid of anything else. She’s not afraid of snow or other threats to her household (verse 21).

Then look down to verse 25 that says, *“Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.”* I love that line. It’s like Satan is dangling in front of her worry about tomorrow’s troubles and what might happen. She sees that, then she glances up at Almighty God, Whom she fears and loves. She is not worried or anxious about tomorrow. She’s not afraid of what is to come, because she trusts completely in her God. She trusts the Lord with all her heart and does not lean on her own understanding. In all her ways she acknowledged Him, knowing He will make her paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6).

So much anxiety, fear and worry cripple so many women. Satan tempts women in this way every day. And men, for that matter, but we’re focusing on women here. Hear the Word of God. When you fear God, you have nothing else to fear. Nothing. You have nothing to worry about. Your life is in the hands of God and He loves you. He is committed to providing for you. This is the Word of God to you today, amidst all kinds of temptations in the world for you to worry about. Fear God and boldly face the future.

And because the Christlike woman fears God, her beauty will never fade. Did you notice what is almost entirely missing from this description of the Christlike woman? There’s hardly any mention of her

physical beauty—the one thing our world exalts above all else. Our world is screaming in thousands of ways, businesses are spending billions of dollars, entertainment industries are spending countless hours to convince women that your need for self-esteem, self-fulfillment, self-significance is found in looking a certain way. But the Word of God booms across our culture, *“Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”*

Please hear this word from God: Spend more time focused on fearing God than what you look like. This is the beginning of wisdom. To neglect the fear of God and focus on what you look like in the world is foolishness. The first mark of the Christlike woman is wisdom, which fundamentally means she fears, loves and worships God with all her heart.

O is for Overseer

The Christlike woman honorably oversees her home. I want to use this word “overseer” carefully, because we see throughout the Bible the leadership role of a husband in the home. Just like we read a minute ago in Ephesians 5, he does this in a way that compliments and cares for his wife. But Titus 2 contains a clear exhortation for women to love their husbands and their children in their home. First Timothy 5:14 exhorts younger women to manage their households, which is exactly the picture we have here in Proverbs 31.

This is a woman who is a manager, so in this sense an overseer in her home. This home is operating like it does and flourishing like it is because of her careful oversight. Just see how the others in her home view her. Her husband trusts her: *“The heart of her husband trusts in her”* (verse 11). What a beautiful statement. Her husband trusts her with his heart. This is fascinating, because outside of this verse and one other verse in the book of Judges, everywhere else in the Bible Scripture condemns trust in anyone or anything but God Himself. Don’t trust in this; don’t trust in that. But here in Proverbs 31:11, we have a picture of a husband who trusts his wife. This is valuable. Now it makes sense. A woman who can be trusted like this with her husband’s heart is indeed far more precious than jewels. He trusts her with his heart, with his household, with his goods. She promotes his good and protects his reputation.

Did you hear the second part of verse 11? *“He will have no lack of gain...”* Why? Because *“She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.”* The center of the whole passage is verse 23 which says, *“Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.”* The whole picture here is one of a wife who has cared for her home and who loves her husband in a way that he’s gained good standing in the community around him. Now, this verse might seem out of place in this passage about the excellent woman, because it’s talking about the excellence of her husband. But that’s the point. He’s excelling because his wife is excellent.

I think about my own life. I could spend all day on this. There is absolutely no question that anything good in me is a result, first of God's grace in my life, and second because of God's grace in my wife. There is no way I could be who I am or I could do what I do if it were not for my wife. We were at the dinner table in our home the other night and one of our kids—who will remain nameless—outright said, "Mom. If something happens to you, Dad wouldn't know how to do anything." And that child was right. Those kids realize the value of their mom.

That leads to the next part here in Proverbs 31: her children bless her. Why? Because she loves them and lays down her life so they might live. Look at all the details she takes care of. From sunup to sundown, she takes seemingly mundane tasks, accomplishes them when nobody else is looking, when no one else is there to laud her for it. But don't miss verse 28. There comes a day when her children rise up and call her blessed. All those long days of hard work, loving discipline and unselfish giving are so that her children are able to stand.

It's at this point I just want to pause and point out how this is totally being undercut and undervalued, even contradicted, in the culture around us. We live in a day when the idea of a woman laying down her life to love her kids is almost seen as second class, like a back seat to more important things in this world or even a waste of a woman's life. But I want to point out something that I pray will not only be biblically obvious to us, but practically obvious to us. Is there any job more important than being a mother? I'm using the word "job" here because this is a role and responsibility that requires training, preparation, commitment, dedication on a day-by-day basis, bringing together skills and energy and time to accomplish a task. Raising children qualifies as a job more than anything else I can think of.

It seems like this woman never sleeps—and that is the point here. Caring for a home is literally a seven-day-a-week, 24-hour job. I can't think of a job that is more important than caring for children to the glory of God.

I once read an article that I'm going to quote from extensively here, because I just can't improve on it.

Few women realize what great service they are doing for mankind and for the Kingdom of Christ when they provide a shelter for the family and good mothering, the foundation on which all else is built. A mother builds something far more magnificent than any cathedral—the dwelling place for an immortal soul, both her child's fleshly tabernacle and his earthly abode.

No professional pursuits so uniquely combine the most menial tasks with the most meaningful opportunities. It's hard to locate an aging mother who believes she made a mistake pouring her life into her children. It would certainly be more difficult to find a child to testify that his mother loved him and poured herself into his life to his detriment and demise.

Being a mother is not a destructive drought of usefulness, but an overflowing oasis of opportunity. It is not a dreary call to contain one's talents and skills, but a brilliant

catalyst to channel creativity and energies into meaningful work. It is not oppressive restraint of intellectual prowess for the community, but a release of wise instruction to your own household. It is not the bitter assignment of inferiority to your person, but the bright assurance of the ingenuity of God's plan. It is neither limitation of gifts available, nor stinginess in distributing the benefits of those gifts, but rather the multiplication of a mother's legacy to the generations to come and the generous bestowal of all God meant a mother to give to those He entrusted to her care.

So wives and moms across this church, be affirmed and honored today through the Word of God for the careful oversight you give in your home to the glory of God. Even if you do other work outside your home, as many of you do, be assured that all the work you do in your home is immeasurably valuable according to the Word of God. Don't underestimate for a second that those seemingly menial tasks are taking advantage of wonderfully meaningful opportunities.

M is for Mighty

That leads to the next characteristic here, whether in or outside the home. The Christlike woman is Wise, carefully Overseeing her home and Mighty in her work. I use this word because two times in this passage this woman is described as dressed or clothed with strength. Verse 17: "*She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.*" Then verse 25: "*Strength and dignity are her clothing.*" It's interesting. Even the form of this poem, when you study it, is written a lot like poems to military heroes were written in Israel's history. There's military imagery throughout. Most poems like this were written to recount the valor and might of a military hero, but this one is written to recount the valor and might of a woman evident in many different ways.

She has willing and skillful hands. Verse 13 says she "*works with willing hands,*" literally "at the pleasure of her hands," which means she goes about her work willingly. Verse 19: "*She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.*" This imagery portrays her skill in spinning and weaving to provide for her children. Her love of them drives her labor for them. She's not lazy. Verse 27 says she "*does not eat the bread of idleness.*" She has willing and skilled hands with an innovative and industrious spirit. Verse 14: "*She brings her food from afar.*" Verse 15: "*She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household.*"

This even goes to the point that verse 16 says this entrepreneurial woman "*considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.*" So this woman is not just going to the store to get grapes; she's planting some of her own for the benefit of her household. She explores and finds a piece of land to purchase—all this, while she's got a little cottage industry going on down in verse 24, making linen garments and selling them, delivering sashes to merchants for profit.

Now obviously, this does not mean it's wrong to shop at the grocery store. God's Word is not saying that the Christlike woman should grow all her food and make a lot of money on the side doing it. No. The picture here is of a woman who is using the time and talents God has given her, even the role God has given her, wisely, with an innovative and industrious spirit.

With that, she has a sharp mind and a strong body. Obviously, in planning and coordinating all these things she has a sharp mind and, as we read in verse 17, she makes her arms strong. That doesn't necessarily mean she works out her biceps regularly. This is more like an idiom in the language of the Old Testament, much like we might say today, "She has a strong back." The point is she works hard with the ability God gives her. Obviously different women have different abilities and different gifts. The picture here is working hard with whatever grace God has given. She is mighty in her work.

A is for Attractive

This leads to the A in WOMAN—she is Attractive in all the right ways. I mentioned earlier that this text hardly mentions physical attraction, but here is a slight and I think significant mention of it, but not in ways we might expect, certainly not in ways we often hear emphasized in our culture. What are the right ways in which she is attractive? In addition to all we've seen, her words are kind and her works are admirable. Verse 26: *"She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue."* With the wisdom of this woman flowing from her fear of God, her words are wise and kind. Whether it's teaching her children or speaking to others in her sphere of influence, she speaks wisdom and kindness. Her words make her attractive, so her works are admirable.

I love the way this whole thing ends with the wisdom of a woman whose works praise her in the gates. Women, be known ultimately not for how you look but for how you live.

This leads right to the next part of a woman's attractiveness in Proverbs 31: her dress is tasteful and her demeanor is delightful. If we're not careful, particularly in light of verse 30's warning against charm and beauty, we might be inclined to think that how this woman cares for herself physically doesn't matter at all. But that's not totally the case. Even in this description of a woman who's working all day long, this Proverb depicts her dressed in fine linen and purple (verse 22). Now again, we need to guard against misunderstanding. This isn't saying she is out planting a vineyard in an elegant dress. Nor is it saying that a Christlike woman needs certain nice clothes. The picture is a woman whose dress is tasteful and whose demeanor is delightful in a way that is indeed attractive to her husband.

Keep in mind that the Bible is not anti physical attraction when it comes to men and women. You only have to turn two books to your right to the Song of Solomon where you'll see a very detailed picture of that. Even here in verse 22, when the Bible says she makes bed coverings for herself, that's the same language that's used earlier in Proverbs to describe how an adulterous woman seduces a foolish man with

bed coverings. So the picture here is a woman who attracts her husband in all the right ways. Her words are kind, her works are admirable, her dress is tasteful and her demeanor is delightful. Think about Proverbs 5:18. Her husband delights in the wife of his youth. She's attractive in all the right ways.

N is for Neighbor

This leads to the last letter, N. She is a Neighbor to the needy. Amidst all of her oversight in her home and industry innovation, she is not selfish. She's not hoarding what she has. Verse 20: "*She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hand to the needy.*" This Christlike woman gives generously and serves sacrificially. She gives generously from what she has made.

I love the picture here. It's not the poor coming to her; it's her going to the poor. She doesn't wait for opportunities to help those in need; she creates opportunities to help those in need. Think of all she teaches her children—and her husband, for that matter—in the process of giving generously and serving sacrificially. In this description, almost every verse is dripping with self-sacrificial service. She's doing what she's doing for the sake of those in need around her, whether it's in her home or outside her home. This makes sense when you think about a woman who is in Christ, because when a woman's life is formed by the Savior Who gave His life on a cross, then it just makes sense that as the overflow of His Spirit, you serve as you have been served and you sacrificially love as you've been sacrificially loved.

This is so different from the world's definition of womanhood. This world screams, "Advance yourself! Look out for yourself. Do this and that for yourself." Meanwhile, God's Word speaks in such a clearly countercultural way: "Deny yourself. Die to yourself. Live for the good of others and ultimately for the glory of God, not for yourself." This is a very different way to live as a woman in this world. This does not mean just let others run over you. This is a picture of a woman who is wise, who carefully oversees her home, who is mighty in her work and attractive in all the right ways, as a neighbor to those in need.

So put all this together and you think about the "So what?" here. Based on this word from God, I want to encourage women all across this church to reflect on these characteristics. Ask God to help you grow in these ways, to become more and more the woman God, in His love and wisdom, has created you to be. I want to encourage married men, not to go home and say to your wife, "You need to be better here or there." For so many reasons, I want to encourage you not to say that. Don't even let your mind go there.

I want to encourage you, first, to affirm your wife specifically in all the ways you see God's grace in her life. Today, this week, ongoing, specifically affirm evidences of grace you see in her life. Tell her the specific ways you see these characteristics in her. Praise her—that's what God's Word tells you to do (verse 28). Ten in the areas where she may need to grow, asks yourself, "How can I help her grow in

this way? How can I better serve her, better lay my life down for her, better pray for her, better care for her, better cherish and nurture Christlikeness in her?”

Then single men, pursue a wife like this. Your takeaway from studying in God’s Word today might be to ask a girl out. What a great sermon! You have a word from God toward that end. And if she says no, bow out humbly and move on. In the process, become a man whom a wife like this wants as a husband. And finally, church, let’s encourage women in all these ways.

Here’s the deal. The portrait we’ve just seen of womanhood in God’s Word is different from the portrait we see of womanhood in this world. This world does not and will not promote the fear of God in women. We’ve got to have our eyes wide open to this. This goes totally against the grain of the culture around us. So, church, we must work hard to promote the fear of God, the love of God and the worship of God in women.

Women, please see this. Ultimately, the Christlike woman trusts God’s Word and God affirms her worth. Women all across this church, hear the Word of God saying to you right now, loud and clear: you are valuable. Immensely valuable. Single or married, children or no children, trust God’s Word in your life and rest in the reality that God loves you so much. He’s created you with a dignity, a beauty and a worth that far surpasses anything this world can ever give to you. Cling to this Word and not to the ways of this world. Fear God. Love God. Worship God. Trust His Word. know, believe and feel that the God of the universe affirms your worth and desires you to experience all He’s created you as a woman to experience.

I want to have a time when we pray together for women across our church. I’m going to invite Heather to join me up here and ask her to lead us in that prayer. She doesn’t love being in front of the crowd; she thrives behind the scenes. But I asked her if she would be willing to lead us in prayer.

Here’s what I want to do. Before she prays, I’m going to ask women of all ages to stand—so from the youngest to the oldest, from kids to grandparents, single, married, with children, without children. We’re going to do Proverbs 31:30 together, *“A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”* That means brothers in church, we’re going to praise God for the women in this church. What that doesn’t mean is us giving a nice little golf clap. I have seen some of you men at sporting events. If you can go that crazy over a bunch of guys running around on a field or a court with a ball in their hand, then all the more a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. She is worthy of more than a polite golf clap.

Then when you stand, the men in this church are going to give God glory for the women in this church. Then Heather will lead us in prayer. With that, I invite women of all ages to stand and we are going to praise God for you. [Lengthy applause] I see some guys who are starting a wave. This is great. You keep standing and I want to ask Heather to pray specifically for the women all across our church.

Heather: Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You for this day when we celebrate mothers and the influence they've had on our lives. God, I thank You for my mother, who not too long ago whom You transformed and redeemed and then took into glory. I'm so grateful for her influence on my life. God, thank You for the many ladies who have invested in me to teach me life lessons on how to live out Your Word. I pray that all the ladies in this room, whether they're a mom, expecting to be a mom, or not a mom yet, or at all, would see opportunities to love and encourage those around them in need of a mother figure.

Lord, thank You that You're using women here to teach children Your ways and point them toward Christ. Lord, Your Word says that children are a heritage from the Lord and I thank You for the opportunity You've given moms to love, nurture and shepherd children for the glory of God. We know we cannot do it on our own, so we beg You to grant us Your wisdom, grace, patience and kindness with our children, both young and old, as we long to show them Your ways.

Lord, I pray for my brothers and sisters in this room who are struggling this Mother's Day—for those like me who have lost their mother recently or many years ago. I know times of celebration like this can be difficult and heart-wrenching. For those whose relationship with their mom is not what they would like it to be, for mothers whose relationship with their children is strained or heartbreaking, Lord, please give them Your peace, comfort and strength today Grant them the ability to praise You even through their sadness.

Lord, I pray for women who long to have children, but for whatever reason are having difficulty. Lord, you know the desires of their heart, the tears they cry, the longing to be a mother. I ask that You would be their strength when they're weak, their comfort when they're hurting and their peace in turmoil. I pray that You would give them the desires of their heart. May Your will be done in each of their situations.

Lord, thank You for withholding children from David and me for a time. As difficult as it was many years ago, I believe that You are sovereign and have a far better plan for our lives than we do. Thank You for beginning our family through adoption from Kazakhstan, biological children, then another adoption from China. I praise You for what You taught me through a failed adoption from Nepal and the fruit that has come out that difficult and sad circumstance. Lord, you have blessed us beyond words. And Lord, thank You for our new child in China who is wonderfully made and who is waiting for us to pursue and bring into our family. I pray specifically for others who are waiting to adopt internationally or domestically. Make their hearts strong during this time of waiting. Prepare them for what's ahead. For those who've lost children through miscarriage or even through abortion, Lord, comfort them in a way that only Your Spirit can. Thank You for caring about our deepest hurts and struggles. For the moms who serve as foster parents, please uphold them with Your righteous right hand. You are the healer of broken

hearts, Lord. Thank You that You can redeem any situation. I also pray specifically for moms of special needs children. Father, give grace for the days and sustain them in unique ways for the task You've given them to care for their children. Lord, we are so helpless without You.

Finally, Lord, thank You for pursuing me and for pursuing us, for adopting us as children of God. I'm always amazed at how You work. Lord, we yield to Your will. Bless Your name for You are good. Your love endures forever. Amen.

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