

THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN WOMANHOOD Proverbs 31:10-31

If you have Bible and I hope you do, turn with me to Proverbs 31.

I am very excited about this text that we are going to dive into on this Mother's Day. Now it is our practice around here at Brook Hills – as a faith family – on this day to, yes, acknowledge our gratitude to God for our mothers and to the mothers of children among us.

At the same time, we take a broader emphasis on this day each to consider not just mothers, but women, and our gratitude to God specifically for the women (the sisters in Christ) who make up this faith family...regardless of whether they are married or single, younger or older, with children or without children.

And so this morning, we are pausing from our journey through 1 Corinthians – where we are seeing the effect of the cross of Christ on the church in different ways – and I want us to consider today the effect of the cross of Christ on the way we understand womanhood.

I have mentioned in our journey through 1 Corinthians how so much of the city of Corinth and the culture of Corinth was infiltrating the church at Corinth – and we have considered how the same reality is taking place in our context.

In fact, one of the reasons I believe God has specifically led us to study 1 Corinthians (and we talked about this a few weeks ago) is because of the rapidly shifting culture around us. And that rapid shift may be most clear in the way our culture increasingly views men and women and their relationships to one another.

What does it mean to be a man?

What does it mean to be a woman?

Are there distinctions between the two – in any way?

Is God's design for man and woman unique – in any way?

These are huge questions, and how we answer them carries huge consequences both in the church and in our culture.

In the words of John Piper, "The tendency today is to stress the equality of men and women by minimizing the unique significance of our maleness or femaleness. But this depreciation of male and female personhood is a great loss. It is taking a tremendous toll on generations of young men and women who do not know what it means to be a man or a woman. Confusion over the meaning of sexual personhood today is epidemic. The consequence of this confusion is not a free and happy harmony among gender-free persons relating on the basis of abstract competencies. The consequence rather is more divorce, more homosexuality, more sexual abuse, more promiscuity, more social awkwardness, and more emotional distress and suicide that come with the loss of God-given identity."

Such loss of God-given identity obviously has huge ramifications for understanding...what happens when a man and a woman come together in marriage?

Or do you even have to have a man and a woman come together in order to have marriage?

These questions are at the core of so much that is going in the culture and in the church today, and so I knew that when we got to this day (Mother's Day) and when, Lord willing, we will get to Father's Day, that it would be well worth our time to pause in 1 Corinthians and specifically consider (today) "The Cross and Christian Womanhood" and on Father's Day "The Cross and Christian Manhood."

So how does the cross of Christ uniquely attribute value and honor and beauty to women...and what does the cross of Christ uniquely enable women to do in this world?

And so I want to bring us to Proverbs 31.

Particularly after considering "The Cross and Christian Wisdom" last week, we come to this book of wisdom, and we find that it climaxes – the whole book culminates in a picture of a woman of wisdom. Let's read it together – starting in Proverbs 31, verse 10...

[READ PROVERBS 31:10-31]

Now...I want to be very careful just as soon as I read that last word to pause and acknowledge something: this is a picture of a perfect woman. In this proverb, we hear nothing about any imperfections in this woman. You think about what we just read...

We read about how godly she is, how wise she is, what a wonderful wife she is, what an amazing woman she is – she's a homemaker, she's a great cook who not only makes food for her family but makes clothes for her children with her own bare hands...she gets up before everyone else gets up, she goes to bed after everyone else goes to bed...she practically never sleeps...she's strong, she's humble, she's confident, she's a servant, she's a leader, she's an entrepreneur who's out in the world making good business deals, buying property for the benefit of her family...and on top of all that, she loves and cares for the poor.

She is wonder woman.

And as a result, women can easily read this passage and instead of coming away encouraged, many/most/maybe all of you may be tempted to come away discouraged, thinking, "I can never be that."

Or single men can read this passage and think, "I want to find a wife who's perfect like that."

Or married man can read this passage and think, "I kind of wish my wife was perfect like that."

All of these things are obviously unhealthy responses to this passage – this picture of womanhood in God's Word. And this is where I want us to realize that we have an ideal, a perfect picture of this woman for a reason. The whole point of the book of Proverbs in the Bible is ultimately to point us to Christ...and to the wisdom that can only be found in Christ.

We read just a few weeks ago at the end of 1 Corinthians 1, "Christ is our wisdom."

And so what we have here at the end of the book of Proverbs is a picture of woman who perfectly displays the wisdom of God in her womanhood...and that is a good thing...and it should neither discourage us nor deceive us with overly lofty ideals.

Think about it – when we turn the pages of the Bible in the NT to the life of Jesus, we behold a perfect man.

A man who perfectly displays the wisdom of God. And as followers of Christ, we don't look at Jesus and say, "I'm just so discouraged by Jesus' perfection."

No, we're encouraged by the perfection of Jesus that we see on the pages of Scripture. Christian men (men who follow Christ) don't look at Christ and get discouraged, saying, "I'll just never be like Him."

Neither should single Christian women (single women who follow Christ) look at Christ and think, "I want to find a husband who's perfect like Jesus," nor do married Christian women say, "I expect my husband to be perfect like Jesus."

Instead, men (and women) look at Jesus and say, "His person is a perfect picture of the wisdom of God in a man, and we want to look like him more and more and more – for our good – and for His glory."
And so I want to invite us to approach Proverbs 31 in a similar way.

Consider Proverbs 31 as a picture of a woman who clearly reflects God's wisdom, and in so doing, women, long to look more and more and more like her...as you ultimately grow into the image of the Christ to whom this picture is pointing you to.

And men, live to serve and love and help the women around you in Christ grow more and more and more into His image...in ways that are reflected here in this proverb.

So as we look at this text, amidst a confused culture (and Church)...specifically when it comes to womanhood – in a world where what it means to be a woman is being twisted, cheapened, perverted, distorted, and redefined at every turn, based on the Word of God, I want to encourage women [all across this faith family...and all across this room]: Be and become Christ-like women.

Let this text this morning/evening inspire you to look more like Christ in your life – not just as a person, but as a woman – with a clear and unique picture of a woman who is like Christ (Christlike).

And I know – I know as I have prayed for you - women in this room, I have prayed for you today – because I know that as we walk through this portrait of a Christlike woman in this text, there are going to be areas of your life that are going to be exposed...areas where you are going to think, "Oh, I have so much to grow in that area." Or, "I'll never be that." Or maybe even, "I've already messed up so much; there's no hope for me in this or that area...or all these areas."

And so before we even get to that point where that thought creeps into your mind and your heart, I want to remind you that in Christ – so when you believe in Christ, for every woman in this room who trusts in Christ, is found in Christ – GOSPEL? – for every woman who is trusting in Christ, know this:
The mercy of God covers your past.

You may have messed up in every way possible, but know this, Christian sister: "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...because the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death."

No matter how dark or dirty your past, no matter how many times you have messed up, now matter what you have said or done or failed to do, know this...in Christ, you have been forgiven. Cling to that truth...that reality.

And don't let guilt over the past keep you from becoming the woman God has designed you to be in the present.

If He has forgiven you, remembered your sins no more...then it would certainly be foolish for you to keep on remembering them...and dwelling them...and letting them keep you from what God, in His love for you, has for you today.

Which leads to my second exhortation to women in Christ all across this room – because I know you also may be tempted to think, “Regardless of my past, I can't be this type of woman.” And that's the beauty of what I want to show you – and to call you to – when it comes to the cross and Christian womanhood.

In and of yourself, with an imperfect heart stained by sin and weakness in this world, yes, you cannot be and become Christlike women...but there is power in the cross of Christ.

He has defeated sin, He has conquered sin...He has risen from the grave, and He has sent His Spirit to you – He has filled you, o woman of God, with His very Spirit, to enable you to live the live you were created to live as a woman loved and led by God in this world.

So the second exhortation...know this:

The presence of God empowers your present.

God is with you, sisters in Christ, living in you, enabling you to experience the life He has designed for you as a daughter of God.

He has not only saved you by His mercy – He has filled you with His presence – so that you might grow more and more and more into His image with each passing day, which leads to the last exhortation I want to give you from the start...

The hope of God guarantees your future. 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, when you are free from sin and suffering and weakness in this world, you will be fully redeemed, restored to be the complete woman that God has created you to be.

This is coming.

So lean on God's grace, grow in God's grace, and trust in God's grace as you long for that day. Amidst a confused culture and church, I want to call women all across this room to be and become Christlike women.

And I want to call married men: [To] Love and nurture a Christlike wife. This is not just a day for us to honor wives; this is a reminder that we have been commanded to daily love and honor our wives.

1 Peter 3:7 – “Show honor to your wife.”

Ephesians 5 – “Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” – and then, listen to this, “so 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 us to love our wives like Christ loves the church, so how does Christ love the church?

Follow this.

He lays down His life for her so that – here's the purpose – so that she might be pure and holy and without blemish – perfect.

So, in the same way, husbands, love your wife – lay down your life for your wife – so that she might become holy, pure, without blemish – in other words, love your wife – lay down your life for your wife in such a way that she becomes a Christ-like woman.

Love her – nurture her toward that end.

As a married man, you are responsible before God for your wife's growth in Christlikeness – this is your God-given responsibility – to love and nurture a Christ-like wife.

So let this Word today be a charge to you to recommit your life to serving your wife so that she grows in Christlikeness, to so love her and honor her and serve her and pray for her and build her up and encourage her to grow more and more and more into the likeness of Christ – to experience all that Christ has bought for her on the cross as a woman in Christ.

So that's the call to married men today.

Now...here's where it gets interesting, because if there is one primary audience in this text, that primary audience is not women – as much as this proverb talks about women – and the primary audience in this text is not married men – as much as there is for married men to learn here. Instead, the primary audience in this text is actually single men!

Let me show it to you...

Look at Proverbs 31:1 – It says, “The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother taught him...” And then it goes on to say, “What are you doing, my son? What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vows?” And then King Lemuel's mom begins to address the way he approaches women. And basically she says what Proverbs has said time and time again throughout this book – she says, “The wrong kind of woman will ruin you.”

You look back in Proverbs (and we don't have time to do this this morning/evening), but over and over again, 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's better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife” (Proverbs 11:24), and even 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 of these warnings in Proverbs, we get to the end, and we have a mom saying to her son, verse 10, "An excellent wife who can find?" and then she goes on to describe her.

So the message of Proverbs 31 is clear for... Single men: Pray for and seek out a Christlike wife.

Pray for this – I want to call you single men in this room to pray fervently for, fast zealously for a Christlike wife.

Proverbs 19:14 says, "House and wealth are inherited from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD."

So ask God for a wise wife, and seek her out. Take the initiative – and we'll talk about this more on Father's Day, but in light of the fact that this text is written primarily to you, single brothers, take the initiative in seeking out a Christ-like wife.

Unless the Lord has called you in a unique and unusual way to single ministry and mission (similar to how he called the apostle Paul) – unless that is the case, let this text be a wake-up call to you this morning: find an excellent wife.

And just so you know brothers, there's TONS of them here in our faith family. I spoke to a group this weekend at our Singles Conference where they outnumbered you easily 2 to 1. So don't wait, brothers.

The world's telling you to wait.

The world's telling you to get an education...get a job...and IF a wife comes along, that's great.

But the Word is telling you, "Get a wife...an excellent wife."

College students, find a wife.

Single brothers, unless the Lord calls you to stay single, find a wife. Like now!

Resist the ever-present trend and temptation in our day to prolong your adolescence (and consequent singleness) into your 20s and 30s.

Grow up.

Man up.

Stop playing video games and get a date.

Stop running after the things this world (even sometimes our Christian culture) says run after and start initiating/seeking out a Christlike wife.

Don't wait for her to ask you out; it's your responsibility to lead out. And if she rejects you, then make that as easy as possible for her – 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.

Little did I realize that when I started studying Proverbs 31 for this Mother's Day sermon that I would realize this is actually a sermon aimed at single brothers...but it is.

And you put all this together – when women (single and married) are being and becoming more and more Christlike – and 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 is glorifying God through Christlike women.

And so this is the last call in this text today – it's for...

The Church: [Let's] Praise Christ-like women as we promote Christlikeness in women.
Verse 30 is clear: "A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised."

Now obviously this does not take away praise from God – this is not an exhortation to idolatry.
No – when you praise women for the grace and the goodness and the wisdom of Christ that you see in them, then who are you ultimately praising?

Christ.

God.

The God who is molding them by His mercy for His majesty into the image of Christ. So let's praise and honor Christlike women as the church as we promote Christlikeness in women across the church.

Church, we are filled with sisters in Christ who are tempted at every turn to confusion and deception in the culture around us about what it means to be a woman in the image of God. And every sister in this faith family needs men and women in the church pointing her to the beauty of God's design for women.

Younger women need older women doing this in their lives – which is why we've tried to create connecting points for that to happen. Every woman needs other women spurring them on toward Christlikeness, and every woman (single or married) needs men at some level speaking truth and showing love into their lives - which is why we're constantly emphasizing getting involved in a small group where you're sharing life with other people – in the context of a community of faith where we're serving alongside one another.

So Church at Brook Hills, let this text be a wake up call to all of us (men and women alike) to look around us and to serve our sisters in this faith family by promoting Christlikeness in them and praising them along the way.

Let's encourage – let's praise them.

C.S. Lewis said: "If we do not admire [what is praiseworthy], we shall be stupid, insensible, and great losers." And quite selfishly, I don't want to pastor a church full of losers.

So let's praise and promote Christlikeness in women.

Now...with that setup, what then are the Characteristics of the Christ-like Woman...

That the Word calls us to promote in the lives of sisters across this faith family?

Women – what does the Word call you to be and 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?

And the answer Proverbs 31 gives is unique because in the original language of the OT, it's an acrostic. Each verse in this poem (starting in verse 10 and going all the way down to verse 31 – 22 verses) begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

And so it would be like a poem that written, and the first verse begins with the letter A, the second verse begins with the letter B, and then C, D, all the way to Z...and it's written like that so that it would be more easily memorable by the hearer (or the reader).

The author here (King Lemuel, which we don't know a lot about him, but he...) writes this down in the form of an acrostic so that he (and others) could more easily memorize the characteristics of this woman. Which means the arrangement of the poem is not like Paul in the book of Romans developing an argument. Instead, it's a list of one thing after another – some similar, some different – some themes mentioned in one verse and then reappearing 10 verses later with the start of another verse, and so what I want to do is to give you an acrostic this morning.

Instead of using the letters of the Hebrew alphabet (which would be of no help to us today) or even the letters of the English alphabet (primarily because I don't have time for a 26-point sermon right now) – but instead, I want to take the word "WOMAN" as we think about "The Cross and Christian Womanhood," and with the beginning of each letter "W-O-M-A-N," I want to give you a characteristic of the Christlike woman.

And I hope that this might enable you to more easily remember the truths that are in Proverbs 31 that we want to be/become, nurture, seek out, praise, and promote in women around us.

So let's dive in to the "W" –

"W" is for wise.

The Christlike woman is...

She is WISE.

Now this works out well that "W" is our first letter because wisdom is the overarching theme not only of the portrait of the excellent woman, but also the entire book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 1:7 set the tone for the rest of the book when it said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Later in that chapter, and then throughout the book, wisdom is even personified as a woman. Proverbs 1:20 – "Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice."

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...”
So that's how Proverbs starts out, and so then you get to the end of the book, and the same words used for wisdom are now used for this woman.

Verse 10 – “She is far more precious than jewels.”
Why?

Verse 30 – “Because she fears the Lord,” which is the beginning of what?
Wisdom.

The Christlike woman has Christlike wisdom because she fears God – she reveres God – she is humble before God – she trusts God – she honors God – and because of this, she is wise.

Because she fears God, her value cannot be fathomed.

The fear of God in a woman is a value that cannot be fathomed.

Over and above looks and education, personality and accomplishments, likes and dislikes, any other characteristic, a woman who fears the Lord is more precious than the finest of jewels.

Be this, nurture this, look for this, promote this, church...and...

Because she fears God, she boldly faces the future.

Two times in this text, this mother says, “Because she fears God, she is not afraid of anything else.”
Verse 21, “She is not afraid of snow for her household” – of threats to her household.
And then you look down at verse 25 – it says, “Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.”

Oh, what a great line.

It's like Satan is dangling in front of her warning about tomorrow's troubles – and what might up – and she glances up at Almighty God whom she fears, and she laughs at Satan's folly.
She is not anxious about tomorrow – she is not afraid of what is to come – because she trusts completely in her God.

Proverbs 3:5-6 - She trusts in the Lord with all her heart, and leans not on her own understanding – in all her ways she acknowledges Him, and she knows He will make her paths straight.

Oh, so much anxiety and fear crippling sisters - and brothers, for that matter, but focusing on sisters here in our culture and in the church – the Christlike woman, because she fears God, she boldly faces the future.

And...

Because she fears God, her beauty will never fade.

Oh, notice what is almost entirely missing from this description of the Christ-like woman.

There is hardly any mention of her physical beauty – the one thing that our culture exalts above all else.

Our culture is screaming in thousands of ways and businesses are spending billions of dollars and entertainment industries are spending countless hours to convince women that their need for self-esteem, fulfillment, and significance is found in looking a certain way – and the Word of God resounds across our culture: “Charm is deceitful.”

“Beauty is vain.”

“A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”

This is the beginning of wisdom.
And this is the first mark of the Christ-like woman.
She is wise – which means fundamentally that she fears the Lord.

Second letter – “O” – the Christ-like woman...

She is the OVERSEER of her home.

Now I want to use this word overseer here carefully – let me be clear on what I don't mean and what I do mean when I use this word.

First, what I don't mean – I don't mean that this woman (as a wife and as a mother, in particular) is the head of her household.

We have seen (and if you'd like to go back to this, we did a whole Secret Church on the topic, and I spent a lot of time there – you can go to radical.net and download that if you want, but we have seen...) that God has created men and women with equal dignity (completely equal dignity) yet unique and different roles in the home (and in their relationship with one another).

Man and woman – husband and wife – mother and father – complement one another. As equal, they serve one another in complementary ways.

From the very beginning of the Bible, before sin even entered the world, God created man to be the head of the household, and woman to be his helper – not in any inferior way...not in any dominating manner...not in any form that undercuts the value of either woman or man – but as a complement to one another in marriage and the home – and God designed it that way from the very beginning because the whole purpose of marriage is to be a picture of Christ's love for the church to the world (Ephesians 5).

The husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church, and the husband loves his wife by laying down his life for his wife, just as Christ loves His church and lays His life down for her. And the wife gladly submits to her husband's leadership in the same way that the church gladly submits to Christ's leadership.

And in this way – in our marriages – equal in dignity, different in role – together we display the goodness and the glory of Christ to the world.

So the husband or the father, in that sense, is the head of the household, or the overseer of the home. However, Titus 2 (in the NT) contains a clear exhortation for women to love their husbands and their children, to be working at home for their good (the word there in Titus 2 is literally “home-workers”), and

1 Timothy 5:14 exhorts younger woman to “manage their households,” and that’s exactly the picture we have here in Proverbs 31.

This is a woman who is a manager, an administrator, and in this sense, an overseer in her home.

This home is operating like it does – and it is flourishing like it is – directly because of her oversight.

And she illustrates for us this complementary role of a woman in her home, particularly as it pertains to her husband and to her children.

As a wife, she is a helper to her husband.

That’s the picture we have in the beginning of the Bible (Genesis 2:18), it is the picture we have later in the Bible in Ephesians 5 and Titus 2), and it is the picture we have here in Proverbs 31 – her clear priority in life is helping her husband so that together they might glorify God.

And this is powerfully portrayed in the language of Proverbs 31. Listen to verse 11 – “The heart of her husband trusts in her.”

Did you hear that?

He trusts her...
With his heart.

This is remarkable.

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 whose 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.
He trusts her...
With his household.

As head over the household, he entrusts her to manage and administrate and oversee that household well, and she does.

The whole picture here is a woman who is overseeing the house well.
He trusts her with his heart, with his household,...
With his good.

“He will have no lack of gain” because “she does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.”
The Christlike wife does her husband good – why? – because she loves him and she loves God.

And so...

She is devoted to his success.

The very center of this whole passage is verse 23, which says, “Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.”

And the whole picture here is a wife who has overseen her home and helped her husband in a way that he has gained good standing in the community around him.

This verse might seem out of place in this passage about the excellent woman – to mention the excellence of her husband – but that's the point – he's excelling because his wife is excellent.

I think about my own life and – a couple of weeks ago, Pastor Jim brought me up here and we talked about influence that the Lord has entrusted to me – and he said something along the lines of, “Behind any successful man is a very surprised woman.”

And I want to take that statement and augment just a bit to say, “Behind any successful man is very good woman.” I think about all my wife (and I promise I'm not going to turn this sermon into an ode to Heather, which I could, and which I will in private with my precious wife), but there is no question that everything I do as a pastor or preacher or author here or some other place around the world is totally, completely, entirely due to the fact that my wife is a good (a very good) helper to her husband.

[Illustration: Story about My Time in Underground House Churches]

And this is the story in so many ways of our marriage – I'll come home from something here or something elsewhere and tell her about all that God is doing, and how God is glorifying Himself in the church, and she will rejoice with me.

And then I'll ask her how her day was, and she'll tell me about diapers she changed and bottoms she wiped and whatever else, and what I say to her – and what I want to say to every wife in this room is – no matter what it looks like – it is Christ-like, it glorifies God to help your husband.

She is devoted to his success, and...
She delights in his satisfaction.

The text doesn't say that she carries out her role begrudgingly, but joyfully, because she's committed to her husband's good and to her Father's glory.

And as a result, her husband trusts her...
With his reputation.
And consequently...
He honors her.

And obviously, we're going to talk on Father's Day more about what that honor looks like in practice, but this a reciprocal picture in the sense that he also loves and lays down his life for his wife's good.

So as a wife, she is a helper to her husband, and...
As a mother, she prioritizes care for her children.

Throughout Scripture, we see a clear and continual theme of how God has uniquely created women for the nurture of children in a way that complements a man's leadership of children.

And such nurture, such care is evident all over this passage when it comes to this woman's children. She loves them.

Providing clothes for them, food for them, protection for them. She lays down her life for them.

All of the details she takes care of – from sun up to sun down – she takes the seemingly mundane tasks and accomplishes them when no one else is looking and when no one else is there to laud her for it, but there comes a day – don't miss it, verse 28, when "her children rise up and call her blessed."

She lives to make [that/]them her legacy.

All the long days of hard work, loving discipline, and unselfish giving are so that her children are able to stand – blessed to bless.

I think about Susanna Wesley, the mother of John and Charles Wesley, two sons who shook two continents for Christ. She wrote, "I am content to fill [just] a little space if God be glorified." And then she went on to say, "No one can, without renouncing the world, in the most literal sense, observe my method; and there are few, if any, that would entirely devote above twenty years of the prime of life in hopes to save the souls of their children, which they think may be saved without so much ado; for that was my principal intention, however unskillfully and unsuccessfully managed."

And it's at this point that I just want to pause when it comes to the Christlike woman being an overseer of her home, and I want to point out how this is totally being undercut, undervalued, and even contradicted in the culture around us.

We live in a day where the idea of a woman making a home, or working at home, is seen as servile, second-class, and even in some ways as a waste of someone's life.

But I want to pause and point out what I pray will not just be biblically obvious to us, but practically obvious to us.

Is there any career more important – and I'm going to use the word career here because a career is a job that requires training and preparation, commitment and dedication, on a day-by-day basis, bringing together varied skills, energy, and time to accomplish a task, and overseeing/making a home, helping a husband, and raising

children qualifies as this more than anything else I can think of – that's part of the point of Proverbs 31 – it seems like this woman never sleeps, but that's the point – overseeing a home literally is a 7-day-a-week, 24-hour job – and I can't think of a career that is more important than overseeing a home, supporting a husband, rearing and nurturing children, all to the glory of God.

Dorothy Patterson wrote an excellent article on this very idea, and she said, "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 pursuit so uniquely combines the most menial tasks with the most meaningful opportunities."

Speaking about these opportunities, she wrote, “It is hard to locate an aging mother who believes she made a mistake of pouring her life into her children, and 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.”

And then – I love this – she concluded by saying, “Homemaking—being a full-time wife and 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 a rope for binding one’s productivity in the marketplace, but reins for guiding one’s posterity in the home; 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 for complementarity of the sexes, especially as worked out in God’s plan for marriage; 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 faith family, be affirmed and be honored today in the text of God’s Word for the management and administration and oversight you give in the home to the glory of our God. Now...there is only one caveat that I want to mention at this point.

In affirming a wife and mother’s role in the home according to the design of God, I don’t want to imply that it is wrong or sinful in every circumstance for a wife or mom to work outside of the home.

Scripture does not teach that.

Though I would say that Scripture does exhort wives and mothers, even if they work outside the home, to make sure not to neglect the oversight of the home, i.e., not to neglect helping your husband and prioritizing care for your children.

And you say, “Well, what about the husband – what about the father – doesn’t he do anything?”

Yes, he does...I promise Father’s Day is coming.

But to continue on here with the Christ-like woman, I want to show you that in the home – and maybe even outside the home, as well (which we see here in Proverbs 31), the Christ-like woman...

She is MIGHTY in her work.

So “W” for wise, “O” for oversight of her home, and “M” for mighty, and I use that 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,” and then verse 25 - “Strength and dignity are her clothing.”

Even the form of this poetry – this is interesting – it’s written much like other poems to military heroes were written in Israel’s history...and there’s military imagery throughout the poem.

And so most poems like this are written to recount the valor and might of a military hero, but this one is written to recount the valor and might of a strong woman...evident in many different ways.

She has willing and skillful hands.

Verse 13 – She “works with willing hands,” literally at the pleasure of her hands, meaning that she goes about her work willingly.

Verse 19 – “She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle” – she has skill in spinning and weaving to provide for her children.

Her love of them drives her labor for them. And she is not lazy – verse 27 – she “does not eat the bread of idleness.” She has willing and skillful hands...

She has an innovative and industrious spirit.

Verse 14 – “like the ships of the merchant, she brings her food from afar – she rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household” – she goes to great lengths to provide for her children, even to the point, verse 16, where this entrepreneurial woman “considers a field and buys it – with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.”

So she's not just going to the store to get grapes – she's going to plant some of her own for the benefit of her house – so 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, the Christlike woman doesn't need to be growing all her food and making a lot of money, but the picture here is a woman who is using the time and talents and gifts God has given here – and even the role God has given her – wisely with innovation and an industrious spirit.

She has an intelligent mind. Obviously in planning and coordinating all of these things, and...

She has a strong body. As we read earlier in verse 17, “she makes her arms strong.” Now this doesn't necessarily mean that she works out her biceps regularly, but is likely an idiom in the language of the OT much like we might say today, “She has a strong back,” i.e., she is physically able to work hard.

So “M” - she is mighty in her work.

And then “A” –

She is ATTRACTIVE in all the right ways. Now I mentioned earlier that this text hardly even mentions physical attractiveness, yet there is slight (and I would say significant) mention of it, but not in ways that we might expect (and certainly not in ways that we would hear emphasized) in our culture.

So what are the right ways in which she is attractive? Well, in addition to all that we've already seen,... Her words are kind. Verse 26 – “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.” So flowing from the “W” – the wisdom of this woman – her words are wise and kind.

Whether it's teaching her children or teaching others in her sphere of influence, she speaks kindness and wisdom.

What an attractive picture. Her words are kind, and... Her works are admirable.

I love the way all of this ends – this is not an ambiguous, theoretical wisdom that is being described in this woman – this is the wisdom of a woman whose works praise her in the gates.

It's just like Paul's exhortation to women in 1 Timothy when he says, "Adorn yourself with godliness and good works." Be known ultimately not for what you wear or what you look like, but for how you live. Which leads right to the next part of this woman's attractiveness in Proverbs 31...

Her dress is tasteful.

So if we're not careful, particularly in light of verse 30's warning against charm and beauty, we might be inclined to think that show this woman carries herself physically does not matter at all. But that's not totally the case.

Even in this description of a woman who is working hard all day long in different tasks and varied industry, with strong arms, this proverb depicts her dressed, verse 22, in fine line and purple. Now we need to guard against misunderstandings here – this isn't saying that she's planting a vineyard in an elegant dress, nor is it saying that a Christlike woman needs expensive clothes.

But the picture is a woman whose dress is tasteful. Her demeanor is delightful, in such a way that she is attractive, particularly to her husband.

So you've got to 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 over to your right to Song of Solomon to see a detailed picture of that – and even here in verse 22 when the Bible says "she makes bed coverings for herself" – this is the same language that is 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, her demeanor is delightful, and in a good and right and biblical sense...
Her husband is both pleased and proud.

In such a way, Proverbs 5:18, that he delights in the wife of his youth. She is attractive in all the right ways, leading to the last letter – "N" – to describe the Christ-like woman...

She is a NEIGHBOR to the needy.

Verse 20 – Amidst all of her oversight in her home, her industry and innovation, she is not selfish, nor does she hoard that which she has, but "she opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy."
This, too, has been a theme throughout the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 14:31 – "Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker."

Proverbs 21:13 – "If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered."

Proverbs 28:27 – "He who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who closes his eyes to them receives many curses."

And so this Christ-like woman...

She gives generously from what she has made.

She doesn't ignore the poor; she initiates compassion. I love this – it's not a picture of the poor coming to her, but her going to them.

She doesn't wait for opportunities to help the poor; she creates opportunities to help the poor. And think of what she teaches her children (and potentially even her husband, for that matter) in the process. She gives generously, and...

She serves sacrificially.

In this description of the Christlike woman, almost every verse is dripping with self-sacrificial service. She is doing what she is doing for the sake of those around her in need – whether it's her husband, her children, her maidens, or the poor outside her gates.

And this is the essence of “the cross and Christian womanhood.”

Women of God, when your life is formed by the Savior who gave his life for you on a cross, then you find yourself serving as you have been served, sacrificially loving as you have been sacrificially loved...and in so doing, you find life.

This is the essence of the call to Christ – Christlikeness – “whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for make sake will find it” – and this is what we see in the Christlike woman of Proverbs 31...

In losing her life, she finds it.

Even if the world does not put the Christian woman who is wise, who oversees her home, who is might in her work and attractive in all the right ways, and who is a neighbor to the needy – even if the world does not put such a woman on a pedestal, the reality is: God recognizes her worth.

And He gives much fruit to her hands as her works praise her in His gates.