

The Woman Who Feared the Lord

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[0 : 00] I would like to ask you to turn in your Bibles this morning to Proverbs chapter 31, verse 30.

! And as I have you turn there, let me say at the outset that I gladly admit the text that I'm going to use this morning is not one that is new. It is one that is in the book of Proverbs that I am confident most every one of you are familiar with.

It's one that on more than one occasion I have come back to in some 30 whatever number of years it is that I have preached on Mother's Day. And it is a text that I trust is more than just a passing curiosity to you, but I trust it is one that is imprinted and affects your thinking.

My call and responsibility today is to take up the Scriptures, to rely upon the enabling of the Spirit of God, to rely upon the time of prayer and study that God has given to me, and your prayers to preach the Word.

And I trust that as I am preaching that one of the things you are doing along with listening is that you are praying that the Word of God would have free course and that it would make a difference in your life.

[1 : 32] Today is a day that we celebrate, and rightfully so, the role and ministry that mothers have in our lives. But the text that we are going to be looking at this morning is a text that covers all of God's people, in that the Scriptures encourage us here to give due regard to the mother, to the wife in particular, who fears the Lord.

And if we are here today and know Christ as our Savior, one of the characteristics of our life should be our fear for the Lord. I want to encourage you to know that after the sermon, it will be our privilege to see two individuals that are baptized in obedience to Christ.

And after that, Jack, your small group is going to be passing out roses. And I trust that that is an encouragement, a blessing to all of the ladies in our congregation, and just a reminder of the value and respect we hold for those who are a blessing to all of us.

Now, I'm going to ask that you turn to the passage and follow with me as I open this up and think with me a little bit about some of the background, and then we're going to step into the specific details that are involved in fearing the Lord.

Chapter 31, verse 1, 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?

[3 : 00] What are you doing, son of my vows? Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who would destroy kings.

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted.

As we open the passage this morning, I want you to understand that this is a very interesting closing chapter to the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs. The one who wrote the majority of Proverbs, Solomon, that we know, marked in the Scriptures as the wisest of all men, nevertheless, was a man who we know had a great deal of trouble with his discernment when it came to the matter of women.

Am I right? So, an interesting close to the book of Proverbs is this comment made by King Lemuel's mother in which, after we get through the introductory part, from verse 10 on to the end of the chapter, we find that the author gives to us a very, very important piece of information regarding women.

[4 : 30] I want you to understand that it was written in such a fashion so that each letter of each sentence or little statement matches up alphabetically.

We call it an acrostic, and the purpose of an acrostic is for the sake of memory work. The implication is that in the educational process that took place in the Hebrew home, Dad and Mom

were engaged in teaching their children not A is for apple, B is for ball, and C is for cat, but they were involved in teaching their children Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Daleth, He, Wow, Zion, Heth, Ted, Yod, Kof, Lamed, Mem, Nun, whatever else, and as they were rattling through these things, each one of the letters of the alphabet was tagged with a specific characteristic for what you're looking for in a wife.

I've heard lots of parents say, I pray every day, I pray every day for my daughter or my son marrying a godly spouse.

I think that's an appropriate prayer. But the Bible indication is that along with the prayer, guess what we should be doing as well. Surprise.

Actually equipping them so when they go kicking tires, how many of you know what I mean by kicking tires? I don't mean that literally. Some of you are going to post something there on Facebook. Did you hear what Pastor said about kicking tires?

[6 : 10] I think he was alluding to, I was not. So when you go kicking tires or when your son or your daughter goes out and begins the process of thinking very seriously about their future and moms and dads, listen to me carefully, your children actually began thinking about it long before you thought they did.

The purpose of this passage is that God in His interest in our children making wise decisions for life partners have a template, have a basis for making a good judgment.

We are not going to take the time to look at all of the passage, but we are going to go to the very end where we find there in verse 30 that the author, King Lemuel's mother, does what any good teacher would do and presses the lesson together and gives us a summary statement that locks it in and makes it manageable in terms of information.

If you don't remember anything else, get the last part. Let me read it to you. Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

[7 : 49] Now one of the things I said early on is that actually the application to this passage has bearing on every single person here. You are here this morning either an individual who by faith has come to know Christ as your Savior and as the songwriter John Newton rightly said, he said, "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved." And so you are here as one who has come to faith and in that relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and the creator of this universe is also a wholesome awe and reverence and real fear.

Or you are a person who is here this morning that does not know Christ and though you may have on occasions little indications and little cautions as to regards to judgment for the most part the scriptures characterize you as one who has no fear of God.

As we look at this passage and we find that the author the Holy Spirit actually is telling us that the summary of godliness is a fear of God we have to ask ourselves the question what does fearing God mean?

In a previous generation one of the things that you would hear said about individuals is they were God fearing. God fearing. Oh it's a God fearing man.

Or she is a God fearing woman. That vocabulary is not used very much today. I can't think of the last time that I heard someone say that. And so let me have you just think for a moment when was the last time you you personally feared God.

[9 : 33] Think about it. When was the last time that you personally feared God? Sadly it's not something that occupies much of our thought and time.

And as we think about this issue of fearing God I want to I want you to understand that while it is essential it is something that in our present day is not given much attention and given the fact that scripture sees it as important I want you to be a humble student of the scriptures and allow the scriptures to inform your thinking going forward.

We do see that fearing God is essential but I do want you to understand that the unbeliever and the believer fears God differently. Let me say it again the unbeliever and the believer fears God differently.

The unbeliever really has for the most part little thought about God or fear of His glory and power. Let me refer to a passage in Romans chapter 3 verse 18 it says this there is no fear of God before their eyes.

Why do people do the things they do? Or why are people restrained from doing some of the things they are inclined to do? In some cases the reason people do or do not do things is because of the

presence of a force that directs them in a different path and so the individual who has no fear of God goes about their life really kind of thinking about themselves as the center of the universe and their behavior is proportionate to their attitude.

[11:16] The unbeliever may on occasion have a fear momentarily about judgment but after a period of time that fear gets tamped down by just the ongoing process of living and the person's pride and arrogance harden the heart to the point that they have no concern whatever about the holy judgment of the God who has created this universe and is absolutely authoritative over all of it.

The unbeliever doesn't fear God. The believer begins to fear God by grace. The believer begins to fear God by grace.

Probably the best illustration of that little opening process is over in the book of Luke chapter 23. I want you to turn to it just for a moment and think with me of the very interesting circumstances and setting that is presented for us.

Luke chapter 23 verse 40 is the crucifixion setting with Jesus being crucified and if you'll remember from the synoptic gospels that means the other gospels as well we have a picture of the cross with the two men on either side and early in the crucifixion process both of the criminals are railing against Jesus but there's a turning point and in verse 40 as one of them is railing against Jesus the other verse 40 the other rebuked him and said do you not fear God you are under the same sentence of condemnation in essence what that thief was saying is it's reasonable to fear God because he is the judge of the whole earth and he has brought upon us judgment proportionate to our crime that was a confession immediately after that he turns to Jesus and he says there in verse 42 he says remember me when you come into your kingdom if that isn't faith

I don't know what it is and Jesus follows up and says truly I say to you today you will be with me in paradise so coming back around we understand that really the believer begins to fear God by grace peace and if you are here this morning and you have come to faith I have no doubt that one of the things that took place is that the spirit of God brought you to a point of understanding the bankruptcy of your own soul and understanding the hardness of your sin and began to bear down upon you and you sensing the divine justice and judgment of God cried out and said what must I do to be saved and you understood that Jesus Christ was your only hope.

[14:05] Not only does the believer begin to understand God and fear Him because of grace, the believer should grow in fearing God. And I want you to understand that that is an important feature in the process of growing to be more like Christ.

We should grow in our fear of God. As I posed the question to myself earlier this week, so Tim, when was the last time you feared God?

I have to tell you honestly, it was when I was having a little problem with going left of center in my attitudes. How many of you understand attitudes? You know, I'm an attitudinal specialist.

I have advanced degrees and studies in it, and I don't have to really stretch or warm up to get an attitude. I have attitudes about all kinds of things. And I found myself drifting into that attitudinal corner where I was pretty comfortable.

And then I had this weird thought of, yeah, and what's God think about that? How many of you have been there? It's like, yeah, sorry. Let's back out of this situation.

[15:14] Here, the believer should grow in his understanding of fearing God. And fearing God is something that you start with salvation, but it should begin to characterize some of your thinking.

Now, when we talk about fearing God, it's interesting that there's some very particular details that I want you to understand. Fearing God means don't fear him, but do fear him.

How's that for complicated? Exodus chapter 20, verse 20. God says, do not fear. Remember, he revealed himself to the nation of Israel on Mount Sinai.

And how did that pull off? Does anybody remember? Smoke and thunder. And the people are all standing way back, and they're saying, Moses, would you go on up the hill and talk to him, but don't have him come down here.

Just have him tell us what you want, you know. And God says, don't fear. But fear. Huh. Huh.

[16:14] What am I supposed to do? Well, the essence of it is this. Is as we grow to know him, we do grow to fear him. But we also grow to love him.

Very interesting to see that this is not just an Old Testament concept. 2 Corinthians chapter 7, verse 1 says, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

So what? Everybody smile, because I'm talking to you. What does progressive sanctification look like? It means growing in a personal interest in living a godly life with a profound sense of the presence and the glory and the authority of God.

Are you moving in that path? Or are you just kind of deedle-dee, deedle-dum, kind of working your way through and just kind of whatever, you know, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord?

Philippians chapter 2, verse 12. Many of us know it. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. How many of you of late found yourself actually engaged in a conscious, deliberate, intentional pursuit of developing your spiritual life, and in doing so, you were doing it so with a fear? [17:38] Godly fear. Godly fear is rooted in three essential things that I want you to think about. Number one, a sense of God's majesty and glory.

Godly fear involves a sense of God's majesty and glory. Number two, godly fear involves a sense of God's presence.

Number three, godly fear involves a sense of God's divine will and word. Now, let me back up and have you think about these three things because they are profoundly important.

And there are some of you perhaps this morning who are sitting here, and the truth of the matter is it's been a decade. It's been a long time since you have actually had a holy fear of God, who is the creator and sustainer of this universe, and with whom we have to deal.

You do not fear what you do not know. You do not fear what you do not know. Illustration of this would be, I grew up in India, and actually this is the gospel truth, not a story.

[19:02] We had leopards that walked around outside our building at night, and I could hear them snarling outside the window.

They took one of my dogs for supper. It was a German shepherd-sized dog that ended up being Dindin.

And I can tell you that without information about leopards, I would not have had the least bit of fear about them. But when I could hear them actually snarling, walking around outside my bedroom window, and my Aya, I want you to know that I was the perfect child growing up.

My Aya, that was like the nanny, my Aya would say to me, Timmy, if you do this, I am going to ask a leopard to come and eat you.

It was like, ah! Suffice it to say, it didn't last very long. I'm going to have to have a tiger come and eat you.

[20:10] I'm going to have to have an elephant stomp on you. Yeah, yeah. Okay, so, here's the point. If you're sitting here, and you're really not afraid, truth of the matter is, is you're not afraid of something you don't know.

And if you are here without a fear of God, it may be that you really don't know Him. Secondly, you do not fear what you do not think is present.

You don't fear in abstraction. There are some of you here that have a pathological fear of ladders. I'm not talking about one or two rungs off the ground, but I'm talking about when you get up there in nosebleed territory.

I know there are some, Todd, you're back there. I can wave at you. When any ladder work is needed in our family construct, it's hire grandpa, have dad come, you know, because ladders don't bother me.

I can go up. I can come down most of the time reasonably. There are some people that when they think about ladders, when they think about ladders, it begins to kind of set the stage for apoplexy.

[21:28] You know, their heart begins to change irregular patterns, and blood pressure begins to respond. It's a, you know, truth of the matter is, is every time they think about a ladder, it resonates.

And so, if you're here, I want you to understand that fearing God means understanding His majesty and glory, understanding His presence, and understanding that He cares about what you're doing.

Now, what does fearing God bring?

Now, in this passage here, we find that, that fearing God is the absolute summary. This is what it works to help you grow to be a godly woman.

This is what you should look for, young man, as you look for a godly wife. So, let me speak in broad terms, then come back to the book of Proverbs 31 in particular. Fearing God, number one, opens the door to increased wisdom.

Proverbs chapter one says this, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. If you're not afraid of Him, you're not going to listen to what He

has to say.

[22 : 35] The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. But fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Secondly, fearing God also brings a deeper understanding into the things of God. Psalm 25, verse 14, it says, the friendship of the Lord is for those who fear Him, and He makes known to them His covenant.

In the King James, it says, the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him. And you may be sitting here, and the truth of the matter is, is that when you think carefully about where you are in understanding God, you have to be honest and say, you know what?

I got that salvation piece, but after that, it's just like, nah. If you lack a fear of God, there will not be much growth and insight into who God is.

Third, fearing God helps us to keep from sin and its destructive harm. Over in Proverbs chapter 16, verse 6, it says this, by the fear of the Lord, one turns away from evil.

[23 : 45] By the fear of the Lord, one turns away from evil. There are some of you this morning that are caught deeply in sin. There are habituated issues that are going on in your life. Maybe no one else knows about it, but at the heart of what is going on is you're behaving as you are.

You're engaged in what you are because you have no fear of God. Remember Joseph when he was tempted by Potiphar's wife? And sure, it was going to be a bad career decision to mess with his boss's wife, but at the end of the day, what he says is, how can I do this against God?

So let me speak now in more particular terms from the book of Proverbs itself. What happens when a wife, a mother, fears the Lord? Fearing God brings absolute trustworthiness.

Proverbs chapter 31, verse 11 and 12. I want you to look at it just for a moment. Mark what it says here. Verse 10 says, An excellent wife who can find she is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.

All the days of her life, she will do him good. I told my mother about a year ago, I said, Lord willing, if I preach your funeral, I don't know when that will be.

[25 : 06] She is not very well today. This is the passage I think I will preach. I don't know if the Spirit of God will change it, but I will say this. She did her husband good all her days.

Why? Because she feared God. I want you to mark also that a woman who fears the Lord is one who consciously and deliberately rejects anxiety.

Look at verse 25. I want you to take your... How many of you ladies here, how many of you people kind of struggle on occasion with worry?

I mean, you don't have to stretch and kind of limber up to do it. You're right on top of... How many are worriers? Worriers. Come on. Oh, we got some. Okay.

Follow along. Follow along. Verse 25. Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. Do you know what that is? It's like, huh, bring it on.

[26 : 08] It's okay. I'm with it. How does that go for the anxious person? Right? Chicken littles.

This guy is falling in. I had a dear grandmother. She's with the Lord right now, and she knows that all the prognostications about how the world was going to collapse. There was never a Sunday dinner we didn't eat where she didn't kind of ventilate about how bad the world was, and she was convinced that, you know, it was going to be apocalyptic that day.

I mean, same song, second verse, little louder, little worse, next Sunday, and then the Sunday, she could cook, but I tell you what, you had to put up with every time we ever came over there, you know, the sky is falling in, and I like this.

It says, that girl who fears God, she laughs at anxiety. Everybody said, amen, right? Got that?

If you're here, and you're a fretful person, and you're kind of caught up being anxious, the problem is you're fearing the wrong person.

[27 : 19] Remember what Jesus said? Don't be afraid of those people who can cut your neck. Be afraid of the one who can throw you into hell. Fearing God makes us laugh at hardship.

Third, fearing God leads to lips that speak with wisdom and kindness. Verse 26, she opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

Hey, how many of you know what a fishmonger's wife is? Does anybody, I mean, that's kind of an illusion from being a literature person, you know, and growing up reading poetry. A fishmonger's wife is someone who is just brassy and sassy and hard-edged and, you know, at least I'm truthful.

You know, yeah. Not kind. You know, what happens? I have no respect. I have no respect for the woman that specializes in being unkind with her tongue and then takes pride in declaring the fact that at least she's truthful.

God forbid. Do you follow me? Everybody, that's wrong. Everybody say, that's wrong, right? Can anybody say it with me? That's wrong. So how do you tamp down that kind of brassiness?

[28 : 46] Here we go. Fear God. And so, there may be a wife or there may be a mother here that needs to work at this, and what they probably should do is since they need help with this, they probably should say to their husband, the next time I go off page, why don't you just say to me, you know, questions are always less dangerous than confrontation.

How many of you know that? Are you following me? Ask the question. So, honey, are you fearing God right now? You know, try that. You know, it's like, You got it?

Okay. Let me close with this. Why does fearing God matter? Why does fearing God matter? Yes, yes, our text was intended by the Holy Spirit as a guide for picking a godly wife and for mothers and dads working in their children's lives to help them grow to be God-fearing.

But there's something else that we shouldn't miss when we think about this passage because not everybody's married and not everybody will be married and not everybody is going to be a mother or a father or whatever, but here's the truth, every one of us are face-to-face before God.

And so, I want you to understand that fearing God may be redemptive. And as you sit here, not having come to faith, one of the things that I trust the Holy Spirit is doing at this moment is bringing in your heart a growing sense of fear for the holiness and the justice of God that leaves you with an unsettled sense of if I were to die today, I have no complete confidence in where I would spend eternity.

[30 : 54] Do you know what the answer for that fear is? Is come to Jesus. Come to Jesus. He is the one who died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sin and the sin that at this point has alienated you from God.

God, Jesus Christ has already satisfied the debt, but He is waiting for you to come in faith and say, listen, I am a morally bankrupt scoundrel and I deserve judgment and yet I hear that you paid my price.

And even though I can't completely understand all that you did, I am thankful that you died in my place and I plead with you to be my Savior. Savior. There's another piece.

I want to say this carefully. Fearing God is the soul of spiritual growth. Fearing God, by the way, it's not original with me, I think it was John Murray that said that.

Fearing God is the soul of spiritual growth. You know, I don't think we give enough thought to where we are spiritually. We kind of just kind of hiccup and go on through life.

[32 : 02] But the truth of the matter is is that one of the characteristics, everybody smile because I'm talking to you, right? One of the characteristics of a genuine believer is that they're moving uphill. Now, we are moving uphill a little slower than I'd like, personally speaking, but we are moving uphill.

I had a person call me. I think it was Thursday. Got my cell phone. It was a person that went to school with me in India and they wanted to know if I was coming to the reunion up somewhere in Wisconsin.

I said, no, I'm not. But, but in the course of conversation, I said, I got to tell you, my days at Woodstock were pretty tough.

Mainly because I was such a skunk. But I'm glad to be able to say that I am not the man I used to be because of Jesus. And I got to tell you, fearing God is the soul of spiritual growth.

Let me give you a Bible verse to resonate with that one. Revelation chapter 15, verse 4, it says, who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name for you alone are holy.

[33 : 16] Do you understand that? So, who wouldn't fear him? You don't fear who you don't know. And you don't fear who you do not sense is present.

And there are some of you here this morning that do not know Christ. And I would plead with the Holy Spirit to work to bring you to a holy terror of the judgment that is to come.

And there are some of you here today that are believers that have, following your conversion and your faith, have become careless in the presence of the Almighty and he is present.

And I would plead with you to humble yourself and say, God, you work to give to me a holy fear that will bring spiritual growth. John, would you come and lead us in a song as we prepare for baptism?

We'd ask the candidates to come as we come to the baptism. Thank you. Thank you.
[35 : 18] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[40 : 18] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.