

True Beauty

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Amen, amen. You may be seated. And if you would, turn with me to Proverbs 31. Proverbs 31, given the day we're going to take a slight excursus into Proverbs for one Sunday. Can't promise I'll do this every Mother's Day. And you may not ever want me to do this again, so that's the good news. Or at least, yeah, whatever. Proverbs 31, this wonderful chapter in Holy Scripture.

Proverbs 31, I'm going to begin reading in verse 10 to the conclusion of the chapter. So if you have a copy of the Scriptures, I'd love for you to grab one. If you don't have a copy, we follow the English Standard Version, and we have copies in the lobby.

They're actually nice. They're not paperback. Nice little hardback. You're welcome to take one. We'd love to get you one and get it in your hands. So Proverbs 31, if you'll look down there with me. Verse 10.

[1 : 19] After I conclude, I'll say this is a word of the Lord, and we'll respond. Thanks be to God. An excellent wife, who can find?

She's far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not harm all the days of her life.

She seeks wool and flax and works with willing hands. She's 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 and portions for her maidens.

She considers a field and buys it. With the fruit of her hand, she plants a vineyard.

She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong. She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.

[2 : 20] She puts her hands to the distaff and her hands to the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor. She reaches out her hands to the needy. She's not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet.

She makes bed coverings for herself. Her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known at the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.

She makes linen garments and sells them. She delivers sashes to the merchant. Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the days to come.

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Her children rise up and call her blessed. Her husband also, and he praises her. Many women have done excellently, but you've surpassed them all.

[3 : 27] Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is worthy to be praised. Give her the fruit of her hands and let her works praise her in the gates.

This is the word of the Lord. Hallelujah. It's been said a picture is worth a thousand words. A well-taken picture captures what would take a thousand words to express.

It's not hard, looking back over history, to remember images we've seen that have done just that.

They've captured the moment just perfectly and expressed so much.

I think about the migrant mother, a picture that captures utter hardship in the midst of the Great Depression. I think about the great relief of seeing this image of the men on Iwo Jima raising a flag after a maddening battle in the Pacific.

I think of the great celebration just months later in New York City, Times Square, where this sailor apparently kisses a complete stranger in celebration.

[4 : 43] I think of pictures of conquests like Neil Armstrong walking on the moon or the horror of the World Trade Centers, an image that I won't forget.

I was 21 years old. Or years later, the Situation Room, where the Commander-in-Chief on a Sunday night approved the execution of Osama bin Laden.

And you see that scene in the White House of all of them. A picture is indeed worth a thousand words. Now, knowing the power of images to compel and to urge us, the book of Proverbs holds out another image for us, an image of beauty, true beauty.

But it's not the image of beauty that we imagine. It's not an image of flat abs and a beach body. It's not an image that focuses on the physical, nor is it an image that's just left in the eyes of the beholder, because true beauty is not merely in the eyes of the beholder.

It's an image of the excellent woman, the valiant wife. It is the Proverbs 31 woman. She's so excellent that it seems these verses are talking about a hero, a legend.

[6 : 02] Did you hear about this lady? A myth. A woman too good to be true. A woman nowhere to be found. But it's not true. We have found her. There are many right here.

She's not here because she's an image or a myth or a legend or any of those things, but to compel us. And so while the image is great and almost too good to be true, it's placed in our Bible to urge every generation of women to chase after true beauty in her footsteps.

It's an image for older women to not let the years harden your heart. It's an image for married women, often with your arm full.

I love being a pastor and watching arms fill up. It's a wonderful thing. And what does it tell us? To not let the hurries of life distract you. It's an image for single women to not let the freedoms of life choke out what you're called to do or the losses to define you.

It's an image, though, for younger women as well. Oh, how I long for younger women to get a taste, an image, a picture of this vision right here so that the world would not mislead you.

[7 : 13] This is an image for every. It's a ravishing image for every woman in here. But it's an image for the rest of us. It's an image about what true beauty looks like.

Two commentators said it this way. The valiant wife has been canonized. That just means placed in our Bible and recorded so that we would read it again and again for generations. The valiant wife has been canonized as a role model for all Israel for all time.

Wise daughters aspire to be like her. Wise sons seek to marry her. And all wise people aim to incarnate.

That just means to embody her virtues. Wise. And this Mother's Day, I want you to get a glimpse of her. My prayers, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you'll catch a vision for this.

Grip by what it says. Grip by what the Spirit says here. That no woman is more beautiful or worthy to be praised than a woman who fears the Lord. No woman is more beautiful or worthy to be praised than a woman who fears the Lord.

[8 : 20] We're going to break this out. Three points. The first is beauty's counterfeit. Beauty's counterfeit. As you may already know, Proverbs 31 is an acrostic poem.

You may have made acrostics for your mothers over the years. Mom, you are great. You're gorgeous, radical, amazing, nifty, and dear. You know, I feel like all my cards to a certain age were always acrostics of some kind.

Well, this is an acrostic of the whole Hebrew alphabet. A, B, C, D, E, F, but I'm not going to go through the Hebrew one all the way down. The idea is this woman is A to Z woman.

This woman is the excellent woman. This woman is the wise woman. This is everything a woman would want to be. But before we can take in the image of this woman, we must take in the image of another woman in the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs concludes with this image of the excellent woman. But way back at the beginning, it introduces us to the foolish woman.

[9 : 25] Proverbs 5 says, My son, we have this for you, be attentive to my wisdom. Incline your ear to my understanding that you may keep discretion. Your lips may guard knowledge. For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey.

Her speech is smoother than oil. And in the end, she is bitter as wormwood. Sharp as a two-edged sword. She does not ponder the path of her life.

Her ways wander. She doesn't know it. The book of Proverbs is patterned after a father and his son. It's a wonderful book for a father to go through with his sons or daughters.

A mother to go through with her daughters. Wonderful book. But it's patterned after this relationship between a father and his son. Tell him how to walk through this world. And one of the first things he alerts his son to at the beginning of this book is the forbidden woman.

To watch out for her in the streets and in the markets. She's smooth. She says all the right things. But she will lead you to break every promise you've ever made.

[10:30] She's beauty's counterfeit. She's beauty's veneer. She's untrue beauty. In so many ways she says with her words and her actions, physical beauty is the only beauty that matters.

I think that's what I'm going to argue. That's what's going on here. She's saying she attracts with physical beauty and says physical beauty is the only thing that matters. In the old days it used to just be in the markets and on the streets or something like that.

But now these images of this woman, of beauty's counterfeit, are all around us pulsing, so to speak, and all that comes before our eyes. And so the father warns his son to watch out for her.

Beauty's counterfeit encourages men to follow beauty wherever it leads. Throw out all inhibitions. Follow beauty wherever it leads. The father warns his son, Proverbs 6.25, he says, Do not desire her beauty in your heart.

Do not let her capture you with her eyelash. Such a vivid poetry, isn't it? What's he saying to the young man? He's not saying go find a dog and marry her.

[11:40] He's not saying physical beauty is nothing. But he's saying don't believe that physical beauty is the only beauty that matters. Don't take the bait.

Don't fall for physical beauty merely. But the warning stands for older men as well. The warning stands for older. Have you ever noticed that women are on the cover of women's magazines and men's magazines?

I think it's because men treat women more often like things to look at than people to love, protect, and provide for. It's not the case around here.

I pray it never is the case around here. Women are objectified. But the warning here is for women as well. Although the father is addressing his son and the warning is son in this passage.

The warning is here for women as well. Beauty's counterfeit encourages women to obsess about their physical appearance more than anything else. It encourages women to obsess about these things.

[12:42] And what stands out to me about this foolish woman is that she's so caught up in this she doesn't even know what she's doing. Can we get that back up? Proverbs 5. That last verse.

She does not ponder the path of life. Proverbs sets out two paths. She said she does not ponder it. Her ways wander and she does not know it.

She stood in front of the mirror so many times asking how do I look that she doesn't think about anything else anymore. She doesn't think about what it's doing to her.

The obsession about physical beauty begins small. A bit of mascara. A bit of blush. Commitment to exercise. But what begins small often begins to consume.

Several years ago I read about an Australian Instagram model who quit social media because of all of the images of her there were not the real her.

[13:39] Her eyes were open to this obsession of physical beauty. She says I was addicted to what others thought of me. I believed how many likes and followers I had correlated with how many people liked me.

I didn't even see it happen. But social media had become my sole identity. She's just like this woman here. I didn't even see it happen.

So deep she became blind before deleting all her images on social media. She went in and changed the caption. Some like saying things like fasted or hadn't eaten two days before this picture just so my stomach looked right.

Under one she said stomach sucked in strategic pose. I want younger girls. I want younger girls to know this isn't real life or cool or inspirational.

It's contrived perfection made to get attention. And the payoff is the intoxication of being liked, of getting a like, of getting that acceptance.

[14:43] But obsession with beauty is not just left for younger women. The average woman spends 12,000 to 15,000 a year on cosmetics. Typical woman spends little more than a year putting

on cosmetics every year.

And maybe that's why we're always waiting on the woman to get ready. And as women age, the challenge is harder and harder. Many turn to so many things. Cosmetics and surgeries and pills and obsessive dieting.

Is it okay? You may think I'm about to get in a lot of trouble. But is it okay? Like is this okay? Is it okay? The makeup, the dieting, the exercise. Is it wrong?

Adrian Rogers, preacher out of Memphis, once said, Some women say it's a sin to wear makeup. I think it's a sin for some women not to wear makeup. There's a healthy place for exercise, dieting, and makeup.

God made woman the fair sex. God made woman beautiful. So it's good to want to look attractive.

[15:55] It's right to care about your impression on other people. So the wise woman does not throw away all of this for a jean skirt or sweatpants.

The wise woman, though, realizes that physical beauty fades. So striking. Look at the end of this that we just saw. The great proverb in Proverbs 31.

Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain. But a woman who fears the Lord is worthy to be brave.

Beauty is vain. Now we often think about that, or at least maybe I think about that song.

You're so vain. You know, when I hear that word. And so you think of somebody just arrogant and self-focused or something like that. That's not what it's saying. It's not saying beauty is left for the arrogant, self-focused people.

It's saying beauty is fading. Beauty is a vapor. Beauty is a breath. That's where it's so radical.

[16:56] It's helping us to see physical beauty is not bad. Physical beauty just fades. It's here today. It's gone tomorrow. Who builds a house on something that's here today, gone tomorrow?

And so there must be something better to build on. And so it confronts the value system of our culture. David Pallison says, almost humorously, though I didn't think he intended it to be, the body eventually starts to look old and nothing can reverse it.

Even women who succeed can do so for only a short window of time. Someday everyone who lives long enough will look like grandma or great grandma.

No offense to the grandmas. Old, wrinkly, white-haired, frail, bent. You're in a race against time in which everyone loses.

If you buy into the value system, someday you'll be cursed no matter what. What's it saying, you know? David Pallison once said, growing old is not for the faint of heart, you know?

[18:03] Because it's an avalanche and loss. What he's saying, though, is there's a value system that says your waistline must be like this.

Your face must not have the crow's feet. But that value system is not the biblical value system. It's begging us to push out that, to overturn the table of that value system and instead to replace it with what the Bible talks about, something more valuable than physical beauty, and that is wisdom.

And so it's imperative on us as husband and as father to establish a better value system, the biblical value system in our home. So first, beauty's counterfeit.

Second, beauty's evidence. Beauty's evidence. What is the evidence of true beauty? After showing us the counterfeit, what is the counterfeit?

What's the imposter? He showed us the imposter of true beauty. Now he shows us the evidence of true beauty. Unlike beauty's counterfeit that does not know what it is doing, true beauty is devoted to good works.

[19:14] If you look down there with me in verse 12, he says, an excellent wife who can find. She's far more precious than jewels. She's rare. She's attractive.

She's precious. The Proverbs say, health and inheritance are from your family, but a woman who fears the Lord, well, a good wife is from the Lord.

What's he saying here is that she's rare, attractive, and precious, more precious than jewels because house and wealth can be inherited, but a woman is a gift from the Lord.

Truly beautiful woman is a gift from the Lord. He continues and says, the heart of her husband trusts in her. Trusting in anyone or anything else besides the Lord in the Old Testament is forbidden, but he trusts in his wife because she fears the Lord.

She doesn't run up the credit card when he's away. She doesn't undermine his leadership behind his back. He trusts her. He trusts her. He cherishes her. And she never fails to do him good all the days of his life.

[20 : 24] Now get this. It's just a wonderful interplay that starts at the beginning with the security this woman finds in her husband's gaze and in relationship with him.

She doesn't learn she's beautiful from a mirror. She doesn't learn she's beautiful from the images of culture, the glances of men. She learns it from her husband who's wooed her and won her and brought her into a home to thrive.

Wendell Berry in one of his novels, this fascinating author, writes a lot of novels about small towns.

You want to understand this place a little bit better? Read a couple of his novels.

Well, seriously, Hannah Coulter is one about this lady who was married, lost a husband. I think she got remarried, but I can't remember.

But Wendell Berry says insightfully at one point in there, he says, A woman doesn't learn she's beautiful by looking in a mirror, which about any woman is apt to do from time to time.

[21 : 26] But that is only wishing. She learns it so that she actually knows it from men. She goes on to talk about how she knew she was beautiful when she was loved by her husband.

And so, husbands, our wives learn they're beautiful from us. From our words, our trust, our affections.

Fathers, our daughters should learn they're beautiful, not by the images of social media, by what we applaud. What we celebrate.

What we underline. So, it kind of begins with this announcement of her value. And then, the Proverbs continue with unpacking that this woman, she works with her hands to produce and opens her hands to provide.

The first thing we see about this woman is she is working. It helps us so much. The first thing we see about a woman in the Bible is she was called to work. God did not, as one author said, look at Adam and say, It's not good for man to be alone.

[22 : 32] I need to give him something pretty to look at. God made woman to be his helper, working hard. The picture of this woman is filled with work. She's not a madman woman sitting on the couch or something like that, drinking Mai Tais.

She is working hard. Look down there in verse 12. She seeks wool and flax and works with willing hands. Unlike the sluggard, she rises up to work.

She seeks out raw materials to make clothing. She's like the ships of the merchant. She does not have a hole and a mast. That's not what it's saying. It's saying that she makes these goods and sends them out.

She has exports and imports in her own home. Well, she provides and she sells to produce for her family.

She works with her hands, works hard with her hands to find things for them to eat. Look at verse 15. She rises while it is yet night. Now, she may get up early, but that's not the point.

[23 : 37] Who hunts at night? Predators. She's like a predator trying to find goods for her people.

Hunting down prey to produce for her family. Now, it may be from the dirt or it may be from Aldi. Getting up early and getting these sales or something like that.

The idea is she has a mission. Ever seen a predator hunting down a prey? Our cat walks around. He's a predator at night. You know, he's going to chase things down, get mice from infiltrating our compound.

And so, that's what this woman is like. She works with her hands to care and to manage. She manages her home with strength and abundance. It talks about her. She finds a field.

Look down there in verse 16. She considers the field and buys it. With the fruit of her hand, she plants a vineyard. She manages her husband's domestic affairs. She's the CEO or the vice president of operation.

[24 : 44] She's getting it done. She's not a squeaky wheel, always needing some direction like some people talk about biblical womanhood. That's not biblical womanhood. Here, she's a strong biblical woman working hard, managing the affairs.

And she makes sure everything is working well, providing well. It says, even her lamp does not go out at night. Again, this is helpful. Our intuitive reading of that is that she works past daylight.

But that's not it. That's not what that means. What it means is that she provides so well for her family, they don't need to turn out the light. Who leaves her light on at night?

Somebody that wants to welcome somebody in the middle of the night. And says, there's so much provision, we're overflowing, you can come on in here. So we leave a light on at night too, you

know.

But the idea is, that's what it's saying. She provides and she produces for her family so well. Well, they don't need to turn to other things.

[25 : 47] Now, this picture does not mean that a godly woman must grow her own food and sew her own clothes. She certainly can. But it's not talking about an economic household that's able to endure the ravages of what's going around here and able not to be dependent.

No, God designed all of us to be dependent on one another. Not just in a local church, but in an economy. An order of two things.

An ordered society that depends on one another. And a supply chain that does just that. And the woman knows that. She sells her goods. Right? She does the marketplace for people that don't have those goods in this area of the town or something like that.

Or the area of the world. So it doesn't mean that. But it does mean that a woman should understand that her calling with her hands is for her family's need. Whether it's from the dirt or Walmart shelves. She's working to produce and to provide. She works to produce. She opens her hands to provide. Look down there with me in verse 9. The emphasis on her hands is emphatic.

[26 : 47] She puts her hands to the staff and her hands to the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor. She reaches out her hands to the needy. What is going on? Her hands are just active out there to provide.

She looks beyond her own household and to the community. She's like the Lord. Right? It's the Lord who said leave some droppings on the ground.

Don't pick up what you dropped in the field. Why? Because the Lord provides for even the stranger. But he's not just provide physically. Look down at verse 26. She opens her mouth with wisdom and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

She's not just interested in physical provision. She's a wise woman that builds up in the fear of the Lord. She opens her hands to provide for her family.

Look at verse 21. All her household are clothed with scarlet. A thick material. She's not afraid of the cold. Because her children are clothed in scarlet.

[27 : 55] A thick material to endure the cold. She's strong. She's no joke. Strength and dignity are her clothing.

Verse 25. She laughs at the days to come. I think the idea. So sometimes. You know. She's not afraid of the cold. She laughs at the days to come.

What is it saying? I think the idea is not merely like that she's so prepared that she can do anything. That's not really it. What it's trying to underline is that this woman is not a self-made woman. This is a woman who trusts in the Lord.

She's come to understand that it is the Lord who is the provider. She trusts in Him. She's worked hard to provide. But she's not afraid. Not because she's worked hard.

But because she knows the Lord who keeps covenant and steadfast love to a thousand generations. But she's learned to trust God.

[28 : 51] I believe there's no greater temptation. Or maybe no greater temptation for a woman than the temptation to control. To manipulate. To manage.

To control. Husbands. Families. Kids. Even our Lord Jesus Christ ran into James and John's mom. He didn't think hover moms were in the Bible but they're there.

Say can James and John sit at your right and left? I mean this is the Lord Jesus Christ. Sinful arrogance knows no bounds. And I'd say there's no greater opportunity.

That's true. There's no greater opportunity for a woman than to learn to trust in the Lord. You know if the temptation is to control. Welcome to the club. You know I'm tempted too. But the invitation.

The opportunity is to learn to trust the Lord. Isn't that the foolish woman's problem? Isn't that why she's out? Isn't that why she's luring with her eyelashes? Why? Because she's taking matters into her own hands.

[29 : 58] Who knows why she doesn't have a husband around. Maybe she was widowed. Maybe she was kicked out. But she's got to learn to trust the Lord. So too. There's nothing greater you can give your family than trusting in the Lord.

I believe that with all my heart. Ladies. Difficulties heaped upon difficulties will never rise to the promise of God. Do you cower in fear?

Are you buried in worries? Are you eating the bread of anxious toil? Do you seek to control the circumstances of your life? Do you fear man?

Are you just. Is it just a fear man fast in the home? Well I want you to learn. I want you to come out. I want you to come. There's an opportunity to trust in the Lord. And what's striking to me in this proverb is that this lady trusts the Lord.

I think in so many ways she relies on the promise for tomorrow. But works with her hands for today. And I just love that. She's relying on the promise for tomorrow. But she's working.

[31 : 00] She's so called up. That's why she laughs at the days to come. Why? Because I got no time to worry about tomorrow. Because today is right before me. And so what are you going to do if you trust the Lord?

You're not sitting back on the couch. Just reciting memory verses. You're getting down and doing the thing. That's what this says. Oh I want this for us. I want this for our church to trust in the Lord. I want it for you. She uses all her strength to bless her husband and household. Verse 12 announces that she does him good all her days.

That means she never fails to do him good. But verses 20 through 27 are organized in such a way. It's kind of like a stair step up. To emphasize that she's doing him good all the days of her life.

All the focus of her work in the home is for the blessing of her husband.

[32 : 01] So you see that right in the center. It says. You got to find it. But verse 23. Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.

So all of it is crescendoing to that. Her husband is known in the gates. Now the idea is not he sits pampered at the gates. Bring me the head of the pig and something cool and refreshing or something like that.

That's not the idea here. He sits at the gates because he's a godly man. A mature man. Making decisions for all the nation of Israel.

So indeed as is often the case behind every great man is a great woman. Often. So too here. That's what's going on.

So all her focus is on making him able to do what he needs to do. And managing, caring, and making decisions for the whole nation.

[32 : 56] All that she does is for her husband. Ladies. Could it be said that all of your work is to bless your husband?

Does he rank first in your affections? Your attention? Your priority?

Do you think of yourself first as a wife or a mom? And if a mom, is it his fault or yours?

It's so striking. This woman getting it done all over the place.

But the focus is on her man. Now, does Proverbs 31 mean every woman should be barefoot, pregnant, and always working at home?

[34 : 04] First off, not every woman will be given the gift of marriage. They may be given another gift as scripture talks about. The gift of singleness. They may want to be married but never be given the gift of marriage.

God may call them not to marry but call them to other things, to be busy with ministry. So if they do not get married, they cannot, they should not, be barefoot, pregnant, always working at home.

But if you're not married, these verses are for you. These verses are wonderful virtues that you must pursue. You must pursue true beauty. You must pursue these things.

Because you're also a spiritual mother and sister in the house of God. And that's a title you won't ever take off. But all physical mothers will lay that one down.

But what about women who are married? Can they work outside the home? And I think that's kind of just a silly question. The Proverbs 31 woman is buying and selling in the marketplace.

[35 : 16] And so really the guiding question is not, can I work outside the home? The guiding question is, what do my people need? Like, what do they need me to be? Who do they need me to be? That's the focus of this woman.

That should be the focus of you too. Fueled by feminism, women are taught to think about themselves mainly. What do I want to do? What are my gifts? What are my talents? What do I bring to the world? You know, something like that.

But that's not the focus of these verses and other verses in Holy Scripture. What do my people need from me? Do they need more of my time? Do they need more of my attention? Do they need me to help make ends meet? And so it's such a compellingly different vision to spend your life.

For the good of your people. So beauty has evidence. Beauty leaves footprints. And so we see it there. Thirdly, beauty's source. So beauty's counterfeit.

Beauty's evidence. And beauty's source. Letter after letter of the alphabet. One, two, three, four, five. Mounting. This mounting description of the wise woman is meant to leave us longing.

[36 : 14] What is it that makes this woman tick? Like, what is it that makes her different? What sets her apart? Why? And it's the fear of the Lord. Look in verse 30.

Charm is deceitful. Beauty is vain. But a woman who fears the Lord is worthy to be praised. If you know anything about this book of the Bible, these aphorisms, these proverbs, it's filled and it's dominated by this idea of the fear of the Lord.

It begins, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, Proverbs 1, 7. Fools despise wisdom and instruction. So the book of Proverbs begins and ends with the fear of the Lord.

The first word of the book of the Proverbs, the last word of the book of the Proverbs, is the fear of the Lord. What must be pursued more than anything else is the fear of the Lord.

But fear often seems a step in the wrong direction. Isn't the fear of the Lord a bad thing? We're just saying, call now all sinners on his precious blood.

[37 : 23] Prepare to meet your judge. But fear gets at the foundation of who we are. That's what I think is going on here. Find out what you fear and you'll find out what you truly love. Do you worry about money? Well, you truly love money.

Do you play out worst case scenarios of the future? You know, there's people that got fears for their fears on top of their fears. You know, it's always fears, this cauldron of fear all day long. Well, what is a fear of the future?

Well, that's where your love is. That's where your security is. Do you care too much about what others think? Well, inside those fears, you'll find out what you truly love.

But when you fear the Lord, when you say that he is more worthy than anything else, it drives out every other fear. That's what's going on here.

If you fear the Lord, you'll fear nothing else. And so, it's compelling us to fear the Lord. And the fear of the Lord is the key to true beauty because it means no one else can tell you who you are.

[38 : 26] No one else can tell you what matters. No one else can tell you how to define yourself. I was thinking about this in the classic novel. I think I read like ten times in school.

Jane Eyre. You probably remember it. The classic novel, Jane Eyre. Jane is an orphan girl who's picked up and abused on throughout life. She becomes a teacher at an estate.

Sounds like a good gig. Falls in love with her employer, Mr. Rochester. She later learns he's married. And there's that spooky lady in the house. That's his mentally ill wife. Lives in the upper room of the estate.

Nevertheless, Mr. Rochester urges her to stay with him and to be his lover. It's a striking scene. She describes it in one of the chapters. She says, While he spoke, my very conscience and mind turned traitors against me and charged me with crime for resisting him.

[39 : 29] So he's saying, once you stay around, she starts to resist him and say, no, I can't do that. But my mind turned traitors against me, charged me with crime for resisting him.

They spoke almost as loud as feeling and they clamored wildly. Oh, comply. Think of his misery.

Think of his danger. Look at his state when he's left alone. Remember his headlong nature.

Consider the recklessness following his desire. Soothe him. Save him. Love him. Tell him you love him and will be healed. Jane is describing the agony going on in her head and mind.

Everything within her is pushing her to comply. This is what she wants. After all, who will comfort him? Who will love him? Who will care for him? Isn't this what she deserves after all her pain?

After all her rejection? But she resists. Continues still, indomitable. That means like unable to be opposed, you know, pressing through all the obstacles.

[40 : 37] Indomitable was the reply. I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am. The more I will respect myself.

So she says, I care about myself. I respect myself. Modern readers read that and assume this is Jane Eyre. She's got self-confidence. She does not have self-esteem issues. And so she's able to reject his urges because of her self-esteem.

But it's not true. Listen to what she says next. Promise is the last excerpt. She says, I will keep the law written by God.

Sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane and not mad as I am now.

Laws and principles that are not for the times when there is no temptation. What's she saying? In the moment of temptation, I'm going to let God decide what is good for me.

[41 : 49] Now, we live in this culture right now that's begging you to let you decide what is good for you. But right here, I think she captures the dilemma.

And sometimes it feels like denying your very essence. Denying who you really are. You know, you really are all these things. But you're really supposed to be this person. But you're denying the very essence. Because you're saying, I will let God decide who I am.

And so, if you're going to find true beauty in this world, you've got to be like her. You have to fear God. You have to bow before him. Let who he says he is and who he says you are define how you live.

You have to let his voice overpower the images of the culture. She is this or that or whatever. You have to let his voice overwhelm and overthrow the chuckles and slurs around you. You have to let his voice overwhelm the feelings of your heart.

I think this is where it comes together. Proverbs 31 is not a formula. It's not a box to check. It's not a step-by-step. It's not get all these things in order and you'll be one of these women.

[42 : 54] Proverbs 31 is an invitation to fear the Lord. To put him first. To follow him.

It's not meant to say that Proverbs 31 is for the one who has it all together. Because when Jesus comes, he doesn't come for the women who have it all together.

Right? And his family tree are Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba. The adulterous woman encounters him and is free. The bleeding woman touches him and is healed.

The sinful woman anoints him in his praise. True beauty is not a well-balanced, perfect woman. It's a redeemed one. It's a woman who fears the Lord. Says, you be first.

And I will follow you. The chapter begins announcing her value and it ends celebrating her value and praise. Her children rise up. Verse 28. And call her breast.

[44 : 05] She rose up to hunt down to pray for the family. They rise up to say, hallelujah, bless your name. Her husband also rises up.

He praises her. May that be the sound in our households. He praises her. He gives her praise. Today I want to praise you.

I want to thank you. I want to encourage you. This room is filled with excellent women. May it be said, Attorney Grace, that their hidden superpower was their women.

I pray it is. What's striking to me, too, is that this room is filled. I mean, most of us are white, you know. Gil and I are trying to change that a little bit.

But this room is filled with women that model this so differently. I think that's the point. Like Proverbs 31, it's not a box to check, right?

[45 : 03] It's more like a prison. To which the fear of the Lord is refracted into all sorts of different situations. So this woman loves her man and he's an elder in the gate.

Your husband might not be. Might be a car salesman. Which means you eat your big meal at lunchtime because he has to work through dinner. Whatever it is. The idea is you're refracting it. You're patterning it in your own home. And we praise you. We thank you. We want to say Happy Mother's Day. I'm told that the lobby has a bunch of gifts for you.

So I don't know how this works. It's like Blue Light Special where you don't have to bring your card. You know, just go in there. Find something you like. Because we acknowledge you. We rejoice in the women of this church and in the mothers of this church.

And no woman is more worthy of praise or more beautiful than a woman who fears the Lord. So women, follow this woman. Men, praise her. Young women, don't take the bait.

[46 : 08] And young men, find her and marry her. Throw her over your shoulders as fast as you can. Let me pray. Father in heaven, thank you. Praise you.

Lord, we want to fear you. Because we want to esteem you more than anything else. I pray, God, that you would loosen our grip on anything that would keep us from receiving that message in total. God, I pray for our homes to be adorned with true beauty and not its counterfeit. I pray for these women, God. I'm so thankful for them.

So honored to pastor them. I pray that you would protect them. That you'd set a garrison around their hearts. That the images of this world would not creep in and define them.

I pray that you would fill them with your Holy Spirit. I pray that you would take up the shield of faith, God. We know your word says that faith, the shield of faith can extinguish all the fiery darts of the evil one.

[47 : 24] Lord, I pray that you'd answer their prayers. I know there's a lot of prayers in this room. And it's heavy on me. And so I pray for them, God.

I pray that you'd answer their prayers. Meet all their needs according to your riches and glory. I pray for the gift of marriage for some.

I pray for the opening of a womb for others. I pray for healing of grief and burdens. I pray for strength to run and keep following hard after you, God.

I pray for the Lord. I pray for the Lord. I pray that you'd deploy these women more and more in this church. That they would look up in their households, but also look beyond them. And I pray for spiritual mothers and spiritual sisters to be active, doing the things of caring for one another and loving one another.

Lord, I pray that you'd protect these women and protect our church. We love you. We thank you.

[48 : 36] We have all confidence in you, God. In Jesus' name, amen. AmenityGraceAthens.com