

A Legacy of Faith

Proverbs 31:25-31

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Billy Graham loved to tell a story about a husband who never bought his wife anything for Mother's Day because he reasoned, "*She's not my mother anyway.*"

One year he decided to change that. On the way home from work he stopped and bought a box of candy and some flowers to surprise her. When he got home, he went to the front door and rang the doorbell. When she opened the door, he smiled and said, "*I love you deeply, honey. Happy Mother's Day!*"

She immediately burst into tears. Through her sobbing she said, "*Oh, Harry! This has been the worst day of my life! The dishwasher broke, the toilet backed up, the kids have been fighting all day, the house is a wreck...and now you come home drunk!*"

I considered staying in our Revelation series for Mother's Day weekend...but then I realized moms already live in a world of trumpets, bowls of wrath, and the occasional plague when the kids bring another virus home from school.

We'll be back in our "Revelation Unveiled" series next weekend when Dr. Ray Pritchard preaches on "The Silence and the Storm" from Revelation 8. Here's a video greeting from Ray.

→ **Play Video Clip.**

I believe God is going to do something life-changing next weekend at Edgewood as we continue praying Psalms 85:6: "***Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?***" Related to that, next Sunday our nation marks the 250th anniversary of May 17, 1776, when the Continental Congress issued a proclamation urging Americans to set aside a day for "*fasting, humiliation, and prayer.*" On Sunday, would you consider fasting and praying as we ask God for a spiritual awakening in our land?

Our focus today will be how God uses moms to pass along "A Legacy of Faith." On Father's Day, our topic will be, "A Legacy of Leadership." Our world today twists, cheapens, corrupts, distorts, and redefines what it means to be a man or a woman. In a culture confused about gender, femininity, masculinity, and the roles

of mothers and fathers, we'll take a fresh look at what the Bible says about cultivating faith at home.

In short, mothers are to nurture faith, fathers are to lead faith in the family, and the church is to partner with them in raising the next generation.

Pastor Chris has helped me see that discipling is both a family and a church family responsibility. The home is the primary place disciples are formed, but the church is the extended family where that faith is affirmed and strengthened.

- Every generation has a role in raising the next generation.
- Every believer is called to be a spiritual mother or father to someone.
- It takes more than parents to raise a disciple – it takes a church.

While we certainly want to magnify motherhood today, I recognize this may be a difficult day for some. Maybe you've lost a child, or one has gone prodigal on you. If you're praying for a prodigal, you're not alone. Some studies suggest 1/3 of parents have a prodigal, while other research indicates 40-50% of evangelical parents have a child who no longer shares their faith.

If you're a mom, maybe you're burdened with "mom guilt," that persistent sense that you're falling short as a mother. Some of you can't have children and you're hurting about that. Others of you aren't married and you wish you were. And some of you are parenting solo as you strive to hold everything together.

I recognize a number of you aren't looking forward to a syrupy Mother's Day sermon because your mother is no longer here. Or maybe you have a rough relationship with your mom, and you struggle with all the saccharine sentiments in Hallmark cards. Perhaps you're in conflict with your mom or your memories of her are not so good. Some of you may have a mother who is very sick, and you wonder how much longer she's going to be with you.

Some time ago, I read a helpful article called, "Don't Make Moms Stand in Church This Sunday." We won't do that because there are...

- Parents who've experienced miscarriage, stillbirth, or the death of a child.
- Women who are OK with not being a mom.
- Stepmoms helping to raise children who don't value them.

- Foster parents who've chosen to refrain from being called "mom" and "dad" for the emotional health of a child in their care.
- Parents who've placed a child for adoption or are waiting for an adoption to go through.
- Mothers who've had an abortion (and fathers who encouraged them to do so).
- Women with estranged grown children.
- Some of you are grandmothers who are standing in the gap as you strive to raise your grandchildren to become young disciples of Christ.

I appreciated one author's tender insight: *"The point is that there is not a one-size-fits-all journey of womanhood, and we hurt women in our churches by venerating one path over all others...let's come together and worship Jesus alone, not idealized images of our mothers or ourselves."*

Let me be quick to say if you aren't married or don't have children you are not inferior. Womanhood is not only about marriage and children. Your worth as a woman goes far beyond your marital or parental status.

As we begin, I do want to give a shout-out to those of you who are raising young children. Some of you are battling bedtimes and wondering when all the whining is going to stop (it will be a while). You're juggling schedules and running on emotional "empty." Many of you can relate to Proverbs 31:15 which says, ***"She rises while it is yet night..."***

Please take a deep breath and listen to these comforting words from the Good Shepherd found in Isaiah 40:11: ***"He will tend His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs in His arms; He will carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young."*** May you know the sweet gentleness of the Shepherd as He leads you to love the little lambs in your care.

Many years ago, in our previous church, several women told me they never wanted to hear a Mother's Day message from Proverbs 31 because the standards are way too high. One mother wondered out loud: *"Is this actually a real woman?"*

At the risk of getting some more moms mad at me, we're going to focus on the last part of this chapter where we will find a timeless example of a worshiping woman. For the record, I've already preached from the front half of this passage several years ago at Edgewood.

Here's some background information that will help us understand the text better.

1. **The book of Proverbs was given to help us grow in wisdom.** Throughout Proverbs wisdom is often personified as a woman. In that regard, it's fitting that the book ends by celebrating the worshipping woman.
2. **Proverbs 31:10–31 is an acrostic.** Each of the twenty-two verses begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to help people memorize it. This gives me permission to enjoy adventuresome alliteration and acrobatic acrostics.
3. **The writer is remembering the mentoring his mom did for him.** We see this in verse 1: *“The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother taught him.”* The influence of a mom is beyond measure. In the first nine verses this mom tells her son to be morally pure (verse 3), no to drink alcohol (verse 4) and to stand up for the little, the least, and the lost because they can't speak for themselves (verses 8-9). Beginning in verse 10, she tells him what to look for in a woman.
4. **Jewish husbands and children have traditionally recited this poem as part of Shabbat.** In many homes these words are sung before the Sabbath meal to honor the wife and mother by celebrating her character, affirming her worth, and publicly magnifying her vital role.

Verses 10-24 describe this woman's work, while verses 25-31 focus on her identity as a worshiper. Listen as I read Proverbs 31:25-31.

- ²⁵ *Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laughs at the time to come.*
- ²⁶ *She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.*
- ²⁷ *She looks well to the ways of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.*
- ²⁸ *Her children rise up and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:*
- ²⁹ *“Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all.”*
- ³⁰ *Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*
- ³¹ *Give her of the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the gates.*

Here's our main idea: *A woman's faith is most effectively passed on when it is consistently practiced at home.*

I see six characteristics of the woman of faith.

1. Her Wardrobe: Resilience of Character. While I don't pay much attention to celebrity culture, I was stunned to hear that a typical custom dress worn to the Met Gala runs into the tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars, not to mention the millions of dollars in jewelry.

In contrast, according to the first part of verse 25, the virtuous woman is clothed with something far more valuable: ***“Strength and dignity are her clothing...”*** The word ***“strength”*** speaks of inner toughness exhibited as moral courage, resilience, and spiritual fortitude. The word ***“dignity”*** refers to honor, splendor, and a noble bearing. It describes a woman whose life carries weightiness and respect.

Notice the text doesn't say she wears strength and dignity like an outfit she puts on and takes off. Instead, they are the clothing that is woven into who she is. In other words, the godly woman's wardrobe isn't measured in designer labels or by price tags. Her clothing is character that can't be bought at a store and is built through years of walking with God.

A mother once said the strength she needed most was not to hold things together, but the strength to let things go as she surrendered them to God.

2. Her Worldview: Radiance of Trust. This woman of character is not fearful of the future according to the second part of verse 25: ***“...and she laughs at the time to come.”*** She looks ahead at what might happen with confident gladness because of her view of God's sweet sovereignty. Instead of being paralyzed in the present because of what may or may not happen in the future, she seeks to live one day at a time, trusting the Lord for what she can't see. Ray Pritchard puts it like this: *“Did you wake up worried? God is large and in charge. He can handle the details that scare you to death.”*

She can smile at the future because she knows the One who holds it. She can laugh about tomorrow because her confidence in God radiates stability to everyone around her. Incidentally, we get a clue that this woman might be from Wisconsin because verse 21 says, ***“She is not afraid of snow for her household...”***

A recent illustration of this kind of confident trust happened at the Kentucky Derby when a horse trainer named Cherie DeVaux was seen passionately cheering as her horse surged from the back of the pack to win the race. Cameras captured this mom shouting, clapping, and urging the horse forward with everything she had. Afterward she said, *“It’s an honor, honestly, to just be that person that other women and young girls can look up to.”*

That’s what godly mothers do every day. They cheer their children on with everything they have. They call out to them to keep going, to keep believing, to keep trusting Christ as they run the race of life. Even when the future is uncertain, a mother who trusts the Lord radiates a quiet confidence that says, *“God is in control, and you can trust Him.”*

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3. Her Words: Resound with Wisdom. Moms are known for some common “momisms” that have been passed down through the generations. To see how much they’re ingrained in you, I’ll say the first part, and you fill in the second:

- If you don’t have something good to say; don’t...
- Close the door! Were you born in a...?
- Stop crying or I’ll give you something to cry...
- Don’t make me turn this car...
- Put on a clean pair of underwear in case you’re in an...
- Don’t swallow your gum. It will stay in your...
- Because I said so, and I’m your...
- Money doesn’t grow on...
- If you’re bored, I can find something for you to...
- Someday you’ll thank...
- I hope you have a kid just like...

We believed these lines when we were kids, rolled our eyes at them as teenagers, and then one day...we heard ourselves saying the exact same things to our kids!

Because this mom has cultivated strength and dignity, along with trust in God’s sovereignty, the words that come out of her mouth are wise and winsome according to verse 26: *“She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.”* It’s interesting that this book of wisdom known as

Proverbs culminates specifically in the portrait of a woman who reflects God's wisdom, not the world's wisdom. Proverbs opens with warnings about an unwise woman and ends with a description of a wise woman.

The word "**wisdom**" refers to the ability to apply God's truth to everyday life. This woman's words are thoughtful, helpful, and grounded in God's ways. The word "**kindness**" is often translated "*lovingkindness or steadfast love.*" It speaks of loyal and compassionate covenant love, reflecting the heart of God.

Because of that, her speech is both truthful and tender. When people heard Jesus teach in Luke 4:22, they "**marveled at the gracious words that were coming from His mouth.**" John 1:14 tells us that Jesus was full of "**grace and truth.**" That's the balance we are all called to pursue as we speak the truth in love. Ephesians 4:32 says, "**Be kind to one another, tenderhearted...**"

Someone said it well: "*We live in a world where people mistake harshness for honesty. This woman is the counterexample. She is wise enough to know what to say and gentle enough to know how to say it.*" Harshness alone can be too strong because honesty without compassion can become cruelty. Kindness alone can be weak. The goal is to tell the truth in a tender tone.

Because Proverbs 18:21 says, "**Death and life are in the power of the tongue,**" the challenge for all of us is to teach truth but to do so tenderly. For parents, that means when we correct, we're called to do so with compassion. Let's watch our words to make sure they are wise, because our words either help or they hurt. Here's a sobering thought: *The words spoken in our homes echo in our children's hearts for decades as they travel into futures we will never live to see.* And as a church, let's continue to be convictional about sin while remaining compassionate toward sinners.

Parents and grandparents, our job description is found in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 which tells us that we are the primary disciple makers of our children and grandchildren as we leverage our words for spiritual impact: "**And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.**"

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4. Her Work: Responsibility in the Home. This woman of valor values her role in her family as we see in verse 27: ***“She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.”*** The phrase, ***“looks well”*** has the idea of ***“guarding, managing, and keeping watch.”*** According to Proverbs 31:13, she ***“works with willing hands.”*** She does not indulge in idleness and is the opposite of the sluggard described in Proverbs 24:30-31: ***“I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down.”*** Neglect always produces disorder. But diligence produces life.

Several years ago, researchers tried to answer an interesting question: *What would a mother earn if she were paid for everything she does?* They listed the many roles a mom has – teacher, nurse, counselor, cook, chauffeur, event planner, housekeeper, financial manager, and conflict mediator. Then they calculated the hours and assigned professional salaries to each job. If moms were paid for everything they do, the average mother would earn more than \$145,000 a year. Long before modern studies tried to calculate a mother’s value, Scripture already declared her worth.

This woman of faith is attentive to what is happening in her home because she takes that responsibility seriously. One commentator referred to her as a fierce provider and protector. She is purposeful, not passive. I appreciate how so many parents at Edgewood are doing this very thing. Many of you are intentionally guarding screen time, managing consistent bedtimes, and paying attention to what your kids are consuming physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We see you and celebrate you!

5. Her Witness: Recognition from Her Family. While many moms are not regularly affirmed by their family, hopefully you’re at least getting a card today. This woman in Proverbs 31 receives some powerful props in verses 28-29: ***“Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ‘Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.’”*** The word ***“excellent”*** means, ***“worthy or virtuous.”*** Boaz used this same word to describe Ruth in Ruth 3:11: ***“And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman.”***

Notice how the language shifts to the second person as this husband doesn’t bring candy or flowers to the front door but blesses her by using his words to communicate her worth: ***“You surpass them all.”*** That takes us back to the

beginning of this section in Proverbs 31:10 where the question is asked, “*An excellent wife who can find?*”

This husband knows he has found an excellent wife...and so did I. He doesn't rely on Hallmark to express his thoughts (like I often do). Instead, he lavishes praise on her, openly celebrating her character and extolling her excellence that surpasses everyone else. He doesn't hesitate to say, “*Of all the women in the world, you are the one who stands above them all.*”

Guys, when's the last time you spoke some deeply personal words of blessing to your wife? If your mother is still alive, make sure to celebrate her on a regular basis.

One pastor tells the story of visiting an elderly woman in a nursing home. She had raised six children, been married for 52 years, and served in her church for four decades. When he asked if her family knew how much she had given, she was quiet for a long time and then said softly, “*I think they know. I'm just not sure they've said it.*”

It's time for us to say it to the women in our lives. Let's see them the way God sees them. Let's rise up and bless them with our words and with our actions...and maybe some flowers and chocolate.

This is one of the most beautiful parts of the passage. Her influence shows up in the lives of the people closest to her. Her children recognize her impact, and her husband celebrates her character. In short, she leaves a legacy of faith to her family.

My guess is if you're the mom of toddlers or teenagers, you're not hearing these kinds of words on a regular basis. I'm reminded of the husband who knew his wife felt unappreciated by their kids so he said, “*As hard as things are right now, just remember that someday our children will rise up and call you blessed.*” To which the exasperated mother replied, “*Maybe...but right now they are just rising up!*”

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6. Her Worship: Reverence for the Lord. Even with all this mom does in the home, the Bible reminds us that her greatest strength is not what she builds around her, but who she bows before. Verse 30 is the theological anchor of the passage

and reveals that what sets this woman apart is her godly character: ***“Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”***

The word ***“deceitful”*** refers to a sham or a lie and is often translated as ***“disappointing.”*** The word ***“vain”*** means empty or fleeting. It’s the same idea used throughout the Book of Ecclesiastes to describe a vapor that appears for a moment and then vanishes. In other words, outward beauty is temporary, while revering the Lord will last into eternity.

Someone said it well: *“And notice what it says about the alternatives. Charm is not just fleeting – it is deceitful. It creates an impression that may not match reality. Beauty is not just limited – it is vain. Empty. It cannot hold weight. It cannot sustain a marriage, raise a child, or face a crisis. But a woman who fears the Lord – she is to be praised.”*

I recently read what Olympic medalist Simone Biles said after spending \$23,000 on her hair, makeup, and stylists for a single red-carpet event. After adding up the bill she commented, *“Is this normal? If that’s the new norm, y’all can have it...I’ll just stay home where it’s free.”*

Our culture constantly tells women to look younger, be thinner, and appear prettier. Apps like TikTok and Instagram amplify these pressures and push endless beauty standards onto children and teenagers. Many young girls scroll through videos where creators use beauty filters that smooth skin, slim faces, enlarge eyes, and reshape noses. After seeing hundreds of these edited faces every day, they begin to believe that is what normal beauty should look like.

The Bible reminds us that beauty fades and charm misleads. 1 Peter 3:3-4 is a good corrective: ***“Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.”***

What truly lasts is something far deeper: ***“a woman who fears the Lord.”*** To fear the Lord means to live with a deep reverence for God by trusting Him, obeying Him, and desiring to please Him above everything else. This is the secret behind the Proverbs 31 woman.

Consider this. None of us can really control how we look anyway. Sure, we might be able to cover up a few blemishes, wear some nice things, and use some filters

online, but basically, we look like we look because that is how God made us. We can spend all our lives wishing we looked different and focusing on the external *or* we can cultivate our inner attractiveness by growing in our fear of God. That's something we *can* control.

Scripture shows us what it means to live that way. Isaiah 8:13: ***“But the LORD of hosts, Him you shall honor as holy. Let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread.”*** Exodus 20:20 says that the fear of God can ***“keep you from sinning.”*** Proverbs 1:7 says: ***“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...”*** A woman who reveres the Lord is a woman of genuine wisdom and grace.

To say it another way, we can fear how we look on the outside and spend all our time trying to make ourselves look better *or* we can fear God and allow Him to make us holy on the inside. The real fear should be that we might displease God not that we might displease someone else. How do you know if you fear God? You know you're revering Him when the thought of disappointing Him is abhorrent to you, when God's awesomeness is more important than your appearance.

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- Her wardrobe is anchored to her reverence for the Lord.
- Her worldview is rooted to her reverence for the Lord.
- Her words are seasoned by her reverence for the Lord.
- Her work is motivated by her reverence for the Lord.
- Her witness is connected to her reverence for the Lord.
- Her worship is based on her reverence for the Lord.

Everything flows from her fear of God.

And because of that, verse 31 says her works will eventually be recognized: ***“Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.”*** Not because she demanded recognition, but because faithfulness always leaves a legacy.

Years ago, after the funeral of a godly woman, her family was gathered in the living room going through some of her things. She had never been famous or built a business. Most of her life had been spent in ordinary ways as she raised her

children, served faithfully in her church, prepared meals, and quietly prayed for people.

As they flipped through her Bible, one of her children noticed the pages were worn thin and certain passages were underlined and highlighted. In the margin next to Proverbs 31:30 were a few words in faded ink: *“Lord, make this true of me.”*

As the family reflected on her life, one of the grandchildren said something beautiful: *“Grandma never tried to be impressive...but somehow she became unforgettable.”*

The beauty that comes from fearing God never fades and a life lived for the Lord leaves a legacy that echoes for generations.

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Let’s conclude by asking every woman to remain seated while the rest of us rise to show our appreciation for your unforgettable impact in our lives.