

(Ephesians) the Virtuous Wife

by Brian Brodersen

Brian Brodersen's sermon emphasizes the biblical qualities and responsibilities of a virtuous wife as outlined in Ephesians and Proverbs.

Duration: 59:07

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 5:18, Ephesians 5:30-33, Titus 2:3

Topics: "Christian Living", "Holy Spirit"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by sharing various activities and responsibilities they have been engaged in, highlighting the importance of being diligent and responsible in daily life. They then address the issue of gossip and slander within the church, emphasizing that it is displeasing to God and contrary to the wise woman described in the Bible. The speaker also warns against the misuse of alcohol as a means to relax, urging believers to rely on the Holy Spirit for peace and joy instead. Finally, they mention performing the funeral of a virtuous woman who desired to share the gospel with unbelievers, emphasizing the importance of teaching good things and being a positive influence in the lives of others.

Transcript

Let's turn to Ephesians chapter 5 this evening. As we continue in our study through Paul's epistle to the Ephesians chapter 5, let me read verses 30 through 33 to you. For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless, let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

We're continuing on tonight not only with our study through Ephesians, but with our series within this epistle to the Ephesians, a series that we've been doing on marriage and family. Before we move on to address parenting in the home, I thought it would be good to look once more at the wives role in the marriage relationship. Now, the only specific instructions wives are given in regard to their husbands are to submit to them and to respect them, and we've pretty much dealt with that already.

But there are other passages that give a more general picture of what a godly wife is like, and that's what we want to concentrate on in our study here tonight. Let me give you a verse for thought, Proverbs 14.1.

The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with their own hands. Important truth.

The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with their own hands. Paul, in writing to Titus, let's turn there together, the second chapter. Paul is giving to Titus, who was an overseer in the church.

He was a pastor, basically. Paul is giving to him instruction on Christian living, and he happens to address the issue of the Christian wife, and so we want to read what he has to say, and then we want to discuss together the various points that he brings out. In chapter 2, verse 3, Paul said, the older women are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things, that they admonish the younger women to love their husbands and to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed, and so what we want to do from this text is look at the portrait that Paul gives here.

He gives us really a portrait of a wise woman, and so we want to look at what a biblically wise woman looks like, and then we want to also finish up tonight by looking at the virtuous woman there in Proverbs 31, and just really encouraging the ladies to be wise and virtuous women. So here Paul lists a number of things that add to this portrait of the wise woman. First of all, he says that she is to be reverent in behavior.

Reverent in behavior, it really means that the ladies are to have a life marked by a consciousness of God. Now, you know, we're speaking to ladies tonight specifically, but what's stated here has application to us men as well in many ways. So guys, don't just tune out, you know, don't stuff some cotton in your ears or anything like that.

Listen up, because many of the things can certainly cross over and have application to us as well, because our lives need to be marked by a consciousness of God as well, not just the women, but he's addressing women here, and that's what we're doing in our series, so reverent in behavior. Ladies, that your life would be marked by a sense of God's presence, that you would be conducting yourself in such a way as to indicate by your behavior that you are a woman who is aware of God's presence, and you're conducting yourself in such a way as to please him. Sometimes we forget that we're in God's presence all the time.

Sometimes we forget that the Lord sees us wherever we are, and we change our behavior sometimes. You know, we can be very adaptable, and we get out among the wild crowd, and we sort of modify things and adapt ourselves to that kind of a crowd, but we're not to be like the chameleon, changing from environment to environment to fit in. We're to be consistent, and we're to consistently live with the consciousness of God, and our lifestyle is to indicate that.

So, reverent in behavior, he says, and then secondly, he says that the women are not to be slanderers. This is an interesting word. It's the Greek word diabolos, and you probably know what that word translates to.

It translates to the devil or Satan, and the word devil is, of course, the title that we have given to that evil person who is behind the scenes working against God and working against us, but the word devil actually means one who slanders, and so the word diabolos, which is also translated devil, is here translated slanderer. So, the women are not to be slandering. The women are not to be given to gossip.

Now, gossip is a problem among both sexes. I don't think it's by any means limited to women, but women, maybe because they sometimes have a little more time, they do seem to get involved in it somewhat more frequently than men do, and it's probably partially because of the fact that women are more detailed and interested in all of the aspects of something and like to talk about it. We've talked about it in the series already, just some of the differences between men and women, and I've used myself as an example of one who generally doesn't give a whole lot of details to anything, so I'm not really fun to gossip with because I don't really, you know, I don't bring out all the juicy details of the story.

It's pretty boring, but, you know, the gals who are able to really, you know, embellish and maybe not embellish because that would indicate maybe not being totally truthful, but, you know, just really elaborate in on all the details of the story and all that sort of thing, that happens, and it's something that the scriptures warn against, warn the women against that specifically. Not gossiping. Now, the average person talks enough in one year to fill 66 volumes at 800 pages apiece.

That's a lot of chatter. How much of that, you know, what if somebody came along and actually decided that they were going to record every word we ever said for a year, and at the end of the year they were going to present us with the 66 800-page volumes of our conversation for the past year? I wonder how we would feel if we read that. How much of what we read would be edifying? How much of what we read would be a blessing? We could read and go, oh, wow, I said that? That's great.

That is, wow, that's edifying. That's powerful. Or would a lot of it be, oh, oh, they wrote that? Oh, I didn't think anybody heard me say that.

We have to be careful. The tongue is a powerful tool. Scripture tells us that life and death is in the power of the tongue, and the tongue can be used to greatly encourage people.

It can be used to destroy people, and the wagging tongue in the church, boy, that's a big problem. That creates all kinds of problems, and so Paul says that the wise woman is not a slanderer. She's not a woman who's given over to gossip.

She's a woman who's learned to take issues to God in prayer rather than take them to other people that will pass them on to other people, and they in turn pass them on to other people, and, you know, it spreads like wildfire. I've got to tell you, in the body of Christ, it is amazing how gossip gets around. I'll tell you, the things I hear about myself, they're interesting, fascinating.

When I was living 8,000 miles away, I heard things about myself that were interesting, and, you know, with the technology we have today with the telephones, but now with the email and all, you know, some rumors can get spread, and, you know, it's just amazing how often this kind of stuff goes on in the body, and we're not really even convicted about it. We're just going about our business and talking about everybody as we go along and slandering people, and this is something that is very displeasing to God and very contrary to the picture that Paul is giving us here of the wise woman, and then he says that she's not to be addicted to wine, not to be given over to wine. Sometimes women and men as well can start using alcohol in small amounts as a means to relax.

You know, it's been a stressful day. The kids have driven me up the wall or, you know, things have been intense at the office, so just sit down and unwind with a can of beer or a glass of wine or something like that, but that can create a very bad habit that can turn into something much worse, and we've already talked about the whole issue of drunkenness as we've gone through the fifth chapter here. Remember,

Paul said, do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit, and as Christians, we don't need that sort of a thing to calm our nerves down.

We don't want some artificial thing like that relieving us of the stress. How much better to have the Holy Spirit come upon us and bring us the peace of God and the joy of the Lord? The wise woman is going to be filled with the Spirit, and then it says that she is a teacher of good things. Now, remember here, Paul is first of all addressing the older women, and then he goes on to address the younger women.

We don't want to make too sharp of a distinction because things would apply in both cases, but here the older women are to be teachers of good things, you older ladies, you have a ministry even though you might not realize it. It's not only the ministry that you have in your home to your children, to your husband, but it's also a ministry within the church to the younger women to teach them good things, the things that will help them to be better Christians, things that will help them to be better wives and better mothers and so forth. So, teachers of good things, and then that they are to love their husband.

Now, I said in our last study that the wife is never commanded to love the husband. Well, here she is told to love the husband, but there's a different Greek word that's used here for the wife than the word used for the husband. As we pointed out, the husband is called to love his wife as Christ of the church, and the Greek word is agape, and that's the love that Jesus demonstrated for us, that sacrificial love, that love that is there because of the preciousness of the object, and that's the love that Paul says husbands are to have to their wives, but now when he says the wife is to love her husband, he uses the more familiar Greek word phileo, which could be translated be fondly affectionate toward your husband.

Now, it is legitimately translated love, but it is a love that does not have that same kind of intensity as the agape, but it is rightly translated love. So, wives are to love their husbands. They are to phileo them.

Phileo is a love that speaks of friendship, closeness, caring, just, you know, that affection that we would have for one another, and so the wives are to have that fondness and that affection toward husbands, and then the same thing is said in regard to children. The wise woman loves her husband, loves her children, is fond toward them, affectionate toward them, caring, showing kindness, and showing compassion, and those kinds of things. Now, I'm not spending a whole lot of time on a number of these because there are things that I want to emphasize, and there's quite a few things that I want to cover, so, and how much do we need to say? Love your husbands, love your children, it's pretty self-explanatory, but then he goes on, he says that the wise woman is discreet.

Now, this is an important one. Discreet means self-controlled, circumspect, or careful, and it's really the opposite of being governed by impulse. Proverbs 11.22 says this, as a ring of gold and a swine snout, so is a lovely woman who lacks discretion.

That's a very picturesque proverb, isn't it? A ring of gold and a swine snout, can you think of anything more disgusting? Well, a lovely woman who lacks discretion is like that, the scripture said. Being discreet, so important to be self-controlled, to be circumspect, to be careful, not living life or conducting yourself on the emotional level. Now, not to say that emotions can't play a factor in decisions and things we do, they always play a factor to some extent, but they are not to be the ruling force in our lives.

Emotions are really a bad way to determine actions or to make decisions, because our emotions can fluctuate and we can be deceived by our emotions and we can feel strongly about something, and if we decide to act on it without really thinking it through, then we might get ourselves into something that later

we look at and we think, oh, why did I do that? And so, he says that the wise woman is a discreet woman. The wise woman is a woman who has thought about life, who thinks about the decisions that she's going to make, and who is controlled by the spirit. Under that, we're moving of the spirit, the fruit of the spirit, one of the fruit of the spirit is self-control, being circumspect, being wise.

That's what the apostle is emphasizing here. Now, my wife told me something that I want to share with you, but I don't want to embarrass her. So, honey, just plug your ears.

She told me about something that happened to her yesterday, and I would understand why this would happen. She was walking through the mall holding our grandson, who's the cutest baby ever born since his mother and aunt and uncles, but as she was walking through the mall, a lady approached her and said, you are just what we are looking for. Have you ever thought of being a model? And, oh, your smile, and you know, just on and on with all of this, you know, how great of a model she would make, and I agree 100%.

I wouldn't dispute that at all, but what really blessed me, see, I don't tell Cheryl this privately. I wait till we're in public to tell her all these things, but what really blessed me is the way she responded, and what she told me was going on in her mind afterwards, and of course, she declined. She wasn't interested, and she came back and told me the story.

She said, of course, she was flattered by such a thing, but she said even the proposition to her was just so unappealing. There was nothing in it that she had any interest in whatsoever. That is not what she wants her life to be all about.

She doesn't want to be all about being a model in a catalog or, you know, on a billboard or anything else like that. That's, and as she was expressing to me, that's not my heart. That's not my desire.

That's not my goal for myself as a woman, and she was just talking about, you know, her goals being that of being a good godly example, being a Bible teacher, and you know, so on and so forth, and you know, as I was studying today and looking at these different qualities here, I thought, you know, that was discretion to look at this proposition and to evaluate it and to say, no, I'm not interested in that, but how easy it would be to not exercise discretion and get carried away with the impulse or the emotion of it all. It's like, oh, I'm beautiful. Oh, well, maybe I could become a model, and you know, as you're flattered by all of this, you could easily just be led off into something that that's not what God has for you, and that's what Paul's talking about when he's talking about being discreet, that we wouldn't act on a whim or an impulse, and that the women would not act on a whim or a wimple, a whim or a wimples.

That's a combination of a whim and an impulse, a wimples, but acting on those things are evidence of a lack of discretion, and in the end, it's like a ring of gold in a swine's snout. There's nothing beautiful about it, and then he says chaste. The word chaste has behind it the idea of purity, purity in spirit, purity in mind, purity in body.

The godly woman is a chaste woman, a pure woman, pure in her thinking processes, pure in her desires, and then pure in her outward apparel. So, a woman who's chaste truly would manifest that through a modesty. Now, I don't have to tell you that our world is becoming increasingly immodest, and clothing styles and all of those things are just indicative of where the culture is and where it continues to head, and even in the church, there are times when ladies come through the door, and it appears that they forgot some of their clothing at home, but yet they didn't.

That's what they were planning to wear, and that is the opposite of what the apostle is talking about here. There's going to be a modesty. The wise woman is a modest woman, not wanting to bear her body to the public, but preserving that for her husband, and honoring God by keeping herself covered up where she ought to be covered up.

Now, there's nothing biblical about, you know, making yourself homely, and there's no biblical mandate to just be as drab and boring-looking as you possibly can, but there is the biblical balance to be on your guard not to go over, you know, to the other extreme, and Peter, in writing to the women, he says that they are to adorn themselves with godliness, and he says not the braiding of the hair, putting on the gold and the fine apparel. Now, Peter's not saying that you can't braid your hair, and, you know, braiding the hair today, that's not anything that's, you know, real fashionable, but back in that day, evidently, that was a way that women expressed their beauty, but whatever it is, Peter's not saying that you can't do it. Some people have misinterpreted the Bible to teach things like, you know, women could never wear makeup, or wear jewelry, or, you know, dress themselves nicely.

The Bible does not teach that at all. What the Bible teaches is that a woman is to be moderate with those things, and to concentrate primarily on the inner person. The inner person is the one that we're to really put the emphasis on.

That doesn't mean that we never take care of the outer person, but it's a matter of priority. The inner person is the priority. So, it's not prohibiting the wearing of, you know, fine clothing and things like that, it's just making sure that there is a moderation in regard to it.

So, the wise woman is chaste, there's a purity about her life, and a modesty. And then, homemakers. Now, the term homemaker, for some people, it just smacks of old-fashioned, outdated American traditionalism that we don't want to have anything to do with.

For others, it's a very appealing idea. The word, literally, homemakers, I think a better translation is guardians of the home. There's a greater sense of, I think, importance when you think of it in those terms.

Guardians of the home. You see, that's what a wife is. Sometimes, you know, just using the terminology, like homemaker or something like that, it almost gives the impression that, you know, this isn't all that important.

I just, you know, stay around home and make sure things are tidy. But, the word here means so much more than that. Guardians of the home.

That the woman is there in the home with a God-ordained task to develop a godly environment where children can be brought up in the ways of God. Where people can come and sense the Lord's presence and be edified in that home. Where people can come for a refuge, for a time of being rejuvenated and built back up in the faith.

Women are to be guardians of the home. A married woman's life should center around her home. Now, we realize that some women have to work.

They're forced to work. Some have had to work because their husbands have failed and abandoned them and left them with the responsibility of the family. And that's a very sad and tragic thing.

And sometimes, that results in you having to be out there and not being able to give the time and attention to the home that you want to give. Don't be condemned over that if that's happened to you. Just do your best and trust the Lord to help you to, as much as you can, make the home your priority.

But knowing that God understands your predicament. My mother was never able to be at home when I was a kid because my dad left her. And she had the responsibility of providing for us and so forth.

Then, you know, she did a good job. She worked hard. And there are many single mothers out there that are working hard and doing a good job.

We need to pray for them. There's also women who choose to work, not because they have to necessarily, but it's their choice to do so. And I wouldn't say that that is absolutely forbidden.

That is wrong under any circumstances. But I would say this, that for those who choose to work, you must be careful not to lose the priority of the home. If you can keep the home as a priority and still maintain, you know, what you're doing work-wise, then that's, I think, allowable.

But if the home begins to fall to neglect because the job has taken the place of priority, that's where I think an adjustment needs to be made. Now, the woman who is just flat out into the whole career mentality, that the home is no place for her and the kids can go off to daycare and off to school, and she's going to just keep pursuing that goal that she set for her in that particular career, I think that you would have a hard time really marshalling any biblical support for that kind of a mentality. Oh, that's, of course, if there are women, children involved.

If there aren't children, then that's a different story. But the home is to be the priority for the woman. And then it says that they are to be good.

Good Christians, good wives, good mothers. And then finally, Paul says that the women are to be obedient to their own husbands. Now, this is my favorite one in the list here.

I'm joking. But this is all part of the whole submission thing that we've already talked about. So we'll leave it at that lest I get in the hot water.

But now here's one picture painted by the Apostle Paul, the portrait of a wise woman. Over in Proverbs chapter 31, we have that famous passage on the virtuous woman or the virtuous wife. And this passage has been, I think, you know, to some extent, greatly misunderstood.

It has been praised by some. Husbands usually are very thrilled about it. Women sometimes are daunted as they read over it, feeling like I can never live up to this and like you're failing before you ever get started.

But I think we need to get the right perspective on it. This is, I think, the ideal for the life of the woman. But it's not a goal that's attainable in a week.

It's something that is sort of set out there, you know, in the distance as this is the goal. This is what we're shooting for. And yet realizing that it's a lifetime achievement.

That's what my wife told me to say about it. And I think she's right. I like that perspective on it.

But let me read it to you. And then we'll make a couple more comments on it. Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.

The heart of her husband safely trusts her, so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax and willingly works with her hands.

She is like the merchant ships. She brings her food from afar. She also rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and a portion for her maid servants.

She considers a field and buys it. From her profits, she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength and strengthens her arms.

She perceives that her merchandise is good and her lamp does not go out by night. She stretches out her hands to the distaff and her hand holds the spindle. She extends her hand to the poor.

Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet. She makes tapestry for herself.

Her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them and supplies sashes for the merchants.

Strength and honor are her clothing. She shall rejoice in time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom and on her tongue is the law of kindness.

She watches over 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 daughters have done well, but you excel them all.

Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands and let her own works praise her in the gates. Now, first thing, this is obviously written in an entirely different cultural context than the one we live in.

So, buying a field and bringing meals from afar and, you know, going out and getting all the materials to make the garments and all of those kinds of things, those are things that belong to another day and another culture. There are places in the world where you can go and find that the lifestyle is similar to what it was in biblical times and these things would have maybe more relevance in those cultures. But I think as you look at it and you try to pull out from it those principles that are there that supersede the culture, you basically see here the picture of the woman that we've already been looking at.

A wise woman, a godly woman, a woman who takes her role as a wife seriously, her role as a mother seriously, a woman who is industrious, a woman who is not sitting around idle in front of the television watching soap operas all day or, you know, that sort of a thing. But a woman who is zealous for God and the things of God and to show forth good works practically, that's the picture that's being given here. Now, I think that is probably the goal of most Christian women.

That's what they want to be. In the day that we're living in, we have to realize that the pressure from the culture is tremendous to conform to modern ideas. We have to resist that.

And there is pressure coming from the culture into the church to conform to various feministic concepts and things of that nature. And it's easy for a woman to start thinking that, you know, maybe this whole

thing of being a wife and a mother really is a worthless endeavor. And, you know, I should go out and get some sort of a credential or a degree so I can get into a legitimate career or something like that so I can be a real contributor to society and I can do something meaningful and, you know, not just waste myself with this whole, you know, family thing.

But what this passage tells us is that being a wife and mother is not some second-rate task for women who can't make it at something else. But this is really what womanhood is all about. This is where God wants a woman to find her fulfillment, and this is where a woman will find that.

You know, it's interesting, these ladies that are heavy into the feminism thing, you know, one thing that you'll notice when you listen to them or when you read their comments in the papers or read any of their literature, they are not happy campers. They are really, you know, they're mad at the world. They're uptight about everything.

And, you know, they're doing everything that they set out to do to break free from male dominance and this whole, you know, male-oriented world and so forth. And, you know, they've got the careers and they've attained the degrees and they're making the money and they're doing all these things. And you'd think that we're happy now because we're liberated women.

But, you know, when you listen to them, they're still not happy. They're still ticked. They're still really uptight.

What else do they want? The presidency? I know one does, at least. You know, and I mean, there's the, you know, within the academic world, I mean, some of the craziest stuff they come up with, you know, they talk about these, you know, maternalistic cultures that used to exist where women ruled. It was a different story.

The interesting thing is archaeologically, sociologically, historically, you cannot find any culture that was ever ruled by women. Hasn't happened in the history of the world. But it should be that way.

And they're looking to implement such a thing, you know, and this is the kind of stuff that they're discussing in the classrooms, in the universities and things like this, what a better world it would be if we got back to worshiping the mother earth, you know, or the goddess worship and that whole sort of a thing there. But, you know, all of it just, it just bears witness to the fact that there's no fulfillment, there's no happiness, there's no contentment. And in some sense, until it's a female domination, until the world is ruled by women, there are women that are never going to be happy.

But I believe those poor ladies are deceived. They've been duped by a philosophy that has no basis in truth. Now, we've already talked in the past about the fact that men have been oppressive to women.

We don't deny that. And remember, in our very first study, we talked about the issue of male dominance, which is a sin. And that's not what the Bible teaches at all.

The Bible does not teach male dominance, but it teaches that headship, male headship, following the example of Jesus Christ, who gave his life for the church. So we recognize that the whole male dominance thing has created really an extreme reaction going in the other direction that has resulted in further hardship and frustration and misery to a large extent for women. So where do you go from there? Male dominance is obviously not desirable, but yet feminism is not really the solution.

The solution is to get back to what God says in his word about the role of the wife, about the design of the woman, about the original intention that God had in mind when he created the woman to be man's companion, to be man's helper, to live alongside of the man and work together with him. That's where fulfillment is found. And so, ladies, do not buy into that idea that unless you're out in the workforce, unless you have a career, unless you're bringing in a substantial amount of money, unless you've finished your education, you're not really worth anything, especially if you're just at home taking care of your husband and your kids.

Don't buy that for a moment. If you're doing that, then you are doing what you were created to do. Not to say that you can't do other things as well.

Notice this woman here that we're reading about. She's industrious. She's buying a field.

She's, you know, traveling and doing different things. But it's obvious as you look at this Proverbs 31 woman, it's obvious that the home is the priority. Everything revolves around it and all of the benefits of all of her activity come back ultimately to the home, to bless the husband and the children.

And so, you can have your ventures. You can be entrepreneurial and go out and, you know, do those kinds of things. But the whole thing to remember is to keep the priority where it's supposed to be, centered around the home.

Now, again, as I said, the Proverbs 31 description here is a lifetime achievement. It's not something that's going to happen overnight. It's just something that you're growing in and you're working toward.

I've got an article here that I got from Cheryl a few months ago. She had read it and passed it on to me. And I read it a few months back and thought this would be interesting to read at some point in a series like this.

And I think it's appropriate for our message tonight. But it comes from the LA Times and the article is entitled, Thou Shalt Be Christian Mothers. I want to read it to you.

Bear with me as I read it. And then I want to point out a few of the key fallacies here that are common fallacies. I want to read this because this woman's experience, I think, has been the experience of many.

But it's not the fault of the Bible or God. It's the failure to understand what the Bible actually says. And she comes to that conclusion herself.

But let me read it to you. She said, I don't blame Andrea Yates. Although I don't purport to understand all the pressure she felt, I do know what it feels like to believe that you are a bad mother.

There was a time in my life that I, too, believed I was a bad mother to my four children. As a young 20-something, I married. I wanted nothing more than to please God and my husband, not necessarily in that order.

We joined a small church. Jesus was preached. God was glorified.

Pastor and wife modeled familial propriety and righteousness. I left my job and rose to a higher calling, Christian mother. One baby came, then two, then three, then four.

Blessed rewards. I kneaded and baked bread, soaked and simmered reified beans, blended mayonnaise from oil and egg with just a dash of dried mustard, purchased flats of half-rotten strawberries and plucked stems, pared away soft spots, mashed, mixed, boiled, and put up jar after jar of strawberry preserves with my toddlers at my elbow. We, my husband and I, were in but not of a materialistic world, covenant before God to thrive on one income to share one car.

After my children's bedtime, I sewed their t-shirts and shorts on my trusty Singer and embroidered pillowcases for each newly married couple at church. Not a very accomplished seamstress, what I lacked in skill I made up for in enthusiasm. I hunted for bargains, a close-out fabric sale, netted six home sewn brown and white plaid two-way stretch swimsuits.

In my spare time, I weeded dicondra, jogged with a dog, hauled laundry to the laundromat, and staggered under the weight of dozens of children's library books, Bible stories at breakfast, nursery rhymes on the potty, fairy tales at nap time. I know how clever Andrea Yates needed to be to keep her five babies clean and fed and amused and enriched and refined. Manners, of course, were learned at home.

Housecleaning was a given. No nannies or merry-maids for us. We are the Proverbs 31 ladies of the Bible, up before dawn, seeing to the ways of our household.

But instead of feeling fulfilled following 15 years of never getting it right, I felt frustrated. Four shabbily dressed siblings bickered, track home paint peeled off fingerprinted walls, the ceiling lining in the car drooped, and the dicondra lawn resembled a wasteland. I rebelled.

I reincorporated four-letter words into my educated vocabulary. I returned part-time to my profession. I scrimped to purchase a pre-owned Volkswagen Rabbit.

I hired a cleaning lady, enrolled in a ballet class at the local college, and resumed reading fiction. Now listen. She diagnoses her own problem, though.

I had awakened to the impossibility of my own expectations. I didn't dump my faith, just switch churches. However, throughout my epiphany and ensuing choices, I had the luxury of not being mentally ill or suffering postpartum depression.

I was just very, very angry at myself for trying to live someone else's definition of Christian mother, at my husband for being a bystander, and at our church for not providing praise, offering grace, or permitting diversity. I believe that there is a part of Christianity squeezed out from between the lines not written in the Bible which plants the onus of family welfare on the wife-mother minus the support system of the extended family available 50 to 100 years ago. Andrea Yates and I had the silent, self-incriminating definitions for Christian mother rushing around inside our heads with no one to refute them or to excuse them from insurmountable tasks daily set before us by our own unattainable standards.

A woman's world can be impossible. We muddle on until we break away from our faith or break up our marriage or just plain break. Now, I read this because the misunderstanding, the misconception that this woman lived under for 15 years is a misunderstanding, a misconception that many do live under.

God is a God of grace, and this poor lady, for 15 years, doesn't seem she understood that. Now, whose fault was that? I don't know. Might have been her fault.

Might have been the fault of the church she went to, the pastor. Maybe they never really taught her, but she does. As the article goes on, she starts to realize and mentions here the fact that it was unreal expectations that drove her to this point of frustration.

And we have to realize that God is not heaping these burdens upon you ladies to become super woman, to become the ultimate wife, the perfect mother. He gives us a model. He gives us a standard.

He gives us something to shoot for. Just like with husbands. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church.

How in the world do you do that? Christ is sinless. He's perfect. He's got all power.

He, you know, all of those things. I look at that and think, how am I going to do that? Now, I can view that realistically and say, Lord, you got to give me the grace. You got to help me.

And when I stumble, I call upon his forgiveness and ask for his grace to get up and keep going. Or I can develop some rigid, formulated system whereby my every action, my every word, my every activity is going to be that of fulfilling to the letter, this command. And I think that's what happens with ladies sometimes.

That's obviously what happened with this lady. Now, whatever happened with Andrea Yates, just for the record, I don't know. She's, I don't know if she knows something about her, I don't, or if she's just assuming things.

She's the one, of course, who killed her five children. But whenever we get into this thing where the standard is on us, and it's weighing upon us, and we've got to live to the, and you know, all of these things that she sort of equated with being a Christian wife or a mother. I mean, come on, strawberry preserves, making your own mayonnaise.

I mean, haven't you ever heard of Best Foods? You can just go over to Ralph's, you know. You don't have to, you know, you don't have to plant a garden nowadays. You can just go over to the, you know, right over there, the produce department.

They've got it all there. But somehow, she did it, and you know, other people do it as well. You start imposing these things, and the devil is good at trying to impose things as well, so he'll, you know, start passing stuff on to you.

You start imposing these things upon yourself or upon others, standards that aren't really biblical standards, and I think she's very accurate where she says this right here. She is very accurate. I believe that there is a part of Christianity squeezed out from between the lines, not written in the Bible.

You see, that's the danger right there. She fell for it for 15 years. That's not the standard that God was putting on her, but it was a self-imposed standard that led obviously to her frustration and obviously to, at least temporarily, kind of a, you know, backing away, but it sounds to me as things go on that she got things right in her relationship with God.

But I read that again to say that, ladies, be careful not to put an unrealistic standard on yourself, and that's why I think Cheryl's perspective on Proverbs 31 is a good perspective. It's a lifetime achievement. It's not something you're going to attain the first year of marriage or the first three years, or it's just as you go in

your life and as you grow, you're just looking at these things and saying, Lord, I want to be this godly woman.

I want to be this wise woman. I want to be this virtuous woman, and just bring me along as I grow in you, knowing that it's not going to happen overnight and knowing that God is full of grace and He's compassionate and He understands and His yoke is easy and His burden is light. I'm going to close tonight by sharing with you the story of a virtuous woman.

I performed her funeral this afternoon. She was 62 years old, and I had met her and knew her just a little bit because she came to see me about performing her funeral. She knew she was dying.

She came, she sat down, and she said, I want you to perform my funeral, and I want you to say these things, and she had written out for me. She'd given me some things that she wanted me to actually express there. She was aware that there would be unbelievers that she loved, and she wanted to make sure that they would hear the gospel, and so today as I was performing the funeral, as I began, I said, you know, I didn't know her well.

I knew her a little bit, but there are many of you that knew her well, and some of you are going to come now and eulogize her, and so we sat through a half an hour or so of people coming up and talking about this woman, and as I sat and listened to the testimony, I just thought, wow, here is a virtuous woman. This is what Paul described in Titus. This is what Proverbs 31 was all about.

She was a woman who loved her husband, loved her kids, raised them faithfully, was out in the business world, was a tremendous influence in her office, led people to Christ, prayed for people through thick and thin. I mean, you know, the testimony was just powerful, and as I listened, and then as I got up to comment myself, I just thought, this is it, Lord. This is what you were talking about in Proverbs.

A woman who feared the Lord. She dedicated herself to God, and one of her colleagues said about her, she said, what I admired about her is that her motto was this, whatever it takes, Lord, whatever it takes to glorify you, and that same woman said, you know, I don't really understand after all the prayer she received, all the requests for healing, I don't really understand why she didn't survive, and afterwards, I got up and I said, she didn't survive because of her motto, that you expressed whatever it takes. If it took her dying ahead of her friends so they could be at her funeral and hear the gospel preached, she was willing for that to be the case, and that was the case, but the thing that really stood out to me was just, you know, the love of her husband, her sons, and especially the testimony of her colleagues that she worked together with for 25 years.

Every one of them had nothing but good to say. She was a woman who feared the Lord, and so that's really the bottom line, ladies. It's just fearing God.

It's loving Him. It's just making Him the priority, and knowing that He loves you, knowing that He's full of grace, and we husbands are growing in grace, and hopefully we'll have the same grace that He does toward you, but even if we don't at times, know that if we don't, it's no reflection on Him. His grace is there, and it's in abundance.

His yoke is easy, and His burden is light. Lord, we thank you for our wives. We thank you for godly women that have had influence and impact, and Lord, we just pray that you would bless each woman here tonight, each wife.

Lord, bless them with a sense of your love and your approval, and Lord, that supply of power that you have for them to live the way you have created them to live, and Lord, for any that have been duped into thinking that the world's philosophy is right, help them to realize, Lord, it's not, and for any that have come under bondage, any that have unwittingly imposed a standard upon themselves that's not from you, relieve them of that burden, and help us husbands to make their yoke easy and their burden light by loving them as you loved them, and by demonstrating that servant's heart that you demonstrated when you were here, Lord. So, bless, we pray, the families in Jesus' name, amen.

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