

What a Woman!
Proverbs 31: 10-31

Well friends it's mother's day. So I would like to read a poem for you – maybe you've heard it before or something like it.

M-O-T-H-E-R

M- is for the million things she gave me,
O - means only that she's growing old,
T - is for the tears she shed to save me,
H - is for her heart of purest gold;
E - is for her eyes, with love-light shining,
R - means right, and right she'll always be,

Put them all together, they spell "MOTHER,"
A word that means the world to me.

Howard Johnson (c. 1915)

Isn't that nice! When I read it I was reminded of all the times I have gone shopping for cards on Mother's day, trying to find just the right sentiment expressed inside that fit the relationship I had with my Mom. It wasn't always easy; actually my acrostic poem might go something like this

M – is for the million times she told me to behave
O – is for being sent Outside after teasing my sisters
T – Is for time she spent with me and my homework
H – Is for homework again
E – Is for effort required to motivate me
R – Are the results which finally occurred – and I turned out Ok.

Thanks Mom

You see friends, there's always this tension around Mother's day when the reality of the relationship with our mothers doesn't seem to quite match up with the idealism expressed by Hallmark or Shoppers Drug Mart.

Now Mother's day is not a Christian holiday per say – it doesn't have a biblical precedent like Christmas, or Easter, or other holidays in the church year, however that doesn't mean that the spirit of honoring our mothers, or women in general doesn't occur in the scriptures.

In fact we might remember that the 10 commandments tell us to “honor your father *and mother*”

And the whole idea of writing poetry to praise your mom, or your wife, or to describe the ideal women, like Hallmark does, is not a foreign concept to scriptures either. In fact the passage we read this morning is an acrostic poem which does exactly that. It describes the ideal woman and praises for her accomplishments as wife and mother.

Each verse of this poem begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and so we could say that this poem is the scripture's complete view on being a woman. It's the A-Z on what ideal woman would look like, the total package as it were.

But here too, as we read this scripture we experience some tension, we have the ideal... and the reality that most of us live with.

Maybe as you listened to the scripture being read this morning you were thinking Who is this woman? She's like Martha Steward on steroids! I can't do all that!

Or perhaps you were mentally ticking of the list.

- *gets up early*: I do that,

- *Her arms are strong*: good I've been working out
- *Speaks with wisdom*: not bad, maybe I need to work on that one.

Friends if there is one thing this poem tends to do when it is read from our contemporary perspective, is identify who are the over achievers and those who feel they are under achievers.

But friends, the gospel of Jesus Christ steers us away from pride and pity and if indeed all scripture points us to Christ, then this passage should be a source of mercy, and grace and encouragement for women, not a source of pride or pity, especially as we are looking at it to celebrate Mothers' day.

So how does a poem which seems to hold up an unrealistic ideal for women actually function as a source of grace and mercy, and encouragement. Let's find out, and to help us remember what we discover we're going to use "W.O.M.A.N" as an acrostic. Isn't that clever☺

W – Wisdom

The W stands for wisdom because this poem is found in the book of Proverbs. So it is considered part of the wisdom writings of the bible. Now among the different kinds of literature that make up the bible – narrative, law, prophecy and so on, wisdom writings are concerned with what it takes to live skillfully in God’s world.

So this has a couple of implications for understanding this passage

- 1) This is not a set of commands for women which God expects them to live up to. Nowhere does it say “thou shalt...” so you can relax☺
- 2) We are to understand this passage as a portrait of wisdom, just like the French have “Lady revolution” and the Americans have “Lady Liberty” and the justice system has “Lady Justice” the bible has “Lady Wisdom” whose name in Greek is Sophia, and this poem is her picture, her statue as it were.

The book of proverbs ends with this personification of all that it has been trying to teach about living skillfully in God’s

world, acknowledging that God created things to run a certain way and that it is good and honoring to Him that we do this – that we fear God.

Lady Wisdom reminds us of this.

So first and foremost what this says to us about Mothers is that as parents their primary calling is to raise us in the fear of the Lord. To teach us who and whose we are and what it means to live skillfully in God’s world.

My mother always used to say to me as I left the house to hang out with my friends – Grant, remember you are a Christian!

Mothers, and those who eventually will be mothers, you play such an important role in helping children begin to come to faith in Christ.

- By reading Bible stories to them when you put them to bed,
- Teaching them how to pray to Jesus,
- Bringing them to church regularly,
- Modeling in your own life the fear of the Lord and

- Letting them see your own devotion and passion to serve Jesus Christ.

And mothers just like Lady Wisdom, who has the last word in the book of Proverbs; you often have the last word in our lives as well. We listen to and respect you, even as we go through our teen years and it doesn't seem to be so obvious! So use that position and influence to encourage us to make Christian decisions so that we love and serve Jesus Christ.

This is more than anything else you will do for your children, like feeding them healthy food, making sure they play sports, go to dance, get good grades in school, etc... because in the end it determines their life and their eternal life. Be Lady Wisdom and teach us to Fear God.

1 Timothy 1:5 - I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

O – Oprah Principle

O stands for Oprah. To many women today Oprah is the epitome of what a woman can achieve. She has overcome the barriers of gender and race to become a wealthy, influential, role model for millions of women around the world. Ladies, mothers, the scriptures want Lady Wisdom to be that kind of inspiration and mentor for you.

Lady Wisdom is not a poor, kept woman, she is a wealthy, noblewoman and she uses her skills and resources to affect the lives of many around her in positive, helpful ways.

- Her husband's reputation is enhanced by her
- She employs servants – gives people jobs
- She is a business supplier of quality goods
- Her family is well provided for, food, clothes etc..
- She has resources to share with the poor
- She shares her insights on life to teach others

What a woman! Lady Wisdom certainly blows any gender stereotypes out of the water! What a woman to model your life after, you don't have to settle for mediocrity, or sacrificing your dreams or stifling your gifts! But neither do you need to

feel intimidated by her level of success if your goals are more modest.

That's because her success is motivated by the desire to bless others; she is not driven to prove anything to herself or to others. (vs. 29) *Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.*

She's out to serve God, plain and simple - there is no other agenda, and that is something you can do this under any circumstances and at any level of success.

Mothers whatever level of education, career, or success you have achieved in life let your children see that you do it because you want to bless others and serve God in doing so.

Colossians 3:17 - *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

M – Married

M stands for Married, Lady Wisdom is married. It's hard to imagine someone in our society today who achieves a high level of success in their career and still remains married, and happily so. In fact it often seems that people are forced to choose between marriage and career. But Lady Wisdom is married and happily so. *Vs. 12 She brings her husband good not harm, all the days of his life.* For her it is not an either/or choice, but both/and!

Friends this is because Wisdom reflects how God has designed this world to work, and God created men and women to be united in marriage. To work as partners in developing the creation and all that this involves, and the most unique aspect of that, for women, is motherhood. So, it's not just an evolutionary biological difference, but a specific God given calling to be pursued with a husband as part of our larger task of being stewards of the creation.

Now, I know that Mother's day is a hard day for those who have not had good relationships' with their mothers. For those who are not able to be mothers or for those whose

marriages are broken or ended and hearing things like this only makes it harder.

But let me say that without first understanding the importance that God places on marriage, the uniqueness of motherhood and the blessing He designed it to be, we are in no position to recognize and truly empathize and support those whose experiences have been less than what God has intended and allow them to experience God's grace.

Nor are we in a position to truly appreciate the sacrifice of those who forgo marriage and motherhood to dedicate their lives to some calling or cause.

Mathew 19: 4-6 *"Haven't you read," Jesus replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let others not separate."*

A – Attractiveness

A is for Attractiveness. Nowhere is this picture of Lady Wisdom do you find her being praised for her looks or her outward beauty. This is not to say that such things aren't important, in fact its hard to imagine someone who values God's creation, but does not take care of their body or how they present themselves.

However, in every age and every civilization it has been common for women to become reduced to objects prized for their outward beauty alone. Lady Wisdom is not someone who buys into this. *Vs. 30 Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.*

It is the skillful way in which she goes about living, expressing her devotion and obedience to God in every area of life that makes Lady Wisdom attractive and winsome.

Friends, Hollywood may have some of the most glamorous and beautiful starlets around – in fact over the last 10 years we've watched a number of them grow up. Britney Spears, Lindsay Lohan, The Olsen Twins, just to name a few. However, after

observing the “skill” with which they live their lives, very few of us would conclude that the train wrecks which they’ve made of themselves are truly attractive, no matter how glamorous they try to make themselves look.

Instead, women and mothers, whose lives are inspired by Lady Wisdom, who embody the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ both for others and themselves - truly set the standard of what is attractive and beautiful a way that certainly includes, but goes far beyond looks.

N – Noticed

Finally N, for Noticed, the reason why we have Mothers’ Day. *Vs. 31 Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.*

Being a woman, being a mother, is not easy. I can only speak from my limited experience as a son and a husband but from what I’ve observed I can say this

There’s been a lot of discrimination and abuse
You frequently wrestle with guilt

You worry constantly about your kids
It’s hard to feel good about your body
You resent always having to sacrifice
And last but not least
You have to try and understand MEN!

So ladies, mothers, we want to recognize and notice and encourage you. We want to say well done for all the ways in which you have strived to live skillfully in your lives.

From bringing us up in the faith, modeling a life which blesses others, being faithful in marriage, and showing how attractive this can all be- for this you deserve to be noticed, congratulated and encouraged. So I say “Well Done!”

But I also say you need to be encouraged. Because all of us know we have our faults and flaws, and so do the women and mothers among us. Lady Wisdom would not agree with a saccharine sentimentality which pretends that we are all perfect.

Today, as much as you need praise, you also need to be reminded that God's grace and mercy are there for you as well.

So, allow us to remind you of it when you mess up, when you feel rotten, when things blow up and you feel like you've not been a great mother or a wise woman.

Be encouraged with these words from scripture

Philippians 1:6 - Be confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus

Women, Mothers – Well done! Be Encouraged – Happy Mothers Day.
Amen.