INTRODUCTION
Wow! We’ve come a long way in the last 20 hours. To wrap up our time, let’s return to Proverbs 31:10-31. Let’s look once again at this famous homage to a very hard working wife and mother.

PROVERBS 31:10–31
v 10 She’s a rare gem. In fact, pious Jewish husbands still recite this poem every sabbath eve in praise of their own wives. “The sense is: Whoever has married such a woman knows from his experience how priceless” she is.¹

v 11-12 The primary audience this book was addressed to when it was written were young men on the verge of marriage and adulthood. And just like the wise man, throughout the book, trusts in God, so also a wise husband trusts in his wife because she brings him good, not harm.

v 13 Here she’s carefully seeking and carefully selecting the raw materials that she will use to make cloth. She understands the nature of quality.

v 14 Land and sea provide goods for her house. She brings in things from near and far.

v 15 She’s getting up early, cooking and providing.

v 16 Again she understands the nature of quality. She astutely evaluates a field to see what it’s good for and how it can be developed to produce prosperity.

v 17 Here is an image of this woman preparing herself for heroic and difficult tasks.

v 18 Up early, up late. She works hard.

vv 19-20 On the one hand, she uses her hands to produce goods. On the other hand she uses her hands to provide for the needy. What a beautiful image, “the hands that grasp to produce open wide to provide.”²

v 21 Because she works hard to take care of her family, she’s not afraid of the future.

v 22 She has an eye for beauty.

v 23

v 24

v 25 Not only are her physical clothes beautiful, her character is beautiful. Again, like in v 21 “she laughs” because she has “no fear.”
v 26 Her wisdom is not only evident in her actions, her words are wise and kind.

v 27 What an incredible understatement.

v 28 Her children bless her, her husband praises her.

v 29 There are a lot of admirable women - politicians, doctors, lawyers, soldiers, teachers, martyrs. But this woman, this house wife and mother is beyond any of them.

v 30 At the time this passage was written, any time women were praised in literature - it was for their external beauty, her physical charms. Ancient literature about women was overwhelmingly preoccupied with a woman’s sex appeal. Here is a direct attack on that way of evaluating women.³

v 31 Again, for the third time, she is praised. First in v 29 by her husband, then in v 30 we are commanded to praise her, and now in v 31 she is praised by her deeds. Three times.

Now I want us to return our attention to something we’ve already touched on.

Those 3 little words toward the end of v 30 “fears the Lord” - this phrase seems to be out of place with the rest of the poem.

Until this little phrase, the poem has been totally occupied with the mundane activities of a wealthy aristocratic wife and mother. The poem is completely focused on her daily, earthly tasks of working, eating, clothing and doing business.

I mean think about it, this morning I said this shows us that God doesn’t rank jobs on some scale of importance. There is no hierarchy of jobs in the Kingdom of God.

Here in our last session together, it’s important for us to see a corollary principle. It’s the whole notion of the sacred and secular divide that we have inadvertently received from our Enlightenment oriented culture.

Look at it this way...
   if you cut out this one little phrase, “Fears the Lord”...
   the reality is that this woman doesn’t appear to be very spiritual!⁴

In the entire list of her virtues, there is not a single mention of prayer, or faith, or loving Scripture, or going to worship.

Sure, she’s a good homemaker, an excellent real estate agent, a great wine merchant. She manufactures and trades in fabrics of the highest quality, and dresses in the most exclusive fashions.

But that’s it...other than this one little phrase at the end of v. 30.
So what’s going on here? Why, here, all of the sudden are we given this spiritual characteristic? This religious quality?

Well, there are **two basic possibilities**.

1. You could say that verse 30 was put there in order to **add** a spiritual value to the list of really good secular values this woman embodies. So, she’s really good in how she handles her daily affairs. But more important than all of these worldly successes is the fact that she fears God, she loves God. Her spiritual life, her fear of the Lord, is in addition to her incredible, excellent secular life. So her piety, her devotion to God, is like a **crown** on top of all this intelligent work, this incredible self-discipline. After all, what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, right, but loses his soul? Well this woman gains the world, and keeps her soul.

That’s one possibility. But it’s **not right**. You see, that way of reading it **doesn’t do justice to the book of Proverbs or to the rest of Scripture** for that matter.

No, the relationship of v 30 to the rest of the verses about this woman is that...

2. all of this buying and selling, and weaving and cooking, her fashion sense and her ability to decorate - this mundane, daily stuff is the **manifestation** of her relationship with God.

For this women, the everyday tasks of her life are **rooted** in her fear of the Lord.

All of these virtues, all of these accomplishments in her home and in her community - they **flow** from her view of God, her relationship with God.⁵

She’s learned how to see all of life’s mundane activities as **“the terrain for service to God.”**⁶ She refuses to accept the worldview of an Enlightenment secular culture whereby our life gets carved up into distinct spheres: that which is secular and that which is sacred.

This is why this woman is a living breathing concrete example of what it means to **“fear God.”**

Look at the very beginning of the book.
Proverbs 1:7, **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”**

And then at the very end of the book, we have the same phrase: **“Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”**

This is an **inclusio**...a literary technique. An inclusio is sort of like a set of parenthesis or a set of book ends or a frame.

The book of Proverbs is bracketed or framed by this phrase, **“The fear of the Lord.”**

In other words, this book, this whole book is held together by **“the fear of the Lord.”**
That’s the key to the book. It’s the theme. If you are going to understand the book, any part of the book, you have to read it through the lens of, “the fear of the Lord.”

And at the time that this book was written, this phrase, “the fear of the Lord,” was a **motto** - a slogan. Think of a it like a suitcase.

A slogan, a motto, its a way of **packing up** a lot of complicated nuances and ideas into a nice tidy little package. There’s a **whole cloud of meaning condensed** into this single drop of a statement.

And when you open this suitcase, “the fear of the Lord,” when you dig around in this slogan, at the time this book was written, it stands for a life completely centered around God.

A person who is characterized by “the fear of the Lord,” is a person whose **entire life is entirely devoted** to God.

It’s the person who has learned to see all of life’s mundane activities as **“the terrain for service to God.”**

The person who **“fears the Lord”** is the person who realizes that all of life, all of reality belongs to God, and as a result of that this person has **no compartments** that God is not a part of. They **don’t segregate** God to Sundays, or to religion, or to personal morality. The person who fears the Lord is the person for whom the ordinary affairs of family, and community, and business, **“all of the activities of their life are undertaken in the light of God’s presence and purposes in the world.”**

So that’s what the **book of Proverbs** is about: living your entire life, all the bits and pieces of your life, in the light of God’s presence and purposes. And when you get to the **end of the book**, the last thing that happens is that the author provides a living, breathing, flesh and blood example of what it looks like to live life in the light of God’s presence and purpose. And it’s not a priest, a prophet, or a missionary, or a martyr. It’s a housewife and mother.

**Now this is a very different way of thinking about the spiritual life than many people in our culture are accustomed to.**

You see, the book of Proverbs is driving home a point that we’ve been touching on all weekend.

**We misunderstand Christianity if we think – the spiritual life is different than the everyday life of normal people.**

**Your spiritual life is not separate from the ordinary, normal, routine things you do on a daily basis with your family, your community, your work.**

Is your work, your school life, a manifestation of Christ at the center of your life?
I mean think about mothering. Many Mom’s look at their day-in-and-day-out, mundane experiences of being a mother as something other than spiritual, as something that is different from their religious life.

- When full–time homemakers think like this…tempted to do lots of stuff, lots of activities, over and above...IN ADDITION to mothering in order to feel valuable and worthwhile. Things like volunteering at school, at church.
- To be frank, the reason some Christian mothers volunteer so much at church is in order to feel spiritual.
- But Prov 31 shatters this way of thinking. It teaches us – the daily, mundane, in and out of chores, changing diapers, packing lunches, car pools, homework, cleaning, cooking, correcting, and disciplining children – that is the terrain for service to God.

Or whatever your job is. Whatever you do for a job, whatever you do tomorrow - those chores, tasks, meetings, relationships...whether it’s shopping, cooking, building, designing, growing...you name it, that’s the terrain for your worship of God.

What about our students, our youth and college students here this weekend.

- The day-in-and-day-out work being a student is the way you are to learn to serve God.
- Being a student, getting up, going to class, home work, listening to teachers…that is the stuff of your relationship to God.
- You can’t be an irresponsible student and a fully devoted Christian…

Coram Deo - Martin Luther, one of the most important theologians the church has ever had, again, from the 16th century. He had this latin phrase, he talked about living life coram Deo, which means “Before the face of God.”

You see, if we restrict God to religious things, our God is too small.

- God is interested in EVERY SQUARE INCH of our lives.
- English class God is there!
- The angel of the Lord over your shoulder – “Go!” Listen, think, study, work - this is your worship.
- Coram Deo!

I’ve been calling Proverbs 31 a poem, but the truth is it’s actually a very special type of poetry: it’s a hymn, a song of praise. Just like the hymns we sing in church, except, this hymn is not to God, it’s a song of praise to a woman, a mother, a wife. This woman is celebrated in a type of poetry that elsewhere is only used for God; a hymn of praise. Why? Because she goes through the ordinary affairs of daily life, knowing that whatever she’s doing - it is the terrain for her worship of God.

Wow! And the point is that you and I can be like this woman. We too can live a life that is worthy of praise. How?
PROVERBS 9:10
Look at Proverbs 9:10, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

(1) To say that the Fear of the Lord is the \textit{beginning}\[1\]
\begin{itemize}
  \item is to say that it’s the \textit{foundation} upon which everything you do must be built.
  \item Whatever you do, recreation, work, relax, eat, love, going to the movies, playing basketball...whatever you do, remember, \textit{coram Deo}, remember that you are in the presence of God. As you learn to remember this, you can begin to serve God through whatever you are doing. Whatever your job is...
  \item Fearing the Lord, seeing all of life \textit{coram Deo}, seeing all of life before the face of God, this is foundation upon which you can learn to go forth to work as an act of obedience in order \textit{“to draw the world into the Passion.”}\[11\]
  \item Fearing the Lord, seeing all of life \textit{coram Deo}, this is the foundation upon which you can build not just a career, but a life, the kind of life that we are commanded to praise. And this is the foundation
\end{itemize}

(2) To say that the fear of the Lord is the \textit{beginning}...
\begin{itemize}
  \item is to say that this way of living \textit{doesn’t come natural}
  \item There are other ways of working. There is a way of going to work that comes naturally to you but it does not honor God.
  \item Don’t assume that because you are a Christian and you behave with Christian virtue, don’t assume that this means you are working Christianly. Don’t assume that being a Christian means that the way you work is Christian.
\end{itemize}

(3) To say that the fear of the Lord is the \textit{beginning}...
\begin{itemize}
  \item Means we need to \textit{persist} in developing our relationship with God.
  \item Remembering that you are in the presence of a God who cares about how you do what you do is the \textit{starting point, the beginning} of a lifelong journey towards Him.
\end{itemize}

But we can do this. We have an example to inspire us.

We have this woman.

\textbf{John 6:1-13} 5 moldy pieces of bread and a couple of sardines. \textit{Your fish and your loaves}.
1 Cohen, Proverbs, 211.
5 Franz Delitzsch, Das Salomonische Spruchbuch (Leipzig: Dorffling und Franke, 1873), 527.
6 Bartholomew, “A God for Life,” 44.
7 Bartholomew, “A God for Life,” 44.
8 Van Leeuwen, Proverbs, 33.
9 Bartholomew, “A God for Life,” 44.
10 Wolters, The Song of the Valiant Woman, 3-14.
11 Capon, The Supper of the Lamb, 146–47.