

The Incredible Worth of a Woman (Proverbs 31)

The most significant ministry in the Body of Christ is the ministry of mothers and fathers. The great apostles and prophets throughout history have made their impact; but, when it comes down to it, the mothers and fathers train the millions and millions most effectively. There is no more significant ministry in the Body of Christ than taking care of those one, two, three, four, five children—one lady I talked to today says, “I am pregnant with number twelve” when I saw her at the coffee shop. Or, the twelve might be the twelve you are pouring your heart into in that little congregation. I am talking about the one or two as well, not just the twelve, and seeing that also as significant ministry unto the Lord.

THE INCREDIBLE WORTH OF A WOMAN (PROVERBS 31)

I want to talk about the incredible worth of a woman and how Jesus sees His Bride as a biblical model for viewing women. There is a verse in Proverbs 31:10-11: “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.” Who can find a virtuous wife is the question that the writer of Proverbs was asking? Her worth is far above rubies, or one translation says precious jewels. The question is not merely, “Who can find”—in terms of obtaining, that is one sense of what this passage means, but also we can ask, “Who can obtain a virtuous wife?” It also means who can see a virtuous wife when one is right before you? The answer is that the Lord can. That is not the entire answer, but that is a context of a word, a prophetic word that the Lord gave me some years ago. He spoke this to me in a really clear and corrective way. The Lord sees the virtue of His wife, the Bride of Christ, and He sees her worth. The Lord wants us to be able to see this virtue in the corporate Church, but He wants husbands to be able to see it in a more individualistic way in context to their home and their marriage.

CORRECTION: WHO CAN UNDERSTAND IT?

Paragraph B. I received a corrective word from the Lord. It was November 26, 1995. I remember it because it was quite dramatic. It was 3 o’clock in the morning. I was sound asleep, and I woke up suddenly. The Lord woke me up like an arrow had struck my spirit, and I woke up prophesying this. I said these words when I was waking up out of a dead sleep. I woke up, and I said, “The incredible worth of a woman—who can understand it?” I was surprised, and I thought, “What?” Where did that come from? It was the Lord speaking through me to me. Have you ever had that experience where the Lord spoke through you but to you? There was nobody else there to listen to it.

The Lord was speaking that: “The incredible worth of a woman—who can understand it?” What He wanted me to understand was that I do not understand. He wanted me as a shepherd in His kingdom and in His Body to bring forth this understanding to others as well because there are many who cannot understand this. He spoke it to me, and its most immediate sense was to the corporate Church, but He intended it to be individualistic to marriages as well. There is a virtuous woman in the earth. She is the Body of Christ—the Bride of Christ. Often we look at the Body of Christ despairingly, we look at the Body of Christ in her brokenness, in her weakness,

we despair, and we are annoyed. We say, “Lord, we love Your Church, except for the people in it.” You may have heard that joke said. However, there is truth in it in the hearts of some who say that. It is kind of in style today to not like the Church. I assure you that the Lord does not agree with that opinion. In her brokenness and in her weakness, He can see virtue in His wife. The question, “Who can find a virtuous wife? Or who can see virtue in his wife? Who can see that the virtue is actually there even though it is in seed form, even though it is a budding virtue, but it is still virtue nonetheless?”

It’s as if the Lord says, “I can see virtue in My Church. I can see worth, I can see great worth in My Church. The Lord wants us to be able to understand how He sees, and He evaluates His Church because it is the way that He sees and evaluates you individually. It really moves us; it really affects us when we see this.” It is also how He wants us to see and evaluate other people as well. This has many applications. When I understand how the Lord views His Church again, I view the Church differently. I have an appreciation; I have a steadiness in my relating to the Church instead of an impatience and despair when we can see the Church the way the Lord sees the Church.

Again, then we see ourselves differently when we see how the Lord views and evaluates people. One of the most life-changing things that has happened in my relationship to the Lord is to begin to see how the Lord evaluates people. He wants us to take this to the level of applying this to our personal relationships; particularly I am focusing on applying it husbands to your wife. I know not all of you are married here, but many of you will be married one day. That is not a prophecy. Do not say, “Oh! The Lord confirmed it. I asked the Lord to speak it, and He spoke it from Mike publicly. It was for me.” Do not put that in your journal. That was an accidental prophetic word if it slipped out that way. I mean that in the most general sense. That is a joke but one of two of you actually went, “Oh! That confirmed it.”

LOVE YOUR WIVES, JUST AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH

Paragraph C. Jesus cherishes His Church as the way to make her spotless and fill her with glory. Let’s read this passage, Ephesians 5:25-29: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.” It says husbands love your wives just as Christ loves the Church. We have heard this statement so many times throughout the years. It is read at almost every wedding.

This is one of the most dynamic definitions of holiness in the Bible. This is one of the most dynamic descriptions of holiness that says that a man would love his wife in the way that Christ loves the Church. This is one of the most dynamic, radiant descriptions of holy, godly, wise living right here. It seems so high and out of reach that many men just kind of assume that it is not really for real. Beloved, this is our inheritance to be able to live this way with a woman in a home. This is an inheritance of every marriage that is in the kingdom of God. Ephesians 5:27:

“As Christ so loved the church so that Jesus would present her to Himself.” Jesus is going to present the Church to Himself because He is the One who paid for her as well as presented her to the Father.

He will present her to Himself as a glorious Church not having spot or wrinkle. Beloved, this is going to happen. The Lord is going to have a Church that is glorious without compromise before the second coming. This is not just the Church in eternity with resurrected bodies; there is no issue of spot or wrinkle. There is no issue of compromise with resurrected bodies.

He is making a very dynamic statement, it is an eschatological statement that before He returns, He will have on the earth a company of people in all nations who are spotless and have no compromise. This is such a dramatic prophecy. It just seems like out of reach and like unreal because the Church is in such bad condition right now in terms of the spirit of compromise.

HUSBANDS SHOULD LOVE THEIR WIVES AS CHRIST LOVES THE CHURCH

Ephesians 5:28 instructs us that husbands ought to love their own wife as He loves His own body for nobody ever hated His own flesh, but He nourishes and cherishes her in the way the Lord does the Church—that is the key phrase. It is the way that the Lord nourishes the Church.

Here is the point of this passage that I want to highlight: The way that the Church is going to become glorious in this age, again do not just relegate this to eternity; we will be glorious in eternity, but in this age He is going to cherish the Church. He is, by the Holy Spirit, going to reveal His heart to the Church in a way that it is such a striking and stunning impact on the Body of Christ. He is going to show how the Body of Christ can be nourished and cherished by the Son of Man in the way that it will cause the Church to respond in such wholeheartedness that she will have no spot, nor wrinkle. There will be compromise in the Church worldwide.

Paragraph C. The Lord sees the power of how when we cherish, it is the most effective way to transform the Church. I want to say that again. The Lord sees the power of cherishing His Church. He knows that it is the most effective way to transform the Church by nourishing and cherishing her. The point is that if the Lord says, “That is My strategy to change My Bride; what should your strategy be to change your bride? If you want to impact your bride in the most significant way, the only way is by cherishing her.” This is the divine strategy, by seeing her worth, and seeing her virtue even though others may not see it as completely as you do. Through the lens of God’s understanding and His redemption, to see even dimensions that others do not see, that is to be like the Lord. That is God-like to see virtue and to value what others do not see. It is God-like if the virtue and value is really there. As members of the Body of Christ, we have virtue, and we have worth. It is part of who we are, and we are not mature in that virtue. We do not see that virtue, but the Lord sees what men do not see, and He calls it forth. The calling it forth helps establishes it in His Church. The Lord is saying through this passage that I want you to imitate My example of how I lead My Bride.

JESUS’ PRIMARY METHOD OF MATURING HIS BRIDE IS TO CHERISH HER

Paragraph D. One of the main themes in the Song of Solomon is how Jesus cherishes His Bride. The Song of Solomon is the eight-chapter love song that is very familiar on the IHOP–KC missions base. The central message—not the only message—but the central message in it is that Jesus is going to have a Bride that is mature in partnership, and His method of changing her, His primary method is cherishing her, not His only method but His primary one. He calls forth dimensions about her: her beauty, her virtue, and her worth in a way that is even startling to her in the early days of her journey.

Song of Solomon 4:1-5: “Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove’s eyes behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, going down from Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep which have come up from the washing, every one of which bears twins, and none is barren among them. Your lips are like a strand of scarlet, and your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like a piece of pomegranate. Your neck is like the tower of David, built for an armory, on which hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies.” This is a very well known passage to those who study the book. There are eight different characteristics of the Bride of Christ, and the Lord calls them forth before she has walked in them in any kind of fullness He calls them forth.

If you have never read Song of Solomon, these eight characteristics are written in the poetic love language of Solomon’s day. As you read it, you need to understand what those virtues mean, but the point of the passage is that the bride in this part of her journey is not yet mature, but the Lord is calling forth her dedication. He is saying, “You are dedicated.” He is calling forth her discernment, her revelation, and her commitment to others even in a greater way than she had manifested up to that time in her spiritual journey. The reason the Lord does this is because He can see the longing, or the cry in our spirit. He sees the cry in our spirit before it is manifest in our character.

THE LORD SEES OUR DESIRE TO BE DEDICATED TO HIM

Our desire to be dedicated to Him; He sees it in its embryonic and budding form long before others see mature dedication. The Lord sees the stirring; He sees the longing and the wrestling of our heart to be wholly dedicated to Him. The Lord esteems it. He wants it to bear fruit, but He sees it in its early forms, and it matters to Him. He does honor it. He sees the value and the worth of it before it comes to pass in full maturity. Again, where I am taking this is that this is how the Lord wants husbands to relate to our wives. This is a message preached for Mother’s Day, but the truth is that on Easter Sunday, we call it resurrection day. That is good, but then most preachers add the statement that “every day is resurrection day,” which is right. It is also true that though today is Mother’s Day, from God’s point of view, everyday in His kingdom is Mother’s Day. It is real. He wants the ladies in His kingdom: the mothers, the wives, and the others as well, He wants them honored in their homes in a way that is supernatural. Not just once, or twice a year, or on a key occasion, He wants them honored as a way of life in a supernatural way in their home. If God could have His way, He would honor mothers every single day in the homes of the people of the Body of Christ.

GIDEON AND THE MIDIANITES

In Judges 6, Gideon was an Israelite; the Midianites, the neighboring nation was coming to attack them, and they were so much stronger. The Midianites had come and surrounded his town where they were invading his town, or his village. He was hidden away and scared to death; I mean shaking like a leaf, hiding from the enemy. The angel of the Lord appears to him. The angel of the Lord says the most unusual thing to him. He says, “Gideon, mighty man of valor.”

What? Gideon might have said, “Mighty man of valor? You must be kidding! I am hidden away because I am afraid. I am not a mighty man of valor.”

But the angel says, “Yes, you are. You do not see it yet, but there is courage in you that you have not even come into contact with. You are mighty, and you are a man of courage and valor. You will lead the people of God.” Gideon is just troubled by this statement. He says, “No. I am away without leave; I went missing in the army. I am hiding. I am not a superhero. I am a hider right now. I am a coward.”

PETER: THE ROCK TO JESUS EVEN IN HIS WEAKNESS

He says the same thing is true to Peter. Jesus looks at Peter early in on Peter’s training. He looks at Peter and says, “Peter, you are the rock.” Of course, Peter might have put his chest out and said, “Yeah. I was wondering if anyone was going to see that!” I do not know if he really did that, but just looking at his personality profile in the gospels, it probably did not shock him as much as it shocked Gideon. Jesus called Peter the rock. Peter was to later deny the Lord before a little servant girl; Peter, completely denied the Lord. Peter had other failures, I do not want to go into them right now, but he lacked courage. Galatians 2 is another example where he lacked courage with Barnabas at Antioch with Paul, and he yielded to the fear of man. He was not a rock as he yielded. Paul rebuked him for his hypocrisy, his man-pleasing spirit, as the fear of man was on him.

Somebody could have said to Peter, “Peter, you are not really acting like a rock, you denied the Lord that one time, you are all but denying Him again. You are denying His purposes in the Church.” You can read the greater details of that in Galatians 2. The Lord looked at Peter and said, “You will have times of failure, but you are a rock.” Jesus called Peter forth. The passage I am putting here is Romans 4:17: “as it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’ in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.” God calls those things, which do not exist as though they did. God calls things that do not exist. God calls virtue in our heart. He calls it forth, as though it does exist because He sees it in its early development in our spirit. It does not exist to the natural eye, but it does exist before God’s eye.

This is the way God leads the Body of Christ. This is the way Jesus leads us. It does not exist in terms of natural manifestation in any kind of fullness, but it does exist in reality. God is not making it up. It is real to Him. That is why the Lord can speak wonderful things over our lives. Sometimes it is startling. Some of the things He speaks will not even be fulfilled in this age.

Some of it will be fulfilled in the age to come, but they will come to pass. They are great and glorious things.

MEN ARE TO THINK OF THEIR WIVES AS THE LORD THINKS OF HIS BRIDE

Paragraph E. The Lord wants men to think about their wives in the way that the Lord thinks about His wife. I want to say that again. The Lord wants husbands to think about their bride in the way that He thinks about His Bride. This is the model of the kingdom. It is not just an ideal that is out there. God really wants us to lead our wives in the way that He leads His wife. He really is serious about this. It is not just like a heavy commandment saying, “Get with it.” He is saying, “No. There is life in this type of leadership. There is life to your heart; there is life to her heart. There is blessing. There is a multiplication of grace if you will follow Me in the way that I lead my Bride.” Husbands, I want to say this to you: your wife is first and foremost Jesus’ wife. She is His wife in the ultimate sense, and the Lord has given you this woman on assignment, on loan, for maybe fifty years or longer, but it is only for a moment in the big picture.

You have a stewardship to partner with Him to bring forth His wife in her virtue, in her worth, and honor. I want to say that again: The Lord wants us to partner, the Lord wants me to be in partnership with Him to bring forth Diane into greater virtue. He wants me to bring her forth into greater honor and to see her worth. He wants me to be a spokesman direct from His heart.

It’s as if the Lord says, “I will speak to her, but often I will speak through your lips when I call forth her virtue and her honor. I want her to hear My voice of honor through your lips more than any other person in life.” The Lord’s desire is that Diane would hear the Lord’s voice most directly through the Word and the Spirit in her direct relationship with the Lord. However, in terms of people, it is God’s will that she would hear the Lord’s voice most through the course of her life through my lips—the voice of honor. The question that I ask men, husbands today, and future husbands, is this something that you have connected with in your understanding as part of your ministry and part of your assignment in this age. It is from the Lord’s point of view. We must ask the Lord to show us how He sees our wife. I ask, “Lord, how do you see Diane? Tell me how You see her.”

The Lord answers, “I will tell you how I see your wife, but understand I am really telling you how I see My wife. That is what is really going on. I want her to hear My voice through your lips often. My voice of life, and My voice of honor and value.” We are to partner with Him in calling our wives forth. We are to partner together with Jesus in this. It does not end with a husband and a wife. We are to do this in the way that we raise our children. We are to do this in the way that we are to even operate with our friendships. We are speaking the Lord’s voice in the friendship context.

SPEAKING HIS VOICE AND HEART IN OUR FRIENDSHIPS

It is not just the family context only: we are to speak forth the Lord’s voice in the way we relate to one another in the Body of Christ. We are to be the Lord’s voice speaking to people’s virtue and to their honor, calling it forth. As part of the leadership team over the years that I have been in in ministry, the Lord has stirred my heart about this many times. He wants me to speak to the

individuals, the friends, those that I am co-laboring with, my friends, with His voice and His heart. The Lord wants His voice to be heard through my lips and vice versa. It goes both ways. This is not limited to husbands and wives. It is the place where it is done the most frequently, and since it is Mother's Day, we are focusing on that. I am trusting this will be just a little kiss from God to women's hearts today on Mother's Day.

Some of you are not mothers, but many of you are going to be mothers. This is what the Lord's heart is for you. When we look at our wives, children, or friends, we must not regard them, or evaluate them only according to their fleshly weakness and fleshly limitations.

WE REGARD NO ONE ACCORDING TO THE FLESH

The passage here in 2 Corinthians 5:16: "Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer." Since the new birth, we regard no one—Paul is talking about born again believers, according to the flesh anymore. We do not look at a person only through the lens of their fleshly weakness, or their fleshly limitations. He goes from now on, we regard people, we esteem them from the lens, or the view of how God views them. He says, "Paul says before I knew Christ, I only saw somebody according to what they could produce in their leadership style, or how much money they had, how much gifting they had, or how much character they developed in their life."

It's as if Paul says, "From now on I have a different paradigm. I do not regard people only to their fleshly limitations, or even their fleshly weaknesses." I now regard them as to who they are in Christ. From now on, we see them in the way that God sees them. Our goal is to see people not just according to the flesh but also in Christ.

NOT AGREEING WITH THE ACCUSER OF THE BRETHREN

Paragraph F. It says in Revelations 12 that Satan is the accuser of the brethren. He is the accuser of the brethren. He is the one who is described as accusing the Church night and day before the throne. With our darkened minds, and our natural way of thinking without the help of the Holy Spirit, we most naturally agree with Satan's accusation against the people who we are in relationship with. That is the most natural thing for us to do. It takes the grace of God to view somebody as to who they are in Christ from God's point of view instead of viewing them from the natural bent of accusation, and when I feel a critical spirit and a negative attitude that is the tip off. It is the tip off that I am yielding to the spirit of accusation.

The spirit of accusation: we are so comfortable with the spirit of accusation. We have operated in it for so much of our life that in the grace of God, we are to operate in an opposite spirit to accusation. We are to operate in the spirit of grace. We tell people who they are, the budding virtues that are in them, how God views them, and where they are going, and how they will succeed. The spirit of accusation is opposite. The spirit of accusation tells them what they are not and how they have failed. This really is manifest very much in child raising. Many parents use a shame motivation to try and wake up their children; they try to tell them what they are not. Beloved, the spirit of accusation is not an effective way to bring somebody forth spotless and

without blemish into the glory of God. Cherishing is Jesus' primary mode of bringing forth character in His people. Again, it is not the only way, He does use the rod, He does use discipline, He does use difficulties, and He uses a number of things

CHERISH, DON'T ACCUSE

Cherishing the heart of the God's people is the primary way to bring forth character, but it is not the only way. Often, in marriage, it is common for husbands to despairingly try to motivate his wife through accusation. They say, "You always do this, you are always that way, how come you do not, how come the other ones are like this, but you are not?"

It is a very normal way even within the context of the Church, though that is the spirit of darkness. That is the spirit of darkness operating even in Christian marriages. It is very common for a woman to respond to her husband in the same way. They say, "You always, and you said that it is the finger-pointing of accusations." It goes both ways.

A SPIRIT OF GRACE INSTEAD OF A SPIRIT OF ACCUSATION

The Lord said that we would call forth the virtue, the value, and the honor that needs to grow, but it is present that that would be our focus. That is not the entirety of our dialogue. There is a place to talk honestly and to talk about weaknesses, but we can talk about weaknesses with a spirit of grace, instead of talking about weaknesses with a spirit of accusation. We can speak negative things in the spirit of grace. God does it all the time. The Bible is filled with God speaking negative things, but He speaks them in a spirit of grace. He offers hope. He offers kindness. He offers a way forward. He speaks about how He sees their heart in a positive sense. He does not just speak negatively, and that is the end of the story. He does it in the spirit of grace.

We do speak negatively within the context of marriage and children. We do point out blind spots and weaknesses, but we do it in a spirit of grace and not a spirit of accusation. Beloved, the most natural thing for our hearts, the most natural thing is to think and to speak in the spirit of accusation. Understand this: as natural as it is, it is the spirit of darkness operating in us. We bring this in our marriages, and we bring this right into our family dynamics. We open the door and we give legal permission for the spirit of darkness to invade our marriages, our families, and children.

The Lord wants us to shut the door to this. He wants us to operate in a spirit of grace. He wants our families to be bastions of honor to where there be not times of correction, but there is honor. There is a spirit of honor and a spirit of grace even in the time of correction. There is a spirit of affirmation and affection even while correcting. That is the will of God. God's gift to the Body of Christ is how they relate to each other in small units whether in homes, or in local churches as bastions and strongholds of honor in the earth. There are no people in the earth who honor one another like the people of God do. There is only one reason the people of God do it. It is because they have freely received honor from God, so it changes their spirit, and then they find grace to give honor to one another because they are recipients of honor. The only reason that I can honor anyone is because I am aware that I have received honor. We will never honor our families more than the revelation we have of the honor that we have received from Him, not the honor we have

received from them. If we get caught in that and say, “If you honor me more, then I will honor you more.”

It’s as if the Lord says, “No. That is not it. I have honored you substantially, and out of that overflow, you honor them regardless of how they respond.” I am not to honor my family in the way they honor me. I am to honor my family in the overflow of how God has freely honored me. The Body of Christ is salt and light in the earth. We are a gift to the world as a salt and light. Matthew 5:13: “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.” We are called salt and light.

WE HONOR OTHERS AS WE HAVE RECEIVED HONOR FROM HIM

We are God’s gift even to the unbelievers in society because one of the things that we have is that we are strongholds of honor: our families, our marriages, our churches, our fellowship, our relationships in the workplace have honor in them because we have received honor. This is God’s ideal. It does not always happen that way: matter of fact, many times it does not. We are to be a breath of fresh air to the human family by the way that we honor one another. The only way we can do it is by receiving honor from God, and seeing how God sees them in their brokenness and weakness. If we only see their brokenness and weakness, we will see them only according to their fleshly limitation. We will speak in an accusatory way. We need to see them in the way that God sees them, and we call forth virtue, honor, and value in the way that the Lord does. Of course, none of us does it perfectly, but that is the track that we are on as the people of God. This is how the Lord wants us to go forth. We honor our loved ones by gaining insight into who they are in God and how God fashioned their heart. That is a vast subject. I am going to say that again.

We honor: I will just talk again about a husband and wife. A man honors his wife: one of the ways is by gaining insight into who she is in God, to what her destiny is, and how God fashioned her heart. God fashioned the heart of every individual differently. As parents, every child has a different passion, gift mix, and a different way to process blessing, pain, and disappointment. Every human being, the make up of their heart, the way they process life, and the way they view life is unique to them. There is no other human being like them. What the Lord wants us to do is to gain insight from Him into the secret of who they are to Him, and to gain insight into how their heart has been fashioned. We will never gain perfect insight, but we will gain more insight by asking for it, by studying it, and by looking at it.

We are going on thirty years of being married a year from now. The Lord has wooed my heart many times to say, “I want you to ask Me about her destiny, about the vision I have for her, about the unique way that she thinks and processes life. I want you to have insight into the way I fashioned her heart.” He has wooed my heart on this for our two sons as well. They are in their late twenties, and they are out of the home. When they were two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, and ten, many, many thousands of times I said, “Lord, I want to see Luke and Paul,” and I would say, “Father, how do You see them? What is Your calling for them and not my agenda for

them? What is Your agenda for them? I want to know the unique way that they think and feel so I can relate more like You relate to them.”

We need to gain this insight, and we do it also to our friends. Obviously, you would not have time to do it to a hundred friendships, but there are two, three, four, or five, and so ask the Lord. I have done that with the Lord on a number of occasions to various ones on worship teams and on our leadership team. I said, “Lord, tell me how You see their heart. Tell me what You are thinking. Tell me how You fashioned them even in their weakness.” I want to know how their heart moves. I do not want to assume that they think and feel like I do. I want to tap into this. That is called honor. When we tap into this, and we speak honor, it really touches their spirit. It brings them forth because we were made to respond in honor. Honor touches us in a powerful way.

It is not enough to ask the Lord. We have to study it. What do I mean by studying it? I mean by literally, actually focusing in, observing, and trying to gain understanding. The man who gains this understanding of His wife’s heart is the man who will honor her the best.

GAINING UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR WIFE’S HEART WILL HONOR HER BEST

The more understanding you gain by looking at her heart, listening, and paying attention to how she moves and operates emotionally and mentally, you will gain the most insight. Beloved, it will change your life, marriage, and your family dynamically. This will change you if it is something that you have not done yet.

We have so many young marriages, and new marriages coming up. I want to add. We want to set the genetic code right; the spiritual genetics of this spiritual family. We want this to really be in its place. I say that young men, young husbands, you need to study, not just ask the Lord, you need to ask the Lord too, but study your wife’s heart and the heart of your children. Study it, stare at it, and observe it. Analyze it in the sense of saying, “Lord, I want to understand. I want to know how they move, think, and process life, their gifts, and their callings and desires.” I assure you that no matter how many children you have; they will all be different than you. They will be different from one another. Each one of them is a beautiful work of art—a beautiful masterpiece in God’s hand of His divine art—everyone of them are.

WIVES, LIKEWISE, BE SUBMISSIVE TO YOUR HUSBANDS

Roman numeral II. Gaining understanding and giving honor and therefore having power in prayer, this is a very important verse here in 1 Peter 3:1-6: “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.”

The context of 1 Peter 3 is marriage; he has talked to the wives in the first six verses. Now, he says husbands deal with your wives with understanding—that is the key phrase. Secondly, give honor to your wife. Dwell with her with understanding and giving honor to her. It goes on to describe wives as the weaker vessel. Spouses are heirs together of the grace of life, so that your prayers are not hindered. I want to assure you of this: the Lord is so committed to this: He is so committed to men dwelling with their wife in a way of understanding, and He is so committed to them receiving honor that He says, “In the government of My kingdom, I assure you, I will hinder your prayers if you do not do this.”

PRAYERS ARE HINDERED IF WE DO NOT HONOR OUR WIVES

Beloved, this issue of understanding and giving honor to our wives is critical to IHOP–KC . We are a twenty-four hour prayer ministry. There are not many things that are more important in a twenty-four hour prayer ministry than the Lord answering our prayers. He says, “You can do what you want, but, I, Myself, will not hear your prayers unless you come to Me.”

We come in Christ, we come with a heart of obedience, but He says that that is not enough. He says, “I want you to come with a history of understanding your wife and a history of honoring her.” When you come to the prayer room, I want this behind you in your history as well. There are obviously times when we are going to come short as men because we are fallen men. The Lord wants us as a staff to present ourselves to Him in prayer on these conditions. Not just who we are in Christ, but He wants us, He is putting a very serious thing here.

PRAYERS ARE RELATED TO THE AMOUNT OF HONOR AND UNDERSTANDING

He is saying your prayers are dynamically related to the amount of honor and the amount of understanding you have toward your wife. This is a very, very important passage of Scripture. He says you are to dwell with her with understanding and to give honor to her as to the weaker vessel. I have read passages on this for years, and there are so many crazy ideas about what that passage means, I will give you my opinion. I do not believe that she is weaker mentally. I know really smart guys, but I tell you know just as many smart girls. He is not talking about weaker emotionally. I know many weak emotional women, but I know many weak emotional men. You hear about the weak emotional women, and I say, “What about the, I know multitudes of emotionally weak men, multitudes of weaker men over the years.” I do not believe that he is talking about physical weakness. He is not saying give her honor because you can do more pushups than her, or because you can run faster. Men are often, not always, physically stronger, but our prayer life and giving honor is not related to how much we can lift. That is not what he is talking about. He is not talking about physically. I believe he is talking about her position in God’s authority, chain of authority: she is in a position of subordination.

What I mean by that: it is not just a principle related to the husband and wife, it is anywhere in life. Anybody who is under somebody’s authority and under God is vulnerable to the weaknesses, the bad decisions, and the bad leadership of the one over them. In terms of God’s org chart and His delegated authority, they are in a weaker position, and if the man makes bad decisions, and the man will. All men make bad decisions because we are human. It makes her

vulnerable, it puts her in a very difficult position, and there are many levels of decision-making. The same would be true of children. The children are in a weak position compared to their mother, or father. Children are subordinate in the chain of authority in the delegated authority. The same thing would be true in a business enterprise, or a ministry. The person that is the main leader of that department has a position of authority that affects the others. The others are intrinsically in a weaker position in that department of that business, or of that ministry. People are not in leadership because they are better. God did not pick men to be leaders in the home in the senior role because they are better than women.

God picks leadership because He wants unity. He wants one voice using a football analogy; He wants one quarterback in the huddle. He does not want three directions in any place of life. He does it for unity. That is why He puts elders in His Church. Not that the thousand people do not count, but He wants a unified direction. Authority unifies the home. Authority unifies whatever sphere God has given. God appoints people for leadership to create humility in the people. Leadership creates humility in the people under them, as well as in the leaders. Authority produces humility. It is one of God's means to producing humility. It is a very brilliant strategy, and there is a lot to say about it, but I do not want to go into that. My real point is that God does not put men as leaders because they are intrinsically better. It is like the leaders of a nation, or the leaders of a ministry are not intrinsically better, or smarter than the other people. God again uses them so that there is unity; it is His means of bring forth unity, but it is also a means of bringing forth humility in that ministry as well as in the leadership. It is a catch—22 for everyone because everybody leads poorly. Nobody leads in perfection except for Jesus. If you are looking for the husband who has perfect leadership, or the business, or the nation, there is no such thing. Your position of subordination, part of it is to bring humility forth in your life. What Peter is saying: he says because she is intrinsically weaker and in a more vulnerable place and because of your proneness to bad decisions and to bad leadership, give her double honor to make up for the gap.

The Lord says, “To see to it that you do it: I am not going to answer your prayers, if you do not take me seriously about this.” The Lord balances out the equation by lifting the grace of prayer off of the man. I have heard this for years, but I do not know if you have. The prayer movement through history has clearly been led and fueled by women across the Body of Christ. There are dedicated in prayer, and we have a good number of dedicated men in prayer here. Right across the Body of Christ, the real workforce in the prayer and worship movement is primarily women. I think that there are several reasons for that. I do not want to give a catalogue of all the reasons. One reason is that I think that men often do not honor their wives, and they have a lack of grace in prayer. Prayer is more difficult because it is part of divine discipline on them. They have to live in a way of understanding, and they have to give honor, or they will not have a spirit of prayer. The woman does not have that same arrangement before God over her.

There are other reasons as well those women are leading in that, but I think that that part of it is not just that we are men, and we struggle in prayer, but many men are under divine discipline because of this verse. They have never connected it. They are very casual about honoring their

wife, and the Lord is not casual about it. The Lord is very earnest about it so much so that the grace of prayer is lifted off of a man's heart if he will not do this.

HONORING OUR WIVES

Paragraph B. Giving honor to our wife: honoring people does not come naturally to us, whether it is to our wife, or our children, or to our friends, it is not natural because we are all prone as men and women to be self-absorbed to be self-focused. It is just the natural way of our minds. When honor is given, it causes the garden of a person's heart to flourish. This grace of honoring needs to be cultivated, and it is important that we cultivate it because it causes the garden of the person's heart to flourish. A man and woman who honor their children, and they raise them with a spirit of honor, those children's hearts flourish in a way that they would not have flourished. I am not saying that they will not have problems, and they will be perfect. That is not what I am saying. It really brings a new dimension to their life. Most people even in the kingdom of God are not raised in homes where there is honor and where honor abounds. When honor is withheld, the heart shrivels up, the garden of the heart dries like a flower in a parched desert. Honor is essential for the human heart to be fully healthy. Honor is essential to fully operate in the full capacity of what God's wants.

Paragraph C. Our family life is only as effective as we excel in honor as families. Honor in a family starts with cultivating it between a husband and a wife. Then it spreads to the children. It starts with a husband and a wife. A significant goal for every husband must be to honor his wife. It must be a significant, spiritual goal if you are a man of God. I talk to a man of God and ask, "What are your goals?"

They might answer, "I want to know God."

I say, "Good."

They say, "I want to be obedient."

I answer, "Good."

They say, "I want to pray, fast, and have power."

I say "Good."

They say, "I want to know the Word."

I say. "Good. But, is anywhere on the list is it your goal to excel in honoring your wife?"

They answer, "Well. I thought she was given to help me with my vision." Bad answer. She is to help you with your vision, and you are to help her with her vision as well. They say, "I thought she was just free labor that happened to be cute." No, no, that is not what this is about. Many

men relate to their wives simply because she is cute, they like her, and she is, in their eyes, free labor. They think that she is suppose to serve his vision, do what he says, etc.

FATHERS TEACHING CHILDREN TO HONOR THEIR MOTHERS

Another significant goal: it is not enough to have a goal for a man to honor his wife. One of my goals when our two sons were in our home was teach them to honor Diane. That was a significant goal. We talked about it many times. I talked about it publicly and privately many times. I would say high up on the list. I must teach you to honor her. It is absolutely essential. It is a father's role to fight for the mother's honor in the home. The mother should never have to fight for honor in her home. If she is doing that, the husband is significantly missing the mark with God. I told Diane early on when Luke and Paul were two, three, and four, or whatever.

I said, "I am committing to you that you will never have to fight for honor and obedience in this house. It is my mandate to see that you get it effortlessly." I remember one time when the boys were younger. Again, now they are in their late twenties. Diane talked to one of them and said, "I told you that I want you to come over here, and obey me right now." I turned around and said to Diane, "I want to say this to you. If you have to raise your voice to make them obey you, then I am failing as the father and the head of this home. I do not want you to have to ever do that." I was not correcting her for raising her voice. I was pointing out that if Diane needed to do that because they are that unresponsive somewhere as the father and the head of this home, I have not done my job. I told Diane, "I want to assure you of this: all you have to do is to say what you want to say, or you should just whisper it if you want. If you whisper one more statement and they do not heed it, say, 'When Dad gets home, we will talk about it.' I assure you that after three or four of those, you will never have to deal with that again. You should never have to lift your voice in this home to get honor or obedience, because I am mandated by God to see that you get it without you fighting for it. It is part of my role under His government to see that you get it without you putting effort forth."

When I disciplined Luke and Paul, when they were young, I said, "You did not honor your mother, and that is an impossible situation to live with in this home. This is an impossible situation, and it can never, ever go on like this." After three, four, five, six, seven, eight, they really knew it was serious and they excelled in this in their obedience and honor. I do not want to boast, but they just did. When they were eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, they excelled in honoring and obeying Diane. This really pleased me because it was part of my mandate as a father. My point of saying that is not to talk about how good or how bad we did it. The point is that every husband, this must be one of your spiritual goals to give honor to your wife and to see that your children honor her. I will say this, and it is self-evident. A child will never honor the mother more than the father does in reality. The father can say all the rhetoric he wants to say about honor, but if he does not honor her in thought, word, and deed, in reality, they will not honor her. A man cannot discipline his own children for not honoring his wife if he himself does not honor her with his words. That is hypocrisy: that is impossible to kind of get all revved up.

CHILDREN HONOR TO THE MEASURE THEY SEE IT MODELED AT HOME

To say, “My kids are going to honor this woman no matter what,” and then you do not do it with your words and your actions—they will see it a thousand times, either the presence or the absence of it. You cannot fake them out, and you will never get a child to honor more than you do. There is that rare kid who honors way beyond everybody. I have met a few of them in life. As a rule, children will honor greater than what they see as youth in their home. By the grace of God, that can happen because there are a lot of ungodly homes, but I am talking to godly men right now. Young fathers, if you ensure that your children honor their mother, you are actually serving your grandchildren, and you are serving the Body of Christ. I used to tell this to Luke and Paul. I would say, “When we would have a tough time where things did not go so well, we have the rod of discipline. You might not understand this now.” They were four, five, six, seven, eight years old. I said, “You do not understand this now, but what I am doing will dynamically change the way you treat your wife, the way you treat your daughters, or your children when you are older.”

They would answer, “We do not care about our wives right now; we just do not want to get a beating.”

I answered, “You will care one day. The way that you treat my grandchildren is being formed right now when you are six years old talking to me right now. What you will be in the Body of Christ is being formed right now in the way that you honor your mother.”

I am boasting, but I am just proud of my kids. Boy, that is a double indemnity, isn't it? I am proud of boasting. Luke honors his wife Ricci; it is remarkable to me how he honors his two daughters. This is one of the high points of his character is the skill and the way in which he honors his wife and his two daughters. It touches me deeply to watch this happen.

Paul—well, he is not married, but he just got engaged. He will be married in September to a really lovely young lady, and I trust that she is going to be wowed by the way she is honored. My real point of saying that is not to give a biographical sketch of my family life. That is not my point because we have lots of weaknesses, and lots of things we did not do like we wanted to. We did not do that as well as we wanted to. What I am really saying is that I want for a twenty-five year old young man to think it is absolutely normal to think this way; it is totally normal to prioritize the place of honor in your home.

UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL SUBMISSION

Paragraph D. This is a really important one. We are to lead our wife by focusing on God's commandment to honor her. We are not to lead our wife by focusing on her need or her commandment in the Scripture to submit to us. I have seen guys do this in my thirty years of ministry. A guy and I are talking, and he says, “I told her that the Bible says that she must submit.”

And I am thinking, “Wow. That sounds like nails screeching on a chalk board.” I ask him, “What?”

He says, “I told her that verse.”

I answer, “Oh, brother, that is horrible—never use that verse, never. Use the phrase right after it, the one that commands husbands to love your wives just like Jesus loves the church. That is the only phrase you want to use in that passage. Do not use the phrase before it.”

“Well, the Bible says it. That is why I am telling it to you.”

Use the one the Bible says to you. I want to say this because I want this to be set in the cement of the hearts of twenty-year-olds and twenty-five-year-olds. In thirty years of marriage, I have never once ever appealed to the biblical command for Diane to submit to me. Never once in thirty years would I ever imagine doing that, because that means there is already failure to do that. It is already operating in a wrong spirit. If she is not submitting to my leadership, a part of it is because I do not love her in a right way. If she is not submitting, do not go to her lack of submission; go to the weakness, the weakness of your love and your leadership style. That is where you must say, that is where your appeal must be. Go to her, appeal to her, and say, “My leadership style is ineffective. I have loved you in weakness, I have loved you in a way that is not proper and not in the way that God has wanted me to.” Go to her that way in meekness and humility. Make your appeals based on your ineptness, not on her lack of responsiveness.

GO IN THE RIGHT SPIRIT OF LOVE AND HUMILITY

Some guys think that it is the most normal thing to appeal to that. I am telling you that the minute any guy does that is already operating in a wrong spirit. It is wrong to do that. The next thing I have here in Paragraph D is that in a husband’s leadership style requires that he honors his family, and he has to take the responsibility to initiate in humility solving conflicts in his home. What I mean by that is when there is a relational tension—we can call it intense fellowship. How many know about intense fellowship? How many know about when a husband and a wife have intense fellowship? OK. I was pastoring before we were married, and I went to a “how to pastor better” marriage seminar. I took my notes, so I could talk on marriage. I am just a young man in my twenties, and I wrote down how to do it.

This guy at this seminar—it was brilliant. He said, “Husbands, here is the model of godly leadership: whenever there is a tension in your relationship with your wife or your children, here is what you need to do. You need to always take the initiative to humble yourself. Do not ask them to humble themselves. You bring up the issue, bring a gift to the table, and acknowledge your ineffective leadership, or your imperfect or immature love. Bring an offering to the table of a confession of your weakness that contributed to the problem. Do this 100 percent of the time.”

I was so impressed with that. Of course, I was not married; it was going to make a great little sermon, so I wrote it down. I meet Diane later, and I am wanting to totally impress her, so I am saying, “Oh yeah, one of my major principles in marriage.” We are both twenty-one-years old. She says, “Oh, you are so wise.”

I said, “I heard this principle, and I think it is right. I make a commitment to that for the rest of our lives that every time that we have tension in our relationship, I will initiate the reconciliation, and I will take the low road 100 percent of the time, because that is how Jesus did it. Jesus was the innocent one, and He assumed the role of the guilty one to initiate reconciliation.”

TAKE THE LOW ROAD OF HUMILITY AND INITIATE RECONCILIATION

That is how the cross worked. The innocent took on the role of the guilty one to initiate reconciliation. I was the guilty one plenty of times, but that is not the point. Whether I feel like I am guiltier, or less guilty is irrelevant because I am the head of the home. I must take the initiative of assuming the role of the guilty one to go before the other and to initiate reconciliation.

I told Diane, “I commit myself to you.” I have preached on this over the years, and I have committed it to her many times because I want to be accountable to do it. I am not saying that I have done it every time, but I have certainly done it most of the times. Sometimes, she knows that she offered more to the conflict than I did, and I have offered more plenty of other times.

She says, “Well, this is going to be fun. I am enjoying this.” We have fun with it, but at the same time I told her, “We have joked about it, but I am as serious as can be. Every time we have conflict, I am committed to do this as a statement of obedience to Jesus Christ.” Beloved, if you do that—again, I have not done it every time, but that is certainly the posture I have taken in these thirty years. If you do that: men, if you will honor your wife in that way, you will not have a problem of her following her leadership. Submission is a not an issue if men honor their wives and love their wives. You only have to appeal to submission because you are not honoring and loving. There are exceptions, there are just sometimes, I am just giving you the general rule of how it works.

WHO IS THIS PROVERBS 31 WOMAN?

Roman numeral III. What is the context of which a Proverbs 31 woman comes forth? She does not just come forth in a void. There is a certain soil in which this garden, a flower grows in a certain soil, this garden comes forth. It says in Proverbs 31:25 “that strength and honor are her clothing. She shall rejoice in a time to come. Her children shall rise up and call her blessed and her husband praises her.” Strength and honor are her clothing.

There are two applications to this: this means that honor is her clothing. She acts honorably, and she does honorable deeds. It is talking about how her character is honorable; therefore, she wraps herself in the garments of her own honor by living in an honorable way. That is a very important way to apply this verse. This verse has a second application: it is that we put honor on her. We put the garments of honor on her as the husband by praising her, and by the children blessing her, we put honor on her, and it strengthens her to be this Proverbs 31 woman. That passage has two applications: young men, if you want your wife to have strength, clothe her in honor then by the words you say and your actions. Men, raise up children who will clothe her in honor.

She will clothe her in honor, and there are two types of clothing that will strengthen her in a

very, very dynamic way. It is important that we do this. Proverbs 31, I will end with this, Proverbs 31. Most of you know that it is the great chapter for women: from verse 10 all the way to the end of the chapter, it is like this incredible super woman.

WHO CAN FIND A VIRTUOUS WIFE?

Proverbs 31:10: “Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.” It is like what on earth? Where is she? Does such a woman exist? The answer is yes! Here is the issue with Proverbs 31. I have not actually counted the character traits, but there are about twenty of them in there. The woman: she gets up early, goes to bed late, she makes all these things, and she sits at the gate. She visits everyone, and she just does everything. She crams ten lifetimes into one.

Here is the key to Proverbs 31: there are twenty or whatever actual character traits listed here. The Proverbs 31 wife is fully operating in all these different activities; they do not operate in her in one thirty-day period, but they operate in her over a fifty-year span.

She cannot get up early. She can go to bed late. She can build the house, and make the clothes all in the same thirty days. Those are different activities that she does in the course of her life. In different seasons, she will do different ones more than other ones. There is just kind of a funny little ironic thing that I think is humorous. I used to talk about that. I used to preach on Proverbs 31 because we had an all young-adult church, and everybody was twenty-two and getting married. It is kind of like we are seeing this happen again. When I was in my twenties, we had a young adult church with many young families. Many of our meetings included sermons and messages for so many young couples.

I used to say, “Diane, has done every one of these except for”—I said this like twenty times and it was just the standard joke—“Diane has done everything in Proverbs 31 except for buy and sell a field. She has never bought and sold a field.” I was never to imagine she would have a real estate company. I said this so many times. When she started Glad Heart Real Estate business, Diane said, “Well, I have now bought and sold a field.”

I told Diane, “Consider the whole chapter complete and finished.”

MINISTRY TIME

Let’s stand.

I told Diane, “I knew when I married you that you were beautiful, smart, and godly, but I did not expect you to be rich.” That was my comeback, but I was glad. I would like all the husbands, if you are a husband or you are engaged—if you are a husband, or going to be a husband, I would like you to come and stand up here. This is going to be because you have the girl in sight, and you are engaged is what I am talking about. When I say engaged, I mean you have a ring on the finger, not engaged in the spirit and she does not know it. I mean ring-on-the-finger engaged.

I would like all of the husbands to come on up here. We are just going to talk to the Lord about this. I do not want anybody even talking to you: I just want you before the Lord. One reason that

I am having you up here is so you can just think about this. I know some gals will be looking at the altar call to see how the husband is responding, and that is not always helpful. I just want you just to posture yourself before the Lord. We are going to worship for a few minutes, and I want to lead you in prayer. Just say your own words, but this is important.

Brothers, we have to excel in this. As the IHOP–KC community, we do not have a chance of having a prayer ministry without this kind of reality because God will hinder our prayers. We are in a catch-22 if we do not do this; I mean, we are praying to a bronze heavens.

So we are saying, “Lord, I ask You”—just say it in your own words—“Lord, I ask you to show me, to show me my wife’s heart, to show it to me. Give me insight; what is Your vision for her? What do You want her to do? Not just what is my vision; what is Your vision for her life? Show me God how You have fashioned her and made her. Give me insight into her unique emotional and mental makeup. Lord, I am committed to partnering with You, I am committed to letting her hear Your voice through my lips of her honor. Help me, Lord. Help me, Lord. Lord, forgive me, I have blown it many times.”

I told you my glory stories but I could tell you about the times I have blown it. I have not done it as well as I wish I would have, but it is something I have cared about all these years, even though I have not done it as well as I have wanted to.

So I have blown it a number of times. We are saying, “Forgive us, forgive us.” Some of you are standing here saying, “I do not even have any heart for my wife anymore.” Though that is an important subject that is not related to this, you can honor her regardless of what you feel. You do not have to have certain feelings to honor her in a biblical way. You are still committing yourself. Some of you are saying, “Our relationship has been really injured because of certain things, and I just cannot get past them.”

The Lord says, “Forgive her in the way that I have forgiven you. Honor her in the way that I honor you.” We are going to worship for a few minutes here. I want the men to stand up here. If you have gone to your wife and used the “s” word—“Honey, submit to me because the Bible says”—go repent to her. I assure you that that is a wrong spirit. If you have not made a commitment to honor her in a real and clear way, go and tell her. Look her in the eye and say, “I am making this commitment. Forgive me for not making this commitment earlier; I am making this commitment now to you, starting today.” Lord, we ask You for grace on our hearts. Help us, Lord. Help us, Lord.