In honor of Mother’s Day, I want to share with you a list I found entitled *Lessons My Mother Has Taught Me During Life*.

My mother taught me RELIGION. She said, “You better pray that will come out of the carpet.”

My mother taught me LOGIC. She said, “Because I said so, that’s why.”

My mother taught me FORESIGHT. “Make sure you wear clean underwear, in case you’re in an accident.”

My mother taught me IRONY. “Keep crying, and I’ll give you something to cry about.”

My mother taught me about OSMOSIS. “Shut your mouth and eat your supper.”

My mother taught me about CONTORTIONISM. “Will you look at that dirt on the back of your neck!”

My mother taught me about HYPOCRISY. “If I told you once, I’ve told you a million times, don’t exaggerate!”

My mother taught me about the CIRCLE OF LIFE. “I brought you into this world, and I can take you out of it.”

My mother taught me about BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION. “Stop acting like your father.”

My mother taught me about ANTICIPATION. “Just wait until we get home.”

My mother taught me OPTOMETRY. “If you don’t stop crossing your eyes, they’re going to freeze that way.”

My mother taught me ESP. “Put your coat on; don’t you think I know when you’re cold?”

My mother taught me TO APPRECIATE A JOB WELL DONE. “If you’re going to kill each other, do it outside. I just finished cleaning.”

My mother taught me HUMOR. “When that lawn mower cuts off your toes, don’t come running to me.”

My mother taught me WISDOM. “When you get to be my age, you’ll understand.”

And my mother taught me about JUSTICE. “One day you’ll have kids, and I hope they turn out just like you!”

Moms, we want to say thank you for all the things you’ve taught us. Happy Mother’s Day. We love you. And since it’s Mother’s Day, turn in your Bibles to Proverbs 31. We’re continuing our study of the book of Proverbs, and it seems appropriate on Mother’s Day to focus on Proverbs’ teaching about a godly woman. So let’s read Proverbs 31:30. Proverbs 31:30, *“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”*

What a great verse! *“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”* The very first thing you need to see about this verse is that it tells us exactly what it is that makes a woman godly. A godly woman is a woman who fears the Lord. Ladies, girls, all the things the world tells you are important… charm, beauty, fashion, makeup, jewelry, clothes, hair coloring… none of that matters. That stuff is external and insubstantial. It’s deceptive, because it changes your appearance without changing your heart. And it’s fleeting. It doesn’t last. But your relationship with God… when you fear Him in the right way… that gets to the core of who you are. That reveals your heart, and that’s what really matters. A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

The second thing I want you to notice is that this verse doesn’t just talk about moms. And this verse doesn’t just talk about wives. This verse talks about all women. Whether you’re a mother or not, whether you’re married or not, a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Being a godly woman does not depend on getting married and having children. Being a godly woman depends on being in right relationship with God. Your relationship with God is the ultimate relationship in your life. Your identity and your worth and your value are found first and foremost in God. And this particular verse describes your relationship with God by saying you should fear the Lord. So if we’re going to understand this verse, we have to understand what it means to fear the Lord. Now, if you’ve been with us throughout our study of Proverbs, you may remember that we looked at this phrase during our very first week, because Proverbs 1:7 tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. But just in case you weren’t with us that day, or just in case the things that you heard six weeks ago have faded from your mind a little bit, let me remind you of what we saw about the fear of the Lord. We looked at an awesome passage in Exodus 20 that gave us some great insight into the fear of the Lord. God has just led the Israelites out of Egypt and brought them to Mount Sinai. He descends on Mount Sinai in thunder and lightning and smoke and fire. And He begins to give the Israelites the law. And Exodus 20:18-19 tells us, *“When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.’”* So the people are afraid of God. But in the very next verse, we learn that that’s not what the fear of the Lord means. Listen to what Moses says to the people in verse 20, *“Do not be afraid*. *God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.”* This is a great verse for helping us understand the fear of the Lord. In this one verse Moses says, “Don’t be afraid,” and then he also says, “The fear of God needs to be with you to keep you from sinning.” That means there are two different types of fear in this text. One type of fear you should not have, and one type of fear you should have. And the text helps us understand the difference between them. The fear that you should not have is the fear of coming close to God and hearing His voice. The Israelites were afraid of being close to God, and Moses says, “Don’t be afraid.” Don’t have the type of fear that keeps you away from God. On the other hand, the fear that you should have is that you should see God’s power and know that God is opposed to sin, and you should fear His power against sin. Moses tells them that the fear of the Lord should keep them from sinning. Now, put these two together and see what they teach us. You should fear God's powerful wrath against sin, but that fear should not drive you away from God… that fear should drive you to God for His grace and mercy. Do you hear that? The fear of the Lord should not drive you away from God. You aren’t supposed to fear being close to God. The fear of the Lord should make you want to be close to God.

And I shared with you a few weeks ago a great illustration from John Piper. He said that he took his son with him to visit some friends at their home. And the friends had a really big dog that barked and growled at first. But after they got in the house with the dog, he was friendly. When they were about to leave, the owner told them, “Don't run from the dog when you get outside.” But as Piper’s young son was walking to the car, the dog came trotting up behind him, and instead of slowing down and petting the dog, Piper’s son started to run away from him. Immediately, the dog started chasing and barking and growling. And Piper says, “What a lesson in the fear of God. (The message was), ‘Do not fear to draw near (the dog), but keep the fear of the dog before your eyes, (so that) you (don’t) run away.’” Then Piper says, “God is a joy to be near and a terror to those who flee. If you are running from God because you are afraid of him, then you are not yet as afraid as you ought to be. In fact, your very flight is a mockery of God, presuming to think that you could outrun this German shepherd. If you *really fear* him and love your own life, stop running, turn around, and hug his neck for dear life, and he will lick your face. The fear of the Lord is fear of fleeing out of his fellowship into the way of sin. Therefore the fear of the Lord is full of peace and security and hope. It keeps us near to the merciful heart of God, our fortress, our refuge, our sanctuary, our shield, our sun.”

So the fear of the Lord is not the fear of being close to God. We should want to be close to God. Instead, the fear of the Lord is the fear of being away from God. It’s the fear of what will happen to us if we run away from God. It’s the fear of what God’s wrath will be like if we aren’t close to Him. So the fear of God keeps us close to God.

Now, bring that back to Proverbs 31:30 today, *“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”* A godly woman is a woman who fears the Lord, and what that means is that a godly woman is a woman who wants to be close to God. A godly woman is a woman who fears the thought of being separated from God. She fears the thought of her sin separating her from God. So she runs to God and she draws near to Him and she trusts His mercy and His grace. A godly woman is a woman who loves God so much that the greatest passion in her life is to be as close to God as she possibly can be. She’s not obsessed with charm and beauty and clothes and make-up and all that trite, trivial, external stuff the world says is important, because she has seen past all of that, and she has seen the One who really matters… she has seen the One who is really valuable and really worthy and really precious… and she is obsessed with being as close to God as she can possibly be. That’s what it means to be a godly woman.

So ladies, the first application of our text today is for you. And it’s this question: Are you that type of woman? Do you love God in that way? Is the greatest passion in your life to be as close to God as you can possibly be? Do you tremble at the thought of being separated from Him, and do you run to Him and trust His grace to purify your heart from all the trivial things of this world that would steal your heart from God? *Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.* Ladies, don’t let this world seduce you into giving your soul to deceptive and fleeting things. Find your identity and your worth and your value in your relationship with God. You want to be a great mom? Fear the Lord and love Him passionately. You want to be a great wife? Fear the Lord and love Him passionately.

And then for all of our single ladies, for our high school girls, for girls who are even younger, please hear me right now. I said this a minute ago, but I want to say it again. This is not about being married or being a mom. Those are wonderful things, but they’re not the most important thing. The most important thing is that you would be a daughter who loves her heavenly Father. That’s what your life is about. It’s about knowing the God who loves you and loving Him with your whole heart. So don’t let this world deceive you. The world’s going to put all sorts of pressure on you that it’s important to be pretty, it’s important to be popular, you’ve gotta get married to be happy, you’ve gotta have kids to be happy. Let me tell you right now, the world doesn’t know what it’s talking about. You focus your life on God. You know Him and love Him and rejoice in His love for you. If you are 6 years old, love God with all your heart. If you are 16 years old, love God with all your heart. If you are 66 years old, love God with all your heart. That’s what it means to be a godly woman. Our daughter, Sydney, will be 3 months old tomorrow, and that’s our prayer for her. We pray that she will love God will all her heart. All the other stuff – stuff like beauty and charm and school and sports and jobs and success – we’ll take it or leave it. But we pray that our little girl will love God with all her heart.

So ladies, are you a godly woman who loves God with your whole heart and wants to be as close to God as you possibly can be? Our text today calls you to be that type of woman. That’s the first application of our text. But that’s not actually the main application today. Look at Proverbs 31:30 again, *“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”* That verse is telling us that when you see a woman like this… when you see a woman who fears the Lord and doesn’t want to be separated from Him and loves Him so much that she runs to His grace… when you see a woman like that… you should praise her. That’s what this verse says. A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. So this verse is actually a call for all of us today to praise the godly women who are in our lives.

Now real quickly, I want to answer a hesitation some of you might have at this point. You might be thinking, “Doesn’t all praise belong to God? Shouldn’t we only praise God?” And the answer to that is yes. I hope we think that way around here. All praise belongs to God. And we should never give anyone the praise that belongs to God alone. But I also want you to see that there’s a way you can praise a godly woman that is really praise for God. When you realize that God has made her and His grace has made her who she is, then you should realize that your praise for her is really praise for God’s work in her. It’s like watching a sunset and saying that it’s beautiful. You aren’t just praising the sunset. You’re praising the God who made the sunset. Or at least, you should be! If Christy and I go out to eat with you, and we comment on how well-behaved your children are, yes, we’re praising your children, but we’re also praising you by praising your children. That’s what’s going on when we praise a godly woman who fears the Lord. When we praise her, we’re praising God.

So the second application of our text today is that you need to praise the godly women in your life who fear the Lord and love Him with all their hearts. Thank them. Encourage them. Strengthen them with your praise. That application is for all of us. And it’s especially for husbands and children. Just two verses earlier, Proverbs 31:28 says, *“Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.”* Children, praise your mom. Thank your mom. Husbands, praise your wife. Thank your wife.

And I’m going to ask you to think of it this way right now. Children, husbands, I want you to listen to me. I want you to imagine that today is the very last time you ever get to talk to your mom. Today is the very last time you ever get to talk to your wife. What would you tell her? What would you want to make sure she knows? What would you want to praise her for and thank her for? Now, here’s how this works: Do it today. Tell her today. Praise her today. Thank her today.

And that brings me to the last part of the application today. It seems to me that I should do more than just stand up here and tell you to praise a woman who fears the Lord. I should do it. I should be an example for you. So I want to close by sharing with you my praise for Christy. By God’s grace, she is a woman who fears the Lord, and I want to praise her today.

God has given me more joy and strength and grace through Christy than I could ever express in words… but I’m going to try anyway. It’s a joy to be married to Christy. It’s a joy just to know her. Christy laughs more often, more easily, and more loudly than anyone I’ve ever met. It was the first thing I noticed about her when we were 18-year-old freshmen at Georgetown College. She laughed so loud and so hard at everything that I was convinced she had to be acting. But it only took me a few minutes to learn that Christy is as genuine and as authentic as they get. She laughs that way because she’s not holding anything back. She loves life and she’s full of joy, and she lets it explode out of her, and it gives me joy just to be around her.

Christy is also as responsive to truth as anyone I’ve ever met. When she knows that something is true, she does not waver. When God speaks into her life and teaches her from His Word, she sets her face and there’s no room for compromise. I can tell you, it would be a pastor’s dream to have a church full of people who respond to the teaching of the Bible the way that Christy does.

That’s another thing that I love about Christy. She loves God’s Word. She’s made it her practice to read through the Bible each year. She’s memorized Philippians and the Sermon on the Mount and Galatians. She keeps a binder full of sermon notes from Sunday mornings and handouts from Sunday nights. She is a student of God’s Word.

 I also thank God for the way that He has used Christy to shape the course of my life. Christy and I were great friends during our first year of college. We had a couple of classes together… we were in a Bible study together… but we didn’t date. And then the summer after our freshman year, we both went on a mission trip to Chile. And the best way I know how to explain what happened is that by the time we got off the plane in Chile, God had opened my eyes, and I knew I was in love with Christy Garland. And the unbelievably good news for me was, she was seeing me the same way. So while we were in Chile, we started talking about what this meant… what our relationship would be like. Now, what Christy didn’t know… what I hadn’t told anyone… was that I had spent my entire freshman year wrestling with God’s call on my life. I wasn’t certain yet that God was calling me into ministry, but I sure was feeling a tug. So here Christy and I are, talking about what we think is going on between us. Now remember, we aren’t even dating yet, and I haven’t said anything to anyone about being called into ministry. I’m not even sure in my own heart at that point. And Christy looks at me, and just as calmly and directly as possible, she says, “I’ve been a pastor’s daughter my whole life. I can be a pastor’s wife.”

What do you say to that? Here I am, a math major, talking to a girl I’m not even dating, and she tells me that (1) I’m going to be a pastor and (2) she’s going to marry me. And you know what? She was right. I knew I was going to marry her, and by the end of the summer, I had publicly answered God’s call into full-time ministry. And Christy was a huge catalyst for what God was doing in my life.

A few years later, we were on staff at a church in Merritt Island, Florida. We loved it there. Loved the church. Loved the area. Had great friends. But one day I got a call from a guy named Terry Young in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee. Through a whole series of events, he had gotten my name and wanted to talk to me about being the pastor at First Baptist Mt. Juliet. Now, Christy and I weren’t looking to leave Merritt Island, never sent out a resume in our lives, but for several months, we had had this sense that God might be preparing us to be called somewhere. So we agreed to talk to this search committee. A couple of them flew down. We talked for 8 or 9 hours that weekend. They left. We exchanged several emails. Several phone conversations. I came up here and met with the committee. And then Christy and I just kept praying about what God was calling us to do. Now, at this point, Christy’s never been to Mt. Juliet, doesn’t know anybody here other than that one interview with Terry Young and Marshall Foster, but one morning, the alarm clock went off, we woke up, and Christy said, “I think we’re supposed to go to Mt. Juliet.” I said, “Okay. We should probably set up a visit first.” So we came up. Kept praying. Kept meeting with people. And in the end, she was right again. And once again, she was a huge catalyst for what God was doing in our life. And I praise God that He has given me a wife who is so sensitive to His leading. He has used her to make His call on my life so much clearer. And it’s a blessing to seek Him with her.

I’m also thankful for the risks that Christy is willing to take to follow God. In our ten years of marriage, it has become clear that she values God above everything else. When we first got married, I was in seminary and Christy was doing her Master’s work. She was teaching, and I was a part-time student pastor at a church in Waddy, Kentucky. You can imagine that a teacher’s salary and a part-time student pastor’s salary didn’t go real far, especially when you figured in my seminary and her Master’s classes. But I still remember calculating our tithe together that very first month, and I’m so thankful that being faithful to God mattered more to Christy than money. During those first years, we lived in a tiny, not-very-nice apartment. The walls were so thin that we could hear our neighbors brushing their teeth at night. I’m not kidding. But I also remember how much we enjoyed being together in that apartment. Christy made it home for us, and we were always happy there. And I knew then that Christy’s joy didn’t depend on lavish material stuff. Then came my last year of seminary. And it started to become clear that God was calling us to Florida. Neither of us had ever lived outside of Kentucky. Christy had never lived more than an hour away from her parents. She has a great relationship with her parents. Her mom’s one of her best friends. On the other hand, we didn’t know anyone in Florida, except the senior pastor and his wife. Christy had just gotten a new job teaching kindergarten, which was the age she had always wanted. We had some people who were close to us who were telling us we shouldn’t go. But when it became clear that God was calling us, Christy left everything she knew to follow Him. And I saw then that God was more important to her than family, God was more important to her than familiarity, God was more important to her than a job, God was more important to her than people’s opinions. We got to Florida and absolutely loved it. We made great friends. Christy got a job teaching kindergarten at a great Christian school. We were really happy and really comfortable there. And then I already told you the story about God calling us here. And Christy had no hesitation. This was where God was calling us, and she was following Him, because God was more important to her than friends, God was more important to her than her career, God was more important to her than being comfortable. What a joy it is for me to be married to a godly woman who values God more than everything else and who lives a life of faith that inspires her to take risks to follow God.

And now we’ve been here for three and a half years, and you have no idea the source of strength that Christy is to me as your pastor. You have no idea the way I lean on her… for advice… for encouragement… for love. I thank God for the grace that He gives me through Christy to serve as your pastor.

I’m also extremely grateful for the grace with which Christy handles life as a pastor’s wife. People have all sorts of ideas of what a pastor’s wife should be like, and one of the things I love most about Christy is that she doesn’t give a second thought to any of it. She is authentic. She is genuine. She is who she is. She’s secure in the fact that her identity is in Christ and not in what anyone thinks a pastor’s wife should be like. And her security in Christ allows her to live this life with incredible grace and strength and integrity. And I love who she is.

I also love how committed she is to this local Body of Christ. She’s helped start three new Sunday School classes since we’ve been here. Now she teaches a college girls Sunday School class. She teaches pre-school rec at VBS every year. She teaches elementary Spanish at MJCA. She has taught children’s missions. She sings in choir. I said it a minute ago, and I’ll say it again: It’s a pastor’s dream to have church members like Christy.

And even after saying all that, there’s still so much more I could praise. Christy is frugal and thrifty and creative. She’s got great fashion sense, but she’s a bargain shopper. She’s a great decorator, but she makes most of the stuff at our house. She’s a great cook. She’s a blast to travel with. When we’re on vacation, I can be with her 24 hours a day and it’s never enough. I can sit and talk to her for hours.

And then, on top of all of that, over the past three months, I’ve gotten to fall in love with Christy the Mom. She loves Sydney. She prays for Sydney. She’s committed to teaching Sydney to live for God’s glory. And she’s setting a great example. Christy is already a great mom and a godly woman who fears the Lord, and she is to be praised. The grace of God and the work of Christ is good in her life, and I praise God for Christy.

*“Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”* Ladies, I pray that the grace of God will make you a godly woman who loves God with your whole heart. And for all of us who are blessed to know women like that, I pray that we will obey God’s command that *“a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”*