

Small Group Guide THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN WOMANHOOD

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

May 12, 2013

Proverbs 31:10-31

Use this resource as a tool to help Christ-followers move forward in their spiritual growth. To do this well requires that the Small Group Leader is building a relationship with the individuals in the small group and has identified where the people are in their relationship with God. Are they Christ-followers? Are they growing in Christ? If so, in what areas do they need to grow further? As disciple-makers, Small Group Leaders shepherd people to know the truth of Scripture, to understand why it matters, and to apply it to their lives. Small Group Leaders come alongside those whom they disciple to discover how loving God, loving each other, and loving those not yet in the Kingdom should shape how they live. The structure of this resource coincides with moving people from knowledge (Main Truth) to understanding (Why It Matters) to application (Now What Do We Do?). Utilize this Small Group Guide as a flexible teaching tool to inform your time together and not as a rigid task list.

GETTING STARTED

Welcome – Incorporate time for greeting one another, enjoying any refreshments, and making announcements. If guests are visiting, make introductions and help them feel welcomed. Ask for their contact information, so you can follow up with them.

Looking Back – Provide an opportunity for small group members to share what God is teaching them, how they are applying what they are learning, and how He has given them opportunities to share the gospel with others. This can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups. Do the people know each other well enough to share more than surface level information? How can time together be used to foster deeper relationships among those in the small group? Also, what are the struggles and needs of the people in the small group? How can the people in the small group sacrificially serve each other?

Looking Up – Hold prayer as fundamental to small group time rather than supplemental to it. Give adoration and thanksgiving to God in prayer. Submit yourself to Him, confessing sin. Petition God for personal needs and other requests. Pray for the disciple-making efforts of those in the group and for the salvation of the lost in each other's families, spheres of influence, and in the world. The Weekly Prayer Focus below can also be incorporated in the group's prayer time.

Weekly Prayer Focus (from Our Worship Guide)

- *Pray for Our Lives: Praise God for our mothers. Pray for women who desire to become mothers but are finding that to be a struggle. Praise God for all the women in our faith family who faithfully serve in so many capacities, both here and among the nations. Ask God to help grant us understanding about biblical womanhood. Pray our families and our faith family would honor the biblical teaching of what it means to be a woman, even if that means being radically countercultural. Pray we will teach our daughters to aspire to be biblical women and our sons to honor and respect women.*
- *Pray for Our City: As we celebrate the mothers in our lives this week, we want to focus our prayers for them and for the women in our church who are serving other women in our city. We are also praying for Zion Springs Baptist Church and Adam Mixon, Pastor.*
- *Pray for Our World: This week we are praying for Long-Term missionary Kristina O. serving in Pune, India. Kristine has served as Director of the Bright Star School for*

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the past few years and helped develop a successful education system for underprivileged children living in the surrounding communities. The Church at Brook Hills had the privilege of sending Kristina out from our faith family and will send a team to serve with her this summer. To learn more about Kristina, visit her blog at mountainsintothesea.blogspot.com.

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN WOMANHOOD

Proverbs 31:10-31

Amidst a Confused Culture (and Church)...

- Women: Be and become Christlike women.
 - The mercy of God covers your past.
 - The presence of God empowers your present.
 - The hope of God guarantees your future.
- Married men: Love and nurture a Christlike wife.
- Single men: Pray for and seek out a Christlike wife.
- Church: Praise Christlike women as we promote Christlikeness in women.

Characteristics of the Christlike Woman...

- She is WISE.
 - Because she fears God, her value cannot be fathomed.
 - Because she fears God, she boldly faces the future.
 - Because she fears God, her beauty will never fade.
- She is the OVERSEER of her home.
 - As a wife, she is a helper to her husband.
 - He trusts her...
 - With his heart.
 - With his household.
 - With his good.
 - She is devoted to his success.
 - She delights in his satisfaction.
 - With his reputation.
 - He honors her.
 - As a mother, she prioritizes care for her children.
 - She loves them.
 - She lays down her life for them.
 - She lives to make them her legacy.
- She is MIGHTY in her work.
 - She has willing and skillful hands.
 - She has an innovative and industrious spirit.
 - She has an intelligent mind.
 - She has a strong body.
- She is ATTRACTIVE in all the right ways.
 - Her words are kind.
 - Her works are admirable.
 - Her dress is tasteful.

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- Her demeanor is delightful.
- Her husband is both pleased and proud.
- She is a NEIGHBOR to the needy.
 - She gives generously.
 - She doesn't ignore the poor; she initiates compassion.
 - She serves sacrificially.
 - In losing her life, she finds it.

Message Summary

In the series "The Cross and Christian Community," we pause our study of 1 Corinthians this Mother's Day to discuss "The Cross and Christian Womanhood." While the world has many twisted views regarding womanhood, manhood, marriage, and sexuality, Scripture urges women to pursue Christ and Christlikeness, and Proverbs 31:10-31 present a picture of a woman who clearly reflects godly wisdom. This passage characterizes a Christlike woman as one who is wise, an overseer in her home, mighty in her work, attractive in all the right ways, and a neighbor to the needy. Throughout Proverbs 31, the woman of godly character is sacrificially loving and serving those around her, embodying the essence of the Christian call – "whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 10:39).

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

Although we have been walking through 1 Corinthians, we pause on Mother's Day to focus on how the cross of Christ uniquely attributes value and honor to women and what it uniquely enables women to do in this world. Explain that we will do the same for men next month on Father's Day. Discuss with your small group why this is important to study what the Bible says about manhood and womanhood.

As you discuss this sermon, consider whether it would be better to discuss as a whole group or, if you lead a co-ed group, to split into two groups based on gender in order to discuss how this text applies to married and single men and women. Depending on their background and prior experiences, women have a variety of responses when reading Proverbs 31. To better understand how the ladies in your group approach this passage, ask them to share about their previous exposure to this passage and what comes to their mind when they hear "Proverbs 31." Ask the men the same question about what comes to mind when they hear about a "Proverbs 31 woman." The women are likely to express feelings of discouragement, defeat, or that they can never measure up to the ideal woman. The single men might admit to either wanting a perfect woman like the noble woman in Proverbs 31, and the married men might wish that their wives acted more like the woman in this passage. Highlight unhealthy responses to this text and why they are harmful. Explain why this passage is meant to be encouraging to women instead of discouraging and discuss what reasonable expectations men should have about their wife or potential wife.

This sermon and passage applies differently to four groups of people: single men, married men, single women, and married women. Knowing the demographic of your group, be sensitive in addressing each of these groups as you study and discuss because it is important for men and women in all stages of life to know what the Bible says regarding biblical womanhood. Point out that Proverbs 31's context involves a son recalling the words of his mother (Prov. 31:1-9), and this chapter concludes by describing a woman of noble character.

Throughout Proverbs, wisdom and folly are personified as women (see Prov. 2:16-19; 3:13-18; 4:5-9; 7:1-27; 9:13-18), and as chapter 31 concludes this entire book on wisdom, it presents principles for a godly, wise

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lifestyle that apply to both men and women. It not only informs men on what type of woman to pursue as a wife, it also captures how we all should live if we are wise. Regarding the structure of Proverbs 31:10-31, it contains eight stanzas (10-12, 13-15, 16-18, 19-21, 22-24, 25-27, 28-29, 30-31), and in Hebrew, it forms an acrostic where each line begins with a succeeding letter in the Hebrew alphabet (in English, the equivalent would be line one starting with an "A," line two starting with a "B," etc.).

Because of the content of Proverbs 31, it provides an opportunity to discuss the foundational truths of a woman's identity, calling, and role. Discuss the difference between the world's understanding of identity, calling, and role and Scripture's understanding of these things. Do the men and the women in the small group align more with the world's understanding or with Scripture's understanding?

- **Identity** – God created men and women in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). Therefore, a woman's identity is found in being an image-bearer of the Almighty, and she reflects Him in ways that are distinct from men. The image of God is displayed through both masculinity and femininity, which is why He created men and women.
- **Calling** – God designed women to be helpers (Gen. 2:18). God created Eve to be a "helpmeet" to Adam, and it is not demeaning for women to be helpers. God created men and women with equal dignity, and He gave them different callings. One calling is not better than the other. While being helpers never changes, how this calling plays out in a woman's life (at work, at home, in ministry, at school, etc.) will change. Being a helper does not necessarily look the same for each woman, for a woman's calling is shaped by her gifts, passions, interests, background, strengths, weaknesses, etc.
- **Role** – A woman's role will shift during each season of her life because roles are temporary. Roles may include being a student, an employee, a wife, a mother, a boss, an athlete, etc. But a woman's role does not determine her identity or her calling. However, it does bring clarity to how a woman lives out her calling.

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to help review the application of God's Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).

- How does the culture twist, cheapen, and pervert womanhood? How has the church also demonstrated confusion regarding womanhood?
- How does the cross of Christ uniquely attribute value, dignity, and responsibility to women?
- In the sermon, women are exhorted to be and become Christlike women. Describe what a Christlike man and a Christlike woman looks like. How do we pursue Christlikeness? Ladies and men, what discourages you from pursuing Christ-likeness? For those who struggle with shame or guilt from past sins, how should you live in light of the knowledge that the mercy of God covers your past? How does God's presence empower your present?
- For married men, what does it mean for you to nurture your wife? What are specific ways in which you can nurture, serve, and love your wife? For the ladies, what are ways in which the men in your life can encourage you in your pursuit of Christ?
- For single men, how does this text apply to you? What type of woman should you be pursuing? Are you diligently praying-even fasting-for a Christlike wife? Why are young men in America currently tempted to prolong adolescence? As you seek a wife, are you seeking what the world tells you to seek after, or are you pursuing what Scripture urges you to seek after in a prospective wife? What does the world tell you to look for? How does this compare and contrast with what Scripture says?
- Proverbs 31:30 says that a woman "who fears the Lord is to be praised." How do we praise women as we promote Christlikeness in women? How do we praise Christlike women without taking away praise from God?

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- How is God using you to promote Christlikeness in those younger than you? How are you investing in the next generation? For the men, how are you spurring on younger men towards Christlikeness? For the women, how are you showing younger women how to live faithfully as a woman of God? Who are you discipling?
- Proverbs 31:10 states that a noble woman is “far more precious than jewels.” Her value cannot be fathomed. Describe the difference between the world’s basis for self-worth and Scripture’s determination of what our value is founded on. What are you tempted to base your value on? How can you faithfully battle that particular temptation?
- Proverbs 31:21, 25 describe a woman who is not anxious about the future. Knowing that this world is full of trouble, how do we face the future and not worry? For those who struggle with fear or anxiety, what does Scripture have to say about fighting these sins? What do these sins express about our view of God and our relationship with Him?
- What does it mean for a woman to be an overseer in the home (see 1 Tim. 5:14; Tit. 2:3-5)? How does this truth fit with the biblical concept of headship and submission (see Eph. 5)? How is a woman a “helper” to her husband? What is a woman’s identity, role, and calling? How does Proverbs 31 and the concept of being an overseer in the home apply to women who are single? For the men, does your understanding of a woman’s identity, calling, and role align with Scripture? How can you better lead and serve the women in your family?
- Proverbs 31:11 describes a husband who trusts his wife with his heart, his household, his good, and his reputation. For wives, how can you grow in supporting your husband? What is one thing you can do this week to help cultivate his trust in you?
- Proverbs 31 describes a woman who prioritizes care for her husband and children. How does this passage relate to stay-at-home moms? To working moms? How is the world undercutting and undervaluing a woman’s role in the home? For those who are mothers, how are you living to make your children your legacy? How are you intentionally making disciples of the children whom God has entrusted to you?
- Discuss the world’s definition of an “attractive” woman. While Proverbs 31 does not mention anything specific about a noble woman’s physical appearance, how does it describe what makes her attractive? For the ladies, do you spend more time on your appearance than you do cultivating your relationship with God? Are you known more for what you look like than for how you live and Who you live for? What does it mean for women to dress tastefully?
- The noble woman in Proverbs 31 serves and gives to the needy. Are you ignoring the poor or serving the needy? How can you initiate opportunities to demonstrate compassion for the “least of these”? How can you arrange your time and plan your budget so that you have more time and money to give to the poor?
- In what areas are you like wise woman in Proverbs 31? In what ways are you unlike her? How can you grow in these particular areas? Would your life be described as wise according to the standard of Proverbs 31? Why or why not? What hinders you from living a life of wisdom in any particular area?