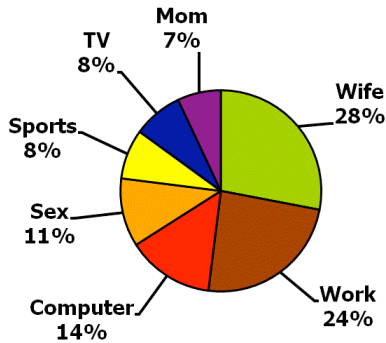


It's my chance to get to speak to the women, but I certainly want the men to listen in. Men, you need to be considering what makes a woman worth dating and marrying. What makes a godly woman? Women, you need to consider that if you want to marry a godly man, what would he find attractive in you?

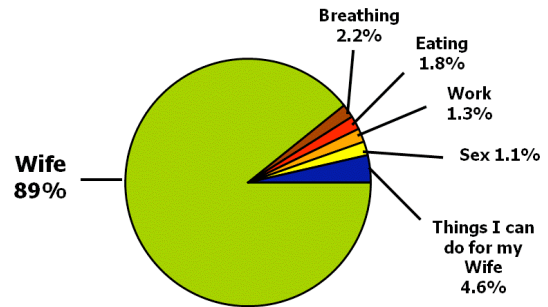
I found a pie chart on the internet that described the thought life of a husband for a normal day<sup>2</sup>. He came up with this as a pretty typical indication:

### Pie Chart of My Daily Thoughts



### Pie Chart of My Daily Thoughts

(Wife Friendly Version)



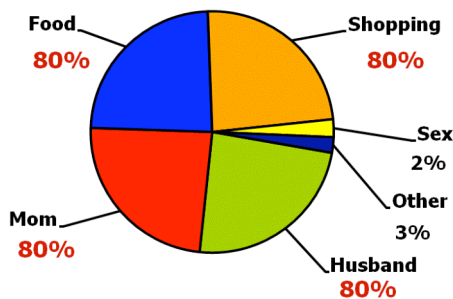
He felt pretty good about that. It seemed accurate and rational. He noted how many times more he spent thinking about his wife by percentage points than so many other things. More than three times than sports. Twice as much as his computer.

Needless to say, she wasn't impressed. So he asked her what she wanted him to think about. The second chart is what she wanted him to think about if she could command his brain.

Finally, he asked her what *she* thought about. So she came up with this as her normal day's thoughts:

### Pie Chart of My Daily Thoughts

(My Wife)



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For this series, I listened to sermons by Tim Keller, Les Newsom, Mark Driscoll, Richard Wise, Buck Rogers and others. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, I now cannot find this on the internet, but I'll bet you can.

This could be why it's complicated to be a woman. Over 320% of capacity of thinking about things. At least for this woman, but is she typical? I hope it's obvious I'm poking fun here and don't actually think this is the way it is.

But I'm afraid you're going to dismiss what I have to say about women because I'm not one. That is very true. But – I married one. And I'm raising two girls, one of whom is 15 now, which is crazy. And – and this is big – I've had twice now women tell me that I know what it's like to have a baby. Last year Cody slammed me in the ribs playing ultimate Frisbee, and I think I cracked a rib. Ian reinjured it when he tackled me on the second to last play of snow football. I hurt it again playing flag football at staff training. Barby Spates told me that a rib injury hurts as much as having a baby. Just last weekend while running, Julie told me the last time she had felt that way was when she was having babies. So there you have it. I know what it's like.

Okay, so that logic is certainly flawed. But you don't have to experience something to know what it's like. Experiential knowledge is good, but it's not the only type of knowledge. I haven't ever nor will I ever have a period or be pregnant. But I have been present for four different pregnancies and seen babies come out of my wife, so I would guess I know more about delivering babies than you do.

All that is to say, I hope you'll listen to me. Not because I know what it's like but because I'm trying to tell you what the Bible says about women.

What do you think our culture's ideal woman is? For some of you it's Malibu Barbie<sup>3</sup>. She's chilling at her house with her car, her pool, her outrageous proportions and some cool outfits to change into. Ken is somewhere. He's around but not the star of the set up. There is a woman named Sarah Burge from England who is called the Real Life Barbie. She's had almost \$500,000 worth of plastic surgery so she can look like Barbie. She's 46 and a mother of three children. On her website she says, "I can sound and be like anything you want me to be." How sad is that?

What about Angelina Jolie? She seems a little more down to earth. She's beautiful, talented, has Brad Pitt on her arm (sometimes) and also is busy around the world adopting children. Someone even painted a picture of her as the Virgin Mary holding her children in her arms.

I doubt you look up to Angelina Jolie or Barbie. I hope you have better feminine role models than those, but I think it is very confusing to be a woman these days. Our culture does not help you. Our church doesn't do much better. What should a woman who loves God look like? Let's look at the Scriptures together to see.

Before we start, let me say from the very beginning that the Bible says the women are co-equal with men. There is not in any way a worth hierarchy. People are created male and female, in God's image. This means that women have equal dignity, status and worth. That men and women *together* are created in the image of God. If we only have one or the other, we are missing out on the fullness of the image of God. So we do not agree with traditionalists or chauvinists or feminists or egalitarians. We are looking for a biblical definition which I think is complementarian in nature. Men and women complement each other. We are different. We are equal. We are not the same.

### ***Beauty***

Let's start with the obvious place. Women are beautiful. Women want to be beautiful, be seen as beautiful, be told they're beautiful and on and on. There is a place in each woman's heart for beauty.

But what is beauty? Fergie is Fergalicious. She sings, "Fergalicious definition Make them boys go loco They want my treasure So they get their pleasures from my photo You can see me, you can't squeeze me I ain't easy, I ain't sleazy I got reasons why I tease 'em Boys just come and go like seasons Fergalicious (So delicious) But I ain't promiscuous And if you was suspicious All that \*\*\*\* is fictitious."

All I know is when you keep saying you're not promiscuous, then I'm not sure I believe you. She's in the gym working on her fitness, but it sounds like Fergie is pretty interested in what the boys think about her. She's using her beauty and looks for power and control. Am I right? She comes off a little bit conceited, but hey, when you got it, flaunt it, right?

There is a powerful beauty culture in our society, and it forces women to squeeze into a certain ideal. I know you say you resist it, but if you watch the sorority girls go out on Thursday night, walking to the Deli, you see a remarkable sameness in their look, their clothes, their Ugg boots, their hair styles. Why is this? What about the rest of you? How many of you don't own a pair of Nike running shorts? These are the "in" thing to have. The purse, the boots, the shorts. It's the look.

But I think each of you know that this is very, very difficult to maintain. If you think about it just for a few minutes, you have to realize that beauty is fading. That you, as college students, look for the most part, better than you ever will in your lives. How can you possibly maintain this height of beauty? I do think women get more beautiful as they get older, but our culture disagrees. Younger, tighter, tanner is the order of the day. Can you keep up? No way.

In that context, hear 1 Peter 3: 3 *Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— 4 but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.*

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<sup>3</sup> From Jean Larroux

Why is Peter saying this? Peter taps into one of the things that haunt women, their looks and bodies. These are two different, yet obviously connected struggles that women have. Whereas men struggle with thinking about sex all the time, it seems to me (and has been confirmed by the women that I've asked) that women struggle with thinking about their bodies all the time. Just as women cannot fathom how men can think of sex every two seconds, men cannot comprehend how women have their bodies in the back of their minds every waking moment. There are legitimate and illegitimate reasons for this of course.<sup>4</sup> Women are more in touch with their bodies (I know a woman who says she can tell when her egg drops each month – I don't even think I know what that means exactly!), and I think Satan uses that good thing and turns it into a very bad thing.

Guys, in general, just don't think about their bodies in this way. Women don't know what to do about it, and many either totally give into the power of the wrong-headed idolatry or they reject that the body has anything to say at all. It is a multi-faceted thing, so let's consider it for a minute.

In our society, and in every society, there is a feminine ideal. Naomi Wolf calls this the Beauty Myth in a book by that title. Much of my thought on this has been shaped by the book, *Eve's Revenge*, written by Lilian Calles Barger, which I highly recommend.

The images on the covers of fashion magazines start with an average model who is five feet eleven inches and weighs 117 pounds. With these measurements, she represents only 2 percent of American women. Even these women have been changed and nipped and tucked and augmented. I remember hearing that even Julia Roberts had a body double whenever she had to do nude scenes. These images aren't real women, but they have the power to pound real women into thinking that it is real, it is beauty and it is attainable. Men buy into this equally.

The idealized female images projected by media dovetail with the fact that men have not changed much; they still respond to "beautiful women." A survey of two hundred college women found that no matter how these women felt about themselves, their dating activity was directly related to how men saw them. According to the researchers, if you are perceived as unattractive [according to the female ideal] and overweight, men may have little to do with you when it comes to dating. But haven't women known this all along? Author Dorothy Parker says she had never seen a man forsake a beautiful woman to flock around a brilliant one. Nor a successful one, I would add. I've known plenty of brilliant and fascinating women of all ages with no man in sight. But rarely have I seen a knockout waiting to dance. One woman commented to me, 'Inner beauty never gets you picked up at a party.' Thank goodness for the older women who consoled me as a teen with the words, 'There is somebody for everybody' while my prettier cousin attracted all the boyfriends.

The commodification of beauty has become the currency of the relationship market, and men expect women to attempt to meet the standard. Through participation in the beauty cult we hope to acquire not only self-actualization but also love... Sexually liberated, we seize the opportunities to use physical attraction to get the power we still lack. Through consumption of the beauty culture, any daring woman can now attempt to play the part of a man-eating vixen. The problem is that in the end a flesh-and-blood woman cannot compete with the fantasy of the feminine ideal. We always fall short with the messiness of our bodies."<sup>5</sup>

The symbol for this right now is the breast. It's all about the breasts. Just look at the magazines and the clothes that are now in the mainstream. "Historically, the breast as a symbol of femininity has been a frequent site of attention. Based on constantly changing fashion, what's vogue has moved from the flat-chested flappers of the 1920s to the current buxom Lara Croft. Even as one group of medical doctors extols the healthful benefits of the breast as a source of nurturing for mother and child, another group is ready to put the knife to them. With breast-feeding socially marginalized and robbed of maternal meaning, breasts have become the premier sexual toy that can be purchased. In many areas, augmentation has become a rite of passage into womanhood and a suitable high school graduation gift as small breasts are increasingly considered a deformity."<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, and to get the foothold in even deeper, the culture wields its power in defining beauty with cosmetics and dieting.

The diet industry is \$40-billion a year business. "As media critic Jean Kilborne has pointed out, overcoming food temptation has replaced sexual chastity as the symbol of female virtue. We've been told, 'You can never be too rich or too thin,' and some of us are out to prove it – literally. When was the last time you heard a woman talk about dieting for health reasons rather than looks? As a way to use the language of the body, excessive dieting seems to prove a woman's ability to control an otherwise uncontrollable life and to attain social legitimacy."<sup>7</sup>

"The beauty cult is a \$25 billion-a-year cosmetic industry. It is ready and willing to feed women's insecurity and help us find our 'true' selves. The beauty cult assumes that the body stands in the way of self-actualization and offers means to manipulate it and control its intrusion. In providing prescriptions for our disconnected selves, the beauty cult understands our spiritual need to be who we 'really' are and preys upon that need."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Think about all the things women have to think about. Men looking at them, their breasts, having a period, walking alone at night in the dark, someone knocking on the door, being pregnant, breast feeding, etc. These just aren't guy issues at all.

<sup>5</sup> Calles Barger, *Eve's Revenge*, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Calles Barger, *Eve's Revenge*, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> Calles Barger, *Eve's Revenge*, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Calles Barger, *Eve's Revenge*, p. 15.

It's unbelievable to me what the body dissatisfaction rate is – 60% in high school and 80% in college. 42% of girls in first to third grades express a desire to be thinner. 15% of women would sacrifice more than five years of their life to attain the weight they desire. There are at least 8 million sufferers of anorexia nervosa, bulimia and other associated eating disorders in America (90% of these are women). It seems that the closer you get to the American Dream, the more you will – as collateral damage – struggle with eating disorders.<sup>9</sup>

This hasn't always been the case. Yes, women have always struggled with going to their bodies for their significance and worth, but it's been just that – a struggle. It's not a struggle any more. It's a given.

In her book, *The Body Project*, Joan Jacobs Brumberg exposes this by comparing American girls and women of today with those of the 1800s. In the nineteenth century, as evidenced from their writing in their journals, girls were talking about character and virtues: self-control, charity, love, service to others. In looking at the diaries of modern girls, Brumberg found almost a total obsession with outward appearance. Girls from 200 years ago still cared about how they looked of course, but it wasn't the center of their identities. They sought to cultivate inner character as true beauty. "At a time when women of many classes and races have greater economic, political and social access, the camera that ought to reflect the multiplicity of ways women are women has instead narrowed the concept of beauty and made it more demanding.... There is not only an almost universally prescribed beauty ideal but also a universal belief that any woman can attain it through consumption. By paying the price and buying the right clothes, haircut, hair and skin products, and makeup, girls as young as eleven can be transformed – or so says the myth."<sup>10</sup>

What is going on here? What is happening to women? Beauty has become an idol in our lives, and it is killing women.

The spiritual role of all human desire is to take us beyond the thing pursued and point us to God. Our desires for social acceptance and beauty reflect our spiritual needs to enter into the divine community. The pursuit of something on earth, like beauty and relationships, can awaken a desire for God because the object pursued can never be fully possessed... [this lack of contentment] is because of a mislocated desire. Nothing in this world can be fully apprehended; the lack always remains, for the nature of things on earth is to awaken our desire for something more, ultimately God. Only when we recognize this ever-present lack in ourselves and in the world will be able to live in freedom from cravings and yearnings. By listening to the lack that is evident in the world, in ourselves and revealed in our desires, we will be propelled toward true fulfillment."<sup>11</sup>

Beauty as an unachievable ideal – it's an idol. Idols provide meaning for us as they make us worship them. "They give us clarity. They tell us how to live and who we are. The claim they have on us is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to escape, and we are driven to serve them. The alternative is to be excluded, and that is to find ourselves socially adrift. What the idol promises in exchange for our devotion is an illusion of power over our life, illusory agency to become what we wish, and a fraudulent identity from which to speak.... Under the idol, all the practices in which we engage our bodies, such as the use of cosmetics, dieting, exercise, and cosmetic surgery, become spiritual service. In such a spiritual role, the body is the place of redemption. It is the altar on which we atone for failing to meet the expectations of the idols of the beauty or of the world. We have a deep desire to be acceptable, to pay for our shortcomings in ways that affect many areas of our lives beyond the realm of the feminine ideal."<sup>12</sup>

Isn't this supposed to be the age of women's enlightenment? Yes, there have always been problems in the world. But in an age where women have more rights, more freedom, more money, more stuff, more access, more, more, more – what else do they have? More divorce. More suicide. More crime. More diseases. More eating disorders. More killing babies. More pursuit of things that will never be attained. More death. More. Is it worth it? Are people happier?

Wow. That paints a pretty grim picture. Again, it is my job to alarm you. I hope you're alarmed.

If you play that game you will lose. So stop. Get off the mouse wheel.

That doesn't mean you need to start to look as dowdy and plain as possible, which is what many of you think I'm saying. No. I'm not saying that. I think you need to find attractive clothing and makeup that is fitting with who you are and what your style is. You don't need to stop being women. You should look good. You should take care of yourself. You should present yourself as God has made you. But that doesn't mean I need to see your cleavage or your crack. Those are for your husband. Your "lady humps" don't need hiding but they also don't need flaunting.<sup>13</sup> Dress in a way that shows you are confident in Christ, not in your own outward beauty.

Peter talks about this in 1 Peter 3: 3 *Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— 4 but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.*

Peter tells wives specifically but women in general that they shouldn't worry so much about external beauty like jewelry or clothes or your cute haircut, but instead there is an internal beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. God cares about the heart. Sure, he also cares about the body because our body and souls are connected with each other. But do you care about your heart or are you mostly caring about your body? If you read women's magazines, are they helping you understand how to be a

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<sup>9</sup> Tim Keller, from his sermon *The Temptation of Beauty*

<sup>10</sup> Calles Barger, *Eve's Revenge*, p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Calles Barger, *Eve's Revenge*, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> Calles Barger, *Eve's Revenge*, p. 49.

<sup>13</sup> A reference to a Black Eyed Peas song

quieter, gentler woman? I think not. Are the ads you see every day, the television shows and movies you watch, are they confirming in you the image of a strong, loving, submissive wife? No.

So your culture around you is against God's word and will for you. So are the men around you. They communicate they are checking out your body first and foremost, and then they'll go from there. That is so harmful. So what can you do?

Care about your spirit. Care about your heart. Resist this pull into the beauty culture. Resist this objectification of your body and other women's bodies. Be beautiful and work on your heart. I am not suggesting that you start to be the modesty police for each other. I am wanting you to think about this issue and its ramifications on your heart and also the heart of the men around you. I'm not asking you to start a crusade against this terrible body tragedy, but that you would start to care for and have a heart for women who have been and continue to be trapped on either side of this huge problem. And that you would start to find freedom from this idolatry and bondage.

Proverbs 11:22 says, "*Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion.*" You reach into to find something beautiful, something shiny and flashy and sexy and cool that you want to have. But you find out it has a nasty, slimy, smelly pig attached to it, and that pig will not come out or come off. They are together for good. Do you still want the ring? So many of us are still reaching for that ring. We want the beauty and are willing to deal with the pig. We get surprised that the pig is still there.

But you are only caring about the beauty and not the depth of your person. You are trying to ignore the pig and the slime. God says that you need to care for yourself and your soul more than your body. That you men are to look at women with character and hearts for God instead of how big their boobs are, how pretty their faces are, how slender their hips are. That is foolishness! That will not make you happy. It will not make them happy. Men, I want you to pray about and care about women's character before God. Does she love Jesus? Does she love the church? Does she care for people? Does she fear God?

God has made women incredibly beautiful and mysterious. But our sin perverts that beauty and turns it into a power play, into a weapon and into a goal that can never, ever be achieved. Prov 9:13 says, *The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing.*

How can we be gentle, quiet and precious in God's sight? What would that even mean?

### ***Worth and Competency***

So if you are to be women who get off the beauty cult train, what would it look like to be different? So you're not interested in the apple bottom jeans with the boots with the fur or the Reeboks with the straps?<sup>14</sup> What now? I think we often think that a gentle, quiet woman is a wimp, is a doormat, is someone or something that can't do anything except clean house and make and raise babies. That again is a perversion of worth and competency.

As I said before, women are created in God's image. If you go back to Genesis 2, you see God making man and woman. In fact, the very last thing God made is a woman, which doesn't mean it was the least important, but that it was the most important, the culmination of his creation, the pinnacle and highpoint of what he had made to give him glory.

I think we all know that women are amazing. I think they are more amazing and interesting than men. Sure, most men are faster and stronger than women because that's how God has made them. But the strength and pain of delivering a child is something to behold, and will make you stand in awe at the bravery and courage of a woman. Women just seem to be able to do most everything.

Proverbs 31 gives us this view of the competent woman of strength, dignity and worth. In some ways she is a composite picture of women taken as a whole. In other ways, she is just a really incredible woman.

*10 An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. 11 The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. 12 She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. 13 She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. 14 She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar. 15 She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens. 16 She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. 17 She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong. 18 She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. 19 She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. 20 She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. 21 She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet. 22 She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple. 23 Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. 24 She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant. 25 Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. 26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. 27 She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. 28 Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: 29 "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all." 30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. 31 Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.*

Verse 10 – this sets the stage for us. We're not just talking about women here, but about a wife. Becoming a wife is an awesome thing in life. Being a wife doesn't make you a woman by any means. So we're looking at what this says about being a

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<sup>14</sup> A reference to Low Low Low, which is a catchy dance song about a stripper.

woman even though specifically it is about a wife. But ladies, please, please keep in mind that being a wife and a mother are wonderful, great blessings in your life. They are huge and high callings.

Verse 11 She is trusted by her husband. This means she is trustworthy (wow, brilliant analysis I know). She doesn't blow all his money. She has the checkbook and credit card and she creates worth in her home. She has grown up and doesn't think her husband's job is just to make money so she can spend it. In verse 12, she is working together with him for their good. They're a team. Julie and I are Team Serven. You become a team when you get married. Team Fenrick. Team Greer. Team Bearer. Team Royle. You stop competing against each other but bring each other good and blessing in your lives. This teamwork is financial, social, spiritual and sexual. It's a joining together of your heart. Are you going to be trusted by your husband? Can you keep a budget now? Do you know how to manage a house well? Or are you still a little girl who cries if she doesn't get a pony?

Verses 14-18 show she is a hard worker. This woman is a business manager. She has foresight. She gets up early to work hard. She manages other people. She's not sitting around watching *Desperate Housewives* and Oprah reruns on the WB. She's out doing stuff. She considers a field and buys it. She knows the price of things, and she makes wise decisions for her house.

Verses 28-30 - I think she has advanced her career when it was the thing to do. She seems incredibly competent, but it doesn't sound like she's doing these things because she has to. I can be reading into the text, but I think she is a wife and mother first, but her interests and her occupation are still important to her.

My wife gave up a lot for a long time when she married me. She worked for a company for awhile before we were married. She made money, wore business suits, got up early, worked well, stayed late, managed accounts and was responsible for a lot of things. She got pregnant pretty fast and then Ruth was born 3 months premature and she had to quit. Julie had made a commitment that she wanted to raise the kids and not put them in daycare so she could work. I don't think most women realize how un cost effective it is to do put your kids in daycare. And how so many of our children are being raised by people who don't know them and don't love them? Please consider making a commitment now to do whatever you can to raise your children when they are young. Marry a man who will allow you to do that.

Verse 19 – She cares about the poor. So this hard-working woman also has a heart. She has compassion on others. She isn't so consumed with her time and her work and her family that she doesn't look around, notice and do something about people in need. Are you involved with service and help? Are you giving your time and money to those around you in need? Develop a heart of love for others.

Verses 23 and 28 – her husband loves and respects her. He is a leader in the community, and he praises her in public, saying, “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.” Wouldn't that be an awesome thing for your husband to say about you to others? This is a marriage where they are truly blessing each other in love and faithfulness. And her children praise her as well. Her children rise up and call her blessed. She's not absent. She's busy, but she's present. She's competent, but she's tender and loving. She has a lot to say and do, but her family is not neglected.

This can be so tough to pull off. Many women try to do it all – they want to look perfect, be a perfect mom, have a perfect career, wear the perfect clothes, have the perfect house. They wear themselves out with this. It's so tempting.

But I think this woman isn't like this. She's not sitting around doing nothing. Honestly, I don't think any of you will be tempted to do that. But I don't think she tries to do it all. It sounds like it from this text, doesn't it? This woman is an overachiever or else she starts to push our overachiever buttons. And yes, she does do a lot, an awful lot. But look at verse 30 – *Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.*

That makes all the difference. She fears the Lord. Fearing the Lord is knowing who God is, walking with God and living according to God's will and his word. It means that she sees and admits the idols in her life and gets rid of them in order to walk with Jesus. She's reading the word. She's in the church and in Bible study. She is open with her life. She is thinking about the beauty idols and the career idols and the family idols in our society and in her own heart. And she's giving those up for God.

She praises God with her life. Her life may be prominent or it may be simple and quiet, but it is directed toward loving Jesus, loving and discipling her family, making the world around her better and helping people.

That's an awesome thing. This vision is so much deeper and more profound than every man looking at you getting low, low, low in the club. This is a vision of real womanhood. Equal. Complementing. Working together. Valued. Blessed.

### **Roles**

Let me say just a few things about roles then. The Bible says there are roles in marriage and in the church. 1 Peter 3 comes in the context of submission of all people to authorities, both in government and in work. We are all also to submit to our elders in church, both men and women are to do that. Furthermore, the Ephesians 5 passage about marriage starts with “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Husbands and wives are to submit to each other.

But we would be neglecting the word if we didn't mention the Bible says wives are to submit to their husbands. This often has been misused and women have been mistreated and certainly feel mistreated. We stand against that, and for women. This has been wrong. This mistreatment is not what we're talking about.

This is for wives to their husbands. It's not for all women to all men.

This does not mean husbands can boss their wives around. You are not to follow your husband if he were to lead you to sin against God.

Basically it means that we work together in our roles as husband and wife, and we don't chafe against those roles. Most of the time these are natural things for us if we are living with Christ and seeking to serve each other. The reason we don't do this well is because of sin. Men shrink away and women seek to dominate, control and manipulate their husbands. This traces back to Genesis 3 and the curse upon Eve from women. We read there that "your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you." That, and the pain of childbirth thing, which is certainly a bummer. Men have the curse of a much harder work life, and women have the curse of relationships going all bad because of their hearts. Women want to usurp this order and take over for their incompetent husbands and the slacker men around them. This isn't crazy. It makes sense. But it's wrong, and it will hurt your marriage and your life.

I can't tell you why God has it this way, but I do know that it is for our good and your good if you would stop fighting these roles and rest instead in them. Be glad God has made you a woman. Figure out what that means. Rejoice in your ability to grow humans inside of you and feed them with milk produced from your own body – that is truly, truly and amazing thing and will be so incredible when and if God were to bless you in that way. God has made you as a helper, which means you have knowledge, skill, strength and insight that your husband in particular and men in general must have. Don't lose your voice. Speak up. Speak well.

Help men to lead by letting them. That doesn't mean you stop leading out in your areas, but help and encourage them to lead.

John Piper says this: "What then is submission? It is the disposition to follow a husband's authority and an inclination to yield to his leadership. It is an attitude that says, 'I delight for you to take the initiative in our family. I am glad when you take responsibility for things and lead with love. I don't flourish when you are passive, and I have to make sure the family works.' But the attitude of Christian submission also says, 'It grieves me when you venture into sinful acts and want to take me with you. You know I can't do that. I have no desire to resist you. On the contrary, I flourish most when I can respond creatively and joyfully to your lead; but I can't follow you into sin, as much as I love to honor your leadership in our marriage.'<sup>15</sup>

Are you open to that? Willing to follow a man who is following Christ? If you are taking these verses seriously, you need to find someone whom you are willing to follow like that. Someone who leads well that you can respect.

That sort of attitude flows out of a love for Christ and a resting in Him. You display that by a willingness to follow, to learn, to lead with respect and gentleness. To be known.

In that freedom then, you are able to flourish. Your outward achievements flow out of your inner beauty instead of idolatry. You develop and use your gifts for others and not for yourself. You're not helpless by any means – you help others. You're a hardworker, diligent, prepared for the future, dressed nicely, hospitable, have great kids, bring your husband respect. You display the characteristics of a Proverbs 31 woman because you love Jesus with all you have.

You have a husband who hears people say without any kind of reservation "You have an awesome wife!"

"His concern is that the church not be known for its production of rebellious wives who have an attitude of superiority, but of women who, because they know God will reward them and set everything right, demonstrate the virtue of gentle submission where Christianity is possible. The OT "cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) is cheering them on."<sup>16</sup>

You have all the Christian women in the Bible to cheer you to pursue this sort of gentle spirit. And you're going to need them, because the voices in our society don't help much. You're going to need a Christian community, one that is authentic in talking about what it means to really be a Christian woman. You have to have this community to repair and restore the vision that has been marred by sin, experience and repeated images beaten into your psyche.

Hear Lilian Calles Barger: "In community, across cultures, and through language, we create alternate diverse narratives by which to live. We define the world for each other. We name and give meaning to our experiences. Together we create stories by which we understand our lives, and we pass on the stories to subsequent generations. But in our assignment of meaning, we want more than an explanation of why things are the way they are. We want a narrative that embraces the life we live in the body – the mundanity of vulnerable flesh. For the followers of Jesus, the biblical narrative is a sacred text that defines the world, corresponding to what is true and real about the Creator ourselves. This sacred text, the eternal Word, has become fully embodied in Jesus and is made flesh in us by faith. The only way for us to escape the world's oppressive paradigm is for God's self-revelation to become embodied in our everyday life. I believe the crux of the postmodern search for meaning is the need for the Word to be made flesh. It is the only way to escape the cultural dictates and to live a new story."<sup>17</sup>

### ***What now?***

Let me end with three images among the many possibilities I could use.

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<sup>15</sup> Piper, same as above.

<sup>16</sup> Davids, p. 120.

<sup>17</sup> Calles Barger, *Eve's Revenge*.

The first is Sarah. 1 Peter 3 uses Sarah as someone for you to look to. *5 For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.*

When I first read this, I'm pretty bummed out that Peter uses this example. I would think the Proverbs 31 woman would be a better choice, or maybe Jesus' mother Mary or the other Mary sitting at Jesus' feet. Or some of the better women in the Old Testament though I can't think of many who fit the bill.

But Sarah? Sarah seemed like a pretty good old lady. She did try to pass off her husband as her relative so they wouldn't get in trouble. She also did suggest her husband have a baby with another woman so they could claim it as theirs. She did seem pretty mean to Ishmael when he got sent away.

So what is up with her? Do I really want my daughter Ruth to have Sarah as a role model?

Well, that's just it. The Bible's role models are still flawed people who need grace and grasp it. They aren't perfect people at all, at all. The Proverbs 31 woman seems to be rather impossible to attain, and that's because she doesn't have a face or a name. Who is she? She's probably a composite not a real person. But Sarah, she's real. She beautiful and an idiot. She's gracious, and she also laughs at God. She is trapped by the ideals of her culture and childbearing and worth, and her own heart is longing for things she just can't make on her own. Her worth is tied to something that she cannot achieve.

But God breaks through for her. Her mocking laugh at God chances to a wonderful cry and claim of grace and graciousness as God does the impossible in her life. She is transformed into something else and someone else by the touch of God into her very person, her womanhood, her identity and everything about her.

Hebrews tells us: *By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.* Wow. That is awesome. Sarah, in her weakness, believing the promise of God, is accounted for in a chapter in the Bible all about heroes of the faith. Not because she did everything right. Not because of her GPA, her figure, her awards, her sorority, her achievements. She didn't ever really "make it." But she believed and the spectacular happened.

The second image I want to hold up to you is the bride of Christ, the church. We are all, women and men, called the bride of Christ. There are images in the Bible that seem difficult for women to access. We often read and sing about being called the sons of God, for example. That really doesn't seem as hard to translate. Being a son and being a daughter are not the same, but their differences are understood and not stretched too far. Being a child of God is important.

But there are feminine metaphors that stretch the men. The biggest one (maybe the only one?) is being called the bride of Christ. We are all in this metaphor, but I think women you should especially get this, and even more especially after you are married. At each wedding you go to, try not to only think about who you're going to marry in the future (which I would imagine would be difficult to stop thinking about), but also how someday in the future you are going to walk down the aisle with Jesus. We all are, but you should get that in a way better than I will.

The doors of time are going to open and Jesus himself will be standing there in the front waiting for us. He has done everything for us, provided this feast, this party. He sought us out to marry him. He dated and courted us despite our weaknesses and infidelities. He has proven faithful while we have been faithless. We have often tried to wrest authority from him, to manipulate and control him, to use our bodies, minds, hearts and thoughts to harm instead of help him. Yet he still wants us. In fact he doesn't just stand there reluctantly or in a disappointed, mad way. He stands there in love. His eyes are teared up because he sees us as beautiful. We are not worthy to be joined to him. We're not worthy to wear a white dress. But Jesus in fact comes to us and walks us up to the front himself and is ready, willing and even anxious to join his life to us forever.

That is a vision for you. Women, you should understand that better than I can. I think I can talk about it and understand it. I can in a way different than most men since I get to stand up there and watch that happen again and again when I marry people in weddings. But I don't know what it's like to be a bride. I don't know what it's like to join a husband in that way, in a way that Jesus talks about.

The third image is Jesus himself<sup>18</sup>. Realize that he wasn't accounted as beautiful on the outside. Isaiah tells us that he was plain, even ugly. Yet of course we know that God loved him. That he walked in perfect righteousness with power and truth. It wasn't his outward looks that made him loved and accepted by God. It was his relationship and status.

This is a powerful reminder and vision that we are loved because of Jesus. We aren't trying to gain God's love by how we look or even by what we do. Not even a beautiful character gets us loved. We are loved in Jesus, the one who gives us his beauty and takes our brokenness, our ugliness onto himself.

Really we're talking about the gospel here. We're saying that you as a woman have a privilege of walking with Jesus in a way that taps into understanding and depth of insight that I need to have and you need to help me with. There are things that are unique to you, and ways you fall into sin that are different than men. We need each other in community, and we need to hold up a vision for a strong, smart, loving, gentle, competent woman in our midst. Women, we need you to do this, to stop fooling around with being girls and grow up to be godly women of God. To call the men to be the men of God he wants them to be and we need them to be.

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<sup>18</sup> Keller expands on this for a long time in his sermon, *The Temptation of Beauty*.

All of this is in Jesus. Jesus makes this by his love and sacrifice. Life in Christ settles our hearts to be who and what God wants us to be.

What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

What is the chief end of women? The chief end of women is to glorify God and enjoy him forever!