

[KURT] If I asked you to consider what the dynamics were of an Ancient Near East family at the time of Solomon, what would you come up with? My guess is, for many of you, you imagined a domineering husband and father, a subservient wife who was considered property and whose biggest contribution was birthing children, and kids who amounted to free labor. And for a lot of the prevailing culture, that would have been true.

What I bet most of us didn't consider, though, is that a family in that day would be a place of love, of advocacy, of equality and complement, and of deep devotion. But that's exactly what God had in mind since he created the family at the beginning of time, and that's the ideal of the family expressed in the book of Proverbs. It is there where you'll find a people for each other, committed to guarding one another's heart and building one another up so that everyone could flourish in their lives. It was an ideal far from the prevailing culture then, and one that continues to stand apart today.

Many in our youngest generation of adults are either waiting later to get married or are wondering if there's really any point to it. We're so busy that moms and dads are event coordinators and our children are being educated by YouTube. And I know far too many married followers of Jesus who look at their spouse and struggle to find a reason to hang in there. So many of us are missing out on the tremendous blessing and benefit of what God intended when he created the family.

And that's what we're going to talk about today, but we're going to do things a little differently. Joining me on the platform this morning is a wonderful wife, an incredible mother, and one of the wisest people I know...which is most clearly evidenced by her incredible taste in men...my wife, Martha Pressler. In nineteen years of marriage and the raising of three boys, we've done a lot of things right and a lot of things wrong. Together, we want to reflect on what Proverbs has to say about family and share some of our observations and experiences in living that out.

As we prepared to discuss what Proverbs has to say about the family God had in mind, a common theme, a necessary and foundational posture, kept coming up over and over again. It was the posture of humility.

[Proverbs 11:2] ² When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.

If we have any shot at living out the vision God gives for families, humility must be front and center. Pride makes it all about me, humility allows me to make it about them. It eliminates entitlement and self-interest and enables us to live out God's wisdom in our families.

[MARTHA]- Posture of humility is the only way wisdom can be received. God has set up families and relationships within as safe places to hear wisdom for growth. If you don't have the posture to be open to listening, open to hearing about some of your blind spots, you won't get the benefit of the wisdom offered in the family.

Ladies, Proverbs gives us one verse that vividly illustrates the impact we can have in our family by choosing to live wisely or choosing to live foolishly.

[Proverbs 14:1-NIV] The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down.

Decorating a home vs. Storm from a few weeks ago

The presence of the woman is not neutral. You have power. You will have a significant effect, but we can choose whether it's positive or negative. As wives, the stakes are high, the very heart of our husbands. When describing the wise woman in Prov 31, it says in verse 11 & 12,

[Proverbs 31:11-12-ESV] The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.

When Kurt performs a wedding, he makes the statement to the bride that no one will hold more influence over her husband's heart than she will. And it's true. As wives we have so much power over our husband, and we can help answer the question so many of them are asking: "Do I have what it takes?" **WE HAVE THE POWER TO BUILD UP.** If you told your husband "I believe in you", think of the weight of that statement! From the person who knows you most intimately! **We have the capacity to be our husband's greatest cheerleader and build him up to take on the world.**

BUT WE CAN ALSO TEAR DOWN.

[Prov 21:19 - NIV] Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife.

Hear the words? Think of living in a desert. You're exposed to the elements, tired, thirsty, cut off and alone. This is the comparison of living with an angry, quarreling wife. **A barrage of quarrelsome words hits your husband like a constant drip...it ultimately begins to erode, to chip away, at his spirit. We have the capacity to encourage him to take on the world, but we also have the capacity to leave him defeated before he ever leaves the house in the morning. I have met a lot of couples where the wife is verbally pecking at her husband, and the husband little by little starts checking out of the marriage. The more he checks out, the stronger she comes on with her verbal attack, and it starts a cycle that really takes a marriage into a ditch. And, for a while, we were in a negative cycle much the same way.**

Early in our marriage I learned this the hard way. I would be sarcastic, biting, taking shots at Kurt, and often times in front of other people. He would get angry, and it would start an entire cycle of crazy in our marriage. Me- being sarcastic and ugly, Kurt being angry. And ultimately, I saw that the thing I really wanted with Kurt, to be close friends, advocates for each other, was eroding. He was hurting, and I was the one who had caused it. And the Lord let me see how I was using unkind sarcasm, and a disrespectful tone, to injure Kurt. I had to repent, humble myself, and ask for forgiveness, and ultimately change the behavior.

[KURT] Ladies, I can't stress enough how true this is. Your husband listens to you. He is vulnerable to what you think about him, even if he pretends to not be. When Martha would take shots at me, it tore me down. I started to doubt she was for me and thought much of me. But, as we worked this out, she realized the impact she could have on me and has, since then, become my number one advocate. I have had seasons of great discouragement where I doubted myself.

But she was a soft and reassuring place to land, reminding me who I am in Jesus and telling me she believed in me. This kept me going. You can have that same impact on your husband.

[KURT] Gentlemen, we too have the ability to build up or tear down: In my years working with couples, there is a question I have heard almost every wife I've ever met ask in one way or another, and it's this: **Do I matter?** Men, I believe God has placed us in our wives' lives to help answer that question, and there is a way for us to do it publicly, and a way to do it privately. You may have heard of the Proverbs 31 woman, but there's also a Proverbs 31 man.

[Proverbs 31:28-29] 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.”**

One of the greatest ways for us to answer the question our wives are asking is by recognizing and honoring the impact she is having in your family, to acknowledge how you all benefit from her effort to build us up. When we praise our wife, we are letting her know she is making a difference. We are letting her know she matters. You see the husband saying, “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.” Understand this is not a competition, not “my wife is better than your wife”. It's a sentiment that expresses “Of all the wives in the world, you're the one I want for me and for our family. You are the one God gave to us, and we are so grateful to have you.”

And don't miss that, as the husband is praising his wife, the children are praising their mother. Our attitude towards our wife is contagious. We can set a tone of gratitude and adoration, or we can go another way. I have seen husbands be unkind to their wives, communicating she doesn't matter, and the kids follow suit. We tear down instead of building up and can fail to answer that question for our wives. We also poorly teach our sons how to treat their future wives and our daughters how they should be treated by their future husbands.

If you want to see your wife come to life, praise her often for the impact she is having on your family. This has proven to be especially significant in our marriage.

[MARTHA] Yes, I'm by nature a task accomplisher and a doer. But I can get so wrapped up in doing- laundry, food prep, taking care of the kids, I get driven by a to do list rather than the heart of the thing, which is building up the people in my home, and loving them well. If you read through Prov 31, Kurt was reading about the husband in that section of scripture, but it's really about the godly wife and what she looks like. And I relate to her because she's busy! She's taking care of her household, making sure people have clean clothes and she's working, buying property and selling goods she's made. I can relate to that woman. But I have to be careful that in my busy-ness I'm not losing the heart of the matter. And Kurt's right, it's so important that a husband is acknowledging the way his wife contributes to the home. Even in small things- Kurt is a student of me, he really knows me and how I'm wired, and he honors those things. And the other thing about him is that he is a really great gift giver. Gifts is one of his primary love languages, and they're really meaningful to him. I am a terrible gift giver and I get horribly insecure whenever I have to give him a gift. But over the course of 20 years, he has given me flowers, perfume, and jewelry, really sweet and beautiful gifts. But a couple of years ago Kurt was so thoughtful, and gave me my favorite gift that he's ever given me. **[SLIDE: BLUE POT]**

It's a blue Dutch oven, goes from stove to oven, and it's perfect for braising meats and making delicious stews in the winter! I love that pot. And some wives wouldn't appreciate that kind of gift, but it's perfect for me, b/c Kurt knows me, validates me, and encourages me in the things I do to build up our family. This year he gave me a mixer.

[KURT] So that's how we answer the question publicly. We can also answer her question privately. Now, it's Family Sunday, and this passage is "delicate", so I encourage you to read it in its entirety this week. I want to point out a few ways we answer that question affirmatively.

[Proverbs 5:15-19] ¹⁵ Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. ¹⁶ Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? ¹⁷ Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. ¹⁸ Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, ¹⁹ a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her...fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.

If the answer to our wife's question is that she is our priority and is a source of blessing and joy, and that you delight in her physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. A wife who knows she fulfills and satisfies you is a wife who knows she matters.

This passage is an exhortation towards fidelity and exclusivity. When we talk about being unfaithful, our mind may go to something specific pretty quickly. But understand, there are a lot of ways we can make our wives feel second: lack of presence, our jobs can become mistresses, we can prioritize relationships with others over her, etc. If she feels like she has to compete for your devotion with anything or anyone else other than God, we will begin to communicate that she doesn't matter as much as those other things. I think the most painful thing I do to Martha is to be present but not be present; there physically, but far away mentally.

So you know what Solomon says? Be intoxicated by your wife. The Hebrew word means "to be led astray". We are to be under her irresistible influence, and when we are, we tell her "I choose you again today. You are the one I want."

[MARTHA] Martha- body image story, work God did in healing me through our marriage

[MARTHA] As we are united and for one another as a couple, that translates to how we parent. Our kids see how we are for each other and believe we are for them. It sets the tone of our entire home and makes them receptive to our guidance.

[Proverbs 3:11-12, 23:25-26] ¹¹ My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, ¹² for the LORD reproveth him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights....²⁵ Let your father and mother be glad; let her who bore you rejoice. ²⁶ My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe (delight) my ways.

We are primary teachers in our kids' lives. God has given us to them to teach them about Him, about right and wrong, about how to live, and to correct them when they cross a boundary. This is not a static and stoic transfer of information and application of consequences. Anyone can do that. This is an outflow of an intimate relationship between parents and their children, a back-

and-forth that is characterized by delight, gladness, and rejoicing. And it's a team effort. But for that to happen in the way God intended, we again see someone's heart must be guarded.

Solomon asks his son to give him his heart. He's saying, "trust me, follow me, let me have an impact in your life." God never intended us to be domineering and dominating parents but to instruct and discipline with the same love God instructs and disciplines us with. When our children know that is how we are approaching them, they will usually respond in kind.

I know when my kids are willing to give me their heart and delight in my ways, and I also know when they are not. One of them gets quiet, another matches my expressions, whether through volume, animated speech, anger, or grunting, and another through an abundance of words or tears...or both. When this happens, I know I have violated something in them and made it difficult for them to respond well. They may still follow my ways, but it isn't because they've given me their heart and delight in my instruction. They do it because dad said so.

I've taught my boys a lot through instruction and modeling the right thing to do. But I also believe I've taught them almost as much in all the things I've done wrong and had to apologize for. And I hate that that's true. But I ultimately tell you this, men, because you may need a nudge, encouragement, or permission to do something that has been a long time coming. Perhaps the most loving thing you can do today for your family, the most humble action you can take today or this week or this month, is to apologize. It's not earn more money. It's not get nicer stuff. It's that you go to them and say "I'm sorry. I've done wrong and I've hurt you, and I want to do better." Reconciling with your family, apologizing to your kids, models wise and humble behavior and begins to make it safer for your kids to give you their hearts, and more likely they will receive the instruction God has called you to pass on.

[MARTHA] And kids...we have kids in this room, there's something for you to learn in this passage. When your parents put limitations, it's because they love you and are for you. So you would do well to trust their experience and wisdom.

[KURT] There is so much more to say, but I pray you are encouraged this morning by what your family can be. And I encourage you to look around if you are struggling, because we have lots of examples of this in our church. We want to close this morning with a story of something Martha observed last week that is a beautiful picture of what God is calling us to in Proverbs.

[MARTHA] It never stops, I saw a multi-generational example of this last week in our church. I was talking to a friend of mine who has kids of her own and her dad came up to her with a word of encouragement to keep going as she raises her kids during a tough age and time. She was open to his input because she knew he was for her and her family. It was a beautiful picture of what Proverbs calls us to. We keep encouraging our children, and grandchildren, until the Lord takes us home.