

A Heart for Home

Biblical Womanhood, Part 3

In the beginning, God created woman as a helper, a supporter and an aide (Gen 2:18,22). Though our culture would scoff at such a role in society, there is truly great honor in it. Within our God-given position as helpers is the innate ability to influence. Where is the primary place the Bible calls us to have influence? The home.

Now, if you just rolled your eyes or felt a twinge of fear or anger at the thought of women being called to the home, listen up. Do not let your culture be the primary informer of your worldview. In our age of career-rules-all, urging women to give their best efforts toward the success of the home seems insulting. *"Isn't that like asking women to play second string? To be the understudy? A benchwarmer? To let men do all the **really** important things, while we clean up their messes and do their laundry and raise their kids?"*

Maybe that's how you think of managing a home... something you do when you've got nothing better to do. Even those who agree that women should be the primary keepers of the home often have an attitude expressing the opposite. We'd much rather be doing vocational ministry, writing a blog, or [fill-in-the-blank] than the menial, every day humdrum of home life.

But do not fall for the lie that the home is unimportant. The home is the fundamental establishment of any society. Like the rudder of a ship, the condition of the homes will steer the direction of the nation. The home is where future world leaders are molded, where brilliant minds are nurtured, where world views are established. Any investment made in the home has ripple effects that last for generations. So when we talk of a woman overseeing the home, this is not to lessen her importance, but to elevate it. God has given us influence over the most important establishment in all of society.

WHERE IS IT IN THE BIBLE?

Let's look at a few key passages of scripture on this topic. And instead of doing the work for you to unpack these passages, I'm asking you to take just a minute to pull out your Bible (or your Bible app) and read the passage yourself and answer the questions.

Take some time to read **Titus 2:3-5** and answer the following question:

- Of the 6 things older women are to teach younger women, how many are related to family/home life?
- What does this communicate to us about our priorities?

Read **Proverbs 31:10-31** and answer the following questions:

- Who are the main beneficiaries of this woman's efforts? (v. 11, 12, 15, 21, 23, 27)
- Does this woman do things outside of her home? (v. 16, 20, 24)
- Read verses 15, 21, 27 again. What do you notice about her intentionality toward those in her home? And what does this imply about her work outside her house?

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Last but not least, let's go back to God's initial design of man and woman for some insight. Read **Genesis 2:7-22**.

- Did God create Adam before or after He made the Garden of Eden?
- Where was Adam created? Inside or outside the Garden?
- Where was Eve created? Inside or outside the Garden?
- What does this imply about men and women?

After studying the passages above, it is evident that God has created women to be uniquely influential within the context of the home. This does not mean she cannot earn an income for her family or devote her time to other ventures, as the Proverbs 31 passage portrays. But regardless of her other commitments, her primary responsibility and area of influence should be oriented toward the home, not away from it.

To drive this point home (no pun intended), consider one last verse from the book of Proverbs:

The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down. Proverbs 14:1

A wise woman is investing in her home. She is putting effort into building it up, strengthening it, and supporting it. Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord, so a woman who fears the Lord will build up her house. This is exactly what we see the wife in Proverbs 31 doing.

FOR ALL WOMEN

Contrary to what many think, this focus on the home is not just for moms of young children. There are no descriptors on which women are in view in these passages (except the wife in Proverbs 31), implying that *all women* are to have a homeward orientation. This includes single women, married with no children women, working women, and empty nesters.

WHAT IS THE GOAL?

Let's take a look at Paul's command to be a "worker at home" in Titus 2:5. This phrase comes from one word in the Greek, *oikourgos*. It is a combination of two Greek words: *oikos* (family, household, home) and *ergon* (work, task, result). The implied meaning is a strategic, focused effort toward the flourishing of the household, namely the people in the home.

The predominant goal here is not just a clean, well-managed home or even how much time you stay at home. You can tear your home down through a negative, critical attitude while also keeping it clean. Likewise, you can ignore the spiritual and emotional needs of your family from home just as easily as if you were working 60 hours a week.

The goal is a **flourishing household**. Flourishing is defined as "growing or developing in a healthy or vigorous way, especially as the result of a particularly favorable environment." It is our responsibility to foster spiritual, emotional, and physical growth in our families. And though, as mentioned above, the physical dwelling itself is not the end goal, it must be considered as a vital part of creating a favorable environment. To summarize, being an influencer in the home means **we assume the responsibility to ensure the people in our home are flourishing, physically, emotionally, and spiritually**.

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PROPER MOTIVATION

*Older women are to teach what is good and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, **that the word of God may not be reviled.** Titus 2:4-5*

*A woman **who fears the Lord**, she shall be praised. Prov. 31:30*

Titus 2:5 gives a weighty purpose for training younger women in godliness: namely *so that the Word of God may not be reviled*. Similarly, the defining characteristic of the Proverbs 31 woman is that she *fears the Lord*. A pursuit of Biblical womanhood should be rooted in passion for the glory of God and the reputation of His Word.

Our first sympathies should be with God. We are His daughters and should find our identity in Him alone. A thriving love for God is the only thing strong enough to sustain our wholehearted service as women in His kingdom. If our work at home is ever tied to those who benefit from it (men, husbands, parents, children), we will feel entitled to their affirmation and will be shaken when these roles change (death of a spouse, children leave for college, etc). But if our service is grounded in a relationship with God, changes in roles or unappreciative family members won't throw us off course or disrupt our joy.

This also means pursuing a deeper relationship with God as Father is a non-negotiable. Don't mistakenly disregard the condition of your own heart in an attempt to serve those around you in the name of being a godly woman. Jesus reminded us that it's only by abiding in Him and His love that we bear any fruit. (John 15:1-5) Therefore, a heart that's abiding in Christ should be your primary concern. **Get your heart in order before you get your house in order.** Seek God first and find fullness of joy in Him and you will begin to see your home flourish. (Matt 6:33, Luke 10:38-42, Ps 16:11)

A STRATEGIC INFLUENCE

No two households will have the same needs. What your family needs will depend on many factors including what activities happen in your home and what each person's day to day looks like. This requires careful discernment as you study your family to observe which needs are the most important and which ones can be overlooked at times without much negative impact. This allows you to concentrate your efforts where they will bear the most fruit.

You cannot do everything. Not only that, you may not be able to do everything your neighbor or friend can do. To understand and live within your limits is a very humble thing, acknowledging that we are finite humans. Consider what obedience to God looks like in regards to your current commitments and how much time and energy that takes. Be aware of what you can realistically do to invest in your household and prioritize the greater needs, as discussed above. A healthy grasp of your limitations will also aid you in knowing when to say no to something.

Remember that the dynamics and activities of a household are always changing as children grow or jobs change, or roommates come and go. With each shift in season, it is good to reevaluate what the greatest needs are to cultivate a flourishing household.

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A COMPREHENSIVE INFLUENCE

When it comes to having a focus on the home, most women diminish that to the physical element alone. But this is an incomplete view of being an influencer in your home. To “look well to the ways of your household” is much bigger than making sure there is food on the table and a clean bathroom. We will discuss 3 major categories in which we can strategically influence and steward our homes well.

Spiritual influence

You should care deeply about the spiritual climate of your home and be active in creating a Christ-centered environment. This is our calling as believers... to make disciples! Where better to start than at home? Here are a few suggestions.

1. Take care of your own soul and create space to seek God yourself. You cannot give what you do not have.
2. Be aware of the spiritual condition of every family member and a thoughtful consideration of how impart truths about God through daily activities and traditions.
3. Take precautions against the influences of the world, the flesh, and satan.

Good questions to ask: Do you have adequate time to seek God in your life? If not, how can you make time and what can you cut out to make this happen? Who in your home is a born again follower of Jesus? How can you encourage him or her in their pursuit of God? Who is not saved? How can you foster conversations about Jesus and what it means to have faith in Him? Where does each person struggle to believe truth? How can you creatively remind your household of what is true? How can you incorporate the Word of God into your daily routines and conversations?

Without a spiritual influence: your house may be organized, your family well cared for, but may lack in a knowledge of God’s Word and understanding of the Gospel of Jesus.

Emotional Influence

As a woman with the ability to bear children, you are a natural nurturer. This bent toward compassion and care should be used to care for those in your home.

1. Be sensitive to each family member’s personality. Pay attention to how each person handles stress and how they feel refreshed and encouraged.
2. Be a peacemaker in your home. This means being aware of any relational difficulties within the home, any conflict and any unrest and pursue peace.
3. Be an intercessor. Pray for those in your homes and look to God for direction on how to minister to each person.

Good questions to ask: How does each family member feel cared for? What affects each person the most, good or bad? Are they introverted or extroverted? How does each person get recharged and refreshed? What are some ways you can encourage each person in areas of weakness? Is your home a

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safe place for every person in it? What threatens the safety of your home and how can you get rid of it? Is there any disunity in your home and how can you bring peace?

Without an emotional influence: your home may be organized and growing in a knowledge of God, but may be disunified, with each person feeling isolated, uncared for and like they must fend for themselves.

Physical Influence

While being an influencer in the home is much more than just taking care of the house, it is certainly not less. The physical home we live in, whether one bedroom, half a dorm room, an apartment, or a 3,000 sq. ft. house, greatly impacts the activity of those who live in it. This encompasses all the tangible aspects of the home: food, cleanliness and order, decoration and room layouts, schedule management, etc. It is easy to forget to be strategic in this area because most of these things happen no matter what. But when thoughtful planning is given to the basic physical and tangible aspects of the home, it can be an incredible blessing to the family.

Good questions to ask: What foods do my family enjoy that are good to keep on hand? When is the best time of day for our family to eat together? What rooms are the most important to keep clean? How can I decorate and arrange a room to foster refreshment, peace, unity, and love? What activities happen in my home frequently and how can I be strategic in helping those activities flourish? What is the best way to manage our family schedule? Do we need to say no to more things to allow the home to be a place of rest and refreshment?

Without physical influence: your family may be growing in a knowledge of God and each person will feel cared for, but your home may be chaotic, dirty, overly busy with little sense of purpose and direction.

HOSPITALITY

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. Heb 13:2

Be hospitable to one another without complaint. 1 Pet 4:9

Our influence at home must be primarily for those who live there, but it does not stop there. When used strategically, our homes can be one of the most effective places of ministry and the advancement of God's Kingdom. How? Through hospitality.

Through hospitality, Rahab was pivotal in the Israelites entrance to the Promised Land (Joshua 2). Through hospitality, the Shunammite woman enriched the ministry of Elisha (2 Kings 4). Through hospitality, Esther exposed the evil plot of Haman (Esther 4). And through hospitality, Jesus was often welcomed into homes to teach and minister.

Defining hospitality.

Hospitality, in the greek, literally means to *love strangers*. This means we utilize and leverage our home to welcome others into it and care for them. It is not about how clean or big your home is, how great the food is, or what the plans are. But rather, that those being welcomed feel loved, cared for,

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and ministered to. Being too concerned about the food and atmosphere can actually take away from caring for the people you are trying to host.

I know there are certain people that feel more comfortable in my home when it's neat and picked up. And there are others who feel at home when I have welcomed them in "as is," scattered toys, dirty dishes and all. Ask the question... what will allow [whoever-is-coming] to feel the most refreshed, most welcomed, and most cared for.

Hospitality as evangelism.

Hospitality can be an asset in ministering and strengthening other believers. The early church was "breaking bread from house to house, taking meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart." (Acts 2:46). But hospitality can also be a pathway for evangelism to the lost. What better way to love neighbors, co-workers, friends or family than welcoming them into your home, refreshing them and sharing about the amazing hospitality of God who welcomes sinners into His family through Jesus?

Too many of us spend a majority of our time with other Christians. But Jesus told us we are to be salt and light to the world. One of the easiest and most natural ways to be salt and light is to get to know your neighbors. Leave space in your schedule to hang out with them. Start to build relationships with them, invite them over for dinner, to watch the game, to have a play date. Be that person your neighbors can call on when they need a cup of sugar and when life is falling apart. Invite those who don't know Jesus into your home and let them see what the Kingdom of God is like: a household of sinners with a great Redeemer, forgiving each other and giving grace to one another and finding joy in the eternal things. Use your home to whet their appetite for the Kingdom.

Practical first steps.

Here are a couple of simple steps toward using your home strategically for the Kingdom of God.

First, create space in your life for times of hospitality. Don't fill every inch of your day with activity, but instead leave margins in your schedule for hosting people and being available to your neighbors. A simple step is to set aside 1 regular time each week to host others. You might not fill this spot each week, but having it available to invite over a neighbor or friend and asking God to show you who you can invite is a good start.

Second, keep a few basic things on hand for impromptu or last minute invites. This might just be simple, easy snacks (like trail mix or popcorn) and tea and coffee. Frozen meals are great to have on hand, either homemade or bought, for a last minute get together. Or, you might have a favorite recipe that only requires canned or frozen food that you can keep on hand all the time.

Lastly and most importantly, be prayerful and aware. Notice those around you (maybe coworkers or neighbors) throughout your day and ask God for help to soften hearts, to give others a willing heart to say yes when you invite them. Most people, even if you don't know them well, feel honored to be invited into your home for a meal and are usually eager to say yes. So don't hesitate! Invite someone over today.

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Be creative! Utilize the nuances of your home and family life to welcome strangers into your life and minister to them! May others say of us what Paul said he looked forward to in Romans 15:32: "so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find **refreshing rest in your company.**"

COMMITMENTS OUTSIDE THE HOME

The issue of working outside the home is not a black and white issue and therefore requires some discussion. We cannot and must not make rules where God has not made them. And no where in the Bible does it say that a woman cannot work and earn money. But, God has clearly ordained for women to be overseers of the home. With that in mind, let's look at a few passages of the Bible for some guidance.

Proverbs 7:11-12 says of the adulterous woman, *"She is loud and wayward, **her feet do not stay at home; now in the street, now in the market, and at every corner she lies in wait.**"*

In contrast the excellent wife in Proverbs 31:27 is said to *"look well to the ways of her household and not eat the bread of idleness."*

Proverbs 14:1 states: *"The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down." Prov. 14:1*

NOT JUST JOBS, BUT ALL COMMITMENTS

If you'll notice, none of the above verses deal with jobs. They deal with the attitude toward the home. This is not merely an issue of *payment*, but rather of *priority*. **All women** should be mindful of these words, regardless of whether or not a paycheck is involved. There are many ways to be busy outside of the home to the detriment of the family, be it a career, a blog, a busy social life, a hobby, or even a ministry. None of these are intrinsically bad, nor improper to engage in. But, at the end of the day, what matters is how it affects the home, the most important establishment in our society.

As discussed earlier, your primary place of influence and responsibility is within the home. This means the flourishing of your family is your responsibility. It's worth considering how heavily career-focused our culture is and what effect this may have had on how you think about work. As we've already stated, there is nothing innately wrong with working outside the home (see Proverbs 31:16, 20, 24), yet often there is a tendency to cling tightly to a job because of its cultural importance.

Another reason we might hold onto things outside of the home is they give us significance. We all want to feel good about ourselves, be paid attention to, and be appreciated. And the task of managing a home doesn't bring much thanks and, by nature, is repetitive and menial. Though investing in the home has weighty and eternal significance, it is a "marathon" investment. And there are many other avenues where our skill sets can be used with immediate payoff. So the question is, how do you know when and if it's right for you to say yes to commitments outside of the home?

SHOULD YOU WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME?

Below are some helpful questions to evaluate whether working outside the home is right for you. Keep in mind that this applies to other non-payment related opportunities outside the home such as volunteering, ministry opportunities, and social commitments.

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Why are you working/desiring to work?

- Is the income essential to meet needs or wants?
- Is working a way to escape or avoid other higher priority responsibilities, such as raising children, discipleship, etc?
- Is a job or career filling a need for satisfaction or approval that should be found in Christ alone?
- Does your husband approve of and encourage you to work? Or does he disapprove yet allow it anyway?
- If God asked you to walk away from your job to care for your family full time, would you be ok?

Can your home flourish while you are working?

- What responsibilities will be compromised by working?
- How does your family feel about you working?
- Can you be excellent in flourishing your home while working? Or are you just “getting by” at home?
- If you are already working, take an honest assessment of your home by talking with each member family. Some helpful questions to ask them are:
 - Do you feel valued and cared for by me?
 - Do you look forward to coming home?
 - How do you feel about my job?
 - Is my attitude toward you better or worse since I am working?
 - Do you feel you are thriving, spiritually, emotionally, and physically? If not, is that related to things I am or am not doing? How could I help facilitate your growth in those areas?

HOW TO FLOURISH YOUR HOME WHILE WORKING

If you decide working outside the home is best, remember that you are no less responsible to oversee the health of your home. Be strategic in leveraging your remaining time and resources for the sake of your household. Below are some helpful questions to consider:

- Can you choose when your work hours will be? If so, consider when is best time to work with the least negative effect on your home.
- What is the best use of your more limited time at home?
- Is there anything you can cut out to maximize time at home? (Ex: hobbies, entertainment, social engagements, etc?)
- Can any of the additional financial income be used toward delegating other household responsibilities to free you up to care for the deeper needs of your household? (Ex: a cleaning service or more easily prepared, ready-made meals) Delegating is better than attempting to do everything yourself while burning out and becoming irritable toward your family.

REGULARLY REEVALUATE.

As the lives of those within your home change, adjust with them. Working outside the home may fit well in one season but not another. Make efforts to regularly check your heart motives and the spiritual and emotional “climate” of your home so that working doesn’t become a mindless habit, but an intentional effort.

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WHY IT MATTERS

The home is the fundamental establishment of any society. Like the rudder of a ship, the condition of the homes will steer the direction of the nation. The home is where future world leaders are molded, where brilliant minds are nurtured, where worldviews are established. Any investment made in the home has ripple effects that last for generations.

Work and ministry outside the home usually seem like the more important task. But that is not true. It is foolish for us to forsake vital investments in the home just because that's what our society does or that's what makes us feel good. Find ways, in whatever season of life you're in, to make investments in the establishment of the home. And weigh every opportunity outside of that with gravity and wisdom and faith. Let's change the world through our homes, one person at a time!

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