

**The Spirit of Wisdom
Proverbs 31:10 - 31**

Brothers and sisters, as I have shared a number of times over the past few months, back in the fall, this past September one of our prayer team members received a vision of a woman in the sanctuary who was inviting us to come and pray with her.

Further prayer and reflection upon this vision gave us the insight that this woman represented the Holy Spirit and that the posture of the women in this vision indicated giving birth... meaning that the Holy Spirit intended to bring something new into existence that hasn't existed at Valleyview before.

So the prayer team began to pray along with the Holy Spirit for this new thing to be birthed, and I've shared about this with you a number of times since then – to make you aware of what has been happening and to encourage and invite you to pray for this as well, perhaps join us on a Tues night...

And I'm sharing it again this morning because the birthing metaphor is appropriate for mother's day, and because

I want to acknowledge that I think we've been seeing signs of what the Spirit wants to birth, much like mothers will start to shown their baby bump, feel the baby kicking, and start to feel contractions and birthing pains.

In the same way over the past few months, we've seen the Holy Spirit's work starting to show - bringing more and more new people to Valleyview, a baby bump if you will.

We've had some nudges from the Holy Spirit, like kicks - to remind us that He's working, that something is coming...

Some people are going through the contractions, and we're walking alongside them during some really difficult times – but we're seeing really significant spiritual growth in them...

All this is to say brothers and sisters that on this Mother's day the Holy Spirit wants to remind us that something new is going to be birthed, so be aware of the indications that it is coming, and continue to pray along with the Holy Spirit for what that might be – I don't exactly know what it is yet.

But a couple weeks ago at Tue night prayer, I got one of those Holy Spirit nudges – I felt the baby kick so to speak...

I had planned out a whole sermon series for the month of May but during prayer I sensed the Holy Spirit nudging me to shift the focus of the series on to Him and continue on with the theme of the Holy Spirit being poured out after we had celebrated Pentecost – because He wants to be poured out more and more upon us here at Valleyview.

and my sense is that this isn't THE new thing that the Spirit wants to birth, but it is another sign of it and likely it is to get us ready and prepared for it.

Because while I don't specifically know what will be birthed, I do know one thing brothers and sisters – if the metaphor of the Holy Spirit birthing something can be pushed a little further on Mother's day... it's that it takes a great deal of strength and endurance and perseverance to give birth, and I believe that is why the Holy Spirit is prompting me to focus on His outpouring this month.

We are going to need the Spirit's divine strength and wisdom to take on the responsibility of what will come from whatever is birthed here. So, let's listen for more of what the Spirit has to say about this as we are celebrating motherhood on Mother's Day because it's a helpful metaphor.

Now we all know that the responsibilities of motherhood in bearing children, birthing them and raising them is a daunting task in the best of situations.

If you add in the additional expectations of pursuing a career, or the necessity of working to pay bills, staying fit and healthy and keeping it all together it is enough to push anyone to the limits of their strength and sanity and leave them feeling like they need to be some sort of Superwoman to pull this off.

Furthermore – this is no longer simply just about a mother as an individual woman, it's become part of a larger women's movement about equal rights and opportunities, breaking the glass ceiling, removing barriers – and what you do is seen as a demonstration what all women are truly capable of.

And that's why whenever movies that feature female superheroes like Captain Marvel and Wonder Woman come along, they are lauded for portraying strong, empowered women who are very capable, heroic and can inspire all women and girls to be strong, to go beyond your limits and discover what you as a woman - are truly capable of.

Now, a key aspect of any super-hero movie is how they receive and develop their super powers; Captain Marvel gets hers by accident when she destroys an experimental light-speed rocket ship engine while Wonder Women is born with hers because she is an Amazon warrior princess who was fathered by the ancient Greek god Zeus.

However both women must face extreme challenges and existential adversity before they come into their full power. It is only as they are pushed to their limits and face the real possibility of being destroyed that they are forced to reach inside and find that internal strength to persevere, and then their latent power is fully released and they become stronger

and more capable than they were before and they defeat their enemies.

Now there is creational wisdom and goodness in trying new things and challenging ourselves. Stepping out of the box so we might discover that we can learn how to do things we didn't know we could do – like learning how to dance, or cook, or go rock-climbing or getting your pilot's license, sky-diving!

But I haven't seen any situations where people face soul crushing adversity and the real possibility of having everything fall apart and somehow it is these circumstances that release their inner potential and they become stronger, better people for it.

In my pastoral experience these sorts of life challenges and situations actually have a negative effect on people and they deplete our physical, emotional and mental resources, and while people may survive they are scarred and bitter and resentful of having to endure such things.

This is why on Mother's Day we recognize what our mothers did for us and acknowledge all the energy and effort that it required to raise us and raise us well.

So we give them cards that say *"thank-you for putting up with me and all the trouble I caused"* we don't give them cards that say *"You're welcome – I'm glad I was able to push you to your limits and help you find your inner strength."*

Now all this is to say that while it's wonderful to have superheroes who inspire us – the reality of trying to live like one – as a supermom, or a super-dad, or just being that person who is always able handle whatever life throws at you and take it all in stride – trying to live like a superhero eventually leaves us feeling overwhelmed and inadequate for the task at hand.

When we reach our limits – there's no superhero moment where we somehow reach inside and unlock our latent power and suddenly find ourselves stronger than we were before. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Maybe you are in such a situation right now in your life with a relationship, or with work, or with school or your family and you're wondering how you will be able to be strong enough to continue!?

Well brothers and sisters the good news this morning is that as the Holy Spirit pours himself out upon us, He will give us **His** strength – so that we will not only be able to persevere and survive in the challenging circumstances in life – but we will also thrive... AND be able to take on whatever responsibilities come from what He brings into existence here at Valleyview!

And we are given a detailed example of what this can look like in Proverbs 31 with the description of the wife of noble character.

Now you and I wouldn't know it at first glance, but this piece of scripture is an alphabetic-acrostic poem... like M is for mother, O how I love thee and so on...

And there are some very heroic phrases and words which are used in this poem to amplify and embellish the description of this woman as extremely capable and very strong and portray her as an inspiration and role model for us to look up to and emulate.

Her title for example in vs. 10 “chayil ishash” gets translated by the NIV as a wife of “noble character” and this emphasizes her as a person of integrity and forthrightness and there is a strength in that, you may have also heard her referred to as the Virtuous wife or the Good wife in other bible versions.

But the Hebrew word “chayil” is a powerful word – if you look it up you’ll find it often refers to an army, a force, might, ability and efficiency or a man of valor, a champion... so a more accurate translation that gets the meaning across to us would be to call her the “super-wife.”

This is further emphasized by how the poem frequently references her arms and hands and all that she accomplishes with them. In fact the phrase used to describe her bringing

back food is usually used to describe a hunter bringing back his prey.

So if this poem was created in our day and age - it probably wouldn’t just be a poem – it would be created like a movie trailer for Captain Marvel or Wonder Woman.

I can envision the opening scene... it’s a shot of a home, late at night – everything else is dark but one window at the back of the home, and you hear a whirring sound, the picture cuts quickly to show part of a spinning wheel as it takes up wool to become yarn and we then see her hands deftly and skillfully working the wool - the camera pans back for the reveal shot and we see the super-wife spinning yarn with the determination and heroism just like we would see the Avengers suiting up to take on Thanos.

Then we get a series of slow motion actions shots of her directing the servants in her household, negotiating a business deal with some wealthy looking merchants, and the closing shot of her walking confidently and purposefully towards the

camera with her fine scarlet cloak billowing about behind her while the narrative gives the closing tag line *“Charm is deceptive... Beauty is fleeting... but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised!”*

Now if you have been paying attention so far you might say *“this is all well and good, and it’s nice to have a strong female hero from the bible, but how is this any different from Captain Marvel or Wonder Woman inspiring us to be strong and do amazing things in our life?”* when we know that we can’t possibly live like a superhero...

And I’ve certainly heard many people say – especially woman – that there is no way they can live up to the example of the super-wife from Proverbs 31.

But what we need to realize about the Super-Wife, which distinguishes her from superheroes like Wonder Woman and Captain Marvel, is where she gets her strength from and how she becomes strong and empowered – that’s the key here.

If we look at vs. 10 and vs. 17 we see that the Super-wife “puts on” her strength. In vs. 10 the NIV gives the translation that *“she sets about her work vigorously”* however the Hebrew wording literally means *“she girds her loins with strength”* (more battle and hero phrases) and in vs. 17 it says *“she is clothed with strength.”*

So this means her strength comes from an external source, she puts it on - it’s not something she has to generate and draw from within herself – and if we are reaching the limits of our own strength and ability brothers and sisters – I think we can see how this is good news.

The super-wife of Prov 31 isn’t a source of inspiration that makes us feel like we can be strong and do so much – rather she is an example that we are to follow because she demonstrates how to put on strength - so we too can put on strength and accomplish the tasks that are set before us in life - just as she does, whether its motherhood, the tasks of running a home, a family or a business, or whatever the Holy Spirit will bring about her among us at Valleyview.

So brothers and sisters this is a testimony of the good news, that God wants to give us His strength as the Holy Spirit is poured out on us. It's an example of how an ordinary person can become very strong and capable and do extraordinary things – or do things extraordinarily well... by receiving God's divine strength from the God's Spirit of Wisdom.

You see the Holy Spirit is also known in scripture as the Spirit of Wisdom in Isaiah 11:2 and in Eph 1:17, and Proverbs 8 links the creation of wisdom to creation in Genesis 1 where the Spirit of God is hovering over the waters.

So how do we do we receive divine strength from the Spirit who created Wisdom?

Well first let me tell you how we don't do it – because when we read the song of the super-wife we can mistakenly think that the example we're supposed to follow is being busy and doing lots of impressive stuff and we're rewarded with the strength of the Spirit of Wisdom being poured out on us because we've performed so well.

But we need to understand that all the accomplishments which are listed here are proof... they are the evidence of that she is operating out of the Holy Spirit's power that comes from Wisdom. Do you see the difference?

So the key to “putting on” the strength of Wisdom is mentioned in vs. 30 where it says *“a women who fears the Lord is to be praised.”* And in Acts 9:31 we see the Fear of the Lord and the Holy Spirit connected, where it says *“the church... enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.”*

Brothers and sisters - fearing the Lord comes from an outpouring the Holy Spirit and it is how we put on the strength of wisdom - and we know this because Proverbs 9:10 says *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...”* and Proverbs 1:7 says *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”*

Now I've explained before how biblical "Fear" for God is respect, reverence, awe, obedience, correct knowledge, love and yes also a bit of actual fear – not terror or dread but healthy caution... all wrapped up into a way of relating and understanding God.

And I think we can be assured that we are Fearing the Lord in a good way if we understand that its something the Holy Spirit gives to us... And we can be assured we're Fearing the Lord in a good way when we pursue our calling to steward and develop God's Creation and embrace that we are created in God's Image as male and female - but we realize we are not actually gods – God is god and we're not.

And we are Fearing the Lord in a good way in believing that He will be hold us accountable for the life and the calling that He gave us and if we have responded to Him by faith.

And we are Fearing the Lord in a good way when we study the scriptures so that we can rightly know what God reveals about Himself to us – and speak of and relate to Him accordingly...

Now there is much more that we could say about Fearing the Lord, but for the purpose of starting to put on the strength that comes from the Spirit of Wisdom this is sufficient... because scripture defines Wisdom as the ability to pursue our creational calling with knowledge, skillfulness and truth to God's glory.

So we are strengthened by Wisdom as we grow in the knowledge of understanding of how God as Creator designed His Creation to function – the Spirit of God hovering over the Waters - and as we become more and more skilled at working with the design of Creation instead of against it.

This can be as simple as learning to work a piece of wood by going with the grain instead of against it or it can be as complex as knowing all the calculations and measurements it takes to launch a rocket and land it on the moon.

For the super-wife, her fear of the Lord has given her wisdom, which is the insight and knowledge which makes her strong and skilled and thus effective and accomplished as a

craftswoman, a manager, a financial investor and a wholesale businesswoman.

And her Fear of the Lord also gives her the wisdom to see these are her particular callings that God has specifically designed her for, and it can do the same for us brothers and sisters.

Now – that calling and task as it comes to each of us in whatever specific way that God has designed each of us might cause us to feel inadequate... or we may have started out ok in pursuing it but now we are reaching the limits of our own strength.

Brothers and sisters, if this is your situation – consider the example of the super-wife and Fear the Lord in a good way – and ask for the Spirit of wisdom to be poured out on you. Because James 1:5 tells us *“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”*

And the Holy Spirit’s wisdom might just reveal to you that you’re at the end of your own strength because you’ve been working harder... but not necessarily smarter. So isn’t it great that God gives wisdom, pours out His Spirit without finding fault!

Keep asking the Spirit for wisdom about whatever has you reaching the limits of your strength – that relationship, that job, that school assignment, a phase of life that you need to go through, a challenge with your health – whatever it is, The Spirit will give you wisdom for it, and strength to face it.

It may come as you gain more life experience... it may come from being mentored by a mature Christian, by reading what others have written about going through such circumstances... You will find it by studying God’s creation to see how He makes it work and then learning to work with God’s creation...

But I believe this morning, we need to ask for the Holy Spirit to be poured out on us so that this occurs for us and we will become strong and skilled and powerful for our tasks in life.

But - all the while we must continue to Fear the Lord in a good way - so that we don't fall into the trap that the Apostle Paul describes in Romans 1:22 where people *"claimed to be wise, but they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles."*

They no longer feared God, they worshiped idols, they worshipped themselves, they worshiped ideologies and grieved the Holy Spirit and thus their wisdom became foolishness - do you understand what I mean?

So brothers and sisters it's my prayer for all of us this morning that the Holy Spirit will be poured out on us, and give us that Fear of the Lord in a good way, that He will strengthen us by His wisdom and empower us to accomplish great things not only within God's creation – but also for what He will birth among us in Valleyview.

The song of the super-wife concludes by stating *"Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her*

praise at the city gate" (Prov 31:31) May the Holy Spirit be poured out on us in Wisdom and strength so that the same will be said of us...

But - I would like to conclude this message by reminding us of the need for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives and in lives of those in our community so that as it says in 2 Timothy 3:15, we may become Wise for salvation - through faith in Jesus Christ.

So may we also receive and share the wisdom of the Holy Spirit not just for this life, but for the next life as well and help others become wise for salvation in Jesus Christ - so that our Lord will praise us at the gates of Heaven and say to us *"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"*

Brothers and sisters, let's be open for the Spirit of Wisdom to be poured out upon us so we may be faithful with what the Spirit will birth among us here at Valleyview. Amen.

