

Proverbs 31:19 – She’s a Distaff

“She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.”

~Proverbs 31:19

I'm sure you're saying to yourself, "*She's a distaff? How is a woman a distaff? I thought a distaff was a tool used for sewing?*"

Distaff in the original Hebrew for Proverbs 31:19 is כִּישׁוֹר (transliterated: kîyshôwr) which means: *a director, i.e. the spindle or shank of a distaff, by which it is twirled.* This Hebrew word comes from כָּשָׁר (transliterated: kâshêr) which means: *to be straight or right; by implication, to be acceptable; also to succeed or to prosper.*

Noah Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language¹ defines it this way: 1. (*n.*) The staff for holding a bunch of flax, tow, or wool, from which the thread is drawn in spinning by hand. 2. (*n.*) Used as a symbol of the holder of a distaff; hence, a woman; women, collectively.

I'm sure you've all heard the term "old spinster". Just the thought of the term brings about a picture in our minds of an old woman, with a scowl on her face, who is grumpy and keeps alone due to the fact that everyone annoys her, as she equally annoys them. According to the definitions from above, this term comes from the word "distaff"—as women of old have often been seen to weave threads and make clothing, curtains, or any other item that could be made from wool or flax.

But how could such diligently, hard-working women earn such a demeaning and disdainful connotation of the word "distaff" to express her character? How did it come about that such fine women who worked faithfully to clothe others, make beddings and provide coverings for people, end up being referred to as a grumpy "old spinster"?

From the origin of the word "distaff", it is reasonable to conclude that being referred to as a "distaff" or a "spinster" would be a compliment, not an insult. But somehow we find ourselves far removed from the original intent of what God created to be beautiful and encouraging, into becoming something not quite as lovely; once again, accomplished by the hands of foolish and ungodly women.

The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down."

~ Proverbs 14:1

The Eve complex is something all women struggle with, in our flesh: the desire to be our "own woman" and our own god was such a concern even in the days of the Apostle Paul that the Holy Spirit inspired him to write to Titus exhorting him to ensure that sound doctrine was being taught to all the "old" and "new" Christians in the church; so that the Word of God might not be reviled due to any ungodly living among His children. In Titus 2:3-5, the Apostle Paul exhorts Titus to teach:

"Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may be not reviled."

Originally, to be a "spinster" or "distaff" was a compliment. As those who could both hold a distaff and spindle in her hand had to be strong (physically and spiritually), intelligent, well-skilled, patient and demonstrated much endurance as she completed this arduous task that inevitably was always a blessing to many others.

Such a woman is modeled for us even in the New Testament; her name was Tabitha (Dorcas)³.

Let's read a little bit about this *spinster*, this *distaff* of old, mentioned here in Acts 9: 36b, 39c (to read how God used her life to save others, please read [Acts 9:36-43](#)):

"She was **full** of good works and acts of charity...All the widows stood beside him [Peter] weeping and showing **tunics and other garments** that Dorcas made while she was with them." (*emphasis mine*)

It's obvious that Tabitha was a distaff, that is, a spinster. It's also clear that the thought of her brought smiles, relief, joy and abundant blessings; rather than an image of a grumpy, old, lonely lady who everyone tries to avoid. As we read the passage above, we also see that she was certainly *not* lonely. Tabitha was well-loved, respected, and surrounded by those who clearly saw the work and character of Christ within her (Proverbs 31:31).

There were many women of old before Tabitha, that gave the name "spinster" a good reputation. And Tabitha certainly upheld the high standard of such a woman who proved: "[I can do all things through Him \[Christ\] Who strengthens me.](#)"

So what happened?

Well, the "second wave of feminism" started in the 1960's and bred women like Madalyn Murray O'Hair, as well as the famous case of "Roe v. Wade" which legalized the murdering of unborn babies in 1973 (noted in [Week #3, Lesson 6](#)). It was after this time, that the once well-regarded term used to describe a hard-working, diligent, and exceptionally skilled, single-woman; became known as a "cast-a-way"—a rejected single woman that no one wanted to marry, and was left to her meager, diminutive and unimportant job of weaving fine linens to clothe others and provide coverings for people and their households in multiple ways.

The women who started the feminist movement no longer felt that a woman should be taught to love her husband and children, but was told she shouldn't *need* a man. She was taught that if she ever chose to have children, they ought to be grateful that someone so smart, independent and strong, was their mother, instead of considering her children to be a blessing to *her*, and a huge **gift from the Lord** who entrusted her with one of **His** creations.

The feminist movement taught women many erroneous things about what it means to be a real woman. And that's when Satan won one of his greatest battles, as he re-used the same scheme and temptation Eve succumbed to in the Garden: "you will be like God." ([Genesis 3:5](#)) Our enemy, the devil, stripped away the beauty and unmatched essence of a quiet, gentle woman God created in order to help the man remain intimate with his Maker. He did it in the Garden, did it again in the 1960's, and we're still suffering from this deception today. But we don't have to—in Christ, we can prevail as godly women, who truly know and understand the strength it takes to humble oneself to another equal sinner.

God uses the number 40 (in Scripture) as the time of preparation:

- 40 days and 40 nights Moses was with God on the Mountain to receive the holy Law, the 10 Commandments;
- God caused the Israelites to wander in the desert for 40 years to rid them of the stubborn, foolish and rebellious generation and prepare the new generation to obey God as they inherit the Promised Land;
- Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit to be tempted for 40 days and 40 nights by Satan before the Lord Jesus would begin His official ministry of reconciling sinful man to holy, Father God;
- and for us as mothers, we carry our children in our womb for 40 weeks, before the child is prepared to take his/her first breathe on his/her own.

Becoming a biblically submissive wife is not an overnight occurrence. If it were, then it would also have an overnight stay. And this is surely not God's desire. For the works of God are everlasting and grow more and more beautiful as time passes, rather than springing up only for a moment, then fading away as quickly as it came. ([Matthew 13:20-22](#)) May we, as daughters of the Most High God, never have hearts that are hard as rocks, nor allow the cares of this world (busyness, even in with "good" things) cause the Word of God spoken to us to be choked out; leading us to become ineffective and unfruitful.

Our God is patient, and He takes His time molding, pruning and refining His beloved children. As we all know, the things that take the most time, effort and labor, are the things we treasure the most.

Biblical Perspective, Practically Applied:

1. Pray without ceasing, with thanksgiving, in all things, and memorize, meditate on and study: [1 Thessalonians 5:16-19](#) , [Philippians 4:4-7](#).
2. Read your Bible a **minimum** of three times a day. Why did I choose three? Because that's how many times a day we spend feeding our physical bodies that are fading away, therefore, should we not all the more, invest at least as much, if not even more, in feeding our spiritual bodies that will live forever? ([2 Corinthians 4:16-18](#)) Besides, if you're doing this study faithfully, then you will have no trouble meeting this portion of the challenge as God has so chosen to saturate this study with His Word; for which I am eternally grateful.

3. *Faithfully* do this study, do not let Satan distract you from accomplishing the one thing God uses to demonstrate to the world how awesome it was that Christ, Who Is God, submitted Himself to the Father and sacrificed Himself for the salvation of the world. ([Philippians 2:6-8](#)). According to Scripture, as wives, **we** are the tool God uses to share this glorious truth and His miraculous work among sinners; for as the Son and Father are equal in nature (God), they have different roles to fulfill—so too, while husbands and wives are equal in nature (sinners), we have different roles fulfill as well. Let nothing distract you!
4. Love the sisterhood and extend encouragement, prayers and every expression of agape love to demonstrate your gratitude to God for His gracious outpouring of loving-kindness to you by fixing your eyes on Christ and focusing more on serving others rather than being served by others.

Gracious Lord God, please help and protect us. Keep us from worldly cares and the deception of even the "good" things that might swallow up our time so that we have no time to be intimate with You through Your Word. Keep us from being daughters that only express love to You and others, with lip service while our hearts are kept far from You. Help us Lord to lead our emotions, instead of following or wallowing in them. Cover us with Your wing as we strip ourselves naked, making ourselves vulnerable, so that we might be more easily conformed to the likeness of Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Thank You gentle and kind Father. Thank You that You hear the prayers of Your children. Thank You that You love us perfectly. We humbly and gratefully come to You, in the name of our blessed Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Footnotes:

1. **Easton's Bible Dictionary & Noah Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language** - used for the definition of "distaff", found at: <http://eastonsbibledictionary.com/distaff.htm>
2. **Tabitha (Dorcas)** - *Tabitha* is Aramaic and *Dorcas* is Greek; they both mean *gazelle*.