

The Virtuous Mother

Proverbs 31

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Years ago, someone e-mailed me “Some of the Things That Mother Taught Me.” I think they’re good. First of all, “Mom taught me to appreciate a job well done: ‘If you’re going to kill each other, do it outside; I just finished cleaning.’ Mom taught me foresight: ‘Make sure you wear clean underwear in case you’re in an accident.’ Mom taught me about weather: ‘Looks like a tornado swept through your room.’ And Mom taught me about taking responsibility for my own actions: ‘If you fall out of the tree and break both your legs, don’t come running to me.’” The last one’s my favorite.

I want to honor mothers today by taking a look at what is perhaps the greatest passage in the Bible about a mother, Proverbs 31. They are the wise words of a mother for her son. Verse 1 says that they are “the words of King Lemuel,” but they are the words of the prophecy that his mother taught him. Who is King Lemuel? We don’t know for sure; there are a lot of different ideas. We don’t know of any “King Lemuel.” It could be a nickname for King Solomon. Also, we’re not sure who the mother would be. A guess is that these are the words of Bathsheba that she gave to her son, Solomon.

But the point I want to make is that it’s a wonderful thing when a mother can give her sons and daughters wise counsel. I can’t think of a better person to counsel my children than my wife, because of her knowledge of the Word, her love for God and her devotion to her children. So what a great place to go. When I hear my kids calling her, talking to her, interacting with her, what joy and blessing it brings to my life to know that God has placed in our marriage such a godly and wise woman. So it’s a wonderful thing for mothers and fathers to “train up their children in the way they should go.” We have in the Ten Commandments, “Honor thy father and thy mother.” We know that mothers are involved, as well, in teaching their children to fear the Lord and to love Jesus.

Proverbs 31 is a prayer for a son and a pattern for a daughter. I love what Herbert Lockyer said. He said, “Christian mothers are the world’s greatest asset; the greatest human influence and the most wholesome and substantial contribution to human society comes from our mothers.” I say “Amen” to that.

In outlining Proverbs 31, in verses 1-9, we have a mother’s words; in verses 10-31, we have a mother’s worth. Our focus is not verses 1-9 but rather verses 10-31. But she does warn her son, in verse 3, to watch out for women. “Do not give your strength to women.” The second warning is in verse 4: “wine.” The king is not to be giving himself to women or to wine.

If indeed this was given to King Solomon, I’m not sure he followed his mother’s counsel here. Solomon had 700 wives. Kind of crazy. But it certainly would be interesting if the counsel was given by Bathsheba to stay away from women and wine, in light of her relationship to King David.

Verses 10-31 are literally the A, B, C's of motherhood, of the virtuous woman. I say that because it is actually an acrostic, meaning that each of the verses, 10-31, start with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It starts with the first letter, second letter and so on and goes through, sequentially, each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is an acrostic that would be used for memorization and instruction of young people.

The second most important decision anyone would ever make in this world is who they marry. The most important decision anyone would ever make in this world is their relationship to Jesus Christ—trusting Him as your Savior and Lord, being born again and having a personal relationship with Christ. Once that is taken care of, the second most important decision is who you marry, who you will spend the rest of your life with.

So as a parent, you need to do your job instilling in your children the importance of making a wise choice and a wise decision about who they will marry. If you are a believer, God's will and purpose for you is to marry another believer. The Bible says, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has light with darkness or Christ with Belial?" There is no communion there; if you're a child of God, you certainly don't want to marry a child of the Devil, because you'll have problems with your new in-laws, for sure. So make sure you marry someone who loves the Lord and is committed to Christ and His Word. That's so very important.

In verse 10, this mother tells her son to look for "a virtuous wife." "Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies." The word "virtuous" means "noble of character," so it means a woman of excellence. Some render this that she is "a fine woman." There are two things about this virtuous woman: number one, she is hard to find, verse 10— "who can find"; and number two, "her worth is far above rubies."

As men, I think we should value our wives and realize that they are God's great gift to us. The greatest gift that God could give us, other than salvation, is a virtuous wife. So she is hard to find, verse 10, and she is of great value. She is rare and valuable.

Proverbs 18:22 says, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord." Proverbs 19:14 says, "A prudent wife is from the Lord." Proverbs 12:4 says, "An excellent wife is the crown of her husband."

As I was studying this passage this week, I discovered that there is only one woman in the Old Testament who is called virtuous. That woman is Ruth. In Ruth 3:11, Boaz said, "All the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman."

Don't we love the story of Ruth and her devotion to Naomi? "Wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God." Ruth left the land of Moab and journeyed to Bethlehem. Ruth was a stranger in the land, but it just so happened that she went out and gleaned the fields of Boaz. The kinsman-redeemer law came together, and Boaz had eyes for Ruth, and Ruth fell in love with Boaz. It's a beautiful love

story.

And out of that love story came a wedding, and out of that wedding came a son named Obed, who became the grandfather of King David. And King David became the great, great, great-grandfather of Jesus Christ. When you read in the book of Matthew about the genealogy of Jesus, our Lord, you find a reference to Ruth. She was a Moabite, but she's included in the genealogy, because she was indeed a virtuous woman. God blessed her life.

A virtuous woman is also the kind that "Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her," verse 28. This is the kind of woman who found herself into the genealogy of Jesus and is the kind of woman whose children call her blessed. It's the kind of woman that her husband says is a blessing.

What kind of woman is it? I want to give you five qualities of a virtuous woman. First of all, she is a helper to her husband. She is rightly related to her husband. Proverbs 31:11-12 says, "The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain." In other words, she can have a credit card, but he doesn't worry or fret. When she says, "I'm going shopping," he doesn't freak out or panic. So she is a helper and not a hindrance to her husband. Verse 12 says, "She does him good and not evil all the days of her life."

I know I may be stepping on some toes by saying this, but in our culture today, it is becoming quite popular or in vogue for a young woman to have children out of wedlock; to have children without marriage. But I want to show you what God says is the right order to being a mother. The first starts with marriage. I don't make any apologies for saying that. Motherhood starts with marriage. First you become a wife. Then you become a mother.

Marriage is a divine institution; it's God's idea. Adam and Eve were the first humans on earth—first Adam and then Eve—and God brought them together. The Bible actually gives us, in Genesis 2, the foundation or the three building blocks for marriage. First, "A man shall leave his father and mother." The first building block is "leave" or "severance." The second building block is "cleave" or "be joined to his wife." That building block is permanent; they are glued together. The third building block is "one" or "They shall become one flesh." That is intimacy.

I want to emphasize that again. First you must leave your father and mother. Sometimes people say, "Oh, it's really cool. We're going to get married, and we'll be able to live with my parents. It's really exciting." I'm thinking, Lord, have mercy! Thank God for your parents, and thank God you can do that to save some money, but the Bible does say, "leave father and mother" and "cleave" to your wife, and "The two shall become one flesh." By the way, the goal in parenting is for your children to "leave father and mother" and to "cleave" to their husband or wife, and they "become one." Then you, as husband and wife, go on being one. So there has to be severance.

A lot of times problems come into a marriage when you don't cut off the dependence and the ties with parents. You love your parents, you talk to your parents, you encourage your parents,

but you need to sever that dependence upon your parents and focus on your mate. No one should be more important to you than your husband or wife. If you're a married man, your mother never comes between you and your wife. If you're a married woman, your mother or father never come between you and your husband. You are committed to one another.

There is severance, independence and then there is the "cleaving," which means to be "glued together." The principle there is that God's design for marriage is one mate for life. You don't get married thinking that if it doesn't work out, I'll get a divorce and try another one. You're not buying a car. Love is not a passing emotion. Love is a continual devotion. Love isn't a feeling; it's a commitment you make. Feelings follow the commitment, but you are committed to that person, no matter what. I'm not afraid to officiate at a wedding where they say, "in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, till death do us part. And according to God's holy ordinances, I pledge you my love." That's it. You commit yourself for life; you're glued together. Jesus said in Matthew 19:6, "What God has joined together, let not man separate."

The "one flesh" speaks of intimacy. No one is to be closer to you on planet earth than your husband or wife. So my exhortation to wives is to make your marriage a priority. Be submissive, be supportive of your husband. Ephesians 5:22 says, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church." God made the woman to be a helper to the man. You are to be submitted, be supportive and do it as unto the Lord.

Notice that the virtuous woman is trustworthy, verse 11. "The heart of her husband safely trusts her." A marriage relationship has to be built on trust. You should never violate the trust of your spouse.

Notice also that she is supportive of her husband: "She does him good and not evil all the days of her life," verse 12.

In summary is Ephesians 5:33, "Let the wife see that she respects her husband." And the husband is to "love his own wife as himself." It's so very important. So being a good mother starts with being a good wife. Mothers, the best thing you can do for your children is to love your husband. Fathers, the best thing you can do for your children is to love your wife and be committed to her.

Let me give you the second quality of a virtuous woman from this proverb: she is not only rightly related to her husband, but she is hard working in the home, verses 13-25. I want to point out some qualities from this section. In verse 27, it says that "She watches over the ways of her household." In other words, she gives her full attention to her household. She makes it a priority. It says she "does not eat the bread of idleness." She works outside the home, yes, but the home is her priority.

I want you to notice how hard she works. In verse 15, she's the first one to get up. "She also rises while it is yet night." The sun isn't up yet, but this hard-working woman gets up early.

Then in verse 13, she sews. It says, "She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands."

By the way, as you go through this section, notice all the references to her hands. Her hands are busy working; they are not idle. Her hands are mentioned in verses 13, 16, 19, 20 and 31. No doubt she had a hard time keeping her nails looking nice, because she is a hard-working woman.

She does go shopping. (You ladies can say, "Praise God!") Verse 14, "She is like the merchant ships; she brings her food from afar." This is my favorite verse in this proverb, because I remember with joy when our kids were little and my wife would take the station wagon and go shopping. It would be chock full of food, and when she came home, I could still hear the garage opening and my wife backing in the car and the kids jumping up and down saying, "Mommy's home! We're gonna eat!" They loved when mom came home from the grocery store. The first thing they asked was, "Did you get ice cream?! Did you get cookies?! Did you get donuts?!"

It reminds me of this proverb where "She is like the merchant ships; she brings her food from afar." When the garage door went up, it was like the draw bridge went down. The station wagon backs in like the ship coming to dock. We would unload all the cargo, the food. Everyone would rejoice that we're going to eat tonight. What a blessing that was.

Notice also, in verse 15, that she takes care of her household by feeding them. "She also rises...and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants." There are a couple of ways to view this. She gets up early and feeds the family, and she gives her maids instructions on what to do for the day. She sets them to their tasks. Some feel it is saying she actually feeds her servants, so they can do their work that day.

She also is enterprising, verse 16. "She considers a field and buys it [from the fruit of her hands]; from her profits she plants a vineyard." So she gets her own income, she invests it by buying a field and she plants the field. In verse 24, "She makes linen garments and sells them and supplies sashes for the merchants." So she also sells things.

Verse 18 says that she is the last one to go to bed. "And her lamp does not go out by night." You've heard the statement that "A man works from sun to sun, but a woman's work is never done." What a hard-working woman she is. She's the first one up and the last one to go to bed.

Verse 20 shows that she is compassionate and benevolent. "She extends her hand to the poor; yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy." Two references to her hands, and they are in reference to helping people. So she cooks food and takes clothes to the poor. She helps neighbors, and she is involved in helping feed people at the church.

In verse 21, she makes preparations for her own household. "She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet." It does snow in parts of Israel. Some places are situated at high altitude. She has made sure that her family is well taken care of.

She also takes care of herself, verse 22. She is well dressed. She doesn't neglect her own wardrobe. "She makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple."

She is a woman of dignity and joyful confidence, verse 25. "Strength and honor are her clothing; she shall rejoice in time to come." She is a dignified woman, and she is a joyful and confident woman; she is not afraid of the future.

In Proverbs 14:1, it says, "The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands."

So moms, you need to be devoted to your husband, and you need to be hard-working in the home and make the home a priority.

In John 13, Jesus got down on his knees and washed the disciples' feet. And Jesus said, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." The Bible enjoins all of us believers to have a servant's heart. How wonderful in the home when a woman has a servant's heart, that she is to serve and be a blessing.

Notice the third quality of a virtuous woman, in Proverbs 31:26: she uses her mouth for good. "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness." So we move from busy hands to a blessed mouth. It's a wonderful thing when a woman's hands are busy and her mouth is used to bring blessing.

There are two things that happen when she opens her mouth, verse 26. First of all, her words are wise; and secondly, her words are kind. Why are her words wise? My guess is because she knows God's Word. She is a woman of The Book. You want to be a wise virtuous woman? Then pick up your Bible and read it every day. Marinate your heart, mind and soul in the Word of God.

How I thank God for the women in my life who have been women of the Word—my grandmother, my mother, my wife. These three women in my life have been such a powerful influence, because they knew their Bible. I inherited my grandmother's Bible and my mother's Bible. They are a couple of my great treasures. I enjoy looking at the notes that were taken by them. They are well-worn Bibles, because they were devoted to the Word of God.

So the reason the virtuous woman's mouth is open with wisdom is because she knew the Bible. When Hannah wanted a child, God gave her Samuel. She sang her song. What came out of her mouth? Scripture. When Mary realized that she was to be the mother of the Savior of the world, she sang her Magnificat. What came out of her mouth? Scripture. So if it's in the well, it comes up in the bucket. When the Word of God is in your heart, wise words come out of your mouth.

Notice also that kind words came out of her mouth. She says things that are kind, verse 26. "And on her tongue is the law of kindness." How important that is. That's why she is filled with the Spirit. So she is filled with the Word and speaks wisdom, and she is filled with the Spirit

and speaks kindness. We need to be filled with the Spirit if we are going to be kind in our words.

Ephesians 5:18 says, "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." Then in Ephesians 4:29-30, it talks about speech and says, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

So moms and wives, you need to be filled with the Word of God and the Spirit of God. You need your speech to pray, to use your words to praise the Lord and to proclaim God's goodness to others, and especially to instruct your children. What an important task.

Let me point out the fourth quality of this virtuous wife and mother: she is devoted to her children. She is a help to her husband, she is hard-working in the home, she uses wise, joyful and kind words and she looks well, verse 27, to the ways of her household. She pays attention to and makes her household a priority. She doesn't eat the bread of idleness.

And here's what happens, verse 28: "Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her; 'many daughters have done well, but you excel them all.'" What a blessing when you are devoted to your husband, you're hard-working in the home, you use your words for wisdom to instruct your children and your children then grow up and say that you are "blessed." Psalm 127:3 says, "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward."

You might be going through those times in which you think, I don't know if I can call these gifts or not. What did I do to deserve this? Why are you punishing me, Lord? Someone said that when your children are small, they step on your toes, and when they get big, they step on your heart.

I realize that preaching a sermon like this can open up some very sensitive wounds. So if you have prodigals, God loves them and will go after them. You must not stop praying for them. There is power in prayer, especially in the prayers of a father and mother who are on their knees earnest before God. God answers prayer. I'm testimony to that. I was a prodigal. I had drifted far from God. My mother and father got on their knees, and my grandmother prayed for me, and I'm here today because of their prayers. There is power in prayer, so don't stop praying. So I realize that sometimes it's hard.

But your children were given to you by God. They are gifts from the Lord. The Bible also goes on to say that they are like arrows, Psalm 127:4. "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man..."—or "woman"—"...who has his quiver full of them." What an awesome picture that is. "Like arrows in the hand of a mighty man, so are children of your youth." Now arrows are to be put in a bow to shoot as far away as you can send them. (I'm kidding.)

My son is graduating from the Defense Language Institute in Monterey. We're all going up there—all the daughters, the sons-in-law, the daughter-in-law and all the grandkids. We're looking forward to that time together with all our family. What a blessing it is to see them going off into this world, off into society and becoming a blessing to others and being used by God.

This week my son was being tested for this graduation, and I sent him Daniel 1, where God gave Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego wisdom. I told him to trust the Lord, and God helped him; he received very high scores on his testing. What a blessing his mother has had on him. His mother has had the greatest influence on his life. More than his father. The Bible says that a mother instructs her children, and God uses that in a mighty and wonderful way.

So I want you mothers to be encouraged. Through your children, God can use you to change the world. Have you heard of Jacobed? She was the mother of Moses. Moses was one of the greatest human leaders in history. She only had him for about three years, but in three years, she instilled in little Moses that Jehovah was God. When Moses was grown up, he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. I believe it was because of Jacobed's influence on his life.

Samuel was one of the greatest prophets in Israel. He had a mother named Hannah. She was a woman who sought the Lord in prayer, asking God to give her a son, and she dedicated him to the Lord all the days of his life. She brought him to the temple and literally left him there. Now we dedicate babies, but the parents get to take them home. But Hannah left him there and gave Samuel to God. God used him to turn a nation back to Him. God wanted a man, so He started with a woman. God needed a man to lead the nation, and He said women were the makers of men, so He started with a woman and chose Hannah.

Then I think of Elizabeth. What a precious woman she was in the Bible. She was a virtuous mother and the mother of John the Baptist. Jesus said, "Among those born of women, there is not risen a greater prophet than John the Baptist."

How about the grandmother, Lois, and the mother, Eunice, of Timothy? We have 1 and 2 Timothy in the Bible. Timothy was a traveling companion of Paul, and Timothy was a pastor who did the work of the Lord. His grandmother and mother had great influence on him.

How about Mary, the mother of Jesus? How God must have used her in the life of Jesus.

There is a fifth and last quality of a virtuous woman and mother. It is the most important. She fears the Lord. Verses 30-31 say, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands..."—there are her hands again—"...and let her own works praise her in the gates." This is the secret and the source of her virtue: she is a woman who fears the Lord.

She is charming and beautiful, but those aren't the things that are the priority of her life. Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last. These things are passing. Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:3-4, "Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on

fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.”

Now Peter is not saying you can't wear jewelry. And he's not saying you shouldn't fix your hair nicely or have nice clothes. But what he is saying is that the priority of your life should be your character. It should be your heart. It should be your love for Jesus Christ. It should be the hidden person of your heart. Peter describes it as “a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.” Your outward beauty is going to fade. You can do all the work you can to put it off, but sooner or later, time will catch up. (I just thought I'd encourage you.)

I've lived long enough now to watch godly women age, and to see that they get more beautiful as time goes on. The beauty of Jesus shines through them. That is the beauty that is not corruptible but lasts.

So what does it mean that she “fears the Lord”? She knows the Lord—she's saved; she loves the Lord—she is seeking Him on a daily basis; and it means that she lives for the Lord—she is serving Him. She is saved, she's a seeker and she is a server. To fear the Lord and love the Lord means that you want God's will more than anything else in all your life.

Never underestimate the influence and the power of a godly woman and a godly mother. Her influence is so great. “For her worth is far above rubies.” Amen.