

The Excellent Mother

Proverbs 31:10-31

Pastor John Miller

Years ago someone gave me a list of the things mother taught me. This is just a sampling of just a few out of that list. I've always liked them. My mom taught me to appreciate a job well done. She said, "If you're going to kill each other, do it outside. I just finished cleaning." My mom taught me foresight: "Make sure you wear clean underwear in case you're in an accident." My mom taught me about weather: "It looks like a tornado swept through this room." And here's my favorite. Mom taught me about taking responsibility for my actions: "If you fall out of that tree and break both your legs, don't come running to me."

I don't know a better place to talk about motherhood than in Proverbs 31. And I know that for a lot of ladies it's a challenge to read, because the standard is so high. But I want to encourage you Christian mothers that God gives you the strength and the ability. And we'll learn that "A woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised." That's the source and strength of your godly motherhood: a woman who fears the Lord.

In Proverbs 31, we are given wise words from a mother to her son. Verse 1 says, "The words of King Lemuel, the utterance which his mother taught him." So it seems that the King penned these words that were given to him by his mother. These are the words of a wise and godly mother to her son about the qualities he should look for in a virtuous woman or a woman of value and praise. What a blessing that is.

Who is King Lemuel? He is believed traditionally by the Jews to be a reference to Solomon. We can't be sure of that, but it was kind of a nickname, which means "one chosen or honored by God" that maybe his mother gave to him.

And who is the mother who is giving this King these wise words? The best guess is that it is Bathsheba. Given her background and her story, it's kind of interesting that she would learn from experience the importance of being a virtuous woman, of teaching her son the dangers of women and wine and the importance of a woman who fears the Lord.

It's a wonderful thing when a mother can give her sons and daughters wise counsel. And we'll see in this chapter a woman who fears the Lord, a woman who counsels her children in the ways of the Lord.

Proverbs 31 is a prayer for her son and a pattern for her daughters. I like what Herbert Lockyer 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 agree totally. "The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world." What an influence godly mothers can have upon our lives.

In Proverbs 31:1-9—we won't really delve into those verses today—we see the mother warning

her son of two things: in verse 3, he should watch out for women; and in verse 4, stay away from wine. So here is a mother's counsel to her son: "Be careful of women." It's not all women but women who will lead you in the wrong direction. Sensual lust will destroy your life. So I think the mother should be teaching in the home, as well as the father taking the lead.

It's a mother's influence in teaching we see in verses 3-4. "Do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel." She emphasizes this in its repetition. "It is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink." So she warns her son about the dangers of wild women and wine in these two verses.

Then in verses 10-31—we are most familiar with these verses and will focus on them—she gives her son the abc's of what kind of woman to look for when choosing a wife. That's something a mother wants to do. She sits you down and tells you that this is what you look for in a wife.

When I say these are "the abc's" I mean that literally. These verses are a Hebrew acrostic; each verse opens with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. We know that it is an alphabetical proverb, because it was meant to be put to memory.

I believe the second-most-important decision that anyone will make in life is who they marry. The first-most-important decision is trusting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. It's giving your heart to Jesus Christ. Whether you are a woman or a man, we all need to trust the Lord Jesus Christ and make sure we have a relationship with Him. Then we marry "in the Lord," looking for a godly woman or a godly man. It's so very important. The Bible says, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers...What communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?" So it's important that you marry only "in the Lord."

Someone said that if you are a child of God and you marry a child of the devil, you'll have problems with your in-laws. That's true. So don't be foolish but look for qualities that are spiritual.

A little tip for you people who are considering getting married is that you can learn a lot by outward observation. You don't need to get involved emotionally and intimately with someone to know them; you observe them. Are they showing characteristics of love for Jesus Christ? You can observe that before you get drawn into a relationship with them. And you should be attracted only to that spiritual aspect in them. You should have a physical attraction to a person; that's important as well. But your priority should be those spiritual qualities in their life. You should choose "a woman [or man] who fears the Lord." It's so very, very important.

This mother, in verses 10-31, is telling her son to look for a woman who is "virtuous," verses 10. She says, "Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies." The word "virtuous" means "noble of character." The King James translation has "a virtuous woman." Other translations have "a woman of valor" or "a woman of excellence." I like the concept of

“excellence.” She is a woman of “excellence” and character.

There are two things mentioned about this woman in verse 10. She is hard to find, and her price “is far above rubies.” So she is rare and she is valuable. If you’ve found a virtuous woman, you’ve found a good thing.

Proverbs 18:22 says, “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord.” And Proverbs 12:4 says, “An excellent wife is the crown of her husband.” So it’s a blessing to find a virtuous woman.

The only woman in the Bible who is called “virtuous” is Ruth. You can study the book of Ruth and study the beautiful love story between Ruth and Boaz to see the picture of a virtuous woman. In Ruth 3:11, Boaz, speaking of Ruth, said, “All the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman.” And Ruth is the kind of woman whose “children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her,” verse 28 of our text.

I was thinking about my grandmother Miller. What a godly woman she was, and what a blessing. It still brings joy to my heart to think about her love for Jesus and her prayers for me. She used to send me birthday cards with Proverb scriptures in them. They used to speak to my heart. Then I think of my own mother, who loved the Lord, read and studied the Word, influenced my life and prayed for me. I believe I’m a pastor today because of my mother’s prayers. Then I think of my lovely wife, who is a godly woman, a godly mother and loves and is devoted to our children. What an influence she has had on their lives. I think of how rich I am.

I sent out a text to all three of my daughters, who are mothers, telling them I love them, Happy Mother’s Day, and telling them I’m proud of them. They’re devoted to their children.

What a rich man I feel I am with all these godly women and mothers who surround me and the blessings they’ve brought to my life. So when I read the Scripture that says, “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord,” I think that is so true, because of these godly women God has put in my life.

Now I want to give you five qualities of a virtuous mother. This is not exhaustive by any means. Number one, she is a help to her husband, verses 11-12. The Proverb writer said, “The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.”

I want to make the point that motherhood starts with marriage. Years ago a preacher would not have to make that point, but today we see the demise of marriage, the demise of male and female. In our culture today, we don’t even know what a woman is. How can we celebrate motherhood if we don’t know what a woman is? There is a woman who is going to be appointed to the Supreme Court, and she can’t answer the question of what a woman is! God have mercy on our nation!

We have men thinking they’re women and women thinking they’re men. And we have gender

dysphoria and confusion. We don't understand that God made them male and female. In Ephesians 5:31, quoting Genesis 2:24, God said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is the foundation for marriage.

Marriage is a divine institution. It's not that we have Christian marriage and secular marriage. No; marriage is God's design. There is only one kind of marriage, designed by God. Anything outside of that is not marriage.

There are four things that marriage entails in God's description. It is a conjugal, heterosexual, monogamous and covenantal relationship between one man and one woman. In God's economy, it's one mate for life. "What God has joined together, let not man separate," Mark 10:9. Even Jesus, in Matthew 19, was asked about the subject of marriage. He said in verse 4, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female'?" Jesus wasn't confused.

In Genesis 2:24, where we have the foundation for marriage as God designed it, we see three building blocks. We have severance, "leave his father and mother"; permanence, "joined to his wife"; and intimacy, a conjugal relationship, "the two shall become one flesh."

In Hebrews 13:4, it says, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." So any sexual relationship outside the covenant relationship of marriage as God designed it is sinful behavior, and it brings the judgment of God.

We're reaping what we've sown in America today, because we've abandoned God and we've abandoned His Word. All the confusion about abortion breaks my heart. Not only is marriage a divine institution, but life is sacred and is from God from the moment of conception. We're so confused about the subject of abortion. We need to think Biblically and Scripturally. It's so very, very important.

This virtuous woman is also trustworthy, verses 11-12. "The heart of her husband safely trusts her." A marriage must be built on trust. "So he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life." In other words, he can give her a credit card. She can say, "I'm going shopping," and he won't have a heart attack. He trusts her.

I like the truth that marriage is based on trust. You can't lie in your marriage. When I'm doing premarriage counseling, I emphasize this so much with couples: never violate your spouse's trust. If you do, you'll really damage your marriage. It is very hard to regain once it's been violated.

This woman is submissive and supportive, Ephesians 5:22-24. "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; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything."

So motherhood starts with marriage and submission. In order to be a godly mother, you must be a godly wife. And to be a godly wife, you must be submitted to your husband. But that doesn't mean you're less important than him or that you're inferior to him. It's for the sake of order in the home, so there isn't chaos or confusion. So the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.

And headship doesn't mean dictatorship. It doesn't mean superiority. It's just the position the husband holds as the head, who is the provider and protector in the home. The proper order is a husband who sacrificially loves his wife and a wife who sacrificially submits to her husband's leadership and headship in the home.

So a wife is trustworthy and supportive. In Ephesians 5:33, Paul says that each husband should "love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband." She is properly related to her husband in marriage.

The second quality of this woman is she is a hard-working homemaker, verses 13-25. The home is her priority. She doesn't exclusively work in the home—she can work outside the home—but her priority is her home. In verses 13-25, we have a picture of her hard-working, domestic duties.

Verse 27 says that "She watches over the ways of her household." She gives her full attention to her household. It says, "...and does not eat the bread of idleness." She doesn't sit around in her nightgown and slippers, with curlers in her hair and watch soap operas all day.

All through this passage we have a picture of a hard-working wife and mother. We have 10 pictures in this passage. First, she gets up early. Verse 15 says, "She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants."

Second, in verse 13, she is busy with her hands. She sews. "She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands." Verses 19-20 say, "She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hand holds the spindle." This is her making the cloth. "She extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy."

There are actually seven times in this passage where her hands are mentioned as being busy. Her hands are mentioned in verses 13, 16, in 19 twice, in 20 twice and in 31. This woman has busy hands. Her hands, her heart, her home and her mouth are used for the glory of God.

Third, verse 14, she shops. "She is like the merchant ships, she brings her food from afar." I like this verse. It reminds me when Kristy would go shopping when our kids were young. She would take the minivan, and when she came back home, she would open the garage door, the kids would hear that and would jump up and down. "Mom's home! We're going to eat!" Everyone would be involved in bringing in the groceries. They're all looking for the ice cream and cookies and good stuff. It's like a big ship coming in to dock; you're unloading all the goods. It's just a beautiful picture. What a blessed picture that is of this virtuous wife.

Fourth, in verse 15, it says that she feeds her household. "...and provides food for her household."

Fifth, she is enterprising, verses 16 and 24. "She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard." Verses 24, "She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants."

Sixth, she is the last one to bed at night. Verse 15, she is the first one to get up in the morning: "She also rises while it is yet night"; and verse 18, she is the last one to go to bed at night: "Her lamp does not go out by night." She works late into the night.

We know the old saying, "A man works from sun to sun, but a woman's work is never done." I can't tell you how many times my wife stays up late and then she's up early. There's always work to be done.

The seventh picture of this woman is her compassion and benevolence, verse 20. "She extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy." In the Hebrew, it's "She opens her hand to the poor, yet, she reaches forth her hands to the needy." As I pointed out, there are seven references to her hands. So she is caring and concerned. She's a philanthropist. She reaches out to help those who are in need.

In verse 21, eighth, we see she makes preparations for her family. "She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet."

Ninth, in verse 22, she is well dressed. All this, and she's a woman of beauty too. "She makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple." She takes care of herself as well.

Tenth, she has dignity and joyful confidence, verse 25. "Strength and honor are her clothing; she shall rejoice in time to come."

What beautiful pictures these are of this virtuous or excellent woman. Her mother tells her son to look for this kind of woman in a wife. Proverbs 14:1 says, "The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands."

The point I want to make to ladies, wives, mothers, women is to make your home a priority. I know that if I say that women shouldn't work outside the home, I would get daggers staring at me. Women can work outside the home, but the priority is the home.

The order of your priorities is your walk with God, submitting to your husband, commitment to your marriage and then to your children. How do you expect to be a good mother if you aren't a good wife? The best thing you can do is model to your children what a good wife is to be. The same is true of the husband to his kids. So get your priorities straight, and make sure your home doesn't suffer, your marriage doesn't suffer. And your walk with God and your relationship to your husband are priorities. It's so very important.

Jesus said to his disciples, in John 13, to wash each other's feet. He said that he who would be the greatest among them would be the servant of all, verse 16. So you should have a servant husband, a servant wife and a servant mother. And the priority should be the home.

For the husbands, their priority is God, their wife and then their children. The best thing you can do for your kids is to love your wife. For the wife, the best thing you can do for your children is to love your husband. Give them a strong marriage in the home.

Number three, this virtuous, excellent woman uses her mouth for good, verse 26. "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness." Two things happen when she opens her mouth: her words are wise and kind. What a great virtue that is. Why is that? It's because she is a woman of the Word. She has hidden God's Word in her heart.

When Hannah prayed for a son, God gave her a son. Her prayer for a son included the stipulation that if God gave her a son, she would give him to God all the days of his life. She was one of the great mothers of the Bible. She wanted to be a mother, she prayed and God gave her Samuel, who became one of the great prophets of the Bible.

Hannah's song is much like Mary's Magnificat. Every word in Hannah's song is very close to the Magnificat of Mary and is all Scripture. Hannah opens her mouth and Scripture gushes forth. She opens her lips with praise to the Lord and prayer. And all that comes out is the Word of God.

So my encouragement to mothers is to hide God's Word in your heart. Quote the Scriptures, sing the Scriptures, pray the Scriptures. Be a woman of the Word. You can never underestimate the power of a mother sharing Scriptures with her children. Teach your children the Word of God.

So her mouth is wise and kind, because she knows God's Word. And she is filled with the Holy Spirit. Those are the two reasons I give for her being this virtuous woman who has these wise and kind words. In Ephesians 5:18, we are commanded to "be filled with the Spirit." Then right after that verse, Paul says, "...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." So a Spirit-filled mother is a singing mother. What a blessing that is.

In Ephesians 4:29, it 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 Proverbs 15:1 says, "A soft answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger."

So, ladies, "Let the Word of God dwell in you richly," and let the Spirit of God control your heart and your mind and fill you. How important that is. Use your words to pray, to praise and to proclaim and instruct your children and grandchildren in the things of God's Word.

Quality number four of this virtuous mother is that she is devoted to her children, verses 27-29. "She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. 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.'" In Psalm 113:9, the psalmist says, "He makes the barren woman to be a keeper of house and to be a joyful mother of children." Praise the Lord! What a blessing that is.

Too many times Christian women today feel as though they are second class, because they're stay-at-home moms just taking care of the kids. Their life is passing them by diaper after diaper. But I believe that is your greatest contribution to society: to raise a godly generation.

I'm absolutely convinced that one of the problems we have in our culture today is the breakdown in the home. The home is the building block of society. So goes the home, so goes the world. We hear all the political talk on liberal and conservative television, but it's so simple that we miss it. We've forgotten God and His Word. We need to get back to the Bible, back to God's design for marriage. We need to get back to making marriage and raising children priorities in our nation. It obviously doesn't mean we should farm our kids out to the government. They need to learn about things at home from godly mothers and godly fathers.

Psalm 127:3-5 says, "Children are a heritage from the Lord...like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them."

Mothers, think of the impact for good you can have. Very few people know who Jacobed is. She is the mother of Moses. Can you imagine having a bumper sticker on your chariot that says, "My son gave us the Ten Commandments" or "My son is Moses; he wrote the first five books of the Bible"? That would be pretty impressive. But Jacobed only had Moses for a short period of time before she had to drop him off in the court of Pharaoh. So in those early, formative years, Jacobed instilled in Moses what he needed to guide him through those difficult years. What an impact she had on him.

I think of Hannah, the mother of Samuel the prophet. Samuel is one of my favorite Bible characters. He was a godly man who influenced the nation, appointed the first king and brought the nation back to God. He came to the end of his life and said, "I haven't stolen anything, I haven't lied to anybody. Can anyone accuse me of any evil?" He had an impeccable life. The influence of Hannah was true in his life.

Hannah, too, had to give Samuel to the Lord. As a little boy, she took him to the temple. The temple priests were corrupt, but she had to leave him there. We dedicate babies at Revival Christian Fellowship, but we give them back to mom and dad to take home. We don't keep them. Praise God. But Hannah had to give up Samuel. Yet she had instilled principles in little Samuel that guided him through his whole life.

I think of Elizabeth. What a precious, aged saint she was. She was the mother of John the Baptist. Can you imagine being the mother of John the Baptist?! Jesus said about him, "Among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist." That's pretty heavy. When Jesus makes a comment like that, it's pretty good. I think of the godly

influence Elizabeth and Zacharias, the priest, had on John the Baptist.

And I think of the mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, had on Timothy. They raised him so wonderfully.

And I think about Mary, the mother of Jesus. What a great mother she was! How blessed she was to have the Son of God. She trained Him and He grew “in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

The fifth quality of a virtuous, excellent woman or mother is one who fears the Lord, verses 30-31. This is the most important quality. This is the source and secret of her excellence. “Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing...”—like an empty, hollow bubble that pops and has nothing in it—“...but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands...”—here are her hands again—“...and let her own works praise her in the gates.”

The Bible tells us in Proverbs 1:7 that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” Whether you are a woman or man, a wife or husband, you should fear the Lord. That’s important. It’s the source of your strength and the secret of your excellence.

What does it mean to “fear the Lord”? It means that you love the Lord with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength and all your mind. Nothing comes between you and the Lord. He is the priority of your life. Everything you are flows out from your walk with the Lord. It’s the fear of the Lord. You become a woman of excellence.

Notice that “Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing.” You can do all you can do to keep yourself looking nice, but sooner or later it happens. But if you have an inner beauty, it doesn’t fade. 1 Peter 3:3 says, “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.” So the outer beauty fades, but the inner beauty grows stronger as the years go by. What a blessed thing that is! Make that the priority of your lives: fear and love the Lord.

So this excellent woman knows the Lord—it means she fears God and is saved; she loves the Lord—she is seeking Him; and she lives for the Lord—she is serving Him. What a blessed person this woman is, this virtuous, excellent woman. “A woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.”