Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Proverbs 31 Woman
Scripture: Proverbs 31:10-31
Code: 80-168

This morning we're going to talk about what the Bible has to say about moms and what God's pattern is. It is amazing, frankly, how our society has changed. It's amazing how our society's perception of a woman has changed, how the society's design for her role has changed. If you ever happen to be rummaging through any old magazines or old newspapers, the kind you see in old bookstores and in your garage and your attic somewhere and you look at the women that are portrayed in some of the ads in the past. You see mothers rocking babies and women in kitchens cooking dinner for families, using some special product or a woman sitting on a bed reading stories to her children. Pictures like that, images like that almost sound like fiction in our world today.

When you look at the woman in advertising today, you see her dressed up in a slick business suit and swinging a briefcase as she sails down a crowded street. Or you see her in tights doing aerobics, or in a skimpy bathing suit half exposed.

What is it that our society really views as the woman to be exalted? The woman to be honored? What is the excellent woman of the nineties really look like? What kind of woman is she? What is the modern superwoman?

Well I suppose if we created a composite it might go a little like this. She works, builds her career, demands equal pay, refuses to submit to her husband, demanding equality with him in everything. Has an affair or two and a divorce or two. Exercises her independence. Relies on her own resources. Doesn't want her husband or her children to threaten her personal goals. Very often has her own bank account. She hires a maid or a cleaning service, eats out at least 50 percent of the time with her family or without. Makes cold cereal and coffee the standard breakfast for everybody. Quick frozen meals, the usual dinner fare if there is a dinner fare at home. Expects her husband to do at least an equal share of housework. She is tanned, coiffured, aerobicized, shopping to keep up the fashion trends, make sure she can compete in the attention-getting contest. She puts the kids in a day-care center. Makes sure each one has a TV in his room or a radio and a CD player so they are entertained all the time and don't bother her...leaving them to the brainwashing of the immoral materialistic society that pumps whatever it pumps through those media. She is opinionated, usually, likes to be heard from and is eager to fulfill her personal goals.

That's the kind of woman that the world applauds. She can't really stayed married, can't stay happy and her kids get into trouble and sometimes drugs and often become criminals. And she is far from

the woman that God has called the excellent woman to be.

What does God say a woman, a mother is to be? Well let's turn to Proverbs chapter 31, that time-honored, age-old portion of Scripture and see what it has to say because herein is God's revelation of the excellent woman. Actually it says in verse 10, "An excellent wife," here is the description.

When it comes down to what a woman ought to be, this is it. Now this is an ideal, this is a model. This doesn't describe some particular woman. This describes the ideal woman.

There is a lot to be said about women in the book of Proverbs. As you know, the book of Proverbs is a list of proverbs or statements of wisdom, and throughout the book of Proverbs there is a...there is a continual interest in women. There is a woman who appears frequently in the book of Proverbs and she is the opposite of the excellent woman, she is the adulteress. She flatters with her lips. She forsakes the covenant with her own husband to seduce someone else. The adulteress has lips that drip honey. She has a smooth tongue and she hunts for the precious life of some victim.

There is not only the adulteress but there is the noisy woman, the loud boisterous woman with whom no one wants to live and the normal man would prefer, the Proverb says, to live in the corner of the roof, in a tiny little place, then in a big house with a boisterous woman. There is the foolish woman. There is the rebellious woman. There is the quarrelsome woman. And they are all really set in contrast to this excellent wife here in chapter 31.

There is in chapter 12 verse 4 of Proverbs this statement, "An excellent wife is the crown of her husband. But she who shames him is as rottenness in his bones." Nothing better than an excellent wife. Nothing worse than the opposite.

In fact, a wife has a tremendous ability to influence a husband and a family. In 1 Kings chapter 21 there is a statement made about Ahab the wicked king, perhaps as wicked as any king in all of the annals of the history of Israel. It says of Ahab that he was wicked because he was incited to it by his wife, Jezebel.

We talk about the fact that God has designed men to be the head of the family, and that means provision and that means protection, that means leadership. Men have that responsibility. But men do not have more than and perhaps not as much as women when it comes to influence. Ahab was the man of his house, he was even the king. He was a leader. He was strong. But his life was shaped by the influence of his wife. A wife plays that role in the life of her husband and the life of her children.

So turning from the adulterous and the noisy woman and the foolish woman, the rebellious woman, the quarrelsome woman, the woman who insights her husband to do evil, we come in chapter 31 to

the excellent wife. And here is laid out for us the pattern for that woman.

Now by the way, just to give you a little bit of background. You look at verse 1, it says "The words of King Lemuel, the oracle, or the speech, or the burden, which his mother taught him." Now we don't know really anything about King Lemuel, but he had a good Jewish mother. And along with chicken soup and whatever else she provided for him, she gave him some really good advice. Because he was royal and because he was going to take a position of rulership, she told him some things he really needed to know. She said to him in verse 3, "Do not give your strength to women." Don't engage yourself in sexual liaisons with other women. In other words, don't commit fornication as a single man. Keep your life pure. Do not give away your strength to women. Those are the way that destroy kings.

She gave him some further good advice. Verse 4, don't drink. Don't drink wine, don't drink strong drink because it clouds your judgment. She continued with this advice and she says to him in verse 8, "Open your mouth for the dumb." In other words, speak for those people who can't speak for themselves. Those people who are oppressed. Those people who can't defend themselves. Those people who are too small and insignificant to have a platform of self-defense. You take up their cause. You take up the rights of the unfortunate.

In verse 9 she told him, "Open your mouth and judge righteously and defend the rights of the afflicted and the needy." This is great advice from this Jewish mother to her son. "Stay away from alcohol. Stay away from sexual immorality. Take care of hurting people. Defend those who can't defend themselves. Stand for the oppressed. Support the needy and deal justly with everybody." This is how to be a good king. This is how to be a great man. And most of all, and this is what occupied the length of her speech from verse 10 to 31, "Find a good wife." Understanding the implications of a bad one, boisterous, quarrelsome, self-centered, wicked, such as Jezebel, and realizing the influence she was bound to have upon his life, his mother encouraged Lemuel to find an excellent wife.

The kind of woman she describes is the model, ideal woman. She is priceless. "An excellent wife...verse 10 says...who can find her worth is far above jewels." And she goes on to describe this woman both physically, mentally, morally, spiritually. In every dimension the character of the excellent wife and mother is unfolded here. She describes this ideal woman, this model woman by looking at six features...her character as a wife, her devotion as a homemaker, her generosity as a neighbor, her influence as a teacher, her effectiveness as a mother and her excellence as a saint.

Now this is...this is really a very important document in Jewish history. Obviously it is inspired by God, but inspired by God in a unique way that to you is not visible, and I'll tell you what that is. There are 22 verses from verse 10 to 31 and there are 22 characters in the Hebrew alphabet. Each of these verses begins with the next character in sequence in the Hebrew alphabet so that it starts with aleph, bet, gimel and so forth right on down through the Hebrew alphabet. The first letter of each of

these proverbs, each verse, is the next letter in sequence. Why? Because it was easy that way to memorize this. It became an acrostic which created a formula for easy memorization and recall of these features so that every young Jewish son could be taught by his mother to memorize Proverbs 31:10 to 31 and thereby have in his mind the criteria at all times by which he was to measure the excellence of a woman. Unfortunately we don't have that benefit in English. It was a great benefit to them in Hebrew.

This kind of woman, according to chapter 19 verse 14, is a gift from God. So it presupposes prayer, that one should find such a woman. In fact, it says in verse 10, "An excellent wife, who can find?...who can find?" Now I just do want to be fair about this because I don't want you to think this is just a problem for men to find such a woman. It is also a problem to find a good man. This is a just a moment of equal time here. Chapter 20 verse 6, "Who can find a trustworthy man?" So, gentlemen, let's not be too proud before we understand they have a similar problem. But this is Mother's Day so they get it today.

Too often when a selection is made of a woman or a wife, it is made for the wrong reasons...looks, education, personality, likes and dislikes, accomplishments, style, rather than virtue, character, those things that matter. But this woman has a value that is far above jewels. The word actually describes precious stones of any kind. Some versions translate it rubies, some translate it pearls. Jewels is the best, it's just the generic word for precious stones. The point being, this is a very, very valuable woman, not easy to find. Then in verse 11 he begins to describe...she begins to describe this woman

First of all, her character as a wife, let's talk about that...her character as a wife. Verse 11, "The heart of her husband trusts in her and he will have no lack of gain for doing so." Now, in the ancient world, you need to understand this, in the ancient world things were a bit different, even in Judaism. Women were not looked upon as God had designed them to be looked upon but grew to be seen as sort of second class. And very often men built strong friendships with other men and maintained their wives only as servants. And in some cases not even maintaining a particular devotion to intimacy with them, they had concubines for their intimate acts. And so wives could be kept at a distance and treated very often as servants. Consequently there wasn't always the devotion between the two that created trust. And so we read in some ancient documents that it was somewhat common for husbands to lock up all their valuables when they went away so their wives didn't take them.

I hope that's not the case in your home. But one of the first things that we read in this whole passage is that the husband doesn't have to lock anything up because he trusts his wife. And the trust is well founded because she's not going to do anything to harm his personal gain. I suppose the equivalent today would be, "Are you willing when you have to go out of town for the two-week business trip to leave your checkbook with your wife?" Or frankly, do you even have a choice? Or leave all the credit cards and know that perfectly...know that perfect calm that comes when you say she will never violate anything, she will never do anything that brings harm. I completely trust in her, she will never

threaten what I have gained for the support of this family. That's what it's talking about. It's talking about the fact that there is an intimate relationship built on complete trust. The husband can go to work, he can go away, he can do whatever he needs to do with absolute confidence of her integrity, her wisdom and her discretion in the use of his assets and in the care of his interests. His comfort is her concern. His burdens are her's to relieve. He is at ease in absence because he knows that all he has is safe with her because she cares for him and he knows that. And love means he would never do anything that would cause him sorrow or suffering or pain or distress. He's not suspicious, he's not worried, he's not jealous because she is absolutely trustworthy. That is a great foundation for a marriage.

He will have no lack of gain. He's never going to have to become some soldier of fortune to make back what she loses. He's never going to have to cheat to gain a little more to cover the losses that she's causing. He doesn't have to be tempted to steal or to falsify some account somewhere so he can get back what she wasted carelessly.

By the way, this indicates, and I think it's an important thing to mention, that she is in charge of the domestic matters. She is in charge of using and accounting for the resources in the home. He is free to give himself to his work knowing that she will be a steward of all of that. That's part of the oikodespotes when it says in 1 Timothy 5:14 that the ruler is to be the ruler of the house, or in Titus chapter 2 that she is to be the ruler of the house. Part of that is the management of those resources that the husband goes out to earn and to provide. She helps him to profit, not loss. He has enough because she is devoted to the care of his earnings because she loves him, because she cares about him, because she seeks his good. And that's what comes in verse 12, look at the next verse. "She does him good and not evil all the days of her life."

This Jewish mother tells her son, you want a woman who always has your best interest in her heart, who always seeks to build you up, whose desire is to make you every bit of the man that you can be in every area. All the days of her life she is devoted to the well-being of her husband, good times, bad times, times of plenty, times of little, times of sadness, times of happiness, sick times, well times...her love is ever and always devoted to the successes of her husband. She is concerned about the highest spiritual principles and she never fluctuates, she seeks the very best and the noblest for the man who is her husband. She serves him as Sarah served Abraham, according to 1 Peter 3:6, and called him lord. She was committed to him. She reveals her virtue by her consistent service on his behalf. Her love is so deep it has a purity and a power and devotion that never changes. All her life long his successes, his comfort, his reputation, his joy are her delight. To live for him is her constant happiness.

And a footnote at this point. That means that when necessary because his highest good is her greatest desire, she will confront his sin and his weakness. And lovingly she will be a conscience, she will be necessarily the voice of God, never unkind, always submissive, but eager to be sure that

he walks with God. She is concerned to confront his sin and his failure. That's part of desiring him to be everything he should be. That, by the way, is the essence of what it says in Titus 2:4 when it tells the young women to love their husbands, that's what it means. It doesn't mean walk around ga-ga over the guy. It doesn't mean some kind of emotion. It means when you love somebody you seek his best interests. You seek that he would be every bit the man that God would want him to be, that he would be as much as he could be spiritually, as much as he could be professionally in every way...to seek that he would be the best father, the best friend, the best worker.

And thus this woman advances her husband's respect. Go down to verse 23, "Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land." The point is, he is known as her husband and his reputation is known far and wide. He is known by everybody. What happened was, inside the gates of ancient cities there would be sort of a platform area, or a patio area, where the elders of the city would gather every day and they would adjudicate the matters that came up in the city, disputes...it was like sort of an open court where hearings were made with regard to the issues of the time in where business was carried out. And the elders of the city, the mature men of the city, sat in that place and rendered judgment.

The point being that this man has a great reputation among the leaders of the city. It is a reputation basically built by his wife. She is so faithful to the duties of her love to him, he is free to be every bit the man he can be and so he develops a tremendous reputation. That reputation is undergirded by her because she's doing everything to make him everything he ought to be. She's contributing to his spiritual development. She's contributing to the clarity with which he sees the issues of life. She's granting him the wisdom that she gains from the knowledge of God and the knowledge of God's Word. She serves him. She cares for the things behind the scenes so he's free to be everything that God would want him to be and everything that the community would benefit from. And so he is known as a man of great nobility and great respect because of the contributions that she has made selflessly to him. And also, you can be sure that she has done everything she can as well verbally to build his reputation and never do anything to tear it down. She gains nothing by tearing down her husband's reputation, absolutely nothing. If people have diminished respect for him, then they have diminished respect for her, first of all because she speaks evil of her husband and secondly because he chose someone inadequate to help him to become all he could be.

This woman has character as a wife. So much character that her husband totally trusts her in the careful management of everything that is precious and important to the family, so much so that she does him good and not evil all her life long, making him all that he can be so that his reputation is impeccable in the community. Her character as a wife.

Secondly, her devotion as a homemaker. And this takes up really the bulk of the passage, her devotion as a homemaker. This is quite remarkable. Immediately in verse 13, it's kind of an interesting transition, "She looks for wool and flax and works with her hands in delight." Vivian

Gornek(?), you wouldn't know who she is, but she teaches feminism at the University of Illinois, says, quote: "Being a housewife is an illegitimate profession." I always thought being a prostitute was an illegitimate profession, but in our day being a housewife is an illegitimate profession. Frankly, the most cruel and certainly the most damaging sexual harassment, you want to talk about sexual harassment, the most damaging sexual harassment taking place today is the sexual harassment by feminists and their governmental allies against the role of motherhood and the role of the dependent wife. That's real sexual harassment with devastating results.

But in God's order, this woman is devoted to the home. She is the ruler of the house. She manages the household. And her devotion is remarkable, really remarkable. Verse 13 tells us that she's involved in making thread out of wool and flax, or linen. And I think it's interesting to note the transition between verse 12 and 13. Verse 12 is a pretty spiritual verse. She's being her husband's conscience, she's doing him good and never evil. All the days of her life she's devoted to him being everything he could be. She seeks his spiritual benefits, spiritual welfare. She wants to comfort and encourage and strengthen him. And yet her submission and her godly virtues don't make her in to some kind of spiritual recluse, some kind of a religious nut pretending that irresponsibility and laziness is deeply spiritual while she shirks the duties of the home. She's not quite ready to become the resident theologian and do nothing but spend time in study. Immediately after the spiritual leadership of verse 12 we find her using her hands in verse 13. No place in her life for self-indulgence, no place for laziness, no place for inactivity. She is full of energy in the duties of the home. Whatever the home required, that's what she did.

She looks for flax and wool. Why? Because she wants...she has to purchase the bare product of flax and wool and then she has to spin it into thread and then she has to weave it on a loom. And then once it's woven into fabric, she has to cut it and make the garments with it. Wool? Because of winter time. It was very cold in the winter. Flax or linen? Because of the hot times. Linen was used in the summer and wool was used in the winter. The needle and the spindle served the family and she worked with her hands in delight. There's no complaint about this. It's not begrudging. She finds joy in this labor. Why? Because she loves the people for whom she does it. It is her love that drives her. The Syriac version of this says her hands are active after the pleasure of her heart.

It's not hard for her to do these things. It's not something she begrudges. It's not an unwilling thing because she loves the people she serves. She loves her work because she loves her family, she loves her husband. Its value is connected to who she does it for. Because of such deep devotion to her husband and her children, she willingly denies herself and takes on the most menial of tasks with the greatest amount of pleasure because she understands that they are an outgrowth of her deep love for those people in her family.

Verse 14, "She is like merchant ships, she brings her food from afar." Some of you are saying, "Well that's my wife, she finds these coupons and drives 30 miles to get a bargain on orange juice and eats

up more in gas than we save." Well, listen, she's trying. Now we understand that benefit of that being frugal and being careful. But in those days the rub was you had to walk...you had to walk. She walked long distances to find something that her family would enjoy. It doesn't even say the price was the issue, although we could assume it was. She's like a merchant ship. I mean, he didn't say she's like somebody who takes a short trip. She's like a ship, she takes a journey to get some food that's way off in the distance, and she has to walk along way to get it. But because of the delight she has in providing it for her family, she willingly does that. She finds her complete satisfaction in the joy of serving those great distances to find the very best, certainly for the best price to bring the benefit to her family.

She's engaged, you see, in good planning, careful management, but it's not just simplistic, it's not just bread and water, there are little things that she adds to make it rich and enjoyable, even if she has to go a long way to get it.

Verse 15 says more about her devotion as a homemaker. "She rises also while it is still night and gives food to her household and portions to her maidens." This is before dawn and she's up. "A lamp...a lamp is always shining." In ancient times in Middle Eastern homes, and it was the wife's duty to keep it lit, pour a little oil in after midnight, get up before dawn to make sure it hadn't all been burned up. That was her. After midnight, trimming the lamp, up before dawn to grind corn for the next day's meals, or prepare whatever had to be prepare for her husband and her children and the rest of the household. Her household is above her own comfort, above her own rest. She's up long before her husband and children so that she can give food to the household.

And it says...notice in verse 15..."And portions to her maidens." That's quite an interesting statement. The word "portions," some would take it to mean food that she's sort of feeding her maidens, but she had some young girls who worked for her. This is a picture of kind of a large estate. Remember, this mother is talking to her son who will be a king. And so there are servants there. But this woman, even though she would be a queen is not indolent or lazy, she works. And the work portions in the Septuagint, they use the Greek word erga which means work or labor. What it means is she's up early passing out the tasks to all the maidens to do their assignments through the day. So she literally gets up in the morning to plan the day's activities, prepare the day's food, pass out the tasks to all the maidens who are going to assist. She really does manage the house.

She's entrepreneurial, too. Look at verse 16. "She considers a field and buys it." Now...notice this, she knows the field is for sale and she thinks it through. She assesses the price and the value of the field and the benefit it could bring to her family. And she decides it's an appropriate thing to do. Notice the independence of this. She considers it, she thinks it through and she makes the purchase.

You say, "Well...well where does she get this money? Did she just take it out of her husband's account?" No. This is a very enterprising lady. It tells you that she purchases the field in verse 16

from her earnings. And then she has enough to plant a vineyard in it. She decides that this would be a great field to plant grapes and that that would benefit the household well. And so she takes her earnings.

Where did she get this little bit of money? Well, she had a little enterprise going. Go down to verse 24. This is an entrepreneurial lady. And what she's doing, according to verse 24, is making linen garments and selling them and supplying belts or sashes to the tradesmen. So she's got a little cottage industry going, I like this. People say, "Well, shouldn't a woman be creative? And what about their talents? And shouldn't they work?" Yes, and she's found the right place. The Word of God pictures her right in the home being enterprising enough to be making these garments, certainly probably assisted by the maidens that come alongside of her, selling them to the tradesmen who tend...who take them and export them all over the world. So she's got her own little export business going, she's working with tradesmen. And from the money that she garnered out of that enterprise she started to save it, and save it and save it, never indulging it on herself but always with a view to securing it so that in the future she could do something that would benefit everybody. She finally comes to the conclusion, she has enough, the field is for sale, that's the best investment. She buys the field, she plants the vineyard and everybody benefits. She makes wise investments.

Wonderful when a woman is enterprising and if she has the time and the inclination and the talents and abilities to do things in the home that can benefit the family, that is a marvelous thing. The sad thing is when a woman decides that she's going to go have a career at the expense of the family, at the expense of the children, at the expense of the husband and the home.

Verse 17 tells us a little more about this woman. It says, "She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong." This does not mean she went to the gym. Just want to make that clear. She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong. She's not soft, she's strong. And what has made her strong, and it's not just talking about her muscles, she's become strong as the result of her effort, as a result of her strength exerted in the daily tasks she becomes strong. And that's why she can do so much. Her physical constitution is strong and her arms are strong and she can work that spindle, look at verse 19. "She can stretch her hands out to the distaff and her hands can grasp the spindle." She can do that handwork. She can work with her hands, verse 13, in delight. Verse 24, she can make those linen garments. She in verse 22 even makes coverings for herself. This is a woman who is a strong woman.

Then in verse 18, "She senses that her gain is good, her lamp does not go out at night." What does it mean "she senses that her gain is good?" That all of this effort is producing goodness ot the family. She sees that what she does is beneficial for everybody and she lives for them. She is motivated by the goodness of that effort, the goodness to everybody around her. She is spurred on not by self-fulfillment, not by self-indulgence, she is spurred on by the inherent goodness of what she is doing in the lives of everyone she loves. The family is not organized in such a way that everybody has to

attend to her, but rather that she is committed to give herself away for the goodness of everyone else. And in order to accomplish all that's in her heart, her lamp goes not out at night.

This is remarkable. She finds work for the hours of darkness. And you have to do a special kind of work, it's hard to do sewing work in ancient times without light bulbs, to the light of an oil lamp. It would be hard to stay warm at night during the winter because the only way you could warm the interior of a room would be to have a pat...a pan of hot coals sitting in the middle of the room, which is what they did. But she is so devoted to the needs of her family that she's up at night in the dark doing what could be done in the dark...sleeping and then up again before the light in the morning preparing for the day. Motivated by the goodness of what she does, motivated because it is so good for all the family to enjoy. She does it, to borrow the words of the New Testament, "Heartily as unto the Lord."

In verse 19, speaks of the distaff and the spindle which are implements that are part of making thread which, of course, lead to the loom where there's a weaving. And finally the fabric is made from which clothes and other things can be produced.

Verse 21, "She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household are clothed with scarlet." She's not afraid of the snow. You say, "Well does it snow in Jerusalem? Does it snow in Israel?" Sure. If you were a king and you ended up on the throne in Jerusalem, it snows there about every other winter. But even when it doesn't snow, it's very cold in Jerusalem. In fact, just as a footnote so you know I'm giving you the straight story here, 2 Samuel 23:20, "Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man of Kabzeel, who had done mighty deeds, killed the two sons of Ariel of Moab. He also went down and killed a lion in the middle of a pit on a snowy day." Just so you know. There are snowy days.

Now, she would provide wool garments for the snowy day, but not just wool garments. It's interesting that they're scarlet...she dyes them deep red...deep red. Why? Well, wool garments deep red in color would retain more heat. We all understand that, that dark garments retain heat and white garments reflect heat. Now just dark black garments, but she makes them beautiful with a deep scarlet burgundy kind of a red. And those would be very important in the winter. As I said, all you have is a portable pan with coals to heat a room and you may have worn that wool garment not only out in the day but certainly in the night sitting in the home and maybe even to cover you when you slept. Such garments were dignified. They were beautiful. They were well made. They were functional but they were red so that they could have some beauty. She cared not just about the basic things, she cared about the enjoyment of her family.

In verse 22 she makes coverings for herself. "Her clothing is fine linen and purple." What does it mean she makes coverings for herself? It could refer to a coat, a cloak, a shawl, some kind of a wrap. It also can refer to pillows, blankets, bed covering. She made coverings for herself. She...the implication here is she made her bed beautiful. I mean, earlier in the Proverbs the prostitute did that

to seduce the man. Here is the godly woman making the bed a place of loveliness and comfort. She adorns the beds of her house for herself, for her family, for comfort and for beauty. And then her clothing is fine linen and purple.

When it came...you know, you could say if you looked at this woman, by the time you get to this verse you could say, "You know, this woman has got to really look bad. I mean, she's got to be haggard. This woman gets no sleep. She goes...she doesn't go to bed till after dark. She gets up before light. She's tramping all over town buying stuff at a bargain. When she does get home she's working with the spindle. She's got to have dirty arms, dirty hands and her hair must be a fright. When does she ever pay any attention to herself? And the husband is probably going to come home and say, "You know, all this is great, but, dear, could you please do something about the way you look."

Not so. This woman appreciates the beauty that God has given her. She appreciates the fact that her husband rejoices in that beauty and enjoys that beauty. And so she's very careful and she makes sure that her clothing is not just linen, but fine linen, and not just any kind of cloth or color but purple, which was always associated with elegance. This woman knows how to take care of herself in a way that expresses her beauty and her loveliness to her husband. All...all of that stuff that she was doing and still time to grace herself. It's important, ladies. You know, there is a day when you just drive past Mervyns to a better store. You know, once in a while... Are you comprehending? Thank you, both of you. (Laughter)

This lady understood how important that charm and that beauty was in the good sense because her heart was also right. Well, I don't want to say anymore about that, I'll really be in a lot of trouble.

Verse 24 says more about this amazing enterprise that she's engaged in as a homemaker. She makes these linen garments and sells them and supplies belts to the tradesmen. The Hebrew word "tradesmen" here is quite interesting. It's the word kenaanites and that refers to the Phoenicians who were the sailors of the ancient Middle East. And what she's doing is making garments, selling them to the sailors who are the traders who take their ships off the coast of Palestine and distribute their goods all over the Mediterranean. So she's got an export business going. Belts is cloth girdles, like cummerbunds, sashes. And you see pictures of people in biblical times, you know, representations of them and they have these long robes. You'll always see them with a sash because that was the way you sort of gathered all that material in.

This is a marvelous lady. Her character as a wife, singular. Her devotion as a homemaker, exemplary. Thirdly, her generosity as a neighbor...her generosity as a neighbor. Verse 20, "She extends her hand to the poor and she stretches out her hands to the needy." It isn't that they come to her, it's that she goes to them. Isn't that good? She demonstrates not only a special devotion to her home but compassion toward those not fortunate enough to be in her home. She demonstrates compassion to the poor and the unfortunate who have needs. When it says she extends her hand to

the poor, it means she gets involved in their life, she provides what they need...maybe it was food, maybe it was money, maybe it was a cloak. She stretches out her hands to the needy, she doesn't just touch those who come close to her, she goes to those who have needs. Her generosity as a neighbor. She is an utterly selfless woman.

Number four is her influence as a teacher. And this is quite remarkable and sets a very high standard. Verse 25, "Strength and dignity are her clothing and she smiles at the future." And I start there even though it doesn't talk about teaching because verse 25 is the platform for her teaching. She is clothed in verse 25 with spiritual character. She has spiritual strength and dignity.

What does that word "dignity" mean? It refers to the fact that she is elevated above common things. She is elevated about trivial things. Her life is not all about what doesn't matter. She has true class, true virtue. She has godly character. She is spiritually strong and she has elevated herself to the nobler issues. And she has the power of true character and its expressed in the fact that she smiles at the future. She has no fear. Why? Because she knows her life is right with God and that secures His blessing in the future.

You shouldn't fear the future. You shouldn't worry about the future. If your life is right with God the promise of God is unfolding blessing, isn't it? She knows in whom she trusts. She knows her life is right. She is faithful. She is pure. And therefore she can delight in what is ahead. Those who fear the future are those who experience guilt in the present. If you're overburdened by the weight of your own sin and unfaithfulness, you have every reason to fear the future because the Bible promises chastening. This woman, because of the virtue of her life, can smile at the future and know the promise of God for blessing.

So, based on spiritual strength, based on virtue and having elevated her thoughts above common things, mundane things, trivial things, worldly things...verse 26, "She opens her mouth in wisdom." And she has credibility because of her life. "She opens her mouth in wisdom...and I love this...and literally the law of kindness is on her tongue." She opens her mouth, she speaks wisdom. But that wisdom comes with kindness. She guides her family daily, including her husband, with words of wisdom from the law of God. Proverbs 1:8 tells a young man to follow the law of his mother. Her's is not a formal class, there's a place for women to teach women, women to teach children and we understand that. And women are limited in not being able to teach the church, as we read in 1 Timothy chapter 2. But women have a class that is not formal and informal...not formal but informal, it's the home. And it's all the time her classroom. It's the instruction in the flow of her life day in, day out, day in, day out she is the teacher. And out of her mouth comes, it says in verse 26, the teaching of kindness, literally the Torah of kindness, the Law of God...the law of kindness. Kindness,w what's that? That's that magnificent Old Testament word chesed, it is translated kindness, loving kindness, mercy. Its perhaps truest translation is grace. So she teaches law, God's law to her family with grace. With pleasing, kind, gracious speech her tongue is regulated. Behind the teaching of the law

is the tempering of mercy, compassion. This is the noble, excellent woman.

Fifthly, we have seen her as a wife, a homemaker, a neighbor and a teacher, fifthly as a mother, her blessedness as a mother...her blessedness as a mother. Verse 27, "She looks well to the ways of her household and doesn't eat the bread of idleness." And because of that devotion to her household and because she's not lazy but she gives her life for them, verse 28, "Her children rise up and bless her, her husband also and he praises her saying, 'Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all.'" There's the reward...there's the reward.

She exercises, according to verse 27, careful surveillance over everything. She manages the children. She manages the household. She is not lazy. She is not eating the product of laziness but the bread of loving hard work. And then the real satisfaction comes for her, it comes from the people she loves the most. She's given everything to them and what does she get back? They rise up and bless her and they praise her. They reverence her, literally. They honor her, they hold her in high esteem. And even her husband because she has set aside her own comfort for his, she receives from him the supreme blessing after all the years of life, he loves her more than he's ever loved her because he now understands her character better than he ever understood it.

It's so obvious that when you marry somebody in the beginning, there are lots of sort of chemical attractions and some social attractions and some other things that bring you together. But you don't have a lifetime of character in which to assess someone. It shouldn't be that somewhere down the life of that marriage you start saying, "Well, I don't love you anymore, this isn't going to work, I want out of this deal." It ought to be that the further you go down that marriage the more noble, the more wonderful, the more excellent that woman becomes so that the further along you are in that marriage, the more likely you are to say, "I wouldn't trade you for anybody in the world." That's how it ought to be. As she becomes older, as her children grow, they will appreciate her more and more and so will her husband because of her sacrifice and they will rise up and call her blessed. They will praise her and he should say of her, "Many daughters have done nobly, I've met a lot of women and some pretty wonderful ones at that, I wouldn't trade you for any of them."

As she becomes older, her children grow. They have their own children and they endeavor then to raise them as they were raised by her. She is constantly before their eyes. Her tender guidance, her wise counsel, her loving discipline, her holy example, her hard work, her unselfish giving, all of these things never cease to fill the memories of her children and so they begin to fill the lives of their children. And that's how righteousness is passed from generation to generation. And let me tell you, no woman in the work place can have that kind of influence.

She's excellent as a wife and homemaker and a neighbor and a teacher and mother and lastly, her excellence as a saint, verses 30 and 31. "Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised." Simple point. Look pass the superficial. Charm in the Hebrew

means gracefulness of form, it talks about her shape. Beauty has to do with the face. That...that is deceitful, that can all look good and really cover up a wicked heart. But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.

So Lemuel's mother says, "Find a woman who fears the Lord. Therein is the beginning of wisdom. She will be praised. Give her the product of her hands and let her works praise her in the gates." What are the products of her hands? All the good she's done to others, it will now come back to her. All the sacrifice will be her's the rest of her life. Everything she did in private will come back in public as they praise her in the gates in the middle of town. She'll be famous for her godly womanhood, that's her reward.

Well, there's the mirror. We look into it and measure ourselves against it.

Father, thank You for this tremendous passage of Scripture. We've just touched the surface of it. Lord, we pray for the women of this church, knowing their love for Christ, knowing their desire to fear You and honor You, knowing their submissiveness to the Word of God, we trust, Lord, that You would lead them to be the women that this great chapter describes, that they might raise a generation of children who will pass on their virtue, that they might know the rich, rich reward that comes when the children and the husband praise them. We pray for the families of our church. We know that much lies in the responsibility of the husband, but much as well in the responsibility of the wife. We pray, Lord, that You and Your grace will forgive us for our short-comings, for all of us have fallen short of the standard both for men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and, Lord, to help us pick up from the failure and to move ahead and to be obedient to be what You want us to be. We pray especially on this day that You would cause all the goodness that so many have given to their families to come back in the joy and the thankfulness and the blessing of a generation of children and of husbands who will praise them. And, Lord, thank You for the grace and the strength through Your Spirit to be what You want us to be, in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).