

The Mirror for All Christian Women

Proverbs 31

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This is Mother's Day and I am certainly anxious to bring honor to all of those faithful mothers in our church family, and I thank the Lord for all of them. I just feel that one day isn't enough. If you have been blessed with a godly and a faithful mother it's certainly a constant point of gratitude and thanks to God for such a gift. But it is a day in which we can focus on the responsibility of being a wife and mother and this morning I've decided that I want to take you to a passage that I haven't spoken on probably in 15 or more years.

It's a familiar one; it's Proverbs chapter 31, if you will take your Bible and look at that. This is really the mirror for all Christian women. When you look into this section of Scripture you see what God has desired as the ultimate godly woman. This passage does not present a particular woman but the ideal. This is the goal of a wife and a mother.

It's really amazing to see how our society has changed. I had occasion some time ago to be rummaging through some very old magazines and looking at how they depicted women; ironing, cleaning floors, cleaning windows, and the product would be in her hand, standing over a stove with three or four boiling pots, sitting on a couch reading stories to her children, playing games in the backyard, pushing a baby buggy around the block, it almost sounds foreign.

Today when you see women in advertising, you see a woman with a brief case sailing down a crowded street late for work, or you see a woman in tights doing aerobics or a woman in a skimpy bathing suit half exposed with little interest in her virtue, and of course our society today has turned the tables on honoring women and that's the kind of woman our society honors.

The woman of this particular era, the modern woman, sort of looks like this, she works, she builds her career, she demands equal pay, she refuses to submit to her husband, demanding equality with him in everything, she has an affair or two and a divorce or two. She exercises her independence; she relies on her own resources, doesn't want her husband or children to threaten her personal goals and often has her own bank account. She hires a maid or cleaning service, eats out at least 50% of the time with her family or without them, provides assorted boxes of cold cereal and some left over coffee as a standard breakfast for the family, quick frozen meals are the usual dinner fare and expects her husband to do his share of the housework. She is tanned, coiffured, aerobicized into a body building shopping machine living up to the fashion trends, make sure she can compete in attention getting contests, puts the kids in a daycare center, makes sure everyone of them has a TV, a radio, or a boom box in the room so they can be entertained and not bother her while they're exposed to the brainwashing of an immoral, materialistic society she cultivates her own interests.

She is usually opinionated, demands to be heard from, and is eager to fulfill all her personal ambition and the world unfortunately applauds her. She can't stay happy and she usually can't stay married,

and the kids get into drugs if she doesn't put them on drugs her self. She is a far cry from the excellent woman described in Proverbs 31.

I want you to look at this chapter with me and I want you to see how God identifies the ideal wife and mother. Now, this is not the first time in Proverbs that women have been the subject. Earlier chapters describe some women who were anything but excellent. You have the adulteress who flatters with her lips earlier in Proverbs. You have the adulteress who forsakes her own husband breaking her marriage covenant. You have the adulteress who lips drip honey as she seduces other men. You have the smooth tongued adulteress who hunts for the precious life. You have the noisy woman, the foolish woman, the rebellious woman, the quarrelsome woman and a few other assorted less than ideal women.

But finally you get to chapter 31 and you have this wonderful picture of the really excellent wife, God's standard. Let's go back to verse 1 and sort of understand the context for what we're going to see in verses 10 through 31. The words of King Lemuel; the oracle, or the revelation, or the message which his mother taught him. All right, here's the scene, here is a mother speaking to her son, her son's name is Lemuel, we don't know anything about this man at all, we don't know who he is, he was a King, but his mother is still exercised some interest in his life, and well she should. I would guess that he was a young King, King's become King's when their fathers die, even if they're eight years old, so as we know from Josiah and the Old Testament, so here is a young man we can assume, who had not yet married. He is still being given instruction by his mother and this instruction is critical and important, and of course, the stakes are heightened a little bit because of the influence that he will bear as a King.

This is a good word from a Jewish mother to her son who is going to have an eminent responsibility as his life unfolds. Here is how it begins in verse 2, "What oh my son and what oh son of my womb, and what oh son of my vows," and so she deepens the intimacy of this designation. "You are my son, you are my son born out of my womb, you are the son that came as a result of the vow I made before God to my husband. You are my intimate, personal son, the son of a covenant, the son of my womb, the son of my love. What do I want to tell you? What is my message to you?" This is a wise woman, a very wise woman, because the message she gives her son is all about character. It is not about achievement, it is not about accomplishment, it is not about success, it is not about money, it is about character.

The first thing she says to him in verse 3, "Do not give your strength to women or your ways to that which destroys Kings." That is to say don't be sexually immoral, don't be sexually immoral; don't give your strength to women. That is a euphemism for sexual immorality, it destroys and it destroys Kings. Particularly Kings because Kings are in the situation where they can possess harems made up of women drawn from other nations with which they make alliances in order to achieve their own goals. Stay away from sexual immorality; that is really good wisdom and advice.

Then in verse 4 she says, "It is not for Kings oh Lemuel, it is not for Kings to drink wine or for rulers to desire strong drink, lest they drink and forget what is decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted." Stay away from sexual immorality, number two, stay away from alcohol. Stay away from that which can dull your judgment, dull your senses; rob you of the clarity of your thinking, great advice. Stay away from the forbidden sexual event activity. Stay away from anything that can corrupt your clarity of mind which alcohol or drugs does.

Then, in verse 6 she says, "Give strong drink to him who's perishing and wine to him whose life is bitter." In those days, beverages with alcohol in them were helpful to alleviate the suffering and pain of those who were in great hurt. We all understand pain, we all know when we have pain we try to find a prescription that will relieve our pain. In ancient times they used these kind of beverages to alleviate the pain of those who were suffering terrible, physical torment. She is saying to him stay away from sexual sin, stay away from alcohol and meet the needs of hurting people. Give yourself away to people who suffer.

She's not done; verse 7, "Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his trouble no more." In other words, you want to alleviate the pain and the suffering of these people. Beyond that, verse 8 here's another category of suffering people, "Open your mouth for the dumb." That is to say speak in defense of those who can't speak for themselves. Make sure you give yourself for the rights of all the unfortunate. Stand by the oppressed, defend the defenseless, this is all about character. What a wise woman she was. Stay away from sexual immorality, stay away from alcohol, give your life to alleviate the pain of hurting people, defend those who can't defend themselves, stand by the oppressed. Then verse 9, "Open your mouth and judge righteously. Be a person on integrity, be a person of honesty, be a person of truth and righteousness and when you open your mouth, out of your mouth as a ruler should come a righteous judgment." Verse 9 closes, "And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy. Deal justly with everybody even the people who can't reward you. Even the people who can't give you anything for the justice rendered in their behalf. Be a man of character."

Now all of that covers a lot of life but it only occupies nine verses. The rest of the chapter is about one other critical area of advice. Verse 10, "An excellent wife who can find," as if to say, "And most of all my son find, if you can, an excellent wife," as if this is the most important priority of all and it really is.

The right life partner profoundly enriching, monumentally enriching for the life of a man, for his children, and the generations to come and all who know him; wrong wife, an unfaithful wife, a less than excellent wife, pain and sorrow, and sadness, and disaster for the husband and the children, and all who know them.

So this mother says an excellent wife who can find for her worth is far above jewels. That word could be pearls. I think the King James translated it rubies, it's a generic word that means jewels, and in the ancient world gold and jewels were the measure of value. More important than the most expensive jewels was to find an excellent wife.

Now what does an excellent wife look like? When we're looking for one what should we be looking for? Well, what unfolds in this passage is just six particular features that I'll point out. 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, a saint. Now just to tell you something, from verse 10 to 31 is actually 22 verses, 22 verses; that's important because there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, Alef, Bet, Gimel, Dalif, and so it goes down through the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Each of these verses begins with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet. The first one with Alef, second one with Bet, the third with Gimel, the fourth with Dalif, and so it moves all the way through. Why did they do this? So it would be memorable. Those of you who have been students know that when you have to remember a list of things you very often will figure out an acrostic, you'll figure out

some way to process your mind down through the elements so that you can remember all that you have to remember, that's what I used to do as a student. If I could figure out the right acrostic, turn it into a word I could work my way back through that material when I had to recall it on a test.

Well here all you had to do is know the Hebrew alphabet. Everybody knew the Hebrew alphabet and the Hebrew alphabet would then trigger each one of these statements about what an excellent wife was like so that everybody could recall to memory and always have the criteria immediately available in their mind as they were assessing women.

So in a memorable fashion, we have by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit this description. This is not a woman in particular as I said, but a full length portrait of the ideal woman. This is then the mirror for every Christian woman. This woman, Proverbs 19:14 says, "Is a gift from God, a gift from God." It's hard to find such a faithful woman and so it demands a lot of prayer and asking God to provide that woman as a gift.

By the way, it's just as hard to find a good man. Just in case you were wondering, Proverbs chapter 20, verse 6, "Who can find a faithful man?" So men don't think you're basking in goodness, they're as rare as good women. To often the selection of a good wife or the assumed good wife is made on the basis of looks or economics, style, rather than virtue, spiritual excellence, internal godly character. But an excellent wife, when found, is more valuable than absolutely anything. The most precious thing you will ever, ever possess as a man, as children, is a good wife and mother.

Now, what are her qualities? As this unfolds it's just very simple, it's straight forward. First of all, looking at her character as a wife, verse 11, "The heart of her husband trusts in her and he will have no lack of gain." That's pretty basic isn't it? The most important relationship in the home is the relationship between the husband and the wife, right? That is the relationship that reflects itself to the children and so that's where the text begins with the most important relationship in the home, and here we find that the most important element in a relationship exists in this one trust, trust. That is what holds relationships together.

Here you have a man who trusts his wife. This is very practical, this is the kind of a woman who allows her husband to do his work, to go away, to be gone, to give himself to the career that he has to provide for his family, and he can go away with absolute confidence and her integrity, and in her discretion, and in her discernment, and in her care for all of his interests he will trust in her to care for the home, to care for the children, to care for all of the resources and assets and responsibilities of the home.

His comfort is her concern and he knows it. His burdens are hers to bear and he knows it. He is at ease in his absence because he knows that everything he has is safe with her. His house is the home of his heart and his heart is at rest. He is not suspicious; he is not worried, he is not jealous because she is trustworthy. By the way, against the background of ancient times, when marriages were basically made by parents and wives were not necessarily trustworthy it was common - I found this in my reading that when a husband left the home he locked up everything valuable. That would be tantamount today to taking all the credit cards with you when you go out of town. Because you're not sure that being gone isn't going to end up in some kind of a serious bankruptcy as she wastes away your resources.

But this woman has so much character, she has the character of a steward, she has appreciation for the resources of the family, she is frugal, she is wise, she has discretion about what she does with the resources available to her, her primary responsibility is to be sure that she increases her husband's trust in her. That is what builds a strong and lasting relationship, trust. Once trust is breached you will have suspicion in a marriage and no matter what may go on everything rises to the level of suspicion. No matter how you try to argue your way out of it, if once you have breached trust then there is reason for distrust in the future, and distrust eats at a relationship like cancer.

He trusts her and it says in verse 11, "He will have no lack of gain." That simply means he's not going to lose what he's earned. He doesn't have to worry about what's going to happen to his resources. She is the *Oica des pites*, that's the word used to describe the role of a woman in 1 Timothy 5:14, the ruler of the house, "Women are the rule of the house, she is the *Oica des pites*, she is the one who has charge over the assets of the house, over the relationships in the home and he trusts her." He will never suffer a lack because of her abuse of his trust. She helps him to profit, she is scrupulous, she is careful, she doesn't put pressure on him to have to lie, cheat, and steal, not report his income properly in order to cover her spending.

In verse 12 it says, "She does him good and not evil all the days of her life." She is consumed with his best interest. She is consumed with building him up all the days of her life. That little phrase is really important because it means in the good times and the bad times, and the times of plenty and in the times of want, and the times of sickness and in the times of health - remember when you said that in your wedding vows? In the times of sorrow and the times of joy, in the times of weakness and the times of strength, in all the times, all the days of her life she does him good. She never does him any evil, she never does anything to harm him and all she does then as the years go by is build his trust, and build his trust, and build his trust and it's easy to love someone you trust.

She serves him as her Lord to put it in the words of Peter, as Sarah served Abraham and called him Lord. She reveals her affection for him and her love for him by consistent stewardship, consistent service in his behalf. Her love is so deep it has a purity to it, it has a power to it, it has a devotion to it that never changes. She is consumed with his comfort, success, reputation, she wants him to be joyful and happy, to live for him and to protect all that is his is her constant happiness.

Never unkind, never chafing against that responsibility, she is submissive in the most gracious way. She is in a sense the protector of her husband as he is her protector as well. This is the essence of what Paul meant when he said, "Wives love your husbands." She advances her husband's respect, look at verse 23, "Her husband is known in the gates as her husband, all those husbands who gather in the gates where the elders of the city sit to talk about all the issues, all those guys that are sitting there that don't have wives like this are envious of him. He's the one who's known as the wife of so and so." When he sits among the elders in the land and they talk about domestic matters he is the one who is the envy of all the rest. She advances then her husband's respect, her husband's nobility with the leaders of the city because she is so faithful to the duties of the home, the duties of her love toward her husband. He is free to be all the man that he can be. Not only is he therefore married to a woman who raises his stature in the eyes of others but he becomes the man that he should be because she frees him from the encumbrance of worry and fear to be all that he can be.

So her character as a wife is presented to us. Secondly, her devotion as a homemaker and the terms of this are different today. "I confess," starting in verse 13 going down to verse 24, because we don't have to do some of the things that they had to do, but I'm going to go through it briefly just to show

you how devoted she was to the home.

The picture may change a little bit, but the direction of that devotion is the same. "She is a homemaker," I know Vivian Gornick, expressing the modern feminist view, a professor at the University of Illinois said, "Being a housewife is an illegitimate profession." That is the modern mentality, it really is, but it is still God's design that a woman give herself away in the home to her husband and her children. She is the ruler of the house, that's the domain of the woman, that's the spirit of her duty and her responsibility.

Verse 13 says, "She looks for wool and flax," not the thread but the raw wool and the raw flax, "And she works with her hands in delight." There she is working with this raw material as we'll see a little later, to spin it into thread to make it into cloth by weaving it, and then to cut it up and sew it into clothing. This is her life, her submission; her godly virtue does not show up immediately in some "spiritual enterprise." We don't find here immediately that she's given over herself to some ministry which somehow allows for some level of irresponsibility and laziness in the home. She first of all is defined as a homemaker, she is the one whose love for her husband is so strong and so consistent all her life long that he has perfect trust in her and he becomes the man he can be because of that. Then you move to the home and you find that there is no place in her life for self indulgent laziness, there's no place in her life for distraction. The focus of everything is in that home.

She's full of energy with regard to the duties of home; she looks for wool and flax and works with her hands in delight. In other words, the work that she does in her hands to make the clothing her family needs, wool used for clothing worn in the cold times, the winter. Flax used for the linen that they wore in the summer, this work is a work that comes out of the joy of her heart. She works with her hands from the delight of her heart. She loves her work. It is not drudgery, she loves it and the reason she loves it is for the pure goodness of it as we will see in a few moments.

It is not a matter of some self denial, some gritting of the teeth to give herself away for the needs of her family, she does it with great joy. She even, verse 14, "She's like merchant ships, she brings her food from afar," and some of you are saying yeah my wife's like that she'll drive 15 miles to save \$.10 on the orange juice, it'll cost me \$12 in gas for her to get to the bargain.

Well in those days they didn't drive a vehicle. Well what is pictured here is a thing so wonderful, she's like merchant ships, she brings her food from afar. Every locale had a sort of staple diet, whatever they grew is what they ate and if you wanted to enhance and enrich and bring variety into the diet of your family, you had to go to some other locale to get what they were growing somewhere else, and because of the love of her family and the desire that they enjoy what she prepared she was willing to be like a merchant ship that sailed away to some foreign land to bring back some exotic kind of food, it's just for the joy of the family.

She found her joy in providing clothing for the family. She found her joy in providing meals for the family. Meals that were creative, meals that had variety, it was not just the same old, same old she went distances on foot to get something that would be special delight for the family to enjoy. This is all rose out of the pleasure that she found in doing it in her heart.

Get the best for the family she loved, verse 15, again back to her as a homemaker, "She rises also while it's still night, gives food to her household," she would get up before dawn in those days

because they started work at 6:00 a.m., they started to work at dawn and they had then to eat immediately at dawn, they would have their breakfast and be out to work and she had to get up before dawn to grind the corn for the day's meals, not only for her family but portions to her maidens. This was a large home, perhaps an estate with land and much responsibility and she has some servants there that she needs to feed as well, and so she's up doing what she needs to do. This was necessary, it wasn't like today when you have a refrigerator and you have canned goods, and all of those kinds of things that are readily accessible and easily available, and you can throw things together rather rapidly.

We don't live in a society where these things need to be done and I think that contributes in some way to the lack of focus on the home and the distraction. It's a great place for you to take all of the things we do have today that people didn't have then and use your creativity to enrich and enhance the home with those things. We certainly have more time to make the personal investment in our families and in our children, not having the same kind of laborious tasks to do everyday.

She really is the ruler of that house. In verse 16, this is so interesting; she considers a field and buys it. She finds that a field is for sale, which can add to the productivity of the family, add to the economy of the family, and she buys it, and you say well where did she get the money? Well it says in verse 16, "From her earnings," and she plants a vineyard in it. Where did she get any earnings? Down in verse 24, "She makes linen garments and sells them and supplies belts to the tradesman." The word tradesman, Canaanites, Phoenicians; the Phoenicians were the sea going people who literally took the trade from the east and scattered it all over the west in the Mediterranean countries and so she was producing goods, she was producing linen garments and belts or sashes, and selling them. She probably had some of the girls - this was a cottage industry, this is a busy lady. Up in the morning grinding corn, preparing meals, during the day she's working for her own family and she's also working to produce something in this little cottage industry along with the maidens who were there no doubt assisting her, and they were selling it to the tradesman.

Again, as she was using this I might say for capital items, she didn't do this to contribute to the general flow of the family economy. The husband was the provider and that was enough, but she was setting this aside and setting it aside and setting it aside, and when enough was set aside and she found a field she bought the field to enhance the economics of the family and purchased the necessary plants and created a vineyard.

Very enterprising lady, nothing wrong with being this enterprising, this is wonderful, this is part of the ideal woman. She wants to assist the family, not only in the tasks that need to be done day by day but in the development of new opportunities so she in making some money it indicates here, "Has not enhanced her lifestyle, she has not used that money made in the cottage industry to somehow raise her personal level of living, but rather has set it aside and set it aside and set it aside until enough is there for her to buy a field and vineyard can be planted there," making wise investments on behalf of her husband.

Through all of this, verse 17 says, "She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong," that is not to say that she becomes buff by lifting weights. What you have here is a woman who's very busy, very enterprising, full of energy, and physically she's healthy, physically she's strong. But it's not just talking about that she becomes a strong woman in the sense of strongly committed to the duties and tasks that are given to her, and I do think there's an element of physicality in this.

The best way to be healthy is to exercise. The best way to exercise is to devote yourself to those things which are essential and those things which are beneficial to others. She works for the good of others, that's how she strengthens herself. Her health is then strengthened by her walks and by her work, by her diligence. Her strength is the result of giving herself away to her household.

Verse 18 sums it up, this is motive, "She senses that her gain is good." I mean the bottom line here is not that she's seeking something for herself, she's not trying to elevate her sense of self worth, she's not trying to raise her lifestyle, she's doing it because it's good. She senses that all the product of this is good. She's motivated by the sheer goodness of it. It's good to provide this for the family, it's good to have the family clothes, it's good to feed them in this way. It brings them joy; it's good to have a husband who trusts in her, this is good.

Spurred on, not by ego, not by self indulgence; spurred on by the inherent goodness of what she does. She does what is good, not so much for herself but for others, but she understands the joy of knowing that she's doing good and receiving the benefit that comes back from it. The love of her children, the love and adoration of her husband; in fact, she's so motivated by the sheer goodness of this and the reward from her family and from God for that goodness that verse 18 says, "Her lamp doesn't go out at night." It's so good that she just does it even after the dark sets in. The dark sets in say at 6:00 or whatever, she still finds work for the hours of darkness, motivated by the sheer goodness of what she does.

This is a good woman. This is a woman who's doing what does hardly under the Lord. This is a woman who gives herself away for her husband, who gives herself for her children. In verse 19 picks up the idea of the wool and the flax from verse 13, stretches out her hand to the _____ staff and her hands grasp the spindle, she has to spin that into thread and of course then she has to weave it into cloth, then she has to cut it and sew it into a garment, but she's motivated by the goodness of all of this.

Verse 21 says, "She's not afraid of the snow for all her household are clothed with scarlet." She's not afraid when the winter comes because everybody's clothed in scarlet. It doesn't snow a lot in Israel but it probably snows every other year or so in Jerusalem and if you're in Jerusalem it can get very cold in the winter, and it can snow there and does. She plans for that.

The only way they heated their homes in the land of Israel in ancient days was a flat pan full of hot coals, just radiating the heat through the house and so you needed something to keep yourself warm. The cloak that they wore in the cold days would be the cloak that they wore to sleep at night, along with other things. They would turn that into a blanket on the bed. She was ready for the snow.

They used scarlet, something very dark, because you know dark garments; dark wool garments absorb the heat. But it wasn't black it was scarlet, and scarlet means that she had a little bit of an eye for beauty. Scarlet was considered a beautiful and rich color and so she makes garments, not just functional but even beautiful, dignified in color.

You say well a woman who does all this she must be pretty dowdy looking. Given herself to all this she must be pretty haggard. Well, verse 22, "She makes coverings for herself, her clothing is fine linen and purple." She doesn't forget the beauty, the things that make her beautiful, but there's more there than that. See that first line? "She makes coverings for herself," that refers not so much to her

clothing but to beds in the house, pillows, mattresses, bedspreads, blankets, coverings, she makes a beautiful bed is really what it says and when those women in those days made a bed, they made a bed, they made the mattress.

Then they made the cloths, and than they made the - whatever the duvet or whatever you call it, or the comforter or the bedspread or whatever, and than they made the pillows and they made a lovely bed. Then also it says that she had clothing that was fine linen. It wasn't the coarse kind of linen, it was that more carefully and tightly spun flax, that fine, fine, almost silky linen so that when she got up and dressed herself she was refined and she was lovely, and she made that linen purple because purple is a beautiful and rich color. She adorned her own beauty, she understood that God is a God of beauty, and she understood that God has made us to appreciate beauty, and a man may have a diligent and busy wife but he also wants to have a wife that's caring about her own beauty and presenting herself to him and to the family and to others in the beauty with which God has graced her.

There's no ostentation here, there's nothing about overdoing it, but she was refined in the way she dressed. So here is this amazing woman, who is busy, and working with her hands, and staying up after dark and getting up before light, and yet with all this labor and all this self sacrifice she is concerned about presenting herself in the beauty of adornment with which God has so graced women.

She manages it all, and as we saw in verse 24, "She makes linen garments, sells them, and supplies belts to the tradesman." She is some homemaker isn't she? She is an amazing woman. Now remember, this is not some woman that you can meet or that anybody met, this is that woman who is the ideal, this is the goal to which you stretch as a woman.

Thirdly, we want to look at her generosity as a neighbor. We have seen her role as a wife and a homemaker; thirdly, her generosity as a neighbor. Go back to verse 20, "She extends her hand to the poor, she stretches out her hands to the needy." How wonderful; this is like the widow you remember in the New Testament described the Apostle Paul who goes on the list in the church, the one who has cared for other widows and orphans. This is a very great responsibility for godly women.

She demonstrates not only a special devotion to her own home but compassion toward those not fortunate enough to be in her home. The poor, the destitute, she extends her hand to them. That is, she gets personally involved in their lives, her hand might have a garment, her hand might have food, her hand might have a bed, a blanket. She stretches out her hands again to the needy. The idea here is of intimacy. She doesn't ship things to the poor and the needy she puts her hands out with them, she reaches out. She again is unselfish, she is sacrificial, she's compassionate.

Fourthly, in looking at this ideal woman, we see her influence as a teacher, her influence as a teacher. Verses 25 and 26 and here's where teaching begins, "Strength and dignity are her clothing." If you're going to be a teacher you start with character don't you? Far more important than what you say is who you are. She is clothed with spiritual strength; strength here has to do with an unwavering, uncompromising resolve. It has to do with that kind of character that is consistent, strong, doesn't fall to temptation, doesn't vacillate, doesn't waiver, isn't up and down, in and out, sometimes doing what's right, sometimes doing what's wrong, this is a strong, spiritual character that is being described here.

The word here - another word that's very important is the word dignity, that word dignity refers to something which is elevated above the common. When we say a person has dignity we're saying they're above the common standard. Class, virtue, this is not a woman like every other woman; this woman rises above in terms of her character. She has a strength, a fortitude in her character that is noble, that is dignified. This is the power of true character, consistent character. Her life is above the standard of most.

Verse 25 says, "She smiles at the future." Boy that is a great statement, "She smiles at the future." That's what character will do for you folks. You be a woman of character, for that matter a man of character, you live in your family, and spiritual consistency and spiritual dignity, you live a godly life, and you can look at the future and smile. You're not going to have to worry that your spouse is going to leave you. You're not going to have to worry that your children are going to turn their back on you and break your heart.

Her character, her virtue, the dignity of her spiritual commitment, the consistency of it means she could look at the future and have no fear. She could look at the future and know that she could continue to have the love and affection and trust and faithfulness of her husband. She could look at the future and not fear the loss of her children, the disaffection of her children. Being able to smile at the future, that is a very, very great thing, isn't it?

She's pure, she's faithful, she delights in giving away her life for those in her family, and she looks at the future and smiles because she knows what the return is going to be on that investment. She's planned well and then having that character as a foundation, verse 26 says, "She opens her mouth in wisdom." I'll tell you, her family listens, they listen. Her character is her credibility; she opens her mouth in wisdom.

This is what Proverbs 1:8 calls "The law of your mother." She opens her mouth in wisdom and the teaching, the Torah, the law of kindness is on her tongue. What does she teach? She teaches kindness; Tzadein Hebrew, loving kindness, grace, mercy. The father who teaches theology and principals and business practices, etc., and the mother teaches kindness and mercy, and graciousness, and gentleness, and compassion. She teaches it because she lives it, this is the balance.

As a father I'm concerned about principles and about theology and about truth, and Patricia's concerned about the heart, grace, and mercy, and compassion, and kindness, and honesty and all those marvelous things. It's a wonderful balance and she teaches the things that are manifest in her character.

Fifthly, you come to her blessedness as a mother. We've seen her as wife, homemaker, neighbor, teacher; here is her blessedness as a mother. Quickly, verse 27 and 28, "She looks well to the ways of her household, doesn't eat the bread of idleness," that's just rehearsing again the fact that she's not lazy; she takes care of her house and here comes the blessedness back. In verse 28, "Her children rise up and bless her."

Her husband also and he praises her. You see that's why she can look at the future and smile; she's made the kind of investment that brings that return. Her children rise up, as her children grow, as

they get older, as the years go by they reverence her, they honor her, they hold her in higher and higher esteem. Is there a greater reward for a mother than that?

Her husband also, because she has so trustingly given her life to him praises her. He praises her by saying many daughters have done nobly but you excel them all, you are the greatest honey, you are the greatest. You're better than any I've ever seen. As she becomes older and the children grow and have their own children, they endeavor to raise them the way she raised them. She is constantly before the eyes of her children, her tender guidance, her wise counsel, her loving discipline, her wholly example, her hard work, her unselfish giving, they never forget and they live it out in the next generation. Her husband rejoices in her and praises her above all others.

Finally, her excellence as a saint, undergirding all of this course is her spiritual life. It comes at the end but it belongs at the beginning. Verse 30, "Charm is deceitful, charm means form, figure, and beauty is vain," that's face and features. They mean nothing in the big scheme of things. Beauty of form, graceful form can be deceptive. Beauty of face can mean absolutely nothing in terms of character. Form and face have no real value, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.

Look for a woman who fears the Lord, be a woman who fears the Lord. This will be a true worshipper; the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, Proverbs 9:10, this means reverencing God, reverencing His revelation, His Word, His Son, that's the core of her character. She is a pure, true, worshipper of God, and out of her love for God, and out of her reverence for God is fidelity to her mate, is commitment to her home, is love for the needy, is wisdom taught to her own and is the fulfilling of the calling of a mother. She seeks no praise, but she gets it, "She shall be praised."

"Give her the product of her hands and let her works praise her in the gates." In other words, give her back the good that came out of her hands to others and let her receive the praise she deserves. This kind of woman almost seems impossible if not ridiculous in our day, but God's standard never changes and this is that which every Christian mother and wife needs to set as the ideal, and ask God for the grace to pursue it.

By the way, if you're looking at your life and saying, "I've been going the wrong direction," well today's a good day to start in the right direction. God is the God of new beginnings isn't He? This is the path for you to walk in.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. It is such a clear and concise and practical and helpful description of what You want, and how glad we are oh God that you have given us Your Holy Spirit to strengthen the women, the women who belong to Christ so that they can set this as a goal and move toward it. It is the prayer of our hearts Lord that You would raise up such godly women by Your Holy Spirit's power by the work of the Word in their lives. Father, we thank You for this Word to us this morning in Christ's name, Amen.

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