

An Excellent Wife

Scripture: Proverbs 31:10-31

Code: 80-50

Well, this is a special day, and a special day like this demands that we give our special attention to the matter of motherhood, being a wife and mother, a matter to which the Word of God speaks very explicitly. And I would draw your attention, if I might, to Proverbs, chapter 31 – Proverbs, chapter 31, to look together at the Word of God and its instruction on the subject of an excellent wife. You know, it's amazing how our society has changed in its perception of a woman and her role. And I don't mean that it has changed over the several thousand years since Proverbs 31 was written, but it seems to me that it has changed in the last 20 or 30 years. It seems to me that at least in my own lifetime, there was a portion of my life in which our society could at least understand and affirm the pattern of an excellent wife given in Proverbs 31. But in the last 30 years or so, our society has moved so far from these principles that it may seem almost ludicrous to imagine a woman of the eighties fitting into the mold of the standards given here in Proverbs 31.

What kind of a woman does our society honor? Who is the honored woman of the eighties? Who is the prototype woman of the eighties? What is the modern superwoman like? If our society and our culture could design a woman, what would that woman be like? Well, let me see if I can't pull it together for you. She would work at a job, build her own career, demand and get equal pay with men. She would refuse to submit to her husband, demanding equality with him in everything. She would have an affair or two or three, a divorce or two or three, an abortion or two. She would definitely exercise her independence. She would make sure that she was eminently fulfilled herself. She would rely on her own resources. She would not want her husband or children to threaten her personal goals. She would have her own bank account. She would hire a maid or cleaning service. She would eat out at least 50 percent of the time, with her family or without. She would make cold cereal and coffee the standard breakfast fare for the family, and quick-frozen meals usual dinner fare, and she would certainly expect her husband to do half the housework. She would be tanned, coiffured, aerobicized, bulging with muscle. She would be shopping to keep up with the fashion trends and make sure she could compete in the attention-getting contest. She would put her children in a day-care center, making sure that each one also had a TV in his or her room, so that when they were home they wouldn't interrupt her routine. She would be opinionated. She would demand to be heard from, and eager to fulfill all of her personal ambition. The world would applaud her, and she wouldn't be able to stay married or happy, and her kids would probably be into drugs. But she would be the woman of the eighties; and she is a million miles from the woman of God described in Proverbs 31.

Do you understand that the book of Proverbs is a collection of wisdom that fathers and mothers were to give to their children? Do you understand that it was common in a Jewish family for a father to teach his sons the truths of this book? And not only a father, but a mother, for on several occasions it says, “Not to forsake the instruction of your mother.” This was basically the composite practical manual for living life that Jewish parents taught their children. Now, one of the very most important things that children needed to learn was directed at the young boys, and that was how to select the right woman. In fact, earlier on in the book of Proverbs, young men are warned against the wrong kind of woman, the adulteress who flatters with her lips, the adulteress who forsakes her own husband, breaks covenant, and entertains a union with someone else, the adulteress whose lips drip honey but who brings about death and destruction, the smooth-tongued adulteress who hunts for the precious life to make him her prey. Proverbs warns against the noisy woman, the quarrelsome woman, the rebellious woman, the foolish woman. And the sons of Israel were to be warned to stay away from and avoid all such women.

In chapter 12 of Proverbs, and verse 4, it says, “An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames him is as rottenness in his bones.” Find an excellent wife, stay away from anything less. And so the warnings have been given. In chapter 19 and verse 14, there comes a hopeful truth. It says, “A prudent wife is from the Lord;” a wise wife, a virtuous wife, a godly wife is a gift from God. So all the way through this marvelous book of wisdom there is instruction about what kind of woman to avoid, and to pursue the excellent woman, the excellent wife, who is a gift from God. It’s interesting to me that the final chapter of Proverbs is chapter 31, that all the instruction given sort of climaxes at this point. And what you have in chapter 31 is the final lesson from a parent to a child; in this case, from a mother to her son. Verse 1 tells us that these are the words of King Lemuel, he wrote them down, but they are the oracle which his mother taught him. Here we have an unknown mother; we don’t know anything about King Lemuel, this is the only time his name is ever mentioned. We don’t know anything about his mother, but here is a Jewish mother who taught her son how to pick a woman, and a lot of other very important things as well. And this is her wisdom given to him.

In verse 2, “What, O my son? And what, O son of my womb? And what, O son of my vows?” In other words, what do I say to you? How do I instruct you? What do I tell you? The first thing I tell you is don’t get involved in sexual immorality, “do not give your strength to women.” That’s what that means. Don’t get involved in living in sexual misconduct. Then on down to verse 7, and following even, down to verse 9, she says, “Stay away from drunkenness, strong drink. Take care of hurting people. Defend those who can’t defend themselves. Stand by the oppressed. Support the needy, and deal justly with all people,” and gives him a wide range of practical truth. But then she comes to the real issue on her heart, which he passes on to us. “Most of all, my son, find a good wife – find a good wife. With her you will spend your life; she will determine your earthly accomplishments, and set the parameters of your living and your influence. Find a good wife.” And from verse 10 to 31, such a wife is described.

The woman described here is of priceless value. She has physical strength, mental strength, moral strength, and spiritual strength. Above all, she loves God deeply and reverently. She is characterized in this section six ways, and I'll point them out to you as we just look together at the Scripture – six ways. 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 person – the sum of all of that makes the excellent wife. And I might add that this is no woman in particular, but this is the woman that every woman should seek to emulate. She is rare, look at verse 10, “an excellent wife” – by the way, the word excellent in Hebrew means force, a woman of force, a woman of substance, a woman of strength, would be another way to characterize her. It's excellent in the sense of her strength spiritually, morally, mentally, physically. She is a woman of substance. She is a woman who has made a dent in society. She is one who makes a difference. There's a force about her life. This kind of wife, he says, who can find? Very rare; hard to find this kind of woman.

By the way, chapter 20 says in verse 6, “Who can find a trustworthy man?” I just want to put that in, because I don't want you to think that this thing is out of balance. It's just as hard to find a trustworthy man at the level of God's standard of character. That was chapter 20, verse 6. But this is Mother's Day, so here we go. Typically men seek a wife for all the wrong reasons, all of them: looks, accomplishment, style, success, money, education – all the wrong reasons. They should seek a woman for virtue, strength of character, spiritual excellence, internal godliness, those are the right reasons. This kind of woman is a woman of force. She makes a difference. She leaves a mark. And verse 10 says her worth is far above jewels. Some would translate that word rubies, some would translate it pearls, the Septuagint translates it precious stones. In other words, she is more valuable than all earthly things which are valuable. She is a rare fortune, a rare find, a woman of force.

What are her qualities, this rare woman? First of all, let's look at her character as a wife, verse 11. And without saying anything specifically about her, it talks about her husband to start with. “The heart of her husband trusts in her.” Now obviously, the first thing we note about her character as a wife is that she can be trusted. She is trustworthy. This is the kind of woman who allows her husband to do his work away from home, who allows her husband to go away for perhaps an extended time. And to do all of that in absolute confidence in her integrity, and her discretion, and her wisdom, and her care for all of his interests. The implication here is that there's a substantial home to be cared for, and substantial resources of which she is a steward, but he trusts her. He trusts her. “The heart of her husband trusts in her.” She has proven to be trustworthy. She is virtuous to the point where he has no jealousy, he has no fear, he has no suspicion, he has no anxiety. He knows that his care is her concern, his comfort is her passion, his burdens are hers to relieve, his being at ease is her high priority, and his house has become the home of his heart, because he trusts in the one who leads that household, his wife. Integrity, discretion, wisdom, faithfulness, trustworthiness, that's what fills the husband of this woman, so that “he will have no lack of gain,” no lack of gain.

In other words, she's not going to cause him to lose what he's working so hard to gain. She is a very careful steward of everything that he has. Let me tell you, this sees the woman in the role of the *oikodespots*, to use Paul's word used in 1 Timothy 5; she's the ruler of the house. She manages the assets. She coordinates the activities. She is the steward of all of that which he has provided. And he has no lack of gain because of her stewardship, her management, her wisdom, her care. And that frees him to be everything that he can be in the pursuit of bread for that family, and also freedom from anxiety, because he knows whatever he brings in she cares for as treasure. Definitely she is in charge of domestic matters, using and accounting for the resources of the home, so he is free to give himself to the work. She helps him to profit. She devotes herself to the care of his earnings. She is careful. She is wise. She is scrupulous. And he can leave home and never give it a thought. He can give his whole heart to that which compels him in his profession, his business, his work, and know that all is cared for. Her character as a wife, she is totally trustworthy, she is a steward of everything that he provides for her. She is definitely on the receiving end of his provision, and she cares for it as a precious treasure.

Personally, verse 12, "she does him good and not evil." She does him good and not evil. She always, always does what's best for him. She pursues his best interests. She strengthens him. She builds him up. She encourages him. She sees it as her role to do good to this man. He is providing for her, and for all those in her care in that home, children and household servants, and workers, if indeed this would include a farm. And he, in providing all of that, is worthy of her best. She does him good. She never takes things from him, not his money, his possessions, his resources, or his reputation. She never speaks evil of him so that those in the home would learn to distrust him because of her testimony of his absence of character. She does him good, not evil. She does everything to build him up. And then it adds, most interestingly, this note: "all the days of her life." Isn't that interesting? All the days of her life. In other words, her love for him is based upon such high spiritual principles that it doesn't fluctuate with the circumstances of life.

When you get married, you no doubt have affirmed the vow that you will live together in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, in plenty and in want. And that's a vow that this woman kept. Good times, bad times, weak times, strong times, sick times, well times, happy times, sad times, plentiful times, empty times, all times, all her life she did him good. Like Sarah in 1 Peter 3:6, she serves him as lord. She reveals her virtue by her consistent service on his behalf. Her love is so deep, it has a purity, and a power, and a devotion that never ever changes. His comfort, his success, his reputation, his joy, his fulfillment, his blessing are her delight; utterly unselfish. To live for him is her constant happiness, and she knows she'll reap the benefit. Never unkind, always submissive in the most gracious way.

And this is the essence of what Paul said when writing to Titus, Titus 2:4 when he said, "Wives, love your husbands. Do them good all your life, manage properly that which is in your care, so that they have no need of gain." The benefit to the husband is expressed in verse 23, "Her husband is known

in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.” You know what that means? He’s risen to the very top of the esteem of the people in the profession he has chosen in life, because he is free to do so because of the dutiful wife. She creates a world for him in which he can be everything that God would want him to be. She’s so faithful to the duties of her love that he is free to be all that he can be as a man. He is known in the gates. He is a well-known man. The implication there is that he is esteemed, he is honored, he is respected. And that is because she has provided freedom from the things which tie him down and bind him so that he can be everything – everything that he would desire to be. That’s her character as a wife. Trustworthy, doing him good all the days of her life, seeing to it that her life is spent to see that he can be everything God would want him to be. That’s an excellent woman. The underlying virtue there is selflessness, that’s the underlying virtue. She is consumed with him and offers herself in loving service to fulfill that desire.

Secondly, not only her character as a wife makes her excellent but her devotion as a homemaker. Now, being a homemaker is not a popular thing today. I was reading this week Vivian Gornick, who is a professor at the University of Illinois, who said, quote: “Being a housewife is an illegitimate profession.” It’s replaced prostitution, in her mind. Being a housewife is an illegitimate profession. Phyllis Schlafly said, “The most cruel and damaging sexual harassment taking place today is the harassment by feminists and their federal government allies against the role of motherhood and the role of the dependent wife,” end quote. But in God’s economy being a homemaker is an exalted role. The sphere of the woman’s duty is the home. She is the ruler of the house, the *oikodespots*, and as we start into looking at this, in verse 13 we will see the beauty of her role there unfold.

Notice verse 13. First of all, “She looks for wool and flax and works with her hands in delight.” She expresses her ability with her crafts, in this case making clothing, blankets, perhaps even curtains, to cover the open spaces in the home that let the air and the light in. She goes after wool, she looks for flax, the idea being she searches for the quality product. She brings home the wool, wool used for clothing; that would be in the cold times. Flax used for linen, which would be worn in warmer times, and would be used for the specially beautiful clothing that they would wear at any season. She finds the best she can, brings it back, with the purpose of using her hands to turn it into clothing. You see, her submission and her godliness, her virtue, her relation to her husband, do not make her into a religious recluse, pretending to be spiritual, when really being irresponsible. She is not defining laziness as spirituality. She is not shirking the duties of the home. In fact there’s no place in this woman’s life for self-indulgence. There’s no place for laziness. There’s no place for inactivity. She is full of energy. She is full of activity. She searches out the raw materials in order that she might work with her hands. It says she might work with her hands in delight.

And that’s the key. You see, she loves the family, and she loves her husband, and it’s the love of her heart that puts delight in her work. If she felt like the reason for her to live was to fulfill herself, everything she had to do for someone else, she’d hate. But because she knows her reason to be is to give herself for the joy of those she loves, the delight of her heart becomes the delight of her hands.

The Syriac version translates that her hands are active after the pleasure of her heart. No complaint. There's joy in the most menial task because the motive is love, and the love motive inside pushes delight into the hands. Self-denial is clearly behind the scenes. She's not concerned about her own pleasure, she's concerned about the joy and delight of her family, which gives her joy and delight because she is consumed with love for them, sacrificial. She makes their clothes and all they need, and does so with joy.

Verse 14 says, "She is like merchant ships, she brings her food from afar." She goes great distances to get food. And she didn't hop on the freeway, she walked – she walked. And she would walk in order to get the best food at the best price, in order to introduce variety into the family, something beyond the local fare which could be purchased in her own vicinity. She was obviously engaged in good planning and good management. She was a faithful steward of her husband's gain, and she would go as far as she needed to go to get what she needed for her family. Not just to provide food, but to provide the variety and the quality of food that would truly express the love and delight of her heart. She wasn't just slapping whatever she had down and throwing it in front of them. She was involved in the process of going as far as she had to go to get what she thought they would enjoy.

Verse 15 says, "She rises also while it is still night, and gives food to her household and portions to her maidens." Typically, in the East, a lamp is always burning in the house, a little terra cotta lamp with oil in it, and a little wick floating in the oil. And, of course, the wick would only burn as long as the oil was there. Because most often they went to sleep when the sun went down, the oil would not last all night, and it was always the wife's responsibility to get up sometime after midnight and put more oil in the lamp, that the family might sleep. Typically, the woman would rise sometime after midnight, put oil in the lamp, keep it lit, and then begin to do the work that was required to feed the family that day. She had to grind the corn. She had to prepare all the day's meals. There were no fast food places. There was nowhere to go. You fed your family by the work of your hand and the sweat of your brow. It was hot in that part of the world for much of the year, still is, and the cool of the night was a wonderful time – the quiet of the night. But it was still a major sacrifice. So she would grind the corn, and do whatever she needed to do in order that when the family awoke a few hours later, there would be food for them all. That was her dedication, her commitment. Her household could enjoy the comfort while she made the sacrifice for their greater enjoyment. You see, she was much more concerned with the blessing and joy of the people she loved than with her own indulgence.

And then it says – and I love this thought – "and portions to her maidens." The word "portions" is quite interesting. It probably means portions of work, not portions of food. Portions is tasks in the Septuagint. The word used is *erga* in Greek. It is translated labor in Exodus 5:14. So what she did was get up in the middle of the night and start her own work, and the maidens who were servants in the household also got up, and she apportioned to them their tasks, so that everybody was busy getting ready for the family and the household. Wonderful, consumed with the needs of others, doing it with delight, she is every bit the manager of the household. To depreciate the role of a homemaker

is pretty foolish. The breadth of the role of homemaker is amazing. To be able to be an economist, a steward of funds and resources, to be able to analyze all the products available, to be strong enough and well-planned enough to make the right moves at the right time to acquire the right things, to be fully a wife to your husband and a tender and loving mother to all of your children, to apportion all the responsibilities to everybody who was a part of the labor force, that takes some woman. People say, "Well, you know, women have administrative skills, why should they get locked up in a house?" They don't understand. It can be the fullest and most wonderful expression of womanhood. That's why I'm excited at the Master's College about the major in home economics; to produce this kind of woman is a major task; by God's grace, a tremendous privilege.

Verse 16 takes us even further into the enterprise woman. "She considers a field and buys it; from her earnings she plants a vineyard." There's a field, perhaps adjacent to the property that the family owns. She feels it's at a right price, and would be beneficial to the family. She buys it. There's a certain amount of independence in that. It doesn't say her husband bought it, she bought it. She made the decision that it was wise. She pursued that option. You say, "Well, now wait a minute, she bought it, and she also from her earnings bought it, and planted a vineyard in it." That's right. "Well, where did she get the money? Did she have a job on the side?" Look at verse 24. "She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies belts or girdles," cloth cummerbunds that were used to wrap up the robes worn by folks in those days, "and she sold them to the tradesmen." The word tradesmen, literally, is Canaanites, i.e. the Phoenicians, the sailors of the ancient world who carried the goods all around. She had a little cottage industry going. She made things with her hands, made a little money. She never let that extra money get into the operational cash flow. She kept it set apart, and when she saw a judicious moment to purchase a field to the benefit of the family, she purchased it, planted the vineyard; she did that on her own. Wise steward, careful money manager, good analyst – this is some woman – some woman. She makes wise investments to assist her husband. She labors in the home to help. She takes the money that she has earned on her own making those things, and invests that in a long-term investment, for the benefit of her family and her children and her grandchildren. She buys land and plants a vineyard – a wise woman.

Verse 17 says, "She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong. The first statement, she girds herself with strength, expresses the energy or the force of this woman of force. It could be translated strength is wrapped around her. She's a strong woman, strongly disciplined, strong in terms of commitment to the family, strong in love to her husband; I mean she's a strong woman. And then even her arms are strong, not because she goes to the gym. Her arms are strong because of the effort exerted in the daily tasks. Her strength is a result of effort. Her strength is a result of becoming a blessing to her family – totally selfless. This is what comes pouring through this passage, her humility, her selflessness, her love, the joy and delight of everything she does, because she's lost in the love of her household.

And verse 18 says, "She senses that her gain is good." In other words, when she gets the field, and she plants the vineyard, and the family prospers, she senses that it's good. In other words, as the Septuagint, says she makes a good profit. She sees that it's good for the family. She sees that it's beneficial. It has welfare provision for them, it's for their wellbeing. And so that motivates her. She's motivated by benefiting others. This is the woman of God's design. She is not motivated by self-fulfillment, self-esteem, self-glory, self-adulation. She is totally motivated by seeing others benefited. That's the godly woman. Spurred on, not by ego, but by the fact that she sees what she does bringing good to others. So as a result, verse 18 says, "Her lamp does not go out at night." She is so fulfilled in the benefit that's coming to others that it spurs her to work harder and harder and harder.

It's amazing what people will do to indulge themselves. It's also frightening what people will not do to benefit others. "Her lamp goes not out at night," what does that mean? Because she is so pleased with the benefit of her work, she finds work for the hours of darkness, motivated totally by the goodness and the benefit of the work. She is utterly unselfish. What a woman – what a woman.

And verse 19 says, in those nights perhaps when the lamp didn't go out, "she stretches out her hands to the distaff and her hands grasp the spindle." Elements of spinning; the distaff and the spindle, turning the wool and the flax into thread, and then taking the thread and turning it into cloth, then taking the cloth and cutting it into pattern, then sewing it into garments to clothe the family. Spinning the wool, spinning the flax, making the scarlet, making the linen, making the purple garments; now, all of it for someone else to be blessed and encouraged. Verse 21 follows then, skipping over verse 20 for a moment, "she's not afraid of the snow for her household." Did you know it snows in Jerusalem maybe three out of five years? It snows there. And even when it doesn't snow in the winter, it can be very, very cold because it's so high. Read 2 Samuel 23 around verse 20, it talks about the snow. But she's planned for that. You know, they didn't have heaters in their homes. The way they heated a room was with a pan of hot coals. They would take that pan of hot coals and sit it on the floor, and then they would huddle together in the warmth of the blankets. But they needed not only warm blankets for sleep, but warm garments, because it was cold sometimes during the day; often that cold season could last a long time. But she had no fear for that. She wasn't afraid of the snow for her household. Look at this. "For all her household are clothed with scarlet."

Why doesn't it say they were clothed with wool? Well, we assume it was wool, because that's the thing that would keep them warm. The scarlet is added to show you that this woman has a touch of class. Normally the wool wouldn't need to be colored or dyed, but she dyed it. She dyed it deep red in color, because that was the color of elegance, still is, because it was beautiful. It was still dark, and dark clothes tend to keep the heat in better. But it was scarlet, because there was something more beautiful, more dignified in the warmth and the beauty of that color. So she made them not just functional, but she made them lovely as well. And she planned far enough ahead so that she didn't worry at all when the cold came, because everything was ready. Remarkable woman.

Verse 22 adds something. “She makes coverings for herself.” Now what that literally means is coverlets – pillows, mattresses, bedding. She made bedding. Now remember, she has to make all this. She adorned all their beds with comfort and beauty, providing for them the comfort that they would enjoy. And again, behind the scene, is this love, this devotion, this unselfishness, this humility that is at the heart of the excellent wife. You say, “Yeah, but, I mean this woman is up all night. This woman is taking trips all over the place to get stuff. She is working her head off, planting a vineyard. I mean I’ll bet she is a tacky-looking gal. I mean I’m sure she goes around in a terry-cloth bathrobe with threads hanging everywhere and coils in her hair. I mean, this is – this woman – I mean, you know, you can see her husband coming home and saying, ‘Hey, you keep a nice house, but do you ever look seedy. I mean can’t you do something about it?’”

Not this woman. She’s appreciative of the beauty with which God has adorned her. She’s appreciative of the love of her husband, and wants to show him how much she cares, and how much she wants to present herself to him in the beauty that God has given her. So verse 22 says, “Her clothing are fine linen and purple.” That’s lovely. Not silk, and gold, and pearls, and et cetera. Just linen, not particularly expensive, but the best, because she went to find the best flax, and did the best weaving she could do. And purple, because the beauty of the color would enhance her own beauty. She takes care of herself. She adorns the beauty of her own creation. She avoids the extreme of ostentatious display, and opts out for graceful simplicity. It’s not overdone. She knows that a woman’s true adornment, as Paul said in 1 Timothy and Peter in 1 Peter 3, a woman’s true adornment is her purity, her chaste character, her virtue, her godliness, her inner beauty. She seeks to honor God, to honor her family, to honor her husband. And that does not preclude her own loveliness, for that brings delight and joy to everyone. So she manages it all, for her family, even for herself, and has enough time, verse 24 says, as we noted, to make some things to sell to bring a little extra in, so that a field can be added to the estate, a vineyard planted, and the family enriched. What a woman.

We skipped verse 20, so let’s go back and note the third thing about her, her generosity as a neighbor. Verse 20 says, “She extends her hand to the poor, and she stretches out her hands to the needy.” Of course, we would expect this, wouldn’t we? This is an excellent woman. And as devoted and loving as she is toward her family, so loving is she toward those outside her family. She demonstrates not only a special devotion to her home, but compassion on all those who don’t have the privilege of being in her home, or a home like her home – the poor, the unfortunate. And verse 20 says, “She extends her hand to the poor,” we might assume that it means she touches them, she’s personally involved, she’s intimately involved. No doubt making clothes for them, and making sure they’re warm and fed. But we might assume when it says “she extends her hand to the poor” that she’s responding to those poor who come to her; the next phrase says, “She stretches out her hands to the needy,” which implies that she reaches out to touch the ones who don’t come near her. She has touched and she is touching. She’ll not just touch those who come close, but she reaches out to those who stay away, with the idea of feeding them, and clothing them, and enriching their life

through her resources.

She is very much the model and the example for Dorcas, who it says in Acts 9:36, was “abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did.” And you remember when she died, the widows stood beside Peter weeping, and showing all the tunics and garments Dorcas used to make while she was with them. She made all these clothes for poor people and widows, and that’s the godly virtuous woman. “She stretches her hands to the needy.” Her generosity as a neighbor. She is engulfed in her family, but she’s not myopic. That’s not all she sees in the world. It’s not overdone. It’s not isolationism. She cares about others, too.

That brings us to the fourth description of her, her influence as a teacher, which comes starting in verse 25 and then in verse 26, and we start in verse 25 because teaching starts with character. “Strength and dignity are her clothing.” She is garmented by strength and dignity. “And she smiles at the future.” Strength has to do with spiritual character. Dignity has to do with class, quality. She is a woman of great character, strong, dignified. She has a grace about her. She has a confidence about her. She has a spirituality about her that really is the foundation of her teaching. You see, you don’t teach in a vacuum, not in a home. I mean, you may be a teacher in a school, and show up and say anything you want, but you won’t do that and be believed to people who live in a house unless you live what you teach, right? So that teaching starts with a platform of character in a home, or else you’re teaching people to be hypocrites and you sure don’t want to give that lesson. When you demand your family to be what you’re not, you’re telling them it’s really not very important that they learn this, it’s only important that they try to teach it to somebody else, and pass on the legacy of hypocrisy. No, the teacher in the home is the woman who has gained the right to be heard and believed, because strength and dignity are her clothing.

It says, “And she smiles at the future.” She has no fear. She has no fear. Because she knows in whom she trusts, she’s deeply spiritual. All things are in God’s hands. She has prepared elegantly for everything. It will be well in the future for her because she’s right with God. It will be well in the future for her household because all things are in order. It will be well in the future for her children because they are properly brought along in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It will be well in the future for her husband, for she has made provision in his case for him to be the best that he can be. It will be well in the eternity to come for all of them because of her life. She has made a spiritual impact.

And then the teaching in verse 26, out of that character base, “she opens her mouth in wisdom.” She guides her family daily in wisdom. I believe the father is to be a teacher in the home. I believe he is the family priest. But I do not believe for one moment that that precludes the reality that it is the mother who, day in and day out, hour in and hour out, is teaching wisdom to the children. Not formal classes, but instruction in the flow of life, she’s the teacher. Men, we may give the formal lessons, but day in and day out, she’s the teacher. And in what attitude does her teaching come? Verse 26, “The wisdom of God comes out of her mouth, and the law of kindness is on her tongue.” The *torah* of

chesed. The *torah* of loving kindness is on her tongue. The attitude in which she teaches all of this is a dominant attitude of loving kindness. What a challenge. What does that mean? Gracious speech, kind speech, tender speech, pleasing speech, compassionate speech, ministering grace to the hearers, as Paul said, edifying, building up. That which comes out of her mouth is the wisdom of God, in tender, compassionate, gracious, kind words. What a teacher. The greatest teacher, because the character of life makes her so believable, because the wisdom of God is true, and because the attitude is compassionate and gracious – no teacher like that. What a portrait. Believe me, women, this is a challenge of a life time.

Fifthly, we note her blessedness as a mother, or her effectiveness as a mother. In verse 27, it sums up her leadership in the house by saying “she looks well to the ways of her household.” In other words, she exercises constant surveillance over it all. She manages the children well, all the resources well, all the household. “She doesn’t eat the bread of idleness.” In other words, she is not eating the product of laziness; she’s eating the product of effort. She worked hard at it. She has the real satisfaction that comes from a supreme effort. She surveys the household. She’s got it all under control. She meets every need. And it implies that her children are in all of this, because verse 28 says, “Her children rise up and” – what – “bless her.” They reverence her. They honor her. They hold her in high esteem.

Let me give you something you need to know. The first half of your life, women, you make an investment, the dividends of which you will reap the second half. It flips over. This woman would raise her children, and when her children were old enough to be on their own, they would spend the rest of their life blessing the woman who gave her life to them. That’s God’s design. The compensation, then, for old age is the exhilarating, blessed joy of the return of the investment of youth in children; the sad thing is you be the woman of the eighties, and the second half of your life, you can’t be the woman of the eighties. You can’t cut it, and there won’t be anybody around to care. That’s the tragedy. God has designed our life in passages, and when we invest our life in those children God gives us, we will find the backside of our life will be the greatest, sweetest time of blessing, as they repay to us the blessing given. That’s God’s design. As the children become older, they have their own children, and they seek to raise their children as they were raised. And therefore their mother is constantly before their eyes, her tender guidance, her wise counsel, her loving discipline, her holy example, her hard work, her unselfish giving. They never cease to fill the memories of her children, who try to pass them on to their children.

And there’s another dividend for her motherhood. Verse 28 says, “Her husband also, and he praises her.” And he says, “Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all.” There are many women of strength, women of force, women of character but, honey, you’re the best. That’s a woman’s reward. That’s a woman’s reward. You invested in your children and they’ll return it. You invested in your husband and he’ll return it.

But how can a woman be like this? It almost seems idyllic to be such a wife, and such a homemaker, and such a neighbor, and such a teacher, and such a mother. How can a woman be like this?

That brings us to the last point, her excellence as a person. It all starts with the spiritual dimension. Please notice verse 30, "Charm is deceitful." Do you know what charm means in the Hebrew? Bodily form. That's deceitful – that's deceitful. Some women spend all their time on their bodily form. That is deceitful because that's not the real you. Beauty is of no real value; it's vain, it's useless, it's empty. Form, deceitful – you think you're getting something you're not. Beauty has no real value. You want to know something? Those are the two things our world looks for. No wonder their relationships are empty and filled with deceit. That's all they look for. Fools, absolute fools. But here's the woman you want. "A woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised, give her the product of her hands and let her works praise her in the gates." What woman is this? She loves God. She's a true worshiper. She fears the Lord. You have to live with that all your life. You live with a woman who fears God, loves God, and you are in the best environment. And by the way, she'll become more beautiful to you every passing year.

This is the woman of character. Only God can produce her. Matthew Henry said, "Proverbs 31 is the mirror against which every Christian woman must stand and face herself." This is God's design. And only God can produce this woman. But this is the woman God wants. This is the woman who will be praised by her children and her husband. This is the woman who will be given the product of her hands; she'll get back everything she gave, and they will do for her for whom she did. This is the woman who is not only privately rewarded with the product of her hands by those she loves, but publicly rewarded as her works praise her in the gates. Listen, this is the woman that God wants, and that every man should desire, and that every woman should desire to be – one who is true to her mate, one who manages well her home, one who compassionately cares for the needy, one who lives and teaches divine wisdom with kindness, compassion and grace, one who fully fulfills the call of a mother so that her children bless her, and one who, though she seeks no praise, will receive it anyway, because of the character of her life. I know we can't sell this woman to our society. I just pray we in the church can continue to focus on God's standard. It's a high standard, but it's God's standard. And my prayer is that every woman who names the name of Christ will seek to be this kind of woman, by God's grace. Let's pray together.

Father, I want to pray right now for all those who are mothers, that, Lord God, You would give them the power of Your Spirit to move them toward this pattern, this design, this portrait of godliness. Also, Lord, may they know of Your forgiving grace for every failure in the process, because the standard is so high. Thank You for the standard, thank You for the power in the Spirit who meet the standard, thank You for the grace of forgiveness for the failures. I would pray for every single mother, through death or divorce, struggling to be all that she should be without that man to give her guidance, that man for whom she can live, and in whose love she is so fully rewarded. And I would pray even with

thanksgiving for those women, Father, who have not been given children because that wasn't in Your plan, make their life fulfilled in their husband. I pray for those who have been called to singleness; may they serve You in that unique way which only the single can, without having the cares of the house and the family, and may they be fully rewarded in the bliss of knowing they're in Your will. I pray for the young girls as yet unmarried, that You would make them the woman that You want them to be. For the young men selecting a wife that they would seek to find the character that is exemplified here, not in fulfillment, but as the goal and direction of the woman of their choice.

And, Lord, even as I think about all of this, this is a heavy burden for women to bear, and all along I can't help but be thinking to myself, "Who would I be to deserve such a woman whom am such a man?" Lord, we fall so short. Not a man of us is worthy of such a woman. Such a woman in our lives would make us guilty. So, Lord, make us the men we ought to be. And then, Lord, I want to thank You this day for my own wife, Patricia, who has for all the years of our marriage sought to be this kind of woman – who has poured her life into me, into her children, to others, to our home, and who has become so much a part of what I am that I know no longer where she ends and I begin. I thank You for the gift that she is from You to me. And I pray that somehow, Lord, I might be to her what a husband must be, that she might be fulfilled. That I pray, Lord, for all, that we might be all that You would have us to be, for Your glory in Christ's name. Amen.

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