

God's Ideal Woman
Proverbs 31:10-31
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Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, after reading this passage, the men here today might assume that it is safe to *tune out* the message because it is really more for women than anything else--it has nothing to say to men.

But that would be a wrong assumption. This passage was written by a man, King Lemuel, and what he records is nothing less than the oracles (the wise sayings) which were spoken to him by his very own mother.

King Lemuel's mother passed down this inspired instruction to her son, to teach him, to show him what was of value when it came to women. She showed him what to look for in a wife. She showed him the portrait of a godly mother.

And even if you're a single with no intentions of getting married you can still appreciate the wisdom that is being expressed here; you can still praise God as you see *virtue* exalted in God's kingdom; you can still praise God when you see how His Spirit changes and transforms the way a Christian man looks at a women, how it reforms his understanding of beauty and worth!

Or perhaps you're a single woman, and you fail to see how this passage relates to you. Maybe you're older and never have been married or been a mother. This passage still has much to say to you because the characteristics of a virtuous woman, the attributes of a Godly woman are not confined to those who are married or who have a busy household filled with children.

God calls all of the women of His kingdom to be women of virtue, regardless of their age, their marital status, or whether they have 5 children or no children, whether all your children are still at home, or whether they are all grown up and out of the house. This passage is still for you.

Then there are other women who dismiss this passage out of hand, who get depressed when they read this because the woman described here seems impossible to emulate, completely unrealistic.

They think this passage means that God won't be pleased with them unless they can knit or sew or make their own clothes, or keep a spotless house, or tirelessly work from dawn till dusk everyday. But that's not the case. This passage is not intended to discourage or over-burden us.

This passage isn't in the Bible to make us all feel inept or incompetent. No. This passage is in the Bible precisely for the same reason that every other passage is in the Bible--because it points us to the Good News of the Gospel.

It points us to Jesus Christ, to the life-changing difference He makes in our lives. It reminds of the way the Gospel transforms our life: the Gospel restores us, it reorients us to the way we were created to live. It redirects our sinful hearts and minds; rearranges our goals and ambitions.

In other words, this passage is no different in that it teaches us of our need for salvation in Jesus Christ. So then, let's consider God's Word as it is revealed in Proverbs 31, where **God Places before Our Eyes a Woman of Virtue**. Notice 3 aspects of this virtue:

- 1) **The *Estimation* of this Virtue;**
- 2) **The *Expression* of this Virtue.**
- 3) **The *Explanation* of this Virtue**

1) The *Estimation* of this Virtue

In the opening words of our passage we see that King Lemuel places a great value, a very high estimation on a woman of noble character. His mother taught him well, saying that a woman of virtue is worth far more than rubies. She is her husband's glory; she is his crown, she is his most treasured possession (if we can classify a wife in that fashion without getting into trouble).

As verse 11 states: *Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value*. Now, in stating her value in this way, King Lemuel is not only assessing her value, but he's also drawing attention to the fact that such a woman is a rarity. A woman of noble character (virtue), a woman who can be fully trusted by her husband is indeed a rare find in our world.

That's not meant to be a slam in any way towards women. That's just stating the basic fact of human nature. As we look to the Scriptures we can find examples of women who (instead of bring their husbands good brought them evil/harm. They were the downfall of their husbands..

Think of Eve, who was created as a help-meet for her husband. But in Genesis 3, she became a temptress to her husband, persuading him to fall into sin. Likewise we think of Solomon's wives who were anything but virtuous. I Kings 11: 4 says that they turned his heart after other gods.

I Kings 21:25 at least partially attributes Ahab's notoriously wicked ways to the influence of his wife Jezebel: *There was never a man like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife.* She was the exact opposite of a woman of virtue.

Think of Job's wife, who instead of encouraging her husband to stand firm in the face of his terrible trials and hardships, advised him to simply *curse God and die.* His own wife was his most miserable comforter.

The book of Proverbs shows us the hazards (curse) of living with a contentious wife, *Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome (contentious) wife* (Proverbs 21:9); also *A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day* (Proverbs 27: 15).

Those passages show us how wives can bring their husbands great evil, how they can bring them great shame, and dishonor, and grief. Let's not forget what has caused this, though. After man fell into sin, God's pronounced His curse upon the woman--*her desire shall be for her husband* (Gen 3:16), meaning that she would desire to rival his authority, to challenge his authority.

The perfect harmony the beautiful balance that God had created between the man and woman in Paradise was lost. The perfect love, the perfect submission, the perfect peace of that relationship between husband and wife was lost. But here in Proverbs 31, it is rediscovered!

This woman *has* that noble character; she brings her husband honor before the elder, not shame. She gives her husband every reason to have confidence in her, to place his full trust in her

opinion, in her intuition, in her judgment. It's been said that behind every great man there is a great woman, and this passage certainly bears that out! It makes no difference whether it's a mother of great virtue that makes the man great, or a wife of great virtue or a combination of both—the Bible makes it clear that such a woman is of great worth and value.

2) **The *Expression of this Virtue***

So that is the estimation of this virtue. Now we consider the expression of this virtue. King Lemuel places before our eyes a woman who, quite frankly, has it all together. She does all things well. She attends to a wide variety of duties; she is the *Martha Stewart* of the O.T.

Just let your eyes scan through verses 12 and following. This woman is skilled at any number of crafts. She works with her hands, making clothing and material out of wool and flax; in verse 19 it says *in her hands she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers*. Those items were used for spinning thread.

Then in verse 21-22, we're told how she used that linen and wool and thread. *When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple*. In other words, beloved, she eagerly and vigorously employed her needle and thread for the service of the family.

But her efforts go even beyond that. Here is a woman whose industrious ways were a financial blessing to the household as well. Verse 24 tells us how she also sold the linens she made and she supplied the merchants with sashes. Earlier in verse 16-18 we're told that she was wise when it came to investments.

She considers a field and she buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night.

But our text also makes sure we see that this woman is not driven by greed or sinful motives. Verse 20 testifies that she has a benevolent heart, a generous spirit: *She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.*

It's also seems evident from our text that the family that is being described here is of some rank and standing in the community. Perhaps they were nobility, we cannot be sure, but we do know that they have servants in their household, they're dressed in colors of nobility (purple and scarlet), and yet, this woman doesn't lead a life we normally associate with nobility and wealth.

Women of her stature and standing wouldn't have to work; especially when it comes to such tedious tasks as sewing and making clothes, linens and garments. Yet she desires to do this. Notice also what verse 15 says. *She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servants girls.*

Her care even extends to those in her household who are there to meet and serve her needs. Not only is this woman highly skilled at her crafts and a tireless worker, but she is also blessed with wisdom and knowledge (verse 26: *she speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction in on her tongue*). Her children, her husband, her friends and neighbors benefit from her wisdom as much as anything else. Verse 27 sums it all up when it states: *She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.*

For these very reasons *her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her* (vs. 28). This verse reminds you children and also us husbands about the Godly response for all her work and labors—we show proper gratitude, love, appreciation for all that our mother does, for all that our wife does for us (when was the last time we showered praise on mom!).

Now congregation, as I mentioned before, there are those who read this passage, shake their head in disbelief and say that such a woman doesn't exist; they say that this is an impossible standard, as far as they're concerned, they fall hopelessly short of this woman of virtue, they close the Bible, and that's about as far as this passage touches their soul.

If that is you, beloved, I hope to bring you some encouragement and hope and motivation this morning, because the purpose and point of this passage is not to call all women to mimic everything that this woman does.

The overall point of this passage is not that a woman of noble character knows how to sew or knit or cross stitch; it's not that a woman of noble character knows how to cook and clean or invest in property or plants vineyard and gardens.

Rather, the point of the passage is simply that everything she does, all of her efforts, all of her time, all of energy, all of her industry both in and out of the home, is dedicated primarily to the service of her household. It's dedicated primarily to the service of her husband, and her children and even to her servants; secondarily, it is dedicated to the service of the poor and needy!

That approach helps us to understand this passage in light of our own duties; in light of our own tasks and responsibilities, gifts and talents, even in light of our own interests and hobbies. You might be an aspiring artist who likes to paint portraits, or an excellent photographer, or someone who enjoys handcrafts—there's nothing wrong with having hobbies and interests like that.

Also, I think this passage brings much needed clarity to the discussion about a woman's place in the home. The woman of noble character within our passage embraced her God given place, her God given status and calling.

She wholeheartedly accepted her calling as the help-meet of her husband; she lovingly welcomed her calling and duty to be a mother and caretaker of her children. Again, all of her duties and responsibilities listed herein were oriented towards her home and husband. In all her wisdom and knowledge, she understood what it meant that her God given place was 'in the home'.

But that phrase doesn't mean what so many think it means today. By 'in the home' we have this notion that all wives should literally be 'staying home', within those four walls, and by doing so they are showing themselves to be virtuous. But beloved, there's nothing virtuous in merely staying at home.

But that's a gross misunderstanding of this passage and of what it means to be 'at home'. Our text clearly lays before us the industrious character of this woman--she was not eating the bread of idleness. To borrow from a parable of our Lord, she was not burying her talents in the ground, wasting time watching Opra, Dr. Phil, or spending 8 hours a day solving Sudoku puzzles.

No, this woman was busy in the home, and the nature of that calling and task took her outside the home on many occasions--never to the detriment of her family, but always for the benefit of her family. Titus 2 says that the older women should teach the younger women *to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home...*

Even there, Paul stresses the need for **industrious** behavior, not being a busy body mind you (spending time on things that are of no benefit to anyone) but being busy. That business can take many forms, it can take a woman physically out of the home; it might mean a tireless schedule.

And let's remember that not all women are in the same situation in life. Some have children at home. Some have no children at all. Some women have children who are grown up and left the home, and now they have more time to fill their days with other kinds of industrious work.

Meanwhile, other women have multiple children in Christian day school and they work vigorously in the home, and for the sake of the home, they may also have a job where they can make money to assist their husband in paying the bills, in keeping the family fed and clothed, and even using that money to help assist the poor as well.

Yes, people of God, in our society we have many instances where a mother's career winds up taking priority over her husband and her family. That's a tragedy. It ruins the marriage; it destroys the household. It establishes an unnatural precedent.

For many years now, young girls and young women of our nation have been taught to scoff at 'traditional values', to refuse to settle for being a lowly housewife, to strive to make something

more of themselves. And as God's people, we must constantly guard ourselves from falling prey to those very same lies and myths.

We have to see through all the wickedness and deception and distortion of our day and age, and go back to God's original plan and purpose for giving the woman to the man. We have to see that only in Christ, only by His redeeming blood, can a woman be restored to her rightful place, to her rightful standing, to her high and honorable calling.

Only in and through Jesus Christ can a woman possess the kind of noble character, and display the great virtue that we see in our text. As verse 29 says *many women do noble things, but you surpass them all*.

3) The Explanation of this Virtue

So what is her secret, you wonder? What is it that keeps her going day after day? What is it that drives her and motivates her? Someone might even wonder what is it that keeps her sane through all her busy days and nights? Here we see, **the explanation of this virtue**.

The answer is quite simple. Verse 30: *This is a woman who fears the Lord*. This is a woman who, just as we have said, understands her God given place and purpose. She works with joy in her heart, with happiness in her soul. She does not go about her duties with a look of misery or dread on her face. She realizes that her calling is from God.

And, we get the sense that she carries herself about with a sense of dignity, she is not shamed by what she does. Her works earn her high praise even at the city gates. Yet she is not prideful in her work; she has not lost her humility.

Simply put, this is a woman whose heart has been touched by God's grace, whose life, mission, purpose and calling are being faithfully carried out. And beloved, is it this portrait of the woman of virtue a beautiful thing to behold?

Just think how sin has so blinded us to true beauty; sin has warped our understanding of what is valuable in a woman, of what to look for in a woman. Young men, let me ask you, what is it that normally attracts you to a woman? What are you looking for in a woman? How would you describe the ideal woman or the perfect wife?

We often think of *looks* first. We think of all the outward attributes. Does she have a cute face? Does she have a good figure? Some guys won't admit it (they might not even realize it) but they have a detailed checklist: does she have blonde hair; does she have beautiful eyes; she can't be too tall, but then again, she can't be too short; she can't be too skinny, but not too heavy either. Does she have a nice smile; is she athletic, etc. etc. etc.

But how many young men out there say, "I'm searching for a girl who has virtue, who has inner beauty, who has a noble character"? Very seldom is that sought after. That's an indictment on us; we dare to undervalue the very thing upon which God places great value.

We cannot gauge a woman's value based upon their outward beauty. If we do, we're deceiving ourselves! We're placing a value on something that God says is only fleeting at best, *Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting.*

Many a marriage has been built on charm and beauty, and many of those same marriages end in divorce because the husband and wife found that beauty and sexual attraction are not a good foundation for marriage. You need the virtue of godliness!

And that's what's so amazing about Proverbs 31 is that not once in this entire passage do we find a single reference to or mention about the looks of this woman. Never once was anything said about her physical appearance. Not one mention was made of her facial features, her feminine physique.

The sole source of her value, the sole foundation of her worth was found in the fact that she was a woman who feared the Lord—that made all the difference in her life, that is what drove her, that is what motivated her, that is what put the fuel in her lantern so that it did not go out at night!

King Lemuel's mother tells her son that such a woman is a rare commodity because this is a sinful world--a world in which true beauty is sorely distorted and real worth is terribly miscalculated. Godliness and virtue are seldom sought after, seldom appreciated.

This is all the more reason that we can be grateful to God for the transformation that has taken place within us because of His Son Jesus Christ. By His grace, Christ has opened our eyes that so that we can see where true beauty lies; so that we would look for beauty where our Lord looks for beauty; so that we would value virtue in the same way that Christ values virtue.

Christ has rescued us from the blindness and deception and depravity of this world, so that as Christian women, we can seek to possess and express this rarest of treasures; and so that we men might truly seek after it—to search only for those women who fear God.

This passage ought to change the way we children look at and treat our mothers, to change the way we husbands look at and treat our wives, to help us see that Godly mothers wives are great gifts and treasures to God given to us.

Husbands, even if you've been married many years, this passage should help change the way we look at and love our wives—realizing that while outward physical beauty may fade with age, the true beauty of godliness and virtue are long lasting, and will only ripen with age.

So let us all take to heart the message and meaning of God Word and praise God for the gift of His redeeming grace; praise Him for the blessing of God fearing wives and mothers, and praise God for the opportunity to have His Spirit work within our lives so that more and more God's Word and will may come to fruition in our lives. Amen.