

Excellence in Womanhood

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[0 : 00] Well, I want you to open your Bibles this morning to an Old Testament book, the book of Proverbs.

! Mother's Day will be Proverbs chapter 31, verses 10 through 31.

So from verse 10 of chapter 31 all the way to the end of the chapter, indeed, all the way to the end of the book of Proverbs. So starting with verse 10, Who can find a virtuous wife?

She also rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and a portion for her maidservants.

She considers a field and buys it. From her profits she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength and strengthens her arms.

[1 : 41] She perceives that her merchandise is good and her lamp does not go out by night. She stretches out her hands to the distaff and her hand holds the spindle.

She extends her hand to the poor. Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy. She's not afraid of snow for her household.

For all her household is clothed with scarlet. She makes tapestry for herself. Her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them. Supplies sashes for the merchants. Strength and honor are her clothing. She shall rejoice in time to come.

She opens her mouth with wisdom. And on her tongue is the law of kindness. She watches over the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

[2 : 46] Her children rise up and call her blessed. Her husband also. And he praises her. My daughters have done well.

But you excel them all. Charm is deceitful. Beauty is passing. But a woman who fears the Lord. She shall be praised.

Give her the fruit of her hands. And let her own works praise her in the gates. I really prefer. And some of you may be reading from a New American Society.

I know some of you have that version. Some of you, even the ESV, I really prefer how it opens, how it begins, its translation. Which says an excellent wife.

An excellent wife. Or woman. Actually, the Hebrew word can mean wife, woman. In the context, it's very likely wife. But it begins that way.

[3 : 46] An excellent wife. Who can find? Who can find? It's a great question, isn't it? And really, the answer to the question which comes in the passage. The answer really takes in the biblical definition of the excellence in womanhood.

That's the idea here. That's the theme here. And so here's a question I have for us today. What kind of woman does our society today define as excellent?

That's a pretty good question, isn't it? Or maybe I could put it another way. What kind of woman is the prototype of excellence in our culture today?

Can you picture her? I'm not talking about within the Christian culture. I'm talking about our culture at large. Can you picture her? Can you describe her?

And really, it should be pretty easy. Because, you know, just consider the way she is portrayed, presented by Hollywood. Whether it's primetime TV or Hollywood movies.

[4 : 55] You know, just notice the typical roles women now play in the movies. Have you noticed that? Or the way they talk. Or how they are talked to or talked about.

How they are dressed or not dressed. Or how they are treated by men. And how they treat men. Have you noticed? I surely have. Whether it's TV or Hollywood movies. And we can also look at the way they are portrayed, presented in advertisements.

And we're inundated by that. Whether we're watching TV or reading the newspaper or magazines or billboards or whatever. You know, just notice how the marketers present the kind of prototype of the excellent woman today.

And we can also look, I think, how little girls are being raised today in our culture. How they dress. [6:08] And the values they are taught. And I could go on and on with that, but I think you get the idea. I mean, if you are going to be objective and really pay attention to how women are portrayed in our culture today, then you know what I'm talking about.

And so we could place today's prototype of excellence in womanhood and place that woman side by side with the woman described here in Proverbs chapter 31.

And if you're honest, I think you would agree with me when I say that the kind of woman our society honors and promotes today is a million miles away from the woman portrayed, how God describes womanhood here in this passage.

And, of course, some women might say, well, preacher, that's not fair. I mean, there's a huge difference between the culture today and the culture of the Proverbs 31 woman.

Or the culture during Proverbs 31. Or the culture of the Old Testament. Even the New Testament. I mean, the culture of biblical times. There's a huge difference between. I mean, these cultures are dramatically different.

[7:12] And I would agree with you about that, of course. They are different in almost every way. And not really for the better. I mean, seriously.

But let's not forget that God is the same. He never changes. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. Scripture teaches that. We understand that about the nature of God.

And by extension, God's Word never changes. Of course, it's set. It's settled. It's there in Scripture. We can't change it, though some have tried.

But I mean more than just simply it's done, it's written, and it never changes. I mean that it transcends cultural changes. That's one thing we need to realize, always realize.

That God's Word remains always relevant. Regardless of the changes that take place in the society, the cultural norms and such that change.

[8:16] And they are always changing. Because they're imperfect, and we're imperfect. And those who change them are imperfect, of course. But God's Word is always the same. It never changes. It's always relevant.

Regardless. All right, so then, looking at the passage, with that in mind, kind of setting the foundation. Because that's the beginning point as we approach this Scripture.

This is God's Word. So we might take issue with the description given here, but it doesn't change anything. And what we have to try to do is not look at the description through the lens of our culture and how we've been taught and what has become the norm for our day.

And so then, looking at the passage, before we really get into it, let me just point out a few things that pertain to the context of this passage.

Something that maybe, though you might be familiar with, you know, the, quote, Proverbs 31 woman, you might not be familiar with its context.

[9:18] Where it falls in this chapter and in the book of Proverbs. And so, the first thing I would have you notice is that this is not the first time in Proverbs that women are the subject.

It's not the first time. Proverbs speaks of the adulteress who flatters with her lips. I mean, if you've read Proverbs, you know that's in there.

Proverbs speaks of the, again, the adulteress who forsakes her own husband and breaks her marriage vows.

Proverbs speaks of that. Proverbs speaks of the adulteress whose lips drip with honey. Remember that passage? Famed with that passage? Lips drip with honey, seducing.

Seducing men. And I'm sorry, ladies, I know this is Mother's Day and it's taboo to say anything negative about mothers or women on Mother's Day.

[10:19] But I have to just preach what God's Word says here. And I'm sorry to tell you, but Proverbs also speaks of noisy women, foolish women, rebellious women, contentious women, argumentative women, quarrelsome women.

I mean, women who are anything but excellent. Now, before you crucify me, it says a lot about men too, okay?

All right? The Bible's not leaving men out. I'll just have to reserve that for Father's Day, okay? This is what the Bible speaks of. So Proverbs speaks of women a number of places throughout the book.

And yet, when we get to the passage in Proverbs 31, what we have here is a description of the truly excellent woman. And here at the beginning, I would admit to you that it is a high, high standard that no one really can reach.

But it's the description of the excellent woman. That's what we have here in this passage. Second of all, I would also say to you that this description of the excellent woman comes to us by way of a woman.

[11 : 33] Did you know that? Comes to us by way of a woman, a mother even. Now, that means that no one can complain that this is man's definition or a man's definition.

Now, technically, specifically, this description comes from God, all right? And so, you know, you say, some might say, well, he's a man, of course. Well, you can take issue with God about it.

But this comes from God by way of divine revelation. But it was given to a woman, a mother, so that she might teach it to her son.

That's what we need to understand about this Proverbs 31 woman. Look at verse 1. I didn't read it a moment ago, but let's look at it. Verse 1, the words of King Lemuel.

Now, he's the one who had this written down. But it didn't originate with him. And what words? The utterance, says in the New King James. Some versions might have oracle, and that's a pretty good translation.

[12 : 40] It's talking about divine revelation. These are the words of God that have been put down, been written down, which he goes on to say, it goes on to say, and pay attention to this, his mother taught him.

His mother taught him these words. So these words about, principles about a woman, a mother, come to us by way of a woman, a mother.

This is a mother teaching her son. Her son's name is Lemuel. We don't know anything about him historically. We don't know who this guy was. But he was a king, it says here in the passage.

Probably, I think we could assume, very young king. Very young man at this point. His mother's giving him instruction. He's unmarried at this point. And, by the way, what is the first thing this mother teaches him in this passage?

Well, verse 3. Do not give your strength to women. That is, in the plural sense, multiple women. Nor your ways, the way of your life, the focus of your life, to that which destroys kings.

[13 : 54] So what's he talking about? She's saying, don't be sexually immoral. That's a good word for sons today.

A thing that, a teaching, a principle that many in our culture have absolutely abandoned. Men and women. This is what she's saying.

And she is saying that if you do, it will destroy you. Now, that's a whole sermon in and of itself, isn't it? And then she moves on to other issues. Stay away from alcoholic drinks, verse 6.

And she says, because they're for medicine. You know, of course, that kind of leaves it open. A lot of people wanted to find, you know, whether it's alcohol or marijuana or whatever.

You know, well, it's for medicinal purpose. You know, granny on the Beverly Hillbillies had her rheumatism, as you remember. Well, that's not the idea here. She says, stay away from alcoholic drinks.

[14 : 57] It's really only good for those who are sick, those who need help. Yeah, it was the medicine that they had in the day. They didn't have medicines like we have today.

But I need to move on. She also said, be an advocate for those less fortunate. Verse 8. Be a person of righteousness and justice.

This is a good set of things for mothers to teach their sons. Be a person of righteousness. Live for what's right. Stand upon what is right.

And also in the things you say, speak with justice. And you can see how that would apply to a king. Be just. All right, but then in the, really the bulk of the chapter, this mother addresses what she believes to be the most important priority for her son.

And it's as if to say, she's saying, my beloved son, son of my womb, son of my vows. Verse 2. Most of all, if you can, and you can, find an excellent wife.

[16:06] Find an excellent wife. And when you do, she will be your greatest treasure. That really sums it all up. This is what she is wanting to convey to her son.

Let me point out one other thing before we actually get to the substance of the text. What this mother taught her son in verses 10 through 31, she meant for him to memorize.

She meant for him to memorize these principles, these things. And it's interesting, she used a memory device that is still quite common today.

It's called an acrostic. An acrostic. Now, you're looking at your Bibles, perhaps. You say, well, I don't see that here. And you can't see it in your version of the Bible because, you know, our language is not Hebrew.

It's English. And so this acrostic doesn't cross over into our versions of the Bible. Now, we have another example in the Old Testament, Psalm 119, which is also this kind of an acrostic.

[17:15] But this is an acrostic. There are 22 verses here. And to correspond to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Now, again, you can't see that in your English text.

It doesn't come through that way. But the first word of each of these principles, each sentence, each verse, begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet all the way through all 22 characters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Now, the whole point of it is what? For purposes of memorization. So that he can, you know, perhaps you've done that.

You know, when you were in school. Some of you are still in school. You have a list of things to memorize. And so what do you do? You kind of form an acrostic or an acronym, something that will help you remember that list.

And probably all of us have done that. So this is what we have here, this passage. And so what this mother was teaching her son was extremely important.

[18:17] That he not only get the basic principles, but that he actually memorize it. And it's still important for us today that we know these principles, these verses, as instructions for our sons, of course.

But also as a divine description of the excellence in womanhood. All right, so let's get to it. Looking at the text.

Here's the first thing we want to see in this passage. First thing about excellence in womanhood. And here's number one. The person she is defined by.

The person she is defined by. What defines the excellent woman? Well, first of all, she is a valuable wife.

That's the first thing in the passage. She's a valuable wife. Verse 10. Who can find a virtuous wife? Again, I think the preferred word, more literal word, would be excellent.

[19:21] Who can find the excellent wife? And, of course, you know the implication. The implication is she's difficult to find. I mean, usually that's what you mean when you say, who can find her? I mean, it's difficult to find.

She's rare. She's unique. Anything but common. And certainly, you know, not only in their culture, but in our culture as well.

So, rarity. Rarity is certainly what's implied here, but explicitly, this speaks of her value. Her value, her worth.

And so, verse 10 says, for her worth is far above rubies. That's a statement about value. Extremely valuable and rare.

And how is this measured in the text? I mean, there's some measurement for this here. Verse 11. The heart of her husband safely trusts her.

[20:23] That's how you measure her value. Her husband trusts her. Trusts her with what? With their children. With their home, their household.

And the things pertaining to it. With their money. With their money. Also, with their reputation. Reputation in the community. You know, a family has a reputation. That's not just an individual thing. It's also a family. Families have a reputation. And so, her husband safely trusts his wife to maintain the reputation in the community.

In fact, Proverbs, kind of a parallel passage. Proverbs chapter 12, verse 4 says, An excellent wife is the crown of her husband. But she who causes shame is like rotteness in the bones.

I can't imagine anything worse than that. What a comparison. All right. So, what's it saying about her worth? Her worth is in her character. Who she is.

[21 : 33] And it goes on to say, So he will have no lack of gain. That is, really the principle is, With her as his wife, He is a wealthy man.

And not just simply in terms of money. Though I can tell you that without my wife, We would be a pauper. We would be paupers. I tell you. Verse 12 says, She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.

Now, what a statement. About her value. Now, at this point, let me show you something else very interesting about the way this passage is written. Again, it's something that's actually easier to see if you really want to look for it.

Easier to see than the acrostic. But there's a certain way that this is written here. A certain kind of pattern that the author follows. Other than just the acrostic.

These 22 verses also have been arranged according to a certain pattern. It's called a chiasmus.

[22 : 43] If you're taking notes, you want to spell it. C-H-I-A-S-M-U-S. Chiasmus. Now, what in the world is that? Well, you probably have heard me mention it before.

Because I'm always intrigued by these things. And you find them throughout the scripture. But the term comes from the Greek letter chi. If you know anything about the Greek alphabet.

And I guess if you've been, you know, in college. You know, affiliated with some of the Greek clubs or whatever. Then you might know that a chi looks like an X. So this term gets its name from the chi.

It's a chiasmus. And it refers to a kind of a literary device. A way of writing that was very common in ancient writing. As I've mentioned, you'll find it throughout the Bible.

Old and New Testament. And without getting, you know, too far into the weeds. Here's basically what we have. The writer uses this pattern of the chi, the X.

[23 : 46] The first thing that is written.

Corresponds with the last thing said. And then the second thing written. Corresponds with the second to the last thing written.

And then the third thing with the third from the last. And so on until you reach the center. Because the chi has a center point.

All right? So virtually it kind of looks like an X. This goes with this. This with this. This with this. This with this. Until you get to the center.

And if you really study the passage closely. You'll see these patterns. Or the parallels that lead to the middle.

[24 : 48] And so at the center of the chi. Is the main point. That's the purpose of using this pattern. You get to the middle.

And there's the main idea. The main point. Now again in the Hebrew. In the Hebrew text. As it was originally written. Proverbs 31 verses 10 through 31.

Were written in the form of chiasmus. And every chiasmus has a center point. Which is again the main point.

With everything else being subordinate to that main idea. Main point. Everything else in the passage.

Intended to move the reader to that center point of the passage. And what is the central point of this passage? Well it is verse 23. What does verse 23 say?

[25 : 46] Her husband is known in the gates. When he sits among the elders of the land. That's the center point. That's the main idea. The thing the author is leading you to.

The most important part of what the author is saying here. Whether it's the big A author or the little a author. Who put this together under divine inspiration.

So here's what it means. The gates of the city were very important back in ancient times. Today probably the center of the city would be more important. The courthouse and you know that kind of thing.

Places of government and commerce and so forth. But in these days the gates. That was the most important place. It was at the gates where important business would take place. Business transactions and commercial transactions.

And legal transactions and documents would be validated there. And certified there at the gates.

And so it was a very important part in the city. Now the word known in the passage.

[26 : 47] Known at the gates. Known refers to a man's reputation. In a positive sense. Respect.

Honor. Value. Therefore the idea is public respect for the husband. That's the central point of the whole passage.

You say well. Okay. This is really amazing when you think about the principle that is taught here. The woman described in these verses is the kind of wife a man needs in order to be successful. I know that flies in the face of feminism today without a doubt. But quite simply a wife's greatest success is the success of her husband.

That's what God says. Or the old adage goes you know behind every successful man is a good woman. You know who kind of brought that in. You know through that kind of old adage.

[27 : 55] All right. So we're talking about the person she is defined by. And first she is a valuable wife. Second she is a vigorous worker.

She's a vigorous worker. Now listen to this. Starting with verse 13. It'll wear you out. She seeks wool and flax. And willingly works with her hands.

A wool and flax that would be spun. And made into yarn. And then woven into material and clothing. And so she would work at this. She would spend hours you know making clothes for her family.

For her household. Verse 14. She is like the merchant ships. She brings her food from afar. What's the idea here? Well the idea is that she makes what her household needs.

She makes these things. But she always makes extra. And she takes those things out to the open market. And sells them and trades them for food. And for other commodities that the household needs.

[29 : 03] Verse 15. She also rises while it is yet night. That is it's still dark. Early morning hours. And provides food for her household. And a portion for her maidservants.

Verse 16. She considers a field and buys it. From her profits. She plants a vineyard. You know what's the idea here? Well. She has a good head for business.

She's smart. She's shrewd. She understands. She's discerning. And she's able to take the initiative. To do. Make certain decisions. And buy certain things.

In order to benefit the household. Huh? Verse 17. She girds herself with strength. And strengthens her arms.

Which by the way. In the Hebrew is a kind of an idiom. That means that she is physically able to do hard work. Verses 18 and 19. She perceives that her merchandise is good.

[30 : 03] It's of value. And her lamp does not go out by night. She stretches out her hands to the distaff. And her hand holds the spindle. Now.

I know that doesn't translate into our day. Unless you're familiar with spinning wool and such. And the distaff is the kind of a spool on the top of this rod.

That would have the flax or wool in it. You know. Wrapped around it. Not yet spun. But wrapped around that. And then she would spin.

Pull it out and attach it to the spindle at the bottom. The spindle would spin. And make the flax and wool into yarn.

Or thread. Used to make things and such. Alright. So. What was the idea? I mean that's hard work. Tedious work. I mean I.

[31 : 02] I can imagine. I've never done it. But it says that she works into the night. Spinning flax and wool. I'm sure every.

Mother in here can relate to that. Do that every night. Don't you? Yeah. You know. Listen. Don't get. Too bogged down with.

The details here. That we missed the principle. Certainly there are. In almost every. At every step. There are cultural issues. That. Many of them don't even cross over into our world today.

I understand that. But the point is. The excellent wife. Is not lazy. She's hard working. She doesn't sit around all day.

Watching soap operas. And eating bonbons. She is a vigorous worker. Salary.com.

[31 : 58] Does a survey every year. To estimate what a stay at home. What they call a stay at home mom. Is worth. That being a worth. In terms of salary. And first.

They provide a list of. Mom's jobs. Quote. Mom's jobs. Here's the list. Executive housekeeper. Executive chef. Daycare center.

Manager and teacher. Facilities manager. Network administrator. Resident psychologist. Sanitation engineer. Taxi driver. Laundry manager.

Chief executive officer. Accountant. Events planner. Maintenance supervisor. Groundskeeper. Interior designer. Logistics analyst. Nutritionist. Plumber. Staff nurse. Buyer. Athletic trainer. Photographer. Social media marketer. Academic advisor. Tailor. Recreational therapist.

[32 : 53] Coach. Tax accountant. Judge. Public school teacher. Just. Just to name a few. And according to salary.com's 2016 survey.

Her total salary should be \$143,102 per year. I think that's probably really low actually. Don't you think? So the excellence of womanhood.

As God defines her. Valuable wife. Vigorous work. And by the way going back to that list. Even those moms who work out in the workplace.

Still have to do all those things too. You know. So there's just basis salary. And then there's all the overtime. The valuable wife. The vigorous worker.

Third. She is a virtuous woman. Virtuous woman. Woman. Her charity. Verse 20. She extends her hand to the poor. Yes. She reaches out her hands to the needy.

[33 : 54] Her care for her household. For her family. Verse 21. She's not afraid of snow. Not bad weather. She's not afraid of bad weather for her household. For all her household is clothed with scarlet.

That's just not a reference to the expense. The kind of the expensiveness of the clothing. But it really literally means double clothing. They have all the clothing they need.

She doesn't fear bad weather. She takes special care. Her character. Verse 22. She makes tapestry for herself. Her clothing is fine linen and purple. That is the idea.

She clothes herself beautifully. And tastefully. But more importantly. Under the category of character. Her true beauty is her character.

Her true beauty is her character. Not what she wears on the outside. It's her character. Because verse 25 says strength and honor are her clothing. And then her counsel.

[34 : 55] Verse 26. She opens her mouth with wisdom. And on her tongue is the law of kindness. All right. So that's number one. Excellence in womanhood. The person she is defined by.

Who can find an excellent wife? Rare thing. Valuable. Valuable. Find. By the way.

Men. The Bible says it is just as hard to find an excellent husband. An excellent man. Did you know that? Proverbs 20 verse 6.

Who can find a faithful man? See just as rare. Just as rare. But I need to move on. The person she is defined by.

Second. The praise she is deserving of. The praise she is deserving of. Verse 28. Her children rise up and call her blessed.

[35 : 54] As they praise her. Her husband also. And he praises her. Do you?

Do you? Do you? Do you? Children? And we're all children. We all have mothers.

Do we praise her? Honor her? Call her blessed? Husbands? Do you? I want you to look at verse 31.

It's interesting. Give her the fruit of her hands. And let her own works praise her in the gates. Fruit of her hands. Give that to her.

We've just been describing the fruit of her hands. Her works. And the fruit of her hard work. His mother. Is the honor that is brought to her by her children.

[36 : 55] That's the fruit of her hands. The honor brought to her by her children and by her husband. Now, specifically focus on the husband here.

Husband to the wife, the mother of his children. Where is he? He is in the gates. He's out there, you know, in the workplace.

He's in the gates. At the gates. Remember what transpires at the gates. All right, now, we've already talked about he's honored.

He's known there at the gates. But there's something else about his activity at the gates. That is, he praises his wife there.

You know, little jokes about the shortcomings of our wives.

[37 : 53] It's not funny. It's really not funny. Men kind of like to get together and say things like that. Shame on us.

He honors her in the public place. He honors her. Calls her blessed there at the gates.

The excellence in womanhood. Person she is defined by. The praise she is deserving of. And one more quickly. The preeminence she is devoted to.

The preeminence with a capital P. She is devoted to. Perhaps some of you ladies might be thinking, Wow, what a downer on Mother's Day. Get all this.

You know, I'm anything but an example of excellence. Some of you might be thinking that. I wouldn't say that. But you might be saying that of yourself. I'm not excellent. I mean, this is kind of hard here.

[39 : 02] Well, no one measures up to this list. Hmm? And yet, the point is, you should try. You should try.

And here's the secret to it. Verse 30. Look at it closely. Verse 30 says, charm. That's referring to outward adornment.

Outward adornment. It's deceitful. Which means, you know, it doesn't always indicate the truth. It's deceitful.

And beauty is passing. And we all know the truth of that, don't we? Men and women alike. Because guys don't care what they look like.

Right? But beauty is passing. I mean, you get enough facelifts, and what do you get? Smile from ear to ear.

[40 : 15] And yet, we keep trying, you know, to maintain that same beauty. But it's passing. It's passing. So, outward adornment are deceitful.

These things are deceitful. Outward beauty is passing. And it's vain.

But, and here is the secret to the excellence in womanhood and manhood.

The excellence really in anything that we endeavor to do or be. A woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.

Talk about your relationship with God. That you reverence Him. Not just with lip service, but with your life.

[41 : 13] That He is the most important thing to you. And you want and live so as to honor Him. Never shame Him.

You fear Him. The fear of the Lord. She shall be praised. She shall be praised. She shall be praised. The fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord.