

FBC POWELL, 5-13-18 AM NOTES
"A Portrait of an Excellent Wife"
Proverbs 31:10-31
5 in Series, "Proverbs: Wisdom for the Family"

"It is better to reach for an ideal and miss it, than to aim for mediocrity and hit it squarely."

—Adrian Rogers

"If you reach for the stars you may not grasp them, but at least you won't end up with a handful of mud."

—Unknown

I. The Worth of an Excellent Woman (v. 10)

"The 6 qualities of an excellent woman are 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." —John MacArthur

II. The Qualities of an Excellent Woman (vv. 11-26)

A. She Is Faithful (vv. 11-12)

Proverbs 12:4 (NASB) "An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames *him* is like rotteness in his bones."

Proverbs 18:22 (NASB) "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord."

Proverbs 19:14 (NASB) "House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord."

B. She Is Industrious (vv. 13-19)

Proverbs 31:24 (NASB) "She makes linen garments and sells *them*, and supplies belts to the tradesmen."

Proverbs 31:18 (NIV) "She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night."

C. She Is Compassionate (v. 20)

D. She Prepares for Challenging Times (vv. 21-22)

1 Peter 3:3-5 (NASB) ³ "Your adornment must not be *merely* external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; ⁴ but *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. ⁵ For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands."

E. She Is a Blessing to Her Husband (v. 23)

F. She Is Diligent to Care for Her Family (vv. 24-27)

"Before you speak, be sure that what you have to say is more important than silence."

—Grady Nutt

III. The Reward of an Excellent Woman (vv. 28-31)

A. Her Children Bless Her (v. 28)

B. Her Husband Praises Her (v. 29)

C. Her Lord Rewards Her (vv. 30-31)

Sermon 5: A Portrait of an Excellent Wife

Proverbs 31:10-31

My first Mother's Day here as pastor (May 10, 1987) was almost my last. I had been pastor here about ten months. For Mother's Day, I simply did an exposition of Proverbs 31:10-31. I thought it would be appreciated by the women in the congregation. Let me share a few things I said on that Sunday morning thirty-one years ago. I said that a godly wife and mother should be a cheerful worker and always have a positive attitude. Instead of complaining, she should thank the Lord for the opportunity to do the mundane things required to care for her husband and children. She should feed her family wholesome foods. She should be a bargain hunter to get the best for the lowest price. She should rise early and cook a nutritious breakfast. Like the woman in Proverbs 31, she could have a side business, and contribute to the family income, but always be available to her family. She should stay physically fit (Proverbs 31:17: "She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong"). She helps the poor, stays beautiful for her husband, and her tongue is always under control. She perceives when something is wrong with her husband or one of her children and sets about helping them deal with their problems. Here is a direct quote in the conclusion: "This [passage] is simply a portrait of a Spirit filled woman."

After that message, I don't remember getting any compliments, especially from young wives and mothers. I think that it was that evening that one of the more mature younger ladies in the church came to me and told me that many of the women were distressed and very upset. She said that they all felt like failures. I got the impression (though no one said it) that my life might be in danger (not literally). I admit that I was shocked. Here is what I unintentionally left out. This passage is a compilation of ideal qualities, not a literal person that Solomon was just describing. One Bible scholar calls this passage, "a poem in praise of the ideal."

Proverbs 31:10-31 was written as an acrostic poem. Each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. An example from English would be something like this:

An **a**mazing wife, who can find?

A **b**lessed woman who delights her husband.

A **c**ommitted wife who cares for her family.

A **d**edicated wife who is respected by her children.

We, of course, don't see that when it is translated into English. The point is that she is everything from A to Z. This is a description of the ideal woman!

When we say that she is the ideal woman, we are not "watering down" the truths taught in this great passage. It ought to be the strong desire of every woman to reach this ideal by the enabling power of Christ in us. Adrian Rogers said, "It is better to reach for an ideal and miss it, than to aim for mediocrity and hit it squarely." [Source unknown]

Someone else said, "If you reach for the stars you may not grasp them, but at least you won't end up with a handful of mud." [Source Unknown]

Allow me to repeat: by saying that this passage is focusing on the ideal woman we are not weakening its truth. Through the filling of the Holy Spirit, we seek to get closer and closer to this ideal, but we realize that it is an ideal and success should be seen as growing closer and closer to this ideal. It is something we strive for in the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. My desire is that we would

realistically see this verbal portrait of a godly woman as a destination we are seeking and not an accomplishment we can reach by the end of this day.

I. The Worth of an Excellent Woman (v. 10)

The word translated “excellent” literally means “capable”, or “strong”. This ideal woman has physical, mental, moral, and spiritual strength. This woman is of great value – more than jewels or other material riches. When a man finds a woman of excellence, he should recognize what a rare jewel he has and be extremely thankful.

II. The Qualities of an Excellent Woman (vv. 11-26)

These verses are the heart of what it means to be an excellent woman/wife. Again, this ought to be what every woman seeks and longs for. This kind of woman is rare. She is indeed worth more than all the jewels in the world. If we had to pick just one word to describe this ideal woman, I think that word might be “selfless.”

A. She Is Faithful (vv. 11-12)

She is trustworthy! There is no doubt that her focus, her desire, is for the good of her husband and children. He knows that, and the result is total trust. One of the quickest ways to destroy a marriage is to focus on your rights instead of the needs of your spouse. This excellent woman sees her task as meeting the needs of her family. Certainly, meeting the needs of his family is also the focus of the husband, but today we are focusing on the wife.

An assumption in this passage is that this woman is the manager of her home. She manages their assets. She coordinates the activities and the smooth running of the household. She is the steward of the family’s assets. She has the full trust of her husband. A wife who cannot handle money is not doing her husband “good” (v. 12) and puts him in a place that he cannot trust in her (v. 11). That is a bad place to be in! The ability to manage resources is not rocket science. It is a matter of planning and discipline and saying “no” to impulses.

In times of plenty and times of need this husband can trust his wife to do the very best possible with the assets they have. He knows that “...she does him good and not evil all the days of her life.”

B. She Is Industrious (vv. 13-19)

The Proverbs 31 woman doesn’t have a lazy bone in her body. Her love for her family puts delight, not drudgery in her work (see the phrase in verse 13, “and works with her hands in delight”). This is key! If the wife is self-centered, then all that she does for her family would be drudgery. One older translation of the Old Testament (Syriac Version) says, “Her hands are active after the pleasure of her heart.” When this is true, even the acts of drudgery become delightful.

In verse 13, she takes care of the family’s clothing, and in verse 14 she takes care of their food. The point is that she wants the best food at the best price for her family. In verse 15 she gets up before the rest of her family while it is still dark. In Solomon’s time a small lamp was always burning in the house. Typically, the wife would rise before the rest of the household, put oil in the lamp and set about getting things ready for the day. Ladies, if you’re feeling really low and inadequate about now, let me remind you that this is a portrait of the ideal wife and mother. Her example should motivate you to excellence, not motivate you to jump off the Henley Street Bridge!

In verses 13-15, the emphasis is on how she uses her hands. In verses 16-19, the emphasis is on how she uses her head. Notice the first two words of verse 16, “She considers...” The CSB says, “She evaluates a field.” Using her home as a base of operations, she makes wise real estate investments. Perhaps the field was next to the one the family owned. Her husband so trusts her with finances, she has a green light to purchase it when it is the right price. It wasn’t her husband that bought it, it was the wife whom he trusted. The principle here is not that a godly woman has a little real estate business on the side. The principle is that she is creative in using the talents that God has given her. Where did she get the money for this transaction? We can’t be sure, but it is likely explained in Proverbs 31:24: “She makes linen garments and sells *them*, and supplies belts to the tradesmen.” That speaks of the sailors of that day who procured items such as this and sold them all over the world. This is some woman – a wise steward, a good analyst as to how to make a profit, and a good money manager.

In verse 17, we are told that she is a strong woman. It literally says that strength is wrapped around her. This is not talking about her going to the gym and working out daily, it is primarily speaking of strong discipline, strong commitment to her family, and strong love toward her husband. Her strength flows out of her selfless commitment to her family.

For the third time, I want to remind you that this is a description of an ideal woman, not meant to make you feel guilty, but to motivate you to be a selfless person who redeems the time and cares for the family and honors God.

C. She Is Compassionate (v. 20)

This woman is not just focused on her family to the exclusion of everyone else. She is compassionate and willing to help those who are struggling.

D. She Prepares for Challenging Times (vv. 21-22)

It actually snows in Jerusalem about three out of every five years. Even when it is not snowing, it can get very cold in the winter because it has a high elevation. This Proverbs 31 woman isn’t afraid of the snow because she has prepared for it. Again, we see her selfless approach to life and how she cares for and prepares for her family.

In verse 22 we see that this lady is not *frumpy* or *sloppy*.” Frumpy and sloppy are not spiritual. She cares about beauty as is evidenced in the coverings and furnishings which would be the equivalent of our bed spreads and pillow coverings and the clothing she wears. This implies that she avoids the ostentatious and expensive for simplicity that still looks nice. She understands the truth of 1 Peter 3:3-5:

Your adornment must not be *merely* external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands.

E. She Is a Blessing to Her Husband (v. 23)

This woman does not take away from her husband’s reputation, she enhances it. The gates were where business was carried out and she is his greatest asset even there.

F. She Is Diligent to Care for Her Family (vv. 24-27)

We dealt with verse 24 earlier. In verse 25 we see that while she seeks to dress nice, it is her character that is her focus, not her apparel (v. 25). The future doesn't scare her – she smiles at it knowing that God and His provision is sufficient. Our God has got the future; we can stop fretting over it.

Verse 26 is so important! One man said, “Before you speak, be sure that what you have to say is more important than silence.” [Grady Nutt] That is counsel that this Proverbs 31 woman took to heart. Wisdom and kindness were the qualities that governed her speech. What a lesson for us all!

Verse 27 is a summary statement. She exercises constant surveillance over her household and stays on top of every aspect of her home.

III. The Reward of an Excellent Woman (vv. 28-31)

These are some of the most precious verses in the Old Testament. When you feel like a total failure and most of your efforts seem in vain, go back to this passage.

A. Her Children Bless Her (v. 28)

The children of the godly woman will one day stand and bless her. It may not be until you are in Heaven, but it will come. A word to those whose mother is still living – bless her! Do it verbally or at least in a written format. I know she wasn't perfect, but she is your mother.

B. Her Husband Praises Her (v. 29)

Husband be your wife's greatest encourager! I know she falls short of this ideal, but at least recognize what a difficult job she has (taking care of you is probably the most difficult job). Tell her often how thankful you are for her.

C. Her Lord Rewards Her (vv. 30-31)

“Charm” here refers to bodily form. Eventually your body is going to get really old and one part at a time (or sometimes three or four parts at a time) quits functioning. Human beauty (primarily facial) is so temporary! The NIV says “beauty is fleeting.” Beauty is so temporary! I encourage you today to set your sights, not on the temporal stuff that fades, but on deepening in the fear of the Lord. As we saw several weeks ago, the fear of the Lord is when we stand in awe of His glory. As one of the Reformers said, “The fear of the Lord may be defined as reverence mingled with honor and fear.” [John Calvin]

I want to close by reminding you that a person of this character and excellence cannot be worked up by trying hard. This is a supernatural life made possible only by the Gospel and the filling of the Holy Spirit.

NASB (New American Standard Bible)

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