

Proverbs 31:1-31

With the proverbs often warning of the adulterous woman & speaking ill of the contentious woman, it's appropriate that the book ends extoling/praising the virtuous & godly woman. A woman who doesn't scorn the Lord, but who *fears* the Lord...

These are the words that a godly mother taught her son (who evidently was to be a king). Last week, we noted that we really have no idea who Agur was. Even so we have no idea who Lemuel was. Some think that it was perhaps Solomon & that it was Bathsheba's pet name so to speak for her boy (Lemuel means, belonging to, or devoted to God). But there's no real historical credence to Lemuel being Solomon, he's not listed in any of the records of the kings of Judah or Israel... It's just as plausible that he was a pagan king who perhaps had a Jewish mother or somehow come to place his trust in the Lord.

But what I'd have you draw out of this is the fact that the influence of a godly mother in the lives of her children is invaluable. The things she took the time to teach him, he kept record of & allowed the wisdom of her words (her influence) to govern his life as *he* got older and began to influence the lives of others.

Vs 1

Again we see the word, "utterance" here, like we did in the previous Ch. What that means is that there was a Divine or prophetic aspect to the words she shared. But we see attention drawn to the fact that these are the words "his mother taught him."

So though we don't know much about this guy, one thing we *do know* is that his mother *knew* the Lord, *feared* the Lord & like Timothy's mother (2 Tim 1:5) taught him the ways & the word of the Lord to the best of her ability. She wanted her son to know & to honor God w/his life. & That's what every godly parent wants for their children. But we want to realize w/this that it wasn't a passive wish, but she was active in planting the word of God in his heart. Mom's, dad's, we can want our kids to honor God w/all that we are. But if we're never encouraging them in the ways/word of God, it'll make things much more difficult as they transition out from under our covering. We're to be looking for teachable moments to train them up in the way that they should go.

Vs 2-3

When she is saying, "What, my son? & What, son of my womb?" It's like saying, "What should I say to you?" Or "How should I instruct you?" & We note that not only is he the son of her womb (in that she gave birth to him). But he's also the son of her vows... Which is reminiscent of Hannah's vow to God...

That if He gave her a son, she would give him back to serve the Lord all the days of his life. Be that the case we see again that she did a great job in instructing him & teaching him how to lead an upright, God honoring life as a prince & then ultimately as a king. She sought to keep her vow in teaching him God's word.

& Ultimately she warns him against women & (in Vs 4-5) wine; the debilitating aspects physically, mentally & spiritually of immorality, adultery & alcohol.

Now we should say that these things destroy women just as much as they do men, both need to remain faithful to God, but here she's addressing specifically her son. She's exhorting him unto a life of integrity, of remaining pure spiritually. It would be easy for a king to spend his time enjoying women & wine, but that wouldn't be wise. These things have been the downfall of many a king. (Both David & Solomon slipped in the area of women & it did tremendous damage to them & to their kingdom).

So the exhortation is not to obsess over sex, just because it's something you *could* do, doesn't mean it's something you *should* do. What you *should* do is honor God w/your spirit & your body, which are His.

Vs 4-7

It's not uncommon for people in our culture to point out the fact that the bible doesn't forbid drinking alcohol. But people neglect to balance that w/the negative warnings that are constantly being given *about* drinking alcohol. If you want to be a person of influence, or want to honor a position of power that God has placed you in, than alcohol is not for you.

Even in these few Vs it's stated again & again. We read that wine &/or intoxicating drink is not for kings & it's not for princes. Or to understand that another way, it's not for those who want to be effective or for those in positions of leadership. Why? Because effectively leadership requires the full use of one's faculties.

Later on in 1 Tim Ch 3 Paul would write that if one desires the position of a bishop (of a pastor or elder in the church) they desire a good work... One of the requirements is that he "not be given to wine". Earlier on we discover that the priests weren't to be given to wine... In Isaiah 28 God *rebukes* the priests & prophets who had "erred through strong drink." He said that the "err in vision, they stumble in judgment."

& That's the exhortation here in Vs 5. "Lest they drink & forget the law & pervert the justice of all the afflicted."

God wants those who serve Him (whom He has made “kings & priests” unto him; Peter refers to you as a “Royal priesthood” 1 Pet 2:9) to be think w/clarity & to reason appropriately. He doesn’t want your mind or your body in anyway impaired through substance abuse or alcohol.

Now He’s not against medication. “Give strong drink to him who is perishing...” Hey if you’re dying & need to be eased in your pain, that’s completely different. But others may use alcohol as an escape, the king isn’t to do so. The child of God isn’t to do so.

Vs 8-9

You see, the whole idea here is that he not use his position of power to indulge himself (to gratify his flesh) but to serve others who have no means to defend themselves. Power can be used to indulge self or to protect/benefit those whom you lead. She exhorts her son unto the latter. Don’t indulge yourself, serve others, use your position to benefit those who have need of your help.

Now... In this next section Lemuel’s mother speaks of the virtuous wife. Many women see this section as goals to meet (& that’s fine), this is a demonstration of the kind of character she can have as she fears/follows the Lord.

However, primarily it’s a description of the kind of wife the Christian *man* should pray for & seek after. Often times pastors will address women regarding the kind of man *they* should seek after (& it comes from a man’s perspective to help the ladies). & That’s good because you want a man who loves God, who serves God, who wants to live their lives *for* & give of themselves *to* God, one who will lead you in His ways & honor His word. But this is the advice of a godly woman to the men, the kind of woman *they* should pray for & seek after (a woman’s perspective to help the men).

So it’s not a passage that’s really addressed to women, it’s *primarily* a search list for a man, *secondarily* it’s a check list for a woman.

Vs 10

The search is for the “virtuous” woman to be your wife. It could be translated “valiant” wife. She’s a woman of power & strength. The things she does don’t simply fall into her lap, she’s a go getter, she walks in wisdom & works hard to achieve what she has.

We’ll discover that she has a diligent work ethic, she’s wise in business practices, she’s honorable in her speech & has compassion for the poor. She’s a strong wisdom & what we’ll see is that her greatest strength is that she fears the Lord...

Now I should say this as well. I'm not sure that a woman who excels in every area mentioned here exists (though she may). Much like the qualities mentioned necessary for a man in leadership in 1st-2nd Timothy & Titus. Most will excel in some areas & struggle in others, but they're the aspiration of every godly leader. The "Proverbs 31 Woman" is idealistic, but it's not incredibly realistic to require your spouse to excel in every aspect of the list... Nor should it be used to compare or condemn. However, these things should reflect the *values & aspirations* of the woman who walks in the fear of the Lord & in godly wisdom.

We read here of the virtuous, valiant woman that her worth is far above rubies. Meaning that she is rare & valuable. Understand that as we make our way through this chapter that the things she does aren't what makes her valuable or virtuous, they're the *overflow* of her virtue. In other words, these things don't define her; they result from the virtue that's found *in* her.

The fear of the Lord will inspire us to be faithful stewards of the time & talents that God has entrusted to us; it'll give wisdom that is productive & beneficial both for ourselves & for others.

Vs 10-12

The virtuous woman not only has her husband's trust (which is critical to *any* marriage, trust is one of the pillars that marriage is built upon) but his heart "safely" trusts her. & What's pointed out here is that he trusts her integrity financially (he will have no lack of gain). The idea being that she's not foolish w/the finances, her character is trustworthy, she actually enhances the wealth of her family.

A woman who is foolish financially won't hold the trust of her husband's heart safely. He's always worried, there's probably secrecy, not full transparency, how is she spending the money? & A woman who can't be trusted will take some measure of blessing from the home (& many times that surfaces in the area of financial integrity or in some measure *materially*). Of course that would hold true if a man were being foolish w/money as well, but the focus here is on a virtuous woman & financial integrity is a primary part of that. It's the very 1st thing that gets brought up.

Some see a wife as a burdensome thing, meaning it might be a hindrance to a better life (materially). Yet the virtuous woman adds blessing & brings gain to the family. She's an asset, not a liability to her husband. Good will come to him that's directly attributed to her. She supports & encourages him, she's faithful in helping him *all the days of her life*.

She does him good & not evil. Again, several proverbs explain the negative effect of a bad/contentious wife. Here we see the opposite is true as well. The virtuous woman is no burden, she's a blessing. Her goodness & faithful character doesn't diminish through the years, it's not sporadic, it increases & it's consistent.

Vs 13-16

She's innovative, she's industrious, she doesn't work from compulsion or coercion but from compassion. (Vs 13) She *willingly* works w/her hands. She loves her husband & seeks to benefit the home.

Of course all these things aren't done in a day, or a week, but the idea is that there's all kinds of different things that go in to wisely & properly managing a home. God is recognizing that the woman's role is no small thing, it's a huge responsibility that God has entrusted to the godly wife.

She seeks wool & flax, she's like the merchant ships. He's saying that she goes out & shops & knows how to find things that are necessary resources for her family. She'll work in simple & practical ways (w/her hands) to help the home. But again, not because she feels like she has to, it's in her heart, it's the overflow of virtue, she "willingly" works w/her hands. The husband isn't seen here guilting her into it, she has a heart to help.

Even if she has help around the house (the maidservant) she still jumps in there & makes sure things are done, meals are ready & the family is fed. In other words she doesn't necessarily see her hired help as a way to slack off, but as a way to take things to the next level. She's not occupied w/certain things so she can tend to other things.

She's forward thinking, she considers a field & buys it. She knows how to invest & uses the profit to better her family & her future. She doesn't restrict herself to an ascetic or overly frugal way of life (just the bare necessities) she procures some of life's comforts (she plants a vineyard).

Vs 17-20

Again its underscored that the virtuous woman is a *strong* woman. But just like the king was to use his power to help others, she too uses her strength for productive purposes. She girds herself w/strength, hers is no easy task, she takes care of her health physically & she stays sharp mentally. She gathers quality materials & merchandise for her home (perceives that her merchandise is good), & we see again that she exercises forethought in what she does (her lamp does not go out by night)...

She planned ahead so that she has what she needs in advance. (Remember Jesus taught a parable about 10 virgins, 5 wise, 5 foolish & the foolish were unprepared for the coming of the bridegroom as noted by the fact that their lamps went out at night. They didn't plan ahead, they were unprepared, that's not this woman).

We see in Vs 19 that she knows how to use the tools & technology that are available to her that she might manage the home well (the distaff is the stick onto which the wool or flax is wound for spinning). But not only does she benefit her family through her wisdom, her innovation & hard work, she has compassion for the poor. She reaches out to those in need... She's charitable w/her resources. She sells things for profit, tends to her family & gives to the poor & needy.

Vs 21-23

We seem to have this pattern of her thinking ahead. She's not afraid of the snow, she's already made sure they have the garments they need to stay safe in the winter. She's prepared her home for adversity (she's got blankets & water & a couple of flashlights in the basement during storm season... or something like that).

& W/God's blessing upon her wisdom & diligence she makes some good things for herself, she enjoys personal marks of God's blessing upon her family (her clothing is fine linen & purple). She dresses nice & enjoys things that are nice... I love the fact that after everything she's done for her family, how she's blessed her husband & had compassion for the needy, she enjoys the fruit of her efforts personally. There's nothing wrong w/having something nice, here God blesses her in just such a way.

Her husband is known in the gates. This is where the elders & men of esteem gathered to take care of business or sort out governing affairs. What we're seeing here is that behind every good man is a good woman, she supports him, encourages him, he excels because she's in his corner. This kind of woman produces this kind of husband... It's true that men are the spiritual leaders, but if you think that as a woman you can't influence your husband for the better or the worse you're gravely mistaken. A woman's choice in how she lives will radically affect her husband. This woman inspires her husband such to the extent that he's honored & esteemed among the leaders in the land.

& Let's remind ourselves that all of this is the blessing of God that comes to the wife who walks in virtue, in wisdom & in the fear of the Lord. God is blessing her home for her faithfulness & integrity...

Vs 24-25

Sometimes people want to know if it's ok for a Christian woman to have a career. It sure looks to me like it is, this is a career kind of woman! Now we see that she hasn't in anyway neglected her home & there are certainly different seasons we go through in life depending on the circumstance. But this woman has her own clothing line 😊.

Vs 26-27

Here we're given a little insight into her personal life. Whether she speaks deliberately (opens her mouth) or spontaneously (on her tongue) she brings forth wisdom & loving kindness.

One might think that w/all her self-discipline, skill sets, hard work & wisdom she might be a bit condescending or judgmental of others who won't work as hard or study as much. But she doesn't condemn others; she's kind *toward* others.

She watches over her house, she doesn't grow lazy, but rather she keeps things on point for her family, makes sure things are the way they need to be.

Vs 28-29

Her family is grateful for her & they aren't afraid to make that known. Her children respect her & her husband praises her. (& This is where I tell you how grateful I am for my wife 😊. I'm so grateful for her love for God, her love for her family, her hard work & diligence to keep everything plugging away & running smoothly... she is truly a helpmate to me & I feel in many ways like Vs 29. "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all.")

& Though this can be true in a literal sense of only one, yet there's a legitimate sense wherein every home should feel this way. Every child can legitimately feel like, "I have the best mom" & every husband can legitimately feel like, "I have the best wife."

Vs 30-31

What's the secret to her success? It's not her charm (though she may have it), it's not her beauty (though she may be beautiful). But those things pass, but the fruit that comes through a woman who fears the Lord is forever. It's not a temporary thing, it'll serve you your whole life. Her secret is her godly character, she fears God & the fruit of it is all around her.

God honors the virtuous wife, the woman of wisdom & diligence, His blessing is upon her, her family & through her He blesses humanity.

Give her the fruit of her hands (don't muzzle the ox as it treads out grain) (the hard working farmer must be the 1st to partake of the crops). She serves diligently, don't be afraid to honor her openly. The reward isn't her motive, but it's a fitting result of her labor. Render honor to whom honor is due... Men, honor your wives, she's a blessing to your life, she will be edified & God will be glorified...

Prayer Points:

God we thank You for the wisdom of Your word that You've invested into our lives throughout the study of Proverbs. May we continue to grow in wisdom, to walk in wisdom & honor You in who we are & what we do. It's our heart that You be glorified in us & in this place, pour our Your Spirit & have Your way...