Proverbs 31:10-31 “The Virtuous Wife & Mother”

Intro. Today is a special day that has been set aside to give honor and recognition to our mothers. And my text today is a Hebrew poem of praise to a very capable and virtuous wife and mother. V.28 expresses this very well, “Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.” Even so, the Word of God teaches us to honor and praise our mothers for all that they have done for us.

My main hesitation in preaching this message is that if taken wrongly, it could result in just the opposite of what I intend. You men may read this account of the virtuous wife, and compare your wife with her, and use this text to put her down for not measuring up. But there is one simple way to keep you from doing that. Just remember, you probably do not fit the description of a virtuous husband either! We all fall short to some degree. It is a mistake to assume that all the virtues in this section are likely to be embodied in any one woman. This is just a picture of God’s ideal in a wife & mother. God’s standard can never be less than perfect.

I heard about some cows who were out grazing in a field and they saw a milk truck go by, and on the side of that milk truck it said something about the name of the dairy, and then it began to advertise the milk. It said that the milk was pasteurized, homogenized, sanitized, and vitamin enriched. One of the cows said to the other one, “It makes you feel inadequate, doesn’t it?” Ladies, as you read this poem of praise, you may be inclined to say, “I feel so inadequate,” but don’t allow that feeling to cause you to miss benefiting from this wonderful picture of God’s ideal in a wife & mother. After all, it is better to reach for an ideal and miss it, than to aim for mediocrity and hit it squarely.

Though we should always strive for perfection as a goal, it is good to know that God has made provision for our shortcomings. First, he has provided forgiveness of our sins through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. Secondly, by His Word and by His Spirit, we can overcome many of our shortcomings. God does not lower His standard to our level. He always upholds the highest standards for men and women, and then enables us to grow stronger in meeting that standard. Ladies, I will present a very high standard for the type of wife and mother you should be. But don’t despair if you fall short; simply seek the Lord’s help in making you more of what you ought to be. As we shall see later in the message, there are tremendous rewards if you do so.

By the way, Proverbs 31 is very important for young single men & women. It is quite possible that this portrait of a virtuous woman was given by the mother of King Lemuel for her son (v.1). This poem begins with the words, “Who can find a virtuous wife?” So here is a portrait of the kind of woman you young men should look for in a wife. Next to making a decision for Christ, the most important decision a Christian will make is the choice of a life’s mate. Prov. 19:14 says, “A prudent wife is from the Lord.” Especially note v.30, “Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.” When it is time to look for a wife, don’t look primarily at how good she looks. Beauty is only skin deep. That young lady may know how to put on the charm when she is around you. But don’t be deceived by that. It may be just an act. What you should look for is a woman of character, a woman of virtue. You may have to wait a long time to find her, but she will be worth the wait!
Ladies, as we shall see, you should be concerned about your outward beauty, but never to the neglect of your inner beauty! 1 Peter 3:4-5 says, “Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.” Outward beauty fades, but a godly woman radiates with beauty from within.

So let’s look at this passage of Scripture together,¹ and see what we can learn from it, and how we can be challenged by it. Let’s consider first of all:

I. THE QUALITIES OF THE VIRTUOUS WIFE AND MOTHER

At the outset, I should point out that the word translated “virtuous” in v.10 does not refer merely to moral excellence. The word rather refers to someone who is strong or capable. I believe the author has in mind someone who is strong spiritually, morally, intellectually, and physically. Notice in what ways she is strong:

A. A Virtuous Woman Is Strong in Her Relationship with the Lord – Notice in v.30 that the woman of virtue & strength “fears the LORD.” This is the secret of her life: she fears God, and therefore seeks to please Him by obeying His Word. No doubt she would arise early in the morning to meditate on the Word and to pray. Her true beauty is within.

I believe this poem of praise ends with this attribute for emphasis. All of the other wonderful characteristics of this woman flow from her walk with the Lord. Prov. 1:7 says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge…” That is foundational. So make sure you put priority on your relationship to God. Make sure you are saved. Make sure you are seeking to please Him every day. He is the source of virtue.

B. A Virtuous Woman Is Strong in Her Relationship with Her Husband - In vv.11-12 we read, “The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.” This means that she’s going to be honest & loyal. He trusts her to keep her marriage vows. Now there’s one particular aspect of their marriage that is mentioned, and that is in the household finances. Notice, “he will have no lack of gain.” Her husband can trust her to manage the household affairs with prudence and discretion. She can be trusted with the bank account. With a wife like that, you don’t have to worry about foolish and selfish expenditures, unlike the women in the following poem, “Theirs was a perfect marriage, but for one feminine flaw, he was fast on the deposit, but she was quicker on the draw.” And notice again in v.12 that “She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.” She is a help meet to her husband. She is a completer, an enhancer to her husband.

V.22 says, “She makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.” Friend, this is an elegant lady. She takes care of her looks, because that is important to her husband. The word translated “tapestry” is found only 2 times in the Bible, and it refers to a fine covering. In Proverbs 7:16 it refers to a beautiful bedspread important from Egypt. Based on Hebrew parallelism, here in v.22 it refers to a covering she wears. It probably refers to a beautiful imported garment. She doesn’t want her husband to see well-dressed women out in public, and then come home to a wife in a sweat suit or an old, ugly housecoat! God created beauty, and I believe He

¹ This portrait of the virtuous woman is actually an acrostic. Each verse begins with a successive letter of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.
intended women to be beautiful. Go ahead & go to the trouble of making yourself look good for your husband. One avenue to a man’s heart is through his eyes. Don’t let yourself go!

Furthermore, she helps make her husband a success. In v.23 we read, “Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land.” The gate of ancient cities was the commercial, legal, and social center. The implication is very clear that he is what he is because she is what she is. There is an old saying, “Behind every good man is a good woman, and a surprised mother-in-law.” A successful man either has a good mother, or a good wife, or both. Certainly that is true in this case. She is a woman who is behind her husband, encouraging her husband. A wise woman never discourages her husband, or puts him down. He gets enough of that in the world. Listen ladies, a woman is to a man what a wind is to a fire. She can fan it up or blow it out.

By the way, notice that it is her husband, and not she, that “sits” among the elders. She knows that her place is in the home.

So the virtuous woman is strong in her relationship with the Lord, and strong in her relationship with her husband. Furthermore:

C. A Virtuous Woman Is Strong in Meeting the Needs of Her Family – Most of this text deals with her hard work at meeting the needs of her husband and family. The virtuous woman of the Bible is a homemaker, and our society is doing a great disservice to our children when we make a woman feel she is wasting her education & talents by staying at home to meet the needs of her family, and work from her home base. Notice with me:

1. What She Does to Meet their Needs – She is the one who makes sure her family is well fed and properly clothed. In the middle of v.15 we read that “provides food for her household.” The word translated “food” is translated “gain” in v.12. It usually refers to catching or hunting prey, though in Malachi 3:10 it refers to what is taken by harvest. Either way, it is food acquired by work. She gets up early either to harvest food, or to prepare it. Now back up to v.14 where we read, “She is like the merchant ships, she brings her food from afar.” It that day the kind of food that would be imported from afar would primarily be spices. Thus, she shopped to add both flavor & variety to her meals. In v.16 we see that she thinks of other ways to provide nutritious food & drink for her family. There it says, “She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard.”

She also took care of their clothing. In v.13 we read, “She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands.” Then in v.19 it says, “She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hand holds the spindle.” Now boys and girls, the spindle is what they made thread with in that day. Now, it’s obvious that this wise woman has learned some real skills. Likewise, v.21 says, “She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet.” Her family is well dressed, both in terms of warmth, and fashion. She can make things herself better and cheaper than she can buy them. By the way, it does snow in Jerusalem, and she made sure her family was prepared for the cold weather. You can be sure that it is the mother of the house that will make sure the kids are dressed warmly when it snows!

She knows that her family needs more than just food & clothes. So she finds ways to earn some extra money for the family. Notice v.24 as an example, “She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants.”

Think about all the other capabilities she must have to be a wife & mother, and manage the home. She must be a chauffeur, maid, cook, referee, philosopher, rescue squad, nurse, hostess, teacher, and counselor, just to name a few. She must be equal to every crisis imaginable.
You may wonder, how does she do all of that? That leads to my other point in this section. We not only see what she does to meet the needs of her family, but also:

2. How She Meets the Needs of her Family – In v.17 our author says, “She girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms.” Literally, “she girded her loins with strength.” A person would gird their loins into their belt when it was time to work. She wasn’t afraid of hard work. In v.27 we read, “She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.” This lady would not sit in a rocking chair or sofa watching TV all day! She not only works hard, but she also works long hours. In v.15 we read, “She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household…” Then in the last of v.18 we read, “And her lamp does not go out by night.” There is an old saying that a man’s work is from sun up to sun, but a woman’s work is never done. This lady seemed to believe that her work could be done if she started work early enough in the morning, and stayed up well after dark. Though we all need times of rest and relaxation, these verses show that she was willing to work long hours to meet the needs of her family. I do not know of any mother with children in the home who doesn’t put in long hours on behalf of her family.

We see that hard work and long hours is one way to get things done. But notice the secret of her diligence. In v.13 it says that she works “willingly” with her hands. Actually, that word (chephets) means that she works with delight. Love makes hard work delightful. Also, it is her delight to do it, because she is doing it as unto the Lord.

By the way, notice in v.15 that this virtuous woman had maidservants. Perhaps they helped do some of the cooking & cleaning, & so forth. So it is OK to use the help of Betty Crocker when it is time to put food on the table! Thank God for the mechanical servants that we have in the homes, to make our work easier. If you men want a virtuous woman, either provide her with maid servants, or give her those labor saving devices, like washers, dryers, stoves, dishwashers, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, sewing machines, and so forth. Don’t work her to death! Furthermore, the older children in the family, especially the daughters, can help your mother out. [The text doesn’t address the issue of the father helping mother around the house!].

D. A Virtuous Woman Is Strong in Meeting the Needs of the Poor - In v.20 we read, “She extends her hand to the poor, Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy.” Not only does she diligently serve her family, but she shares her extra income with the poor. She is not selfish, but willing to share her prosperity. She shows that she is a godly woman, for she is like God, showing mercy and compassion to the poor. She has a giving spirit like God. Here is a prime example of utter unselfishness.

E. A Virtuous Woman Is Capable of Speaking Just the Right Words – In v.26 we read, “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness.” She speaks words of wisdom; she is very practical in solving problems that her family faces. She gives wise advice to her children. She also speaks words of kindness. Here’s a woman who has control of her tongue. Kindness, not anger, rules her tongue. She is gracious, even though she is prosperous.

What a contrast to the woman described in Proverbs 27:15, “A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.” Or Prov. 19:9 says, “It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.”

Such a woman makes many sacrifices. Is it worth it? Is it all in vain? Well consider with me:
II. THE REWARDS OF THE VIRTUOUS WIFE AND MOTHER

Yes, being a hard-working virtuous woman is worth it for the following reasons:

A. She Shall Be Praised – In v.30 we read that “a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.” Notice this kind of woman shall be praised:

   1. By Her Husband – In the last of v.28 we read that her husband also praises her. Indeed he should, for we read in v.10 that “For her worth is far above rubies.” God does not compare her with a diamond. A diamond catches and reflects light, but a ruby has that inner glow. Furthermore, Proverbs 12:4 says, “An excellent [same word translated “virtuous”] wife is the crown of her husband.” Therefore, we men need to give more praise and show more appreciation for our wives! We should not take them for granted. We need to give our wives the paycheck of praise and admiration. You need to let her know how special she is to you. I can tell you that I do not have words in my vocabulary to express to you how much I value my precious wife. Husbands need to set the right example before their children by openly praising the Lord and his wife for the blessings of the home. This kind of appreciation must not be reserved for Mother’s Day or Christmas; rather, it must be shown sincerely all year long. Gratitude is a wonderful Christian virtue. It needs to be cultivated in every home. Sacrificing for the family should not be a thankless task.

   We should express praise and appreciation for our wives because they deserve it for all they do for us. But there are other reasons as well. Praise will bring more positive results than criticism! It also meets a psychological need. We all need to feel that we are worthwhile; that our lives count. One reason at least some women prefer to work outside the home is because they get more praise and recognition there than they do at home.

   Furthermore, notice v.31, “Give her of the fruit of her hands….” She should be rewarded by her husband and children for her hard work. If she earns some extra money, she should be able to use that money to buy her some things she has been wanting. Let her enjoy the fruit of her labor.

   She should not only be praised by her husband, but also:

   2. By Her Children – In the first part of v.28 we read, “Her children rise up and call her blessed….” I don’t think that there can be any greater reward. When you reach the end of your life, it will not matter very much what clubs you were an officer for. It will not matter much what kind of career you had. What will matter most is that you are surrounded by your children, and they rise up & call you blessed. What will matter is that they can look back & be thankful that they were raised by a Christian mother who loved them, and guided them down the right path.

   3. By Others – In the last of v.31 we read, “let her own works praise her in the gates.” The reference to “in the gates” again refers to the elders and leaders of the city. They all will speak well of her, because of her good works for her family and others. She does not need to toot her own horn; her good works invite praise.

   Perhaps the author was thinking of the story of Ruth. Ruth 3:11 says, "And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman."

B. She Shall Face Life with Confidence – In v.25 we read, “Strength and honor are her clothing; She shall rejoice in time to come.” Under stress, she can smile at the future. She shall rejoice in time to come. She has the comfort and satisfaction of her virtue in her own mind. She is certainly not a slave of her husband or inferior to her husband, but a person in her own right who
takes a full and honored place in the life of the home and community. There is no doubt that she had good self-esteem.

Conclusion: Ladies, what are you after in life? What do you want most? Do you want a big beautiful house or a beautiful home? Are you more concerned about the praises of an employer, or the praise of your family? May there be more ladies like this woman, and may the praise of such women ring out in cities all over the world!

I believe that many women really want to be the kind of woman I have described, but there’s only one way: to be committed to Jesus Christ.


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