

Proverbs 31:10-31

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Date: 03 March 2019

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[0 : 00] will be from Proverbs 31, verses 10 through 31. That's on page 615 in the White Bibles. Again, that's Proverbs 31, 10 to 31, on page 615 in the White Bibles.

An excellent wife, who can find? She's far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not harm all the days of her life.

She seeks wool and flax and works with willing hands. She is like the ships of the merchant. She brings her food from afar. She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.

She considers a field and buys it. With the fruit of her hands, she plants a vineyard. She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong. She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. She puts her hands to the staff, and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.

[1 : 13] She is not afraid to show her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet. She makes bed coverings 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. She delivers sashes to the merchant. Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also, and he praises her.

Many women have done excellently, but you surpassed them all. Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

[2 : 35] Well, good morning. It is worthwhile to pray, given the text.

Lord, may we taste and see that you are good, that your word assures us that blessed are those who take refuge in you. So as we come to your word, may we see your goodness proceed from it. Would you give us attentiveness and hearts that are moldable.

I pray for myself and the delivery of this word, that you would be in me and be at work through me. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Where does one go for wisdom?

[3 : 54] Where does one go for counsel? Where is the source of tangible and practical principles and advice?

Some will say wisdom is surely acquired. It's learned by experience. As a university student, it doesn't take long for you to learn that procrastination is often painful.

Wisdom can be gleaned from books. History is commended because we don't want to repeat the same mistakes from the past.

It is obtained through observation, therefore disciplines like sociology and anthropology, and arguably the hard sciences as well.

But perhaps the source of much wisdom comes through relationship. It is received through relationship.

[4 : 59] And this is what we've seen in the book of Proverbs. It's wisdom imparted through relationship. And since your Bibles are open, it's worthwhile to point it out.

If you turn to Proverbs chapter 1, you'll begin to see it. In verse 8, it reads, hear my son, your father's instruction.

If your eyes proceed to the first verse in chapter 2, my son, if you receive my words, if your eyes flow down to the first verse of chapter 3, my son, do not forget my teaching. Again in chapter 4, verse 1, hear, O sons, a father's instruction. And to anchor it even more, chapter 5, verse 1, my son, be attentive to my wisdom.

Again in chapter 6, again in chapter 7. These are the words of a father to a son. Wisdom imparted through relationship.

[6 : 09] And this is wisdom. These are life lessons and invaluable insights that are received on how to live well, particularly from a dad to his boy.

This morning we come to the final chapter of Proverbs. Proverbs 31. Proverbs 31. The ESV translation splits up the final chapter in two and distinguishes it by two questions.

Whether they should be questions is up for debate, but the ESV puts it that way. In verse 2, what are you doing, my son? What are you doing? What are you doing?

The mom is concerned. There's the concern with the task of the son, particularly a royal son. And the question she is posing is, how should a king serve?

How should a king serve? And the second part of the chapter is identified by a question as well. In verse 10. An excellent wife who can find.

[7 : 14] If the first half is addressing the question, how a king serve, the second part of Proverbs 31 answers the question, what should a king seek?

How does a king serve and what should a king seek? If you've been with us these past two weeks in Proverbs, the answer to the question is wisdom.

Seek wisdom. It's summarized by chapter 4, verse 5 through 9, and I'll read a portion of it. It reads this. Get wisdom.

Get insight. Do not forget. Do not turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, namely wisdom, and she will keep you. Love her, and she will guard you.

The beginning of wisdom is this. Get wisdom. And whatever you get, get insight. Prize her highly, and she will exalt you. She will honor you if you embrace her.

[8 : 13] She will place on your head a graceful garland. She will bestow on you a beautiful crown. It's clear that the book of Proverbs, the objective is to seek wisdom and make every effort to seize it.

If the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs is wisdom personified, then I want to make the case that in chapter 31, you see wisdom embodied.

Wisdom embodied in a person. More specifically, a woman. Most precisely, a wife. See, you and I may presume, if you've read Proverbs through, that the culmination of Proverbs should be this iconic description of a wise male, a God-fearing man who embodies all the instruction that has gone before, such as presented in Psalm 112.

You could turn there. It's really the counterpart to Proverbs 31. But the final chapter of Proverbs is jarring in this, that though directed to a son, it's no longer a father speaking.

It is now a mother. It's a queen describing to her son one that would be suitable, one that he should seek, one that he should seize, in contrast to those he had already wastefully given himself to.

[9 : 42] Chapter 31, verse 3, the son seems wayward. The instructions in verse 2 are what are you doing?

Another translation reads, No, my son. No, son of my womb. No, son of my vows. Do not give your strength to women. He seems to have been wayward.

And the second half of Proverbs 31, where we'll spend the rest of our time, presents for this son, one, he should be giving himself to.

See, what is read was to be applied by a male audience to a male audience. Interestingly, in contemporary times, it's held up as a popular text for women's conferences, when in reality, the questions that should be asked, they should be, the question that should be asked is whether, when was the last time this was the passage for a men's conference.

It's a poetic capstone to the book. It's formatted as an acrostic. A, B, C, all the way to Z, and it's according to the Hebrew alphabet, so there's 22 letters.

[11 : 00] Possibly to aid in memorization. My children have books on vegetables and fruits, and so A is for apple, B is for blueberries, C is for cantaloupe, and it catalogs fruit from A to Z, and you get to tricky letters because some, there's no English equivalent, so they give you like a Chinese word, transliterated.

But all that to say, it aids in memorization, but probably it's formatted, more likely so, as an acrostic because it describes the fullness of wisdom.

Wisdom from A to Z. Wisdom from beginning to end. Wisdom that is comprehensive. It is a celebratory outburst of poetry beheld in a person.

And this morning, I would like to propose that verses 10 through 31 assert this. God-fearing women are precious and praiseworthy.

God-fearing women are precious and praiseworthy. I lift the words from the ESV translation in verse 10. She is far more precious than jewels.

[12:20] And the last few verses beginning in verse 28, 29, 30, and 31 are the summons of praise to this woman.

I would like to frame our time with what is commonly known as the six W's. They are a set of questions that you learn at a young age.

They were reinforced for me in high school journalism. They're questions journalists and investigators ask. Who? What? When? Where?

Why? And how? That's the last W. And as we answer these questions, my aim is for the text to yield this reality that God-fearing women are precious and praiseworthy.

Who? Who is this woman? The subject of the poem is what the ESV translates as an excellent wife. There is a lot of dialogue on what is the best translation of this phrase.

[13:29] That adjective excellence excellent. If you were to pick up other modern translations, you would find translations that read the wife of noble character, a capable wife, a woman of strength, a virtuous wife, a woman of valor.

And this is not the result of the Hebrew word being ambiguous. ambiguous. Rather, it's a term that encapsulates so much. How are we to understand who this woman is?

Well, this word gives us insight. This word has been translated as strength. It's the exact same word, the excellent word, and the strength word in 31 verse 3.

In other places, it's identified as not only physical strength, but moral strength. It's translated as endure to stand firm in Job.

It's used of military action describing valiant, heroic conduct by numbers in the book of Numbers. It's used to describe exceptional moral character, trustworthy, worthiness in Exodus.

[14:44] It describes wealth in two kings. There are certainly militaristic undertones that have led to ample writing making the case that this segment is a tribute to a heroine.

You see, tributes are given as celebrations. In the sports world, tributes are given after medal ceremonies and trophy presentations. They invite you to celebrate, rejoice, and cheer one's efforts, achievements, sacrifices, and victories.

This is what is taking place here. This is a tribute to a heroine, a poetic celebration of an excellent wife, a valiant woman. How this is actually practiced today in modern context, a handful of us were in Israel over the Christmas holiday, and we attended a Shabbat dinner.

It was a great meal, but between interspersed in the meal, there are prayers and there are songs. And interestingly, the husband of the household sang Proverbs 31, 10 through 31, to his wife to praise and to celebrate, to pay her tribute.

I knocked on our neighbor's door who practices Judaism, and she says, yes, the husbands do it today.

[16:18] And much from being what you and I may have perceived as a checklist or a prescription, the text actually is a summons to praise.

The exhortation is not to, hey, there's these 37 impossible attributes to look for.

Instead, the writer, mom, is saying, when you find her, celebrate. Be joyful.

Rejoice. This is the woman. That is who she is. Well, what is she doing? The answer, the better question is, what is she not doing?

She seems to be doing everything. The verbs beginning in verse 13 running through verse 27 are nearly all attributed to her.

[17:21] You hear the rhetorical effect. She seeks. She works. She brings. She rises. She provides. She portions. She considers. She buys.

She plants. She dresses. She makes. She perceives. She puts. She holds. She opens. She reaches out. She makes. She sells. She delivers. She certainly is not idle. She is almost made out to be this omni-competent person who can and does everything.

And so, we must applaud her resilient drive and her industrious hands. Her strength and her dignity according to verse 25. you applaud the fact that she is a seamstress.

She is a chef. She is an agriculturalist. She is in commerce and trade. She is a volunteer that serves and gives to the poor and the needy. She is a teacher according to verse 26.

She is an investor according to verse 25. She is a wife and on top of that, she is a mother. mother, you like me, are wondering, can all of this productivity flow from one individual?

[18 : 34] We would be hard-pressed to find this amount of productivity from a fleet of individuals, let alone a solitary individual. Who is she?

What is she doing? When? When is she doing all of this? Well, verse 15 tells us she rises while it is yet night.

Verse 18 tells us her lamp does not go out at night. She rises early and stays up late. And you being the university student go, oh, I got that one covered.

Wait. It's like the schedule of a diligent university student. But it's different in this sense. It's not only for one, two, four, six, seven, nine, ten years.

But to some degree, she keeps the schedule all the days of her life. Verse 12. Her tireless efforts are marked by consistency and longevity.

[19 : 47] Regardless of whether it is springtime, and she acquires a vineyard to plant it. Or wintertime, where she clothes her family from the snow, according to verse 21, she avoids idleness.

She is always about her business, unceasingly and relentlessly. She is what the New Testament would say, someone who redeems the time, making the most of every opportunity.

who, what, when, where, where is her presence experienced? The truth of the matter is that she is a benefit and blessing wherever she chooses to be.

Catch this. Whether it be in the close confines of her household, verse 21, or far off to gather food, in verse 14, she impacts both the home and the marketplace.

Her impact is testified in all of civic life, according to verse 23. There is a great sense that whether it be near or far, private or public, you have an individual that causes all around her to prosper.

[21 : 07] And why do they prosper? Because they reap the benefits of her labor, her selfless service. As a wife, her husband and her household flourish.

As an employee, her maidens prosper. As a businesswoman, her goods and commodities are in demand. As a teacher, she imparts wisdom and kindness in her classroom so that her students are nourished.

As one who demonstrates mercy and generosity to the poor, society is being restored. where this woman chooses to be and what she chooses to be involved in, all prosper and flourish around her. Her presence brings the prosperity of others. There is a selflessness that is demonstrated through her service and all.

benefit because of it. Fifthly, why? Why? Why? Why does she do all this?

[22 : 20] The poem closes with a woman who deserves praise. Hence, the tribute to the heroine. She is praised by her children. Verse 28.

She is praised by her husband. the fruit of her works praise her. In verse 31. In verse 30, summon all to praise her.

But what may surprise you is why she deserves praise. You could and rightfully so applaud her for how she serves her household.

You could and rightfully so could applaud her for how she ran her business. You could applaud her for her wise investments and you could applaud her for the work she did among the poor.

You could applaud her for the quality of her work. But the poem gives us the primary reason why we are to applaud her and give her adulation.

[23 : 27] A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. And what is the fear of the Lord?

I'll summarize it in this way. It's living under God's reign and rule. One writer says the fear of God produces a new way of looking at all of life.

It sees each moment as the Lord's time, each relationship as the Lord's opportunity, each duty as the Lord's command, and each blessing as the Lord's gift.

While reading with a group of graduate students this past week, one of the students noted something that as I looked at it was, whoa, really surprising.

There is actually no mention of any overtly spiritual activity in this chapter. She is not at the temple.

[24 : 26] She is not engaged in any religious ritual or religious observance. There is little talk of worship, nothing of that sort.

We aren't to picture a woman who is all consumed, I have to be cautious, all consumed with merely prayer and fasting, devotion, and private meditation all day long.

That's not what the picture gives us. Instead, we are to see that because a life lived under God's rule, all things are understood to be as worship.

She is not more devout when she reads her Bible. She is not than when reading an academic textbook. See, the rule of God extends to every crack and corner and compartment in one's life. This is the way of wisdom. This is wisdom embodied. This is what Paul meant when he said whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, you're able to do it for God's glory.

[25 : 46] Why? Because God rules over all of life. Who, what, when, where, why, how, how.

Perhaps this is the question everyone's asking. How, how, how do you get anything close to this? How did she become a woman of valor? Well, there's nothing explicit in these verses, but verse 30 certainly grabs my attention.

As a mom is bursting forth in tribute to a God-fearing woman, she mentions that charm is deceitful and beauty is vain. You certainly sense that this mom has experienced life.

Her hands are worn, her face is wrinkling, her hair is graying. Perhaps she became queen for her attractiveness, her charm, and her beauty, which are not intended to be diminished because we'll see that in a few weeks in the book of Song of Solomon.

But she wants to tell her son, above all those things, seek wisdom. seek the embodiment of wisdom. And in contrast to all the literature in the ancient Near East at this time that highlighted the physical attributes objectifying women, the Bible gives us something quite different.

[27 : 16] In strong opposition even to popular culture today, there is nothing about her appearance. what is attractive about her is not what she does, but how she goes about doing it.

Too long has this text been wielded as a perspective checklist. What is being prescribed here are not tasks, but temperament.

the woman is precious and praiseworthy not because of what she does, but how she does it. The woman does all this in strength as she fears the Lord.

See, you are not asked to do all these things. Rather, you are asked as you do all things, are you honoring the Lord?

The most menial tasks of a mother, when done in strength, honor the Lord. The unseen tasks, the early morning or late night study sessions by a student, when done in strength, honor the Lord.

[28 : 42] The business transaction, when done in strength, honors the Lord. the tedious instruction of young children, when done in strength, honors the Lord.

And this is what the Christian faith does. Because when you and I become Christians, when we pledge allegiance to Christ, we often think of it, oh, it's deliverance from death, evil, the consequences of sin, deliverance from hell.

But the gospel does more. it does more than that. Because Paul writes that when Jesus came, he is reconciling not only humanity to himself, but he is reconciling all things to himself.

All things. Creation and all its activities. And see, as Christ's followers, we have to learn what it means that there are not trivial things.

There are not insignificant relationships. There are not less noble tasks. That there is no sphere of existence over which Jesus is not sovereign.

[30 : 02] There's no division in where some areas he rules and others he does not. There's no neutral ground in the universe. every square inch, every split second is claimed by God to belong to him.

The Bible actually gives us an example of this heroine. The precise phrase is applied to only another single individual in the whole Bible. Though there's probably others.

the Hebrew Bible makes this connection because the book of Proverbs is followed by the book of Ruth in the Hebrew Bible. And the phrase woman of strength is what Ruth is called in chapter 3.

Ruth chapter 3 verse 11. And you may not be familiar with the book of Ruth. It's a short four chapters. You could read it over lunch. But a few things you have to note about Ruth.

Ruth. She was a foreigner. An immigrant. A refugee. She was a widow.

[31 : 12] Childless. She was poor. She had no money to go buy land to plant a vineyard. She had no household to look over.

She had no husband to live alongside. Circumstantially, Ruth has her life looked nothing like Proverbs 31.

Realistically, the woman in Proverbs 31 is on the opposite end of the social strata. Yet, the Bible doesn't hesitate to call her a woman of noble character.

A worthy woman. Why? Because you can be a noble woman in every circumstance. This is one who has given themselves to the fear of the Lord.

A life lived under the rule and reign of God is a commended life. It's a praiseworthy life. And as you do so, your children will rise up to praise you. Your husband will praise you.

[32 : 17] The works of your hands may praise you. Those within your city gates or your sphere of influence will praise you. your colleagues, your neighbors, your co-workers, your classmates.

May they praise you. Not because of your productivity, but because of the spirit in which you do and serve others around you.

And therefore, God-fearing women, are precious and praiseworthy. God-fearing women are precious and praiseworthy.

Well, let me pray first. Father, I pray, Lord, that we would be those who celebrate the lives of those around us who demonstrate the fear of the Lord in all tasks, especially women, especially mothers, spouses.

They are gifts because to us they embody wisdom, not because of all that they do, but because of the spirit in which they do all things. and so, Father, we thank you that we are able to glorify and honor you in all things, small and big, in basic things.

[34 : 04] And so, as we even come to a meal together, we pray that in it, you would be glorified. For Jesus' sake, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.