

A Celebration of Motherhood

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[0 : 00] To Proverbs 31. We'll be reading verses 1 through 10.! Again, I want to say to all mothers present, a very happy Mother's Day.

! And I sincerely pray that you are encouraged and thanked for all that you do. And I pray that this day is a very special day for you.

You should be thanked every day, but especially today. My own mother is here, and I'm so grateful for the way she has, as a full-time mother, cared for me and my siblings.

And I reflect on those years and continue to realize how blessed I really was. This morning, since it is Mother's Day, I'll be primarily addressing mothers, but not exclusively addressing mothers.

I will be addressing all of us because this is God's Word written to all of us. And from the outside, I want to say that I realize that for most of you, what I'm going to share is not you.

[1 : 14] It is more of a reminder. And I'm reminded of the Apostle Peter in his second letter to the recipients of that letter.

He said, I want to stir up your pure minds by way of reminder. And hopefully, that is what we will have as the effect of God's Word on us this morning, that our minds will be stirred up by hearing God's Word.

I believe that you would agree with me that increasingly so, in many circles, motherhood is not on the list of things that are celebrated, and especially stay-at-home motherhood.

Many people see motherhood and its responsibilities, especially when children are young, as hindrances to other things, like career advancement, the freedom to enjoy life going and coming as you'd like, enjoying life with other responsibilities of having children to look after.

And sadly, these views are not restricted to the world, the world of unbelievers. These views, in some cases, are shared by those who follow Christ.

[2 : 35] And just so that you would know this morning, my aim really is for this message to be an encouragement to mothers specifically and to women in general.

So please bear that in mind, even as you hear some of what I might say today, that without bearing that in mind may sound as if it's not encouragement.

I do want to encourage mothers, in particular, and women in general. At certain points, I believe you may be minded to check out, but please don't do that.

Just stick in there. It's not going to be long. Hear it to the end and then make an evaluation. Before we read God's word, though, I want to ask some questions for personal consideration.

The first is to married mothers. If you were able to stay at home and care for your family and your home, your husband is able to manage all the obligations, would you do that?

[3 : 45] And what about you single mothers? If you were to get married and had the opportunity to stay at home and care for your home and your family because your husband was able to manage all the expenses, would you choose to do that?

And to the single ladies in our midst, who are currently working, not married, no children, what about you?

If you were to get married and similarly, your husband was able to care for all of the financial obligations and you had the opportunity to stay at home and to care for your family, would that be something you would choose to do?

And last, since we have quite a number of ladies who are still pursuing their education, I want to ask you, what do you desire most?

Do you desire having a career outside of the home or do you desire to stay at home and care for your family?

[5 : 06] I know that the answers to these questions will vary. They no doubt will vary. And they vary for all kinds of reasons.

But I want to ask this very final question before we read God's Word. What informs your answer? Is your answer informed by Scripture or is your answer more influenced by culture?

The things we hear around us, the things we see around us, things that are popular, but really not based on God's Word.

And is it based on what would be best for your family or is it more so based on what you believe would be best in your own interests and with your self-fulfillment in view?

Now, without hearing your responses, because I cannot, I can say that the choices that many women make today regarding what their roles are, the choice to be at home or not, the careers they choose and how they relate to their families are more shaped by culture than they are shaped by Scripture.

[6 : 27] I want to help to minimize, try to minimize any misunderstanding right up front by making a couple of qualifying statements.

First, there are single mothers who have to work and I'm not at all suggesting that you do not work. Also, there are married mothers who are in financial circumstances that they also need to work alongside their husband and I'm not suggesting anything otherwise.

But the reality is that we live in a fallen world and in many ways, our circumstances are affected by the fall. But I think it's important for us to understand the rule even when our experience is the exception.

And from this, our desire should move towards the standard as best we are able to with God's help, but not be under any condemnation because for the moment, we may not be living by that particular standard.

With that lengthy introduction, let us now read Proverbs 31. We begin in verse 10. I'm reading from the English Standard Version.

[7 : 54] If you have another translation, it would read a little differently. Proverbs 31, beginning in verse 10. An excellent wife, who can find?

She is 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, which brings her food, 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.

[9 : 08] Her lamp does not go out at night. She puts her hands to the distal and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.

She is not afraid of snow for 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 where 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.

[10 : 19] 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. Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you this morning that we can gather on this Lord's Day, on a day that mothers are celebrated around the world, and we can sit under the instruction of your word.

Lord, this is your word. And I pray that you would speak to our hearts through your word. I pray this especially for the mothers in particular and the women in general who are gathered in this place.

And Lord, I ask that you would grant me abundant grace to be able to proclaim your word as I should, to be faithful to your word.

And I ask that you'd superintend my tongue this morning and my heart, that I would speak as your oracle this morning on your behalf to your people.

[11:47] We ask, O Lord, that you would do this and more beyond what we can ask, think, or imagine. In Christ's name, amen. Even though we know that marriage and motherhood are not the experience of all women, we also know that marriage and motherhood are the normal expectation for all women.

This is certainly the biblical view. This is the view that Proverbs 31, these verses that we just read, we are out.

In this passage before us, God in his wisdom has recorded for us a description of the mother and the woman who is worthy of praise.

And when we consider this passage and evaluate the activities of this woman, here's what we can conclude. We can conclude that the mother whom Scripture celebrates is one who lovingly cares for her family and diligently manages her home.

That's true in Proverbs 31. That is true in the witness of Scripture that the mother whom Scripture celebrates is one who lovingly cares for her family and diligently manages her home.

[13:14] Or to put it another way, the life of the mother whom Scripture celebrates revolves around her household, her loving care for her family, and her diligent management of her home.

Truth is, culture doesn't celebrate that, but Scripture does. And this morning, we want our time together to be informed by what Scripture celebrates.

It's important to note that this section of Proverbs that we have just read is written in the form of an acrostic poem. An acrostic poem is a poem in which each verse begins with the successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

And this poem in Proverbs 31 celebrates the ideal woman. So ladies, if you were a bit discouraged as I was reading about this amazing woman, remember this is a poem.

This is a poetic celebration of the ideal woman. And quite frankly, realistically, I don't think that such a woman could exist without an amazing divine endowment of material resources and personal ability.

[14:38] If such a woman did exist, you could be looking at a miracle that God himself actually performed. But instead, this is a poetic celebration of this ideal woman.

And the point of the passage in our Bibles is not for women to read this and set out to try to mimic and imitate this woman, act for act.

That's not the purpose of it. Instead, I believe that women should read this description of the ideal woman and mother and seek to emulate her priorities to the best of their abilities based on their circumstances.

I learned a very helpful definition of excellence a number of years ago and it really has helped me. Excellence is doing the best with what you have where you are.

Excellence is not taking a standard by somebody else's life and measuring your life by that.

Excellence is doing your very best with what you have where you are, what God has blessed you with, and where God in his providence has placed you.

[15:47] And so this woman should be one that women and mothers should consider and consider her priorities and seek to emulate them the best of their abilities.

In our remaining time, I want to consider two aspects of motherhood that are laid out in this passage. And I pray that mothers will be encouraged. I pray that the rest of us will be inspired. to thank our mothers for all that they have done and they continue to do for us. First, in this passage, we see that mothers are called to lovingly care for their families.

In verse 1 of Proverbs 31, we're told that the words of this poem are an oracle or a message that the mother of King Lemuel taught him.

So while many people would attribute all of the book of Proverbs to King Solomon, clearly, that's not so here in 31.

[16:49] It's certainly the same in chapter 30 as well. Proverbs 31 was written by King Lemuel and he said it's an oracle that his mother taught him.

But that's a side point. The main point is that here in Proverbs 31, we have King Lemuel writing this acrostic poem about the ideal woman and like the rest of Scripture, he's writing it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

We must remember that. All of Scripture is inspired by God and what we're reading this morning is no less inspired than Genesis or Matthew or any other part of Scripture.

And it is instructive, I believe, to all of us that he describes for us a woman whose life revolves around her household and her family.

Her heart is turned towards her household. And when we consider the general activities of this woman, we see that her love for family is what really motivates her.

[17 : 58] In caring for a family, it is also instructive that the first aspect of family mentioned in this passage is this woman's life as a wife. Look again at verses 12 and verses 11 and 12.

We read, 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. Notice in verse 10 that while referring to her husband instead of saying what she does specifically for him, instead, the results of her care for him are stated.

First, because of the kind of wife that she is, her husband's heart trusts in her. The book of Proverbs has a whole lot to say about unfaithful, adulterous wives.

Several chapters just dedicated to that earlier in the book of Proverbs. So it is an interesting contrast and really an incredible contrast to read about this ideal woman in Proverbs 31.

She is faithful and her husband trusts in her. In the latter part of verse 11 and then in verse 12, her trustworthiness is further seen in the fact that she is of benefit to her husband in the sense that she does not take advantage of him materially or otherwise.

[19 : 25] She does him good, not harm, all the days of her life. And mothers and women, it is by divine design, I believe, that scripture would list this first attribute about this ideal woman, that the heart of her husband trusts her.

In a relationship with a woman, especially in marriage, nothing is more important to a man than the fidelity of his wife. And wives and ladies, this entails some practical issues.

If this will be true of you as a wife, remember that you won't build trust in your husband. His heart will not repose trust in you if you're not circumspect in your dealings with members of the opposite sex.

You won't build trust in your husband if you are a flirt or a tease. You won't build trust in your husband if you dress immodestly.

These apply to all women, but especially to those who are married. In verse 23, we see that this woman's husband is known in the gates when he sits with the elders of the land.

[20 : 57] And the implication is that this woman is connected to the honor and esteem that her husband enjoys with others. In other words, her efforts of caring for her family contribute to honor and esteem that her husband enjoys with others.

And I think this is why Proverbs 12 verse 4 says, An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rotteness to his bones.

It's like the bones that are supposed to hold one up in a straight and a strong way. The rotteness just causes him to droop when a wife would bring shame.

So we see that this woman who is celebrated in Proverbs 31, who cares for her family, has her husband as her first priority.

But in addition to caring for her husband, she also cares for her children. Now, let me just say this. Because a woman's first priority is to care for her husband.

[22 : 13] This does not mean that a woman who has children, perhaps young children, the children are hungry, and she's going to feed her husband before she feeds the children. No, that's not the meaning of this.

The children are hungry, actually, the husband should be there helping to get the children fed as well. It's not that kind of bizarre distortion that sadly does exist in certain cultures and even sometimes in particular settings where a husband is just treated in an unreasonably prioritized manner over everything else.

I don't think that is the intent of this priority that we see in Scripture that a wife's priority is to her husband.

A mother should appropriately respond to the needs of her children, and when she does that, she knows and understands in an overall way that her heart is reposed towards her husband.

I know that in a world where children are idolized, this sounds very foreign, it sounds almost like one that you'd want to object to, that a husband should take priority over his children.

[23 : 37] But let's continue for the sake of time. In Proverbs 31, the only reference to children is in verse 28, where it says that they will rise up and call her blessed.

But if you think about it, even though children are mentioned once in this particular passage, they're not rising up and calling her blessed in a vacuum, they're not doing it for no reason.

They're calling her blessed because she has lovingly cared for them in all these activities that we see laid out here for us. Just look at some of them. In verse 13, it says that she seeks wool and flax and works with willing hands.

In verse 15, she provides food for her household. In verse 19, she sews. In verse 21, she clothes her household in clothes of scarlet or meaning or double thickness, well-insulated clothes.

Verse 26, she teaches wisdom, which Scripture tells us is the fear of the Lord, and she also has kindness on her lips. All of these activities this woman does benefit her children.

[24 : 58] She lovingly cares for them. This is the reason that they would rise up eventually when they understand and they will say, oh, you're blessed. They would praise her because of what she has done.

Now, let me pause and ask you mothers, where do you stand in relation to this priority of caring for your family?

Do you see it as a God-given responsibility, or do you see it as just something you do, that's just the arrangement in the house, or do you see this as a God-given role?

If you're married, do you make the effort to care for your husband as a priority, laboring to build trust in his heart, seeking to do him good and to support him as a helper?

Or have you allowed non-priorities to crowd out this priority of caring for him and your family? And if that's the case, I encourage you to receive grace from the Lord today and seek to change.

[26 : 14] In addition to mothers being called to lovingly care for their families, second and finally, from this passage, we're able to see that mothers are called to diligently manage their homes.

Look at verse 27. Verse 27 really sums it up when it says, she looks well to the ways of her household. In verse 15, we read, she rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.

Look at verse 18. It says, her lamb does not go out at night. This woman diligently manages her home. She has a lot going on, but she is diligently managing her home.

I imagine if I could get in your heads, some of you will be protesting. Some of the ladies, I have a full-time job, and not only that, it's pretty demanding.

Or I'm a single mother, and I have young children, and they make a mess all the time. It's hard to manage diligently with them, and the list goes on and on.

[27 : 27] Here's how I would answer those protests that I can imagine. I'd say, don't read into what is being said this morning.

I'm not advocating that you quit your job and start learning how to sew, and stay up late in the night to show that you're being industrious, and get up early in the morning to work.

Remember, this is a poem. This is a celebration of the mother who lovingly cares for her family and diligently manages her home, but it is held before us in a poetic fashion.

So I'm not suggesting that you try to match this woman in Proverbs 31, act for act. And so if you're protesting in your heart this morning and thinking that you're being given a list of things to do better or to start doing, then you're missing the point.

Because what is being commended here is this woman's care for her home. The point is that she is not idle. The point is she is not a busybody or a gossip.

[28 : 48] And interestingly, scripture tends to use these two particular activities, being a busybody or being a gossip, as a tendency that some women tend to fall in.

The point is that she is oriented towards her family and her home. And so mothers, no matter what your circumstances are, no matter what your limitations might be by those circumstances, you should be oriented in your heart towards your family and your home.

mother. That's the mother that scripture celebrates. Now, if you get the impression that I'm standing here this morning advocating for mothers to stay at home, while I do believe that those who are able to do that, it is a blessing, that's not what I'm advocating at all.

Clearly, this woman in Proverbs 31 had some form of income, earning work outside of the home. Look at verse 16. Verse 16 says, she considers a field and buys it.

With the fruit of her hands, she plans a vineyard. And then verse 24, she makes linen garments and sells them. She delivers sashes to the merchants.

[30 : 08] So this celebrated woman had things going on in terms of income-earning activities outside of her home. But taken into context, it would appear that these income-earning endeavors were in support of her roles of caring for her family and managing her home.

And I want to be very clear this morning. If you see your family and your home as your priorities and your work and education and other endeavors that you may engage in as being in support of these primary roles that you have, I can tell you that by God's grace, your children and your husband, if you are married, will do for you what is done for this woman by her children and by her husband if you are married, in verse 28.

It says they will rise up and praise you and call you blessed. And mothers, you should never be ashamed to say that your family and your home are your God-given priorities.

You should never be ashamed to say that. You may get someone to help, you may pay someone to help you with cleaning or with caring for the children, managing other household duties.

There's nothing wrong with that. Those are your responsibilities and you have every right to be able to delegate those responsibilities. You cannot delegate the role itself, but those tasks you can actually give them to someone else to actually help.

[31 : 58] But if your heart is oriented towards your family, even though you hold a full-time job and you have a lot going on, then you're a true hero. And you'll be celebrated.

And you know, it's interesting to hear sometimes the testimonies of children where they would talk about how their mother worked. I heard a former member of parliament recently talk about how his mother, who was a straw vendor, how she held two jobs and raised a pretty large family by herself. And he was praising his mother on a particular radio program for all that she did. So this praise is not exclusively for the mother who stays at home and does this in a full-time way.

It is for any mother whose heart is oriented towards her home and she does what she needs to do to be able to care for her home. Remember, it's based on our circumstances, based on your circumstances, but recognizing that this is the priority that God has called you to.

So mothers, this morning, as you listen to God's word, I think it is fitting for you to consider how you're managing your household.

[33 : 23] Would the word diligent be appropriate to describe your management? Is your heart truly oriented towards your family and your home, or is it oriented towards something else, like perhaps a career?

And I know that all of us, even in pastoral ministry, sometimes the God-given roles and responsibilities that we have can be a burden, can be such that our hearts are desirous of just finding relief in any particular way that we can.

And sometimes I imagine that the weight of motherhood can sometimes bring you to that place.

Those are seasons. They can be exhausting. We would all want to break from it at times, and that's okay.

But let that not be the norm for us. Let it not be the norm that every day we begrudge or we complain about those roles and responsibilities that God has given to us.

The norm for mothers is that your heart should be oriented towards your home and your family. And I think it's important at this point to say to us husbands that one of the ways that we care for our wives is being aware of what's going on with them, helping them around the home in the diligent management of the home, and not just sitting and watching them slave, especially if your wife works.

[35 : 10] I know sometimes it is so easy just to think that, oh, she'll do that, or she's supposed to do that, not being mindful of the reality that she needs help.

And this will go for children as well. We can make the work of mothers easier by doing simple things like cleaning up after ourselves and offering to help with particular tasks and duties.

So we need to help them. And I think a lot of mothers today would probably rather gifts that would say something like, I'll clean for the next year or I'll wash for the next year, rather than roses that are going to fade tomorrow or gifts that they'll soon forget about.

Amen. Yeah. But if we stop reading at verse 28, we would think that this woman is praised exclusively because of the great job that she does, caring for her family and managing her home.

But that's not the only reason that she is praised. As we read on, we see the ultimate reason that she deserves to be praised. It's in verse 30. Verse 30 tells us why she is to be praised.

[36 : 39] It's not because of charm. We're told that charm is deceitful. And it's not because of her beauty. We're told that beauty is vain. Instead, it is because she fears the Lord.

And Simon says in Psalm 19, verse 9, the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. That is why she is praised.

The fear of the Lord informs how we live. There is this awareness of the Lord in what we do. We don't live with this absent-mindedness of God.

And so, mothers and ladies, to fear the Lord is to embrace these God-given roles to the best of your abilities.

May God help us all to see and embrace his wisdom in celebrating this kind of woman and mother that we see in Proverbs 31, even in the face of a world that would reject all of this.

[37 : 48] This woman who lovingly cares for her family and diligently manages her home. God tells us there's wisdom in celebrating this woman.

And I pray that he would grant to all mothers a growing desire to fulfill these roles more and more over time.

Let's pray. Amen.