

Women Worthy of Praise

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[0 : 00] The words of King Lemuel, an oracle that his mother told him. What are you doing, my son? What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my wolves?

Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel. It is not for kings to drink wine or for rulers to take strong drink.

Lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted. Give strong drink to the one who is perishing and wine to those in bitter distress.

Let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more. Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute.

Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy. The woman who fears the Lord, an excellent wife who can find.

[1 : 04] 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. 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 distaff 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.

[2 : 11] 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 in 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 surpass 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.

[3 : 10] Here ends our reading. Thank you very much for reading, Ashley. And let me begin by joining Lyndon in wishing a very happy Mother's Day to all of the mothers.

I pray that every day you're encouraged, but especially today, when we recognize and celebrate mothers for all that they do.

I've repeatedly said I don't understand men who complain that women get more, or mothers get more recognition on Mother's Day than fathers get on Father's Day.

I don't understand that because when you really think about it, I mean, yeah, there may be a few men who may be worthy of praise above the mothers of their children.

But I confess this morning, I'm not one of them. And I think if we would be honest, most of us fathers here this morning were confessed that we are not among that group either.

[4 : 25] But women are, when I think about all that they do, it could only be by God's design that they do what they do.

By God's wise design, mothers for nine months carry babies in their bodies. They watch their bodies change in all kinds of amazing and difficult ways.

And then they go through the adventure of childbirth, the pain of childbirth, and some women even die in childbirth. And many are aware that getting pregnant, bearing a child, giving birth to that child could actually result in loss of their lives.

And they do that all the same. And then if that's not enough to carry a child for nine months, God's design is that those children would be attached to their mothers and be nurtured by their mothers for quite a number of the early years when fathers watch on in amazement and change a diaper here or there, that mothers do the bulk of the heavy lifting in the early years of their children.

So I think it's fitting today that we take time and we honor and we celebrate mothers for all that they do. Now this morning, although I'll be primarily addressing women in their roles as wives and mothers, this is God's word and so God's word comes to all of us.

[6 : 14] So let us open our hearts and let us posture them and let us hear what the Lord would say to us. Let's take a moment and do that right now. Father, we are so grateful that we can gather in this place this morning.

Thank you for mothers who are part of your wise design. And Lord, as we seek to celebrate them for all that they do, would you draw near to us in speaking to us from your word.

Lord, we pray that we would all be instructed. We pray that wives and mothers in particular would be encouraged. Lord, may we all be instructed by your word that we may live in accordance with it. So would you draw near to us this morning, draw near to me as I seek to be faithful with this passage, draw near to all of us as we seek to hear it and apply it to our lives.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Although, for many men and women, for various reasons, marriage doesn't turn out to be a reality for them.

[7 : 48] But what we see in Scripture is that it is God's good and wise design that the norm is that women grow up and men grow up and they mature and they marry, form families, and they have children.

Again, for any number of reasons, too many to even mention this morning, this is not the outcome for everyone, but this is the norm for everyone. This is what God, who is wise, who makes no mistakes, this is what he has designed for men and women.

And so it is good that young men, it is good that young women have a desire, have a vision for the possibility of one day getting married and forming families with children.

The passage that we have come to this morning shares and affirms this view, but it does so from the vantage point of women.

And the part of this chapter that we are considering this morning starts in verse 10. We're considering verses 10 to 31.

[9 : 14] And from the outside, I think it's important that we recognize that what we are considering is a poem. If you have an ESV Bible, an English Standard Version of the Bible, you would notice that there's a footnote number 4, and at the bottom of the page, it says that this is an acrostic poem.

It is a poem that is written following the Hebrew alphabet, which is 22 letters. And it is written as a celebration of motherhood and of wives in the home.

And so this would be no different than if some of you who are poetic were to decide that you were going to write a similar poem for wives and mothers, and you use the English alphabet, and for every letter, you start a verse.

And so your poem will be 26 verses long, celebrating wives and mothers. And I say this right up front because if we don't remember that this is a poem, I think wives and mothers could become discouraged.

But this is a poem, and the idea behind this poem is not to encourage wives and mothers to try to imitate this woman in a rote kind of way, in a verbatim kind of way, but instead to be inspired by this celebration of this godly woman, this industrious woman, and based on our circumstances or based on your circumstances as wives and mothers, that you would seek to be inspired by this celebration of the ideal woman.

[11 : 10] And again, this will look very differently for every single woman because no two women have the exact same circumstances. You're not like any other woman and your circumstances are not like any other woman.

So you want to hear this in your own individual and unique context. So here's how I would summarize these 22 verses that we are considering this morning.

The woman whom Scripture celebrates is the one who cares for her family, manages her home, and fears the Lord.

that's the woman that Scripture celebrates. To put it another way, women who lovingly care for their families, diligently manage their homes, and who fear the Lord, they are women who are worthy of praise.

And this is the inspired, inerrant word of God that says, these are the values, these are the reasons that a woman is worthy of praise.

[12 : 35] In our remaining time this morning, I want to consider three characteristics of women who are worthy of praise from this poem that we just read.

And I pray that mothers and wives will be encouraged in their roles. And I pray that all of us would be inspired to encourage them to continue to do all that they do.

And so in this passage, the first characteristic that we see that the woman who is worthy of praise has, is, she cares for her family.

This care is seen throughout this passage. But it's important to see that right at the outset of caring for her family, this woman who is worthy of praise has as her priority her husband.

And rightly so, because before a mother is a mother in the context of the home, she is a wife to her husband.

[13 : 57] Look again at verses 10 to 12. 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. Celebrating a woman who is worthy of praise starts with celebrating her as a wife to her husband because it reflects God's good and wise design for motherhood, marriage.

Which is marriage. And this is a truth that's easy to overlook in today's world because increasingly sexual relations and motherhood have been separated from marriage.

There are women today who want children, but they don't want marriage. marriage. But that's not God's design. God's design is for motherhood to take place in the context of marriage.

And this is in no way intended to shame or belittle women who have become mothers outside of marriage. If that's your situation this morning, I pray that you have already come to know that God is good and merciful and kind.

[15 : 26] Even when we disobey, even when we sin, when we fall short, we find that God's grace and mercy meets us where we are and he offers us redemption.

So this is in no way at all to belittle or discourage mothers who have had children outside of marriage.

But the point I pray that we all see this morning is that this is God's unchanging design. This is God's design that motherhood is to take place in the context of a covenant marriage.

And I pray that we humble ourselves to embrace this. And I say it that way because increasingly so this is not being embraced in our world.

This is being pushed back against. This is being rejected in so many ways in our world. So in caring for our family this woman who is worthy of praise recognizes that her husband is her first priority.

[16 : 36] We're told in verse 12 that the heart of her husband trusts in her. And clearly that's not in a vacuum. He trusts in her because she is trustworthy. She's shown herself to be trustworthy.

We're also told in verse 12 that she does him good and not harm. She does him good and not harm all the days of her life. And this is the God-given role of a wife to her husband.

God gives wives to husbands as helpers. help him in the man that God has called him to be.

Help him in his responsibilities. And his primary responsibility is to lead his family, to provide for them and to protect them. And so even though when a husband receives a wife, it is his duty to care for her.

we observe when we go to weddings that a father, if he's alive, or some other male figure in her life, would give the wife, give this woman to a man.

[17 : 54] And they would ask, who gives this woman to be married to this man? And the husband would say, the father or father giver would say, I do. That's a picture of a man taking responsibility for a woman.

And part of that responsibility is to care for her, to provide for her. Now, a wife who comes into a marriage as a helper, if she works, well then obviously she helps in that way, but that's not her primary duty.

She does him good in helping as best as she's able to. her and she serves him because this is part of God's design.

She does this intentionally, she does this willingly, she seeks and considers how she might do her husband good, what will serve him, what will bless him, what will encourage him.

This is what God has called her to do. And notice it says that she does him good and not harm.

[19 : 05] To do intentionally do harm to your husband, wives, is to rebel against God's good design.

It is to betray the covenant of marriage that you have entered into. And notice that this is a lifelong calling. It says she does this all the days of her life.

This endures for the entirety of her life as long as she is married to that man. She enters marriage with a commitment to do him good and not harm all the days of her life.

life. And you know it's not circumstantial. Wives, this is your God-given responsibility even when your husband hasn't loved you sacrificially as Christ loves the church.

Even when he's behaved in ways that don't deserve goodness as we husbands sometimes do when we can be insensitive, when we can be harsh, when we can be selfish.

[20 : 26] This call to a wife to do her husband good remains. Now how does a wife do this? How does a wife do her husband good all the days of her life even when he acts in sinful ways?

She can only do this by the grace that God provides. And no woman should attempt to seek to do her husband good on her own strength because you just can't do it.

You need divine help to be able to live out this God-given role. And that's one of the wonderful things about our Savior. Whatever he calls us to do, he gives us grace to do. He provides the grace that we're able to do this.

And you know one of the things, and we'll see this as we return to 1 Peter, Peter tells us it is a wonderful thing in the eyes of God.

When we do good in the face of ill treatment, that demonstrates that we belong to the Lord, that demonstrates that we're doing what we do by the grace of God.

[21 : 40] And so this woman, we see in her being celebrated, in her being praised, this woman sets as a first priority her husband in the family.

Now, let me just state the obvious, and that is that this doesn't mean that you know, husband is king of everything, and a wife is to neglect her children to care for her husband.

No, those two God-given responsibilities don't have to compete with each other in ways that causes a wife to betray one or the other.

In God's good, wise design, that is not the case at all. And no husband should want his wife, at least no sensible husband should want his wife to cater to him and care for him at the expense of caring for the children.

Now, I don't know this is landing on your ears this morning, but my prayer to be faithful calls me to say this to us.

[23 : 00] This is God's good and wise design. we live in a world where many parents, and mothers in particular, idolize children.

Children are idolized. But you know that the relationship between a husband and a wife is a stronger and more enduring bond than the relationship between a mother and her children.

in marriage, God joins a husband and wife together. And Jesus says it this way, Jesus says, and what God has joined together, let no one separate.

God takes two individuals in marriage and he joins them together. And so in a marriage, beyond the marriage officer who's officiating, there's God himself present and he is fusing two lives together, making them one flesh.

And only death is intended to separate them. But the same is not true with children. Women bear children and children are raised in the context of the home, but the vision is that those children will one day mature and they will leave home, they will leave their father, they will leave their mother.

[24 : 29] And therefore this clinging to children, that's my heartstring that a lot of mothers would say, that's unbiblical.

That attachment, that allegiance, belongs to your husband. It belongs to your husband. husband. And did I say this morning that making that adjustment where that adjustment needs to be made might make the world of difference in your marriage.

By taking that attachment, taking that allegiance that you have to children and turning that towards your husband as God designed it, could make the world of difference in your marriage.

When our children leave home, there is no tearing that happens. That is a natural thing to happen in God's design. Let me just say, when we look at this passage, there's a single reference to children. We find it in verse 28. At least a single direct reference. There are other indirect references, but there is one single direct reference to children.

[26 : 00] Where it tells us that the children one day will rise up and call this godly woman, this woman who is worthy of praise, they will call her blessed.

And they do so for good reason. They do so because she lovingly cared for them. And here in Proverbs 31, we see many things that this woman does that have her children in view, even though they're not specifically mentioned.

In verse 13, we see she seeks wool and flax and works with willing hands. Not grudging hands, with willing hands.

And what a joy it is to behold willing hands serving. In verse 15, she provides food for her household.

Verse 19, she sews clothing. Verse 21, she clothes her household in clothes of scarlet. That word scarlet means with double thickness.

[27 : 11] She gave thought to the kind of material that was needed to keep them warm from the cold. In verse 26, she teaches wisdom.

The scripture tells us is the fear of the Lord. She also teaches kindness. All of these activities that this mother, who's worthy of praise, does, she does to benefit her children.

and she is lovingly caring for them. Last Saturday at our men's meeting, anticipating Mother's Day, we took some time just to reflect on our mothers and to just share lessons that they taught us, lessons that impacted us.

And one of the things that stood out to me is that all the stories that were shared, all the lessons that were shared, they had one common denominator. almost all of them without exception. And the common denominator was sacrifice.

I marveled as I listened to these stories. And although these stories went way back to childhood, as I listened, they sound so near, they sounded so close because they were so real, and they still had an impact on us as men.

[28 : 35] the lasting impact of the care and the sacrifice of mothers. When I think about the fact that we are by nature selfish people, the smallest child knows how to break a cookie and take the biggest part.

And nobody teaches them that. And when we see mothers sacrificing, brothers and sisters, we're saying something divine. We're saying something that is God-ordained, that they would do that. That a person who innately and naturally is selfish would sacrifice. And that is what mothers do day by day and without thought.

The second characteristic of the woman who is worthy of praise is she manages her home, she manages her household.

Look again at verse 15. We're told she rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.

[29 : 53] In verse 18, her lamp does not go out at night. And the reason it doesn't go out at night is because she's diligent. The reason it doesn't go out at night is that she knows that that lamp needs oil and she is going to ensure that there's sufficient oil so that when you really need the lamp which is at night, that lamp is not going to go out.

But it also points to her being at work late at night. Points to her being diligent. Not just working in the day but also working at night.

Verse 27 says, she looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Again, let's remember this is a poem that we are considering this morning. This is a poem that celebrates the ideal woman. So again, wives and mothers, you shouldn't be thinking, I'm going to match this.

If you don't sew, you don't need to put learn to sew on your to-do list. Verse 27 summarizes well what all wives and mothers should be aiming for.

[31 : 22] The woman who is worthy of praise looks well to the ways of her household. She doesn't eat the bread of idleness.

And this should be the aim of every wife and mother. To have eyes. To have eyes for your household. To have eyes to watch over your household. Do you know that mothers primarily set the temperature in homes?

They're the ones, they're the thermostat to set the temperature in homes. Wives and mothers do that. women do things like And they should be the aim of every mother to look well to the ways of a household.

Now, being idle doesn't mean that, not being idle does not mean that you don't have leisure, that you don't have time for hobbies and to do other things. Instead, not being idle means not wasting time or not being a busy body, not being a gossip.

Activities that scripture associates often with women who are idle. The point is that the woman who is worthy of praise is to be oriented towards her family and towards her home.

[32 : 52] And that's where she invests her time. And so wives and mothers, whatever your circumstances are, you can and should be able to maintain an orientation towards your family and towards your home.

And to do so is to recognize that this is God's good design for you. But sadly, we live in a world where for many women, this is a design they reject.

They reject it claiming to be wise and they reject it showing themselves to be fools. We live in a day where there are many women who desire to be defined by other things.

They desire to be defined by their career, for example. They desire to be defined by their independence, even though they may be married.

their brothers and sisters, that's the world's way. That's not God's way. That's not God's design. God's design for wives and mothers is that they would embrace his good design in the context of the home.

[34 : 12] And that they should be willing to be identified primarily with this orientation that God has given to them as a helper to their husbands and as the overseer, the carer for their families and for their households.

If you're hearing even the slightest hint that I am in any way advocating for women and wives to stay at home, well, I think that is a tremendous blessing if you're able to do that.

That's not what I'm advocating this morning. I'm seeking to simply convey what I see in these verses before us. What we see is this woman who is worthy of praise.

She actually has income earning activities outside of the home. We see in verse 16, for example, she considers a field and buys it and the fruit of her hands.

With the fruit of her hands, she plants a vineyard. And then verse 24, she makes linen garments and sells them. she delivers sashes to the merchants. This is an industrious woman.

[35 : 21] This is a hardworking woman. But what is clear is her focus is on her household. Her focus is on her family.

She's caring for them. She's watching over her household. She is not losing that sense of that priority. her family. And it's important to see that as you, wives and mothers, as you seek to learn from this woman who's worthy of praise, you should think of your life and your responsibilities.

Most of you work. Most of you have demanding jobs, demanding careers. what you should see is that that career, that job, should not displace your domestic roles.

Shouldn't displace it. this is something that you, by the grace of God, should not be ashamed about. There should be no shame in saying, my family, my husband, my household, they are my priority.

There is no shame in that because this is God's good and wise design. Yes, you may have someone who comes and helps you with household responsibilities.

[36 : 49] You may pay them to come in whatever frequency they come in. And it's fine to get help with those responsibilities, but those responsibilities at the end of the day are God-given, they're given to you, and you may be able to delegate work, but you can't delegate those responsibilities.

Those responsibilities, wives and mothers, they remain yours. in an unchanging way. And so wives and mothers, as you hear God's word this morning, I encourage you to reflect.

Reflect on how you are caring for your family, how you are managing your home. is your heart oriented towards your family and your home, or is it oriented elsewhere?

And I may be asking the question at a bad time. Maybe in this moment it is not. Maybe in this moment you're weary of all the duties and responsibilities that you have to care at home.

And that's understandable. We all get weary in carrying out the responsibilities and roles that we have, whatever they might be. And sometimes we need to take a break.

[38 : 21] But that ought not be the norm. The norm ought to be, as a wife, as a mother, that you ought to be oriented towards your husband, towards your children, towards your home.

This is God's wise design. Now, husbands and fathers, we need to consider our role in helping our wives in their roles.

And I think at a minimum, what we should not be doing is making their roles harder. So if your wife is having to pick up your clothes the way she picks up the children's clothes, something is wrong with that.

If you're creating, like my mother used to say, dirt, like the children make dirt, something is wrong with that.

And we should be considerate of our wives. And my mother used to say to someone, so you're just like a snake. Wherever a snake shed his clothes, that's where you leave your clothes.

[39 : 35] I hope that none of you are like a snake. You put your clothes in the hamper. Now, see, I was teased a while ago. Actually, I wasn't teased.

I don't know what he was talking about. Guilty. Guilty. But, one thing my wife will testify to is, I don't give a work.

Like that. All right, this is my gift to all the wives and mothers this morning. This is a short sermon, so my third and final point.

The third and final characteristic of the woman who is worthy of praise, I want to bring to our attention from this passage is, she fears the Lord. Look again at verse 30.

It says, charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Charm, or attractiveness, and beauty are words that we generally associate with women.

[40 : 45] You know, we generally don't talk about a beautiful man. But these are words we associate with women. And you know what? It's God's good design.

It's God's good design that he has made women, that word charm is also the same as attractive. He's made them attractive. He's made them beautiful.

He's made them in a way that men are drawn to them. That's God's good design that he has done that. But even though women who are attractive, women who are beautiful is God's good design, we find in verse 30 a warning.

We actually find a warning about both of these characteristics that are normal for women. Why is a woman's charm or attractiveness deceitful?

I think one of the reasons it is deceitful, an important reason that it is deceitful, is it can capture our hearts as men and draw our attention away from evaluating more important attributes that we should be considering, and attributes that a woman who is attractive and charming may actually lack.

[42 : 20] But attraction can do that. Attraction is so captivate our hearts that we become fixated on just being drawn into, just being attracted, our hearts are captured, and then we don't focus on what we should be focusing on, and in that way, charm becomes deceptive, deceives us.

It makes us make more of charm than we should. And beauty is vain, because beauty so vanishes, and this word for vain, it is literally the word for mist of vapor.

vapor. And the reality is that beauty, like a mist, like a vapor, is here one moment and gone the next.

And on this earth, because of aging, there is no human beauty that lasts. The beautiful face will so and wrinkle, the curves will soon become straight.

What is firm will sigh. And more than that, and more than that, even when there's youth, even when there's youth, and aging doesn't affect the beauty, because we are part of Adam's fallen race, sickness sets in, and accidents come.

[44 : 24] and things change in a split second. And so we're told that these things that we are drawn to, this beauty that we are drawn to, it's like a mist, it's like a vapor, it can just vaporize in front of us.

And yet we have made so much of it. And so when it comes to women, neither charm nor beauty should be our focus.

And I think we all need to hear this this morning. Women need to hear this because sometimes you can put so much effort into being attractive, into enhancing your beauty, and we men can make much of it.

love. And so we all need to hear this morning what God's word says to us about both of these attributes.

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is fleeting. Beauty is vain. And instead, we should all be guided by the latter part of verse 30, the concluding words of verse 30, which tell us that the woman who fears the Lord, she is to be praised.

[45 : 53] Where the attention needs to come, where wisdom is seen, is where we don't over emphasize attractiveness, we don't over emphasize beauty, but we emphasize the fear of the Lord, because the woman who fears the Lord, she is the one to be praised.

And this is the ultimate reason for praise. If we were to stop reading at verse 28, we would think that the ideal woman is to be praised for all the things that she does in her home, all the things that she does for her family, how she looks over her household, how she is diligent, but that's not where it ends.

That's not where it ends. The ultimate reason for praising this woman, the ultimate reason this ideal woman is praised, is she fears the Lord. And to fear the Lord is to live before him with reverence that is informed from scripture of his holiness and his greatness and his power.

It is the awareness that all of life is lived before the eyes of the Lord, and we live with that reverence, we live with that awareness that he's the God who knows all and who sees all. love. Psalm 19, verse 9, says the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever.

[47 : 20] That's what endures, brothers and sisters. When the attraction and when the beauty vanish, the fear of the Lord is clean and it endures forever.

forever. And unlike beauty that fades over time, the fear of the Lord increases over time. The fear of the Lord becomes more beautiful over time. God help us to see and embrace his wisdom in celebrating this kind of woman that we see in Proverbs 31, one who cares for a family, one who manages a home, one who fears the Lord.

As I reflected on these verses in this poem about this ideal woman, I couldn't help but think of the many godly examples that we have in this church of women who look so much like this ideal woman in so many ways.

And I rejoice. I thank God for that. When we were together, last Saturday in our men's meeting, one of the men made a very similar comment.

I'm not saying this alone, I'm not saying this in isolation, I'm not saying this in any way that is unusual. One of the men remarked about how the women in this church exhibit godliness and how they embrace their God-given responsibilities and they do so in a world where that's not valued, that's frowned upon.

[49 : 32] And I pray that you're encouraged by that. I pray that you're encouraged by that. I pray that you are encouraged, that you are a woman who's worthy of praise because you're seeking to live in this way that God has revealed in his word about the ideal wife, about the ideal mother.

And may that continue. And I pray that you will be an example for single women in our congregation. That they can follow in your footsteps, they can follow in your example of being a woman who is worthy of praise.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for your word this morning. And I pray that on this Mother's Day that wives and mothers would hear these words, they would take them to heart, they would be encouraged.

And I pray that as they do, their husbands, their children, will call them blessed.

And most of all, I pray, Lord, that as they live their lives in service to you, that you would be pleased. we ask all this in Jesus' name.

[51 : 06] Amen.