

Learn to treasure your family!

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Date: 30 March 2025

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[0 : 00] Well, welcome everybody. It's appropriate that today I'm closing the series on Proverbs on this Mother's Day by talking about the noble wife.

! So you really need to understand I'm taking my life in my hands here as a married man Well, the good news about the noble wife is she's the ideal woman. Okay? So if you feel that you don't measure up, none of us do. Alright.

But then the other good news is that it's not just about, the passage is not just about the noble wife. It's also about her husband and also about her children.

So none of us really escape. Even if we think, well, I'm not married, so ha ha. Well, yeah, I'll have something for you too, I'm sure.

So, we've been learning to value things. Learning to value your family is what we're looking at today. So it's not just the focus on the wife.

[1 : 21] And then the other thing to remember, of course, and this is really important to say, is when Solomon was writing this, he was writing at a time when men were really the boss. Okay? They really were the boss.

In some cultures, not necessarily in the Jewish culture, but in some cultures, women had very little status. Yeah, their value was as homemakers and bearers of children.

And in some cultures, if they didn't do one of those jobs very well, then they weren't around for very long. And in some cultures, of course, there would be more than one wife. There would be lots of wives. Solomon himself had lots of wives.

So this is why this is the ideal woman, because this is a one-woman man in a household where there is just a husband and wife, which wasn't always the case, and the children.

Very much like the kind of nuclear family that we talk about today, which became normative in Christian societies. The other thing to remember, of course, is that the book of Proverbs was written by a father to a son, preparing his son for life as a man leaving home, setting up his own home.

[2 : 37] So the advice that's been given is very much in that direction. And you might be tempted to say, especially you ladies, why doesn't he give advice to the woman about the kind of man she should choose?

Well, that wasn't his focus, that's all. This was direction from a father to a son, not to his daughters. But the things that he says to his son could equally apply to his daughters.

So the wife of noble character will have a corresponding husband of noble character. The woman of noble character will have a corresponding man of noble character.

All right? That's really important. So a few men are tempted to sit back and think, well, this is not about us. We're keeping the checklist. Performance management. My wife, let's see.

Does she do? Oh, she's never up early. And she's always in bed by eight. And I've never seen her down at the market buying wool. Yeah, that's not the way to treat this, okay?

[3 : 41] That's not the way to treat this. It's not a checklist exercise to try and find fault. That should never be the spirit of a Christian family anyway. Then the other thing to remember, of course, about Proverbs is that wisdom is feminine.

Yeah? There are two ways in Proverbs. The way of the righteous or the way of the wicked. The way of the righteous is to follow the wisdom of the wife of noble character.

The way of the wicked is to follow the adulterous woman. And that's the kind of trade-off that the father kind of does in Proverbs.

The wise person follows the instruction of father and mother. And finding wisdom is following in her ways.

The wise son, the foolish son, is easily led by the adulterous woman who calls her into his home only to trap her in his snare.

[4 : 48] That feels kind of unfair to a modern reader too. But it's just remembering the culture and the context, as I say, in which it was written. Okay.

Learning to treasure your family. This passage points to the wife of noble character, a woman of wisdom, strength, and devotion. She's not a historical figure, okay?

She's God's vision of feminine excellence. God's vision of feminine excellence. And she's a rare jewel. Notice what is said in Proverbs chapter 31 and verse 10.

A wife of noble character who can find. Now when you read about her, the next quote will give you a sense of what you're going to feel at the end of this.

After reading of this multi-talented woman, one wonders whether the opening question, who can find a virtuous and capable woman, was intended to be answered with a no one. Well, let's see why.

[5 : 50] Verse 10. A wife of noble character who can find. She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value.

She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships bringing her food from afar. She doesn't do online shopping.

This woman, off she goes. She's carrying the bags under her arms. She gets up while it is still night. She provides food for her family. When you get down in the morning, there's breakfast on the table.

It's all been done. She's been up since four. The man just has to get his pipe and slip as in he's happy. She is like merchant ships bringing her food from afar.

She gets up while it is still night. She provides food for her family and portions for her female servants. She considers a field and buys it. Out of her earnings, she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously.

[6 : 50] Her arms are strong for tasks. Interestingly, you know, in the Greek, the woman who has strong arms is Andrea. She is a manly woman.

Yeah. She's a hard worker. She's industrious. She's not a pampered lady like the lady in the Song of Solomon. She is a hard working woman.

And she's very industrious and quite independent, really. She's in charge of her own domain. She sees that her trading is profitable.

Not easy. Pull the wool over her eyes. She has a Morrison's coupons. If you still have coupons, do you have coupons? Or her Morrison's card and she gets all the bargains. And her lamp does not go out at night.

In her hand, she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers. She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. When it snores, she has no fear for her household, for all of them are clothed in scarlet.

[7 : 56] She makes coverings for her bed. She is clothed in fine linen and purple. Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them and supplies the merchants with sashes.

She is clothed with strength and dignity. She can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Her children arise and call her blessed. Her husband also, and he praises her. Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all, he says.

Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise in the city gate.

Amen, and may the Lord bless the reading of his word. So, just to remind you men, this is not a divine permission to audit your wife's performance.

[9 : 03] Your wife is not a project to be critiqued. She is a gift to be cherished. And the Proverbs 31 woman should inspire your praise, not give you ammunition for your next argument.

But you wives, don't be discouraged if you don't measure up. She represents the ideal. She should not be a burden to you.

She should not be the kind of person that speaks to your inadequacy. She should be an inspiration to you. This is a Christ-like woman. And this is the woman that you should aspire to be, even if on your best days you fall somewhat short of this ideal.

Isn't it true that we actually all fall short of the ideal, whether it is a Christ-like woman or a Christ-like man? We aim high.

Yeah? So, we become very aware, sensitive to the, as the Holy Spirit teaches us and instructs us, sensitive to those areas of our life that we're not so good at.

[10 : 17] You know, we all have different things. Some of us have a propensity to gossip. We like a bit of salacious material to feast our minds upon. And we know we ought not to do it, but we just can't do it.

Some of us just are quick to speak. And we say the wrong thing at the wrong time. And we know we ought not to do it, but we just do it. It's, we're always aware of an ideal that we're falling short of.

But the important thing is we still desire to be the better me. We still desire to be more like Jesus because we fall so far short of his ideal standard.

And then it really provides us with a blueprint of a godly family, doesn't it? The ideal godly family is a family where the wife is honored, where the husband feels secure in his marriage and in his home, and where the children are well taught, well nourished, well cared for.

And the net result of their judgment of what life was like in that home is that they rise up and call their mother blessed. If you have had a home like that, if you're at the other side of a home like that, where you can remember the care, the love, the gentleness, the protection, and if you had Christian parents, the godly instruction that you received, and you can thank God for such a home, you can rise up and call your mother blessed.

[11 : 52] A beautiful thing to be so thankful that God has given us a great blueprint of what a godly family looks like.

One of my favorite passages in Timothy is when Paul says to Timothy, I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now I am convinced that dwells in you as well.

And Paul says of Timothy, I remember that you learned from infancy the scriptures that were able to make you wise to salvation. So I like to think of Timothy's home, where grandmother and mother were there, and each took their turn to sit Timothy on their knee and remind him of the holy scriptures.

And he was able to grow into a godly man and a useful servant of Christ because he had such an upbringing. We should aspire to godly families in which all of our children's needs are met, not only material needs, but spiritual needs as well.

So what can we learn from this passage? First of all, we should value, next slide please, we should value integrity in family relationships. Look again at verses 10 to 12.

[13 : 08] A wife of noble character who can find she is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.

That is about the love that exists between the couple that brings about an implicit trust in each other. She knows that she is not simply looking out for her own interests.

She is protecting the reputation and interest of her husband. And he knows that he can go out of the house and she can be trusted to manage the affairs of the home really well.

Now, this, of course, sounds like a kind of family unit that I was used to when I was a young lad, where mum was at home and dad was out of work. That was commonplace until relatively recently.

I realize family homes are not quite like this anymore. So whatever your arrangement, you might be a house husband. I don't know, you might be a house husband. There's nothing wrong with that. Whatever your arrangement, there should be an implicit trust between a married couple that ensures that integrity is at the heart of their relationship.

[14 : 35] An implicit trust of one another. That there will be no surprises, no secrets, nothing hidden. You can trust each other with your emotional well-being, your spiritual well-being, your physical well-being, your financial well-being.

There should be no secrets. Healthy marriages are marriages in which implicit trust and integrity is at the center.

And there is no competition in this relationship, is there? They're not trying to outdo one another. Her husband has full confidence in her.

They're not at war. They're working together because they themselves are working together to a greater good, which is the well-being of their children and their family.

And the honor of God. Because what really is at the heart of this relationship is that the woman fears the Lord. And it is the fear of the Lord, and that just means respect and reverence for the Lord, that makes this such a godly home.

[15 : 53] So the first challenge that we have, if we're husbands and wives, is do we trust implicitly one another? Is there a respect for one another?

Is there a recognition that we are stronger if we're together in everything? We're not trying to kind of just do our own thing.

That seems to be a kind of modern phenomenon in marriages. Well, you know, I'm still an individual. I'm going to do my own thing. And if it doesn't suit him, well, tough.

Or if it doesn't suit her, well, tough. I'm going to get on with it. That kind of attitude is going to lead more often than not to breakdowns in relationships. And it perhaps is little wonder that we have such a major breakdown in relationships in modern life.

Now, there were lots of things wrong with the old days, wasn't there? Lots of things wrong. But I remember when I was kind of that young man and my father was giving me advice about relationships.

[16 : 57] His general advice was this. You make your bed. Finish it. You lie in it. Yeah. And my father was not a Christian man.

But he had no time for divorce. Didn't like the idea. He was a man into commitment. I mean, a tough marriage sometimes, my mom and dad.

But they loved each other and stuck with it. There was an inherent idea about commitment. Now, there's lots of things wrong with the past as well. There were marriages that were only marriages in name only.

They were only kept up for the face of it. And there were some women particularly who suffered terribly at the hands of very bad husbands. So I'm not denying that sometimes relationships should end and have to end.

But remember, it's never God's ideal. This is God's ideal. Where trust is at the heart of relationship. Where wives and husbands cultivate an atmosphere of loving commitment to one another.

[18 : 04] Then they can ensure that there will be integrity in family relationships. Next slide, please. The second thing we notice here is that we should appreciate the hard work that goes into providing for a healthy family.

The hard work that goes into providing for a healthy family. Never get married young men or young women unless you're prepared to put in the effort.

Because marriages don't run on romance. And especially when you have children, they will not run on romance.

Yeah, there's nothing romantic about a dirty nappy. There's nothing particularly romantic about being up four or five times in the night with a crying child.

There is nothing particularly kind of, you know, attractive about having to clean up after them day in and day out.

[19 : 11] But that's the long-term commitment that you're in when you get married. Relationships take, and family life takes, hard work. And we've got to appreciate it here.

And what you've got here is an example of what one theologian called domestic feminism. A woman who ran her house really well. You get the impression that she's almost like a sea captain.

Like the female equivalent of Captain Von Trapp in The Sound of Music. You know, there she is. Hey, it's four o'clock in the morning. Let's get the bread on. Let's make sure the breakfast is ready.

Are the servants up? Grand. We'll get the children up. We'll feed them well. We'll make sure husbands fed well. He can go off to the market. Everything's going to be wonderful. Everything's got to be ship-shaped. It's all got to be organized.

It's all got to be planned. It's all got to be cleaned out. You know, we've got to make sure that we're buying the right stuff, getting the right stuff. I mean, she's just amazing, isn't she? Just amazing. She is loving and faithful, verse 12.

[20 : 13] She's careful and hardworking, verses 13 to 15. She's prudent. She's strong. She's diligent. She's generous. She's prepared. She's extravagant in her care, verse 22.

She's dignified and good-humored, verse 25. She's wise. She's watchful. She fears the Lord. No wonder her children and her husband call her blessed.

And no wonder he praises her at the city gate. This is a woman of noble character. Verse 27 says, She watches over the ways of her household.

She's a real matriarch. I love her. What a woman this is. The woman's worth does not come from working outside the home or inside it.

It comes from her fear in the Lord. That's where it comes from. She is not just doing it for him. He might be a real stud.

[21 : 21] A real Romeo. See, this is the problem with trying to be cool. You kind of realize that your kind of buzzwords are about 50 years old. What would be the equivalent of a stud now?

I have no idea. I probably don't want to know, actually. She doesn't do it for him. She doesn't even do it for her children.

She does it because she fears the Lord. That's her motivating spirit that drives her on day after day. Because after all, there's nothing particularly glamorous about this kind of lifestyle.

The Kardashians wouldn't advertise this and tell you how cool I am. The Kardashians. I've never watched it in my life, but I kind of know it exists. You know, you kind of get this insight into somebody's life.

She wouldn't. This wouldn't be particularly glamorous. You know, nobody wants to be her. It's just hard work every day. It's the same all same. Yeah? But how wonderful that every day she does it with a desire in her heart to please God.

[22 : 31] Paul wrote to the Colossians. He talked to the slaves and he said, When your masters are being hard on you and life is dull and it's really hard work, remember that you do your work to the Lord and not for men.

You're working for Jesus. That can transform a really awful, mundane, dull old job into something sacred. You do it for Jesus.

Yeah? Now, we all like to have great jobs, don't we? You know, yeah, I'd love to be a chief executive or I'd like to be a head teacher or I'd like, don't do that.

Or I'd like to be something, I used to be teaching, so it's tough work. Or I'd like to be, where do you work? Ah, I stack shells at Sainsbury's.

That's a good job. That's a good job. What do you do? Ah, empty bins. That's a good job. What do you do?

[23 : 33] I'm at home and I look after my kids. That's a really good job. But remember to do it to the Lord and it'll feel even better. Because if we're remembering that we're working for Jesus, it'll keep us from being resentful when it's hard.

You know, like family life. Like, what are you going to do in your chore today? I'm going to clean the toilets. Oh, wonderful. But you don't just do it for your family.

Do it for the Lord. It transforms the way we view life and we view the work that we do. This woman has real strength of character.

She is a devoted woman. A woman who sacrifices for her children and for her family. And she does this because she serves the Lord. Remember Ruth?

Remember how Ruth lost her husband and then she was, her sister Oprah had left and gone off to marry again. But she wouldn't leave Naomi. Naomi. She said, where you go, I will go.

[24 : 41] Where you live, I will live. Your people shall be my people. But she didn't stop there. Your God shall be my God. Dare I say, ladies, that you should never get married unless you're prepared to say that.

And dare I say, men, you should never get married unless you're prepared to say that. Where you go, I will go. Where you live, I will live. Your people shall be my people.

Your God shall be my God. All of those elements have to be in place. There has to be a willingness to give. Not just to get. You know, sometimes modern life gives you the impression it's all about what you get out of it.

But actually, it's healthier when you're giving something. Relationships work best when we both mutually give to each other. That's when we sacrifice.

And that's when families stay together because they work hard together and they commit to one another. Next slide. The next thing we learn is the importance of cultivating generosity as a family value.

[25 : 54] Verse 20. Just draw on verse 20. She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. This is a compassionate woman who doesn't just have eyes for her husband and her children and her servants.

She has eyes for those around her who are poor and in need. She has a heart of compassion. She's a woman that is generous with her goods and with her possessions.

And she shares those with people in need. We have to learn to be generous. One of the privileges of having a family home is that you can open it up to people who don't have a family home.

One of the privileges of being able to give hospitality is that you open it up to people who don't get much hospitality. Who are lonely and in need.

See, we're not building fashion houses or even museums where it's all about our furniture and how wonderful it looks and the fact that dust never settles.

[27 : 04] Does dust never settle in your house? We made friends with dust. It's good. We love it. Sorry, that was not meant to be a criticism.

You see, you've all got the checklist. I haven't got the checklist. I haven't got the checklist. The reason we make friends with dust is because our house is a home.

And you can't have children, can you, without it being messy? I mean, that's just not possible. And so all we do is tidy up afterwards.

And if somebody arrives and you're not prepared for it, dig into the cupboards or nip out to little's, find something, feed people. Give them a cup of tea or a cup of coffee.

Make them feel welcome. Make them feel loved and cared for. Let your home be a place where people find a godly environment in which they feel welcome.

[28 : 16] Offering hospitality is a big emphasis in the New Testament. The reason it was an emphasis in the New Testament is because church very often was done in the home. They didn't have nice buildings like this.

It was done in the home. Aquila and Priscilla, they opened their home. And they opened their home for the church. And you read it again and again in the New Testament.

The church that meets in somebody's house. Somebody just opened their home. What shall we eat? Well, let's all bring something. We'll share it together. And if we haven't got much, well, we haven't got much, but we'll share what we haven't got.

And if we've got a lot, wonderful. We've got a lot. And little wonder the church was, sometimes the metaphor to describe church was that of the family. God is our father.

The church is our mother. The children are our brothers and sisters. Cultivate generosity in the family as a family value because God is pleased when we care for the poor.

[29 : 17] The Apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, said, There's really only one thing I want you to remember. Remember the poor. Look after them. People in need. And be grateful that you've got so much that you can share with those who've got so little.

Develop a generous spirit. Cultivate generosity as a family value. And then, fourthly, create a God-centered home.

The last part, verses 28 to 31. Really love this. Her children arise and call her blessed. Her husband also, and he praises her. Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.

Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting. But a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Honor her for all that her hands have done. And let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

The fear of the Lord. I create a home in which God is respected. In which Christ is at the center.

[30 : 24] And in which everybody knows that, first and foremost, this is a place where God is honored. I want people to catch, to breathe in that kind of environment.

Now, that's a big challenge. And you think, well, how am I ever going to do it? Because, you know, I know I fall short. I'm not this man of noble character.

And I hesitate to guess that some of you women are not the woman of noble character. But, in spite of your failings, and we make allowances for each other's failings every day, aren't we?

My children know that I am not perfect. Yeah? They can find fault if they wish. But what I want from my children, not because they have to give me it, but because I want to model this, is their respect that dad seeks to live the best he can for Jesus.

It's actually a wonderful thing to hear children sometimes say, you know, when they're reflecting on their lives when they were younger. Well, I used to do this, and I used to do that, and I used to do that.

[31 : 41] But I used to keep it hidden from mom and dad. And I never asked to do this or that, because I know they would never have allowed it. Not in their home.

That's very respectful. Especially if it wasn't kind of demanded, you know. This woman is not a nagging woman who's like, you're going to do what you're told. And this man is not a terrible authoritarian father who waves the big stick.

These are people who have loving, God-centered values that the children respect. And by the grace of God will grow up to replicate when they set up their homes.

For Scripture says, train up a child in the way that he should go. And when he is old, I'm always encouraged by that. When he's old. Not when he's kind of like, my dad knows nothing, I'm going to be the prodigal son.

But when he thinks about life. When he's got his own kids. When he thinks about what's best for family life. He thinks, I know where I saw that modeled. I'm going to recreate the godly home that I had when I was a child.

[32 : 54] And if my children do that, I'm going to feel that I wasn't such a bad father after all. Not a perfect one. But I've created by the grace of God, a Christ-centered home.

It's Mother's Day, children. And we're all children. I love and hate Mother's Day. I love the fact that my children's mother is honored.

That her children rise up and call her blessed. And I miss my mom. Goodness, it hurts. I still miss her.

And I guess you do too. But she was a good mom. A good mom. And I thank God for her. Husbands, love your wives.

As Christ loved the church and gave himself for her. Washing her with the word of God. There is nothing more important, husband. Than loving your wife like Jesus did.

[34 : 11] And there's nothing I need to do better than that as a husband. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.

Comes in the context, of course, of submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. But there is a reminder here that in some ways the family is representative of the Trinity. In which three equal persons, God the Father, God the Holy Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Live together in perfect harmony and unity. And where each of them submit to one another. And honor one another. And that's the ideal family home.

In which each of us together live in mutual submission. And honor each other. Husband, wife, children.

A reflection of the great divine family. The Holy Trinity. This is a big challenge.

[35 : 18] But let us create godly homes. Communities that will be respected and honored. And dare I say to you, for whom this feels a little irrelevant because you live on your own.

And this Christian family is your family. Where you will have fathers, mothers, and children. And we will take care of you.

And honor you. Please, please feel that you can be a part of it. Amen.