

“A Woman of Noble Character”

Proverbs 31:10-31

5.08.22

Happy Mother’s Day. Women can often be their worst critics. They deal with many negative self-judgments. They are hard on themselves. You don’t need more fuel for the fire. So when they see that I will be speaking on Proverbs 31- a picture of an excellent wife they can already be self-taking about how they are going to see again how they don’t measure up. That is NOT our goal for this morning. For we have some wonderful women, wonderful wives, wonderful mothers in this church. We are truly blessed by the quality of you women.

The context of Proverbs 31 is a mother writing to her son who was a king. She was imploring him to live wisely in verses 1-9. At the end of this plea she paints a portrait of the kind of woman that her son should want to marry. Please turn to Proverbs 31:10–31 (ESV). Page 552 in the Red Bibles. “An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. ¹¹ The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. ¹² She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. ¹³ She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. ¹⁴ She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar. ¹⁵ She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens. ¹⁶ She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. ¹⁷ She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong. ¹⁸ She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. ¹⁹ She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. ²⁰ She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. ²¹ She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet. ²² She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple. ²³ Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. ²⁴ She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant. ²⁵ Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. ²⁶ She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. ²⁷ She looks well to the ways of

her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.²⁸ Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:²⁹ “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.”³⁰ Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.³¹ Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.”

The mother starts out with asking the question, “An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.” The word excellent is an interesting word that has many nuances, like power, strength, wealth, valor. It is even used 77 times in the Hebrew Bible for “army.” The context helps to determine what the author might mean. I don’t think the mom was saying, “An army wife who can find?”

She is trying to sum up the kind of woman that she is about to describe. She describes many character qualities of this woman. Here in the ESV, the word is excellent. The NLT translates the Hebrew word as “virtuous and capable.” I like how the NIV translates it as, “A wife of noble character.”

The passage reads the a wife of noble character is more valuable than rubies or diamonds. Why is that? We are going to see.

Before we get into the details of this noble wife a few caveats. First, this description is not a ruler for wives to measure themselves by. When looking at this passage, we need to recognize that this was written for the context of their day. What we can do is to pull out the characteristics that made this woman excellent and place it into our context.

The second caveat is: this passage was written to wives and mothers. However, it can apply to all women, whether single, divorced, widowed or married. This passage is also helpful for teenage girls seeing qualities worth emulating. And though this passage was not written about men, the qualities of this woman could also apply to men. For if we all lived out these qualities we too could be considered of noble character.

Speaking of men, you might be wondering why there is not a Proverbs 32- dealing with a description of an excellent husband? The reason is: God had a better description that needed more time to become a reality. God needed Jesus to come and die on the cross before He would give the description of a noble man or husband or father. The reality is, the description and call on husbands is more challenging than Proverbs 31.

God's description for a noble husband is found in Eph 5. Ephesians 5:25 (ESV), "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." How many of us husbands have measured up to that standard? I haven't.

We are going to look at 5 character qualities of a noble woman followed by what a woman like this will experience.

First,

A woman of noble character is trustworthy.

Verse 11, "The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. ¹² She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life."

This woman's consistent actions have built great trust. Her husband doesn't need to be concerned if she has his best interests in mind for she is focused on his good and not harming him. He doesn't need to keep tabs on his wife. He knows she is faithful to her vows- to love and to cherish.

He doesn't need to be stressed wondering how she is caring for their children. He knows that the children are in the best hands.

When a wife consistently keeps her word and is doing what is best for her spouse and children she gains trust that creates great freedom.

This woman is so trustworthy that her husband gave her wings to fly. She had the freedom to find a field, buy it and then plant a vineyard. That was a rare thing back then.

How are you doing at building trust? Are you trustworthy in your home? Do you seek to do what is best for your spouse, for your kids. Are you trustworthy in the workplace? Do you seek what is best for your employer or employees or are you in it only for yourself?

Motherhood is being maligned in our culture today. According to the culture anyone can be a woman. And anyone can be a mom. Some in society want to do away with Mother's Day and instead celebrate, "Happy birthing person day."

And there has been a negative attitude toward stay at home moms. Culture says, in order to reach your full potential, you need to discard the role of a homemaker and go into the workplace because you are wasting your talents by staying at home.

Culture is wrong once again. "G.K. Chesterton praised the vocation of mother and homemaker as *greater* than paid employment in the modern marketplace, noting especially the broad range of responsibilities it involves. In her own domain, a homemaker is like the Queen, 'deciding sales, banquets, labors and holidays'; she is like the great retailer, 'providing toys, boots, sheets, cakes and books'; she is like Aristotle, 'teaching morals, manners, theology, and hygiene.'"

"Esolen echoes Chesterton, saying that our culture has gotten this backward. If a woman works full-time in the modern economy, specializing in one task - perhaps cooking, arranging flowers, or performing music - then society praises her. But if she *'can do all these things* and in fact does them for the people she loves and for those whom she welcomes into her home (and she is not afraid of guests, because her home is always just a whisk or two away from hospitality), we shake our heads and say that she has wasted her talents.' On the contrary, Esolen says, she has put her talents to use. Instead of 'preferring the specialist who amputates and cauterizes and does one thing well, for herself primarily and sometimes even at the expense of the family,' we must renew our respect for 'the woman of many talents and many tasks in the home.'

Like Chesterton, we must acknowledge that **the dignity of work does not depend on pay, and that the work done inside the home is just as important as the work done outside of it, perhaps more so."**

Second,

A woman of noble character is prepared.

The writer gives us several verses to describe what this woman in her context did to be prepared. Verse 13, "She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. ¹⁴ She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar. ¹⁵ She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens. ¹⁶ She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. ¹⁷ She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong. ¹⁸ She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. ¹⁹ She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle."

This woman works with "willing hands." Willing here means "delight, pleasure." She finds pleasure in working in order to have her home prepared.

In her context, it was not as easy as today to purchase clothing. She made a lot of her own. In our day, many noble women look for great deals on good clothes. They plan ahead and purchase clothing for the various seasons that the family will experience.

She will travel quite a distance to hit an outlet mall or a store that has the right clothing at the right price.

Not just clothing, she looks for the best foods for her family. She plans ahead. Some wives have a monthly meal plan and purchase all the food for the month at one time.

She is able to recognize that her "merchandise is profitable" and may sell some on Facebook Marketplace or eBay in order to make more money for the family.

Because she is prepared she has confidence that her family will be taken care of with the changing seasons or situations in life. She would be prepared to live in Iowa. Verse 21, “She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet.”

Wives or mothers may not make their family’s coats. But she may buy them the year and bring them out for the winter season. This wife is doing many things that the husband does not need to do. The husband doesn’t need to worry about warm coats for the kids for she has taken care of it.

Andrea, like some of the women here shop for the future. She enjoys looking for bargains. She shops for clothes at the end of the season for the next season.

She also shops for Christmas throughout the year. I cannot do that. If I buy a present for someone, I want to give it to them. I don’t like waiting a long time.

Third,

A woman of noble character is other-centered.

This woman, as we have seen so far, is focused on the needs of her husband and family. She has them on the forefront of her mind and she passionately works to bless them.

That is not how some wives are. There are some wives who expect the family to revolve around them. They seek to be the center of attention. The husband and family are expected to make her happy. And if momma isn’t happy nobody is happy.

A relative of mine was married to a wife who was narcissistic. The world revolved around her. She wasn’t focused on the best for her husband and kids. She manipulated and played her husband and kids causing conflict within the family. She enjoyed it when her husband and kids were at odds with each other.

She secretly spent a lot of money on herself. She racked up \$100,000 of debt before her husband found out.

She caused so much chaos in the home that the husband was stressed out and struggled to do his job well. The tension and turmoil was causing him health problems. When he was working, he was concerned about how his kids were being cared for.

It was such an unsafe place that after years and years of this without any change on her part the husband filed for divorce. There is still chaos within that family but not as intense since he doesn't have to deal with her as much.

Godly spouses do not expect the family to revolve around them. Godly spouses choose to do good to one's spouse. Godly parents seek to focus on the needs of the kids above their own.

Are you the center of attention in your home? Are you demanding that your needs be met above others? If you don't get your way, is the rest of the family going to pay for it? Are you seeking to be served instead of serving?

If you see yourself in this, then it is time to change your focus. Get your focus off yourself and on to those you are supposed to care for.

My mother is a great example of focusing on her family over herself. My father died leaving his 37 year old wife to raise three kids- 13, 11 and 8. My mom didn't mope around and feel sorry for herself and expect us kids to make her happy. She focused her attention on caring for our needs. She gave up her teaching job in order to be home when we got home from school.

When my sister became pregnant at age 15, my mom gave her two choices. She could keep the baby and my mom would help her raise the child or give it up for adoption. My

sister kept the baby and my mom helped raise my niece. My niece is a nurse in Austin, Texas.

When all the kids were out of the house, my mom moved up to be near her mother in order to care for her. When things got to where my grandmother could no longer be alone at night, my mom sold her house and moved in full-time to care for my grandma and did it faithfully until she died.

One of the reasons I have been able to remain at Cornerstone this long is that my mother has not put expectations on me to be there and care for her. She has not pressured me to come back to the northwest even though she is now 81 years old. That is a woman of noble character.

Sometimes we can become so fixated on our families that we miss opportunities to be a blessing to the less fortunate. This Proverbs 31 woman is not just focused on family, she also looks after the vulnerable. Verse 20, "She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy." She has a heart like God- a love for the poor and when she sees a need she helps.

Are your hands open to the less fortunate? Are you teaching your children that all people matter? Are you cultivating a love for the underdog in them?

That is something my wife and I have instilled in our kids. It is something that we have prayed daily over our kids is that they would have a heart for the poor, for the underdog, for the lost.

This woman seeks not to be served but to serve. That is just like Jesus.

Fourth,

A woman of noble character is industrious.

Synonyms for industrious are: hard- working, persistent, diligent. It means she is not idle or lazy. Verse 27, “She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.”

She doesn't sit around and let the hours go by. She is making a difference. It said that in the Proverb that she arises when it is still dark and in verse 17, “...Her lamp does not go out at night.”

Is this Proverb teaching that this woman goes on little sleep? If studies prove that the amount of sleep one gets is essential to good health, would the Word of God contradict it? No. The statement that “her lamp does not go out at night” is not speaking about her staying up late into the night. Rather, it is speaking to her preparedness. She makes sure the lamp has enough oil in it to last through the night.

This is not a Proverb teaching that women should always be working and never get any time alone. This is not a Proverb that is teaching women to work themselves to death. That is not healthy. And that is not what the Bible teaches.

In fact, God instituted the Sabbath for the Israelites, their servants and livestock to take a day off. It was put in the 10 commandments for us to obey. God doesn't want people to work themselves to death. He doesn't want our livestock working themselves to death. That is why He instituted the Sabbath. For our rest and refreshment.

I doubt there are lazy or idle women here. But I do bet there are some that are over scheduled and not getting time to get refreshed. What will you do about your busy schedule? How will you carve out alone time to recharge your batteries so that you can be at your best to care for others?

Fifth,

A woman of noble character is God-fearing.

Verse 30, "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised."

External appearances are often what first garners man's attention. But outward appearance alone will not keep a man. Beauty is vain. The word vain mean, "having no real significance or vapor or perishable." **To focus solely on looks is a losing battle.**

Jim Newheiser in his commentary, *Opening up Proverbs* adds, "The world may measure a woman's worth by outward charm and beauty, but those who are wise look beyond the surface... Worldly women often have physical beauty while lacking character.... Mere outward beauty does not last in spite of make-up, exercise, and surgery. A marriage based merely upon outward beauty will fail because the body wilts over time like cut flowers. But the godly woman's inner beauty grows over time. She is adorned by her good works and wise character. A godly man finds his greatest delight in such beauty."

When you choose a God-fearing or a God obeying woman, you will choose someone whose beauty from the inside radiates to the outside. You will also find her to be more beautiful as she ages compared to a woman who is vain and self-focused.

A godly woman will sin less and that makes her even more beautiful. Sin erodes beauty. The effects of sin on a person's looks is like driving a nice car down a gravel road. Over time the road causes wear and tear. The car doesn't look as shiny. It gets chips in the paint. It gets rocks in its hubcaps and makes various noises.

But take the same car and drive it on a paved road and it will look good for years to come.

Godliness enhances beauty. Young girls, when you focus on following God, He will enhance your beauty and will make you look prettier. You will be beautiful on the inside and outside.

Of these five qualities, which one would you say is your strength? Which one is your growth area? How will you shore up that growth area and make it a strength?

Ask God to help you. For it is His desire to make you a person of noble character.

What is the outcome for a woman of noble character?

A woman of noble character is honored.

Verse 28, “Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ²⁹ “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.” ...³¹ Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.”

This woman will be praised by her children by her husband and even by others. The town will be talking about her greatness. That is what it means, “her works praise her in the gates.”

Word travels about excellent women. Boaz said to Ruth who chose to care for her mother-in-law after both of their husbands died. Boaz saw how Ruth cared for Naomi and said, “And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my **fellow townsmen know** that you are a worthy woman.” Ruth 3:11 (ESV)

Some of the moms here are in the throws of raising young children or teenagers and you wonder if you will ever hear praise from your children’s lips. Don’t give up. Keep growing in noble character. They will talk of your excellence one day. But is not just the children that will praise their mothers. It is also their husbands.

Husbands, be verbal and talk about how great your wife is in front of your kids and others. Teach your kids how to respectfully talk and honor their mother. First hand compliment vs second hand compliment. Second hand is more powerful.

It is Mother's Day. For those who have a mom still living and you are in a good relationship, what can you say to her to honor her today?

Let's pray

o.b.g.