

Proverbs 31. God's Rare Woman

“In Praise of the Rare Woman of God”
Proverbs 31:10-31

Introduction: Pg. _____. Prayer (for all moms, new moms, women who desire to be moms, grieving the loss of moms)

Happy Mother's Day! Moms, today we celebrate you. You are fabulous! you are beautiful! you are stunningly sacrificial! you are smart! your value cannot be calculated! AND you are loved, and so today is the day we want to SHOW YOU SOME LOVE!!

And this is a very Christian thing to do. In fact, we would go so far to say that the way our culture treats women and mothers on Mother's Day sets forth much of the Christian vision how we should treat our Mother's everyday!

Motherhood and womanhood are God's idea. That is why we are going to turn our attention to an ancient text today in the Book of Proverbs.

Proverbs is a book of wisdom composed as a collection of sayings that provide general truths of how life works in God's world. The whole book is an invitation to know and live in God's wisdom, which is the path to life.

In the final chapter, we have the wise words of a mother, the mother of a king named Lemuel. Interestingly this woman is teaching his son about the kind of woman he should pray for and seek after.

Proverbs 31 provides a portrait of God's Woman. This poem forms an acrostic of the Hebrew alphabet, with each line starting with the corresponding Hebrew letter to help aid the memory.

- If you're a woman (single or married), pray to become this woman.
- But men, don't check out today! Single men: pray for and look for a woman like this. Married man, pray for this and when you see it this in your wife, praise this in your wife!
- If today is difficult for you because your mother has passed from this life to the next, here's an encouragement I hope you will find consoling. Every time you hear of a quality you saw in your mother, just whisper "thank you" to God for the wonderful mom he gave you.

Read Proverbs 31:10-31

Did you catch those final words? This woman is to be praised. Praised by her children. Praised by her husband. Praised because she loves God. Praised because of how she lives her life.

So my encouragement for all of us today is to...

The Point: Make praising the rare woman of God a pattern of your life!

The Proverbs 31 woman is a rare woman. She is to be treated like a treasure. Verse 10

And she is an active woman, a *very* active woman. That's why we...

I. Praise her because of how she serves others.

She works hard...

- Verses 13-19 show us how hard she works:

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- She seeks wool and flax,
- She works and brings her food from afar. (This doesn't mean you have to shop at the Trader Joe's in Brookline - just to be clear!)
- She provides food, buys a field, plants a vineyard.
- Her life is characterized by working late into the night (when needed) and rising early.
- WOW.
- This woman is focused. She has her plan and works her plan with endless energy.
- She possesses a work ethic that would put most any man to shame! :)
- And amazingly, verse 13 tells us that she enjoys it. She works with "willing hands" or "works with hands in delight." (NASB)
- She helps us see that God didn't just make men to work. He made women to work, to have unlimited impact in their God-given roles, so let's pay them what their worth! C'mon now! Work is work. Jesus wouldn't discriminate if he was calling the shots.

- Now, let me be clear: Work can mean in the working outside of the home, but it can also mean working inside the home.
- The Proverbs 31 woman actually shatters stereotypes at both extremes. It's not an either/or; it can be a both/and.
- She reads *HBR* and *Fast Company*, while not missing her favorite episodes on HGTV.
- There is a healthy prioritization of her home while finding ways to be industrious and entrepreneurial. She works hard in order to provide for her family.
 - Verse 18: her merchandise is profitable
 - Verse 24: she makes garments and sells them; delivers sashes to the merchant.
- Whether your focus is working in or outside the home, or some combination, MOMS - WE SAY THANK YOU!

T: We know you work hard because you are...

Motivated by a love for her family.

Look at her husband (10-12, 23)

- *Verse 10*. This rare woman is worth far more than precious jewels.
 - Married men: Go ahead and stop looking at me, and look at your bride. Say it with me: "You are more precious than jewels." KEEP GOING. "Your eyes are like diamonds. Your smile could melt the stars..." C'mon!
 - You can say this because...
- *Verse 11*: The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.
 - Deep down, he knows she is faithful. She is trusted to not flirt with another man. Trusted with the secrets you share. Trusted with how she spends money. And...
 - He has "no lack of gain." The Hebrew word there describes "the rich plunder of a victorious army. It is metaphoric for the abundance of good things she brings into the home."
- *Verse 12*: She consistently does him good. It is life-giving to be in her presence. (Contrast with verse 31:3)
- *Verse 23*: This verse is the center of this poem and most likely the focal point (chiastic structure). Remember, this is written to a young man. His mom is telling him... people will respect you because of her.
 - This kind of woman, will make you look GOOD! Can I get an "AMEN" from my men! (I can't hear you! I can't hear you! Man, we having some fun today.)
 - More importantly, as you pursue Christ, God can use your commitment to you help lift up your husband to another level spiritually. Make that your mission.

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- I love my wife for so many reasons, but the top of that list is how she pushes me to be a better follower of Jesus. She constantly fans the flame of God's work in my heart.

T: But she is not only a godly wife, she is an amazing mom!

Look at her children (15, 21, 27-28)

- She cares for her home. She provides food and clothing (vv.15, 21)
- She looks well to the ways of her household; she does not eat the bread of idleness. (v.27)
- She doesn't fear the future but lives with faith in God, laughing at the the time to come (v25).
- I know I would not be the person I am today apart from the endless sacrifice, care, and affection of my godly mother.
- So.. mothers: Thank you for changing diapers, bandaging wounds, and putting food on the table. Thank you for the homework you help finish and the recitals you wouldn't miss. Thank you for getting us dressed, fixing our hair, and giving us a listening ear just because we needed a friend. Thank you for praying for us, teaching us about God, helping us see what it looks like to put other people first.
- Thank you for doing what you do in the seemingly monotonous and mundane moments, because you were building something monumental in us simply because you love us more than we'll ever know!
- Thank you!

T: But the Proverbs 31 woman isn't just motivated by a love for her family, she is...

Motivated by a love for all.

- Verse 20: She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.
- She exudes compassion. She is a minister of mercy.
- When she sees needs, she graciously and generously takes what belongs to her and gives it to help someone else.

T: In reading all of this, I can imagine you might be asking, how is this even possible? Just reading all this woman does can wear you out!

I think we begin to see the answer (in v. 17): "She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong." But as we see: her strength comes from within. This kind of transcendent, supernatural strength comes from her transcendent, supernatural God!

What she does is fueled by who she is! That's why we also...

II. Praise her because of her character before God.

Verses 26-31 or Verse 30

- Last week we learned who we are is more important than what we do. This godly woman teaches us: what we do flows from who we are.

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- Moms: it's hard for us to comprehend all you do, but everything you do should flow from the posture of verse 30.

Are you a woman who fears God? Fearing God does not mean we are afraid of God. It means we have a reverence (the highest respect) and a sense of awe before him!

Why is this so important?

- **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...” (Proverbs 1:7)**
 - While beauty will inevitably fade and charm can't be trusted, wisdom grows as you fix your gaze on God.
 - Fear is really an expression of friendship.
- **“The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him...” (Psalm 25:14)**
 - Fear doesn't push us away. Fear draws us close.
 - Those who fear God are captivated by God. Nothing captures their attention like him. (Not kids, not work, not anything). The woman who fears God just wants more and more and more of God.

It's little wonder this woman pours forth wisdom & the teaching of kindness (verse 26).

- Because she is captivated by God, she is consistently spending time with him in worship, in prayer, reading his book which makes her wise.
- Moms / Women: What is the first thing your kids or your friends would say about you: “She works hard. She's busy doing a lot of things” OR “She loves God. When I'm around her, I get know God because of what she says and how she lives.”

This kind of woman is worthy of our praise.

- Verse 28-29
 - “You surpass them all.”
 - Word to the wise: Husbands, when you hear or see another husband talk about their wife in this way - don't get too literal about it! It's not the time start a fight in the Facebook comments section: “That's what YOU think - you think your wife might be Proverbs 31:29 but mine, MINE, is the REAL 31:29 - She surpasses all, including your wife!” Ok, that's not the point. Like or Love it and move on.
 - It's not a competition. It is compelled commendation.
- We get the sense that the father and children couldn't hold their praise back. They rise up and speak out (v. 28).
 - When is the last time you told her she is beautiful (before this am)?
 - When is the last time you thanked her for all she does?
 - When is the last time you commended her Christlike character?
 - I love your patience when life is hard or when you've answered the 75th question in the last 30 minutes.
 - I love how you listen to and encourage your friends.
 - I love how you don't give up on people.
 - I love how you constantly sacrifice your own welfare to serve others.
 - I love how you are an example to others in prayer.
- But let's not just talk a good game. Let's show them how much we love them.
 - Let's serve them. Let's bend to their preferences - even if it means missing part of the Celtics game (or the whole thing!).
 - And let's never allow any form of abuse of any kind of any woman (verbal, emotional, sexual). If you ever see something, say something. The #metoo movement would not exist if every boss, coworker, spouse, boyfriend lived like Jesus.

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- Women would only be honored and treated like a treasure.

T: Men, let's praise the women around us, because of what they do, but more importantly, who they are before God. And when we do, here's the really cool part...

III. Let your praise of her ascend higher in praise to God.

When we look at this woman, we are looking at the ideal woman. She actually personifies the wisdom we are called to throughout the entire book.

If you don't feel like you measure up, let me encourage you. No woman does... apart from the grace of God in Jesus.

This woman points us to Jesus.

- "And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption." (1 Corinthians 1:30)
- "in whom (JESUS) are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Colossians 2:3)
- As you become this woman in increasing measure, you are becoming the rare woman God desires for you to be, a woman that reflects the pristine character and life of his son.

So when we praise the women around us for this reflection, we are really praising God's work in them. Our praise of them ascends higher in praise of the God working in them!

And Jesus is in the business of forgiving our shortcoming and transforming us into the people we need to be.

- Moms, Women of Redemption Hill: maybe you see some ways that you clearly don't measure up. Draw near to God, receive his grace and forgiveness today. If you need the grace of the gospel of Christ, come to Jesus, but...
- You need more than that, you also need his transformative power.
- The question of verse 10: "Where can you find a woman like this?" is really found in another question: "How do women become women like this?" Answer: They are a masterpiece of God.

Conclusion:

Octavius Winslow said: "[H]ow powerful and deathless is the influence of a holy mother!"

Mother's what kind of legacy will you leave?

Women, what kind of woman will you be?

The picture is clear. The standard is possible because God wants to fill you with his fullness that he might overflow through you.

Pray: hold a mom's hand... Reach out and put your hand on her shoulder. But not just moms... any woman around you...