

INTRODUCTION

The second message in the series "God's Medicine for Hurting Families" is directed toward women. Last week I spoke to the men. Remember, all you men who are 12 years old and older need to follow the first three verses of Psalms. It is also true, in Bible times that females were considered adults around the age of 12. That's why many girls married at the age of 13 or 14. If the first three verses of Psalms spoke to the men, the last 22 verses of Proverbs speak to women.

Women are very intelligent creatures—if you don't believe it, listen to some quotes from famous women:

1. Erma Bombeck once said, "Never lend your car to anyone to whom you have given birth."
2. Rosanne Barr said, "I'm not going to vacuum the house 'til Sears makes one you can ride on."
3. Dolly Parton said, "I'm not offended by all the dumb blonde jokes because I know I'm not dumb ... and I also know that I'm not blonde."
4. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher said, "In politics, if you want anything *said*, ask a man; if you want anything *done*, ask a woman."
5. Zsa Zsa Gabor said, "I'm a marvelous housekeeper; every time I leave a husband, I keep his house."

A little girl came home from Sunday School after the teacher had taught them about Adam and Eve. When she was asked what she learned in Sunday School, she replied, "First God created man, Adam, and then God looked at him and said, 'I think I can do better than that,' so he created a woman."

What's the difference between a woman and a lady? Every lady is a woman, but not every woman is a lady. A hundred years ago, in the courts of Europe, the title "lady" was reserved for a woman who possessed dignity, charm, and class, as in *My Fair Lady*. Today, we have lost the meaning of the term and we address everyone as "ladies and gentlemen." But some females are repulsed by the term "lady." In the modern feminist vocabulary, the term "lady" is almost an insult. On the other hand, many women still want to be treated like a lady. Years ago, a pop song said, "you gotta treat her like a lady and she'll give in to you." When you think about it, that's the apex of male selfishness to say that the reason you treat a female like a lady is so that she will "give in to you!" Actually, you should treat certain woman like a lady simply because they *deserve it* – whether they "give in to you" or not!

Most people agree that Proverbs 31 contains the description of a real lady, a first class female. When many women read Proverbs 31 they get discouraged because they think it is too high a standard. In her book, *Queen of Hearts*, Jill Briscoe writes:

“The Proverbs 31 woman has long stood as the Statue of Liberty—at the harbor of the City of Womanhood, welcoming all who flee from being anything less than perfect. But what if I have runs in my stocking (I’m sure they were all right when I left home); consistently lose one of my husband’s socks in the washing machine; and regularly misplace my car in the supermarket parking lot (It’s blue sir—I know it’s blue!)? Is there any hope for me if I dream of writing a book about my small children called *From Here to Insanity*? And if I am shaped like a pillow instead of a post? Is there any hope for a woman if she’s not everything she ought to be, facing this description of an excellent woman? What response do we have—women or men—when encountering a life that is noble and lived to the full? Do we find ourselves filled with hope or sinking in hopelessness?

To understand this section, you have to look at the first verse in Proverbs 31. “The sayings of King Lemuel—an oracle his mother taught him:” While much of Proverbs was written by Solomon, we don’t have a clue from Bible history who Lemuel is. Also note that while Lemuel wrote this, it was something his *mother* taught him. So this is a mother’s opinion of the kind of woman her son should look for. Many times, mothers don’t think the girls their sons marry are “good enough for him” so she sets a pretty high standard!

Remember, this is a hypothetical woman, not an actual one. This is the female personification of wisdom that King Lemuel was taught by his mother. I commend Lemuel’s mother for instructing her son on the kind of wife he should look for. Note: parents, be sure to teach your children what kind of person they should be looking for in a mate. If you never do that, don’t be surprised or disappointed when they come home with a real jerk!

Jewish parents used the Book of Proverbs to teach their children valuable life lessons. One of the most important things that children needed to learn was directed at the young boys. And that was how to select the right woman. In fact, earlier on in the book of Proverbs young men are warned against the wrong kind of woman, the adulteress whose lips drip honey but who brings about death and destruction. Proverbs warns against the noisy woman, the quarrelsome woman, the rebellious woman, the foolish woman. And young men looking for a mate are warned to stay away from and avoid all such women.

Throughout the book there are some passages that speak of fine women, too. Solomon wrote in Proverbs 18:22 “He who finds a wife finds a good thing.” And as I’ve said before, Solomon knew a good thing when he found it; that’s why he had 1,000 wives—that’s too much of a good thing! In Proverbs 12:4 it says, “A wife of noble character is her husband’s crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones.” Find an excellent wife; stay away from anything less. And so the warnings have been given.

In 19:14 there comes a hopeful truth. It says, “Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord.” So all the way through this marvelous book of wisdom there is instruction about what kind of woman to avoid and to pursue the excellent woman, the excellent wife who is a gift from God.

But the very best place to learn the characteristics of a lovely lady or a fine female or a wonderful woman is in the last 22 verses of Proverbs 31. This material is not organized

thematically and we're going to have to jump around a bit to consider it. Verses 10 through 31 form an acrostic in Hebrew. The first letter of each of the 22 verses of this section, when read in sequence, spell out the Hebrew alphabet. It's probably written that way to help in memorization, among other things.

What can we learn from a Proverbs 31 woman? First:

I. SHE EXCELS IN RELATIONSHIPS

As you read through these verses you discover that the excellent woman is *not* a one-dimensional person. She lives a multi-faceted life and she relates to others in at least four different kinds of relationships. First, she excels as a:

1. **Wife** (vs. 10-12, 23, 28)

"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...Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land...her husband also, and he praises her."

Not every Proverbs 31 woman is a wife. Some are single women. But if you *are* married, we can learn some of the qualities of this kind of wife. First, she is more valuable than precious stones. Men, you need to recognize that your wife is more precious to you than gold, silver, diamonds or precious stones. Next, it says that this kind of wife is good for her husband; she brings him good—not harm. Wives have the ability to either build up or tear down their husbands. A Proverbs 31 woman only brings him good. Because of this, her husband is respected. A great wife can make the difference whether or not a man succeeds in life. Notice that this wife has a husband who compliments and praises her.

Someone has said, "Behind every successful man, is a surprised mother-in-law!" A few years ago, a man who was the president of a large insurance company was taking a trip with his wife. When they stopped to get gas, he visited the men's room and when he returned to his car, his wife was in a friendly conversation with the guy pumping the gas. When they got back in the car, his wife mentioned that the man pumping gas had been a teenage friend of hers and that they had even dated years ago. The husband smiled and said, "Just think, if you had married him, you'd be married to a gas station worker instead of the president of an insurance company ... " His wife smiled and said, "No, dear, if I'd married him, he'd be the president of an insurance company and you'd be pumping gas!"

Joseph Conrad once wrote: "Being a woman is a terribly difficult task since it consists principally in of dealing with men."

Ladies, do you want to be a better wife? You've got to learn to communicate with men and nearly all men are "communicationally" challenged. Here are some tips from another wife. Cynthia Lindsay has come up with a list of ten things that a wife should never say to her husband. Let me give you four of them:

1. Never ask, "How do I look?" If you don't look all right, he'll notice. If you look great, he won't notice so don't waste your time or his.
2. When your husband says, "Sometimes I think my mother is crazy," do not say, "She certainly is!" He'll say, "I don't mean *really* crazy." And you'll say, "But I do." And then you're off.
3. Never tell him you are tired—he's tired—you just didn't plan your day right!
4. Never ask if he enjoyed his nap after he snored all the way through an evening television show. He was *not* asleep; he was just resting his eyes—he heard every word of it!

It says that the heart of her husband safely trusts in her. Trust is one of the most valuable elements of a good marriage. One the greatest things that any husband can say to his wife is "Honey, I trust you." I don't have to know all the information, and you don't have to explain to me why you do what you do; I trust you."

The second relationship of the Proverbs 31 woman is as a:

2. Mother (vs. 14, 15, 28)

"She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family...Her children arise and call her blessed."

Here is a mother who provides food for her family, even if it means getting up early to do it. It says she goes great distances to get food; she couldn't hop into the car and head down to the nearest grocery store, either. She had to often walk great distances just to procure the food to feed her family.

Here is the reward for being a great mother: ²⁸her children grow up and call her blessed. I want to say that I have been blessed in the area of mothers. My mother was an RN and even though she worked outside the home, I never felt she neglected us. When she lived with us in 1983 before she died with cancer, I had the chance to take care of her and to tell her what a great mom she was. Folks, if you mother is still alive, don't waste another day before you tell your mother how much you love her.

Then, I married into a great family and Cindy's mother has become a second mother to me; she is a super lady. And in every church I've ever served, there are certain women who have taken it upon themselves to "mother" me and I am so blessed again. I rise up and call all these women blessed!

It's hard being a mother but it is a great calling. I heard about a little girl who had a line in her Sunday School play—all she had to do was quote the words of Jesus when He said, "I am the light of the world." She practiced it and practiced it, "I am the light of the world." But when it came

time for her to speak the line in front of all the parents; she went blank. Her mother began to whisper, "I am the light of the world." Finally the little girl smiled and said, "My mother is the light of the world." It's actually true, for many mothers light up the lives of their children.

It's tough being a mother. One mother I know who has three children all under the age of four said that her schedule was pretty hectic until she bought a playpen. Now she says it's better because from 2 p.m. until 4 p.m. she climbs into the playpen so the kids can't get to her!

Mothers, don't judge what your children say about you when they are teenagers, wait until they grow up. That's when the promise is given that they will "rise up and call you blessed."

Third, this Proverbs 31 woman has a relationship as a:

3. Friend (v. 20)

"She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy."

What is a friend? A friend is someone who is there when you have a need. I've said before that, "A friend is someone who walks in after everyone else has walked out." Here is a woman who looks around and sees poor people, needy people, and she is willing to be a friend. Notice it doesn't say that she gives money to the poor or clothing and food to the needy. It says, "She opens her arms." That means that she gives herself, she embraces those who are hurting, poor, and needy. Did you know that one of the greatest needs in this world is that sometimes we just need someone to open their arms to us and hug us? Do you know someone around you to whom you can open your arms?

Finally, we see this Super Woman relating to others as a:

4. Worker (vs. 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 24)

This is a woman who has a career and in most of these jobs, it's obvious that she's the boss.

"She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands...and portions for her servant girls. She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night...She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes."

Let's notice all the commercial and entrepreneurial endeavors in which she is engaged. It's interesting that there are six verses in this section that refer to this woman's business acumen, compared to two verses that speak of her role as a mother. Let's see what she can do. She is able to purchase raw material. She gives assignments to her servant girls. She is in the real estate business and commercial agriculture because she considers a field (she is smart enough to give it a fair-market appraisal); she buys it—she must have some operating capital. She has some other investments because it says "out of her earnings" she plants a vineyard. Wow! What a businesswoman! She is a diligent worker; she makes a profit—even it she has to work at night.

What does she do with the wool and flax she bought in verse 13? She makes linen garments and sells them to merchants. She is in the wholesale tapestry business. Some say that a woman’s place is in the home but there are more verses that deal with this woman’s business expertise than address her role as a mother and wife! She is a brilliant CEO of her own family of companies and yet she has time to be a great mom and wife.

Every woman works. I’ve learned through the years that the correct question to ask a woman is *not* “Do you work?” The correct question is, “Do you work outside the home?” For those who have made the choice to be full-time mothers and homemakers, I commend you for this choice; I believe there is no business more important than running a household. But for those of you who choose to work outside the home, I want you to learn from Proverbs 31, that you can still be a godly woman.

One woman complained about what she calls the “chickenization” of women. She said, “Woman are frequently compared to poultry. We cluck at hen parties. When we aren’t hen-pecking men, we are egging them on. In youth we are chicks. Later mothers watch over their brood, and still later we are old biddies with an empty-nest syndrome. Maybe that’s why most women work as hard as men and get paid chicken feed.”

Second, we see that the Proverbs 31 woman is characterized because

II. SHE EXCELS IN ABILITIES

She’s able to:

1. Create (vs. 19, 22, 24)

“In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers...She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple...She makes linen garments and sells them.”

Here is a woman who has the ability to take basic materials and to create something beautiful from them. She begins with the raw material of flax and wool, then she grabs the distaff and spindle of a spinning wheel and she forms the flax and wool into thread. Next she takes the thread and weaves it into cloth. Then she fashions the cloth into beautiful garments. What a woman! She does so much of this that not only does her family have enough so that they are never cold; she even sells some of her products the merchants!

One of the greatest things my wife has done is to create a stable, secure home for her family. She loves to work in the garden. There are sections of our yard that just used to be bare patches of grass that are now beautiful flower gardens. Women have that unique ability to create, to create beauty.

2. Plan ahead (vs. 21, 27)

“When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet...She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.”

She plans ahead. There are a number of references in this chapter to thinking about the future. When winter comes, she doesn’t worry or panic, because she’s already made provision. The time to make warm clothes for your family is *not* when the snow is falling but in the months prior to that when it is warm. This woman is so skilled that she plans ahead to schedule her work. She isn’t lazy; instead, she gets up early in the morning to make the food for the people who work in her household. She thinks ahead of time about what needs to be done. And these abilities to organize and anticipate seeing consequences and arranging for them ahead of time, as anyone who works in business knows, are managerial skills that are very important. They require a fine intellect.

It says that, “She does not eat the bread of idleness.” That means that she makes good use of her time. She is a good time manager. The old proverb says, “Idle hands are the devil’s workshop.” A Proverbs 31 woman stays busy doing the *right* things at the *right time*. She plans her life in a way that she accomplishes a great deal, but she also makes sure that she has time to plan and rest.

So here is a woman who excels in relationships and abilities. We see also, that:

III. SHE EXCELS IN CHARACTER

Now relationships are based on other people. A person’s abilities have to do with what they can do—but when you look below the surface, you can discover the most about a person when you examine their character. Someone has said that character is who you are in the dark. You can buy an education, and you can buy cosmetics and clothes but you cannot buy character. Let’s notice three things about the character of a Proverbs 31 woman:

1. Outward (v. 25)

“She is clothed with strength and dignity.”

When you look at this kind of woman, you notice something about her outward appearance. The first thing you notice about her is that she is “clothed” with strength and dignity. That means that strength and dignity are so natural that she wears them like a well-fitting garment. When you look at her you see those qualities. They may begin on the inside, but they are evident on the outside. When it speaks of strength here, it doesn’t speak of physical strength, in fact, the New Testament calls a woman “the weaker partner.” (1 Peter 3:7) This is referring to a woman’s strength of character, her strength to maintain her moral purity, her strength to stand up under the stress and demands of life.

We sometimes look at the “pioneer women” who made the trek westward across America, and we marvel at their strength. When you see some of the early photographs of those women, you can see the strength of resolve on their faces. They cleared forests, built houses, planted fields,

cooked meals, while having seven or eight babies in the process. What strength! But today, we have plenty of strong women in our midst. I know of women who have experienced the death of a mate who took care of every detail of their life and now that's he's gone, they have the strength to carry on. I know of women who have been deserted by sorry men, leaving them with no money and two children. But these women are resilient enough to carry on; that's the kind of strength this is talking about.

But she is also clothed with dignity. Our word dignity comes from a word that means "worthy." It is the picture of a woman who holds her head high, whatever the circumstances. We would say that she has "class." She is "graceful" in all she does and says. A Proverbs 31 woman has the kind of outward demeanor that reflects confidence and assurance. People say that she is a first-class lady.

2. Inner (vs. 25, 26)

“...she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.”

I love these next two descriptions of the Proverbs 31 woman. She has a cheerful personality. She can laugh. That's important, because we have all known people, men and women, who seemed to have undergone a humor-bypass operation. They just have no sense of humor. Here's a woman who has a positive, cheerful outlook on life and she can laugh. She also has hope, because it says, "she can laugh at the days to come." That means that when she thinks about the future, she doesn't fret or worry; she can laugh!

Next, she speaks with wisdom. Some of the greatest teachers in the history of the world have been mothers. God has given mothers a supernatural wisdom that few others have. Can you remember all the valuable, wise lessons that your mother taught you?

One lesson that my mother taught me over and over again was this: "If you can't say something nice about somebody, don't say anything at all." I still think that is excellent advice and I try to live by it.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower was once asked, "Who is the greatest man you ever met?" He replied, "The greatest person I ever met wasn't a man. It was a woman. It was my mother. She never had much schooling, but she was wise in God's wisdom. She went to school with the greatest of all books, the Bible." He said, "Once, when I was a boy, my brothers and I were playing a card game with my mother, not real playing cards because she was too straight-laced for that. A hand of cards were dealt and I remember this night Mother dealt me an utterly impossible hand. And I began to complain about it. "She said, 'Boys, put your cards down. I want to tell you something, especially you, Dwight. You are playing a game in your home with your mother under loving circumstances. We all love each other here and I have dealt you a bad hand. 'Now,' she said, 'when you get out in life where they don't love you so much, you are going to be dealt many a bad hand. What are you to do? You are to pray to God. You are to trust God and like a man you are to play out the hand that is dealt you.'" And President Eisenhower said later, "that is one of the wisest things I learned in my youth."

So many women today are concentrating only on developing their outer beauty. There are dozens of magazines that promote beauty and fashion. Sometimes it must seem a bit overwhelming.

April was Beautiful Woman Month, and someone sent me the following information: Cheer up ladies; there are 3 billion women who *don't* look like super-models and only eight who do. The average woman weighs 144 pounds and wears between a 12-14. If Barbie *were* a real woman, she'd have to walk on all fours due to her proportions. A psychological study in 1995 found that three minutes spent looking at a fashion magazine caused 70% of women to feel depressed, guilty, and shameful. In 1950, models weighed 8% less than the average woman; today, they weigh 23% less.

Proverbs 31 speaks of another kind of beauty—inner beauty.

The beauty of a woman
Is not in the clothes she wears,
The figure that she carries,
Or the way she combs her hair.
The beauty of a woman
must be seen from in her eyes,
Because that is the doorway to her heart,
the place where love resides.
The beauty of a woman
is not in a facial mole,
But true beauty in a woman
Is reflected in her soul.
It is the caring that she lovingly gives,
The passion that she shows,
And the beauty of a woman
With passing years—only grows!

Author Unknown

Peter 3:3-4 "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight."

Finally, notice a third dimension of her character:

3. Spiritual (v. 29, 30, 31)

"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. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate."

The Hebrew word for “charm” literally means “bodily form.” You can be deceived by the appearance of a man or a woman. Beauty may be there for a few years—but it soon flees. But a woman who “fears the Lord” has an advantage over all others; she occupies a position of honor and blessing that age and appearance can’t take away.

Matthew Henry said,

“Proverbs 31 is the mirror against which every Christian woman must stand and face herself. This is God’s design. And only God can produce this woman. But this is the woman God wants. This is the woman who will be praised by her children and her husband. This is the woman who is not only privately rewarded with the product of her hands by those she loves, but publicly rewarded as her works praise her in the gates. This is the woman that God wants and that every man should desire and that every woman should desire to be ... one who is true to her mate, one who manages well her home, one who compassionately cares for the needy, one who lives and teaches divine wisdom with kindness, compassion and grace, one who fully fulfills the call of a mother so that her children bless her and one who though she seeks no praise will receive it anyway because of the character of her life.”

The Bible says we should “give her the praise she deserves.” *Where are the Proverbs 31 women?* Many of them are in this church. I live with a Proverbs 31 woman and so do many of you; let’s make sure that we give them the praise they deserve!

CONCLUSION

Where are the Proverbs 31 women? Look around you: they are in the choir; they are in the balcony; they are in every section of this room. Many of you live with Proverbs 31 women. You see, this hypothetical standard pictures a perfect woman and any woman who desires to be a Proverbs 31 woman can be called one. Because when you express your desire to God to be this kind of woman, then He gives you the power to become more than you ever could on your own.

Many of you men are sitting next to a Proverbs 31 woman; many of you men and women have mothers who are Proverbs 31 women. Be sure to give her the praise she deserves!

OUTLINE

SHE EXCELS IN:

I. RELATIONSHIPS

As a:

1. Wife
2. Mother
3. Friend
4. Boss

II. ABILITIES

She’s able to:

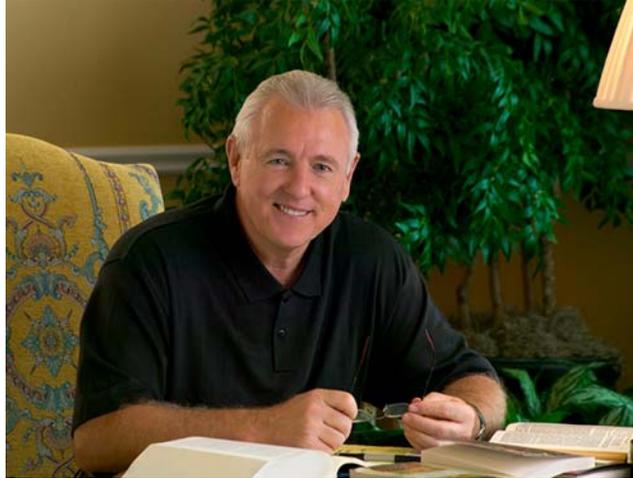
1. Create
2. Plan ahead

III. CHARACTER

1. Outward – “strength and dignity”
2. Inner – “laughter and wisdom”

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. *1 Peter 3:3-4*

3. Spiritual – “fears the Lord”



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes