

VIRTUOUS WOMANHOOD

INTRODUCTION: Please take your Bibles and turn to Proverbs 31. My guess is that if there was a way you could “poll” all the Bible-preaching pastors in America today, you would discover that many of them are using Proverbs 31 for their text. Bible commentators tell us that verses 10-31 are in the form of an **acrostic poem** that follows the Hebrew alphabet. What that means is verse 10 starts with the **first** letter of the Hebrew alphabet, verse 11 with the **second**, verse 12 with the **third** and so on until we get to verse 31 which begins with the **last** letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In English, we would probably call it something like the “A to Z of Womanhood.” It is obviously way too much to cover in one sermon, so I’m going to be highlighting what I believe are some of the more important traits of this woman.

As we get started here this morning, please note that I will be using the word “**womanhood**” throughout the message for a couple of reasons.

First, because it encompasses women...and wives...and mothers. The word “**woman**” is used in vs 10—although some translations have “wife” instead. “Woman” is also used in vs 30. She is indeed **a wife**—we see a reference to her **having a husband** in vs 11, 23, and 28. And she is also **a mother** as indicated in vs 28 “Her children arise up, and call her blessed...”

A second reason I’m using “womanhood”—as opposed to mothers or wives—is because the characteristics we will be focusing on in this chapter are ones that **any woman—or person**, for that matter—should aspire to have.

Before we look at traits, though, I want to consider...**1. The peril of virtuous womanhood**

Look again at the first part of vs 10 “Who can find a virtuous woman?” Interesting question, isn’t it?

Sometimes we have in the Bible what is called a **rhetorical question**. A rhetorical question is one where no reply is necessary because the answer is obvious. Here are a couple:

Prov 20:9 “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” The obvious answer is NO ONE!

Rom 8:35 “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Again, the answer is obvious—NO ONE!

“Who can find a virtuous woman” is **not** a rhetorical question, though. How do we know? Because the answer is **not obvious**! The answer is not “**NO ONE**” can find a virtuous woman—and the answer is not “**ANY-ONE**” can find a virtuous woman! The question is asked to **make us stop and think**, then realize that virtuous women are **rare**; they are not easily found. They are **not plentiful**; they are not “a dime a dozen” as the saying goes. Why is that? Why are they so hard to find?

Before giving you a couple of reasons as to why they are so hard to find, we need to **define** what is meant by a “virtuous” woman. The Hebrew word that “virtuous” comes from carries the idea of “firmness, strength, and valor.” The strength and courage being referred to, though, is that of **character**—not the **physical attribute** of strength. She does “strengthen her arms”—we see that in vs 17—and you will notice as we go along that she certainly has a **strong mind**. Her rarity, though, is because of her strong and courageous **character**—not her physical strength. So why are women of **strong character** hard to find?

I’m sure there are more, but here are two reasons.

A. Resistance of society against what God says

I don’t believe I’m being overly dramatic to suggest that the concept of **womanhood** is under attack! Why do I say that? Because the very **definition of woman** is being **resisted and questioned**, so much so that a highly educated Supreme Court Justice appointee claimed she **could not** answer the simple question: “What is a woman?” **Why** couldn’t she answer the question? Was it because she didn’t **know** the answer? Maybe I’m being a bit **harsh and judgmental**, but she obviously **knew** the answer! And because she **knew** the answer, **she lied** when she said she **didn’t** know the answer! If that’s not bad enough, we should be asking why. **Why** did she lie? I can’t say **for sure** because I didn’t ask her!

But it is pretty safe to say she did not want to give an answer that would **offend** certain people. Which people? The people that want to **do away with womanhood!** Make no bones about it—if you want men to play in **women’s sports...** and men to go into **women’s bathrooms...**and men to go into **women’s prisons**—you **don’t care about women** or womanhood!

Gen 1:27 “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; **male and female created He them.**”

God created **both** male and female in His image—**both** are image-bearers of God! That means they are **equally valuable** in God’s sight—even though they are different! And if you are fighting that, you are resisting what God says—period!

Why are virtuous women hard to find? Because society resists what God says about womanhood. A second reason is this: B. Rebellion of sin nature against what God says

Here’s what I mean: women aren’t **naturally strong** in the character traits this woman displays! How can I say such a thing? Because if it **came naturally**, virtuous women would not be so **hard to find!** As we go through some of these characteristics, you will see that it takes determination...and discipline...and planning...and perseverance...and sacrifice...and work to become a woman like this. None of those things **come naturally** to any of us, so our very nature fights against us being godly. It also **takes grace**—meaning God’s help. And to have God’s help, **we need humility**. And sadly, women—and men—are often **too proud** to see our need and don’t ask for God’s help!

Next, let’s consider... **2. The price of virtuous womanhood**

Look at the second part of vs 10: “...for her price is far above rubies.” The “price” of womanhood is not how much it **costs** to be a woman—or how much **you have to pay to get** a woman! Rather, it is how **valuable** a woman of **strong character** is in the sight of God and man! “Her price”—her value—“is far above rubies.”

How much are rubies **worth**? Again, I don’t think that is the point! God is not trying to **assign a value in dollars**; He is emphasizing the fact that a woman of strong character and courage **is priceless!** **Clarke writes:** “No quantity of precious stones can be equal to her worth.”

One of the quotes I gave you on the bulletin insert reads: “There is no influence so powerful as that of the mother.” I wonder how many moms really think about and appreciate how valuable **their role is** in society.

Ever hear this phrase, “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world?” What I didn’t realize until I did a little more digging was that that is also the **name of a poem** written by William Ross Wallace who lived in the 1800s. I’m not going to read you the whole poem, but I was struck by this stanza:

*Woman, how divine your mission, here upon our natal sod;
Keep – oh, keep the young heart open, always to the breath of God!
All true trophies of the ages, are from mother-love impeared,
For the hand that rocks the cradle, is the hand that rules the world.*

So what is it that makes this woman so valuable? What is it about her that makes her priceless? That is what we will be looking at next in... **3. The peculiarities of a virtuous woman**

Peculiarities are simply the characteristics or traits that separate her from other women. They are what make her rare...and unique...and valuable. There are a number of them listed here in this passage, we are going to focus on 4 of them.

First, we see that she is ... A. Generous

Vs 20 “She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.” Do you need to be “gifted” to see—and meet—the needs of others? No—you just need to be looking at others and **thinking about their needs**—not your own! The Bible has a lot to say about meeting the needs of the poor.

Deut 15:11 “For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt **open thine hand wide** unto thy brother, **to thy poor, and to thy needy**, in thy land.”

Prov 19:17 “He that hath **pity upon the poor** lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again.”

Prov 22:9 “He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he **giveth of his bread to the poor.**”

I John 3:17 “But whoso hath this world's good, and **seeth his brother have need**, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”

God wants us to be giving; to be generous. **Are you** a generous person? Do you look out for the well-being of others—or just for your own needs? **Phil 2:4** “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” Often times people need **our help**—our time—more than our money.

The virtuous woman is not only generous, she is also B. Gracious

If someone is gracious, they are **kind and courteous**. We see that in vs 26 “She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.”

We'll come back to wisdom in a little bit; for now, I just want to focus on **kindness**. I find it interesting that the verse **does not** say “in her tongue **is occasional** kindness.” Instead, “in her tongue is the **law** of kindness.” The kindness that came from her was **consistent**—it was **constant**—it was as if she operated under the “law” that ‘if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all!’

Too often times we speak in ways that are **not kind**, don't we? Instead of being **courteous and kind** in our speech, we speak with an attitude of “**annoyance**” or “**tolerance.**” Worse yet, there are times that **what we say**—and **how we say it**—is downright **cruel, mean, and almost hateful**—and directed to people **we claim to love!** No wonder **James 3:8** says, “But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.”

We know from Jesus that a problem **with the tongue** is not really a problem **of the tongue!** Instead, it is really a problem of **the heart!** **Luke 6:45** “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the **abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.**”

What is **in our heart** is what affects our tongue. If you want to **speak** with kindness, you need a **kind heart**. The problem is that our hearts are “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” the Bible says in Jer 17:9.

In order **to have** a kind heart, God needs to **give us a new heart!** And when we are born again and become a child of God, God does that very thing! **II Cor 5:17** “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new new creature [meaning creation]: old things are passed away; behold, **all things are become new.**”

Are you a kind person? Does the “law of kindness” control your tongue? Pretty safe to say that if we want our **children to talk** with kindness, we need to be doing it ourselves!

A virtuous woman is generous and gracious. Thirdly, she is C. Goal-oriented

Notice vs 27 “She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.”

To look well to the ways of your household, you have to **plan ahead**. You can't just let things happen—you **prepare for things** that you know **could** happen or **will** happen.

In vs 21, we see her doing that very thing. She is “not afraid of the snow for her household.” Why? Because she **knew winter was coming** and she was prepared for it! But to **be prepared**, you have to have goals and plan ahead.

Maybe I'm reading too much into it, but my guess is that she wasn't **just concerned** about whether or not her family was ready for the **changes of the seasons**. Based on the fact that **she feared God**—we see that in vs 30—I believe she worked on preparing them **for life!**

Looking back on our **child-rearing days**, there are certainly things that my wife and I **could have been—**and **should have been—better prepared** to handle. When you have a child, it is not a mystery that they will become a teenager in 13 years! And yet—even though you know it is coming—you still aren't prepared for it!

Not that 13 is a “magic age,” but the point is that there are certain pressures and temptations that come as your children get older. Many of them can be anticipated—and prepared for—ahead of time. I believe the virtuous woman did that very thing. What about you? Are you looking well to the ways of your household—or are you just letting things happen?

Lastly—and I would argue **most importantly**—the virtuous woman is... D. God-fearing
Look at vs 30 “Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.”

“Favour” here probably means “charm” or “grace;” how she conducts herself. Think of how women in Hollywood stand...and walk...and greet others. They **pretend to be princess-like** in their mannerisms—but the majority of them are **incredibly evil!** The way they behave is **deceitful; it is a façade**—and done for show!

“...beauty is vain” means it does **not last**. It is a fading, fleeting, and **very temporary**.

We **value appearance** so much, don’t we? But what **does God** value? What is **important to Him**? What will have praise **from Him**? We have the answer right here: “...but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.” By who? By the ones **that matter most**—her children and her husband (vs 28)—and I believe God Himself (vs 30)!

In the little bit of time we have left, I want each of us to consider this question for ourselves: “Why should I fear God?” This woman **received praise** for fearing the Lord. Is that the only reason we should fear God? No; there are a number of reasons and I’m going to quickly share 7 with you.

1) Because God commands you to!

Ecclesiastes 12:13 “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.”

2) Because God will judge you some day!

Ecclesiastes 12:14 “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”

Hebrews 9:27 “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:”

3) Because God has the ability to cast you into hell!

Luke 12:4-5 “And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. ⁵ But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him.”

4) Because it is the beginning of wisdom

Proverbs 9:10 “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.”

5) Because it will keep you from sin

Job 28:28 “And unto man He said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.”

6) Because it will motivate you to trust Christ for the forgiveness of your sins

That’s what happened to the thief on the cross that died alongside Jesus. One of them mocked Christ—but the other did not. **Luke 23:40** “But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?” He obviously feared God—and knew he would soon be meeting God—so he cried out to Jesus for forgiveness. His fear of God and the judgment is what brought him to that point.

7) Because it will cause you to warn others

In Luke 16, we have the account of the rich man in hell. He did not fear God before he died—but he certainly did **after he died**. He had two requests:

- i) He wanted a drop of water placed on his tongue because he was tormented by the flame.
- ii) He wanted his brothers warned “lest they come into this place of torment.”

The virtuous woman feared God—and I just gave you seven Bible reasons why you **should** fear God. The question is, “Do you?” You will someday—but if you wait until after you die, it will be too late!

So what would God have us do in light of His Word this morning? What actions does God want us to take?

1. First to the ***mom's with children*** under the age of 18. I'm not going to ask for a show of hands, but my guess is that if you compare yourselves to the virtuous woman, you feel ***like a failure***—and ***you should*** because you ***are!*** But don't focus on ***your failure***—focus ***on God*** who wants to help you!

God has given you the ***most important task*** in the world—and the most ***impossible*** one! But as I sang earlier, "His ***will*** cannot lead you where His ***grace*** will not keep you!"

God cares for you—and wants to help you. Don't depend on yourself—depend on Him!

2. To the rest of us—and to the Mom's with young children—I want to again ask this question: Do you fear God? You need to! Why?

Because God is holy and hates sin—and you are sinful and will stand before Him some day!