

Be the Man, Find the Woman

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 November 2020

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] Please turn with me to Proverbs chapter 31. And let me pray now for the reading and preaching of God's Word. God, we come before you knowing that we live in a confused world, that we are aware that we are bombarded with conflicting messages about what a man should be, about what a woman should be, about what a husband should be, about what a wife should be.

But these things have implications that stretch well beyond our own personal lives.

They affect society. They affect profoundly those who are in our lives. And Lord, we want to be conformed to your will.

So we come to you humbly. We incline our ears toward you. So address us. Humble us. Humble us. Humble us. convince us.

Convince us. Not only of the truth of your vision, but of its goodness, of its beauty.

[1 : 40] We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Proverbs 31, verses 1 to 31. The words of King Lemuel, an oracle that his mother taught him.

What are you doing, my son? What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vows? Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings.

It is not for kings, O Lemuel. It is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted.

Give strong drink to the one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress. Let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more.

Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy. An excellent wife, who can find?

[2 : 56] She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.

She does him good and not harm all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax and works with willing hands. She is like the ships of the merchant.

She brings her food from afar. She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens. She considers a field and buys it.

With the fruit of her hands, she plants a vineyard. She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong. She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.

Her lamp does not go out at night. She puts her hands to the distaff and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.

[3 : 55] She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet. She makes bed coverings for herself.

Her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them.

She delivers sashes to the merchant. Strength and dignity are her clothing and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed. Her husband also and he praises her.

Many women have done excellently, but you surpassed them all. Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

[5 : 00] Give her of the fruit of her hands and let her works praise her in the gates. This is God's holy and authoritative word. We're in the last chapter of the book of Proverbs.

We've been in this series for a total of 34 weeks and most of the book we've seen is written from the perspective of a father addressing his son. But scattered throughout, we have seen hints that not only the father, but also the mother is responsible for instructing her children in the wisdom of God.

We saw in Proverbs 1.8, Hear, my son, your father's instruction and forsake not your mother's teaching. We saw in Proverbs 6.20, My son, keep your father's commandment and forsake not your mother's teaching.

Interestingly enough, at the conclusion of this book, the author of this section, King Lemuel, relays an oracle that his mother taught him. And the main lesson that she conveyed to King Lemuel is this, a man should give his worth to a worthy woman who fears the Lord.

First, in verses 1-9, she tells King Lemuel what kind of man he should be. And then in verses 10-31, what kind of woman he should marry.

[6 : 25] So let's look at the first section, to be the man. Using her special status as his mother, she implores King Lemuel in verse 2, What are you doing, my son?

There's this affectionate reproach in her tone. What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vows? So the way she addresses her son gets progressively more intimate.

So first, it's just son. And then it's son of my womb, recalling the time before Lemuel's birth, when she was carrying him in her womb. And then third, it's son of my vows, likely referring to the vow that she made before God prior to conception.

In much the same way, Hannah in 1 Samuel chapter 1 makes a vow to God saying, If you will give your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life.

That might be why the king's name is Lemuel, which means belonging to God. If that's the case, then Lemuel was a special son that her mother had dedicated to the Lord even before he was conceived.

[7 : 32] So then this progressively intensifying address to the son shows just how deeply concerned his mother is for her son's welfare. There's perhaps no human being in the world that's more concerned for the welfare of a man than his mother, who loves him, save except the excellent wife we'll get to later.

It would bring her endless sorrow to see her son reduced to folly and shame. And so she warns him in verses 3 to 7 about the dangers of womanizing and over-drinking.

She says in verse 3, Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings. The Hebrew word that is translated strength here is a very versatile word.

It could mean a lot of different things depending on the context. It can refer to a person's wealth as a reflection of someone's fiscal power. It can refer to an army as a reflection of someone's military power.

It can refer also, as it does here, to a man's sexual power. And so Lemuel's mother warns him, Do not give your strength to women. Notice that the word woman is plural.

[8 : 45] This is not a prohibition of a godly monogamous marriage, but a warning against womanizing, consorting with multiple women. Indulging your sexual appetite in sinful ways.

And she gives the reason in the second half of the verse, Because such women destroy kings. Notice that the word king is also plural, indicating that not one king, but many kings have been destroyed by such women.

The king destroyer is not always the mighty army of a foreign kingdom. Often it's the charming adulteress. Israel's history bears this out. Even King Solomon, the sage who wrote much of the book of Proverbs, according to 1 Kings 11, loved many foreign women who were from nations concerning which God had said, You shall not enter into marriage with them.

And as a result, when he was old, when Solomon was old, it says his wives turned away his heart after other gods. The queen mother understands this grave danger.

So she solemnly warns her son, Don't waste your manhood on unworthy woman. And then, in verses 4 to 7, she transitions to warning her son about drinking too much alcohol.

[10 : 06] This seems abrupt, but this is not the first time that the book of Proverbs juxtaposed the seductive powers of women along with the addictive powers of alcohol. Chapter 23 similarly compared red wine that sparkles in the cup to the temptations of an adulteress and warn the son to be wary of their seductive charm.

So Lemuel's mother continues in verse 4, It is not for kings, O Lemuel. It is not for kings to drink wine or for rulers to take strong drink. Picking up on the word kings from verse 3, verse 4 repeats that word two more times and adds the word rulers to emphasize that it is especially unbecoming unbecoming of a king to indulge in wine.

His charge is too great, his command too weighty for him to fritter away his life on woman and wine. Israel's history also bears out this truth that drunkenness is often the undoing of kings.

She gives a more specific reason in verse 5, Lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted. The king is entrusted with executing the righteousness and justice of God.

If the king becomes intoxicated and therefore incapacitated, the people who depend on him, the afflicted, the powerless, whose cost he must champion as the one who has power will be neglected.

[11 : 37] Isaiah chapter 5, 22 to 23 put it this way, woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and valiant men in mixing strong drink who acquit the guilty for a bribe and deprive the innocent of his right.

To the drunkard, his thirst for alcohol becomes a god that he must appease at all costs and everything else gets sacrificed at its altar. If cunning people offer bribes that promise to sustain the king's drinking habits a little while longer, then the king might succumb to that.

If he is too distracted with merrymaking and drinking and getting drunk, he will not attend to the cause of the afflicted. For these reasons, drunkenness, she says, is not for kings.

Rather, it's for the perishing. Verses 6 to 7 say this, Give strong drink to the one who is perishing and wine to those in bitter distress.

Let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more. It's important to note that this is not a policy recommendation.

[12 : 46] It's not saying that kings should give out free beer to people in distress to numb their pain. It's important to understand this in light of the poetic contrast with verses 4 to 5.

Verse 4 says kings should not drink and verse 5 gives a reason lest they forget. Similarly, verse 6 says wine should be left to those who are in bitter distress and verse 7 gives a reason so that they might forget their poverty and misery.

In other words, verses 6 to 7 are less a literal command and more a literary foil, a contrast that highlights why kings should not drink. Forgetfulness induced by drunkenness should be left for those who have no hope at all, those who are trying to forget.

but that's not you, Lemuel. That's what his mother is saying. Especially as a king who should have the faculty, the clarity of mind to execute justice and righteousness, a drunken stupor is unbecoming of him.

The king's mouth instead should be used for something else. It says in verses 8 to 9, open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.

[14 : 06] Drunkenness slurs a person's speech, makes them incoherent, it cripples a person's ability to think. Though this passage addresses the dangers of alcohol specifically, we can apply this general principle to other things in our lives, to any form of diversion that we use, especially addictive diversions we use in order to escape our realities and shirk our responsibilities.

What do you typically do when you procrastinate as a way of coping with stress? What do you do to escape your realities and shirk your responsibilities?

Do you surf the web, scroll through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or the New York Times? Do you watch show after show on Netflix or YouTube or do you play video games that are designed to keep you glued to the screen going after one level after another?

What distractions or diversions in your life delay you from keeping and fulfilling your responsibilities to your family, to your church, to your school, to your work?

That's the point that Lemuel's mother is making. She warns him, if you open your mouth to drink, you will be incapable of opening your mouth to speak on behalf of the voiceless.

[15 : 32] This has been a recurring lesson on leadership throughout the book of Proverbs. One of the main purposes of power is this, defend the powerless.

If you have a voice, you have a responsibility to speak on behalf of the voiceless. If you have influence, you have a responsibility to use that influence on behalf of those who are mute and destitute, poor and needy.

The rich, the self-sufficient, the powerful people already have a voice. People with cultural cachet already have a voice.

They can blare out their agenda on media. They can spend their money to lobby politicians and maybe even bribe them. They have lawyers in their pocketbooks.

They can pull on their relational strings to get an audience with people in strategic posts. But the poor and needy are voiceless. They are powerless to demand respect and command an audience.

[16 : 40] Who will speak up for them? That's the responsibility of those to whom God has entrusted power. Before speaking of the kind of woman that her son should seek to marry, Lemuel's mother tells her son first, be the man.

This is the kind of king you should be. Instead of being preoccupied only with the kind of woman you want to marry, be the kind of man she would want to marry.

And vice versa. If you are a single, this is a good lesson for you to heed. But even if you are married, you should ask yourself, what would it look like for you to be preoccupied more with the kind of spouse you should be rather than with the kind of person you want your spouse to be?

That kind of humility breeds peace and unity in the home. But Lemuel's mother knows that if her son is to succeed, he needs to find a good wife.

Now that brings us to the part of the passage that all of you women were looking forward to with breathless anticipation. I've noticed in recent years that there's a kind of dread that women feel about Proverbs 31, support shared of the excellent wife.

[18 : 11] I think that could be for a number of reasons. I think for some, not many of you here, I think for some it may be because they have assimilated some of our culture's judgments about the Bible's teaching on womanhood.

They wrongly think that the Bible promotes a regressive, even repressive standard for women that they don't want to hear any more of. If that's you, let this passage serve as a corrective.

Remember what I said about the word oracle last week in chapter 30, verse 1. The word oracle in chapter 31, verse 1 is the same word. This is a word from God.

And as citizens of God's kingdom, then we are to let the mold of Scripture shape us rather than being conformed to the cookie-cutter shapes of the woman of this world.

But I don't think that's the only reason. For other women, I think, it's less a doubt about the truth and the goodness of God's word, but more of a discouragement from feeling like they fall short of this glorious standard.

[19 : 16] If that's you, I want to encourage you from the outset. Verses 10 to 31 are written as an acrostic. Verse 10 begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and then verse 11 begins with the second letter and so on all the way through ending with the last letter of the alphabet in verse 31.

In other words, this poem is literally the A to Z of biblical womanhood. It's the textbook, the ideal, which means all women, one way or another, is going to fall short of this.

Imagine that you are painting a portrait of this godly woman. You take a look at this portrait in chapter 31 and then you look at the canvas of your own life as you paint.

There's always going to be adjustments you need to make, but if the painting of your life is based on her, and not on some other woman that you see in the world, then you should be commended.

Let all the ways in which you fall short then drive you to deeper humility and greater dependence on God. Then you will become more and more like her. First, verses 10 to 12 tell us about the excellent wife's worth.

[20 : 36] An excellent wife, who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not harm all the days of her life.

An excellent woman, an excellent wife, who can find? The implied answer is almost no one. That's how rare she is.

She is far more precious than even rare jewels. That's the poetic way of saying that a wife like that is priceless.

You can't place a monetary value on an excellent wife because the jewels are the most precious commodity. If she far exceeds their value, how do you measure that kind of worth?

You can't. She is priceless. Yes. Earlier in Proverbs 3, 13 to 15, Solomon said this about gaining God's wisdom. Blessed is the one who finds wisdom and the one who gets understanding.

[21 : 41] For the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels and nothing you desire can compare with her.

In other words, marrying a wise, excellent wife is like gaining God's wisdom that is more precious than jewels.

And this is why if you desire a wife, you must pray and beg the Lord. Proverbs 19, 14 said very clearly, house and wealth are inherited from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord.

If this passage fills you with longing for such a woman, you should pray, cling to the feet of our Father. Ask Him. The word excellent is the same word that was translated strength early in verse 3 when Lemuel's mother exhorted her son not to give his strength to women who destroy kings.

As I mentioned then that the word excellent means power, strength, or worth. Notably, the same word is used in Ruth chapter 2, verse 1 to describe Boaz as a worthy man.

[22 : 57] And then, again, in chapter 3 of Ruth, Ruth 3, 11 to describe Ruth as a worthy woman. So then, the excellent wife is a worthy wife, the one whom the man should give his worth to.

Interestingly, it's also a word that is often used in military contexts. So it could be rendered strong or valiant, as is the case in some translations. This is consistent with the imagery in verse 11.

The heart of her husband trusts in her and he will have no lack of gain. The word gain here is more literally spoils, the plunder of war.

So then, what's in view here is a warrior wife who brings back the spoils of her battles, from her battles to her husband.

Lemuel's mother is doing this intentionally to elevate wifehood in our minds. Wifeliness is not about weakness, it's not about timidity, it's not about dependence, it's the stuff of wars, heroes, and legends.

[24 : 06] It requires might, grit, courage, and resilience. Earlier, she told Lemuel not to give his strength to women who destroy kings, but now she tells him to find a strong wife who is worthy of his strength.

This woman is a king maker, not a king destroyer. And the first evidence of this woman's preciousness is this, the heart of her husband trusts in her and he will have no lack of gain.

She does him good and not harm all the days of her life. Her husband trusts in her. This is shocking because that expression is rarely used with anyone other than God as the object.

You're not supposed to trust other things, other people besides God. Yet this wife is the rare human being who proves dependable to her husband time and time again.

This wife's worth is explained here in terms of the good she does to her husband because in Genesis chapter 2 verse 18 God gave the woman to be the man's helper.

[25 : 21] This is not to say that the man never helps the woman in marriage. The man too must make many costly sacrifices and love his wife as Christ loved the church.

But there are nevertheless distinct roles. The wife is her husband's helper in a way that the husband is not his wife's helper. Wifeliness has a self-effacing nature.

Look at verse 23. Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. The city gates is where the civic and economic decisions of the ancient world are made.

Where the leading men of the city gather to exchange ideas and make decisions. According to this passage one of the main reasons why this man occupies that prominent seat among the elders of the land is because of his excellent strong and valiant wife.

She is the reason he can hold up his head high among the movers and shakers of his city. He excels because of his excellent wife.

[26 : 41] As Proverbs chapter 12 verse 4 said, an excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rotteness to his bones.

This woman is the crown of her husband. As Winston Churchill, the British prime minister who defeated Hitler and defended Europe's democracy from the spread of fascism, once said, my most brilliant achievement was my ability to persuade my wife to marry me.

I don't think he was joking. Her wife was his crown. He was able to accomplish all he did and garner all the respect and honor he enjoyed because of his wife.

The saying that was popularized in the 1940s to recognize the often unheralded contribution of woman is true. Behind every great man there is a great woman.

Ruth McHugh Bell was born in Jiangsu province in China 1920. She was a daughter of missionaries Nelson and Virginia Bell.

[27 : 54] She enrolled in Wheaton College at the age of 17 and though she had vowed never to marry out of a desire to serve the Lord wholeheartedly, a lanky southern boy named Billy asked her out to go watch Mendel's Messiah together in college.

After that faithful date she told God that it would be an honor to serve God, serve him as Billy's wife. Long before the 1957 evangelistic rally in New York that catapulted Billy Graham to his worldwide fame, long before Graham's travels to 185 countries and territories to preach to around 215 million people live, around 2.2 billion people if you include other media through which he preached.

Long before he was voted into the top 10 of Gallup Poll's most admired men, a record 61 times in a row starting in 1955. Ruth Bell understood that marrying Billy Graham would mean finding her calling in his.

If I marry Bill, I marry him with my eyes wide open. She wrote this in her journal. He will be increasingly burdened for lost souls and increasingly active in the Lord's work.

I will slip into the background. In short, be a lost life, lost in bills. Though she had aspired to be a missionary in Tibet, she surrendered that dream to be her husband's helper.

[29 : 33] That's worth far more than jewels. The two married in 1943, and with Billy Graham traveling for months at a time to preach, Ruth Graham anchored the family and took the lead in raising their five children.

She personally supervised the construction of their mountain homestead in Montreat, North Carolina. When Ruth Bell Graham passed away in 2007, as it says at the end of this chapter, her children rose up and called her blessed.

And her husband also praised her. Her daughter, Ann Graham Lotz, said, quote, without Ruth Graham, there wouldn't have been a Billy Graham. Her husband said, Ruth was my life partner, and we were called by God as a team.

No one else could have borne the load that she carried. She was a vital and integral part of our ministry, and my work through the years would have been impossible without her encouragement and support.

The heart of her husband trusted in her, and he had no lack of gain. She did him good and not harm all the days of her life, and because of this, her husband was known in the gates when he sat among the elders of the land.

[30 : 55] Ruth Bell Graham was an excellent wife. A wife who makes it her calling to do good to her husband, who beams with pride at her husband's accomplishments, who loves her husband, who supports her husband, who counsels her husband, who prays for her husband.

That kind of woman is far more precious essentials. That's the excellent wife's worth.

And then verses 13 to 25 speak of her works. This woman is a hard worker. The word hand is repeated, seven times in this passage, to emphasize her industry and generosity.

Proverbs 24, 33, 34 said this about the foolish sluggard, a little sleep, a little slumber, and a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber and want like an armed man.

But the valiant wife is not like the sluggard. No, she works with willing hands. She puts her hands to the distaff and her hands hold the spindle.

[32 : 24] She does not oversleep like the sluggard. Instead, she is often burning the midnight oil. Verse 15 says she rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household. Verse 18 says her lamp does not go out at night.

If we take these two verses literally, we might wonder whether she ever sleeps. But that's not the point. The point is that she is often up late and often rises early because she is busy working.

As verse 27 says, she does not eat the bread of idleness. She is not idle but industrious. She does not pass time lazily but labors for the good of her husband and her household.

She puts the flourishing of her household above her own comfort. Verse 13 and verse 19 tells us that this wife is involved in making and selling textiles.

She acquires wool and flax and using the distaff to hold the fibers and the spindle to spin the fibers into yarn. And then later she uses that yarn, verse 24, to knit or weave linen garments.

[33 : 34] It says she makes linen garments and sells them. She delivers sashes to the merchant. She is not only involved in the textile industry, she is also involved in commerce and real estate and farming.

Like the ships of the merchant, she purchases and brings her food from afar. Using the money she has earned, she not only buys food, she buys a field which can provide food and drink for the future.

She has foresight. It says she considers a field and buys it with the fruit of her hand, she plants a vineyard. She prepares for the future. It says in verse 21, she is not afraid of snow for her household.

For all her household are clothed in scarlet. Verse 25, to strength and dignity are her clothing and she laughs at the time to come. She is not afraid of tomorrow.

She is not anxious because she has worked hard today in preparation for the future. The way people dressed in the ancient world as they often do today reveals a person's identity, a person's status.

[34 : 43] This woman is clothed in strength and dignity. Clothing fit for royalty. Verse 17 says, similarly, she dresses herself with strength.

That phrase is literally she girds up her loins with strength. Girding up your loin is the ancient equivalent of rolling up your sleeves. She is strong and ready for action.

This woman is a hard worker. Now this text challenges two common misconceptions about the role of woman, the role of wives in particular. On the one hand, some people say that women should never work.

But the Proverbs 31 woman works. She is involved in the textile industry, commerce, real estate, and viticulture. She is creative and resourceful.

She can make things with her hands. She is business savvy. She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. It says in verse 18, she considers a field and buys it.

[35 : 43] It says in verse 16, she's thoughtful and competent. And she's not afraid to get her hands dirty. She plants a vineyard. She's not the kind of delicate woman who can't do any manual labor because of her long manicured nails.

This woman is strong. She's a workhorse. However, we must not swing too far into the other misconception. It would not be accurate to describe the excellent wife as a career woman.

A career woman puts her career first. She prioritizes her career over her family. And that's decidedly not the picture that we see here in Proverbs 31.

Look at how many times the word household is mentioned. Verse 15, she provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.

Verse 21, she's not afraid of snow for her household. For all her household are clothed in scarlet. Verse 27, she looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

[36 : 55] Look at her orientation toward her husband. Verses 11 to 12, the heart of her husband. Her husband trusts in her and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not harm all the days of her life.

Verse 23, her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. In fact, if you look closely, verses 20 to 26, the entirety of it is structured chiasmatically for the purpose of emphasizing verse 23.

The excellent wife opens her hand in generosity. Verse 20, and opens her mouth in kindness. In verse 26, the match. She is not afraid of snow.

Verse 21, and laughs at the time to come. In verse 25, she makes bed coverings for herself. Verse 22, and makes linen garments and sells them.

Verse 24, she does all of this. Why? The goal and effect of all of this is verse 23. Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.

[38 : 06] The excellent wife dedicates her life as her husband's helper. She is not homebound, but she is home-oriented.

Her work is not limited to her household, but that is where her primary allegiance, commitment, lie.

Her household is the primary beneficiary of her strength. life. This is why in Genesis 1 to 3, the man's name is Adam, which means from the ground, and God commissions him to work the ground in Genesis 2, 5.

But the woman's name is Eve, which means mother of all living, and God commissions her to be Adam's helper in being fruitful and multiply and filling the earth and subduing it.

That is why after they sin, God tells Adam, cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life.

[39 : 16] But God tells Eve, I will surely multiply your pain in child bearing. In pain you shall bring forth children. This is why in Titus 2, 3 to 5, says that godly older women are to teach the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind and submissive to their own husbands.

This is why in 1 Timothy 6, 9 to 10, which lists the good works that should characterize a godly woman, the first item on that list is that she has brought up children.

This is why 1 Timothy 2, 15, says that women will be saved through childbearing if they continue in faith and love and holiness with self-control. This is not an isolated idea in one extraneous text of Scripture.

It's a thread that runs through the entire revelation of God. This general division of labor between a man and his wife was not invented by prudish Victorians.

It's a biblical idea, abetted by our very biology. So if we're going to be biblical Christians, we must avoid both extremes.

[40 : 36] Let us not unduly tie up a gifted woman, her creativity and resourcefulness by telling her that she should never do anything besides cooking, cleaning, and raising children.

But also let us not unduly sever the wife from her household and deprive men of strong wives and deprive children of strong mothers.

But while the primary beneficiary of the woman's work is her household, they are not the only beneficiary.

It says in verse 20, she opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. This continues the repetition of the word hand from verse 19. She works hard with her hands in order to earn, but she is not thereafter tight-fisted with her hard-earned money.

She opens her hands in generosity to the poor and needy. And she not only opens her hands in generosity, it says she also opens her mouth with wisdom.

[41 : 42] Verse 26, she opens her mouth with wisdom and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. When she opens her mouth, she does not spew out gossip or idle chatter or folly.

Instead, she speaks wisdom. The teaching of kindness. It's literally the law of love. The word kindness is the word that's translated elsewhere as steadfast love, one of the core attributes of God.

It's the same word that the New Testament renders grace. The law of grace is on her tongue. Colossians chapter 4 verse 6 says this, Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt.

Whenever she speaks, this woman's speech is gracious. Whenever she opens her mouth, she speaks godly wisdom because she knows and fears the Lord. It says in verse 30, charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Groupon ran, I don't know if people still use Groupon. Now, Groupon ran a survey a few years ago to find out how much people spend on average on their physical appearance.

[43 : 04] They found out that American women spend an average of \$3,756 a year. Add that up to, and then it's over a quarter of a million dollars in an average lifetime.

That's a huge sum of money. The numbers are even more staggering if you look at women in Hollywood. Women like Jennifer Aniston and Gwyneth Paltrow, that's how you say your last name, spend quarter of a million dollars on their appearance in one year.

We live in a culture that's obsessed with physical appearance. But notice that in this entire chapter, not once are we told of how this excellent wife looks.

We don't know if she's tall or short, skinny or fat. We know neither the length of her hair or the color of her eyes. Yes, we're told in verse 22 that her clothing is fine linen and purple.

But that detail is provided as evidence of her industry, not of her taste for luxury or preoccupation with physical appearance. This feature of the poem is shocking, especially when you compare it to contemporary ancient Near Eastern literature.

[44 : 25] They tend to fixate on the erotic appeal of women, the poems that praise women in other ancient Near Eastern literature. Lemuel's mother, likely well advanced in age by the time King Lemuel is writing this, knows from experience that charm is deceitful and beauty is vain.

Charm is deceitful because it does not last, does not deliver on what it promises. If you marry a woman for her external beauty, you will learn in time that that beauty fades.

Beauty is vain. It's a fleeting vapor. But a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Because for the wise, wisdom grows with age.

I think folly also grows with age. But for the wise, wisdom deepens with age. And this is the ultimate reason why she is not afraid of snow for her household.

This is why she laughs at the time to come because she fears the Lord. She does not fear the uncertainties of the future because she fears something far greater.

[45 : 46] Because she fears the Lord who takes care of her. Come what may, she says, the Lord is with me. Whom shall I fear?

What future shall I fear? The Lord Almighty is with me. Her fear of the Lord is what is truly praiseworthy. So single men, I want to exhort you, don't fantasize about beautiful woman.

Pray earnestly for a wise woman who fears the Lord because she will surely do you good. Remember Proverbs 11, 22. You should memorize it. Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.

A gold ring is pretty to look at, sure. But what good is it if it's adorning a pig? A beautiful woman is pleasing to look at, sure.

But what good is it if she is a fool who will be like rotteness in your bones? Don't ever marry a trophy wife. A trophy wife is good for nothing but to be stored on a shelf and looked at just like a trophy.

[46 : 59] Of course, nobody says that the wise woman can't also be beautiful. But the wise woman is already rare as it is. So don't say when you meet a God-fearing woman, oh, she's not my type.

God's word says she should be your type. A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Let's be a church that praises women for their wisdom, for their fear of the Lord, and not merely for the way they look.

Let's be a church where women gain attention and respect not because of the way they look, but because of their wisdom. Speaking of praise, verses 28 to 31 conclude this poem by speaking of the excellent wife's wage, her reward, her praise.

It says, There's a wonderful reciprocation going on from the first part of this passage to the end.

this acrostic began with the question, an excellent wife who can find. And it ends with the commendation. Many women have done excellently.

[48 : 40] Same word. But you surpassed them all. Because of his wife, the man was honored at the gates in verse 23. And now this same man praises his wife at the gates in verse 31.

This woman rose to provide for her family in verse 15. And now her family rises up and calls her blessed in verse 28. She spent the fruit of her hands for the sake of her family in verse 16.

And now she receives the fruit of her hands in verse 31. Due to the self-effacing nature of her role, the valiant wife might not get widespread recognition.

But her husband and her children rise up and call her blessed. And there's a note of hope in that relative obscurity also.

Because Jesus teaches us in Matthew chapter 6 verses 1 to 4 that those whose good works are seen and praised by others have already received their reward.

[49 : 46] But that those whose good works are not seen by men will be rewarded by our Heavenly Father. The good that the wife does might not receive the recognition that it deserves.

It might not get the recognition that her husband's good works do. But what is not rewarded here on earth will be rewarded more richly by our Heavenly Father.

And the valiant wife, the worthy wife who fears the Lord lives with that eternal perspective. What man in his right mind would not marry such a woman?

But what fool would marry a woman who cares nothing for the man but only about herself? What fool would marry a woman who would repeatedly cheat on him?

What fool would marry a woman who makes no provision for the future but lives only for instant gratification? What fool would marry a woman who would do no good to him but only harm?

[50 : 53] What kind of a fool would marry a woman who incurs only loss and brings no gain to her household? You know what the answer to that question is? Only our God whose foolishness is wiser than men.

Only our God who chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. Only our God who chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

Only our God who chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Only he would court and betroth himself to such a woman. Because that's exactly what he did. Throughout the Old Testament, God describes himself as the husband or bridegroom of his chosen people.

It says in Isaiah 54 verse 5, For your maker is your husband. God says to his people in Hosea chapter 2 verse 19, And I will betroth you to me forever.

[52 : 00] Though we had only been a foolish woman with no potential or promise, God repeatedly courts us despite our unfaithfulness. And in his final overture, Jesus Christ, the Son of God himself, comes to redeem us, his bride.

It says in Ephesians 5, 25 to 27, Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Jesus, the wisdom of God, paid the price of our folly on the cross. And it's by this scandalous grace, this wonderful folly of Christ crucified, that we are saved.

In and of ourselves, we do not have the power to be the kind of man or the kind of woman we should be. But when we trust in Christ and submit ourselves to him as our Lord, as our husband, he sanctifies us.

And he will one day present us to himself as a bride without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Please take a moment to reflect on this truth.

[53 : 36] How is the Lord, your bridegroom, calling you to greater allegiance and submission to him? As you ask yourself that question, take a few moments and then we're going to respond together by...