

The A-Z of a Godly Woman

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles and we're going to read together in, as I said, the book of Proverbs and the very last chapter. Pretty near the middle of the Bibles and after the Psalms and before Ecclesiastes where we were this morning.

And Paul has been doing a little series in parts of the book of Proverbs. And last week we looked at the first half of chapter 31 or the first portion of it.

Which we're told are the words of King Lemuel, whoever he was. And the words are an oracle that his mother taught him.

And I think, and Paul thinks, that that probably applies to the whole chapter. So this is still, I suppose, advice to a young man who's to become king. Not about his own behavior, as it was last week.

But on the very important matter of finding his life's partner. So there may be some people like that in the audience this evening.

[1 : 0 5] And you might like to pay attention. Whether you are looking to find or looking to be found. There's something here, I think, for everyone. An excellent wife, who can find?

She's 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's like the ships of the merchant. She brings her food from afar. She rises while yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.

She considers a field and buys it. With the food of her hands, she plants a vineyard. She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.

[2 : 0 6] 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. She's not afraid of snow for her household.

For all her household are clothed in scarlet or double thickness, as the footnote says. 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, of loving kindness, is on her tongue.

[3 : 0 9] She looks well to the ways of her household. And doesn't eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed. And her husband also.

And he praises her. Many women have done excellently. But you surpass them all. Charms, deceitful, and beauty is vain.

But a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands. And let her works praise her in the gates.

Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Amen. Amen. Well, good evening. And please turn in your Bibles to the passage that Willie read for us earlier.

Proverbs 31. Do please have that open as we think about this second half of the chapter. We're looking at the first half last week, as Willie mentioned. And looking at the continued words of King Lemuel's mother.

[4 : 1 5] Words that she taught him. Now, we read a chapter like this. And we might perhaps think that it presents the idealistic woman.

An impossible standard. And some might answer the question posed in verse 10 by saying, no one. An excellent wife? Who can find?

No one. Some might say that. But that seems to me an unlikely response, don't you think? Why would Lemuel's mother pose that question and then go on to great lengths to describe the excellent wife?

She wants Lemuel to go and find a wife just like she's describing. Such a woman exists. She's just warned him, hasn't she? About the wrong sort of woman.

As we saw last week. She gave him a stinging rebuke in verses 1 to 9. Don't look for the sort of woman she says in chapter 31 verses 1 to 9.

[5 : 17] Avoid that sort of woman. And rather, here's the sort of woman you ought to be looking for. And she goes on to detail that from verse 10 to the end of the chapter.

It is not an impossible task. This isn't some sort of imaginary perfect woman. She is a role model, certainly. A high standard, yes.

But, as Bruce Waltke argues, this is not some unattainable person, but rather an example to follow. This is the sort of woman you're to seek out, and if you're a man, to marry.

And if you're a woman, this is the sort of woman to be like. She is primarily a wise woman. Note verse 30, the penultimate verse.

This is a woman who fears the Lord. That is the sort of woman this chapter is talking about, and that sort of woman is to be praised. And remember, that is the key note through the whole book of Proverbs.

[6 : 21] The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And here is what a woman who fears the Lord looks like. This is a virtuous example.

And it's not here to crush you. You could read it in such a way as to feel crushed, couldn't you? But that is not its purpose. It is not here to crush you.

Rather, it's here as an example for us, a standard to strive for, and with God's grace and help to see flourishing in our church. And in fact, I think we have a room full with many such women here tonight.

Just look around, and there are women who match this description all around us. And we give thanks to God for that. Kevin DeYoung, writing about this little section here, he says, We do not want women to be deflated every time they come to the dreaded Proverbs 31 woman.

Instead, they ought to be encouraged by the picture of a woman exercising all her physical, mental, and entrepreneurial powers by serving, with a broad array of virtues, her husband and her household.

[7 : 32] And Bruce Waltke writes that this valiant wife has been put in our Bibles as a role model for all Israel for all time. Wise daughters aspire to be like her.

Wise men seek to marry her. And all wise people aim to incarnate the wisdom that she embodies, each in his own sphere of activity.

So that is our task this evening. As we listen to King Lemuel's mother, let's seek to apply it in those ways. But the primary application is really going to be aimed at younger men.

There's quite a few in this room tonight. So this is particularly for you. So listen up, sharpen your ears, and pay attention. This section, like last week, is addressed to a young man seeking to steer him well.

And this section, in terms of finding a good wife. So pay attention. But also to younger women aspiring to marriage. There's a lot to note, and much to learn here for you as well.

[8 : 39] So we'll think about this section in three parts, as it describes the excellent wife, in terms of her value, her activities, and then her praise. So look at verses 10 to 12, where we see the godly woman, the godly wife's value.

So Lemuel's mother says this, 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. Such a woman, says the queen mother, is valuable, and far more precious than jewels.

And the value from jewels comes not just from their beauty, but from their scarcity. There is a limited supply, and they're hard to come by. Therefore, they are valuable.

In the same way, Lemuel is going to have to search for this excellent wife, like we go searching for jewels and gold and silver. He seems to have found his way easily enough to the wrong sort of

woman.

[9 : 54] Look back at verse 3 of the same chapter. He seems to have got himself in the wrong place with the wrong woman plenty of times. But a more concerted and deliberate effort is required here to find the excellent wife.

And the fundamental reason for the scarcity of such a woman is because of what we read there in verse 30. This is a woman who fears the Lord.

That one fact alone rules out for Lemuel, and for any of you here tonight, quite a lot of women. Take the female population of Glasgow and exclude those who do not fear the Lord.

You're left with a much smaller number than you started with. If you're a student, think about all the female students in your university and rule out all those who do not fear the Lord. What you're searching for is actually quite a small number of people amongst a big city.

If you're looking for a wife, then do not look beyond the family of faith. That is the consistent message of the whole Bible. Willie, in his book *Aspects of Love*, makes this comment.

[11 : 14] A marriage partner, according to the Bible, is to be first of all a helper for your service of God's kingdom, not a hinderer. There is no middle way. A spouse will either help or hinder your spiritual life.

And you must be real about that. Many a bloke has been led down a perilous path by a pretty face and flattering eyes and many a girl by a dazzling guide to the regret and sometimes ruin of both.

That is why Paul says, do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Now what Paul is saying there is broader than just marriage, but it certainly includes marriage.

Do not be yoked with unbelievers. But it's not just her scarcity. It's also her character that's valuable, as we'll see as we look on.

She fears the Lord. That's the fundamental thing. But she also uses her strength, her ability, her wisdom, her valor to totally and selflessly serve others.

[12 : 16] She is a precious woman. Verses 11 and 12 detail her value in relation to her husband. Her husband trusts her deeply.

Notice that it says the heart of her husband trusts her. And we thought about what the heart means in the Bible and in Proverbs in previous weeks. It's a reference to the very core of our being.

The seat, not only of our emotions and our intellect, but our wills. This man deeply trusts his wife with everything that he has. She is highly valued by him and she in turn does him good, not harm.

The man married to this sort of woman will be blessed and helped, not beaten down, not hempecked.

This woman does not hold her husband down under her thumb. Proverbs 12, verse 4 says this, An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rotteness to his bones.

[13 : 26] You see, a spouse should edify and build up the other. An excellent wife will build up her husband and speak kind words of him in private and in public and speak well of him to others in public.

She does him good. And the same goes for husbands as well, speaking well of their wives and speaking kindly. And a woman like this is so valuable, so precious, says Graham Goldsworthy, that a wife like this is sufficiently rare as to require a diligent search.

You must look well. So, gents, if you're a young man here looking for marriage, you ought to be diligent and discerning.

Listen again to verse 30. Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Now, most young men will have beauty and charm at the very top of their list of criteria as they look for a wife. Don't do that, says Proverbs 31.

[14 : 40] Those things, it says, are fleeting. They will fade. And there are many other aspects to consider. But as an aside, don't go too far the other way either.

Beauty and attraction aren't unimportant. Just flick through the Song of Songs. But the point here is you must look beyond beauty and charm.

That's the point in 31 here. Look beyond mere beauty and charm. Well, such a wife like this is valuable and rare.

So, we're to be diligent and discerning. But let's look on to the middle section which brings much color to the Queen Mother's description of the excellent wife. we've seen her value.

Well, now let's look at her activities. This is from verse 13 to verse 27, the big middle section. And it falls roughly in two halves. First, thinking about her work, verses 13 to 18.

[15:43] And then, her standing in the community from verse 20 to 27. So, notice first her work. this is an industrious woman.

Look at verse 13. She seeks wool and flax and works with willing hands. Now, one writer, we're quite distant from these processes, aren't we, about getting wool and flax. But one writer details what that involves. It says, the wool had to be weighed, combed, and washed. After the flax had been pulled out, it had to be soaked in water and then dried. Pieces of bark and wood were removed. The fibers removed were pulled by crooked blunt hooks to split and arrange them. Short fibers were removed as well. It was then ready as linen thread to be used for making clothes.

That's quite a lot of work, isn't it? It's quite involved. But note the word willing there. End of verse 13. She works with willing hands.

[16:47] Literally, glad palms. These are happy hands, happy at work. That is her frame of mind, her posture, her attitude in her work.

No hint of resentment here. No moaning, no complaining, but glad, willing work. Look on to verse 14. She is like the ships of the merchant.

She brings her food from afar. She rises while it's yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens. Now, we don't need to read this too literally.

It wouldn't be especially good news come midsummer in Scotland, was it? It would be up at 3am to beat the sun. But you get the idea. This is an industrious woman.

She works hard. And one writer makes this comment, and this is especially pertinent, I think, for those of us in the parent category.

[17:46] He makes this comment. The keynote throughout this chapter is industry. Look at all the work she gets through. Where did she learn all this?

One does not suddenly develop this in a vacuum. It needs training. And one is obliged to conclude that this kind of training is often at a discount in our modern homes.

Here it may be is a word to young girls and it asks, how do you do at home? Do you help with the washing up, the cleaning, the chores, the cooking?

Or when you go to other homes, does it occur to you to offer help? Where's the word for parents? Are we training our children, our daughters? I observed recently someone who clearly had been raised in such a home where such training did take place.

She was a guest at someone's home after the meal without asking, just cracked on with the dishes. What a blessing to those hosts. And if you're a bloke and you spot a girl like that, don't hang about.

[18:56] But parents, I include myself in this category. How are we training our children and our daughters in particular? Will our children be able to manage a house, prepare meals, clean, manage their finances, be good employees, willing to work hard?

Will your children be known for those things when they leave your house? It's worth pondering and find those who do it well and see how they do it. But it's not just a woman who works hard on the home, is it?

Derek Kidner says that this chapter shows us the fullest flowering of domesticity, which is revealed as no petty and restricted sphere, and its mistress is not a nobody.

This is not painting the picture of your typical 1915 American housewife. This chapter paints a picture of a wife who is deeply involved in public commerce, yet in a way which takes nothing from her home life either.

Look at verse 16 and following. She considers a field and buys it. With the fruit of her hand she plants a vineyard. She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.

[20:15] She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. This is a shrewd businesswoman. She considers a field.

She does her due diligence. Is this the kind of field that's going to grow vines well? Does it need much clearing out? What's the aspect? Where's the sunshine? She obtains as much knowledge as she can about vineyards and finds a good field and gets to the hard work of planting the vines.

Verse 24. She makes linen garments and sells them. She delivers sashes to the merchants. This is a woman who's adding to the family economy.

She's working hard. Verse 27. She looks well to the way of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. this woman is extremely busy.

With so many irons in the fire it would make us suppose that she would hardly have time to think of others. But no. She stretches her hands out to the poor and needy and fulfills a ministry of compassion towards them.

[21 : 27] Look at verses 19 and 20. She puts her hands to the distaff not quite sure what that is. The commentators have no idea. But presumably it's some sort of household chore helping implement.

She puts her hand to the distaff and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hands to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. You see the very same hands that are hard at work providing for her own family are the same hands that reach out to those in need and brings help. This is a woman rich in compassion not just to those in her immediate household but those in the wider community. She's able to help and care for them as well.

The idea of me time would I suggest be anathema to this woman. The sort of woman commended by the Queen Mother here is not a self-centered introspective type but rather one who is servant-hearted looking always to the needs of others both her home and in the wider community. And so we are to see this woman as an example to follow. Here is what a wise woman a woman who fears the Lord looks like. Wise daughters aspire to be like her.

[22 : 52] Wise men seek to marry her. And all wise people aim to incarnate the wisdom she embodies each in his own sphere of activity. And we are being shown here a glad willingness to work hard both within the home and outside the home.

So if you are a young woman here tonight are you willing to work hard? Are you prepared to do that? sacrificing self to serve others?

And if you are a man are you looking for someone to potentially marry? Well start here. Observe those who are industrious. Observe which women are making the best use of their time and talents to work hard to do so willingly and in the service of others.

Watch and see which women go out of their way to chat with the new visitor or the older saints after the service is finished. Watch that. Watch and see which students gladly give up some of their plentiful free time to serve young families in the church and older saints.

Watch that. Watch and see who is diligent in their studies or their work. Those are things to look for if you are looking to marry.

[24 : 17] That is the first thing we see in terms of her activities. This is an industrious entrepreneurial hardworking woman. Look on to the second half of this middle section. We've seen her hard work but notice her standing in the community from verse 20.

Her husband is known in the gates where he sits among the elders of the land. Strength and dignity are her clothing and she laughs at the time to come.

She opens her mouth of wisdom and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. Her husband is well thought of. She is therefore a great blessing to those around her.

She influences others for the better it seems. It's often said and forgive the sporting analogy but it's often said that great players the great players they will influence all those around them in the team so that they all perform better.

A great player makes others perform better and so it is I think with an excellent wife she will enable her husband to over realize his potential and as I look around at the excellent women in this room their husbands have definitely over performed I count myself in that category he'll be a better man than he was before because of the influence of his wife this sort of woman is known for her strength and for her dignity verse 25 that is the clothing that matters she clothes herself with strength and dignity and she has a healthy perspective on life she laughs at the time to come it's an interesting phrase that one isn't it she laughs at the time to come but she is unafraid isn't she of what may come the future is not a source of great anxiety to her actually does one actually to laugh at what's to come this is a woman who fears the

[26 : 22] Lord who trusts him who knows that he is sovereign she knows that God is in control and that he can be trusted through all the changing scenes of life the future to us is totally out with our control but such a woman knows the Lord and she can laugh at the future she is therefore a calming steadying influence in the rush of life not panicked but trusting and dignified she has an easy laugh there's a lightness to her spirit a joy in the midst of life's troubles and hardships it's not so there won't be sorrows but even in those sorrows there is a lightness and a joy and notice her

words we've thought about this in recent weeks haven't we as well our words this is not a woman marked by her gossip but rather by her wisdom verse 26 she opens her mouth of wisdom and the teaching of kindness literally loving kindness the Lord's loving kindness is on her tongue you see there is a wisdom there is a woman there is a wisdom that your family and your friends need that will only come from a heart that can laugh at the future because it fears the Lord that's the sort of woman that this chapter is describing a woman confident in the

Lord's sovereignty and that all things are in his hands there's so much more we could say isn't there but those are some of the marks of the woman who fears the Lord these are the marks that King Lemuel's mother was wanting him to grapple with and understand and look for such a woman is hard-working industrious caring generous unafraid of the future wise that is the kind of woman you should strive to be again it's not talking about perfection but rather here are the traits that you would expect to observe in a godly woman who fears the Lord and every woman will be different it's not a call for clones no one's the same but I'm thankful to God that we are part of a church that is full of women like this there are many women around this room who fulfill these words and I'm glad to be married to a woman like that too

I promise I wouldn't have said that but I had to and so given that it is right and fitting this poem ends where it does with praise for the godly wife for the godly woman look at verses 28 to 31 we've seen her value her activities but finally her praise firstly by her family verses 28 and 29 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 this is a woman who blesses her family and her children and her husband they are all reaping the benefits of her godly life her children rise up and call her blessed her husband praises her Tim Keller makes the observation he says this it is sometimes said that men are not as emotionally affirming and do not express affection and praise as well as women he might possibly be on something there but he goes on to say that may be true in a given culture or for men of a certain temperament but it's never right you see men we ought to praise our wives and verse 29 tells us even what to say so why don't you buy your wife some flowers and have this note included in the bouquet many women have done excellently but you surpassed them all praise your wife she's worthy of your praise

C.S. Lewis points out beautifully in his little book on the Psalms that praise is not merely the expression of joy but rather it's the consummation of joy a joy isn't fully enjoyed until it comes to expression and praise and so you're not fully enjoying the blessings of a godly wife until you can express your joy in praise so use your words praise your wife thank God for her and children praise your mother articulate to her all the things that you're thankful for consider all the sacrifices she's made for you the sacrifices you know about and the many others you don't and that goes for anyone of any age praise your mother but it's not just her family the wider community praise her too look on to the very last verse give her of the fruit of her hands and let her works praise her in the gates that is the place the sort of central place in the town where folk would gather this is the central community space let her in other words receive the recognition that is rightly due to her it is right to recognize and celebrate women like this it is right in the community of God's people to uphold those who are worthy of praise it is good to point out those who set an example and to praise them that is a good thing to do and C.S.

Lewis again he says if we do not admire what is praiseworthy we shall be stupid insensible and great losers and what is praiseworthy prophets 31 tells us is a godly wife and so we must praise such women so if you're a young man here tonight seek out this sort of woman a woman like this will provide the foundations for a godly family which will bring great blessings to the church and to all of society if you're a young man or not even so young man but you're looking to be married then open your eyes look around you here tonight there are many women who meet this description so take the lead take a deep breath and ask her for a coffee but don't take her to

[33 : 31] Starbucks take her somewhere nice an excellent wife who can find well open your eyes notice those women who fear the Lord she is more valuable than the most precious of this world's treasures so seek her and if you know women like that cherish them and praise God for them well let's pray shall we as we wrap up father we thank you that your word brings great wisdom for all of life for every aspect we can think of and we thank you for these wise words as we think about marriage and particularly about the sort of person to marry so Lord help us together to praise what is worthy and we thank you for all the excellent women that we know in our own lives we thank you for them and help us together as a church to honour such women for we ask it in

Jesus name Amen