

**Wisdom That Works: Dealing with People
Women Who Fear the Lord
Proverbs 31
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Happy Mother's Day! I'm skipping ahead in our study of Proverbs, because it is a very special day, focusing on mothers. But this message is not just for mothers, this day is relevant to all of us... some of you are mothers, others will be mothers, some are married to mothers or will marry mothers, but all of us have mothers and our lives have been impacted by mothers.

We have been asking the question, Which way are you going? What road are you on in life, because all of us are on a road that will lead to life or to death, and a critical factor on our journey is this issue of parenting. We see it right at the beginning of Proverbs 1:8, "**Hear my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching.**" Parenting matters, and today, especially today, the message for mothers is... your voice matters, your influence matters. It's huge!

On another mother's day we can look at the influence of mothers in the Bible. It's a fascinating study, especially when you look at the history of Israel's leaders and their kings. You know they had a few good kings and many bad kings right? The Bible actually identifies the mothers of many of these kings, and the good kings had mothers who feared the Lord, and in every case the bad kings had mothers who did not fear the Lord. I'm not holding Moms responsible but... Mothers have a huge influence for better or for worse, not just on their families but on nations and on history.

Throughout the book of Proverbs we will see these two voices calling out to get our attention. The woman named Folly and the woman named Wisdom. Two voices that call out to us even today. **Which one are you listening to?** Our text today is Proverbs 31, it is the climax of this incredible book of wisdom. It is the voice of a specific woman, the mother of King Lemuel who wrote down what his mom told him, and a poem about a mother and a wife who fears the Lord.

For many women, this passage has haunted and terrified them. They see it as an impossible standard. We don't want to discourage anyone today, especially moms who have a difficult assignment in a fallen world where sin makes everything harder. What we do want to do is affirm the critical role that moms play in our lives, our families, and our culture. The Bible sets the bar high, not to discourage us, but to inspire us. And whatever difficulties you may be facing or have faced as a mom or a potential mom, God knows your situation, you are loved, and your voice matters... whatever has happened, there is hope. A woman who fears the Lord can change the world. And men, you need to listen because you have a part to play in this as well. Your influence and impact on the world around you is going to be significantly impacted by the influence of the women, the mother, the wife, the daughters in your life.

So as we turn to Proverbs 31, our focus is on mothers, but our text reveals 10 traits that can change the world, traits that can be true of all of us, and impact the road we are on and the road that those we influence are on, for life or for death.

10 traits of a woman who fears the Lord...

1. She gets our attention. 31:1-2

I love this verse! I can't get the picture of a Jewish mother from New York out of my mind. "Hey, What are you doing! Yes... You, my son, the one I gave birth to, the one who is the product of my wedding vows... You! Are you listening to me? What are you doing!"

Moms are not afraid of anyone, even when one of their children becomes a king. "I don't care what title they give you... I'm your mother and you need someone to call you out, what are you doing?"

We need people like this in our lives! People who will have the courage to get our attention. A woman who fears the Lord gets our attention because she is not controlled by the fear of man. Fear of man is what keeps us from speaking

out when something needs to be said. So, moms, this is part of being a mom, we need it! We appreciate you getting our attention, we apologize that sometimes you have to raise your voice to get our attention. We all need people in our lives who will ask us...What are you doing! If you don't have people like that in your life, you are in big trouble!

Because we don't see what we don't see. That's part of trait #2

2. She tells it like it is. 31:3-9

Moms see stuff that no one else can see, right? It's like they have Mom goggles on. The rest of us are oblivious or we might sense that something isn't right, but moms can nail it on the head. "Here's your problem!"

King Lemuel's mom goes right for the jugular. Two major temptations for men of power. Women and drinking. She is not criticizing women as much as she is criticizing the king for giving away his strength to women who he shouldn't be giving it to. That's what will destroy him. It destroyed Solomon who wrote many of these proverbs. The Law of Moses clearly said to have only one wife and to be faithful to her, even for the king. Yet Solomon had over 300 wives and 700 concubines. That's 1,000 women who looked to Solomon for strength. How did that happen to him? With all that wisdom, how could he have thought that was a good idea? Maybe his mother did not have the courage of King Lemuel's mother. Maybe she didn't fear the Lord enough to confront her son and say, My son, what are you doing?!

We don't see what we don't see...this is why we need people in our lives who will tell it like it is. Who will get our attention and say things we may not want to hear, but they do it because they fear the Lord more than they fear men.

Do you fear the Lord? Who is it in your life that needs you to get their attention? Who do you need to approach in love, but tough love and say, "What are you doing?" It doesn't matter how important, successful or powerful they are... they don't see what they don't see. If you love them, then be like a mom, a mom who fears the Lord, get their attention and tell it like it is.

Now, we also need to be careful when we go around exhorting, reproofing and rebuking people. You earn the right to do this in people's lives. We need to examine our own lives and make sure that we are on the good way, get the logs out of our own eyes, before we start pointing out all the splinters in others. You don't have to be perfect, but you need to have trusted people who know you, who you have invited to reprove you.

So these next 6 traits set the stage to give us the permission to practice 1 & 2.

Third trait of a woman who fears the Lord...

3. She is trusted by her husband. 31:10-12

Now these next 22 verses, 10-31 are actually a poem in Hebrew. Each verse begins with a successive letter from the Hebrew alphabet. It's like when you take someone's name and use each letter to call out a trait you want to highlight or compliment. This woman is everything from A-Z!

It's not saying..., "who can find her? Like good luck!" No, it's saying an excellent wife, a woman who fears the Lord, is an awesome find. Men, you who found this kind of woman, you struck Gold. Better than gold, she is more precious than jewels.

Other translations for excellent wife are...noble, strong, able, valiant, capable. These are husbands who are all part of the married up club! I'm definitely in that club.

When a wife and mother fears the Lord, it causes her husband to trust in her, his heart trusts in her, its deep. He knows she isn't looking first and foremost to him for strength, he knows that would be a bad idea... because he is human. He knows that her strength comes from her faith in God. Her strength is not because she is perfect, none of us are, but because her life is not centered on her husband, her kids, or her performance but on the Lord. So when mom has her goggles on and gets our attention and tells it like it is, we listen! We take it to heart, we know she has what is good for us in mind, she has the right and the trust to speak truth into our lives. **If you fear the Lord**, you will have this right and this responsibility in the lives of others too.

Trait #4

4. She is a hard worker. 31:13-19

Proverbs has a lot to say about hard work and its value. But I don't know if anyone exemplifies hard work better than a mother who fears the Lord. They clothe their family, feed their family, keep the family schedules, late nights, early mornings. I don't know how moms do it all. It's not the kind of work that gets lots of recognition. Its work that blesses others, it builds trust, it honors God. Thanks Mom! (what about you?)

5th trait...

5. She is compassionate. 31:20

These are mom goggles again. Most of us are so consumed with our own stuff we don't see the needs of others around us. She herself is not poor, we can see from the text she is engaged in business, buying real estate, selling merchandise, she has fine clothing. She is a woman of means, but she is not consumed by her means. She takes the initiative she opens her hand, she reaches out to those in need. When we fear the Lord, we know that we are simply stewards. We brought nothing into the world and we will take nothing out of it. Everything we have is from God, he gave and he can take away. He has given it to us to be good stewards of it. And part of being a good steward is being compassionate. I can be so driven at times that I don't see the need around me. I need my wife and her mom goggles and her courage to get my attention and tell it like it is, she helps me be a better steward! I'm grateful to have someone like that in my life.

6th trait...

6. She is ready for tough times. 31:21-22

Life has its ups and downs, its good times and bad times. A woman who fears the Lord knows this and is ready for either one. She takes care of others, see how she looks after her household. But she also takes care of herself. Sometimes moms are so focused on meeting other's needs that their own needs are neglected. But moms, you need to hear this... its OK for you to do something special for yourself as well. V22, she makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple. That's the good stuff! She's ready for hard times, but she can enjoy the good times as well.

7th trait...

7. She is a blessing to her husband. 31:23

Her husband is a leader, in the community, in the church. He is known and respected. But look who he married! She's the rock star, but her success does not compete with his. A capable woman who fears the Lord is the greatest blessing to any man. If a man does not see this, he won't last very long in any place of influence. I doubt if there have been any men who have had a lasting influence for good on the world who did not have a woman of strength and character beside him. We all know that in a godly marriage we sharpen one another, we strengthen one another. For those who are not married or are not in a godly marriage, this is perhaps one of the greatest struggles and losses that you feel in life. It's not good for a man or a woman to be alone. Marriage is a crucible that will grind us to powder in order to make us into something spectacular, if both spouses fear the Lord. If not, you still must fear the Lord, and trust him to use your faithfulness in your own life and in others.

8th trait.

8. She is filled with godly wisdom. 31:24-27

Women who fear the Lord, this excellent wife... She does so much...

She works hard with her hands v.24

She is adorned with character, v.25, strength and dignity

She is appropriate in her speech, v.26. she gets our attention and tells it like it is, but the woman who fears the Lord also knows that having a **tongue** is a huge responsibility and she is careful. She may not get it right all the time, none of us do, but wisdom and kindness is the right approach.

She is attentive to her home. V.27.

I'm sure you could add many more things to this list. No mom is perfect, probably not even this mom in Proverbs 31, but a mother who fears the Lord deserves to be recognized.

Brava mom! Thank you mom! Can we say thank you and bless our moms who do all these things for us?

Friends, these last 2 traits are very important, but they are fruit, they are the result of these other traits and the rest of us play an important part in them.

Trait #9

9. She is admired by her family. 31:28-29

Right now, some women might be feeling a little defeated. Maybe your standards haven't been this high, maybe you haven't gotten through to your husband at this level, maybe you don't feel strong. This passage isn't meant to

discourage us, it is meant to inspire us. There is always hope and that hope is found in the fear of the Lord, not in meeting some kind of perfect standard of performance. God sees you as precious, he values you deeply. We mean it when we say you are loved! You are deeply loved by God and this is where you find strength to keep growing even in difficult circumstances.

Right now there might be some men who may be feeling, "I haven't trusted and valued and affirmed my wife as she deserves." Proverbs has a lot to say to men, especially husbands and fathers, and we will look more at that. But this one is relevant to today. Think about the meaning of the word husband, it actually has a meaning of cultivating, tilling, nurturing for growth. If you are a husband, here is a big part of your job; to cultivate and nurture your wife.

Your lifetime impact on your wife should be this...that because of your cultivation, your being a husband..., that your wife is becoming more and more of all that God created her to be. How does a husband do that? In part by praising her. Her children rise up and call her blessed, they speak respectfully to her. They tell her why she is so special and why they admire her. Where did they learn that? They learn it from Dad who praises her. Ok, let's stop for a minute. I know for many homes, I have just exposed a deep wound. This blessing mom and praising our wives doesn't happen as much as it should and over time the pain and wounds and guilt and shame run deep and make it hard to change course. If you are feeling any of that, you are not alone. Let's decide today that starting right now we will try to love better, to let Christ live in us and through us to love one another better.

Praise is a key word in these final verses of Proverbs. Three times it says a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. A husband cultivates his wife by setting an example of praise in the home. No putdowns, no fault finding, no insults. Not even neutral silence. "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all" is not in the Bible! Silence is not an option! God wants to fill our homes and our churches with this beautiful wisdom, where men are not passive but overtly, intentionally cultivating the excellence of their wives, and where those women are thriving.

What does your wife excel at? Tell her, tell her in front of the kids, tell her in front of others. Men, this is not a pep talk. This is part of the gospel, that by believing in Jesus as the son of God that we would have life in his name, that life would flow from us to others. Cultivating your wife, cheering her on, helping her become magnificent... that's part of your job. Men, we need to lean into this as much as anything else we are doing.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, we saw that in chapter one. Fearing the Lord is seeing God for who he truly is. And if we are struggling with praising our wives, she is not the problem. **We are!** This is our job. And the reason we are struggling is most likely a spiritual one. We don't fear God as we should. Seeing God for who he is should change the way we treat others especially our wives. So men, and kids, let's repent of our silence and the sin of withheld love.

He put you with your wife because he loves her. He put you with her to be a blessing to her. Just let's start doing it. And finally trait #10

10. She is honored by the Lord. 31:30-31

Charm and beauty are not bad, they simply are not what makes a great woman. The fear of the Lord, seeing God and worshipping God for who he truly is, it changes your life, it brings wisdom and knowledge, God will do all the things in your life we talked about last week from Proverbs 2. Lean into this fear of the Lord, listen, ask, seek him and Wisdom will come into your heart, it will guard and protect you, you will walk in the way of the good. God honors that. He honors faithfulness, he honors moms who fear the Lord. And so do we.

Thanks Mom.

Let's pray.