

Proverbs 31: A Woman's Perspective
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Every Mother's Day pastors all over America pull out their rusty—I mean trusty—sermons on the Proverbs 31 woman. Many women walk out of these services with a smile on their faces and a rose in their hands. What others don't see is the hurt and frustration in their hearts. Once again they have been compared to “Super Woman” and found sorely lacking.

Who was this woman anyway? She worked day and night—eagerly. She provided warm clothes for her family and servants. She had an outside business. The minute a pastor would begin to expound on the virtues of the Proverbs 31 woman I was sunk. There was no way I could ever measure up to the perfection of this chapter of Scripture. And pastors always spoke about her as if they were encouraging me, and scores of other women who, like myself, had no gift or talent for household management.

I became frustrated to the point that even when I was planning to do something, if my husband even mentioned it, a spirit of rebellion would flare up and I wouldn't do it. Even more frustrating was when I did actually get things done, and I thought my husband was going to be so proud of me, and he instead would notice the one thing I hadn't done.

So whenever anyone would talk to me about the Proverbs 31 woman I would just throw my hands up and give up trying because I knew that I would never be able to meet that standard. It got to the point where I was avoiding reading Proverbs 31, thus I was avoiding a part of God. Yet, everything anyone had ever said about this chapter of the Bible left me condemned.

I hated the Proverbs 31 woman.

Still, at I times, I found myself wondering: *was I being overly critical of the sermons on this chapter.* Was I being exceedingly rebellious to God's purposes for me as a woman? I didn't know, but I realized that I had to find out. If I was going to grow as a woman of God I had to stop avoiding Proverbs 31 and face it—head on—regardless of what convictions it might bring to my stubborn nature.

So one day, in a state of half dread, half excitement I opened Proverbs 31. I asked God to give me a new revelation of His Word. I determined that no matter what, whatever *I* was directed to do by this chapter I would do it. Then I read.

I didn't have to read far before I was struck by my first revelation. Verse 1 says: ***The sayings of King Lemuel—an oracle his mother taught him.*** Wait a minute, I thought, this in not a teaching for women at all, this is a teaching to a man. So what was it the man was supposed to learn? And why was this never mentioned from the pulpit? I read on. First his mother told him about being a king, about avoiding drink and wayward women. Second she shared with him how to be a man or honor. Third, she spoke to him of marriage.

Hm, now things were getting interesting. Verses 10 and 11 became to me the two most important verses of the chapter, followed by verses 28 and 31. 10 tells *the man* to choose a wife wisely, and to choose a woman of noble character. What is a woman of noble character? It is a woman who knows God. Well, my husband had already married me, and although we had not been born again when we married, I was now. So this was my next revelation. I was a woman of noble character! It was also clear that if a man is

not currently married, he is to be careful in choosing a woman who already has the Biblical foundation and to not be unequally yoked

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness.

2 Corinthians 6:14

He is also to realize that they are to submit to each other.

and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Ephesians 5:21

Verse 11 was my next revelation. “Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value.” Wait a minute. He has full confidence in her? When my husband would question what I was going to do with my day, and then criticize what I had not accomplished he was *not* showing confidence in me. No wonder I wasn’t getting anywhere.

“Say,” I asked a friend one day, “how would you respond if your husband told you how well you were doing as a wife, had the children compliment you, and went to church and told everyone how wonderful you are?”

“Why I’d melt like butter and want to do all I could to please him,” she responded.

Bingo!

So would I.

So would most women.

I had to show this to my husband. But how? I didn’t want to just blurt it out because then it would sound like I was blaming him for my own shortcomings. Still, I knew that it would really make a difference if he truly understood the concept of the Proverbs 31 man. How could I explain that the husband showed confidence in her—he acted first—and then he reaped the benefits?

I wanted my husband to be relaxed, out of the chaos, comfortable. So one night I took him out to dinner: no screaming children; no screaming dishes in the kitchen sink; no screaming laundry in the hall. I gently shared with him how I was struggling with my failures as a housewife and the constant comparisons to the Proverbs 31 woman. I then asked him if I could show him what I had learned. He said yes. I began by explaining to him that Proverbs 31 was not intended to be used to teach women who they should be, but rather was intended to show men what they would reap from their wives if they acted in a certain manner towards her.

I then went on to verse 28: “Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.” The Proverbs 31 man understands that women flourish under spoken compliments. He knows that just because he is thinking his wife is wonderful doesn’t mean she knows it. He also understands that he should teach the children to compliment her, and share his joy in his wife with others so she will feel publicly appreciated as the Proverbs 31 man does in verse 31.

My husband received what I showed him. He became more complementary and less critical. I became more responsive to his mild requests. We began to compliment one another rather than battle each other.

Once I learned that Proverbs 31 was never intended to be taught to women, I wondered: Is there really a Proverbs 31 woman at all? The answer was yes. The mother.

The Proverbs 31 woman is a teacher who teaches her sons (and daughters) how to be godly. This was exciting news for me and also quite a challenge because I have three sons. But, I had determined that I would move forth in whatever God showed me was my responsibility to Proverbs 31. And I have. I take more seriously my role in raising three sinful natures to be godly men and husbands. One day they will go out in the world, pick a wife and have their own families. How they go about that will reflect on how good of a Proverbs 31 mother I was.

The method I have most employed is infusing a godly attitude towards every day situations. In particular, whenever we witness an attitude, or behavior that is explicitly sexual, or disrespectful towards women, I will ask them how God would want them to behave in a similar encounter with a young lady. This gives them an opportunity to reinforce the teachings they have received over the years. It also gives me an opportunity to hear exactly how they have interpreted the teaching I have given them.

The second method I use most is not as flattering. Whenever my husband or I do a particularly poor job of being a husband or a wife we will tell our sons why what we did was wrong, and what would be a better way. We also try to reinforce good things we do by explaining to the boys that this is something they would want to do as a husband or wife. For example, when my oldest son was in kindergarten I would take him to school every day. Every day we would kiss and say, "I love you." One day I stopped him and said, "When you grow up and get married, tell your wife every day that you love her and give her a kiss because women like that." He said ok and quickly got out of the car. Did this advice take? I think so. Today he is in a serious relationship and I hear him quite often telling his girlfriend that he loves her, and I am pleased by that.

How am I doing with the housework? Better. Not perfect, but better. My husband rarely criticizes me anymore, and he is quicker to compliment me when I do something well. I also hear him telling the boys to compliment me as well, especially when I've cooked a good meal. Sometimes I catch him looking at me across the room at church while talking to someone else. Is he expounding my virtues? I hope so.

So my prayer next time Mother's Day rolls around, is that pastors will recognize that Proverbs 31 is not to teach women how to be good wives and household managers, but instead will teach the men how to love their wives as Proverbs 31 men.

Oh, and have a happy Father's Day.