

Proverbs 31:10-12

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/prov/prov-31/proverbs-3110-12/>

Lemuel's mother introduces her son to the virtues of a noble wife.

The passage that completes The Book of Proverbs (verses 10-31 of Chapter 31) consists of what is popularly known as The Virtuous Woman (or, The Virtuous Wife). It is often given this heading in Bibles. These verses are a continuation of the words of Lemuel's mother ([see notes on Proverbs 31:1-9](#)). This is a mother telling her son (who happens to be a king) about one of the most important things in life—finding a partner of good character.

This passage is traditionally understood as being addressed to women, but it is actually spoken **by** a woman to a man. The purpose is so he can recognize good character in a potential wife, and that he should steward his character in a way to be deserving of the virtuous woman. This passage can be summed up in this way: Lemuel's mother is simultaneously telling her son how to recognize virtue and calling him to be virtuous himself.

The 22 verses (10-31) begin with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The purpose of doing this is to make the passage easier to memorize, to express poetic skill, and as a metaphor to show the all-encompassing nature of these characteristics.

Just like in verse 2, Lemuel's mother begins with a rhetorical question. *Who can find (an excellent wife)* (v 10)? The insinuation is that all are looking for such a woman and that Lemuel himself is capable of finding her.

The word translated *excellent* here is the Hebrew word “hayil.” It is translated “virtuous,” “of noble character,” and “capable” (to name a few) in other translations of The Bible. Lemuel's mother used the word “hayil” in verse 3: “do not give your **strength** to women”. “Hayil” (which is a masculine noun, by the way) most literally means “a force.” Throughout the Bible, it is often translated as “army.” So, this woman is a strong woman. She is powerful. Her power is not used to exploit, but to serve and do good. Perhaps most literally “hayil” means “a force of virtue.” This is the same expression used in Judges 6:12, there translated as “mighty men of valor.”

This is a woman whose *worth is far above jewels* (v 11). The value of this kind of wife is beyond any physical, superficial measurement. This phrase, *far above jewels*, is often used in wisdom literature to describe wisdom itself: Job 28:18 says “...for the price of wisdom is above jewels”; Proverbs 3:15 says “she [wisdom] is more precious than jewels”; and Proverbs 8:11 says, “for wisdom is better than jewels.” Thus, the virtuous wife is a manifestation of wisdom. And her value is on par with what she is manifesting—wisdom, which is more precious than gold or jewels (Proverbs 16:16).

Verse 11 begins with the Hebrew letter “beth,” the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In it, Lemuel's mother begins to tell her son about the value of the virtuous wife. *The heart of her husband trusts in her* (v 11). The first mark of the virtuous wife is her trustworthiness. Her

husband can rely on her; he does not worry about what she does in private, for it is the same as she does in his sight. In the Hebrew language and culture, the *heart* was seen as the center of a person, their core. Trusting from the heart is a deep, thorough, complete *trust*.

Due, at least in part, to her trustworthiness, the husband *will have no lack of gain* (v 11). The Hebrew word for *gain*, “salal,” literally means “plunder” or “spoils”—as in “spoils of war.” The point here is that the wife will not be a hindrance to any sort of success. To be partnered with someone who is untrustworthy would cause one to constantly be distracted, diverting energy elsewhere, and having to work in a relational silo (as far as marriage is concerned). But a wise partner helps expand success.

The noble wife *does her husband good and not evil all the days of her life* (v 12). The Hebrew word “gamal” is used at the beginning of this sentence—it is translated as “does.” The word literally means “to wean.” So, she weans him in the direction of good. She helps guide him toward good. She cannot do it for him, but she influences him in the proper direction. This infers that she uplifts and steers without attempting to control.

That she does *good and not evil* for her husband shows she understands what is in his best interest and seeks that path for him. She is wise and has knowledge. She does not react and respond. Rather she understands and seeks his benefit.

That she seeks *good and not evil all the days of her life* says she is incredibly consistent. She is not up and down. She is not flighty. She seeks *good* day in and day out, without fail.

This is a pretty straightforward recognition of the value of relationship. It also speaks to the consistent theme throughout Proverbs—there are two paths (wisdom and folly). One leads to *evil* and the other to *good*. The excellent wife has the effect on her husband of helping him choose the path of wisdom. Her consistency causes this to be the case for her husband *all the days of her life*.

This cannot mean she is perfect all the time, since she is human. But it does infer she is consistent in choosing the path of wisdom (which includes owning and learning from mistakes, apologizing, asking for help, etc.).

These three verses serve as an introduction to the virtuous wife. In the verses to come, Lemuel’s mother will unpack what this looks like, practically. The virtuous wife is a powerful force who represents the path of wisdom; she serves toward the betterment of others; and she is, therefore, consistently trustworthy. These over-arching characteristics make her more precious than jewels. The insinuation here is that, of all of the things she could be advising her son on (including the previous verses), there are few—perhaps none—as vital as seeking a noble partner and being worthy of her.

Biblical Text

An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels.

¹¹The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.

¹²She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.