

# Proverbs 31:19-22

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/prov/prov-31/proverbs-3119-22/>

*The excellent wife serves both her household and the community.*

Lemuel's mother continues her description of the excellent wife. The *distaff* and *spindle* are part of a tool that was used to produce spools of neatly wound yarn, which could then be used to make clothes or other garments. When the excellent wife *stretches out her hands to the distaff* (v 19), she is taking the wool and flax she gathered (in v 13) and putting them into this machine.

The *distaff* is the stationary part of the tool; it stabilizes the material. Her hand is there to provide the pressure needed for that stabilization to occur.

The opposite *hand grasps the spindle* (v 19). The *spindle* is the part of the tool that spins to roll the wool into a ball. The wife would use her hand to feed the material through it smoothly.

So, she is continuing the work she started by gathering the materials (wool and flax: v 13). Even though she has made wise investments (the field and vineyard from v 16), she does not neglect the work she started. She is looking to expand, not replace her opportunities. Presumably her maidens and household staff participate in this industry as well. But she is not an absentee manager. She has expertise from working herself.

Next, Lemuel's mother celebrates the wife's servant heart. *She extends her hand to the poor* (v 20). In v 15, the excellent wife is praised for serving her husband and her maidens. That other-centered perspective now *extends* beyond the home. The Hebrew word for *extends* here is "paras"; it literally means "to spread out."

To reiterate this point, Lemuel's mother adds, *and she stretches out her hands to the needy* (v 20). Again, there is an idea of extension beyond the home into the community. Her character blossoms from the inside out. Not only does she care for her maidens, but also the *poor* and *needy* of the community. That she cares for both lets us know this care is not for show. She is not abusing her household while doing public charity in order to prop up her image. Her concern is genuine and manifests across the border of all her activities.

The words for *poor* and *needy* are more or less synonyms. Using both phrases here is likely a way to emphasize her compassion. She reaches out to those who require help, the less fortunate.

Like all families (and animals for that matter) living off the land, the winter is the most concerning part of the year. It is the season where *snow* covers the ground and makes harvesting, game hunting, and gathering much more difficult. However, the excellent wife *is not afraid of the snow* (v 21). This is because of the diligence she has exercised throughout these verses. It has provided enough for her to protect herself and others, even into the lean months. Returning to the servant-minded characteristic just celebrated in v 20, this says her concern (or lack of concern) is not just for herself but *for her household*.

Lemuel's mother gives a direct example of this preparation: *for all her household are clothed with scarlet* (v 21). The word for *scarlet* here is in the plural, so more literally “scarlets.” This likely means the family has the ability to wear multiple layers to keep warm—a product of that time with the distaff and spindle. Also, *scarlet* is easy to see against the white *snow*, so perhaps there is an element of visual safety referenced here. There are other verses in Scripture (like Isaiah 1:18: “...though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow...”) that show the use of these dramatically contrasting colors.

The excellent wife also *makes coverings for herself* (v 22). *She* is not just providing for others, but taking care of *herself*. The fullness of a caring person includes caring for oneself. She has provided for her household and the poor in the community. She has made provisions for the coming winter. Part of an excellent life is finding the things that bring joy and allowing oneself to indulge in them in the proper way at the proper time.

The word for *coverings* is “marbad”; it means “a tapestry.” The word is used to describe blankets and furniture *coverings* more often than clothes. In fact, the only other time “marbad” is used in Scripture is in Proverbs 7:16, where the adulterous woman (in the act of seducing the young man), says “I have spread my couch with *coverings*...” ([see notes on Proverbs 7:11-21](#)). The adulterous woman uses these things inappropriately, stewarding toward perversion. The excellent wife uses these wisely, stewarding toward healthy enjoyment. This wife is making *coverings* (tapestries, bed spreads) that bring practical warmth and the delightful joy of color and beauty into her household. She is not only practical, but also brings beauty and charm to her house.

In addition to these personal enjoyments, Lemuel's mother says of the excellent wife: *her clothing is fine linen and purple* (v 22). She has stewarded resources so well she has enough to enjoy some things for herself. *Purple* is a symbol of royalty and was an expensive dye to produce.

She is able to make and enjoy these personal projects because she has stewarded well the other aspects of life—serving her family and community. And she does not suffer from a sense of false modesty. She is humble as Moses was humble (Numbers 12:3). Moses saw reality as it was, and played his assigned role faithfully as a servant of the Lord. The excellent wife is a royal, so she provides and dresses as a royal. She is not trying to be someone she isn't, nor is she hiding who she is. She is being authentic and real.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>19</sup> She stretches out her hands to the distaff,  
And her hands grasp the spindle.**

**<sup>20</sup> She extends her hand to the poor,  
And she stretches out her hands to the needy.**

**<sup>21</sup> She is not afraid of the snow for her household,  
For all her household are clothed with scarlet.**

**<sup>22</sup> She makes coverings for herself;  
Her clothing is fine linen and purple.**