

Proverbs 31:23-26

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/prov/prov-31/proverbs-3123-26/>

The virtue of the excellent wife impacts her husband. She is clothed in honor and speaks with the wisdom central to the overall message of Proverbs.

Lemuel's mother continues describing the characteristics of the excellent wife. It is important to remember that this is a mother speaking to her son. The passage (vv 10-31) is about what it takes to be a wife of noble character. But this was not written to women, not directly/immediately. The most direct audience here is young men. The subtext in this passage is that the wise man should look for a partner that is noble and be noble enough to become worthy of such a partner.

This subtext bubbles to the surface here, where Lemuel's mother talks about the excellent wife's *husband*. The *husband* of noble character *is known in the gates* (v 23). The implication here is that the excellent wife aids in the nobility of *her husband*. But surely Lemuel's mother is not suggesting she is responsible for it. The wife is, at least to some degree, contributing to the character of the husband. But this is also a call to her son to be worthy of the kind of woman being described.

To be *known in the gates* is no small thing. The city *gates* were not just a welcome mat to the metropolis. This is where public business occurred. It was the location for meetings and assemblies. The city gates are where the prophets cried out and kings pronounced judgement, sort of like a modern courtroom. It would be a given that the king's identity would be known. This Hebrew word translated "known" is "yada" which is used to describe Adam having sexual relations with Eve and conceiving a son (Genesis 4:1). It is used to describe the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, to "know/yada" good and evil (Genesis 3:7, 22). So it would seem here that the point being made is that the king is intimately involved with the rulers in the gates. He is not aloof, but is a teammate, sharing the load of ruling (Galatians 6:5).

To be *known* here is to be a person of influence. The excellent wife propelling her husband's ability to steward his own character and impact the marketplace.

At the *city gate*, the *husband sits among the elders of the land* (v 23). Older men, then and now, represent wisdom and experience. The inference is that her husband has risen to a place of wisdom ahead of his time. This suggests that the husband is humble enough to learn from those who have gone before him and wise enough to be allowed a place among them. Because the wife is serving the household, as well as her community, with diligence and excellence, the husband is empowered to do the same.

Returning to a direct focus on the wife, Lemuel's mother speaks to how the wife adds to the business ventures for the family; *she makes linen garments and sells them* (v 24). This is an extension of earlier praise: the wife was gathering supplies (wool and flax) for garments in verse 13 and working on production in verse 19. This seems to be a business venture all her own—she is the one who *makes* and *sells*.

As part of this, *she supplies belts to the tradesmen* (v 24). The word for *tradesmen* here is actually the word “Canaanite.” The Canaanites were a group of people who lived on the Eastern shores of The Mediterranean Sea. They were conquered by the Israelites when they entered The Promised Land. So, these are people traveling to the area. This suggests the excellent wife is at the city gates (the markets) too, along with her spouse. She is there conducting her part of the business while the husband is doing his.

Of course, it could be that she has servants or her husband is doing the active part of the selling, but this proximity, yet distinction, to the previous verse suggests the wife is there herself. The couple have a true partnership. They are an example of living as one, as God intended (Genesis 2:24; Mark 10:8-9).

As has been highlighted in other parts of this passage, the excellent wife is working diligently to add value to the house and home. She is doing it in partnership and with the full trust of her husband.

In verse 17, the excellent wife was said to “gird herself with strength.” That same word for *strength*, “oz,” is used here in v 25; *strength and dignity are her clothing* (v 25). The word for *dignity* is the Hebrew word “hadar.” It is translated many different ways throughout The Bible—“glory,” “honor,” “beauty.” It is most often translated as “majesty.” In Proverbs 20:29, “hadar” is used to describe the honor of old men.

These two combined, *strength and dignity*, are a formidable pair. There is the practicality, the plain usefulness of *strength*. And then there is the moral excellence alluded to by *dignity*. The excellent wife wears these as her clothing. She adorns herself with what is good, helpful, and in the best interest of herself and those around her.

This might have been what the Apostle Peter was thinking of when he wrote:

“Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.”
(1 Peter 3:3-4)

There are innumerable noble outcomes from a person of this caliber. Here is one: *and she smiles at the future* (v 25). The word for *smiles*, “sahaq,” can mean “laugh” or “play.” It can mean “to rejoice” or even “to mock or scorn.”

The translation *future* comes from two Hebrew words, “yom aharon,” which means “the last day.”

The excellent wife is not afraid of the *future*. She is hopeful, optimistic. She would meet even the apocalypse (the last day) with a *smile*, because she would know she has stewarded life well. This infers that she understands the true meaning of life. She knows that true fulfillment comes through pleasing God. And God asks us to love Him by serving others. Because she trusts the promises of God, she does not fear the future, but smiles at it (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

All of this noble character leaks out of the excellent wife. *She opens her mouth and wisdom* spouts out of it (v 26). This description also means that she only *opens her mouth* at wise times, able to discern when it is most helpful to speak and when to listen (James 1:19).

When she does speak, *the teaching of kindness is on her tongue* (v 26). The word for *teaching* here is the Hebrew word “torah,” which is used to describe the first five books of the Old Testament (or “The Law”). The Law teaches us how to live according to God’s (good) design, whereby we gain our greatest benefit. So, the phrase *teaching of kindness* literally means “torah of mercy.” The excellent wife is diligent with practical tasks. She is also wise and articulate, able to communicate goodness. It is natural for her to do so (wisdom is right on the tip of her tongue) because she is overflowing with internal righteousness.

Biblical Text

²³ **Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sits among the elders of the land.**
²⁴ **She makes linen garments and sells them,
And supplies belts to the tradesmen.**
²⁵ **Strength and dignity are her clothing,
And she smiles at the future.**
²⁶ **She opens her mouth in wisdom,
And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.**