

Proverbs 31:27-31

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Lemuel's mother implores her son to seek, recognize, and be worthy of partnering with an excellent wife.

These last five verses serve as a sort of summation for Proverbs 31. Lemuel's mother has been describing the excellent wife. This is her crescendo, the conclusion that tries to emphatically land her point: this is the kind of wife her son ought to pursue and he ought to be the kind of husband who matches her in nobility of character.

Throughout this discourse, Lemuel's mother has praised the excellent wife's attention to the household (v 15 and 21). Specifics are given previously, here she describes the wife's attentiveness in general terms: *she looks well to the ways of her household* (v 27). This is meant to be overarching in scope. The wife does all of the things necessary to care for her family as well as the extending household (her maidens). The specifics given are examples, but she is watchful to do whatever needs to be done.

Throughout The Book of Proverbs, Solomon writes about two paths, two *ways*. One is the way of wisdom. The other the way of folly. Wisdom is mentioned in v 26 ([see notes on Proverbs 31:23-26](#)). The excellent wife is looking to keep her *household* on the path of wisdom. She is like a watchman, keeping an eye on the family as it journeys through life.

Ever diligent, she *does not eat the bread of idleness* (v 27). This is an idiom for avoiding laziness. She is not sluggish. Perhaps *bread* is used in this metaphor because it signifies comfort, safety, apathy. To sit and sink your teeth into *bread* helps you to relax and feel as though your job is done. The excellent wife does not allow herself to consume the *bread of idleness*. She remains industrious.

This indicates to us that many problems stem from lack of industry. We can lose purpose. Our minds can start spinning out of control. We can fall into passions that lead to addictions (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). This woman understands that health and happiness require industry. And she applies herself diligently.

All of her character traits are acknowledged by the members of her household. *Her children rise up and bless her* (v 28). To rise up suggests they stop what they are doing, stand, and celebrate her. This is not one of those situations when a child says what they are supposed to because of obligation, barely looking up from whatever truly holds their attention. In this scenario, they change posture. Standing up is a way we show honor (like what happens during the playing of The National Anthem).

The word for *bless* is "asar." It means to "go straight," "make progress," or "advance forward." So, to *bless* someone is to go forth in the path they suggest. When we give someone words of affirmation, we are in a sense verbally following them, encouraging them to continue straight on.

We are acknowledging the rightness of their path. The *children bless* her by following the way (v 27) she is watching for them. This is not just a verbal recognition, but an action-filled response. Their behavior blesses her.

The *husband praises her* (v 28). The word for *praise* is “halal.” It literally means “to shine.” The husband highlights his wife. He celebrates her, shining a spotlight on her. She supports him and lifts him up. She lives in a manner that is helpful and serving, living virtuously and in a manner that is righteous, and he responds by singing her praises. Perhaps this is what Peter had in mind when he wrote that men are prone to shift from being disobedient to God’s word to following God’s word when they have a godly wife serving as an example (1 Peter 3:1).

This is what the appreciative husband says in *praise* of his wife: “*Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all*” (v 29). It likely seems strange to the modern reader to see the husband use *daughters* in reference to his wife. But all wives were once *daughters*. In a multi-generational, family-centric society, this reality is never forgotten. It paints a picture of noble lineage—she represents her family of origin well, doing them honor. It is not just her current household that is honored by her virtue, but her former as well.

The Hebrew word for *nobly* is “hayil.” It is the same word used in verse 3 and verse 10 to describe the wife ([see notes on Proverbs 31:10-12](#)). It can be translated “excellent,” “virtuous,” “of noble character,” and “capable.” It most literally means “a force.” Throughout the Bible, it is most often translated as “army.”

There are *many* wives who display honor. Many *daughters* who are given away in marriage steward well and act with strength of character. The husband declares: *you excel them all*. At first glance, this looks like a comparative statement. You are better than they. Our competitive nature gravitates naturally to this idea and it is possible this might have been what the husband means. But the word for *excel* is “ala”; it means “go up” or “ascend.” It is a verb that suggests this particular wife is climbing alongside the other noble *daughters*. She is not the wife of noble character; she is a wife of noble character. She ascends to the shared space of this vaunted group of high-caliber women.

In the second-to-last verse, Lemuel’s mother gives perhaps the quintessential statement about what it means to be a virtuous wife (or a virtuous person in general). She gives two examples of what we often mistake with virtue: *charm is deceitful and beauty is vain* (v 30).

Lemuel’s mother describes *charm* as *deceitful*. The word for *charm* is the Hebrew word “hen.” It means “grace” or “favor.” Given the context, the inference is that Lemuel’s mother is speaking of favor from other people.

Favor is conditional. Like approval, it requires you to do something that pleases the granter. This is why “hen” is often translated as *charm*. It is the things we do to gain the approval of others. But this is circumstantial. Therefore, it is *deceitful*. It is instant gratification, not as consistent as we want it to be. It says something about a particular thing we have done, but not necessarily about who we are. It can be granted for a variety of reasons. Some merited and some unmerited. Therefore, to stake our identity on approval of people is like building a home on shifting sand.

In the same way, *beauty is vain*. The context here infers outer beauty, in the eyes of other people. The word translated *vain* here is the Hebrew word “hebel.” It is the word often translated as “meaningless” or “vanity” throughout The Book of Ecclesiastes ([see notes on Ecclesiastes 1:2](#)). Essentially, “hebel” means “mysterious.” The most literal translation is “vaporous,” like a wisp of smoke; as soon as you try to wrap your hand around it, it seeps through your fingers. It is elusive.

Like a wisp of vapor, *beauty* is not reliable. It is subjective. It changes with time. It requires interpretation. As soon as you think you have a grasp on what it means, the vapor seeps through your fingers and you are left with a clenched fist. Like vapor disperses with time, so does beauty.

Charm and *beauty* in the eyes of other people are too unreliable, too subjective. They are too easily manipulated, perverted for unholy means.

But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised (v 30). It says elsewhere in Proverbs “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” *The fear of the Lord* is a recognition of God’s enigmatic holiness. It is an acknowledgement that He alone is God and our trust belongs to Him. God is dependable. He does not vary. Seeking God’s approval is seeking wisdom. Listening to God is seeking the greatest of treasures. Believing that God will in fact reward us for living righteously is a necessity to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

Faith, then, carries the consistency missing in charm and beauty. For one very specific reason—faith depends on who God is. Seeking approval from men depends on a kaleidoscope of personalities. When we *fear the Lord*, we initiate wisdom. Along that path is the way of good stewardship and good character. A woman, a wife, who chooses this path *shall be praised* (v 30). As we just saw, she will be praised by her family. But she will also be praised by God (1 Peter 3:4, 5:6).

The word for *praise* here is “halal,” the same as in verse 28. It literally means “to shine.” It means to highlight, to turn a spotlight upon. This kind of woman is the one worth noticing, worth looking at, and worth joining in partnership. Her character should be emulated.

After a long list of the excellent wife’s accolades, Lemuel’s mother ends by giving her son instruction on how to be partnered with a woman of such high character. First, he is to *give her the product of her hands* (v 31). The word for *product* here is “peri”; it literally means “fruit.” Since all she has produced was designed to be shared by the entire household (and, indeed, the community), this likely means to give her credit for what she is producing. Acknowledge the work of *her hands*. It is also a plea to let her steward and enjoy what she has worked so hard to make (1 Corinthians 9:9-10).

In the same way, the young man is to *let her works praise her in the gates* (v 31). The husband is not to be jealous that she is well regarded by others. He is not to hide her excellence from others. He is to allow her to shine, to let others see her excellent character and be influenced by it. He is to be supportive, inviting her to be a “fellow heir of the grace of life” (1 Peter 3:7).

This excellent wife is no less than Wisdom Personified. The first time in The Book of Proverbs Lady Wisdom was personified was at the end of Chapter 1 ([see notes on Proverbs 1: 20-23](#)).

“Wisdom shouts in the street, she lifts her voice in the square; At the head of the noisy streets she cries out; At the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings.” (Proverbs 1:20-21)

These are also the same gates the husband is recognized at in verse 23 of this chapter. The works of the excellent wife shine in the public arena. They highlight wisdom to neighbors, strangers, family, and friends. She is a witness to the path of wisdom. And the husband ought to be the foremost at acknowledging and celebrating this reality. It takes an excellent husband to be worthy of the excellent wife.

Biblical Text

**²⁷ She looks well to the ways of her household,
And does not eat the bread of idleness.**

**²⁸ Her children rise up and bless her;
Her husband also, and he praises her, saying:**

**²⁹ “Many daughters have done nobly,
But you excel them all.”**

**³⁰ Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,
But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.**

**³¹ Give her the product of her hands,
And let her works praise her in the gates.**