

Mother's Day: What Characterizes a Good Woman?

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I. Introduction

What does it mean to be a woman in any day or culture? What constitutes a good woman in God's eyes and are those characteristics accessible to any female? In our culture today, there's a heavy emphasis on women being strong and independent, particularly in light of the abuse (especially sexual) that many women have suffered in the recent past at the hands of men who exhibit the worst possible behavior males capable of towards women. Can a woman be strong and independent without losing her femininity, without her beauty being used against her?

II. What Characteristics Does God See in a Good Woman and Are They Accessible to Any Woman?

Marcia Hornok (retired editor and wife of a retired pastor) in an article titled "A No-Guilt Look at Proverbs 31" in the May/June 2018 edition of *Grace IN Focus* magazine points out what she learned about Proverbs 31:10-31 from Martha Montgomery (a home Bible teacher in Dallas for over 30yrs who taught the wives of seminary students attending Dallas Theological Seminary). Ms. Montgomery noted a unique literary structure to these 22 verses: three verses of Introduction, five verses for each of the three states of life—early, middle, and later years—and four verses for the Conclusion. Ms. Hornok also noted that Proverbs 31:10-31 applies to all females.

Does Proverbs 31:10-31 apply to all females or wives only? If the proverb is a snapshot of a single day in the life of this amazing woman, it's unattainable to most women. But if it's a glimpse of one woman's entire life, then it is attainable, furthermore, it's accessible to all women not just wives and mothers. Additionally, the whole proverb contains the words of king Lamuel's mother to her son as advice on what to look for when searching for an awesome wife. This means that he's to look for these qualities in a female who is single, which means it applies to all females. All females should aspire to the qualities this woman possesses. The life snapshot as opposed to that of a single day seems to make the most sense of the proverb.

Ultimately, I think that the role of a woman is Mother, as the role of a man is Father, i.e., to be a man in every sense of the word is to possess fatherly qualities and characteristics. Likewise, to be a woman in every sense of the word is to possess motherly qualities and characteristics. Included in "mother" is the role of wife and career woman if she so chooses to have a career. But her family, i.e., her role as wife and mother, comes first, in fact, her role in the workplace is done for the benefit of her husband and children.

What does Proverbs 31:10-31 say?

Proverbs 31:10-12, an excellent wife, a virtuous wife is one whose husband trusts her completely with his wellbeing and the wellbeing of his family, who fulfills all of his and the family's needs, who is a blessing and not a curse to him and the rest of the family all the days of her life. Does such a woman exist? Is the answer to the opening question, "no one"? Thus, these introductory verses introduce an impossible dilemma? No, in fact, they summarize why her value far exceeds that of any jewels, a value that the rest of the proverb goes on to detail. But it's a value that is accessible to any woman.

The Early Years: Proverbs 31:13-17, she works with her hands, including making her family's clothing (for summer [flax] and winter [winter]) and she does it with joy. She goes to great lengths to feed her family. She gets up before dawn to prepare food for her family and a portion for her servants. She takes a plot of land and from the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. She strengthens her arms. **Her clothing: strength**. What she's wearing is mentioned in each of the three sections that describe her life. And each article of clothing is a comment on her character. Notice also how she views menial tasks; she does them "willingly," i.e., with joy (31:13). Why? How does she see those menial tasks, as menial tasks or ways she's providing for/serving her family? When my mother first told me of her journey from Mexico to the US, I was in tears and I thought to myself, "My God, how did she go on? How could she put up with such abuse over and over? Such disappointment and heartache over and over? How? The most important thing to my mother was her three children. She knew that she had to get us out of Mexico if we were to have a better life. She would've given her life for us and in many ways she did.

The Midlife Years: Proverbs 31:18-22, she's aware that her merchandise is of good quality. "Her lamp does not go out by night" may not mean that she works late into the night, but that she leaves the light on for those who may need help (perhaps travelers). The clothes she makes she also provides to the poor and needy. And her family doesn't have to fear the winter cold because she also makes winter clothes and bedding for her family. **Her clothing: fine linen and purple**, which reveal and signify dignity and honor in her character.

The Latter Years: Proverbs 31:23-27, thanks in part to her own honor, dignity, and sacrifice, her husband is well-respected as one of the leaders of the city. Her garment business does well and generates income. **Her clothing: strength and honor**. She has a reputation among her family, neighborhood, and business community as a strong, honorable, and competent woman. When she thinks about the future, she laughs with joy. When she speaks, wisdom and kindness pour out. Finally, she's still vigilant over the affairs of her household and she's not a woman who is lazy.

Proverbs 31:28-31, as her grown children think about their mother, they can't help but praise her. Her husband also makes an incredible statement which reveals just how virtuous and excellent she is, "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all." As he thinks of the many virtuous women he's known, his wife excels them all. In the last verse, she's also praised publicly by her community. This proverb ends by revealing the secret to this tremendous woman. What's her secret, how is she able to be such an amazing woman? It first mentions two things that will not gain a woman virtue and excellence. The first is charm which can be deceptive: instead of revealing a virtuous heart, it can reveal a manipulative heart with ulterior motives. The second is beauty which always fades. These were not her secret. What was her secret to being such an amazing woman who garnered such high praise from all who knew her? She always honored the Lord; the goal of her entire life, no matter what her task was—whether menial or not—was to please and follow the Lord in all her ways. This is the key to life in the book of Proverbs: 1:7.

What are the characteristics of a good woman/mother? Each activity mentioned reveals something about her character. She gets the necessary material to make her family's clothing: resourceful. She's not afraid to get her hands dirty and when she does, she's happy to do it: humble and not prissy. She does whatever it takes to feed her family: diligent. She gets up before dawn to make food for her family and servants: selfless, hardworking, and generous. She takes a field and turns it into a vineyard: independent and ambitious. She makes sure she's strong enough for the task at hand: prepared, strong, and diligent. She keeps the light on in case someone needs help: selfless and considerate. She makes the clothes with the necessary tools: capable and resourceful. She feeds and clothes the poor: empathetic and compassionate. She makes sure her family has winter items (clothes and bedding): resourceful and inventive. Her husband is a respected leader in the city: honorable and dignified. She has a garment business: entrepreneurial. She looks forward to the future with a smile: confident and optimistic. She imparts words of wisdom and kindness to her family: wise and gracious. Keeps watching over her household: selfless and responsible. She's not idle and lazy: hard-working. She seeks to honor and follow the Lord in all she does: she's a selfless servant of God.

To be a good woman in every sense of the word is to exhibit these motherly characteristics. But this does not mean that you have to be a wife and/or mother. The characteristics mentioned in Proverbs 31:10-31 are accessible to every female. All she has to do is fear the Lord, i.e., honor Him, follow His guidance in everything she does. This is what it means to be a woman in every sense of the word.

III. Conclusion

Strength and honor are her clothing; she shall rejoice in time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness. She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all." Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.