

# POWER

“. . . the gospel . . . is the power of God unto salvation . . .” (Romans 1:16)

## THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN (PROVERBS 31)

by Wade L. Webster

**T**he book of Proverbs has much to say about women. Solomon, the book's primary writer, knew a lot about them. As you know, Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3). Within the book, Solomon dealt with both vice and virtue. He pictured the constant nag and the caring nurturer; the flirty seductress and the faithful spouse. Although much of the book deals with a woman to flee - the strange woman, the book closes with a woman to find - the virtuous woman.

The thirty-first chapter records the prophecy that King Lemuel's mother taught him (Prov. 31:1). We are not certain about the identity of King Lemuel. Some suggest that it may have even been Solomon. What we do know for sure is that this king's mother was concerned with who her son would meet and marry. She wanted him to find a virtuous woman. She wanted him to find a woman who would lead him to heaven and not to hell; a woman who would save him and not sink him (1 Cor. 7:16). She did not want her son to squander his strength on wicked women or wine (Prov. 31:3-7). She wanted him to spend his strength on serving others (Prov. 31:8-9).

Realizing that her son might have trouble seeing past a pretty face or a petite figure, King Lemuel's mother described in detail the value and the virtues of one who would be a godly

wife and mother. She wanted to help her son to make a wise selection. Today, her words serve as the gold standard by which all women are measured.

### Her Price

“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life” (Prov. 31:10-12).

King Lemuel's mother began by pointing out the price or the value of the virtuous woman. The first question suggests that a godly woman, like a godly man, is hard to find (Jer. 5:1; Ezek. 22:30; Eccl. 7:28; Ruth 3:11). To find a virtuous woman, a man must search diligently and prayerfully for her. Virtuous women are not a dime a dozen. Like precious gems, they are very rare. Their price is far above rubies. The expression “far above” is used in other passages to describe the distance between the true and living God and all other gods (Psa. 97:9; cf. Eph. 1:21); and, between God's ways and man's ways (Psa. 10:5; cf. Prov. 3:5). There is a very wide gap that exists between the virtuous woman and all other women. She is a “lily among thorns” (Song of Solomon 2:2)

What price can be put on trust? It is priceless. The husband of the virtuous woman has someone in

whom his heart can safely trust. He knows that she will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. He doesn't have to worry about where she is, who she is with, or what she is doing. He has no need of spoil or of anything else. He has all that he could ever want in her. He has that which no amount of money could buy. He has found “a good thing” and has obtained the “favor of the Lord” (Prov. 18:22; cf. 12:4; 19:14).

### Her Provision

“She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens” (Prov. 31:13-15).

The virtuous woman isn't afraid of work. Whether it is sewing, cooking, or caring for the children, she is willing to do it. She doesn't have to be compelled to do it. She does it willingly; yea, gladly. She is happy to wear the apron of a servant (John 13; cf. Gen. 18:6-8; Acts 9:39-40; Eccl. 9:10; 1 Thess. 4:11; 2 Thess. 3:10-12; 1 Tim. 5:10-14).

No doubt, the Bible student is reminded of beautiful Rebekah who drew not only water for Abraham's servant, but also for his camels (Gen. 24:13-14, 18-20). As you recall, that

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was the sign that Abraham's servant had found the right girl for his master's son, Isaac. Not only did she willingly provide water for the servant and the camels, she ran to do it, and she continued to do it until they were satisfied. Do you know how much water a camel can drink? Abraham's servant had definitely found the right girl

He had found a second-mile girl (Mt. 5:41). For the virtuous woman, no distance was too far to go in providing for her family. Like a merchant ship, she would travel to the far regions to secure precious things for her household. Interestingly, the same wonderful trait of being willing to serve was seen in Ruth, whom Boaz quickly took as his wife (Ruth 2:2-3, 11-12, 23; Ex. 2:16). A virtuous woman is not often found among women of ease (Isa. 32:9-11; cf. 3:16-24). She is found among the fervent of spirit (Rom. 12:11).

The virtuous woman wants to please her husband; and, he wants to please her. The desire to please one's mate is a mark of true love (1 Cor. 7:32-34). Rather than staying in bed, the virtuous woman arises long before day to prepare food for those of her household. She also stays up late when necessary (Prov. 31:18). Her family is cared for well. Her husband doesn't go to the fields hungry. He goes with his belly full and with lunch in his hands. Furthermore, he won't be hungry for long when he arrives home at the end of a hard day. He will find supper waiting for him. The virtuous woman keeps the home; and, she keeps it well (Tit. 2:5).

## Her Perception

“She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands

she planteth a vineyard” (Prov. 31:16).

The virtuous woman gives careful consideration to the things that she does. Before she buys a field, she gives great thought to it. She doesn't buy on impulse. No doubt, she asks a number of questions before making the purchase. Perhaps, the first question she asks is, “Do I really need it?” She is careful not to make unneeded purchases. She considers the need before she considers the price.

Secondly, she might ask, “Is it a good deal?” She wants to make her money go as far as she possibly can. In the third place, she might ask, “Is it the best available?” She knows that there are likely other pieces of property for sale. She considers other fields and the prices being asked for them.

Once the virtuous woman has determined the need, considered the price, and narrowed down her

choices, she confidently makes the purchase. When the field is hers, she follows through with her plans for it. She improves the property by planting a vineyard on it. In a season, her family will begin to eat the fruit of it. Furthermore, if she ever decides to sell it, the improvements that she has made will ensure that she gets her purchase price back and maybe even a little more.

At the end of her life, the virtuous woman didn't have too many regrets concerning how she had spent her money or her time. She had carefully managed both.

Barbara Bush wisely observed, “At the end of your life you will never regret not having passed one more test, not winning one more verdict, or not closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a friend, a child or a parent.”

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## Her Power

“She *girdeth* her loins with strength, and *strengtheneth* her arms” (Prov. 31:17).

The virtuous woman is not weak. Her core is strong. She girdeth her loins with strength. Although her arms may be delicate, they too are strong. She continually strengthens them. Furthermore, the writer declares, “Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come” (Prov. 31:25). Inside and outside, the virtuous woman possesses and portrays strength.

Margaret Thatcher, the Iron Lady of Britain, once declared, ““If it's me against 48, then I feel sorry for the 48.” In like manner, those who line up opposite the virtuous woman have a battle on their hands (Psa. 18:39). She will stand strong in the Lord (Eph. 6:10-17; Psa. 29:11; 68:35). She will fight for her family and faith.

## Her Pity

“She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy” (Prov. 31:18-20).

Not only does the virtuous woman provide superb care to her own family, she blesses the families of others. Her heart is soft to the needs of the poor and the hungry. The love of God dwells in her and is displayed by her. John, the apostle of love, declared, “But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God

in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:17-18). The virtuous woman didn't just love in word. She loved in deed. No doubt, the laying of the hands to the spindle and to the distaff reminds the Bible student of Dorcas and the many coats and garments that she made for those in need (Acts 9:39-41).

## Her Preparation

“She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple” (Prov. 31:21-22).

The virtuous woman made preparation for the winter. The snow didn't catch her or her household unprepared. They were clothed warmly and well. In fact, their clothing was scarlet.

Likely, the virtuous woman's preparation reminds the Bible student of the wise builder who prepared for the coming winds, rains, and floods (Mt. 7:24-27). When the wind blew, the rain fell, and the floods rose, the wise man's house stood firm. You may recall that Solomon spoke of a wise woman in similar terms. He wrote, “Every **wise woman** buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands” (Prov. 14:1).

## Her Place

“Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She

openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.” (Prov. 31:23-27).

The virtuous woman's husband sat in the gate. The gate was his place of service. Her place was in the home. The virtuous woman didn't have to sit in the gate to feel important. She was content to remain largely behind the scenes. However, you can rest assured that she was a major reason why her husband sat in the gate among the elders of the land.

Staying behind the scenes had nothing to do with strength or ability or intellect. She possessed plenty of all three of these things. The fine linen and girdles that she made and delivered to the merchant showed the amazing ability that she possessed.

Furthermore, the writer specifically mentioned her strength and wisdom. Clearly, the virtuous woman could have done many things. However, she used her talents, strength and abilities to care for her own family. She knew that her primary responsibility was to keep and to guide her house (Tit. 2:5; 1 Tim. 5:14). She gladly submitted to the roles of wife and mother and performed them well. She looked well to the ways of her household.

## Her Praise

“Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that

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Deuteronomy 5:32

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feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates" (Prov. 31:28-31).

The virtuous woman received the praise of those who knew her best. Her husband and her children praised her. Their praise revealed that hypocrisy didn't dwell in her heart and that it wasn't displayed in her home. She was not one way in public and another way in private.

The beauty of the virtuous woman wasn't just physical. It wasn't deceitful or empty. There was inner beauty to match, and possibly, even to excel the outward beauty. She feared the Lord. This reveals that she possessed the inner beauty of holiness (Psa. 29:2). She had the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price (1 Pet. 3:4).

Not only did the children and the husband of the virtuous woman praise her, her own works did. Her many acts of kindness were being talked about in the gates. Just imagine how pleased her husband, who sat in the gates, must have been to hear her being praised.

Of course, the ultimate praise of the virtuous woman was yet to come. It was to take place in or at another gate. It was to be spoken by her Lord "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Mat. 25:21).

In this study, we have seen the kind of woman that King Lemuel's mother wanted him to find. If he was wise, he heeded her words and selected wisely. As parents today, we need to diligently teach this prophecy to our children. No doubt, it will help our daughters to grow up to be virtuous women. Furthermore, it will help our sons to look for and marry such a woman.

**Editor's Note:** Much of this material was prepared for the funeral of Cornelia Sparks. Sister Sparks was a truly virtuous woman. She will be sorely missed by the Southaven congregation.

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