

The Excellent Woman

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Proverbs 31:10-31 "A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls. She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night. In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers. She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple. Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes. She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all." Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate."

The closing picture in the Book of Proverbs is famous. It is the portrait of the *virtuous woman*. The old-time portrait is full of most interesting practical things. Age has not dimmed its luster, nor made its teachings pointless. The wisdom of the counsels given, has not become outworn in the advance of the centuries. Girls and young wives of today will find its suggestions as helpful as if they had lived three thousand years ago. There are some things that never grow old-fashioned. *Character* does not. *Motherhood* does not. *Life* itself does not. The same old lessons which were taught by Solomon, may be learned today anew, and they will be found as applicable and pertinent as ever.

"The Virtuous Woman" was the artist's name for his picture. By the word "virtuous" he meant strong, noble, capable. It was his thought that such a woman was rare in those days. We can understand this. Womanhood did not reach its best and noblest—until Christ came.

Any man who has a noble woman for his wife will say *Amen* to the statement, that the price of such a woman as is painted in this passage is far above rubies. She is better to him than all the rubies in the world would be. He would be a fool if he were to exchange her for them all. The young man who finds such a woman for his wife—may consider himself rich, though having nothing in the world besides. The reference to rubies suggests also some of the qualities which belong to the true character of every worthy woman. A writer says: "There is something in the glow of precious stones that peculiarly fits them to serve for spiritual figures. There is about them a subtle light, a brilliancy that burns without fire, that consumes nothing and requires no supply, that forever shines without oil. A diamond that glows in the sunlight flashes yet more beautifully at night. No mold can get root upon it, no rust can tarnish it, no decay can waste it. The jewels that were buried two thousand years ago if now dug up from the royal and priestly tombs would come forth as fair and fresh as they were when the proud wearer first carried them in his diadem—fit emblems of the beauty and imperishableness of Christian virtue."

It would be easy to show how this applies to a true and Christlike woman. There pours forth from her spirit a gentle emanation of light, like that which a diamond emits. It is the *soft radiance of love*. It is the *peace of God* in her heart, shining out. It is the quiet beaming forth of the joy which lives deep in her soul. It needs no oil and no fire, for the candle of love which burns within her own breast, supplies the light.

Like the diamond, also, womanhood of this type shines the most brightly in the *darkness*. The noble woman is beautiful in the *light*—in the time of joy, in the brightness of prosperity, in the midst of earthly gladness. She

shines then in her home, among her friends, wherever she goes. But it is only in time of *trial*, that the most precious things in her nature appear. Like those precious stones, too, the rich luster of her life is not dimmed by time and its experiences. Sorrow comes upon her—but it makes her beauty of soul only the more radiant. Care comes to her—toil, burden bearing, responsibility, sometimes poverty, pinching want, loss—but amid it all, she moves victorious, unfretted in spirit, keeping faith, her face shining still with its sacred inner light.

That husband would be a miserable wretch, whose heart did not trust in such a woman. He can trust her in every way. He knows that she is true and faithful to him, for this woman is as far from such flirtations as are often heard of in modern society gossip, as the angels are from sin. He can trust her also with the management of her part of his affairs. She is not *extravagant*. She is not *wasteful*. She is not a mere bill of expense. She is not a costly luxury. Her husband need have no anxiety about her end of the finances. John Bright's wife said to him at their marriage, "John, attend to your business and your public affairs, and I will provide for the house and relieve you of all cares at home." He never had occasion to carry any burden of care in his wife's domain. That is the ideal division of burden in the household life.

One day, after long years of wedded life and of work together on the field, Mrs. Moffat said of her husband, to another in his presence, "Robert can never say that I hindered him in his work." He promptly assented, speaking in highest terms of praise of her helpfulness. She had never been a hinderer in the slightest way—but always a sharer of burdens, an aid in counsel, a strong help at every point. She was like the woman of Proverbs—she will do her husband good all the days of her life.

Every woman who consents to become the wife of a godly man, ought to settle it in her mind at the very beginning, before she enters the sacred relation—that she will never make life or work harder for her husband, will never hinder him in his business or in his duties—but will "do him good and not evil all the days of her life." It is said that in these days thousands of thoughtful young men are not marrying, because they cannot afford it. Young women, they say, are not willing to live plainly and humbly for a time while the foundations of future competence or fortune are laid—but expect to begin where their parents have climbed through twenty or thirty years of patient, self-denying toil. This is not the spirit of the woman of the lesson. She is ready to go with her husband into a plain little house and begin by his side to work and save, that together they may rise to greater comfort and larger things.

The old way for a woman to make herself useful and helpful, was to seek flax and wool, to work willingly with her hands. Woman's work in those ancient days was limited to a few very simple industries. The meaning is that she was not willing to be a burden to her husband—but insisted on doing her share in providing. She was *thrifty*. In these days not many wives spin and weave their husband's garments—but there are other ways in which they can make themselves helpful. The Persian bird *Juftak*, they tell us, has only one wing. On the wingless side, however, the male bird has a hook and the female a ring. Neither one can fly alone—but they fasten themselves together, by means of this hook and ring, and thus fly. This illustrates the true husband and wife. Either alone is a sort of incomplete being and unable to fly upward, except in a very awkward kind of way; but united they can together rise to noble life and great happiness and blessing.

Another habit of the excellent woman is that "she rises also while it is yet night." Early rising has been highly praised in all ages. Almost every philosopher who has ever lived, has said something in its favor. No doubt it is a good thing if one joins with it "early to bed." Otherwise it is not good. There is no blessing in early rising if one robs one's self of sleep to accomplish it. The good wife must manage ordinarily to get her eight hours sleep before she rises, whatever the time may be. Otherwise she will soon lose both health and beauty, and will grow old long before her time.

Again, "She stretches out her hand to the poor; yes, she reaches forth her hands to the needy." This is a beautiful trait in her. A woman without a *kindly heart* and a *gentle hand*—is not the sort of woman God wants. This model wife does not live only for herself alone, nor does she confine all her thought and care and toil to her own home. She does not neglect her own household in order to do good outside. It has been sometimes hinted of certain women, that they were so busy attending missionary meetings or temperance meetings, or looking after orphans or the poor—that their own husbands and homes and children had but scant attention. Perhaps this is not a just charge. At least it could never be true of such a wife as the one described in this passage. On the other hand,

however, there have been women who lived so unselfishly and so exclusively for their own, that they never had any thought or time or help for any human being outside. This is almost as faulty a life as the other. Every woman should seek to make her home a center of light and joy and blessing, not only to all who come within her doors—but to the needy, the sorrowing, the suffering outside. One of the noblest opportunities of usefulness and helpfulness given to anyone in this world, is that which a well-prepared woman finds in her home. She can make it a place of warmth and cheer. She can open her doors to her neighbors and friends with the charm of hospitality. She can let the light shine out through her windows to shed its beams outside. She can send out help from her doors in many ways. Then she can make her home a center of gentle and kindly influences which will roll near and far.

Further, this woman "is not afraid of the snow for her household." She *provides* well in summer for the exigencies and needs of any possible winter. She does not wait until the cold and the storms come, before thinking of warm winter garments for her household. There are mothers who do this—but this woman has everything ready in advance. There is a good lesson here for everybody. The rule to lay up in summer, for the needs of winter—applies in a thousand ways.

Youth is a summer-time, when in school and home, boys and girls should lay up health and knowledge and wisdom for the days of toil, temptation, care, and duty in the after years. It is well for all to begin life on the principle of laying away in store every year, something of the year's earnings or income. This is the only way ever to accumulate anything, or to have anything to fall back on in the "rainy day" which is sure some time to come to everyone. The young should seek also to make friends in their youth, so that when the stresses of life come and they need sympathy and help, they will not stand alone. In the time when they are sheltered in their homes, young people should gather strength into their life—firm principles, sturdy convictions, habits of doing right and of resisting wrong and sin. Then when they go out into the world, to face life's *winter*, with its duties, struggles, burdens, temptations, sorrows—they will be ready and will not fail.

"Her husband is known in the gates." A great many public men who have risen to eminence and power, have not hesitated to confess that they owed it all to their wives. An inefficient, indolent, thriftless, gad-about woman—will never help her husband's promotion; on the other hand she will hinder his advancement, will prove a heavy drag, and will probably make his life a failure. It is no secret that there are wives of this kind. More men than we probably think are kept down by their wives.

The practical lessons are important. Girls and young women should train themselves to efficiency, earnestness, thrift, helpfulness, strength of character, so that if they marry they will make such wives as the woman of this lesson. And boys and young men, in forming their ideas of the woman that will make a good wife, must not be so foolishly blind as to overlook what is taught here about the kind of woman whose husband becomes honored among men. They must remember that their own future success as men, will depend very largely upon the kind of wife they choose.

The *law of kindness* is on the tongue of the excellent woman. She has trained her speech to gentle tones. A woman's voice is a wonderful revealer of her character. Every young girl should train herself to speak *softly* and *kindly*. One who has not done this in early life, will not be able suddenly to adopt "the law of kindness" when she sets up her own home. Little girls should begin to speak softly when they are playing, or at school and in their home. Nothing is more beautiful in a woman, than calmness and quietness in manner, showing itself in well-controlled speech. Bad temper is a great blot on a woman. A wife and mother who is always scolding, scolding, scolding—not only mars the beauty of her own life, but hurts the lives and scars and spoils the characters of her children, and makes her home an unhappy place for her household. Wonderful is this law of kindness. In a mother in her home, its influence is heaven-like. Every girl and young woman should take this "law" into her life at once, and train her heart and voice to the sweetest kindness.

"Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her." Here we find something in the lesson for the children. They ought to bless their mother. *Children have a great deal to do with the happiness of their parents*. They should not forget to be kind and loving to the mother and father who have done so much for them. There is a word here too for some husbands. They forget to praise their wives. One of the ways to make a home happy is for all its members to train themselves to speak pleasant and encouraging words the one to the

other. In some homes scarcely a word of affection is ever spoken. Though they are courteous to strangers, at home the love in their hearts seems to freeze, and only cold, snappy words are ever heard. No one thanks another for any kindness. Favors are received in silence. That is not the way the good wife and mother deserves to be treated. Let the children try this rule—rise up and fill their mother's heart with joy. Let the silent, grumpy husband begin to praise his wife, say pleasant things to her, show her some of his love.

Plenty of children, and husbands, too, pour out blessing and praise when the mother and wife is dead. But that is too late. It does her no good then. One loving word when she is living—is worth more than a thousand words when she is dead. One flower brought home and put into her hand when the thoughtful act will give her cheer—is better than a whole carriage-load of flowers piled upon her coffin.

Every woman wants to be beautiful. The secret of true beauty is stated in this chapter of Proverbs: "Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that fears the Lord, she shall be praised." Some women sacrifice everything to win favor, to become popular. This word tells us how worthless, how empty and vain is the world's favor. Nothing is worth striving for in womanhood, but pure, noble, lovely character. That is gotten only by being a Christian, by loving God and doing His will, and staying near Him all the time. Many people's religion, is not just like Jesus Christ's religion. Yet everyone should try to be like Him. If we are, then we shall be beautiful. I have read about a girl, a boarder in a family, whom everybody seemed to be wanting all the time. The children wanted her to help them with their toys and play. The old people wanted her for this, and the young people for that. She had learned the true secret of favor. Can you find it?

A woman like this does not need a *monument* over her grave after she is gone, for her own works will be the best and noblest memorial she can have. We remember what a memorial *Mary's broken alabaster box* became to her, and how the fragrance of that beautiful, blessed deed of hers still fills all the world. We must not forget that it was through the *breaking* of the box, and the *pouring out* of the ointment, that the memorial was made. If Mary had thought the vase too fine to break and the ointment too precious and costly to pour out we would never have heard of either. Things we keep to ourselves leave no blessing in the world, and write no record for us in heaven. It is only the *broken things* which do good—the things dear to us that we give up for Christ, which are remembered and become immortal.

The "works" of this good woman in our lesson that praise her in the gates, are not the things she did for herself—to get rich, to win honor. They are her kindness to the poor, the distressed, the troubled, the sorrowing. Not only do such "works" praise us in the gates of earth—but our Lord assures us they will also praise their doers at the final judgment, and in the gates of heaven forever. There ought to be sweet encouragement in this, for every woman who is trying to live a life of loving service for Christ. No one knows what the final outcome will be of the smallest thing done in love, for one of Christ's little ones in the Master's name.