

Part 41: How to Find a Spouse

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So here we are—the end of our series in the book of Proverbs.

We went into this book knowing a couple things lay before our church. We were going to be homeless, we are in an increasingly polarized world, and we were entering into what seemed to be the loudest and most contested election cycle, while also living in the midst of a pandemic. But the hope of Proverbs is that Lady Wisdom makes her home at the head of crowded and noisy streets calling to those who feel lost, simple and overwhelmed reminding us of the God who runs the whole world and showed his wisdom by solving our greatest problem by keeping his promise to save his people.

Forty-one weeks later we have reached the end and in God's inspired providence he has laid before us a chapter which so fittingly sums up and bookends the whole wisdom of Proverbs. Our prescript today in Proverbs 31 reads: **Proverbs 31:1**.

So here we have a King, Lemuel, who is otherwise unknown in scripture but who speaks with divine inspiration. But what's interesting is that what the Holy Spirit has preserved for us are actually the words of his mother. This is a fitting ending because we see the hope of what we read earlier in Proverbs. When Solomon opened a section of his early teachings with this: **Proverbs 1:8-9**.

Here is the son who put wisdom to work. The son who even though he was King, listened to his mother. Historians have found no parallel in wisdom literature of this era where a mother's wisdom was so preserved by the lips of her kingly son. But this wisdom is unparalleled wisdom. Not because it came from mom, but because mom reminded Lemuel of what comes from God. It's based not in pragmatism, but in providence.

God's wisdom works because God works. His wisdom is reliable because the Lord is reliable.

As Lemuel reflects on the wisdom which has endured him in his own kingdom he calls us to consider two pictures which frame our study today. First, in verses 1-9 we are to long for **The Faithful King**, and then in verses 10-31 we encounter this unique poem which holds up for us regardless of gender or relationship status, the joy of **The Excellent Wife**.

What we will see by end of this passage is that the road to meaningful purpose, joyful labor, and flourishing relationships is a commitment to the words of the Lord. Clarity in life, joy in work, and meaningful relationships stem from the man, and the woman, whose fear is the Lord.

Let's begin by examining our first point this morning: **The Faithful King**, by reading **Proverbs 31:1-9**.

I remember getting frustrated so frustrated in a tennis match in high school that I threw my racquet on the ground between sets. In that moment my coach and my teammates said nothing, but I heard a voice calling me over to the fence. My mother, lurking in the shadows said to me, "If you throw that racquet again I will personally pull you from this match." That warning has been burned into my memory.

Lemuel here remembers a warning from his own mother. Proverbs has often showed the grace of wise parents correcting wayward children, and here we see the fruit of this sort of counsel.

Lemuel's mom had at some point in the past spoken into her son's moral failures. She said, "What are you doing my son?" Three times she appeals to his actions so that we can assume these words come not from the sterile ivory tower of perfection, but from the trough of failure and mistakes.

To call her son from the foolishness in which he participated, his mom warns him of two errors. She warns him of desires which destroy and delights which distort.

We see **desires which destroy** in verse three when she says, "do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings."

Here we are reminded of sins of sensuality and lust which seek to destroy us. We live in a culture which promotes the exact opposite of this mother's love and God's good word. Our world often says that if anyone tried to curb your sexual expression in any way, they are against the flourishing you deeply need.

How many of us believe this lie even in our white knuckled obedience! Perhaps we think that God's design for gender and sexuality is a rigid mold we must adopt even though it seems to keep us from what we really want.

But may each of us pray that we learn to see the end of a heart taken over by sensuality and lust. It promises deep desire but pays in devastating destruction.

All Lemuel would have to do is look back in the history of Israel to see the danger this kind of lifestyle. Kings just like himself, kings which perhaps just as you might today, had felt entitled or empowered to take what they thought they deserved in regards to sexual passions.

It was the blindness of sexual passion which led King David to kill an innocent man to cover up his power driven affair. It was Solomon's thousands of wives which led even the wisest man, for a season, walk away from all the truth that God gave him. Even though Solomon came to his senses after a painful season of following his sinful desires, it was the burden of his unbridled lusts which ultimately divided the kingdom and dipped it into a bloody civil war.

God knows that male or female, we will desire to be the king or queen of our own sexuality. But here through the words of a loving mother, and king who wisely listened, we see the hope to turn away from such desires.

But secondly, Lemuel's mother warns him to be mindful of **delights which distort**. Look with me once more at **Proverbs 31:4-7**.

Remember what we saw earlier in the book of Proverbs in chapter **23:31-34**.

The drunkenness is a devastating distortion of what is really true. Drunkenness proclaims peace when there is no peace! In fact that's the dark humor behind the advice to give strong drink to those who are dying. The point is that the only possible use of such an experience is to numb the pain of those who are

dying. But we know that even those who are dying, who feel well under the influence of alcohol, are still dying. Their peace is an illusion.

But it's actually here in this warning against delights which distort that we see the plea behind the mother's warning.

Why should the king not be destroyed, why should he not inebriate himself? Because when we distrust what is trustworthy, and trust what is not, we easily lose our sense of purpose and clarity in life.

Lemuel's mom does not want him to forget what he is meant to live for and the role he has to play: **Proverbs 30:8-9.**

It is God's wisdom which reminds us of our true purpose and noble calling: that is to glorify God and love others. God's wisdom reorients our hearts so that we might remember his decrees and bless those around us instead of harming them.

Wisdom is of corporate importance. It always affects others.

In contrast to the person who is constantly distracted from God's word, look at how Psalms 1 speaks of the blessed man: **Psalms 1:1-2.**

Here Lemuel, who is king, shares his wisdom with those who are not. If you wish to live in a way which preserves your life and blesses those around you, cling to the decree of the Lord. Do not forget it.

We are saved by a king who said no to the devices of this world and remembered the glorious purpose of his life. Look at what Paul says in **Philippians 2:5-11.**

Jesus is the faithful king we always needed, he is the king who obeyed faithfully at great cost to himself so that he could do something to help those who couldn't help themselves. That is us, those who were muted by sin and dead in our trespasses. To see the wisdom of King Lemuel, we must learn to see supremely the wisdom of King Jesus.

Because it's when we see how Jesus delivers us from sin and death that we can refuse to be bumped off course. God has a massive purpose for us in life and if we want to be one who thrives and blesses others, we must be ones who say no to the promises of sin and yes to the wisdom of God.

The faithful King, and people of the faithful King are those who submit themselves to the decrees of the Lord and find life and life abundantly. Here is your call, cling to God's word and lay down yourself for the good of others.

It's only after we see the commission to the faithful king, that we now turn and see a portrait of the faithful wife. This is where we see our second point this morning: **The Excellent Wife.**

While the style of writing changes a bit in the following verses, it's not lost on us that after we are warned of women who would destroy us we are introduced to the woman who gives life.

Just as the king was encouraged to lay down his life for the flourishing of others, here is the portrait of an excellent wife who lays down her life for the good of others as well.

What's unique about this text is that there are no commands given here to the wife. It's all descriptive of who she is: she is one who above all things, fears the Lord.

This doesn't mean that wives, and women, in a broader sense are not to desire to emulate what we read in this text. But it does point out to us that this text is primarily about desire. Lemuel wants men to desire a wife who embodies this sort of spirit. Men, this text is actually written with you as the primary audience. Don't stop listening here and assume this is their problem. Lemuel is after your heart as well.

Similarly if there is one aspect of this woman which should inspire the women in our body today it would be the headwaters of these virtues which we see in **Proverbs 31:30**.

What we see here is a woman whose primary goal is fear the Lord. The wisdom, grace, strength and deep joy which overflows from this text begins here. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and it is the perfect conclusion to this text as well.

So what I want to do in this passage is first read the whole thing, then I want to look at three quick things. First I want to examine this text in light of our cultural moment, then we are going to examine three attributes of this excellent wife, and lastly we will have a couple points of application.

First here is the passage in full: **Proverbs 31:10-31**.

Now, when it comes to our cultural moment, I imagine as we heard that passage read, many of us have lots of presuppositions which were piqued from many different angles.

We live in a time where gender, gender roles and sexuality are all up for grabs. So for some of us, when we see a description of a wife we perhaps immediately find it to be archaic and outdated. But what's interesting is we see in this passage descriptions which our secular culture would seemingly applaud.

In fact the language is the same language used to describe military men of the day. Some translations express the word "excellent" as "valiant," she is one who literally (vs. 17) "has girded her loins" for the battle of life. Here is a woman successful in the workplace, one who is busy in industry, generous to others, fearless, and incredibly strong.

Yet the way in which this strong, wise and independent woman uses her skills is not for the elevation of herself, but in service to everyone around her: her husband, her family, her friends, those in her workplace, and those in need around her.

We also live in a time where a healthy reassessment of gender roles inside the church is happening. We cannot escape, nor do we want to, what the Bible says about the complementarity of husbands as head and wives as helper. But we are beginning to assess whether our applications of head and helper are shaped primarily by scripture, or by our own preferences.

So for many of us in here we see a wife who is a distinct homemaker who serves her husband faithfully. But we also see a wife who speaks up in kindness and has the covenant wisdom of God on her tongue. We see a wife who in whom her husband extends and places his trust. And also a wife who is free to use her passions, skills and giftings in the marketplace in service to God and others.

What's also distinct in this passage is we do not see any mention of the sexual life of this wife. That's not to say that she is not intimate with her husband, but it shows that the excellent wife is not primarily excellent only in regards that she cares for her husband sexually. She is seen as an active helper, trustworthy source of gospel wisdom, and one whose primary goal even in her marriage is to fear the Lord with all of her heart.

Men, this text is meant to correct your longings. Many of us frame off our desires in that we want a Christian woman, but what we really long for is beauty and the bedroom. But Lemuel warns that beauty is vain, the reprieve of wisdom is to not be wise in our own eyes. This means that we need to be wise enough see what is not here, but also inspired and attracted to what is here. This is true for any of us regardless of our relational status.

With that said there are three primary attributes of this wife which should stand out to us. First we see ***She Provides for Others***.

Did you notice the overwhelming sense of provision in **Proverbs 31:13-15**?

Here is a woman whose eyes are always on the lookout for how she might help others. She desires to provide and is like a ship which brings food from afar to those in need, and gathers supplies to cloth those who need covered.

Just as the faithful king was to consider the needy, here the excellent wife is driven to the shores of want by the winds of grace.

How does she provide for others? She uses the gifts God gives her to work and to create. **Proverbs 31:16-25**.

Here is a woman who is a wise business person, “considering fields” and “perceiving her merchandise is valuable.” She’s also incredible craftsman (meaning she uses the gifts God gives her to provide however she can), putting her hand to work with the tools of her trade.

This is a needed correction to all of us whether we are male or female. Here we see Proverbs view of work come full circle again, this time in the context of the relationships and family. Here is a wife who is well known, and greatly successful in the workplace.

Our culture would once more applaud these accolades. But it's important to note that the reason she is successful is not to advance the fame of her name. Instead it is to provide for others. She puts her hand to her tools so that she can open her hand to the poor, reach out to the needy and provide for her family.

What's more is that her faithful use of her God given gifts actually allows her husband to use his God given gifts. As she labors well, it frees up her husband to work faithfully and be well known and respected in the public square.

This means that a wife is free view her vocation without legalistic burdens. A wife is free and encouraged to use her gifts, her hands and her heart working in the home if that is what allows her to glorify God and provide best for those around her. A wife is free to work in the marketplace with her

gift, her hands and her heart if that is what allows her to glorify God, and to provide best for her family, and those around her.

Isn't this a relief we need to feel? This is the beauty of God's view of work. For women I hope this provides relief, and for men this provides correction. There is immense pressure placed on women to outperform men in the workplace or other wives in the home. But the joy of the gospel is that if our primary goal is to fear the Lord, we find the freedom of trusting God's view of us regardless of where we work.

For men I hope this corrects our sense of false importance as well. How easy is it for us to think that the goal of our wife is to help us make a name for ourselves? But Eve was not given to Adam so that Adam could become great, Eve was given to Adam so that God's kingdom would become great. When both men and woman, husbands and wives accept that all of our labor is for the glory of God's name, then we can enter into gospel-shaped discussions of what it looks like in marriage for each of you to use your gifts to honor God and provide for others.

As we all look at the excellent wife, may we all view our vocation, our hours, and our pay as something God desires to use not to build up worldly success, but to pour out our worship to God and love towards others.

But secondly we see that she not only uses her physical skills, but she also uses her words to care for others. ***She Speaks for Others.***

Look back with me at **Proverbs 31:26-27.**

Here is the joy of a gospel preaching wife. The teaching of kindness here is literally the teaching of the Hebrew word "*chesed*" which implies the covenant keeping love of the Lord. Her wisdom with which she looks to the ways of her family, and those around her, is gospel wisdom.

In 1 Peter, Peter reminds husbands that their believing wives are "coheirs with you in the grace of life." The beautiful joy of a woman who loves the gospel is that whether it's as a single lady in a Bible study, or a married woman with her husband, she gets to remind others of the truth of Jesus' kindness to us.

A godly wife seeks to care for her house by covering her house, in the words of grace. She provides for others in both body and in spirit.

Why does she do all of this? Because it is for her joy. This is the last attribute we see: **She is Praised by Others.**

Look again at **Proverbs 30:28-31.**

Here again we see the good promise of wisdom that we saw earlier. Just as Lemuel's mother reminded him that God's decree wishes to spare us destruction, here we see that a life lived for the glory of God and good of others is a praiseworthy and deeply satisfying life.

God is not against you getting praised. In fact God desires to praise those who please him in the gospel. What God is against, is us desiring praise by the world's standards instead of the Lord's standards.

This wife, leaves nothing on the table. By providing good to her husband, serving the needs of those around her, giving of her time and her skills to service she finds deep joy.

Why? Because at the heart of the excellent wife is the fear of the Lord. If we did not see this attribute, this list would be a crushing burden to any woman who aspires to be a wife. It would also perhaps seem unattainable to those who live in singleness. But the key to everything here is not a husband, but a heart for the Lord.

The woman who fears the Lord is given the wisdom in which to live her life in a way that deeply satisfies her, serves others, and glorifies God.

This is where I want to zoom out for a moment with two points of application.

The first is for those who either live in marriages or are looking forward to marriages: **look at marriage God's way**. I often call marriage "long form discipleship." Marriage is the longest relationship of helping someone follow Jesus you will know in your life. And here we see how marriage is meant to help us do that.

In contrast to the vices which pull us away from our task of glorifying God, and sins which destroy us in the process, a biblical wife helps remind her husband of the work God called both of them to and seeks to support him in his faithfulness to the Lord and the Lord's calling in his life.

Similarly, husbands, your goal in marriage is not to find a wife who pleases you in the comforts of your flesh, but instead one for whom you desire to pour out your own life for. Look at how Paul puts this in **Ephesians 5:25-28**.

Just as wives are called as helpers to serve those around them with their gifts, so husbands are called like Christ our head, to lay down our lives so that we might wash our spouses with the word, care for them as they follow Jesus, and support them as they support us.

Just as husbands progressively grow in looking like Jesus, so too do women progressively grow. That means that women, if you look at yourself and this doesn't look like you, there's hope in the gospel. Men, if you think you're going to find a woman who embodies all of this perfectly, you had better hope that women aren't looking for you to embody Jesus perfectly. Instead, we all aspire by grace to grow more and more into who Jesus promises to make us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Here in the end of a book on wisdom we see the wisdom in which we are to view marriage. It is not how the world views it. Christian marriage is a sphere in which we get to uniquely help each other follow Jesus in a way that expresses Jesus' love for the church.

But secondly, there is an application in here for all of us, whether we are male or female, single or married. **Lean into God's excellent wisdom**.

This poem is an acrostic. Meaning each line starts with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Part of why it's done this way is to show that this woman is the complete woman.

We are called to emulate her by the power of the Holy Spirit to the degree you are able to. But also this kind of helper in perfect consistency is impossible from our perspective. No wife can do this all the time

in the same way no husband is perfect all the time. Spouses and even church members will fail to help each other follow Jesus and sin against each other.

But lady wisdom will never lead us astray. Remember throughout the book of Proverbs wisdom was personified as a woman calling us to herself. Look at what Solomon says in **Proverbs 7:4-5**. The woman who is more precious than jewels is also seen here **Proverbs 3:13,15**.

The excellent wife who is seemingly hard to find calls out to us in **Proverbs 8:17**.

You see God has given us a helper who seeks to do us good, who wishes to give us gain, and who protects us from the desires which destroy and the delights which distort. That is his wisdom in his word, and his power in the Holy Spirit.

This is why one does not have to be married to be a Christian. We can apply this text by striving to live, each and every one of us faithful kings and excellent wives, but for each of us God has provided a Faithful King for us in Jesus Christ, and an Excellent Wife in his wisdom.

As you sit here today, God has reached out to love you through the wisdom of Jesus Christ. As you look at a loud and frantic world, you might feel without a helper. But God has given us help with deep provision in his word. You might feel terribly alone and unloved and without purpose, but here God has come to love you, redeem you and give you a purpose that no husband or wife ever could in the gospel of Jesus Christ. All of this is here in his word, cling to it and you will find him excellent in all his ways and noble in all his rule.