**The virtuous woman**

(Proverbs 31:10-31)

Probably no one has written funnier stories about motherhood than the late Erma Bombeck. She could make you laugh until you cry. But the following story is on the more serious side. It is entitled, *A Mother’s Love.*

"You don't love me!"  How many times have your kids laid that one
on you?  And how many times have you, as a parent, resisted the urge
to tell them how much?

Some day when my children are old enough to understand the logic that motivates a mother, I will tell them:

**I loved you enough** to ask about where you were going, with whom and what time you would get home.

**I loved you enough** to insist that you buy a bike, that we could afford to give you, with your own money.

**I loved you enough** to make you return a Milky-Way— with a bite out of it—to the drug store and to confess "I stole this."

**I loved you enough** to stand over you for two hours while you cleaned your room, a job that would have taken me 15 minutes.

**I loved you enough** to let you see anger, disappointment, disgust and tears in my eyes.

**I loved you enough** to admit I was wrong and ask for your forgiveness.

**I loved you enough** to let you stumble, fall and hurt.

**But most of all,** I loved you enough to say NO when you hated me for it. That was the hardest part of all.

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When you read the famous passage about the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31:10-31, you may begin to think that the King of Israel who wrote this passage (King Lemuel) might have lost his mind. It would seem nearly impossible that one woman could do—day in and day out—all the things that are listed in these 22 verses. Some women might say, *“If this is what it takes to be a woman of excellence, I’m toast. There is no way I could live up to all of this.”*

Well, in a recent issue of *Grace in Focus* magazine, writer and Bible teacher Marcia Hornok has pointed out that our problem is that we have read this passage as if it were referring to a woman’s “daily chores” rather than a picture of a woman’s “entire life.”

Here’s what she means. To list everything that is written in vv. 10-31 and make it a list of what every woman needs to be doing every day of her life is simply overwhelming. The woman that can do all of these things every day would have to have some kind of supernatural powers like Wonder Woman or something. Therefore, it would be better to read Proverbs 31 as an overview of a godly woman’s entire life:

* The early years (31:13-17)
* The middle years (31:18-22)
* The later years (31:23-27)

With this being Mother’s Day, I would like to keep my thoughts brief, so what I would like to do is to simply make a few comments about each of these sections (kind of like a devotional).

Let’s start with the **introduction** in vv. 10-12:

**Proverbs 31:10–12**-----10 Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth *is* far above rubies. 11 The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain. 12 She does him good and not evil All the days of her life.

Notice that phrase “all the days of her life.” This phrase tips the reader off to the fact that the author will be talking about the woman of noble character’s lifetime and not her daily chores. She does good to those around her all the days of her life.

**II. The early years (31:13-17)**

This section revolves around an organized home and the priority of the family. She is busy clothing and feeding the family and working hard out in the garden. She’s a hard worker who nurtures those God has given to her and equips them for the future. Verse 17 shows us her resolve:

**Proverbs 31:17**-----17 She girds herself with strength, And strengthens her arms.

Ladies, use your strength in the early years to get your children ready for everything they will face in the future. Let them be able to look at how you have managed the home and nurtured them so that they will know what to do when they are adults.

**III. The middle years (31:18-22)**

In this section, as her children are growing up and can take care of themselves more and more, we see the virtuous woman expand her care as she provides for the poor and needy. Look at verse 20:

**Proverbs 31:20**-----20 She extends her hand to the poor, Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy.

As the kids get older, it opens up opportunities to do more than you could when the kids were younger and more needy.

**IV. The later years (31:23-27)**

What we see here in her later years (as an empty-nester). Her husband is sitting in a position of authority and the virtuous woman is sharing his good reputation and character:

V. 25: Strength and honor [or, dignity] *are* her clothing…

And because she is a woman of maturity and character she can dispense wisdom and grace to the younger women:

V. 26: She opens her mouth with wisdom,
 And on her tongue *is* the law of kindness.

In Titus 2:3, Paul tells the older women that they are to be “teachers of good things.”

Ladies, do all you can for as long as you can for others. One day, you may be so frail physically that your ministry revolves around prayer alone. But while you have strength, keep on helping others along the path of following Christ.

**V. Conclusion (31:28-31)**

Proverbs 31 concludes with the virtuous woman’s secret (v. 30):

**Proverbs 31:30**-----Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing,
 But **a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised**.

Charm deceives and beauty dissipates but godliness never goes out of style!

The woman of virtue has worked all her life for others and now she is rewarded:

**Proverbs 31:28-29**-----Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband *also,* and he praises her:

“Many daughters have done well [virtuously---same word as in v. 10],
 But you excel them all.”

Her good works are praised in public:

**Proverbs 31:31**-----Give her of the fruit of her hands,
 And let her own works praise her in the gates.

**Close:** I would like to close with a question. In light of all we have looked at today, how should we define “virtue”? Sewing, cooking, working a garden?

It can be. But in reality, virtue is using your talents to bless others!

Find out what you’re good at and bless others doing it!

If you do that, you will prove to be a person of virtue—whose value is far above rubies!

Shall we pray?