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Proverbs 31



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In "Proverbs 31," Steve Gregg provides insights on the responsibilities and challenges of being a just king and queen. The text emphasizes the importance of ruling with justice and avoiding the exploitation of the poor and needy. The passage also highlights the value of a virtuous domestic woman who is faithful, hardworking, and conducts home-based business to provide for her family. Additionally, the author advises on the appropriate use of alcohol and cautions against the misuse of wine that could lead to a loss of judgment and perversion of justice.

Transcript

Let's turn to Proverbs chapter 31. Yesterday we completed our general survey of the book of Proverbs, and then we also looked at chapter 30 in some detail, and we want to now take chapter 31 in detail. Now, this doesn't mean that we've completed our study of the book, although this is the last chapter.

We have not really embarked on our study of the major portion of the book, which would be in chapters 10 through 29, where we're going to take that in a topical manner rather than chapter by chapter. But trying to get the special chapters sort of taken care of before we change directions and start doing our topical studies in Proverbs, we took chapters 1 through 9 more or less as a pass through, verse by verse, commenting, and then we did the same with chapter 30, and we'll do that with chapter 31. And then we will have the deck cleared for looking for the rest of our time in Proverbs at the topics that are addressed so much in the main body of the book.

In chapter 31, it says, The words of King Lemuel, the utterance which his mother taught him, as I've said previously, we don't know for sure who King Lemuel is. There is no king of Israel or Judah whose actual name was Lemuel, but it could have been a pet name, a nickname given to one of the kings by his mother. It's clear that he's his mother in this addresses him as Lemuel in verse four.

And so it's possible just a name that she called him by, in which case the king is not identified. But since the book is primarily a book of Solomon's wisdom, many have

thought that King Lemuel is a name for Solomon, a nickname. It could be.

We don't have any better theories that I know of. And so we might as well assume that it is Solomon, since it was almost certainly written by an Israeli. And as I said, the kings of Israel and Judah were not named Lemuel, so it would be a second name for somebody, possibly for Solomon.

Now, his mother said this. What my son and what the son of my womb and what the son of my vows do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings. It is not for kings or Lemuel.

It is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink. Let's say drink and forget the law and pervert the justice of all the afflicted. Give strong drink to him who is perishing and wine to those who are bitter of heart.

Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his misery no more. Open your mouth for the speechless in the cause of all who are appointed to die. Open your mouth, judge righteously and plead the cause of the poor and needy.

Now, this is a queen mother speaking to her king son about what his responsibilities are as a king and what the dangers are that we fall men, especially men of power and people who have affluence and can get what they want as a king. Usually kings succumb to greed or women or maybe a few other possible things, maybe just a pleasure, wine and so forth. And so his mother warns him that kings have special responsibilities since it is there in the position to govern and to judge righteously, to judge and bring justice in the land, to make decisions between people who have legal disputes and to make sure that the poor and the needy are not bulldozed in these proceedings, as was so often the case in corrupt governments and there have been few that were not.

Generally speaking, those who are rich and powerful are the ones who will get what they want. And the poor and the needy are not able to bribe, the judges are not able to bribe the king and therefore often they are mistreated in the courts, although they might have justice on their side. And this is certainly the case in our society in many instances, although we profess to be a nation that values justice for all, there still is the case that the high dollar corporations can bribe Congress or can at least donate to the campaigns of certain politicians who will support their causes, even if those causes are not good for people.

And even if those causes sometimes damage the poor and those who cannot stand against them. I will not give examples right now, though there are a few in my mind. The only reason I won't give them is I don't want them to sound like pet peeves of mine about our own government and that's not where we're going to go with this.

But the truth is that it's always been that way, that people who are rich could get what

they wanted from the judges in the courts because they had what the judges wanted, and that is money to grease their palms. And so to open your mouth for the speechless in verse eight, in the cause of those who are appointed to die, that would be those who, of course, are unjustly appointed to die. Perhaps those whose rights, maybe their estates, are being taken from them by rich oppressors and therefore they could be in danger of starving to death.

Open your mouth, judge, righteously, verse nine says, and plead the cause of the poor and needy. That's the bottom line. Now in the course of that, he points out that there are some distractions that might lead a man in power to compromise or to even see things out of focus.

One of those is the distortion of reality that can come when a man is swept away by passion and another is when he's swept away by alcohol. And she says initially in verse three, do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings. If this was Solomon who received this advice, he certainly didn't take it because he was destroyed as a result of his love for many women.

According to the book of First Kings, he loved many women, foreign women, and his love for them caused him to compromise in his religious purity. And he built shrines for the gods of the heathen to please his wives in Jerusalem. And this turned his heart away from God and brought judgment upon him and destroyed him, destroyed his kingdom in a way.

It got split in two after he died. He didn't see it in his lifetime, but he knew it was going to happen because it was prophesied to him. Now, these days, a man is not as likely to build temples to the gods of the wrong kind of women that may seduce him.

But he may in other ways compromise his Christian beliefs and character and principles. And many times when a man is led away from the faith, it is partly because he's interested in somebody who does not appreciate the faith. And he wants to please her rather than God or more than God.

That's why Jesus said, anyone who loves wife or children more than me is not worthy of me. Now, of course, the same goes the other direction. Many women have compromised their faith by falling in love with somebody who is not a believer and perhaps convinced in their own minds that they could lead him to the Lord after they were married, have gone off and bound themselves unequally with an individual who became a grief and a matter of compromise for her.

And so both both sides can be led off and destroyed by giving up their strength to women. I wonder if this very line, give not your strength to women, might be reflecting back on Samson, who certainly was a man of great strength, but he forfeited his strength to please a woman. She kept asking him, what is the secret of your strength? And she

certainly made it obvious to him that she intended to do whatever it was he told her would take his strength away, because three times he gave her a wrong answer.

And she did the thing that he said would cause her to lose the strength. So there could be no question that his strength was what she was after. She was going to destroy him if she could.

And because she whined and moaned and said, oh, you don't love me and you tell me the truth if you love me, you know, just being manipulated in this case by this woman, he gave in and he surrendered his strength. He told her cut my hair and he knew she was going to do it. I mean, how could he not know that she had done all the other things that he had said? And so he basically just said, I'm giving it up.

I'm giving it all up for this woman. And he lost everything, his eyes and the woman and his life. She destroyed him.

He was not a king, but he was a judge, the closest thing that Israel had to kings in those days. And maybe Lemuel's mother has in mind a case like that of Samson. But she could easily, if she was writing in generations after Solomon's time, she could have Solomon himself in mind who gave up his kingdom, as it were, because of his love for many of the wrong kind of women.

Now, later in the chapter, she gives a description of the right kind of woman in verses 10 through 31 in the famous song concerning the virtuous woman or the virtuous wife. But she knows of both kinds of women. She knows of the type that's virtuous and who will do her husband good and not evil all the days of his life.

And she knows of that kind of woman that will destroy a man and take his strength from him. Now, in addition to women, she's aware that kings often celebrate and they celebrate with wine and song and so forth. And she says, you know, Lemuel, you need to stay away from the alcohol.

Now, the Bible does not, as some people think, forbid all consumption of alcohol. There are lots of Christians who think that Christians should not drink any alcohol at all. Some denominations take this as their official position.

And there are individuals who feel this way, whether their denomination does or not, because in many cases they have, in their own families or their own lives, seen the horrible destruction that the abuse of alcohol can bring about. And so some who perhaps maybe have lost loved ones to an accident involving a drunk driver or who had fathers or husbands whose drunkenness has destroyed the family and brought misery to everybody in the family. People like that can be quite sensitized to the dangers of alcohol and you can see why they would be.

And so many times when they're Christians, they simply say, I can't imagine why any

Christian would ever approve. Of drinking alcohol, and this apparently because they've never seen alcohol used moderately. They've only seen the damage that happens when it is abused.

We must remember that alcohol was created by God. We don't know that it was a part of a fall. Some people think it was, but it seems to be more something built into the natural laws that certain sweet fruits ferment.

And actually Lemuel's mother suggests there is a positive use of alcohol, but the wrong use of it will take away the judgment from the mind of a king. The right use of alcohol, she says in verses six and seven, is to give strong drink to who is perishing. Apparently somebody who is dying painfully.

Maybe somebody who's dying on the battlefield of mortal wounds, or maybe somebody who is, you know, eating away with cancer if they had such back then. I don't know if cancer is a modern problem due to various lifestyle and environmental issues that have come up in modern times, or if they had cancer back then. But they certainly had ways in which people died painfully.

There's one of the kings of whom it says that his bowels came out while he just had a problem where his intestines came out through his rectum and so forth. It must have been extremely painful. This was a natural condition, a sickness that he had.

There's lots of people who've died in agony. And Lemuel's mother says, you know, give wine to them. Give them enough to anesthetize them, really.

Give wine to those who are bitter of heart. Now, bitter of heart could mean people who are depressed. And, of course, those who are perishing or those who are on their deathbed.

Now, there seem to be two uses of wine that she acknowledges. One is as anesthesia. They had no better anesthesia in those days than that.

In fact, even until fairly modern times. The best anesthesia was, you know, a pint of vodka or something. You remember in the old cowboy movies when somebody had gangrene in their leg and they had to thaw it off.

What they do, they strap the guy down, give him a pint of whiskey and start hacking at his leg. From the way it's depicted in movies, it sounds like it didn't completely numb all the pain. But it came closer than being sober.

Now, some might say, well, are you recommending getting people drunk as an anesthesia against pain? Well, I'm not the one giving the advice here. This is King Lemuel's mother. However, I would say that in special circumstances, when a person is dying or when, you know, something drastic has to happen that's extremely painful, it

does sound here that perhaps God has provided alcohol as a painkiller.

And while we would not recommend recreational drunkenness to get a man to the point where he's feeling no pain from alcohol is perhaps not morally different than putting him under with a modern anesthesia. You certainly wouldn't want to make a habit of it in either case. But for a one-time thing or for an end-of-life relief of excruciating pain, I'm not sure that this was not one of the things that God has created alcohol for before there was, you know, sophisticated anesthesia.

And also, the one who's bitter at heart. Now, the problem here is someone might take this to mean, whenever you're feeling low, just go ahead and drink until you feel happy. And I don't think that's necessarily the case.

I think it's possibly suggesting that a little bit of wine can elevate the mood when there's extremely depressing circumstances. Now, I have personally never used wine for either of those things. I'm not a drinker.

I'm not saying I never have drunk wine. I have, and I would again. I don't have any problem with it.

However, I've never had any interest in it. I've never used it for anesthesia or for a mood elevator. And I've never had any interest whatsoever in being drunk in my whole life.

I couldn't even be tempted with it. I just can't imagine why anyone would want to do that. Unless, of course, you're in agony and dying.

And I suppose I would accept it then. But I value my brain cells too much to want to recreationally use alcohol in excess. But there's certainly nothing wrong with moderate use of it.

And the Bible says that wine cheers the heart of men. It says that twice, once in the Psalms and once in Judges. And in the latter case, it says it cheers the heart of God in men, which is a strange phrase.

Of course, that's in Jotham's parable about the trees going out to speak to a king. And they asked the vine, and he said, I give up my wine, which cheers the heart of God in men to go and be a king over the trees. We're not told that Jotham was inspired.

So maybe wine doesn't cheer the heart of God. It's hard to know how it would, particularly unless he's happy to see people cheered. But the point is, we have to be awfully careful when we consider the use of wine as an elevator of moods, not to see that as some kind of a sanction of drunkenness.

But at the same time, we need to be careful not to overreact to the dangers of drunkenness and forbid all use of wine, even for the purposes of the Bible says it's

useful. It is, you know, it kills germs. We know that.

They didn't know that biblical time. But you put wine on a wound or something could be a positive use of it. But also apparently elevating the mood and killing pain are things that the biblical times recognized as a good use of wine.

It didn't have the stigma in biblical times that it doesn't from modern American evangelicalism. For example, if you go to Europe or whatever, the Christians there don't have the hangups about wine and beer and so forth that American Christians sometimes do. I think it's typically the American Pentecostals, maybe Baptists.

I know I grew up Baptist and there was this thing about drinking alcohol. And there are some denominations that just have their policy. We don't believe in any use of alcohol.

To my mind, that is just legalism. It's sort of like when, you know, God told Eve, don't eat of this fruit. And she said, we should not eat it or touch it.

You know, well, it's really a good idea if you're not supposed to eat something to keep your hands off it too. It's great advice. It's just what God said.

And it may be that if you're not supposed to get drunk, it's great advice to not drink at all. Good advice, but not God's word. And there may be times when actually God's own intended use of alcohol should be considered as a legitimate thing.

These days, of course, because alcohol is a little harder to control or maybe simply because people can make their own and the drug companies can't make any money off it. Pharmaceutical painkillers and pharmaceutical mood elevators are much more respectable in our society, although they alter the consciousness, even as alcohol does in different ways. But still, you know, whatever is objectionable about using alcohol for these things, presumably would be equally objectionable for using Valium or whatever other pharmaceutical substitutes there are for that in modern times.

And I'm not saying those things are all bad. I'm saying that we really shouldn't approve of the one and not the other. Before they had pharmaceutical companies, they had alcohol.

And this passage seems to suggest that it had an intended use in the sight of God. Now, she did say, however, and she's a very balanced woman. She talks about bad women and good women.

She doesn't just blacklist all women with a broad brush. And she also doesn't, she's not one dimensional about wine either. She recognizes there are some medicinal uses of wine, but she also knows the danger of wine to pervert the mind.

She says in chapter four, I mean, verse four, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for

princes intoxicating drink, lest they drink and forget the law and pervert the justice of all the afflicted. Now, the danger here is, of course, that a person who drinks too much will very possibly lose their judgment. They are altering their minds with alcohol and they will not make good judgments.

If you look at Hosea chapter four, right after the book of Daniel, it's Hosea chapter four and eleven, it says, harlotry, wine and new wine enslave the heart. Here are the two things that Lemuel's mother are concerned about, too. Women, the wrong kind of women and wine, the wrong use of wine.

These things enslave the heart. Now, this can hardly be agreeable with what Solomon advised in Proverbs four, Proverbs four, twenty three, keep your heart with all diligence for out of it spring the issues of life. You don't want to enslave your heart.

You don't want to give over your brain cells or your judgment. Your good judgment and your discernment to, you know, chemicals. And by the way, this is something we don't think about very much, but just as wine chemically alters the brain in such a way as takes away judgment in some cases, causes us not to see moral issues as clearly.

And we'll see another place in Proverbs that makes that clear. But also, harlotry or sex in general. I mean, obviously, there's good sex.

I mean, there's legitimate marital sex and then there's immoral sex. But the point is that the sexual hormones that are stimulated, you know, in a romantic setting, they are consciousness altering drugs, too. I mean, maybe not drugs, they're chemicals.

You know, when you begin to allow your mind to go there, when you begin to allow yourself to be stimulated sexually, aroused, hormones are released that alter your consciousness from it. Not in the same way wine does, but certainly in a way that makes you think in ways you wouldn't normally think and sometimes do things you wouldn't normally do, things you wouldn't have any interest in doing or wouldn't have any, you wouldn't approve doing. Once those hormones are activated, they kind of befuddle the judgment, too.

So, these are really two areas where the mind can be confused. The mind can be even twisted in its values by chemistry. Now, Lemuel's mother didn't know much about chemistry, I don't suppose.

I mean, I don't know if they'd speak of it in that way, but we talk about chemistry in a relationship between a man and woman. There's chemistry there, there's not chemistry. That's a correct saying.

Sometimes you're talking about something that's not really rational. There's just something that does to their minds when they're together. That is a dangerous thing, as wine is a dangerous thing.

You change the normal chemical balance in your brain with either an excess of hormones in a situation where that's not safe or an excess of alcohol, and it perverts judgment. You're thinking, wine and new wine and harlotry, take away the heart. Or that's what the King James says, enslave the heart in the New King James.

And if you're to guard your heart with all diligence for out of it are the springs of life, then you need to guard yourself from allowing your mind to be altered and your judgment to be muddled. In Proverbs 23 verses 29 through 35, Solomon draws sort of a caricature of sorts of the person who's enslaved to wine and the effect it has upon him. Proverbs 23, 29 says, who has woe, who has sorrow, who has contentions, who has complaints, who has wounds without cause, who has redness of eyes, those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine.

Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly. At last, it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things and your heart will utter perverse things.

Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea or one who lies at the top of the mast of a ship saying, they have struck me, but I was not hurt. I was feeling no pain. They have beaten me, but I did not feel it.

When shall I awake that I may seek another drink? This is written with a note of irony. The person who drinks too much, the person who is given over to alcohol, has woe, sorrow, contentions, complaints, wounds without cause, redness of eyes, that person who lingers long at the wine. Now, there's nothing wrong in Solomon's wine, drinking wine, of course, but lingering long, you know, drinking for a long time, taking in large volumes of wine, getting drunk, in other words, getting to the point where you're feeling no pain when you get hurt.

You know, a guy gets drunk in a bar, he gets involved in a fight because he's a jerk when he's drunk. There's a brawl, he gets beat up, he gets wounded, but he didn't know it because he's drunk. He's numb.

He says, you'll be like a person who's trying to sleep at the top of the mast of a ship. You know, this dizziness, this, I mean, what a strange description that is. It almost sounds like the writer has known the experience.

And this person, I think he describes being drunk in a very unattractive way, on purpose. And then he says, but the person who wakes up from that and says, wow, I've got all these wounds. I don't know where these came from.

I don't know where this brand new tattoo came from, you know. But I didn't feel a thing. He says, this alcohol really is ruining me.

When can I get another drink? It's an addiction, in other words. So, Lemuel's mother is

also aware that alcohol can befuddle the judgment. And if a person is in a position to make right judgments as a king is, or judges, or as a Christian is, every day, then to have their judgment unimpaired must be held at a high premium.

And we make judgments all the time, maybe more than the average person, because for us there are many things which would be ethical or moral concerns that a person without thoughts of God wouldn't be concerned about. So, we're making ethical judgments about things that other people might not even think about in those terms. And we have to make sure our judgment is not deliberately impaired, at least.

We certainly should hope not to ever have it impaired at all, but we shouldn't do things that get us in that position deliberately. Not wise. Proverbs is concerned about being wise.

Okay, now we have then this song about the virtuous wife. The King James Version says virtuous woman. A lot of translations say excellent wife.

So, virtuous can be translated as excellent. Wife can be translated as woman. The words in Hebrew are the same, wife and woman.

But the woman in question here is certainly a married woman and a mother. And so, the description is of the ideal domestic woman. And, you know, this section could be seen as a tribute to womanhood, except that it suggests that there aren't many of them that are virtuous.

And if this is a man saying it, like Solomon says it in Ecclesiastes, you might say, it's a cynical old chauvinist. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon says, you know, searching one by one, I have not found one wise among men. I found one in a thousand among women, none.

You know, he's not very flattering of men, but even less so of women. And here, the statement is not, look how virtuous women are. The statement is, who can find one that is? The idea is, it's a rare thing to find a woman that fits this description.

It's a rare thing to find a truly good woman. Now, if you think that this, like I say, is a chauvinistic thought, two things I'd say, and that is, one is that elsewhere in Proverbs, Proverbs said, most men will proclaim everyone his own faithfulness or his own goodness, but a faithful man who can find. So, this who can find suggests it's not easy.

But he says the same thing about a faithful man, as he says about, as his mother says about a virtuous woman, it's hard to find good people. When he's talking about men, he says it's hard to find a good one. When he's talking about women, it's hard to find a good one of those too.

It's just hard to find good people, men or women. And when one is considering women as especially Lemuel might be evaluating prospective women as wise, as his mother would

assume. She wants to let him know that not every woman is a good woman.

In fact, those that really are good are hard to find. Their value is above rubies. It says in verse 10, and that simply means rare.

Why would rubies be of great value? Before the invention of lasers, which actually used rubies for, you know, an industrial purpose as a component in a laser. But back then a ruby was just loved for being a gemstone, but a gemstone, you know, agates are pretty cheap, common, pretty stones. You could make rings and necklaces out of agates.

Some of them are very beautiful, but people don't value them. But they value rubies. Why? Because agates are everywhere.

Rubies are hard to find. Diamonds, harder still. When a stone is hard to find, if it's extremely hard to find, it becomes, and if it's pretty, it's a gemstone.

Its value is based on its rarity. If the whole beach was covered with rubies, instead of sand, though rubies were every bit the same as they are now, they would be of no particular value. It is their rarity.

So instead of a virtuous woman, a virtuous wife, her value is above rubies. It's saying she's a rare catch. It's a rare thing to find such a thing as this.

And goes on to describe it. The heart of her husband safely trusts in her. So he will have no lack of gain.

She does him good and not evil all the days of her life. Now, unlike the woman that is implied in verse three, who destroys kings, this woman does good to her husband. His heart safely trusts in her.

Now, there have been many men who trust their wives, but it wasn't safe. It's very important to recognize that this man doesn't just trust his wife, but it is safe for him to do so. The woman who was the seductress in the earlier chapters of Proverbs had a husband also.

He went on a long trip. Now, we don't know anything about her husband or their marriage, except that when he was away, she went out seducing men. Did her husband know it? Maybe, but maybe not.

Maybe for all he knew, she was a faithful wife. He could trust her. He could leave for a long trip with a big bag of money and know that his wife is going to be or trust that his wife is going to be faithful to him.

If so, that trust was not well placed. He could not safely trust in her, although he might trust in her. Many a woman has trusted her husband who was not a faithful husband.

And therefore, while she trusted, the object of her trust was not reliable, not trustworthy. And so the idea that someone can safely trust in you means you are faithful. Someone makes themselves vulnerable to you and puts their confidence in you.

Well, that's not a safe thing to do if you're not a faithful person, if you're going to stab them in the back, if you're going to betray them. But the woman who can safely be trusted is a woman who will not cheat. She will not betray her husband.

She will keep her vows. And that's what is being said about her here. Her husband can safely trust in her, so he will have no lack of gain.

He can go ahead and pursue the family prosperity with it through his career without having to keep an eye on his wife to see if she's running around behind his back. He can focus on what he's supposed to be doing, that is providing for the family, while he knows his wife is going to be doing what she's supposed to be doing. And the two of them, as a partnership, can improve the family's well-being.

He goes out and gains by his business and knows that she's taking care of things on the home front. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax and willingly works with her hands.

She's like the merchant ship. She brings her food from afar. She also rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and a portion for her maidservants.

She considers a field and buys it. From her profits, she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength and strengthens her arms.

She perceives that her merchandise is good and her lamp does not go out by night. She stretches out her hands to the distaff and her hands hold the spindle, that is a loom, where she makes cloth. She extends her hand to the poor.

Yes, she reaches out her hand to the needy. She is not afraid of snow for her household. For all her household is clothed with scarlet.

She makes tapestry for herself. Her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.

She makes linen garments and sells them and supplies sashes for the merchants. Strength and honor are her clothing and 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. Now, these are the things she does. She is definitely a domestic woman involved in the things that mothers and wives need to do.

She provides food for her family, both in terms of her shopping for it. She goes out and

buys the food and she also prepares the food. She even rises up before the sun is up, in verse 15, to provide food for her household.

I don't know exactly what they had for breakfast in those days, but apparently, since they didn't have the modern conveniences, if she's going to cook something, she'd have to go out and get some coals somewhere. Maybe they'd bank the coals from the previous night in the oven, or maybe there's a public bonfire where they'd go out, all the people from the village would go out and gather. But you'd have to get a fire going.

You have to get things heated up and so forth. It took a long time. Apparently, since people would rise normally at the crack of dawn, workers would, to go out in the field or do whatever they have to do, she had to get it before the crack of dawn so that when her husband would get up and her children, that there'd be food hot and ready for them.

So she got up while it was still night to cook and to prepare. And she's still up late at night because her candle, we're told, does not go out at night. That is, she stays up.

This is verse 18. She perceives her merchandise good and her lamp does not go out at night. She gets up before it's light and she stays up after it's dark.

Now, by the way, staying up after it's dark doesn't seem strange to us. We just turn on the lights and we can have it lighter at night than it would be in the daytime sometimes. In fact, sometimes when it's daytime, we turn on the lights to add more light.

We take for granted the availability of light. To us, working a swing shift or a graveyard shift is an option because it's just as light in a factory or an office or someplace or a store in the middle of the night as it is any other time. But they didn't have that luxury.

In ancient times, or even before the invention of the light bulb, for the most part, people didn't go out after dark unless there was an emergency. If they did, they had to take a torch. And I don't mean a flashlight.

The British used the word torch to mean a flashlight. They'd have to take a torch or a lamp. And fuel was expensive, oil and so forth.

They just didn't want to burn it a lot. They wouldn't stay up for hours after dark burning their lamp fuel. Why bother? They have to get up when the sun comes up anyway.

They would work while it was day. Jesus said there's 12 hours in a day when men can work. But the night comes when no one can work, Jesus said.

When night comes, it was just not possible to continue your outdoor work. Now, the woman here, she does have her lamp going after dark. It's possible that the rest of the family has gone to bed in this scenario and she's still up, you know, preparing what has to be prepared before the next morning.

So the idea is she's not a lazy woman. She's not a woman who loves sleep. In the book of Proverbs, a person who loves sleep is always characterized as a fool and an evil person, really a sluggard is always viewed as an evil person.

But she's the opposite of that. She's diligent. She prepares the things for her family.

She makes clothing for them. And she also negotiates other kinds of deals for the family's enrichment. Now, a lot of times in modern days, people read this and they say, oh, she's a business woman.

Because, of course, ever since the basically the feminist movement, the woman's movement, women are as often out of the home as in the home, perhaps more often out of the home than in the home making a living. And many times people have tried to point out that the woman being away from the home all day long to, you know, away from the children, away from the work of the domestic things, that's normal. Even this virtuous woman, what she went out and conserved her field and bought it.

She's a real estate agent, they say. You know, she made sashes and sells them to the merchants. She's an industrialist.

She's a manufacturer. She's a business person. Well, that's true.

The Bible does say she does some business. She does go out and consider a field for the family. She's not working real estate deals for people.

She hasn't given up her domestic life. She goes out and there's a field to buy for the family farm to, no doubt, to for her or the servants to produce more crops for the family's enrichment. She does have a home-based business.

She does make tapestry for herself and for her household. In verse 21 and 22, she clothes her whole family in scarlet and adorns herself with tapestry that she has made by her own hands. While she's at it, she makes more than her family needs.

And so in verse 24, she makes linen garments and sells them and supplies sashes for the merchants. She isn't a merchant. She's a home business, has a home manufacturing thing going on, on the side, besides cooking and making her family's clothes and doing all the other domestic things, she also has something she sells to the merchants.

Now, does she go out to the marketplace and sell them to the merchants? Maybe. It doesn't say she sells them to the public like she has her own store or something like that, but she makes stuff. She brings in family income.

She has a home-based business. That's OK. Apparently, it does not require her to be away from the kids or away from the duties of the home.

And her husband, then, what's he doing? What we saw earlier, he safely trusts in her so

that they have no need, no lack of gain. He's out making a good living for the family. And besides that, verse 23 says, her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.

Now, we will find, if we study the historical books of the Old Testament, that the gates of the city were the places where people normally transacted legal matters. If somebody had a legal dispute, where we would go to the county courthouse, they would go to the gates of the city. And the elders of the city and the judges, the magistrates, they met at the gate of the city, probably because the majority of the population lived outside the city walls.

Most of the business district, virtually the whole business district of any town, was within the city walls. But most of the people didn't live in the city. Some did, but most were farmers.

And there was not room within the city walls for farmland. So most people lived in the villages and farming land outside the walls. If there was an invasion from a foreigner, they might all run into the city.

All the people outside would go in there and they'd slam the gates. And then the foreigners would usually burn up their crops and start them out. But if somebody, an average citizen, wanted to transact some legal transaction, rather than clogging up the city within the walls with their trouble, they'd meet at the gates.

There's a place. They wouldn't have to go inside the city walls, necessarily, and congest the business area there. But they could do their legal transactions with the elders or the magistrates instead of the gates.

Now, this woman's husband is a magistrate or an elder. And he's known in the gates. What this suggests, of course, although it would not be true in every case because a man who's not an elder might have a good wife, too.

But what Lemuel's mother is saying is that, well, behind every great man there's a great woman, that because her husband can leave many of the areas of the family concerns to her, and she's competent, she's conscientious, she works hard, she does the things that she's expected to do, he is well known in town as a man who has a great wife. And that causes him to be respected. A good marriage requires, of course, a good man and a good woman.

And many marriages are not good just because one or the other is not good. The man might be good, but his wife's not, or the wife is good, but her husband's not. But when you've got a good man and he's married to a good woman, he becomes an example and an object of respect in the society.

He's viewed as knowing how to run things. He runs his household well, so maybe he can

run the country well or the city well. So, because his marriage is good and his family's in order, he is viewed as qualified to be one of the magistrates.

And he's honored in the city because of his wife. You know, that's what Paul said when he's talking about elders of the church. In the passage, I'm thinking that he uses the word overseers, but overseers and elders were terms that Paul used interchangeably.

In 1 Timothy 3, 1 says, This is a faithful saying. If a man desires the position of an overseer, the New King James says bishop, but the Greek word is overseer. He desires a good work, and we could say an elder because Paul definitely uses overseer and elder as interchangeable terms.

An overseer, then, must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous, one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence. So the man's got to have a household that is well managed in order to qualify to be an overseer in the church. Because he says in verse 5, For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God? So that being a leader in the church is like being the leader in a household, and a man who can't lead his own household well is not a good candidate for being a leader in the church either.

So what we see is that having a good wife, and as a result, a good marriage, will cause a good man to qualify for leadership in the church. As it says in Proverbs 31, he qualifies for leadership in the city. If his wife is a shrew, if his marriage is a disaster, then why should anyone want him to take leadership in the church? Now, unfortunately, in many cases, this is ignored in modern churches, and sometimes a man who doesn't have a good relationship with his wife is nonetheless allowed to be an elder overseer in the church.

I've often mentioned that I don't consider myself qualified to be an overseer in a church for that very reason. My marriage life is not a good example. I personally think that I have been a good example as a husband, but my marriage does not reflect that, and therefore, I don't think that anyone would be wise to invite me to be an overseer in a congregation.

Not that a failed marriage means that a man didn't do what he could, and didn't do the right thing, and wasn't a good husband or father, but onlookers don't know that. I mean, any man will, like Solomon said, all men will protest their own goodness, but a faithful man who can find. You know, everybody's going to say it was their wife's fault if the marriage broke up, or the wife's going to say it was her husband's fault in most cases, but the average cynical onlooker is going to say, yeah, you know, how'd you, you know, how come you think you can lead us when your marriage failed? So, and that's a legitimate cynicism.

It's not always applicable to the real-life situations, but it's a legitimate suspicion, and therefore, to avoid that, Paul says the leaders should be people whose wives are, and their children, and their household are in good order, and one can look at their household and say, there's a well-ordered home. Probably a church that's overseen by a person like this will be well-ordered also. That's what Paul says, which agrees very much with what Lemuel's mother said.

The man who's got a virtuous wife, he trusts in her, and obviously, the assumption is the man's a good man too. Obviously, there could be a virtuous wife who's got a bad husband. He shouldn't be in the gate with the elders, unless he's on trial there, but the idea that the man, the assumption is the man's a good man.

The question is, does he have a good marriage? Well, he will if he has a good wife, a good man and a good woman together will have a good marriage, and that being so, he will have a position of leadership in society or maybe even in the church. Now, it says also about her that she is strong. Verse 17 says, she girds herself with strength and strengthens her arms.

This is apparently physical strength it's talking about because it talks about how she stretches out her hands in verse 19 to the staff and her hand holds the spindle, the loom upon which cloth is made requires some physical manipulation of large, you know, wooden parts and so forth that require some strength to manhandle. And she's kept in good shape. She's kept, I mean, she's been an active woman.

She probably has a lot of strength. We think of the woman as the weaker vessel. The Bible uses the term.

I'm not sure that it's referring to physical weakness, although, of course, all things being equal, most women are physically not as strong as most men, but you'll certainly find women who are so strong and men who are so weak that that dichotomy would not hold up. There are strong women, and this is suggesting that she's physically strong because she's physically active. For a woman to just sit around the house and eat bonbons and watch soap operas is not going to contribute to her being in good physical condition and physically strong.

It says in verse 25, strength and honor are her clothing. And that's, of course, a figure of speech. She clothes herself as the Bible says that people should be clothed in humility, or it says of virtuous women in 1 Timothy chapter two, I believe it is, Paul said that women should not be adorned with costly jewels and things like that, but rather they should be adorned with good works.

So here she's adorned or clothed with strength and with honor. And she is intellectually a match for her husband. She is wise, which you know to Solomon is the chief virtue.

It says in verse 26, she opens her mouth with wisdom. On her tongue is the law of kindness. The virtuous wife, the ideal wife is one that when she speaks up, she says something worth saying.

It's something perceptive. She can give counsel to somebody else, to her children, even to her husband, to other women who are having struggles in their lives. She can speak wise counsel.

She opens her mouth with wisdom. And it's not just the harsh, insensitive kind of wisdom that sometimes may come from a man, an intelligent man. He may not have that sensitivity that a woman has.

The law of kindness is really governing her tongue. She can speak, as it were, the truth in love. She speaks wisdom and she speaks it kindly.

So this is the description of the ideal wife, the ideal woman. And it says in verse 27, she watches over the ways of her household. So she's a home watcher.

She's a homemaker. Now, in our day, many women do not have the luxury of being homemakers. For one thing, a lot of women are single mothers and have been abandoned by their husbands and they have no choice.

They have to go out and work and support their family. It's sub-ideal. And I would think that any single mother would recognize her situation is sub-ideal.

It's something that is not wrong because it's not immoral for her to go out and support a family. It's, in fact, a virtuous thing, no doubt, for her to do in the emergency. But no one would recommend that life as a norm because it's sub-normal.

It's sub-ideal. God does not desire for women to have to go out and support their families. It's clear that he would prefer that they're able to be supported by their husbands so that they can be available to their children.

And Paul gives that counsel in Titus chapter 2. In Titus chapter 2, verses 3 through 5, Paul says, The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given much wine, teachers of good things. Verse 4, that they admonish, as the older women should admonish or teach the young women, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers. And the word homemakers here in the Greek is actually a combination of two Greek words.

It means workers at home, home workers, it's called. Good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. The word of God, the reputation of God hangs on every Christian because they call themselves Christians.

They have the name of Jesus on them. They stand for the gospel. When they speak the

gospel, people will look at their lives and say, Am I attracted to this or not? Does their life adorn the gospel? What does adornment suggest? Beautify, render attractive.

Does the life of a believer render the gospel attractive to onlookers? In the case of women, Paul said that a woman who is obedient to her husband, who loves her children, who attends to the matters of the home and so forth, will adorn the gospel. Now, again, a person can adorn the gospel in less than normal circumstances. My own circumstance is less than normal.

I'm a divorcee. I was a single father. That's not normal.

That's not ideal. It's not what I recommend. It's not what I would hope for anyone to have to be in.

Yet it is in the fallen world. Things happen that are less than ideal. And God doesn't always blame us for having to bear a burden that's less than ideal lifestyle.

But very few people would say that my circumstances adorn the gospel. My own adult children have often thought, you know, they believe, but they don't very much want to have a life like mine, which, I mean, they've looked at me as a loser. I've lost marriages.

I've lost, you know, I've lost my ministry at different times because of losing marriages. I've been through a lot of different things, which I'm not whining about. I'm just saying there are things that when people look on, they don't say, wow, there's a life I'd like to live.

I mean, my kids look on and they don't think that I have much fun in life. I do. I love my life.

I love what I do and so forth. But when people look on a Christian family, the ideal would be for them to see what everyone would wish to have in their own family. And they can say, well, the reason this family is doing well is because both the husband and the wife are devoted to following the ways of God, following the word of God.

And look at the bliss of that marriage. Look at the children. You know, look, these children are not on drugs.

These children are not on rebellion. The daughters aren't going out and getting pregnant. They're you know, they're not criminals.

The wife is not only content, but cheerful and happily supporting what her husband does verbally and and with her back backstage, you know, behind the curtain support of what he's doing. And her husband loves her and cares for her and provides for her. This is a situation that adorns the gospel.

If people all follow the biblical instructions, husbands, wives and children and parents, if

everyone follows biblical instructions, families will be blissful and the children will appreciate her, too. It says in verse 28, Proverbs 31, 28, her children rise up and call her blessed her husband also. And he praises her.

So she's getting she's getting her strokes, probably people in the community praise her, but she's not out there hearing their accolades. But she hears what her children say. She hears what her husband says.

And by the way, children should praise their virtuous mothers and husbands should verbally praise their wives who are virtuous. And her husband says this in verse 29, many daughters have done well, but you would sell them all. Every husband should be able to tell his wife that she sells all the others.

Of course, that can't be literally true. It can't be that every wife excels all other wives. But in his estimation, she does.

And he's got to make sure she knows that charm is deceitful and beauty is vain. But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her the fruit of her hands and let her own works praise her in the gates.

Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain. But the woman who fears the Lord shall be praised. That's a powerful verse there, because, of course, charm and beauty are powerful influences.

Our society and probably every society before us has always seen the power of a beautiful and charming woman to influence society. First of all, men are drawn to her, but women admire her, too. They may resent her.

But what she does sort of sets the trend. Everyone wants to be like her. That's why advertisers always use beautiful female models, even to sell products to women.

Because the women who buy the products want to identify with the beautiful woman. They'll use beautiful women to sell products to men. And men are attracted to beautiful women for a different reason.

But the point is, beauty is something that has power over people. But Solomon's mother says, that's vain. It's empty.

It's not the kind of respect you want to get. It's empty. It's fading.

Every beautiful woman becomes an ugly old woman unless she dies young. And by the way, men become ugly old men, too, unless they die young. But the point is, charm, it's used to manipulate, to deceive.

Beauty, it's empty. It can be like a jewel of gold in a swine's mouth if a beautiful woman lacks discretion. But the woman who fears the Lord, she will be praised.

And we can see. Just in closing. The parallel thought in First Peter, Chapter three, in First Peter, Chapter three, in the opening verses, he says, likewise, you wives be submissive to your own husbands.

That even if some do not obey the word, they without a word may be won by the conduct of their wives when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Husbands who don't otherwise have any interest in the gospel may, if their wives conduct adorns the gospel. May be drawn to it.

And he says in verse three, do not let your beauty be that of outward adorning, of arranging of the hair, of wearing of gold or putting on apparel. It says fine in italics in the New King James. That's not in the Greek, just your adorning should not be the clothing you wear and the jewelry you wear, but rather let it be the hidden person of the heart.

With the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God, so a woman who fears the Lord should be praised for beauty and the charm. Those are surface and deceitful things. They do have their power.

They do have their influence, but it's short lived. And yet a person who fears God, she'll be praised for generations to come by her own children, by her husband, and even in the gates. Her work shall praise her in the gates that is in public places.

She'll be well known for having been excellent, having been virtuous. And so ends the description in Proverbs 31 of the virtuous woman. Amen.