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Proverbs: Wives



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In "Proverbs: Wives," Steve Gregg discusses the role of wives and husbands according to the book of Proverbs. While wives are often seen as the weaker party in the relationship, they are capable of wielding significant power, particularly in managing the household. According to Proverbs, a virtuous woman who fears the Lord is praised above all; charm and beauty are deemed deceitful and vain, and a woman without discretion is seen as empty. Gregg emphasizes the importance of mutual respect and submission in a marriage, noting that a wife who refuses to submit can be a serious detriment to the relationship.

Transcript

The topic I would like for us to look at today in the book of Proverbs is the subject of wives and husbands. And we have come to that portion that is talking about human relationships. And we were talking about children and parents yesterday.

It's one kind of a relationship. Another kind, very different kind, is that between husbands and wives. There are many different kinds of relationships that Proverbs discusses, and we'll be looking at all of them in the course of our series here.

But as you can see from the notes I've given you, there are a lot of Proverbs that have to do with the relationship between married people. And we can begin by Solomon's observation of how much power is really wielded by a woman. You know, women are sometimes referred to as the weaker vessel.

Actually, the Scripture refers to the wife as the weaker vessel in 1 Timothy 3. Sometimes we call them the weaker sex. But actually, although they are in some respects weaker than men, in other respects they are quite capable of wielding tremendous power in a relationship. And in Proverbs 12, in verse 4, Solomon said, An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who causes shame is like rotteness in his bones.

An excellent wife, this is the same expression that's found in Proverbs 31. You know, who can find an excellent wife, or who can find a virtuous woman. A virtuous wife, a virtuous woman, is a crown to her husband.

She's an honor to her husband. One could even say a crown is like he's made to be a king if he's got a virtuous wife. Remember, it says in Proverbs 31 about the virtuous woman, Her husband sits with the elders in the gates of the city, meaning he's influential.

He wields authority in the community because his wife is a godly wife, support to him. You know, the old saying, behind every great man there's a great woman. And that's pretty much what that's saying.

Here's a man who's great in his community. He's recognized as a leader because, frankly, he's got a home that endorses his leadership skills and abilities. When in fact, of course, to manage a wife can take a lot of skill on the part of a man.

But on the other hand, it may be that it's the wife that's got all the virtue. The man might not be very skilled at all, but if his wife is virtuous, it makes him look good. It's a crown to him.

But the wife who is causing shame, the wife who is misbehaving or misspeaking all the time and bringing embarrassment or shame is like rottenness in his bones, which just means it kind of eats him up from the inside. So having a wife that is trustworthy and virtuous makes a man confident, makes a man able to function without any insecurity in the community. He trusts his wife out of his sight.

He knows that everyone looks at his wife as a virtuous person, makes him proud. It's a crown to him. But when a man knows that his wife is bringing shame to him, either because she's unfaithful or just foolish, it kind of eats away at him.

It ruins his life. And it says that in chapter 14, verse one, also that every wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands. So a wise woman builds her house.

Doesn't mean that she goes out and does the actual physical construction of the building. It means her household. Her household is built up.

Its reputation is elevated because she's wise. And of course, that agrees with the description of the virtuous woman in chapter 31, that her whole family is better off because of her. But the foolish woman pulls down her household with her hands.

She can destroy the family single-handedly. Now this, by the way, is contrary to popular belief today. It is generally believed that one person cannot wreck a marriage.

It takes two. You may have heard that before. Whenever there's a divorce, you'll always hear people who are trying to sound sophisticated and modern saying, well, there's no innocent party in a divorce.

And that is just a very silly thing to say. In the divorce between God and Israel, was there any innocent party there? Was God not innocent? When Hosea's wife committed adultery in Latter-day Saint, was Hosea not innocent? Is Christ not innocent of the foolishness of the church that goes out and brings shame to him? Is Christ not innocent? It's absurd to say there's no innocent party. Of course there are innocent parties.

In divorce, like any other crime, there are perpetrators and victims. Now, if someone says there's no innocent party because nobody's perfect, well, okay, fair enough. Nobody's perfect.

But nobody thought they were marrying a perfect person when they got married, did they? If they did, they were the fool. Because you never marry a perfect person, you marry a human. And every human has flaws.

That's not the same thing as being responsible for the dissolution of a marriage. There is such a thing as loving people, and love covers a multitude of sins. The person who divorces their spouse because they found their spouse to be annoying or imperfect or something like that, has not necessarily got grounds for divorce.

So, it is possible for either the man or the woman to destroy the home single-handedly without any help from the spouse. The spouse does not have to have any participation in the destruction of the family. In fact, in our society, more often than not, marriage is broken up strictly by the decision of one party against and over the protest of the other party.

And there is no court in the land that will ever protect a marriage against the decision of one party that wants to destroy it over the protest of the other spouse and children and relatives and friends. Because, of course, the courts don't want to keep somebody from being happy. They don't care how many people they make unhappy by letting that person be happy, but you would never make someone stay in a marriage if it makes them unhappy.

And it is entirely possible for a person to tear down their marriage alone. Solomon seems to be saying that the foolish woman pulls down her house with her hands. That is, she can single-handedly destroy her family and her home.

So can a man, by the way. But one should not think that it is always the man. And there is a popular notion in some Christian circles today, and there are Christian books that say this, that in every case where a marriage dissolves, it is always the man's fault.

Even if he was a good man and the wife was a bad woman, it is still his fault because he, as a head of the family, is responsible. Just like the captain of the ship is responsible if the ship runs aground, even if he wasn't at the helm. Even if it happened while he was sleeping and he had left somebody at the wheel, he is responsible.

He is the captain. Well, that may be true of a ship and of a captain. There are things different about a marriage than a ship.

One is the captain has every right to remove someone from the helm if they are drunk or if they are incompetent. The person at the helm, all the people on the ship have to obey him or go to the brig. You don't have that in a marriage.

The wife is supposed to submit to her husband. If she doesn't, what can he do? He can't take her off the job. He can't make her not be the mother of the wife anymore.

He can't put her in prison. He can't discipline her like he can discipline children. He has no control over her.

Human beings are human beings whether they are male or female. They have free will. It should not be thought that a woman has less free will than a man to do the wrong thing if she wishes.

Our family was at a church once where a man was preaching about husbands and wives. He gave an illustration I had heard hundreds of times from different preachers. There are popular illustrations that don't make any sense, but they are popular nonetheless.

There is a common preaching illustration that the wife is like a flower and the husband is like the gardener. If a flower wilts, it is the gardener's fault. If the husband is being the right kind of husband, his wife will thrive and flourish spiritually.

Everything will go well. She can't go wrong. Because the husband is doing the right thing.

In other words, she has no free will. She is just molded by her husband. Her fate is determined by the decisions of her husband, not by her own.

My daughters, who were teenagers at the time, heard that sermon and they were offended. They said, what, don't they think we are human? Don't we have the ability to go bad if we choose? And hasn't everyone seen that there are godly women who have wicked husbands and wicked women who have godly husbands? How did anyone ever think that illustration fit reality in any way? A woman is not a plant. She's a human.

And any human being, male or female, can destroy a marriage by themselves. It only takes one. It doesn't take two.

It takes one. And so Solomon says, every wise woman builds her house, but a foolish one pulls it down with her hands. Now, there's, in Proverbs, a lot of things said about the wrong kind of wife and a lot of things said about the right kind of wife.

And sometimes people remember the negative things Solomon says about the wrong kind of women and think he might have been a little misogynistic. But actually, he says

more things, I believe, in praise of the right kind of women than he says about the wrong kind. Everyone knows there's good men and bad men and there's good women and bad women.

In chapter 31, King Lemuel's mother told him in verse 3, Do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings. A man can simply become spineless by being in the hands of a woman that he cares about and all she cares about is controlling him. He cares about keeping her happy.

A man that wants to keep his wife happy is probably a good man, but he's trapped. Because as most people know, most women aren't happy all the time. And it's impossible for a man to make a woman happy if she's not going to be happy all the time.

He can try, and if she's a woman who's easily made happy, he may be successful. But if a woman is not easily made happy, she can easily take that impulse of the husband and destroy him. Neutralize all of his other activities.

Just make him do what she wants him to do. Because he wants to save the marriage. And she just wants to control the marriage.

That's the wrong kind of woman. And she can destroy kings. Ahab was certainly destroyed by his wife Jezebel.

Not that he would have been a great man without her. But he was certainly controlled by her. And we've had people in the White House who have been compared with Ahab and Jezebel in their relationships.

Where a strong wife seems to control a husband who doesn't seem to be that strong. And a woman can destroy a king if the man is concerned enough to keep her happy. And she's concerned enough to exploit that.

And, you know, men do the same thing to women. But that's not what we're talking about right now. In chapter 11, in verse 22, it says, As a ring of gold in a swine's mouth, so is a lovely woman who lacks discretion.

We've talked about this verse earlier in our introduction. How that there are two traits in the woman who is a lovely woman who lacks discretion. One is that she's pretty.

The other is she's foolish. And these two traits are like the two traits in a pig that has a gold ring in its nose. The gold ring is pretty.

The pig is repulsive. And so a pig with a gold ring in its nose. These two things don't go together well.

You generally would not put a jewelry on a pig. And if you did see jewelry on a pig, it would rather spoil the effect of the jewelry. Jewelry that's otherwise attractive would

somehow be made less appealing by being attached to a pig.

And the idea is that a woman who is otherwise attractive is made less appealing, even repulsive, if she lacks discretion. There are women who are pretty, but repulsive, like a gold jewel in the nose of a swine. And so he's, of course, warning his son that if he picks a wife strictly on the basis of looks, which is the impulse of many men, since that's the first thing that men are usually attracted to in a woman when they first see a woman.

If they're attracted to them, it's usually because of their looks. Hopefully it goes deeper than that very quickly. And there may be times when a man is attracted to a woman who he doesn't find really attractive, but her personality is just glowing.

But more often than not, a man will first notice a woman's looks. And once he's noticed her looks, he may be so dazzled that he doesn't ever notice that she lacks discretion, that she lacks wisdom or whatever. In which case, he's going to end up going home with a pig.

In chapter 31, about the virtuous woman, it says of her in verse 30, Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain. But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Women can be charming and beautiful, and yet, if they have no fear of the Lord, if they have no wisdom, in other words, if they are a lovely woman without discretion, then they are vain, which means empty, by the way.

We use the word vain to mean self-absorbed. But the word vain in the Hebrew, in the Old Testament, means empty. That it's an empty thing.

Charm deceives and beauty is an empty thing. It certainly is. I mean, it's amazing how when you meet somebody, you might think they're very unattractive, but if they're very good people and very wonderful people, you soon forget that you thought they were unattractive when you first met them.

When you become friends with somebody like that, you know, your first impression might be, wow, they are really a homely person. But when you get to like them, you think, did I once think they were homely? It's hard to realize that or you don't even think about it anymore. And likewise, if you think someone is absolutely beautiful when you first see them, but you get to know them and they're very annoying and very, you know, rude or very self-absorbed or very foolish, then suddenly they don't look so beautiful anymore.

It's interesting how their looks change to your perception. Beauty is a vain thing. If somebody doesn't fear the Lord, if somebody doesn't have wisdom, if in other respects their personality is repulsive, then being pretty doesn't count for an awful lot.

Now, Solomon knew apparently a lot about a contentious wife and he had a lot of wives. And I imagine that that tended to inspire contention because obviously you never find in

the Bible a happy polygamist family. You never find a case where women are sharing a husband and they're happy about it and happy with each other.

So Solomon probably invited a lot of his trouble into his own household by marrying multiple wives. A lot of his marriages were, of course, political marriages. They had nothing to do with love in all likelihood.

Just, you know, you marry the princess of another country because you're the king of this country and that's sort of like making a treaty between the two countries. You know, there's not going to be war as long as there's marriage between the two royal houses. And so Solomon probably married a lot of women for that reason.

But I don't think there were 700 wives, 300 concubines. I don't think there were 700 countries around for him to have political marriages with. So my guess is he just took whatever women he wanted and brought them into his harem.

And that was a foolish thing for him to do. And in fact, the Bible says that was his downfall. He was wise in other respects, but in this respect he was not.

And his wives turned him away from God. But he had some unbelieving wives, wives who were not Jewish, didn't share the faith of Yahweh. Probably some very awful wives in some cases.

And I'm not saying he was a real sweetie himself, but I'm sure he knew. He seems to know a lot about how much ill can come into the home through a wife's bickering and a wife's contending with the husband. In chapter 19, verse 13, he says, A foolish son is the ruin of his father, and the contentions of a wife are a continual dripping.

There's an Arab proverb that says, Three things make a house intolerable, tack, knack, and back. Now in Arabic, tack, knack, and back mean rain leaking through, a wife nagging, and bugs. Three things make a house intolerable.

Having rain leaking through the roof, having a nagging wife, and having bugs in the house. And in Arabic, those words sound very similar to each other. And Solomon compares a contentious wife with a continual dripping of rain through the roof.

In chapter 27, in verse 15, it says, A continual dripping on a very rainy day, and the contentions, or a contentious woman, are alike. Now, what is this similarity? How is a contentious woman who's continually nagging her husband, how is that like a continual dripping of water? Well, I think the first thing that comes to mind is torture, you know? Chinese water torture, you know? Or we've all seen comedies or cartoons when we were little, of somebody trying to sleep and the bathroom faucet's dripping in the other room, so they get up and they tighten it down and it stops dripping, so they go back to bed, and then the dripping starts again. It's a common theme of cartoons.

I'm sure I've seen it a dozen times in different cartoons when I was a kid. You know, the drippy faucet. It just is annoying.

You're trying to go to sleep, and every drip, you know, the guy winces, and it's like a hammer hitting an anvil in his head. And so, you know, he keeps going up and tightening, close the faucet, and it stops, so he goes back to bed, thinking he's going to get sleep, then of course, after a few seconds, drip, drip, drip. It's supposed to be funny.

It happens all the time in cartoons because the idea is it's annoying. Now, I don't know if Solomon had a drippy faucet since he didn't have indoor plumbing, and therefore he might not have had that imagery. He might not have thought of a continual dripping as something annoying.

Dripping on a rainy day isn't particularly annoying. I mean, when water's dripping off your roof, raining off your roof, sometimes it's even a pleasant sound rain. So, what is the connection of a contentious life and continual dripping? And I think it may, in his mind, have been more along the lines of erosion rather than annoyance.

That if water is dripping in one spot for a long time, it makes a hole in the ground. The dirt is harder than water, but the soft water, that is the liquid, which is soft compared to the hard soil, actually wears it away over time. It'll wear away a rock over enough time.

Just something as soft as water going over something as hard as rock, if it's continuous, will eventually erode it, break it down. And this may be what Solomon has in mind. It's like when a man is saying no to his wife and she keeps nagging and nagging and nagging and nagging, keeps contending with him about it, it's like she can break him down.

She can erode away his resistance. Like water continually dripping in the same spot erodes whatever it's hitting. That might be what he's thinking.

It is certainly, generally speaking, true. A wife can very often, most of the time, get her way if she simply keeps bugging her husband. Because men eventually don't like getting bugged and they usually will cave in.

And because that is true, some wives do that. Because if they do it, they will almost always get their way. Now, some wives would have a conscience against doing that and would not do that.

A good woman wouldn't want to manipulate by nagging. But everyone knows there are such women who do that. And at this point, we're looking at what Solomon says about the wrong kind of woman.

There are good women that Solomon knows about too and whom he praises very highly. But some women just eat away, erode away at a husband's resistance to any idea. And

by continual contention, it's like continual dropping.

It eventually erodes the hole through his resistance. Now, the very next verse, chapter 27, verse 16, says, Whoever restrains her, that is the contentious wife, whoever restrains her, restrains the wind and grasps oil in his right hand. What does that mean? Well, you can't do it.

You can't restrain the wind. Just try it. You can't grasp oil and hold it in your hand.

It penetrates the cracks and so forth. It'll go through your fingers. You can't grasp oil in your hand and retain it.

You can't restrain the wind. And you can't anymore restrain a woman who won't be restrained. As I said, you know, you can restrain your children because they're smaller than you and because as a parent you have the right and the responsibility to restrain them.

You can send them to their room. You can spank them. You can do all kinds of things.

You can restrict them. You can take their allowance away. There's many things you can do to a child that no adult is allowed to do to another adult.

A man can't do those things to his wife unless he wants to go to jail, probably. And so how can he restrain her? He can and must restrain his children. Remember what it says of Eli that his sons made themselves vile and he did not restrain them.

That was his fault. He didn't restrain his sons. But who can restrain a wife who won't be restrained? You see, a wife has to be willingly submissive to her husband or else it ain't going to happen.

And many husbands who are Christians make the foolish mistake of continually compelling or trying to compel their wives to be submissive. Because the Bible says wives submit to your husbands and husbands will preach to their wives about that. But it doesn't help.

If the wife doesn't want to be submissive, preaching about it only makes her more resentful. And the Bible never says that a man should make his wife submit. He can't.

He's never commanded to make his wife submit. The wife is commanded to submit. He's commanded to love her and they're both expected to do their part.

They can't make the other do it. The wife can't make her husband love her by telling him you're supposed to love me. The Bible says to love me.

And the man can't make his wife submit, not from her heart anyway, by preaching that she must submit. A husband has got to just kind of release the whole idea of his wife

submitting. He's got to take charge and lead.

And if she doesn't follow, he can't make her follow. If she resists him, he can't stop her from resisting, not forcibly. The worst thing that can be imagined is a wife that just doesn't want to be on the same team with her husband.

A wife who sees herself and her husband as rivals, not team members. Rivals for different agendas. He's got an agenda, she's got an agenda.

And she knows how to get hers because she can nag and she can do whatever she wants. She can deprive, she can do all kinds of things to the husband. She can starve him out.

And she'll get her way eventually. Scaring feed. Of course, he may get so frustrated he beats her up.

Men do that sometimes too, but that doesn't even make her submit. He'll just go to jail or she'll leave or whatever. And even the women who stay with an abusive husband often don't submit.

They just go ahead and do what they're going to do and sometimes the guys just don't handle that right either. We've got some real dysfunctions in human relationships. But the reason is because people are not willingly doing what God said to do.

If husbands just loved their wives, whether their wives were submissive or not. If women just submitted to their husbands whether their husbands were loving or not. If everyone just did what they're supposed to do, there'd never be an unhappy marriage in my opinion.

And there might be a few other things that make a marriage unhappy. I'm not going to say there wouldn't be anything that could make a marriage unhappy. But I would say that almost everything that makes marriages unhappy these days simply can be traced back to people not doing what they're supposed to do.

And yet mostly being very mindful of what their spouse is supposed to be doing. The man's always aware of how much his wife should be submitting more than she is. And she's always aware of how much he should be more considerate and loving to her than he is.

And this is just the way non-Christians think. It's about what I'm not getting, what I'm supposed to be getting from my spouse. Christians are supposed to be thinking, what am I supposed to be doing for my spouse? Ask not what your spouse can do for you, but ask what you can do for your spouse.

Ask what am I supposed to do for her? What am I supposed to do for him? And the man

who wants to physically restrain his wife is a fool. I mean, it's not a fool to want to, but it's a fool to think he can. You might as well try to restrain the wind.

The best thing you can do is be careful not to marry someone who's a contentious wife and someone who's going to be a problem. Because once you've got her, you're not going to be able to control her. Now, that doesn't mean that a woman who's a bad wife can't become a better wife.

But it's not likely that her husband's going to make her that way. He may encourage it. I will say this, it is my opinion that in most cases, I'm not going to give the flower in the gardener illustration because I don't believe it.

But I would say that in most cases, except for extreme ones, the man who shows himself to be taking the leadership in a way that is showing concern for a woman's needs will cause her to be less tempted to stand up for her own needs because she can see her husband's doing it. If she thinks that her husband is looking out for her rather than for him, then she can relax a little more and go along with his program. But many husbands don't appear to, at least the wife doesn't think, he doesn't appear to be looking out for her, he seems to be only about his own agendas.

And so she feels like, well, if I don't push for my agenda, I'm going to get walked right over here. I'm just going to be rolled over like a bulldozer by his agendas. Now, by the way, that's not a good thing.

But on the other hand, what should a wife do in a case like that? I think she should submit anyway. I mean, not because I'm all about men getting their way, but I'm just all about having a marriage fit the biblical patterns. I think the wife is still the party in the marriage that's supposed to represent the church.

It's supposed to submit to her husband as the church submits to Christ, Paul said. But it's much harder for the wife if the husband is not looking out for her. And the husband, who has a contentious wife, can certainly go a long way in helping her be more cooperative by making it obvious that his choices have her welfare in mind.

That doesn't mean he does everything she wants. That makes her the head. Everything she says, if he feels like, your wish is my command, then she has become the de facto head.

She's wearing the pants of the family. But on the other hand, if she can see that when he's making the decisions, when he's taking the lead, his main concern is that his wife and children and the home are secure and cared for and so forth. Then the wife doesn't feel insecure and feel like she has to stand up and defend the children and herself against the husband.

When there's a rivalry in the home, that's not a home. Not the kind of home anyone

wants to be in. But the husband and wife are supposed to be in a partnership for the same goals.

But the man who's got a wife who just won't go along, and I know of cases, I know for sure, that there are cases where the husband is willing to do everything to please the wife and to look out for her needs. And she's just not into the marriage. She's not into having a husband.

She's into having a rival. And she likes to fight. That's something a man can't always change.

And the man can't be blamed if his wife can't be restrained. There's not much that a man can do to restrain a woman who's determined to behave wrongly. I don't know what Solomon saw in his own marriages that resembled this.

He was a king. I would think he could restrain just about anybody he wanted to. He wasn't going to be arrested.

But he still saw women, probably in his own home, that he was not able to really restrain. And so, with reference to these contentious wives who are like continually dropping and cannot be restrained, what's the best thing to do? What's the best approach? Well, get away. That's what Solomon says.

Chapter 25, verse 24. It's better to dwell in a corner of a housetop than in a house shared with a contentious woman. I showed you these verses in our introduction, chapter 21, verses 9 and 19.

It's kind of funny because in the same chapter he says almost the same thing but slightly different. In 21.9 he says, It's better to dwell in the corner of a housetop than in a house shared with a contentious woman. And verse 19, It's better to dwell in the wilderness than with a contentious and angry woman.

I told you a student of mine once said, Well, Solomon was writing this chapter and his wife was nagging him. And so he went up on the housetop and wrote, It's better to dwell in the corner of a housetop than with a contentious woman. And then she came up there and kept nagging him.

So he went out in the wilderness and said, It's better to live in the wilderness. The housetop isn't far enough away. So it's not always not good for man to be alone.

There is something worse. The truth is, it is not good for man to be alone. But there are things worse.

And that is to not be alone with a contentious wife. Now, I'm sure none of the women here would ever be that kind of a wife. But there are such wives.

And Solomon is not really stating a moral issue here. He's not saying, you know, this is the prophetic word of God. You know, if you have a contentious wife, you'd be better off without her.

It's just an observation. Life is miserable with the wrong kind of marriage, with the wrong dynamics in your marriage, the wrong kind of relationship between a husband and wife. And chapter 30 of Proverbs and verse 23, Agur said, well, you have to start at verse 21.

For three things the earth is perturbed. Yes, for four, it cannot bear up. For a servant when he reigns, a fool when he's filled with food, a hateful woman when she is married, and a maidservant who succeeds her mistress.

A hateful woman when she's married. There are hateful people, men and women. There's people who are full of hate.

They shouldn't be married. So Solomon is very much aware of the wrong kind of woman. Then he also is aware of the right kind.

And so he devotes quite a few verses about that. And a lot of them, of course, are found in Proverbs 31, which is that extended description of a virtuous woman. Chapter 31, verses 10 through 31.

And we'll look at some of the things he says about a virtuous woman. But that's not the only place that he speaks about such. In chapter 18 and verse 22, he says, he who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.

Finding a wife is finding a good thing, notwithstanding the difficulties that arise in a home with a hateful woman or with a contentious woman. Solomon apparently did not think that most women were hateful or contentious. In general, he thought marriage was a good thing and a wife is a good thing to have and a favorable gift from God.

Now, Paul said that there's different kinds of gifts from God in this respect. And if you look over at 1 Corinthians 7, Paul is actually encouraging people to consider singleness as an option. And he said in verse 2, Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband.

But concerning that, he says in verse 6, But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment, for I wish that all men were even as myself. So he said to avoid fornication, the best thing is often just to get married. Because there are people whose sex drive is just such they don't handle it well when they're single.

So just get married, avoid fornication, get married. But he says, I'm saying that as a concession, not really what I would prefer. I don't really prefer for everyone to get married.

I'd prefer it if people could stay single and pure. He says, I'm not giving you a commandment to get married, but only making a concession. He says, for I wish that all men were even as myself.

He was single. He says, but each one has his own gift from God. One in this manner and another in that.

The word gift here is charisma, the same word that's used when it talks about the gifts of the Spirit. God gives different gifts to people. And he's talking here about singleness versus marriage.

It's a gift to be single. It's another gift to have a wife. Not everyone has the same gift.

The person who finds a wife, finds a good thing, obtains favor from the Lord. That's a gift from God. And he says that also in chapter 19 and verse 14.

Chapter 19, verse 14 says, Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord. Your father can leave you a house. He can leave you riches.

He's got those things to give. He doesn't have a prudent wife to give you. That comes from God.

It's a gift from God to have a wife who's wise and good, as opposed to the kind that he described as the wrong kind. Now, in chapter 31, we have a lot of things said about wives. And we actually have studied that chapter separately.

But we will look at some of the things he says about the right kind of woman. First of all, he says in chapter 31, 10, that she's a rare jewel who can find a virtuous wife for her worth is far above rubies. It's unusual.

Rare, like a ruby is rare. That's why it's valuable, because there aren't a lot of them around. And a wife whose virtue is valuable like that, because there aren't a lot of them around.

Not as many as there should be. And that's just because there are not as many good people as there should be. Let's face it.

It's really hard to find people who are principled and godly. And I've been told by single women, it's hard to find a godly man. I can believe it.

I mean, I know a lot of godly men. It seems like an awful lot of them are married. And I know a lot of godly women.

And most of them are married, too. But in the single world, it's been very difficult in our modern times for godly men to find godly women and for godly women to find godly

men. Because it's just not as common as it should be.

To find a virtuous wife is quite a gift from God. It's a rare thing. A man may accidentally get one.

I've known men who weren't even Christians, who married non-Christian women, and the woman got saved and turned out to be a model wife, and he just lucked out. He just stumbled over that diamond there. He didn't know what he was getting.

But it's still rare. And men ought to appreciate what they have if they've got something like that. The woman who is virtuous is said to be faithful to her husband.

Chapter 31, verses 11 and 12. The heart of her husband safely trusts her. He will have no lack of gain.

She does him good and not evil all the days of her life. That is, he can trust her when he's not watching. She's not going to betray him.

She's going to do good to him, not evil, as long as he lives. That's the virtuous wife. And it's essentially the first thing he mentions.

Because it's the most important thing. My first wife was unfaithful. She had a number of affairs, and I remember when she left and divorced me, and I was single again, I remember thinking, almost any woman who's faithful will do.

You know? Because unfaithful is so glaring a fault that a faithful wife, that virtue, to my mind, would just shine above all other things. It would hide a multitude of sins. You know, a woman who would not cheat on her husband.

When you've had a wife that cheats, and you can't safely trust in her, and she does not do you good and not evil all the days of your life, suddenly you realize that there's nothing that matters as much in a spouse. Now, there are other things that matter. And by the way, you may have a faithful spouse and have a fairly miserable marriage.

You don't want that. There are other things that go into making a marriage happy, and a relationship happy, than just being faithful. But when unfaithfulness is present, then nothing else can atone for that.

Nothing else can make the marriage happy. It's like the one thing most important. And the reason is, because marriage is a relationship of faith.

That's what it is. It's a relationship, unlike all other relationships, that's based on promises that are made. And when people make promises, you can either believe them or not.

If someone says, I promise I will forsake all others and cleave only to you, and I will stay

with you for life, and you can put all your eggs in this basket, and you won't lose them. And you're trusting them. It's a faith relationship.

That's what a covenant is. There's promises made, and believing each other's promises is what makes the relationship exist. And when one party shows that they can't be trusted, and you can't believe what they said, then there's not much left to make the relationship of what it is.

You can tough it out and stay in the same house and so forth, but the relationship is nothing. When your spouse is out of your sight, you don't know if there was somebody else. And you almost have to get to a place where you don't care anymore, just to survive.

Because there's a self-protective survival mechanism to say, well, he's probably out with some other woman now, or she's probably out with some other guy, and I guess just to survive, I have to not care. When you get to a place where you don't care, you don't have a relationship anymore at all. That's why faithfulness is the thing that's more important than any other in a marriage.

Other things are important at another level, but the highest level is that we can trust each other, out of each other's sight. And so that's the first thing that Solomon mentions about a virtuous wife, or that Proverbs 31, assuming it's Solomon writing it, King Lemuel, whoever he was. She's trustworthy.

She's also well-spoken. Chapter 31, 26, she opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness. She isn't always just jabbering foolish things.

When she speaks, she speaks things that are valid, godly, helpful, insightful. Now, no one talks that way all the time, by the way. No man or woman.

Well, I won't say that. There are some, perhaps, who just are very quiet unless they have something wise to say. That's a good thing.

But anyone who talks a lot is going to say some things that aren't wise, of course. And most of us talk probably more than we should. You know, it says in Proverbs, in the multitude of words, there lacks not sin.

If you talk a lot, you're going to say things that you regret saying, no question about it. But, in general, a person whose heart is good is going to be mainly saying things that are good. A good woman is going to talk in ways that aren't going to be, you know, she's not going to have to eat her words a lot.

She's not going to have to apologize for misspeaking a lot. And men, too, that way. But, see, women sometimes are thought to be more talkative than men.

Many times women complain that their husbands are not communicators. Their husbands just don't talk. They just sit and don't answer and things like that.

I know that, in general, women are known to be more talkative than men, just on balance. And so, if someone's very talkative, of course, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. And you'll be hearing what's going on inside.

And a good woman, who's good in her heart, is going to be speaking out wisdom and she's going to be speaking it kindly. She's a woman who is compassionate and kind and her speech comes out that way. And in chapter 31, verse 13 through 22, she's obviously very industrious.

She works hard. In 13 through 22, it says, she sticks wool in flax and willingly works with her hands. She's like a merchant's ship.

She brings her food from afar. Shelter rises while it's yet night. 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 merchandise is good and her lamp does not go out at night. She stretches out her hands to the distaff and her hand holds the spindle. She extends her hand to the poor, yet she reaches out her hands 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 and clothing.

Her clothing is fine linen and purple. So this woman does it all. She goes out and she buys the family a plot of land to farm.

Then she farms it. Plus she makes their clothing. Plus she gets up before dawn and fixes their food.

Plus she helps the poor. Good thing women can multitask. I don't think you can do all those things while you're doing someone at the same time.

Vacuuming and cooking and all these things at the same time. It's amazing how many things a woman can get done compared to a man. Because women can do so many things at once.

Most men I know just can't do more than one thing at once and therefore get a limited number of things done in a lifetime. A woman gets so many things done. It amazes me how much a woman can do and how productive a woman can be.

One woman can do all these things. You don't often find women who do all these things.

Partly because you don't often find virtuous women.

But it's always amazing to me when I see a woman who can do virtually everything and do it well. There are women like that. And they're almost like superhuman compared to men.

Seems like. The virtuous woman is a very industrious hard worker. Verse 24, she makes linen garments and sells them.

Supplies sashes for the merchants. Verse 27 says, She watches over the ways of her household. Does not eat the bread of idleness.

She doesn't sit and be idle. There's always work to be done. And we already saw in chapter 14, verse 1, that the wise woman builds her house.

That just means her activities build up the family. You know, prosperity in the family, vastness in the family. Even the number of children comes largely from her.

More than from the husband. She cares for them and makes it possible to have the children. And if she wasn't there to take care of the children, the father wouldn't really be able to take care of them and do what he has to do, probably.

She brings honor to her husband. We already saw in chapter 12, in verse 4, that a virtuous wife, a wise woman brings honor to her husband. She's a crown to her husband.

And so also we saw that in chapter 31, verse 23. Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land because he's got a godly wife. You know, one of the qualifications for an elder is that his wife and children and family are in order.

So, in a sense, a godly wife, by being submissive and by helping her husband have an orderly house, she qualifies him or, by not doing so, disqualifies him from being an elder in the church. You see, his ability to be a leader in the community or in the church rests upon her cooperation. She can undermine that, or she can make it happen.

The man who has his family out of order is not qualified to be an elder. That's one reason I'm not an elder. In others, I don't want to be one.

I never wanted the job. But if someone offers you that, you say, I'm sorry, I'm not qualified. Didn't you read the scriptures? Husband of one wife, have any wife and children in order? That's not me.

I'm not qualified to be an elder. It's amazing how a person might be, in other respects, qualified, but totally disqualified by a wife who is not cooperative. So the wife herself elevates her husband or brings him down.

A good wife is an honor to her husband. He is promoted socially and in the spiritual

community too, of course, by the fact that she is a virtuous woman and she's his wife. And she herself, of course, is honored.

Not only is her husband honored because of her virtue, she herself is honored because of her virtue. Chapter 31, verse 25 says, Strength and honor are her clothing. She shall rejoice in time to come.

Also, of course, just a couple of verses later, in verse 28, says her children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also, and he praises her. Many daughters have done well, he says, but you excel them all. 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. There are a lot of references to praise here. She gets praised.

She's honored. Her children honor her. Her husband praises her.

She's praised because she fears the Lord. Her works will praise her in the gates. A woman who is virtuous, the right kind of wife, brings honor to the family, brings honor to her husband, and honor upon herself as well.

And so that's what Solomon sees. Now, I thought we'd take more of this in this session, but we'll take the rest of it next time. We'll get next time to talk about what the virtuous husband is described as, and what Solomon knows about strife in the home, and how to avoid it.

Those are things we're going to come upon too, that have to do with the husband-wife relationship. Obviously, a lot has been said about the wife, partly because Solomon believes, and I think he's correct, that the wife has more power than the husband to decide whether the family's going to do well or not. Because a husband, in a sense, can be a jerk, and yet the wife, who has more influence on the children, generally, than the husband does, can still direct the general well-being of the family.

Obviously, it's much more challenging. If the husband is not the right kind of leader, it's much, much more challenging for the wife. I think it's easier for the wife to pull the family together when the husband's gone AWOL, than for the husband to pull the family together when the wife's gone AWOL.

I've known a number of single women about my age whose husbands had left them when their children were little, and whose children are grown up now, and their children are serving God, even though there's no husband in the home. But they had a mother, and a mother really bonds with the children in a different way than a father does, usually. And a godly mother, even in the absence of a father, can sometimes really have the right kind of impact, whereas when a mother has abandoned her children, everything's upside down.

Women just don't abandon their children. When a woman goes AWOL on her family, it's just so unnatural. It's unnatural for a man to also, but it's more unnatural for a woman to.

So the woman really, by her presence in the home, by her choice to be a partner or an adversary to her husband, has almost everything to say about her husband's success, and about the family's prosperity, and everything else. She is much more powerful than people think, because she's at home. Now a lot of times today people think, well, the woman needs to be empowered by getting out of the home.

The woman at home, she's just the victim of her husband's tyranny, or whatever. She's just not exercising her gifts as she should. She's not developing her potential, because she's just staying home, doing something really unimportant like raising kids.

Doing something really valueless, like shaping the next generation. So they consider that she really needs to be empowered by getting out of the home, so she can do the powerful things men do. Well, by women leaving the home, we've had an awful lot of children raised who don't know which direction is up.

We live in a generation now, my generation was probably the first generation where women, in large numbers, just left the home to go out and work outside the home, and left the raising of the children to surrogates. And frankly, I don't know if we've ever had as large a percentage in America of young people who don't have any idea what right and wrong are, who God is, what marriage is supposed to be, what a family is supposed to be. Our society is quite messed up.

And it's going to be more so when the younger generation is now the ruling generation, because they don't know anything about, I mean, most of them, there's young people who know God, who are Christians, but for the most part, the younger generation doesn't know what a family is, they don't know what a marriage is, they don't know who God is, they don't know what right and wrong are. They don't know anything, because they haven't had a family, they have not been trained in the home. And traditionally, although the Bible does talk about men bringing up their children in the nurturing and admission of the Lord, obviously the fathers are supposed to be involved, let's say it's a day by day, hour by hour through the day, it's generally the mother, more than the father, who has access to the children, who's shaping their thinking and so forth, when she's at home, that is, when she's with them.

In our society, at least for a very long period of time, while the younger generation was being born and raised, a lot of women were outside the homes, handed off to children to be raised by surrogates, and those surrogates didn't know how to teach a child what a family is, because the children were not in a family, not a normal family. So, we've really had deterioration in this society, because of the absence of the mothers. And that only underscores how important, how powerful the mothers are to affect the fate of the world, the fate of society, and the fate of the family.

And Solomon knew it was true even 3,000 years ago when he wrote this.