
The Excellent Wife

Proverbs 31:10-30

Russ Kennedy

Leadership – what does this word bring to mind?

When you think of leadership in the church, what do you expect?

The Bible is clear about the qualifications for Elders and for the deaconate.

The Bible is clear about how leadership is to function in the church.

The Bible is clear about what is to characterize Biblical leadership in the church.

Where do the men and women who lead in the church gain their ability and experience?

We only consider whether or not a person has a good reputation at work...

Leadership at church is developed primarily in the home.

(Frankly, this explains why so many churches are poorly led – they are not training or qualifying their leadership *in the context of the home.*)

So what does Biblical leadership in the home look like?

This is the subject we will pursue the whole month of January in our morning and evening gatherings.

The Bible is going to challenge some of your preconceptions.

The Bible is going to charge some of you with neglect and sin.

The Bible is going to call most of you to radical transformation.

The Bible is going to change your heart – the way you think and what you want in your home.

And I intend to start in a most unusual place. Our text this morning is an acrostic poem with each stanza beginning with successive Hebrew letters. It is sung in praise of the godly woman. In our consideration of Biblical leadership in the home, I want to introduce you to the wise and godly woman who glorifies God through her home. She is a priceless treasure who is to be sought, honored and respected. And godly wives model for us what it means to be the bride of Christ. From this text, truth and application will come to us in our day through Christ and His bride, the church.

As the Delight of her Husband

(v. 10-11)

The godly woman is the delight of her husband. His heart safely trusts in her. How is this said in this Proverb?

¹⁰ An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. ¹¹ The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.

Her Great Value

(v. 10)

A godly woman is the delight of her husband because of her great value. This kind of woman is a treasure because she is hard to find. She is rare. She is of more worth than all the precious jewels you can own.

Her Deep Trustworthiness

(v. 11a)

Her husband delights in her because he trusts her. He trusts her to live out her godly character in a godly life. She has proven faithful in all that he has entrusted to her. She is a joy to him as she thrives in his loving care and trust.

Her Rich Reward

(v. 11b)

In an interesting turn of phrase, the husband is seen as growing in his prosperity. This is both because of the worth and value of his godly wife and because she is careful with the resources they have. This understanding of this short phrase is borne out in the rest of this chapter.

Is this the way you think of your spouse? Are you training your heart to seek after a Christian lady like this? Are you training your daughters to be this kind of person? Are you training your sons to value this kind of lady?

This is so because this is the way it is between Christ and His bride. He delights in her. He has entrusted much to her. She is thriving and prospering under His loving care, protection and provision. The Bride of Christ is an excellent wife whom Jesus has sought, found, wooed and won. She is more to Him than all the precious jewels in the all the universe/

In the Description of her Qualities

The godly woman is described for us. She is not described in her physical attributes. Nor is she described by simply listing her virtues. The snapshots here are of her in the midst of life. Since it is a life lived long ago, I am going to rephrase these for you so that you can see her now. And I want you to see how the church, the bride of Christ, is pictured here as well.

She does good and not harm

(v.12).

¹² She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.

She is the kind of woman who seeks to do good for her husband. She avoids what will bring harm, shame and disgrace to him and to her family.

Are you careful and committed to seeking the good of your husband?

As the bride of Christ are we constantly seeking the good of Christ and His church?

She is a good worker**(v.13-14)**

¹³ She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. ¹⁴ She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar.

She uses her talents and abilities to ensure her family is provided for. She plans and procures what is necessary for their sustenance. The sense here is not only of hard work, but of careful and strategic planning.

Are you growing in your ability to plan and provide for your family?

As the bride of Christ are we working hard at careful and diligent planning to sustain the family of God?

She has a servant's heart.**(v. 15)**

¹⁵ She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.

She does not focus on being served, but rather is willing to serve others. She gets up early to not only prepare the morning meal for her family, but for her own servants.

Are you willing to serve the members of your family, even those who would normally serve you?

As the bride of Christ do we have humble, serving hearts?

She is financially responsible**(v.16).**

¹⁶ She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.

She is entrusted with family money and inheritance (land and fields is not merely commerce). Her husband delegates to her the handling of their finances and the management of their farm.

Are you a lady who handles money responsibly? Men, if something were to happen to you, does your wife know how your finances are organized?

As the bride of Christ, do we handle the Lord's money with responsible stewardship?

She keeps herself up physically**(v.17).**

¹⁷ She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.

She seeks to maintain her physical strength for the sake of her home. She understands the importance of being able to carry out the responsibilities given to her.

Without trying to be a superwoman, do you seek, within God's providence and care, to keep yourself fit for the sake of your home?

As the bride of Christ, are we prepared to handle hardship and physical adversity for the sake of the church?

She is diligent in her responsibilities**(v.18-21).**

¹⁸ She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. ¹⁹ She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. ²⁰ She opens her hand to the

poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. ²¹ She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet.

She works hard to take care of her family and provide for the poor. However, she is not greedy, but generous and shares with those in need.

As the bride of Christ, are we diligent to provide for the work of the ministry and to care for the needy among us?

She seeks to dress in a pleasing way (v. 22)

²² She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.

Two possibilities from verse 22:

Literal: She seeks to decorate and dress in an attractive way; or

Idiom: She seeks to dress and prepare herself for intimacy with her husband.

In either case, while she understands the vanity of beauty and outward adornment, she also understands the value of being attractive to her husband. Ladies, who *do* you dress for?

As the bride of Christ, the church, do we adorn ourselves with righteousness, which is of great value in our Lord's eyes?

She frees her husband for his work (v.23)

²³ Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.

He is well regarded because of her. Her reputation, her character and conduct, are well known and well-spoken of by her husband. Because of the kind of woman she is, he is qualified and able to serve in the leadership of the city.

Husbands, do you speak well of your wife? Wives, what are you known for by your husband's friends?

As the bride of Christ, do we enhance the reputation of Christ in the world? Is he well known and well-spoken of because of our character and conduct?

She is calm and secure (v.24-25).

²⁴ She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant. ²⁵ Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.

The godly woman is full of grace, hope and laughter with no fear of the future. She rests in God's providences but is not presumptuous. She is secure in God's provision as she works to provide.

As the bride of Christ, do we live in such a way as to show our trust in God's providences and our commitment to wise planning?

She is godly in her speech (v.26).

²⁶ She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

She is wise in her teaching having been well instructed in kindness. Notice the focus on her teaching and instruction. Her speech is wise and kind. She has been taught to use her speech in ways that are pleasing to the Lord and helpful to others. Clearly, she avoids speech that is shrill, harsh, foolish and unkind.

As the bride of Christ, is our teaching wise and our talking kind?

She is engaged with her household (v.27).

²⁷ She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

She is attentive to trends in her home. She is actively observing and dealing with the way things are going in her home. Once again, she is not lazy, but extends serious energy to accomplish what is needed.

As the bride of Christ, are we observant of our church family? Are we hard at work to do what is needed? Have we become spiritually lazy?

She excels in her roles in the home (v.28-29).

²⁸ Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ²⁹ "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all."

She is commended, admired and praised by her family. Her acclamation is well deserved. She stands out as a godly and gracious lady.

Ladies, how do your husbands and children speak of you? Families, do you praise, encourage, bless the lady in your home who strives to be pleasing to the Lord? Men, are you approving, encouraging, helping, rejoicing over efforts your wife is making to grow in all these things?

As the bride of Christ, the church, are we commended by the Lord? Do we seek to grow and mature in such a way that we know we have his commendation?

From the Genuineness of her Character

Her beauty arises from her fear of the Lord (v.30).

³⁰ Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

Not Measured by Physical Beauty

Here is the deceit of charm when used to manipulate. Here is the woman who wraps her husband around her finger by appealing speech and ways.

Here is the vanity of a relationship based on physical attraction. Here is the man whose standard will eventually lead him into sinful relationships.

Here is the folly of building a marriage on lies and lusts. This is a word to all, but especially to those who are thinking about dating, courtship and marriage. What is your standard? Why are you sought out (or not) by others? Whose attention and affection are you seeking to gain?

What will you do when inevitably it all fades?

Maintained by Spiritual Virtue

Here is the glory of a truly lovely lady – she fears the Lord. In all that we have seen in character and conduct is the fruit of reverencing and respecting the Lord. Here is where all true leadership in the home begins – with the fear of God. This is the beginning of knowledge. This is the trajectory of wisdom. This is the way of the Lord.

While the outward is fading away, the inward is being renewed day by day.

With the Response to her Excellence

(v. 31)

Give a woman/a sister-spouse who is like this great honor, respect and praise.

³¹ Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

Allow her to Prosper

Brothers, do all you can to encourage and enable your wife, your sisters in Christ, to become all that God intends for them to become. For all her effort and labor, reward her with praise and protection and provision. Let us entrust to them what they can do well.

Acclaim her with Praise

Brothers, say and sing the praises of such godly women among us. Let us honor them. Let us hold them up. Let us recognize them. Let us speak well of them.

Reflect and Respond

What has all this to do with Biblical leadership in the home? What have you noticed from thinking together over this text? Under her husband’s leadership, with his care and for the family’s good, this dear lady is responsible and able in much.

Brothers, let us lead and love our sisters in Christ who are our spouses as Christ loves the church.

Honoring them as praiseworthy...

Entrusting to them responsibilities where they are able...

Guiding and guarding them so they will be safe...

Treating them as equal in their persons and standing in Christ...

Leading them with listening ears to their counsel...

Encouraging them as they grow and change and do well...

Sisters, may you reflect to us and to all the world what the bride of Christ is like:

In her godly character that fears the Lord...

In her diligent work to do all that is entrusted to her care...

In her faithful stewardship of what she is given to do...

In her seeking to respect and honor her husband...

In her desire to be pleasing to the Lord above all things.

Nothing here is in contradiction to what we will hear through the rest of this series. This is the kind of woman the Christian man is to be leading. And there is much more to come.

May God fill this church with such excellent and godly women.