

CONCISE BIBLE NOTES**PROVERBS 31****PORTRAIT OF A VIRTUOUS WOMAN****Dr. Stanford E. Murrell**

Portrait of a Virtuous Woman

Proverbs 31:10-31

10 Who can find a virtuous [thrifty and devoted] woman? For her price is far above rubies.

31:10. Who can find. While a virtuous woman might be difficult to find, it is not an impossible task. God has many daughters of grace whose value is far above rubies. These great ladies become the mothers of Israel (the church). The virtuous woman is a woman who can be depended upon. She is capable, has a high energy level, maintains a high sense of dignity, and is capable of handling her household duties.

11 The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil [prey, booty].

31:11. The heart of a good husband will have total confidence in the love, loyalty and unselfish affection of a good woman. Despite his position in life he will never be poor.

12 She will do him good and not evil [injurious behavior] all the days of her life.

31:11. The virtuous woman will use all of her influence for the good of her husband. She will not speak evil of him, or do anything to cause him harm. She will not embarrass him in any way, all the days of her life.

13 She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.

31:13. As Eve was made to be a help mate for Adam, so the virtuous woman finds joy in acts of service. Her mental attitude regarding service is one of delight, and not drudgery. She seeks to serve and works willingly.

14 She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.

31:14. The ancient ships would bring treasures from distant lands. In like manner the virtuous woman is constantly like the merchant's ships as she brings forth things old and new, to surprise and delight those whom she serves with love.

15 She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat [prepares food] to her household, and a portion to her maidens.

31:15. The virtuous woman will rise early if necessary, to accomplish the work that needs to be done. Her thoughts are not on herself, or having others serve her. Rather, she serves others.

16 She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.

31:16. The virtuous woman is not only industrious, but looks to enlarge the possessions of the family through wise investments.

17 She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.

31:17. The virtuous woman exerts herself, and her physical strength increases. She is able to accomplish much through proper planning and organization.

18 She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night.

31:18. The virtuous woman has confidence in what she produces, and she diligently works at what her hands finds to do. Her candle does not go out by night, for she toils until her task is done.

19 She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold [pull] the distaff [the prepared fibers from the spindle].

31:19. It is possible to hold a distaff in one hand and twirl the long wool spindles with the other, then pausing to wrap the thread around a spindle.

20 She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.

31:20. By diligent work the virtuous woman is able to help the needy.

21 She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet [the best].

31:21. As the virtuous woman looks after the needs of the poor, she does not neglect her own. Some parents are so busy doing good for others, they neglect their own family, and that is wrong. The virtuous woman clothes her family with the best garments possible, for her economy.

22 She maketh herself coverings of tapestry [cloth]; her clothing is silk [fine white linen] and purple.

31:22. Silk was not brought to Israel until the time of Justinian (AD 483 – 13 or 14 November 565). Fine white linen is probably referred to. The virtuous woman does not mind dressing well, and that is important. Far too many women let their personal appearance dissipate after they are married. That should not be done.

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

31:23. The virtuous woman will be patient and marry well. She will marry someone of like faith and temperament. As a result, the marriage will allow her to enhance her husband's reputation, and promote him so that he is honored among others. He is known in the gates, the place of public gathering for important discussions.

24 She maketh fine linen, and selleth *it*; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.

31:24. The diligence and hard work of the virtuous woman has produced enough for her to make linen and sell it for profit. Spiritually, there is an application from this section. The virtuous woman is filled with practical godliness so that she is a blessing to her family and a blessing to others as well.

25 Strength and honour *are* her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.

31:25. A person is more than the substance of material matter. Every person has a soul and thus a character. Spiritual strength and personal honor characterize the virtuous woman bringing her peace of mind, and inner joy, for time and eternity. There is much joy in having a good conscience toward God that is undefiled (1 Peter 3:21).

26 She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law [governing principle] of kindness.

31:26. Wisdom is the right application of bible doctrine to a given situation. The virtuous woman is known for being wise, and expressing her thoughts with kindness, according to gospel terms. Violent verbal language, sarcasm, emotional outbursts and dark thoughts are not to be found in the virtuous woman. Aesop (620-560 BC), the ancient storyteller, told this fable: Once upon a time, a donkey found a lion's skin. He tried it on, strutted around, and frightened many animals. Soon a fox came along, and the donkey tried to scare him, too. But the fox, hearing the donkey's voice, said, "If you want to terrify me, you'll have to disguise your bray."

Aesop's moral: Clothes may disguise a person, but words will give a person away. Blessed (and rare) is the man who has found a woman characterized by kindness in her conversation.

27 She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.

31:27. The virtuous woman is not an idle woman. She puts her family and not herself first. Others are her priority, and in serving them she finds personal fulfillment. The virtuous woman does not let the hours slip away in idle behavior that is unproductive, and self-destructive of her time and character.

The Spanish philosopher, Miquel Unamuno (1864-1936), once illustrated how destructive idleness is in all of nature. He told about the Roman aqueduct at Segovia, in his native Spain. It was built in 109 A.D. For eighteen hundred years, it carried cool water from the mountains to the hot and thirsty city.

Nearly sixty generations of men drank from its flow. Then came another generation, a recent one, who said, "This aqueduct is so great a marvel that it ought to be preserved for our children, as a museum piece. We shall relieve it of its centuries-long labor." They did; they laid modern iron pipes. They gave the ancient bricks and mortar a reverent rest. And the aqueduct began to fall apart. The sun beating on the dry mortar caused it to crumble. The bricks and stone sagged and threatened to fall. What ages of service could not destroy, idleness disintegrated (*Resource*, Sept./ Oct., 1992).

28 Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her.

31:28. The virtuous woman does not crave self-attention, and she certainly does not demand it. Nevertheless, if she will be virtuous, and forget herself, and serve her family and others, she will be rewarded. One day her children and her husband will rise up and call her blessed. They will do this out of a deep appreciation for who, and what a good woman is. Any woman who demands attention, and affection, and honor will not find it. That is not the gospel way. God's way is for a woman to serve others and in that service she will find her glory. If this is a biblical concept hard to believe, it is because a generation of women has arisen more interested in looking out for number one, than in having a meek and gentle spirit.

Study 1 Peter 3:1. *"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; 2 While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. 3 Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; 4 But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. 5 For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: 6 Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement."*

29 Many daughters have done virtuously [well], but thou excellest them all.

31:29. Many types of women can excel in life, but the virtuous women is said to remain pre-eminent. Brains, beauty, an attractive figure, and a large bank account are commendable assets, but the spiritual woman is the most honored in the kingdom of God.

30 Favour *is* deceitful, and beauty is vain: *but* a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.

31:30. The virtuous woman may not be the most physically attractive woman, but her spirituality and tremendously kind personality, makes her a beauty to all. Men, by nature, are initially attracted to outward beauty, but most do value much more a godly and virtuous woman. She is the one who shall be praised. Shame, decay, sorrow and death, awaits those who live for the sake of personal vanity, and do not cultivate an inward spiritual life that fears the LORD.

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

31:31. The final listed characteristic of a virtuous woman reflects the sum total of her life. The works of a woman will either condemn, or praise her. How can a man recognize a virtuous woman? Jesus has provided the answer in Matthew 7:20. “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

31:11-27.

Characteristics of a Virtuous Woman What a Christian Woman will Do

- A Christian woman will not give her husband any cause for behavioral concern (31:11).
- A Christian woman will not engage in injurious behavior towards her husband (31:12).
- A Christian woman will work diligently with the tasks set before her (31:13).
- A Christian woman will be wise in matters of commerce (31:14).
- A Christian woman will prefer the needs of others before her own interests (31:15).
- A Christian woman will be able to successfully engage in expanding her household resources (31:16).
- A Christian woman will not avoid hard work (31:17).
- A Christian woman will not be bound to a strict time schedule, but will do all that is necessary to bring many projects to a good conclusion (31:18).
- A Christian woman will be accomplished in practical matters within her sphere of endeavor (31:19).
- A Christian woman will be compassionate, and reach out her hands to help others in need (31:20).
- A Christian woman will make sure her family is reasonably comfortable (31:21).
- A Christian woman will be careful about her personal appearance (31:22).
- A Christian woman will marry wisely an honorable man (31:23).
- A Christian woman will be able to be industrious when the opportunity arises and seek out ways to improve the household income (31:24).
- A Christian woman will be characterized by moral, and spiritual strength, and honor (31:25) so there is nothing she will be ashamed of.
- A Christian woman will be gracious in her speech, dispensing words of wisdom with kindness (31:26).
- A Christian woman will not be slothful, but diligent in her labors (31:27).

Heart Work

Self-Evaluation

- I do not give my husband any cause for behavioral concern (31:11).
True ____ False ____
- I do not engage in injurious behavior, with words or actions, towards my husband (31:12).
True ____ False ____
- I work diligently on the tasks set before me (31:13).
True ____ False ____
- I am wise in matters of money (31:14).
True ____ False ____
- I prefer the needs of others before my own interests (31:15).
True ____ False ____
- I successfully engage in expanding my household resources (31:16).
True ____ False ____
- I do not avoid hard work (31:17).
True ____ False ____
- I am not bound to a strict time schedule but do all that is necessary to bring projects to a good conclusion (31:18).
True ____ False ____
- I am accomplished in practical matters in my sphere of endeavor (31:19).
True ____ False ____
- I am compassionate, and reach out to help others in need (31:20).
True ____ False ____
- I make sure my family is reasonably comfortable (31:21).
True ____ False ____
- I am careful about my personal appearance (31:22).
True ____ False ____
- I wisely married an honorable man (31:23).
True ____ False ____

- I am industrious when the opportunity arises, and seek out ways to improve the household income (31:24).
True ____ False ____
- I am characterized by moral and spiritual strength and honor (31:25). There is nothing I am ashamed of.
True ____ False ____
- I am gracious in my speech, and try very hard to dispense words of wisdom with kindness (31:26).
True ____ False ____
- I am diligent in my daily labors (31:27).
True ____ False ____

The Woman I would Like to Be

If I could be the biblical woman I would like to be....

*"I would have the faith of Sarah,
the loveliness of Rachel,
the foresight of Rebecca and the humility of Ruth.*

*I would have the persistent prayer life of Hannah,
and the courage of Esther.*

*I would be as brave as Deborah
and as wise as Abigail.*

*I would be as glorious as Mary,
As gracious as Martha,
and as generous as JoAnna.*

If I could be the biblical woman I would like to be,

I would have the eyes of Eve who was able to see sin and weep.

I would have the voice of Miriam who sang the praises of God.

*I would have the moral strength of Jael.
And I would have the business mind of Lydia,
the seller of purple.*

*I would have the heart of Mary Magdalene
who loved Christ completely.*

*I would have the knees of those women
in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost who knelt in prayer
and received the Holy Spirit.*

*I would have the feet of the woman of Samaria
who ran to tell others to come and see the Saviour."*

~*~

Written by

**Dr. Stanford E. Murrell for His
Daughter-in-Law, Laura**

Once More on the Knees of Mother

2 Kings 4:17-19

“And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life. 18 And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. 19 And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother.”

“Dear Lord, it’s such a hectic day,
 With little time to stop and pray,
 For life’s been anything but calm
 Since You called me to be a Mom—

Running errands, matching socks,
 Building dreams with wooden blocks,
 Fitting lids on bottled bugs,
 Wiping tears and giving hugs,
 A stack of last week’s mail to read—

So where’s the quiet time I need?
 Yet, when I steal a moment, Lord,
 Just at the sink or ironing board,
 To ask the blessing of Your grace,
 I see then, in my small ones face,
 That you have blessed me all the while—

I stoop to kiss that precious smile
 And then sit to cradle my child.”

There is no place on earth that feels so secure to a child than being on the knees of a loving mother. God has created this special natural haven near the heart, where children can climb to cry until comfort comes, sleep until the Sandman sprinkles his magic potion, and talk about mindless matters until the soul is satisfied. On the knees of a loving mother, children first learn to listen to stories being read. Then they linger to hear the voice of an angel singing sweet lullaby’s, and fall asleep knowing that all is right with their world.

In another era, and in another culture, there was a woman who wanted a child to sit in her lap. In that time, so long ago children were desperately desired, for they were seen as a divine delight. Children were viewed as a gift of God. The Sweet Singer of Israel said “Lo, children are a heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward” (Psa. 127:3).

In the Israeli town of Shunem, there was a woman who wanted such a reward, but the Lord had not been pleased to give her a child. God had given her great wealth, however, for we read in 2 Kings 4:8 that she was a “great woman.” According to the passage, the meaning is that the woman had great wealth.

In a larger and more spiritual context, it can be argued the woman was great, but not because of the economic prosperity she enjoyed. Many a person has had enough financial resources to fund a lifestyle that moved them towards a certain and fearful damnation. Riches are no sure sign of righteousness. This woman was great because of other factors.

Consider the greatness of the woman’s graciousness. When the woman of Shunem perceived the unusual visitor in the area, named Elisha who was a “holy man of God”, she was moved to minister to him having been blessed by his presence. Such is the nature of grace that it wants to give to those who have been a source of spiritual blessing. Elisha had told the Sunammite woman about the mercies of His mighty God, who saves, and sanctifies, who redeems and regenerates. Elisha was “a holy man of God”, of which there are distinct characteristics.

A holy man of God, in context, is a person set apart for special ministry. Elisha had received a call from on high. Heaven had whispered his name. Elisha was anointed to be a prophet to Israel. He was set apart for special ministry.

A holy man of God, is a person familiar with the Eternal One who inhabits the heavens. Prayer is not foolish to such a person, for there is a supreme confidence that God is real. There is a daily dialogue with Deity, for prayer is the power that moves the hands of God.

A holy man of God, is a man who lives by Divine directions. The reason Elisha was in Shunem was because he was geographically in the known will of God. Elisha went where God told him to go and he stayed where the Lord instructed him to stay. In the words of Peter Marshall, Elisha was a man under sealed orders.

A holy man is a man who has unbounded faith in the sovereignty of God. The faith of Elisha would be a source of his own survival, and a blessing to others.

A holy man of God, has a distinct message that cannot be compromised. The content of the distinct message is the gospel of redeeming grace, which emphasizes the ruin of man, the redemption of sinners, and the regeneration of the heart by the Holy Spirit.

God’s man with God’s message, has but one theme: Christ! Christ in His death! Christ in His burial! Christ in His resurrection! Christ in His ascension into heaven, and Christ in His soon return. All eyes are to be turned towards Calvary, which is the focal point of the message.

“Up Calvary’s mountain, one dreadful morn,
Walked Christ my Savior, weary and worn;
Facing for sinners death on the cross,
That He might save them from endless loss.

Blessèd Redeemer! Precious Redeemer!
 Seems I now see Him on Calvary's tree;
 Wounded and bleeding, for sinners pleading,
 Blind and unheeding—dying for me!

“Father forgive them!” thus did He pray,
 Even while His lifeblood flowed fast away;
 Praying for sinners while in such woe
 No one but Jesus ever loved so.

O how I love Him, Savior and Friend,
 How can my praises ever find end!
 Through years unnumbered on heaven's shore,
 My tongue shall praise Him forevermore.”

This is the distinct message of every age.

A holy man of God, is not a perfect man, but he is God's man first, and foremost. The apostle's confessed they were men of like passions as others. *Acts 14:15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:*

In James 5:17 we read that Elisha was a man subject to like passions as we are, But he had the ear of heaven. “And he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.” A holy man of God is not perfect, but he does have a passion for the Lord.

Those who listen to the men of God are often moved to express their appreciation in verbal, and in tangible ways. Having been blessed by Elisha the Shunemmite woman wanted to provide Elisha with a place for him to stay and rest when he was in the area (2 Kings 4:10). There was in this woman a heart of hospitality. There was in this woman the greatness of common graciousness.

Consider the greatness of the woman's humility. It is not likely that this woman considered herself a humble woman, for humility is not thinking low thoughts about yourself. Humility is not thinking of yourself at all. This woman did not think of herself, but others, which in turn caused those she was gracious towards to think well of her, and seek her happiness. There is a spiritual law, that what we sow we reap.

One day, while Elisha was resting in the little Prophet's Chamber that had been built for his comfort, his eyes began to circle the room. He noticed the table to one side. He looked at the chair, and glanced at the lamp stand. Everything he needed for the work of the ministry had been provided. And suddenly, Elisha wanted to do something for this lady of grace.

Calling his servant Gehazi, Elisha instructed him to find the woman of Shunem, which was done. The Lady of Shunem was humble enough to come and speak to the prophet, even when summoned in her own house. She was forever gracious to her guest.

“Lady,” said Elisha when she appeared, “What shall I do for thee?” This was no ordinary question, for this was no ordinary man. Elisha had the ear of heaven. Elisha enjoyed divine power for God was with him. And so Elisha asked the woman what she wanted. Humbly did the woman reply, “Prophet of Yahweh, man of God, I want nothing. I dwell among mine own people and that is enough.” Then she left.

Watching her departure, Elisha was amazed. “The woman wants nothing? She could have anything and she asks for nothing? She could dwell in the palace of the king if she wanted, and she wants nothing? That is remarkable. Nevertheless, what then can be done for her?” To that rhetorical question Gehazi had an answer. “Elisha,” volunteered Gehazi, “she hath no child, and her husband is old.”

“What was that servant? What did you say? She has no child?” Suddenly Elisha knew what could be done for the woman. Not by his power, but by the power of God a miracle would be wrought in her body. Such is the sovereignty of the Lord. He can make a dead body live again.

Calling the Shunemite woman back into his presence, Elisha made a unilateral pronouncement. “And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son” (2 Kings 4:16). The woman was astonished, and disbelieving. “And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid.” But the matter had been settled. A child would be born according to the will of the Lord. As a true prophet of God, Elisha foretold not only the event, but the timing of the event, and beyond that the sex of the child. As Elisha had predicted, a child was born. 2 Kings 4:17 “And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.”

If the story of the woman of Shunem ended here it would be a delightful narrative, but there is much more, for tragedy came. The promises of God are no barrier against the progress of sorrow in our hearts. One day, after the child had grown a few years, he was out in the fields watching his father at work. Suddenly the young child put his head between his hands and cried out, “My head! My head!” The father was familiar with headaches. In the hot burning sun it was not uncommon. Perhaps the child needed to go inside. “Take him to his mother”, said the father without undue alarm. A servant picked up the little boy and took him home.

When the Shunemite woman received her son, she knew that he was very sick, and there was not much she could do except hold him in her arms, and comfort him. Hour after hour the woman held the child in her arms, rocking him, fearing for his safety. At noontime the mother looked down and noticed that her child had stopped breathing. The love of her life, the desire of her heart perished in her arms, and her heart broke.

The Loss of a Child

“You ask me how I'm doing, I say, ‘I am just fine’
 ‘Is there anything you can do for me?’
 ‘Not unless you bare this loss of mine.’
 Every second, every minute, everyday
 This pain just will not go away.

When I try, and shut my eyes,
 I see his angelic face.
 Though this hurts me so,
 I know he's in a better place.
 ‘When I breathe it hurts totally,
 and completely, devastating’ I say.
 This circumstantial torment will surely fade away.

I frequently hear him cry, will my tears ever dry?
 I wake at three a.m., just to check on him.

When I stand at his crib the emptiness consumes me.
 I stand here, and cry. Without him I may die.
 I find myself holding his blankie to my face,
 smelling him like he'd never left this place.

I reach down into his crib to find a teething ring.
 Looking over in the corner to view his baby swing.

‘Where is he?’

He has NOT gone!
 Falling to my knees, I pray...
 ‘God give me wings to fly, if not~
 give me death for I truly want to die.’”

Dedicated to the memory of
 Nicholas Stephen Sack
 Who died at 9 months of age

Consider the greatness of the woman's faith. When the Shunemmite woman knew that her child had died, she did something very unusual. She took the boy in her arms and carried him to the prophet's room where he was placed on the bed of promise. Then the woman called a servant to provide her with transportation to see the man of God.

At that moment her husband arrived from his labors in the field. It was time for a mid-day meal. But before eating, his wife had a request. “And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again” (2 Kings 4:22). This was a great surprise.

2 Kings 4:23 And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him today? It is neither new moon, nor Sabbath. Rather than explain what was happening, the woman of great faith said simply enough, "It shall be well."

With these words, the woman did not lie, nor did she explain. Faith was compelling her to a certain course of action, and that was all that mattered for the moment. "Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee" (2 Kings 4:24).

Here was a mother on a mission. Run mother run! She wanted her child back, and there was only one way that could happen. The God of promise and creation must also be the God of recreation, and the holy man of God must help her. Run mother run!

In record time, the woman of Shunem found the prophet Elisha. Overcome with grief, the woman could hardly speak. Her heart was in anguish, but she wanted to make two arguments to plead her case.

"Man of God, "she cried, "Did I ask for a son?" and the answer was no. Though Elisha had pronounced the birth of a baby long ago, the woman had submitted herself to the will of the Sovereign. She had stopped asking God for a child, and yet a child was given.

"Man of God," she cried again, "Did I plead with you not to deceive me?" and the answer is yes. The Shunemite had pleaded with Elisha not to manipulate her emotions, as it is possible for men to do.

Her case was well made. Elisha was silent but in the silence, the Spirit of God told him what could be done. His servant Gehazi, was to take his staff, go find the child, and place the rod on the body as a sign of Divine authority over death.

As soon as he could, Elisha would arrive and deal with this situation personally. And so it was done. "And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing" (2 Kings 4:31). There is a reason for that. The staff was made of wood, a symbol of creation. But it is not creation that is needed, but the Creator. The child needs for God to breathe once more the spark of life into the body, so that he can become a living soul once more.

Then came Elisha.

"And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. 33 He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD. 34 And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. 35 Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. 36 And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. 37 Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out."

Here is a scene that defies description. We read in astonishment at the concept of a resurrection from the dead. We are thrilled that once more a beloved child could be placed on the knees of his mother and in her arms. But we wonder what it all means.

Only this much is certain. The miracles in the Bible are not for show, but for a purpose. Therefore, consider the spiritual lessons to be learned from this narrative by way of application.

There is a lesson in the narrative for pastors. As Elisha was concerned about the welfare of the Woman of Shunem, so pastors should be concerned about the emotional, physical and spiritual well-being of their people. The constant question on the heart of a faithful minister is this, “Is it well?” (2 Kings 4:26). That is what I always want to know about you. “Is it well? Is it well with your soul?” I want to know whether or not the Spirit of God has touched your eyes with His, your hands with His, and covered you with His presence?

There is a lesson in the narrative for all of God’s people. “However the providence of God may disappoint us, we may be sure the promise of God never did, nor ever will deceive us: hope in that will not make us ashamed” (Matthew Henry). Though the child died in the providence of the Lord, the God of creation is the God of recreation, and the child can live again (cf. John 11:17-27).

There is a lesson in the narrative for women. To be a great woman, be more like the woman of Shunem. Be great in graciousness. Be great in humility and service to others. Be great in faith. And when the hour of testing comes, when the trials of life overwhelm the soul, let your husband and your children hear you say,

“It is well, it is well, with my soul.”

Wise as a Woman

Judges 4:1 - 5:31

The history of mankind is largely the history of warfare. Few nations go for long periods of time without bloodshed and violence. If there is not internal unrest and civil war, there is the threat of foreign conflict. When the children of Israel entered the land of Canaan, they entered as the aggressors. They had come to conquer the land, under a Divine mandate. God was determined to judge the Canaanites. He would drive them from the land and give it to another people of His own choosing.

Had the children of Israel stayed close to Jehovah and obeyed His voice, they would have taken the land quickly and lived in relative peace. But Israel was constantly doing evil in the sight of the Lord.

They violated the Sabbath, married the heathen woman of Canaan, entered into political treaties and they let down their guard.

Instead of conquering and transforming Canaanite culture, the Israelites were transformed by it. As a result, they found themselves enslaved to the very ones they should have been the masters of. If Israel would not lead the way to righteousness, the nation would learn something about Divine discipline. Israel would be enslaved as often as necessary to produce repentance.

In Judges 4, the scene opens on the third period of servitude, under the Canaanite, which lasted twenty years (Judg. 4:1-2). The First Servitude took place under a man named Chusham and lasted for eight years. A warrior named Othniel delivered Israel from the period of bondage.

Then came the Second Servitude under Eglon, king of Moab, which lasted for eighteen years. Ehud arose to deliver Israel by killing Eglon. For sixty years there was peace in the land beyond the Jordan, till the Midianites appeared.

Now, Israel was in trouble again. The Lord had delivered the nation into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan that reigned in Hazor. It must be kept in mind that there were many kings in Canaan, for the land was filled with tribal kings.

As Israel had twelve tribes, independent of each other, so the various tribes of Canaan were independent of each other. The conflicts that arose came over border disputes, water rights, personal grudges, political disputes, acts of restoration and the desire to take by force what others had.

In the absence of a centralized government, Israel had no standing army to defend itself. Instead, each tribe had to find willing warriors. Each tribe would fight its battles alone, and thus became enslaved, or remain free. However, at times, when a common enemy was found, and a capable leader emerged, the tribes would unite. Not until the days of Saul did the nation seriously move towards unity, but they came close in the time of Deborah. The facts surrounding Deborah are simple and straightforward.

First, Deborah was a prophetess Judges 4:4 “And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.” In Scripture, a prophet or prophetess had a two-fold function. They could, on occasion foretell the future as Deborah did in Judges 4:9. “And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.”

While that function was the most spectacular part of their ministry, they also had the ability to simply tell forth the will of the Lord. They had a high ethical standard of righteousness and knew instinctively what was right and what was wrong. There was a tremendous measure of discernment present to see through a situation to its conclusion.

Second, Deborah was the wife of Lapidoth. Unfortunately, we do not know anything about this person. Some Bible scholars suggest the name refers to a place, meaning Deborah was from Lapidoth.

Third, Deborah was a judge of Israel. The word for judge, “shophetim”, means “to discern”, “to regulate”, “to direct”. How she rose to such great prominence is not indicated in Scripture, but she was obviously very wise because the leaders of Israel sought out her counsel. In more recent years, the world has known wise women. In Israel there was Golda Mier, and in England there was Margaret Thatcher. In America we have any number of women who serve as majors, governors, congresswomen, and senators.

Fourth, Deborah was a natural leader of others. Using her political authority to command, Deborah sent for a man named Barak to come and lead the nation of Israel into battle. Deborah needed a capable military general. She thought Barak was the right person for the moment. She would give him guidance.

Barak was to mobilize his troops from the two tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun. Ten thousand soldiers would be enough to defeat the host of Sisera, general of the Canaanite army under the king named Jabin. In addition to his own foot soldiers, Sisera had 900 chariots with iron scythes on the wheels. But that did not matter. Nor did it matter that each chariot was manned by trained orders armed with long ranged bows. Deborah had heaven's assurance that everything would be all right.

“And she [Deborah] sent and called Barak, the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? 7 And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand” (Judges 4:6-7). Sometimes the confidence of a person will inspire others to great deeds, sometimes it will not.

While Deborah was confident that a small, token force of 10,000 soldiers could defeat a superior, well-trained army, Barak was not sure. He was determined to make no move without a measure of reassurances. "And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go" (Judges 4:8). For Barak, the reassurances he sought was in the personal presence of the prophetess. It is one thing to send others into battle; it is far different to go into battle yourself. If Deborah is willing to risk her life, then Barak will be encouraged.

Fifth, the Bible says that Deborah was a determined lady of great personal courage. She went up with Barak. Judges 4:10 "And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him." In this way, the stage began to be set for a major battle near the plains of Esraelon (Armageddon).

At first, it seemed that the forces of Sisera had the strategic advantage. Not only did Sisera have the larger army, but also the movements of the army of Israel were revealed to him by a man named Heber, the Kenite, a descendent of Hobab, and the father-in-law of Moses. Judges 4:11-12 "Now Heber the Kenite, which was of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which is by Kedesh. 12 And they shewed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor." If betrayal by a friend is treacherous, so much more does a family member make betrayal infamous.

Why Heber showed Sisera the movement of Israel is not given, but even that was part of God's divine plan. God is sovereign over the report of spies. By the time Sisera's forces found the army of Israel, Barak had stationed most of his soldiers on the fortress of Mount Tabor, which guarded the northern entrance to the Plain of Esraelon.

Meanwhile, Deborah had taken a small detachment of troops to act as a decoy. They lured Sisera's army to the valley of the Kishon River. The signal was given and suddenly the full force of the army of Israel swept down from the hill and attacked Sisera's men. A general panic ensued in the opposing army. Horses panicked and could not be controlled. They ran into the mud along the Kishon River and got stuck. Then, a torrential flood swept many of the soldiers of Canaan away. Meanwhile, the Israeli army continued to cut down the foot soldiers that tried to flee. Only Sisera managed to escape.

Fleeing into the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber, Sisera cowered under cover. Thirsty from his ordeal, Sisera drank milk offered to him by Jael. Then Jael covered him up and when he fell asleep, Jael killed him. The mother-in-law of Moses killed one of Israel's greatest enemies.

While the tent spike was still in the head of Sisera, Barak arrived. Jael went out to meet him. She wanted to show him her bloody work. Judges 4:21-22 "Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died. And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples." In this extraordinary way, God subdued, "on that day Jabin, the king of Canaan before the children of Israel" (Judges 4:23).

When Deborah heard the news of the death of Sisera, and the destruction of the opposing army, her heart rejoiced and she composed a song and sang it before the people of Israel.

A brief summary of the beautiful ode reveals that it is religious and political. The Lord is thanked and honored for the military victory and deliverance of Israel from Canaanitish bondage and oppression. In addition, the story of past Israeli history is retold, then the battle and the death of Sisera are restated. Generations to come would learn of the day of Divine deliverance. Multitudes would be inspired to have faith in God against overwhelming odds. That is what Deborah wanted to happen, and that is what has happened. Many years after, even the church salutes Deborah, recognizing her greatness, and the Church can pray that others will be as wise as this woman—though not as violent.

Daughter of an Oath

Proverbs 4:3

*“For I was my father’s son, tender
and only beloved in the sight of my mother.”*

What does a person do who has fallen into grievous sin? Depending upon the situation and the nature of the sin, several responses are likely.

First, a person may try to hide sin. That is the normal and almost distinctive thing to do. Adam and Eve ran from the presence of the Lord. Achan took gold and buried it. Gehazi, the servant of the prophet tried to hide the wages he stole. David killed Uriah the Hittite so his sin would not be made public if he could help it.

Second, a person may try to deny sin. When Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit, they denied doing wrong before the apostles. The prophet Jeremiah, representing God, charged national Israel with sin, only to receive this reply, “Yet thou sayest, because I am innocent, surely His anger shall turn from me. Behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest I have not sinned.”

Then third, a person might chose death in response to sin. Each year thousands of people commit suicide over sin. A chief of staff to one of America’s leading officials jumped out of a twenty-five story apartment after it was to be made known that he committed sexual indiscretions with certain staff members.

A fourth response to sin is depression, leading to withdrawal from life. A low self-esteem sets in, and there is constant self-condemnation.

Finally, we want to mention, there is a fifth response to sin, which is to boast about it. Someone has said, America as a nation, has forgotten how to blush. The indictment is that there is open pornography, prostitution, drugs, and violence. In California, gang members involved in murder are defiant of the law, and proud of how many bodies were killed protecting their turf.

What does a person do who has fallen into sin? A person may hide it, deny it, commit suicide, withdraw from life, or boldly brag about it. None of these options are very good, and the soul is left to wonder, “Are there any other options?”

The answer is yes. A person may do something else with sin, and that is forsake sin, confess all evil to God, and receive the redemptive grace found in Jesus Christ.

In just a moment, I shall set before you a woman who sinned grievously. I set her before you on this mother’s day to remind all women afresh, that whatever good can be said about women or men, can only be said because of redeeming grace. We must fully appreciate where we have been, if we are to appreciate where we are going.

The woman I set before you is a vivid reminder that the flesh is weak and sinful, and needs a Redeemer. But grace shall not leave the woman in sin. There will be redemption, and full knowledge of the grace of God.

The woman I want to speak of was a mother once, and then twice, and as far as the Scripture records, she was a good mother. I am convinced she was a good mother despite a vile, sinful deed in her life, for many reasons.

First, this mother taught her son to honor his parents. To honor one's parents means to show them proper respect. Children need to learn to say yes sir, no sir, please and thank you. Children need to be trained not to use improper body language. They might be, rather, like the little girl who was told to sit finally said, "Mother, I may be sitting on the outside but I am standing on the inside."

Mothers teach children respect by firm, proper, and consistent discipline. No excuses must be made for bad behavior, no matter how sweet a child might be.

So well did this mother teach her son respect, that he in turn would one day write to his children, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother."

The greatest legacy a mother can pass on to her child is not money, status, or power, but the law of God.

A mother was putting the final things away for her son who was going off to college. On top she placed a Bible, her law of life, and said, "Son, either sin will keep you from this Book, or this Book will keep you from sin."

Then second, I believe the Daughter of an Oath, for such does her name literally mean, was a good mother because she loved her son. (Proverbs 4:3) Once, when an injustice was about to be done this mother pleaded his case, taking it to the King himself. She loved her son.

It may seem strange to have to mention a mother's love, but I assure you there are many women who do not love their children. They are not fit to be mothers. The abortion statistics around the world cry out that millions of women do not love their children. The number of neglected and abused children by women, declare that far too many women do not love their children. However a woman begets a child, if she loves that child, she can be a good mother.

The Daughter of an Oath loved her son, she protected him, encouraged him, and inspired him on to greatness. Oh, the power of a mother's love.

John Quincy Adams said, "All that I am my mother made me."

Abraham Lincoln said, "All that I am or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother."

Dwight R. Moody declared, "All that I have ever accomplished in life, I owe to my mother." Napoleon was wise when he said, "Let France have good mothers, and she will have good sons."

Mothers, love your children and show that love. Be affectionate. With a thousand kisses and a million hugs, let your children know you care for them. Do that, and they will love you back. I always kissed my mother. Then, always use a soft voice, even if the temperature is rising. A mother's voice is the most melodious voice in all the world. Satan will try to turn it into a coarse, ugly sewer. Don't let him.

Margaret E. Sangster prayed, "Father in heaven, make me wise, so that my gaze may never meet a question in my child's eyes. God keep me always kind and sweet and patient too, before their need. Let each vexation know its place, let gentleness be all my creed, let laughter live upon my face! A mother's day is very long, there are so many things to do! But never let me lose my song, before the hardest day is through."

Mothers, love your children.

There is a third reason I know the Daughter of an Oath was a good mother, she taught her son the horrors of sin. She taught her son that when he sinned he always hurt not only himself but her as well. She knew by experience. And the son remembered and wrote, "...a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother."

Many a mother has known what it is like to have a foolish son. What a heaviness it is.

I would have you see, in the fertile imagination of your mind, an old woman with a halo of silvered hair, the hot tears flowing down her furrowed cheeks, her worn hands busy over a washboard in a room of poverty, praying, for her son, John. John who ran away from home in his teens to become a sailor. John of whom it was now reported that he had become a very wicked man. Praying, praying, praying always that her son might be of service to God.

God answered the prayer by working a miracle in the heart of John Newton. In time to come he would write the wonderful song, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound. That saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found. Was blind but now I see."

Mothers, teach your children how much their sin will grieve you if they should go astray. A good mother will do that. But, be careful. Do not let self-righteousness creep in. Do not let a reputation be the most important thing in life, but let children know that when they do wrong it hurts.

The opposite is true as well. When children do good, they need to be praised, and without apology. I can remember several times my mother coming home and saying, "I heard a good word about you in the neighborhood today." Then, she would tell me what the storekeeper said, or the neighbor said, or a friend. It inspired me to be better. I wanted to please her.

I am appalled at many parents I hear who are afraid to give their child a compliment. So they will pass it on, or say something with a sarcastic remark. A young person will be proud of his work and might say, "My that is nice", and parents detect a note of pride, and move in for the kill.

Mothers, brag on your children. It is all right. Be proud of them, and do not be afraid to let it show. Such commitment, such kindness will instill in them such gratitude, that the words of Rudy and Kipling will be true when he wrote,

“If I were hanged on the highest hill,
Mother o’mine, O mother o’mine,
I know whose love would follow me still,
Mother o’mine, O mother o’mine.

If I were drowned in the deepest sea,
Mother o’mine, O mother o’mine,
I know whose tears would come down to me,
Mother o’mine, O mother o’mine.

If I were damned of body and soul,
Mother o’mine, O mother o’mine,
I know whose prayers would make me whole,
Mother o’mine, O mother o’mine.”

Would you like to know who the Daughter of an Oath is? Perhaps by now you have reasoned it out. The mother who taught her son to honor his parents, the mother who loved her son with an intensity of soul, the mother who taught her son the horrors of sin because she had once sinned grievously, was Bathsheba. Her son was King Solomon, and he gave us the Proverbs we have quoted today.

History has not been kind to Bathsheba. Commentators usually refer to her as the adulterous wife of Uriah the Hittite, and so she was. But where sin abounds, grace does much more abound. Bathsheba was severely disciplined. The child born of a sinful conception died. But God showed mercy, and Bathsheba “bore a son and called his name Solomon; and the Lord loved him” (2 Samuel 12:24). As a baby the Lord loved him. Something good can indeed come out of something once wrong, when God is in it.

Women need to be kind to one another, for the heart of Bathsheba is in every one of us, even if the actions of Bathsheba are not. Redeeming grace is what saves us all, and makes every Christian woman a potentially good mother.

Solomon could have been worse in having a mother other than Bathsheba. But I dare say he loved her, honored her, and was proud to be the child of the one called, The Daughter of an Oath.