

Mother's Day: Proverbs 31:10-31
You Excel Them All

"Noble character" (v10) means "virtue, integrity, uprightness, fitness, and strength." In fact, "courage, strength, substance, and ability" are the core meaning of this word which is often translated "army."

Proverbs 31: 29 says, "Many women do noble things, but you surpass (excel) them all." This is the ideal woman in the mind of the poet, probably her husband. He acknowledges that other women do noble things, but she excels them all.

There is only one woman in the Bible who is actually described by this Hebrew term, "noble character." Boaz declares of Ruth, after she sleeps at his feet on the threshing floor, that everyone knows her to be "a woman of noble character" where this same word is used. Her reputation as a noble person came about because of her love and care for her complaining mother-in-law, Naomi, who was bitter about all that God let happen to her. Yet Ruth stayed with her and helped her resettle in her own land, giving up her native Moab.

Boaz is also described by this word, but most translators go with the term "a mighty man of wealth" rather than using an ethical term such as "substance" or "ability" or "valor," all of which are frequently used to translate this word.

The same term is used in Proverbs 12:4, "A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones." Here the word "noble" is contrasted with "disgraceful."

The virtuous woman has substance. She has a presence when she walks into the room. Her husband is seated at the city gate in large measure because she is his wife. The respect has garnered is a product of his wisdom in choosing such a woman as his lifelong companion.

She is no charmer, not a honey-lipped flatterer. She may or may not be physically beautiful. Perhaps in her youth she was considered good-looking. Now in her maturity her looks are secondary to her inner strength and beauty.

The most important people in her life—her husband and children—think she is really something, and they praise her. The crowd at the city gate, they praise her, too.

Who is this person of excellence? May I follow in her footsteps? Here are five descriptive terms for the virtuous woman:

I. EAGER HANDS: *She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands (v13).*

A. "Eager" is the idea of delight and pleasure. She delights in the work which she does. It is not a drudgery to her.

B. "She brings him good, not harm" (v12). Her hands are eager to do good. Jesus "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil, for the Lord was with him" (Acts 10:38).

C. She is not afraid of manual labor. She works hard.

D. She has INITIATIVE.

1. She has a plan. She is not waiting for others to tell her what she should do. She gets up and does it.

2. She travels.

3. She makes purchases. She is a shopper, this woman of virtue. She goes to the grocery store, sometimes even to Kenner.

4. She gets up early, even before others are stirring in the house, so that everyone, husband and children and servants, can start the day with a healthy breakfast (v15).

5. She makes real estate investments, spending their money wisely and laying up for later years (v16).

6. She starts a business, planting a vineyard. She is an entrepreneur whose diligence and judgment bless her family.

II. OPEN ARMS: *She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy (v20).*

A. Her arms are strong arms: She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks (v17). Her penchant for manual labor increases her strength. She is buff, this woman of virtue.

B. Everyone around her benefits from her presence and her work, and that is just what she wants.

C. She cares for the poor. These are the afflicted and the weak. She also extends her hands to the needy. These are the abused and the oppressed, the forgotten and the lowly.

Please be aware—this notion of virtue is not universal. Many people have disdain for the poor and needy. They disregard them and think that they are victims of their own laziness and moral failures. They think this virtuous woman is foolish to help these miserable people. The process of natural selection will shortly remove them from the earth, and the planet will be better off without them, these hard-hearted people think.

Tenderness of heart is a virtue. If you are growing cynical and hard-hearted, you need to reverse that process immediately.

C. She anticipates disaster and trouble. Her care for the poor is reflected in how she cares for her own children and servants. She prepares for winter and cold weather. She is thinking ahead in her concern for the needy of her own household and others.

III. READY LAUGH: *She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come* (v25).

A. She is prepared for the future although she does not know what the future will bring. Her preparations give her a confidence, strength and dignity.

B. When someone tries to frighten her about the things that may come upon the world, she laughs because she is ready for life or death, poverty or wealth, health or sickness.

C. SHE WILL NOT LIVE IN FEAR. She knows what is out there in the world. She has been around. But she refuses to retreat from life and live in a shell.

D. She has developed that healthy balance between caution and adventure. She is not ruled by fear because she has been ruled by diligence. Diligence and faithful preparation are her best weapons against fear and panic.

E. She has a sense of humor. She loves to laugh. Her laughter is mentioned here because her husband and her children know her laughter.

***Laughter is still a genetic mystery to biologists and anthropologists. It is universal among humans and other species. It is not necessarily about surprise. It is about communicating and relating.

IV. FAITHFUL SPEECH: *She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue* (v26).

A. A virtuous woman cannot be described without mentioning her tongue, her speech, her verbal communication. This involves three things here:

B. Laughter. This is the first verbal communication mentioned about this noble person. She knows how to laugh. It is one way in which she communicates.

C. Wisdom. She speaks with wisdom—chokmah, the standard word for wisdom in Proverbs. She is not foolish. She is godly, experienced, and strong. When she speaks, people want to hear what she has to say.

She weighs her words carefully. I do not get the impression from this poem that she is a woman of many words although she may be. I think she is known neither for her verbosity or her silence. She is known from wise speech.

D. Faithful instruction is translated in KJV, "law of kindness." The two Hebrew words are TORAH and CHESED. Torah is law, and chesed is kindness or mercy.

***Sometimes you eat something that changes the color of your tongue—like a blue snowball. When this woman opens her mouth, her tongue is colored with the law of kindness. It is how she lives her life and speaks her words. She is not only clothed with strength and dignity. She has law of kindness in her speech.

V. FEARS THE LORD: *Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised* (v30).

A. This woman of virtue is anchored in her faith in God, her reverence for God. This is the source of her strength.

B. The Sovereign Lord is my strength (noble character); he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights (Habakkuk 3:19). The book *Hinds Feet on High Places* describes the heights to which a faithful servant of Christ can go. It is based on this verse from Habakkuk where God is the source of noble character. The English author, Hannah Hurnard, tells the story of a young woman named Much-Afraid who journeys away from her Fearing family to the High Places with the Shepherd, guided by her two companions, Sorrow and Suffering.

CONCLUSION: Move from fear to diligence and laughter.