

The final chapter of Proverbs describes the perfect woman that a man should desire to have. Just as Jesus lived a perfect life that we can never match, this woman represents an ideal that women should aspire to emulate even though they could never attain it perfectly. This ideal woman loves her husband and children and works hard to care for them as well as bringing additional income into her home.

This chapter is described as the wisdom taught to King Lemuel by his mother. We don't know who Lemuel was, although Jewish tradition suggests it may have been Solomon. If it wasn't Solomon, then perhaps this is just wisdom that Solomon encountered in his quest for more wisdom and wanted to include it in this collection of wisdom that we call the book of Proverbs.

10 Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.

In v. 3, Lemuel's mother advises him to not allow women to distract him from obeying God. From v. 10 to the end of the chapter she describes the kind of woman that he should seek to marry, listing the characteristics of an ideal woman. No woman could ever perfectly exhibit all of the characteristics mentioned, but they provide an ideal that all women should aspire to. Lemuel's mother asks "Who can find a virtuous woman?" which implies that such a woman is a rare find. If such a perfect woman were to be found, her value would be far above the price of precious stones. Even women who exhibit some of these characteristics are valuable.

11 The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. 12 She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

"The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil" – Her husband will not need to rely on the spoils of war to supply the needs of the house. He can trust that his wife is not going to waste money but instead will help increase their income, as described in the upcoming verses. She brings value to the house instead of being a drain on its resources.

"She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life" – She will be a benefit to the home for as long as she lives. The word "evil" refers to negative consequences, meaning that she increases their net worth rather than decreasing it. Her husband (and the family) is better off because she is there.

13 She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. 14 She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. 15 She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.

"She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands" – We see that this woman is not lazy. She seeks and acquires the materials for weaving and sewing clothes for her family and works "willingly" (not because she is forced) with her hands to do so.

"She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar" – Merchants use ships to travel to acquire merchandise to sell and transport it back home. This woman is willing to travel wherever needed to get the best deals and best food for her home.

"She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens" – She gets up before dawn to prepare breakfast for her family. She does not act like the queen of the house, waiting for her servants to cook the food and bring it to her. Instead, she not only cooks the food herself, but she also prepares it for her servant girls as well. This speaks of her loving and humble nature.

16 She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. 17 She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.

"She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard" – This woman is not satisfied to buy all her food. She looks around until she finds a good deal on a field and then she buys it so that she can plant and work it as a vineyard.

"She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms" – This speaks to the amount of effort she puts into her work. She does not do these things halfheartedly but sets her loins and arms to work with all her strength.

18 She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. 19 She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.

"She perceiveth that her merchandise [gain; profit] is good" – The word "merchandise" could imply that she sells the fruits of her labor (from the vineyard or making clothes) to make money, or else it may mean that she recognizes the benefit that her labor has had for the home. She recognizes how much her work benefits her family and so she is diligent to continue doing it.

"her candle goeth not out by night" – We already saw that this woman gets up early (v. 15) and now we see she stays up long after dark to get her work done by candlelight.

"She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff" – The spindle and distaff were tools for spinning wool into thread. Apparently she is staying up after dark, working by candlelight, working to provide clothing for her family (v. 13, 21), the poor (v. 20), herself (v. 22), and to sell (v. 24).

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

This woman is compassionate toward the poor. Part of her motivation for working so hard may be so that she would have something to give to the poor. The stretching and reaching out of her hands may imply that she offers them her labor in addition to material things such as money, food and clothing. This woman is not afraid to work!

21 She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household *are* clothed with scarlet. 22 She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing *is* silk and purple.

“She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household *are* clothed with scarlet” – She is not concerned when cold weather comes because she has already provided warm clothing for her family (and likely also the servants).

“She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing *is* silk and purple” – This woman is not forced to wear old, worn out clothes. She makes beautiful and expensive clothes for herself to wear. These are evidences that God has blessed her labor.

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

The gates of the city is where the city officials sat to administer justice to the citizens of the city. This woman’s virtuous nature has reflected well on her husband so that he is recognized and respected as an official of the city.

24 She maketh fine linen, and selleth *it*; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. 25 Strength and honour *are* her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.

“She maketh fine linen, and selleth *it*; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant” – This woman is industrious and doesn’t depend on her husband to be the sole provider of income for the household. She also works to make money to help support her family.

“Strength and honour *are* her clothing” – This woman’s wisdom has led her to be proactive in her lifestyle. She doesn’t let laziness lure her into complacency but instead has worked so that she has been clothed with strength and honor as people recognize and respect what she has done to supplement her family’s income.

“and she shall rejoice in time to come” – She is prepared for the future. Even if she were to become a widow, she has already established a source of income to support herself and her children.

26 She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue *is* the law of kindness.

She does not open her mouth to engage in idle gossip or to express foolish ideas. Instead, when she opens her mouth, she speaks with wisdom and kindness. She is able to speak with the wisdom she has acquired through years of caring for her family and hard work.

27 She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. 28 Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her. 29 Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.

“She looketh well to the ways of her household” – She is diligent to ensure the well-being of her children and that they are obedient to God. She also ensures that her husband is well fed and clothed. Her diligent care likely extends to her servants as well (v. 15).

“and eateth not the bread of idleness [*laziness*]” – She is not lazy but this does not mean that she never has any leisure time. “Not eating the bread of idleness” means that she utilizes her time well. She does not sit around while there are things that need to be done.

“Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her” – Her husband and children recognize and appreciate how hard she works to take care of them. They will have nothing but good things to say about her.

“Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all” – This woman is not the only one who works hard and has done many of the things that have been listed in this passage, but none have done all that this ideal woman has done.

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

“Favour [*charm; gracefulness; elegance*] is deceitful [*deceptive; a lie; falsehood*]” – We tend to prefer and trust someone who is charming and elegant over others who are less so, but Lemuel’s mother stresses that a woman’s charm does not necessarily reveal what is in her heart. There are many people who are able to charm others in order to satisfy their own selfish motives.

“and beauty *is* vain [*vapor*]” – Beauty does not last, so it is unwise to favor a woman based solely on the temporary characteristic of her beauty that may not reflect who she is in her heart. Some beautiful women have black hearts full of evil and hatred.

“but a woman *that* feareth [*to be afraid; to reverence*] **the LORD, she shall be praised” – External qualities like charm and beauty cannot compare to the internal qualities possessed by a woman who fears and reverences the LORD. These internal qualities manifest themselves in the behaviors described in vs. 10-29. Such a woman deserves to be praised.**

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

“Give her of the fruit of her hands” – This woman deserves to reap the rewards and benefits of her labor.

“and let her own works praise her in the gates” – The officials of the city, who reside at the gates, will praise her for the things that she does and recognize that she is indeed a virtuous woman (v. 10). Praise based on these things is superior to praise for her beauty and charm.