

Proverbs: Living Just in an Unjust World

Study Guide

Topic 15: Woman and Wife

by George Stagg

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Family Study Guide 19: Woman and Wife
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Written by George Stagg.

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All Bible references and quotations, unless noted, are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Woman and Wife

Beauty and Virtue

11:22. Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.

We've all seen the movies, sitcoms, and TV ads. A extraordinarily beautiful woman walks into a scene crowded with men. All the men's heads turn to ogle the woman, with great disgust to the other women present. This proverb addresses this global phenomenon.

Men are instinctively drawn to admire a woman who is beautiful in both form and face. However, men's weakness is that their perception of beautiful women rarely deepens beyond what they can see. External beauty does not reflect internal quality. Unfortunately, external beauty does deceive both men and women into thinking that external beauty is much more significant and important than it really is. When beauty is paired with indiscretion (cannot make good, sensible decisions) the whole of the woman is seen as a large pig with a small gold ring in its nose. The gold ring represents the beauty of the woman. It's there, it's real, it's valuable, and it's beautiful. It's also hard to notice and is of little worth when one has to live with the entire pig, which is ugly, smelly, loud, and altogether unappealing in any way. Who cares about the gold ring? The pig must be done away with, ring and all. Likewise a woman without discretion must not be taken seriously as a potential wife, example, or good friend.

Women must be on guard to avoid being overly concerned with external beauty. It will unnecessarily deceive her to place too much importance on beauty, which will lead to an underdeveloped inner woman with virtue. Women must guard themselves against jealousy and covetousness just as men must guard themselves against lust and weak thinking.

A Woman and Her Household

12:4. An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rotteness in his bones.

14:1. The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down.

These two proverbs address the same concern. Excellent and wise women bring honor and strength to their husbands and households. Proverbs 31, which we will address momentarily, describes this woman. In contrast foolish women that are poor wives ultimately dishonor their husbands and cause their households to fall apart. Foolish wives may do this through laziness, instability as a result of fear and anxiety, adultery, financial imprudence, and a whole host of other reasons.

Wife as Blessing

18:22. He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.

19:14. House and wealth are inherited from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.

The first of these proverbs highlights the beauty and blessing of finding a wife. I believe that the text assumes that the wife is a good woman, and not a foolish one. A good wife is a gift from God. It is beyond the abilities of men to pass on such a worthy gift. A good wife is favor found only by the hands of God.

The Effect of a Quarrelsome Wife

19:13. A foolish son is ruin to his father, and a wife's quarreling is a continual dripping of rain.

21:9. It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.

21:19. It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and fretful woman.

25:24. It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.

27:15–16. A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike; to restrain her is to restrain the wind or to grasp oil in one's right hand.

These five proverbs all address the same concern--a wife who is the cause of conflict and strife that characterizes the relationship with her husband. The word translated as “quarrelsome” in all five of these passages is the same Hebrew word with a range of meanings that includes strife, quarreling, scolding, argumentative, and nagging. The proverbs do not indicate a reason for the argumentativeness. There could be a variety of reasons, ranging from discontent and jealousy to fear and anxiety. A lousy husband could also be a strong element contributing to the contentiousness of a wife.

There are several metaphors/images used in these proverbs to communicate the husband’s experience of living with a quarrelsome wife:

- continual dripping of rain (never ending and tedious)
- the preference of living in the attic (stifling and overwhelming)
- the preference of living in a desert (exhausting and draining of life)
- to restrain her is like restraining the wind/grasping oil (ever elusive and impossible)

In fact, the Proverbs leave little hope for the man married to a quarrelsome woman. Why these Proverbs? I think that their lessons are for both men and women. For women, the Proverbs are a source of instruction whose content they are unlikely to hear from the men in their lives. Saying what needs to be said, the Proverbs warn women that if they do not suppress and overcome their argumentative nature, they will find themselves to be lonely and without the affections of men. For men, the Proverbs guide men to select uncontentious women as wives. This can only be determined by careful observation over time. Men must resist forming opinions of women based upon their physical beauty alone. They must allow the necessary time and contexts to ensure the woman they seek to marry are prudent and excellent women. This can best be determined by observing how women act in the context of the men in their lives, particularly their fathers and brothers, but also how they relate with their moms. Additionally, the Proverbs also provide men a motivation to cherish and nourish their wives. Lousy husbands can cause a woman to grow increasingly quarrelsome through their irresponsible behavior. Men must make every effort to love their wives. In doing this, they will strengthen their wives to become better women.

The Indescribable and Beautiful of Man with Woman

30:18–19. Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not under-

stand: 19 the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a virgin.

This proverb points out observable beauty that can hardly be explained. One of those things is the dynamic between two young lovers. It is a beautiful and marvelous thing that reflects the wonder and beauty of romantic love as a gift from God. We should aspire to live and express this beauty in our relationships, not only in their youth, but on into the years.

The Excellent Wife

31:10–31. 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. 12 She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. 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. 15 She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens. 16 She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. 17 She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong. 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. 22 She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple. 23 Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. 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. 26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. 27 She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. 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.” 30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. 31 Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

The author of Proverbs 31 originally intended it to be a mother’s instruction to a son. We correctly read it as a description of what a great wife and mother looks like. As such, women read the passage to

provide an image to aspire to. Much has been said about this passage, but we have the space to point out a few critical things:

1. The woman in the Proverb is an older woman. Her husband is an elder and her household is established. She is helping young women, who have placed themselves around her, to become good wives and mothers. Many young women read this passage and grow discouraged because of the high standards set here. The achievements and qualities of the Proverbs 31 woman were long in the making. Young women, regardless of where they are starting from, should show optimism and hope and begin striving for these qualities. Through God's power and perseverance, they will arrive eventually.
2. As the son is looking for a young woman to marry, Proverbs 31 then points to a set of inherent qualities a man should for and young woman to aspire to:
 - trustworthiness (v.11)
 - servant/submissive (v.12)
 - hard working/diligent (vv.13-15, 27)
 - competent (v.16)
 - capable (v.17)
 - discerning and savvy (v.18, 24)
 - generous and sympathetic (v.20)
 - optimistic and faithful (vv.21, 25)
 - beautifies herself and surroundings/carries herself well (vv.21-22)
 - honors her authorities (v.23)
 - wise/understands the Scriptures (v.26)
 - her priority is her household (v.27)
 - good reputation with family/friends (vv.28-29)
 - fears God and does not manipulate with her beauty (v.30)

Women/Wives and the Gospel

Proverbs 31 points to what the Scriptures consider foundational qualities that I believe are the sources of transformation for women and wives who want to become excellent women. If the reader of Proverbs 31 were to simply try to start doing what the woman does without seeing the spiritual qualities present within the woman, they would fail and continually grow distressed and ashamed of themselves for not

measuring up. The future excellent woman/wife must look at these foundational qualities to start with, and building upon these qualities, strive to become the Proverbs 31 woman. These qualities are:

- optimism/hopefulness (vv.21, 25)
- fear of God (v.30)

These qualities are ignited in the gospel. 1 Peter 3:1-6 best demonstrates the dynamic between fear, which seems to be one of the leading causes, if not the leading cause of women not rising up to their potential. Peter urges women to hope in God and not fear. In so doing, they will be able to rise above their nagging, quarrelsome natures and become a woman that honors her husband and pleases him and strengthens the household. The children will grow in their respect for both parents and become more obedient and orderly. The family as a whole will grow in harmony and fruitfulness. But how can women hope in God, especially in the context of a man rejecting the Scriptures? (1 Peter 3:1) Women need to understand that God, who rose Jesus from the dead, desires to improve men through their wives. God does not want to do this through a wife's nagging and scolding. God wants to do this through the beautification of the wife that occurs when she more fully knows and trusts Him. Kindness is the means to repentance, and God wants to bring husbands to repentance through the kindness and beauty of their wives. Only when women put their hope in God and stop using men as idols and functional saviors will women become and enjoy being an excellent woman.



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