

“The Unreal Woman”: Proverbs 31 Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on May 13th, 2007

“I started spending a lot of time hanging out on the playground and, for the first time, discovered the world of stay-at-home moms. It was an eye-opening experience. The women around me, for the most part, lived in affluent suburban Washington communities. They had comfortable homes, two or three children, smiling, productive husbands, and a society around them saying they’d made the best possible choices for their lives, yet many of them seemed just miserable. One woman told me she’d lost all interest in sex with her husband. She was just too bored. Another one said that her husband had lost all interest in sex with her. He was just too tired — up at dawn, at work all day, at client dinners in the evenings, and then semiconscious in front of the TV for the hour at night when she saw him. She had become obsessed with organizing a school fund-raiser. Another mom complained of spending her weekends in her car, shuttling between soccer and swim meets and birthday parties. And another had taken up the politics of play dates as an issue in therapy.”

From “**Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety**” Judith Warner

Introduction: Our culture is a strange one. Depends on what magazine article or book you read, you could be led to believe that children and being a mom are an anathema, and a drain on your lifestyle, or that children are mini-gods to be worshiped and adored every moment of their waking days. To the latter, author of the “**Mommy Myth**,” **Susan J. Douglass**, laments that “*The ‘new momism’ (As she calls it) is a set of ideals, norms and practices, most frequently and powerfully represented in the media, that seems on the surface to celebrate motherhood, but which in reality promulgate standards of perfection that are beyond our reach.*”¹ Unfortunately this (And the front quote) are not isolated feelings for a few “Feminist” who hate men and the children they sower, these appear to be the reactions of many 21st century American married woman, believer and non-believer. The signs of the “American Woman” are obvious. Tired, frazzled, dissatisfied, longing for meaning, guilt ridden, and lacking any real relationship with their husbands (Physical and non-physical). There’s an isolation formed which can often times bring forth a resentment towards our children and spouses, leading to a suffocating effect of loneliness, anxiety and despair. When we look at Proverbs 31 it is easy to perpetuate the “Stepford Wife” image of a woman. She seems too perfect, but is this an over reaction to the meaningless maze our culture demands from a mother? Is it possible that we are guilty of spinning our wheels in the mud of oblivion, instead of working hard in the kingdom of God? Simply put, are we doing what we are called to do as exiles living in a strange land promulgating a different life for different reasons? Our aim isn’t the “Traditional” 50’s mom, but our aim certainly isn’t the self-centered 21st century feminist.

From the Head...

It is important to note that Proverbs is a poetic book, and we need to watch how we connect with the words of this book. Most often we look at verses 10-31 and fail to even consider its context in the chapter and the book itself. Verse one begins by telling us that these are the words of king Lemuel’s mother (Who herself must be a queen?). It is also interesting that if Lemuel were a king then his wife would be a queen. Now at first glance there might seem to be a disconnect here. After all, none of us here are queens preparing our children for royalty. If you were, would it make a difference? What if we were doing just that? Could this be where most of our meaning is lost in being a mom? If you were truly a regent preparing your child for royalty, would that help shape your identity? The fact is we are all royalty and act as co-regents in His kingdom (see **1 Peter 2:9, Exodus 19:6** cf. **Revelation 20:6, Colossians 3:1**). **If this is true, shouldn’t our parental focus be dramatically altered? Our questions shouldn’t focus on,** “How can I make my child a better citizen,” or “How can I get my child to obey,” but quite possibly we can begin to focus on “how can I prepare my children for kingdom living?” How can we help our children become “Worthy of the calling by which they have been called (**Ephesians 4:1**)? Does it matter if they’re on 5 baseball teams, get singing lessons with Whitney Houston, and score 1600 on their SAT’s? Have we been duped into the “Super Mom” myth because of our failure to put our children into perspective? Are we guilty of over protection or de-valuing our children? It is important to see that our kids are fruitful in the kingdom of God, and they are the future of the fight against evil in this world.

There is basically no other literature on this king. Some feel that he is the king of Edom, but there is not enough evidence to support this. There is a Jewish tradition that sees Lemuel, as King Solomon himself, and that Lemuel was a name his mother called him. Also not enough evidence to be sure. If the latter is true however, his mother is Bathsheba, which certainly gives us another perspective on the words of this passage. The following is some observations in Proverbs on being a mom.

The task of being a mom, can be a burden

The Hebrew word most often translated “Oracle” in your bible’s is the word “Massa” which most often means burden, (As in a load to carry) or “*That which causes hardship or distress as a figurative extension of the weariness occurring when*

¹ Susan J. Douglass, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How it Has Undermined Women*, (New York, Free Press, 2004), pg. 4

*carrying a load.*² In this text it is also potentially the realm of the King (“King of Massa”), since the word’s root is close to an Arabic city “Mas’u.” Again, we don’t need to be dogmatic, but the idea of the “Burden” is quite interesting. A lot of what moms need to communicate may not be easy to hear, but it is imperative for our children to become the co-regents they are called to be. The very task of being a mom is weighty, and an amazing load to bear. We are called to lead and teach our children about the will of God. We are not called to let them “Find themselves,” and become “Independent, autonomous” beings floating in a sea of purposeless choices. Moms are the key conveyors of faith and biblical truth, and the mission of God to the next generation. Moms are the inspiration that inculcates faith in our children.

Moms are called to raise their children to serve others

In verses 2-9 there are a few interesting observations, that help us begin to define what it means to prepare your child for royalty. The three times “What are you doing...?” relates the mothers emotional connection to her son, her authority as evidenced by her use of “My womb” and her commitment seen in her “vows” before the Lord (cf. **1 Samuel 1:11, 28**). According to the first 9 verses the king ought not to get caught up in worldly affairs (Women and Wine), but ought to do God’s work by ruling justly and fighting “*For the rights of all who are destitute.*” She backs this up by her teaching and her actions (**Proverbs 31:15, 20**). Her mission extends beyond her own “Nuclear” family to others in need. The preoccupation of God’s people needs to be His mission in the world. It is not the preoccupation of the professional minister; it is the mandate of every transformed soul in Christ. The biblical mom feels the weight “Burden” of this task, and glories in it.

What is Mission?³

“Mission Dei” = God’s Mission (In which we are called to join)

1. To individual’s for salvation
2. To fight for justice
3. To engage cultural thinking
4. To sustain creation
5. To fight against demonic powers that hinder the advancement of the kingdom

Building her household with wisdom is a priority

There are some who believe that Proverbs 31 is actually a poem that personifies wisdom much like it does in Proverbs 8. Although I do not know for sure if this is the case, I do not think we should approach this chapter with a check list of things for women/moms to do, but we should meditate on the wisdom of a woman who is enamored with her task in God’s kingdom, and although she owns at least two businesses (**Proverbs 31: 16, 24**), she sees her “household” as a worthwhile project (see too **Proverbs 9:1; 14:1** cf. **31:15, 27**).

...To the Heart

Being a mom in today’s world is not an easy task. When we are guilted into trying to be a perfect mom, the task will only become more difficult. **As a mom, we need to find our identity and focus from Christ, and join Him in His mission in the world.** Without that we will try to find our identity in our children or our careers, which will only intensify our guilt and anxiety as we try to raise our children “Perfectly,” and of course fail. It is this guilt motivated parenting (Sometimes even promulgated by Christian teachers) that conclude with child centered parenting. **As moms who love God, our end is not our children; they are a means to the glory of God.** We are not called to make perfect kids that obey, we are called to teach our children how to love God, and love others. We are also not called to center everything we do on our kids needs, but we are called to expand our mission and theirs outward to other’s needs. Thus we don’t need to feel guilty because we couldn’t enroll our child in three sports teams, drama, advanced technology class, gymnastics and singing lessons. It’s also ok to leave the kids with a baby sitter and go out with your husband. It’s also ok to make money for the family, and it’s mandatory that you have a relationship with the one your identity should be found in, which begins as this chapter ends and this book begins, “*In the fear of the Lord!*” (**Proverbs 1:7; 31:30**)

²Swanson, James. *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament), Electronic Ed.* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997)

³ From the book “*The other Six Days: Vocation, Work and Ministry in Biblical Perspective*, by R. Paul Stevens, pg. 202