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Proverbs

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PROVERBS: THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

THE RICHEST FAMILY STUDY EVER

When I think over my entire experience as a father of my five wonderful children over the past 18 years, there is one experience that I am so thankful for I can't wait to share it with you. In the spring of 2003, I had the joy of leading all my children through a 14-week family study in the book of Proverbs, with my wife Blythe as my co-teacher and facilitator. We met every Tuesday morning for about an hour and a half around our round oak kitchen table. I had them doing all sorts of written assignments: they had to identify the chapter breaks and provide titles for each chapter section; after a careful reading of Proverbs 1:8-9:18 I asked them to write a one-page letter to their future son based on what they would want him to learn, followed by a one-page letter to their future daughter on the same subject. Each child had to write a paper on the meaning of Prov 18:21, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Together we pondered such questions as "What is the fear of the Lord?" "What does it mean to listen to God?" and "What are the key life skills a father would want a son to learn?" We challenged the modern-day proverb that tells us "experience is the best teacher." They had to write a proverb in their own words, and draw a cartoon depicting a favorite proverb. They concluded by writing a letter to their future son describing in their own words what he should look for in a wife. That time will live forever in my memory as one of the sweetest periods of my whole life: doing what I love best – studying the Scriptures in a serious way – with my favorite people on this earth. Today I want to take you with us into that world, into the family study around the oak kitchen table, to learn what a father most wants his sons and daughters to know.

In Proverbs we see Solomon's heart as a father, seeking to prepare and instruct his son in wisdom. Wisdom can be defined as "the ability to live life skillfully." Solomon's key theme as he seeks to train his son is that "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." Then from this theme, Solomon prepares his son to learn three powerful lessons: 1) to learn to listen wisely, 2) to learn to speak wisely, and 3) to learn what to look for in his future wife, the Proverbs 31 woman. Thus, in this book are words of wisdom from the wisest man who lived before Jesus Christ, words of wisdom for all ages, but which especially instruct the young in learning to live life with skill. So, let's turn to the book of Proverbs for a whirlwind tour of this unparalleled book of wisdom.

Proverbs 1:1-7: The Purpose and Theme of Proverbs

Fortunately, this book is one of the few Biblical books to outline for us explicitly what its purpose is. The purpose of the book is found in Prov 1:2-6, "To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding, To receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity; To give prudence to the naive, to the youth knowledge and discretion, A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, To understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles." Notice how many infinitives there are in these verses: to know, to discern, to receive instruction, to give prudence, to understand. These are the primary purposes of the book.

Following this, the theme verse of the book is explicitly set out for us in Prov 1:7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." This is actually the theme verse of all the Wisdom literature in the Hebrew Scriptures, appearing in similar form in Job 28:28 and Psalm 110:10. But this is certainly the theme verse of Proverbs, stated as the first principle of the book and reiterated in

Prov 9:10 and 15:33.

I want to begin by focusing our attention on this theme verse, Prov 1:7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." Just what is this "fear of the LORD?" Is it some sort of cowering fright, as if God were some wicked Scrooge just waiting to dock our wages, or is it a deathly fear of the God who wreaks capricious judgment in the form of terrible thunderbolts from heaven?

When God is the object of this *yira*, or "fear," the Hebrew term emphasizes awe or reverence for God. It is this heart attitude of respect and reverence for God that is the root of real wisdom. But how can we respect and revere someone if we do not know who he really is? Let's stop to think about who he really is.

HE IS ...

He is the All-knowing, All-present, and All-powerful One.

He is the Blessing Giver, whose first word to man was a blessing.

He is the Creator of every single thing in the universe, and the father of all creativity.

He is the Defender of the weak and the destroyer of the wicked.

He is the Everlasting one, living before the beginning and having no end.

He is the Father of the fatherless, the Father of us all.

He is the God of Grace, freely giving us gifts we don't deserve.

He is the Holy One, who is Holy, Holy, Holy ... sin melts away before His throne.

He is the Imperial Majesty of the Universe, and there is no other.

He is the Judge of all the world, and His judgment is final.

He is the King of Kings.

He is Love ... the very definition.

He is the Maker of Man, because it takes God to make a man.

He is the Namer, naming day and night, having authority over both.

He is the Owner of every believer.

He is the Preserver of His people, to the very end.

He is the Quintessential Embodiment of Integrity, in whom is no shadow of hypocrisy.

He is the Righteous Ruler whose rod and staff comfort us.

He is the Savior who satisfied His own righteousness by His own self-sacrifice.

He is the Teacher without whom we would be totally ignorant in this world.

He is the Upright one, who alone makes man upright.

He is the Victorious One, the God of peace who will soon crush Satan under your feet.

He is the Wise one, who founded the earth by His wisdom.

He is the X-ray who examines our hearts, finds us wanting, and heals our hearts.

He is the Yoke-maker, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light.

He is the Zealous one, whose zeal is for you.

In short, He is worthy of respect.

One man in history who learned this respect and awe of God was Job, as we see at the end of his interview with God in Job 42:2-4. His record is weighty, since he had a personal, face-to-face contact with God in which God gave him a personal theodicy. Job's response is rightly filled with awe, respect and humility when he said, "I know that Thou

canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted... Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 'Hear now, I will speak; I will ask Thee, and do Thou instruct me.'" What a wise prayer: O Lord, do Thou instruct me.

This is the point of Proverbs: if we want to be wise and have knowledge, the beginning, middle and end is to revere, respect, and love the God of the Bible.

There is a long list of heroes down through the ages who agree that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Just in our nation's history, here is what some of our heroes have said to affirm this. George Washington concluded that "It is impossible to govern the world without God and the Bible." Patrick Henry, in his inimitable, dramatic style, proclaimed, "The Bible is worth all the other books which have ever been printed." Abraham Lincoln wisely said, "In regard to this great book, I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to man. All the good Savior gave to the world was communicated through this book. But for it we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man's welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it." These were men who feared God, who revered him and his word, and their wisdom is uncontested.

Proverbs 1:8-9:18: Learning to Listen to Lady Wisdom, not the Strange Woman

The best way to understand what is happening in Proverbs 1:8-9:18 is to study chapter one and chapter nine closely. The two chapters are quite similar. In each, the enticements of sinners or the "strange woman" are juxtaposed with the call of Wisdom. Wisdom is personified as a woman, often called "Lady Wisdom." In both chapters, the strong exhortation is to learn to listen to Lady Wisdom and be instructed by her rather than listening to, and being seduced by, words of evil.

The enticing words of sinners are described in morbid detail in Prov 1:8-19, especially in vv. 11-12: "If they say, 'Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood, let us ambush the innocent without cause; let us swallow them alive like Sheol, even whole, as those who go down to the pit.'" But the word of the father to the son in response to these enticements is found in v. 15, "My son, do not walk in the way with them." The father's reason is profound, as seen in v. 18, "But they lie in wait for their own blood; they ambush their own lives."

Then in v. 20, the scene changes dramatically, as another, better voice can be heard by the young man: "Wisdom shouts in the street, She lifts her voice in the square." Lady Wisdom then gives a moving soliloquy in vv. 22-33, ending with the exhortation that "he who listens to me shall live securely, and shall be at ease from the dread of evil." Thus, the ending note of chapter one gives us our main theme for all of chapters 1-9: the key is for the young man to learn to listen to Lady Wisdom.

In chapter two, this theme is immediately expanded upon, in vv. 2-6: "Make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; For if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will discern the fear of the LORD, and discover the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding." Notice how wisdom comes from only one source, from the LORD himself. And the key life skill this father wants the son to learn is how to listen wisely.

In the middle of chapter two we are introduced to the voice of temptation, the words of the strange woman, in Prov 2:16-19, "To deliver you from the strange woman, from the strange woman who flatters with her words; that leaves the companion of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God; for her house sinks down to death, and her tracks lead to the dead; none who go to her return again, nor do they reach the paths of life." There are two women calling to this young man, Lady Wisdom crying in the street, and the strange woman whispering flattery in the shadows at nightfall.

This interplay between these two voices reaches a dramatic height in

chapter nine. Listen carefully to this final scene in Prov 9:1-4 and 13-16. In Prov 9:1-4, here is Lady Wisdom: "Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars; she has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table; she has sent out her maidens, she calls from the tops of the heights of the city; 'Whoever is naïve, let him turn in here!'" Compare that to the call of the strange, foolish woman in 9:13-16, "The woman of folly is boisterous, she is naïve, and knows nothing. And she sits at the doorway of her house, on a seat by the high places of the city, calling to those who pass by, who are making their paths straight: 'Whoever is naïve, let him turn in here.'" Both of these ladies call from the heights or high places, and their call is identical: "Whoever is naïve, let him turn in here." Then both bid the young man to eat: Lady Wisdom says, "Come, eat of my food, and drink of the wine I have mixed," while the strange woman says, "Stolen water is sweet; and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." The minute the young man hears the words "stolen...eaten in secret..." he should be ready to flee. But the crushing contrast comes at the end: Lady Wisdom says, "Forsake your folly and live," in 9:6, while Solomon tells us plainly in 9:18 about the strange woman's house, "But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave." Solomon's point is this: you had better learn to listen wisely and well to discern the difference at the front end by wisdom, rather than the bitter back end by experience.

Isn't this humbling material? How can we learn to listen with such profound insight to see the difference between wisdom and folly, when they can look so incredibly similar at first? Again, Solomon showed us the way. There is the wonderful story in 1 Kings 3, how God appeared one night to Solomon in a dream, and said to him, "Ask what you wish me to give you." What an incredible statement! How would you have answered God? Take a moment to ponder this. It is one great gut-check question. But what did Solomon say? We have all been taught that Solomon asked for wisdom. But in the original language, Solomon literally asked for a hearing heart. What was the secret of Solomon's wisdom, the second wisest man ever to live? He asked for a hearing heart. If you want to be wise, and learn to discern good from evil, pray for a hearing heart, and carve out time in your day to sit quietly and listen to God.

I remember a time in my own life when I had to listen to my Lord with my heart to discern good from evil. It was in my first serious career job up in San Francisco. By the grace of God, I was one of three hires at the management consulting firm that had been the most highly bid-after interview among Stanford seniors and MBAs that year. The firm was an extremely elite boutique finance consultancy: everyone there was from the top five schools in the country – Stanford, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Berkeley. Everyone there was bright, but there was this one guy who was the unquestioned guru in the firm. Conference rooms that had been buzzing with chat would grow quiet the minute he entered. He had his Ph.D. from Harvard Business School in finance, and he had even lectured there. He was our in-house boy genius, a young man still in his twenties. I remember he taught us a training class one time entitled, "The Magic of Leverage," a title that even today sounds so good, so right, so...magical. The class outlined in flawless theory how a company should maximize its debt as the ultimate means to create shareholder value. The class was mesmerizing, and the environment could not be headier in the conference room on the 25th floor of our very tony office building on Market Street in the Financial District. But I left with a disturbance deep in my spirit: I come from poor farming folk from Texas, for whom "debt" was definitely a four-letter word. Something about that whole experience at that firm was like a delicate professional charade. About 18 months later I left that firm in order to intern at PBC to become a pastor. I often wondered over the years what had happened to our boy wonder. Fourteen years later, just two years ago now, my answer came in my own local newspaper, the *Contra Costa Times*. I opened the business section one day to see an almost full-page color picture of the now-older boy wonder testifying before a Congressional hearing as the CFO of a global telecommunications firm that had just entered Chapter 11, a company whose slick approach to corporate finance had destroyed its many investors' portfolios...a far cry from creating shareholder value.

The bogus can sound so good at the front end (“The Magic of Leverage”), and prove to be rotten to the core at the bitter back end.

May we all ask God to give us a hearing heart, that we may learn the first lesson of Proverbs, to learn to listen wisely. So, what is the next lesson in this book?

Proverbs 10-29: Learning to Live and to Speak Wisely

The book of Proverbs takes an obvious turn in Prov 10:1. This section is prefaced as “The proverbs of Solomon,” and then the first proverb is immediately introduced. In Prov 10-29, there are proverbs covering virtually every aspect of human life and experience. But is there a single thread of wisdom running through these proverbs? I believe there is. These proverbs in a general sense teach a man or woman how to live life skillfully, but more specifically, they are designed to teach a man or woman how to speak wisely. The theme of speech plays a key role in Prov 10, 12, 15, 16, 18, 19, 22, 23, and 26. In fact, in chapter ten, 11 of 32 verses deal with our speech, and in chapter 26, 11 of 28 verses address the theme of speech. So, I want to narrow our focus on this critical lesson: learning how to *speak wisely*. Here are some of the most compelling of the more than 100 proverbs dealing with speaking:

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,
 But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence. (10:11)
 When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable,
 But he who restrains his lips is wise. (10:19)
 By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted,
 But by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down. (11:11)
 There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword,
 But the tongue of the wise brings healing. (12:18)
 The one who guards his mouth preserves his life;
 The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin. (13:3)
 In the mouth of the foolish is a rod for his back,
 But the lips of the wise will preserve them. (14:3)
 A gentle answer turns away wrath,
 But a harsh word stirs up anger. (15:1)
 Pleasant words are a honeycomb,
 Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. (16:24)
 A worthless man digs up evil,
 While his words are as a scorching fire. (16:27)
 Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise;
 When he closes his lips, he is counted prudent. (17:28)
 Death and life are in the power of the tongue,
 And those who love it will eat its fruit. (18:21)

I was particularly struck by the forcefulness of Prov 18:21, that “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” How much more pointedly can Solomon tell us that the power of our speech is earth-shaking; it can be an instrument of the Spirit of God to bring life or it can be a sword of the flesh to bring death!

But what convinced me most about the importance of this theme was the priority given it in Prov 22-23. In Prov 22:17-21, there is a review of all the foregoing proverbs, including their intended purpose stated clearly in v. 21. Here is Prov 22:17-21, “Incline your ears and hear the words of the wise, and apply your mind to my knowledge; For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, That they may be ready on your lips. So that your trust may be in the LORD, I have taught you today, even you. Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, to make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may return words of truth to him who sent you?” Thus, the goal of all this instruction in wisdom is found in Prov 22:21, “that you may return words of truth to him who sent you.” Solomon spoke these proverbs to teach his son how to speak wisely in the world.

Now I want you to think with me about a perfect illustration of what we have studied in Proverbs thus far. That illustration is Jesus Christ. One cannot read the gospels even one time without being utterly impressed by one overwhelming fact: Jesus always knew exactly what to say

in whatever situation he walked into. With the woman at the well, after they spoke together of living water, Jesus simply said, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” How did he know the exact question to ask to pierce right to her heart? Then at the pool of Bethesda, he walked into an area with hundreds of invalids, walked right up to one who had been sick 38 years and asked, “Do you wish to get well?” That may be the most piercing question ever asked. Sometimes he spoke a sentence, sometimes he crafted a brilliant story on the spot, like he did in the story of the prodigal son and the loving father. And who can forget his stirring final words to the adulterous woman: “Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more.” Every time I study about Jesus, I am blown away: how did he always know the perfect word to speak to pierce right to the heart of every situation? How did he do that?

Isaiah tells us how Jesus learned to do this in an amazing and prophetic insight into the life of Jesus the Messiah in Isa 50:4: “The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.” Thus, the critical focus of Jesus’ training at the hand of his Father was to learn how to listen in order to learn how to speak. And oh, what a marvelous speaker he turned out to be! Moreover, this little verse in Isaiah answers one of the most frequently asked questions about Jesus’ life: “What was Jesus doing during the so-called Silent Years, when he was 12-30 years old?” The answer is simple: our Lord was learning to listen, in order to learn how to speak! There is no greater endeavor for a young person: it was what our Lord Jesus focused on, and may we focus on it too, especially when we are young. Consider this: the key goal in God’s discipleship of us in our life is that we learn to listen to him in order to learn how to speak wisely in any situation. This was paramount on Solomon’s mind in Proverbs chapters 1-29.

Let me be even more specific about what this means for our lives. Every Christian who is a Christian according to the Biblical definition is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God himself lives inside us. What God wants to teach us is to have a hearing heart for the still, quiet voice of the Holy Spirit, speaking to us through the Scriptures primarily, but also speaking to us through other Spirit-indwelt believers, through our circumstances, and speaking to us when we are in prayer. And the secret of a great prayer life is not to keep talking at God, but to be quiet and listen to God as he speaks to us through the Holy Spirit. One great modern-day listener, Dr. Klaus Bockmuehl of Regent College, used to say, “I must listen to God twice as much as I talk.” That’s a pretty good ratio. Then, as we listen to him day by day, we discover that he wants to speak through us to our world. Each of us is made to be a mouthpiece of the living Spirit of God inside us. Learning to speak wisely is not learning to be eloquent, or a great preacher, or a great counselor; it is learning to let the Spirit speak through us, that he might use our minds and our tongues to bring words of life to each situation we face. This incredible journey of learning to listen to the Spirit and being available to let him speak through me is the greatest adventure, the greatest joy I have ever known in this life. This is life itself, and I commend this adventure to you with all my heart.

A few weeks ago my eldest daughter had an adventure with the Lord in learning how to speak truth into a situation. She was taking a class at Diablo Valley College on music appreciation with a teacher who is living with his partner and “over-sharing” about his own relationship during the class. During a class break, as about a dozen or so students were milling around the room, one of the students loaded a CD into the class stereo and started blaring R&B music with sexually explicit lyrics. This launched a group discussion about what kinds of music people liked, and they asked my daughter if she liked the music that was playing. She said, “I don’t like this music, and I choose not to listen to it. It’s just sex music, and I don’t want to be filling my mind with that.” The whole room stopped buzzing the minute everyone heard the phrase “sex music.” Everybody turned to listen as the boy who loaded the CD asked her “Why is that bad?” To which she responded, “It’s not what I want

to focus on, because I'm not going to have sex until I am married, and listening to that music doesn't produce anything I want in my life right now." They were all stunned. The whole class was at a standstill. One guy in the back gave her a "thumbs up." It was clear the group respected the fact that she had so boldly spoken her convictions. Quietly, the guy who was playing the CD took it out and replaced it with something better.

So, we learn to listen to the Spirit in order to learn how to let the Spirit speak through us. This is how we learn to be wise. Proverbs 23 affirms this again in Prov 23:15-16, when for the first time since Prov 7:1 we see the familiar phrase "My son." This important phrase introduces another set of verses which detail for us the purpose of the entire instruction, in Prov 23:15-16, "My son, if your heart is wise, My own heart also will be glad; And my inmost being will rejoice, when your lips speak what is right." The point of all this instruction is to learn how to bridle the tongue and make it available to God as an instrument of wisdom, truth and healing, full of gracious speech that builds up rather than tears down.

Proverbs 31: Discovering the Woman of Worth, the Excellent Wife

Chapter 31 is unquestionably the crowning achievement of the book. The most important verse in Prov 31 is the first verse, because it hides two golden but easily missed truths: "The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him." How easy to blip over these introductory words! But in these words we discover that the wisdom of Prov 31 is not from a man, living in a male dominated society, so that we can debunk what he says about women. No, we discover that the wisdom in Prov 31 is from a woman, King Lemuel's mother, who taught him these things. Thus, this description of the Prov 31 woman is a woman's description of an excellent wife, not a man's description. Secondly, it is highly significant that in this great compendium of thoughts designed to instruct sons on how to live a wise life, a woman has the last word! The final word, the crucial closer, comes from the wisdom of King Lemuel's mother.

This serves to underscore the radical nature of this material. This is the only existing example we have discovered of an ancient document which portrays a woman in such a place of dignity and honor. It literally stands alone atop all the ancient literature in this way. Furthermore, since these words are the oracles of a woman who was given the final say in an important training document, these verses are elevated to become some of the most honored words found anywhere in the Bible! What a statement on the way in which God honors women in the Scriptures! And it is found in the little, easily missed first verse of Prov 31.

Now just what wisdom did King Lemuel's mother impart to him? She waxes poetic in vv. 10-31, painting a portrait of a virtuous and wise woman, an excellent wife, which not only instructs her son but provides a powerful conclusion to the major themes of Proverbs. These verses are written as an acrostic, with each successive verse starting with the successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet...that young people would memorize this and remember it well. So, she begins her oracle by saying in v. 10 with the letter *aleph*: "An excellent wife who can find? For her worth is far above jewels." Think about that: her worth far exceeds the worth of emeralds, rubies, even diamonds. Only the Lord can produce a woman like this, and only the Lord can lead such a woman to a young man, since it is hard to find such a woman on your own. But the most important point here is that a woman of character and worth is far more significant and valuable than the most expensive jewels.

Then the mother says, "The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain." What a statement! She is a woman of such complete faithfulness that her husband trusts her implicitly! I have to say, this has been my single greatest joy in being married to Blythe. I have never once in our almost 20 years of marriage found any cause not to trust her. She is entirely faithful, completely trustworthy, and

unfailing in her loyalty. As a result, I am a mightily blessed man! This is the first and foremost thing a man desires: a woman with whom he can trust his heart, his innermost hopes and dreams, a woman who will not tear his heart apart through adultery or false dealings. This woman "does him good and not evil all the days of her life." Truly, the value of such a woman is inestimable.

Then in vv. 12-29, the life cycle of this type of woman of worth is defined. She is not some hip-hop modern woman who does all this in one day, every day of her life, to the point that she is utterly exhausted. Rather, these vignettes of her dealings in her own home and family and community typify her over the course of her lifetime. I especially want to focus on vv. 25-26: "Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she smiles at the future. She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue." Oh how thankful I have been for the innumerable words of wisdom God has given me as wonderful gifts through the speech of my wife! Virtually every night I have the great privilege of sitting and talking through my day with her, praying with her, and listening to her. Her words are always intriguing, always interesting, and unerringly wise! Thank you, Lord!

But this great oracle closes with the wisdom of vv. 30-31, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her the product of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates." These verses seem to bring the entire book of Proverbs together thematically. First we were introduced to Lady Wisdom in chapter one, and then Lady Wisdom was contrasted in her call with the call of the "strange woman." It was no mistake that wisdom in this book was personified as a woman, as I have come to learn in the course of my marriage. But there are also some women in the world who seem to be wise at first, streetwise at least, but whose beds are the portals of hell. Thus, Lady Wisdom was to be listened to, and the strange woman avoided at all costs. But Lady Wisdom is not existent in a human form, so the young man is left wanting. It is hard to embrace a personification; a person is needed. But here in Prov 31, we see the woman of worth, the excellent wife, and we discern the root of her excellence: she is "a woman who fears the LORD." Thus, *she is the wise woman*, since the "fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom," and we see that in the excellent wife of Prov 31 Lady Wisdom has become a person, a woman who can be embraced. This is the woman to be valued and prayed about. She is the woman to cherish and marry, and standing as the human embodiment of Lady Wisdom. What a forceful conclusion to the book!

And in this conclusion is powerful wisdom for young women and men today. In this great book of wisdom, the beauty and glory of the woman is enshrouded in mystery through her introduction as Lady Wisdom, and through the powerful contrast between this wise woman and the strange woman of folly. Finally, in the last chapter, even the last few verses, the woman of worth is revealed as Lady Wisdom in human form, the excellent wife who fears God and whose worth is beyond all the jewels in the world. The wise woman does not show herself openly in the streets like a prostitute. She doesn't wear clothes specifically designed to entice men to want to undress her. She cultivates mystery, revealing her full glory and beauty only when she is a wife. My heart breaks when I see so many young girls flaunting themselves today, literally giving themselves and their bodies to just about anyone, devaluing themselves like trash in the process. It is my desire for all the young women here to know your worth and value, cultivate that mystery, and reveal all of who you are both on the inside and the outside in the marriage relationship alone, as an excellent wife beyond the value of all the jewels in the world. And young men, my prayer is that you settle for nothing less! Amen and amen!

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