

What Every Mother Wants to Hear

Proverbs 31:28-31

May 8, 2016

Thank you once again for being part of worship today. And Happy Mother's Day to all the ladies.

A four-year-old and a six-year-old presented their mom with a houseplant. They had used their own money to buy it and she was thrilled. The older of them said with a sad face, "There was a bouquet at the flower shop that we wanted to give you. It was real pretty but it was too expensive. It had a ribbon on it that said 'Rest In Peace,' and we thought it would be just perfect since you are always asking for a little peace so that you can rest."

On this Mother's Day, I want to invite you to turn in your Bible to Proverbs 31. I thought on this Mother's Day that we would look at this wonderful passage. But I have to be honest here: I may say wonderful, but Myra says, and maybe other women say, this passage is not so wonderful, that it seems to lift up an unrealistic standard for women and mothers. I can understand that.

Now, that is not to mean that we shouldn't study Proverbs 31. If we did that, we would miss several important truths. First, verses 10-31 that comprise the Proverbs 31 woman, in the original Hebrew, are an acrostic poem, which means each verse begins with successive letters of the alphabet. So imagine writing a poem, where the first line started with the letter "a", then the next line started with the letter "b", and so on through the alphabet. That's exactly how Proverbs 31:10-31 is written. Pretty cool.

There's another reason we should study this passage. Some people have the mistaken idea that the ideal woman in the Bible is retiring, servile, and entirely domestic. Not so! The Proverbs 31 woman is an excellent wife and mother. She is also a manufacturer, importer, manager, realtor, farmer, seamstress, upholsterer, and merchant. Wow. But her strength and dignity do not come from her amazing achievements, however. They are a result of her reverence for God. In our society, where physical appearance counts for so much, it may surprise us to realize that her appearance is never mentioned. Her attractiveness comes entirely from her character.

While the woman described in Proverbs 31 has outstanding abilities, she may be a composite portrait of ideal womanhood. So we should not see her as a model to imitate in every detail. Ladies, your days are not long enough to do everything she does! So I suggest that when you consider the Proverbs 31 woman, you see her instead as an inspiration to be all you can be through God. We can't be just like her, but we can learn from her industry, integrity, and resourcefulness.¹

Now, I don't want to focus on that part of the passage. I mean, come on. Do you think I'm stupid? Preach on a passage on Mother's Day that may sound like I'm saying that women don't do enough, telling mothers to get off the couch and do something? If I did that, I don't think I would make it out of this sanctuary alive.

In fact, I think there are too many unrealistic expectations placed on mothers today. You have to do everything around the house and go to work. You have to look like you did when you were 20 – before 2 or 3 kids. The more sports the kids are in, the more responsibilities for the moms. It's not just getting the kids to practice and games,

¹ Life Application Study Bible, Proverbs 31:10-31

but the laundry, the registrations, the times you have to provide the drinks or the snacks, on and on.

Instead, on this Mother's Day, I want the mothers, the women in our lives, to hear something different than the constant demands on your time and life.

So let's look at Proverbs 31:28-31 this morning:

Her children rise up and call her happy; her husband too, and he praises her: "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all." Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Give her a share in the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the city gates.²

"Her children rise up and call her happy; her husband too, and he praises her... let her works praise her in the city gates."

I want to share with all of us – if we are mothers or not, married to mothers or not, sons and daughters to mothers or not – I want all of us to find out what every mother – every woman – wants to hear. You might want to write these down. What every mother wants to hear from those she loves.

First, **Thank you.** For being my mother. For buying my favorite snack. For cutting the crust off of my grilled cheese sandwich. For helping me with my homework. For letting me make brownies in the kitchen right after it was cleaned. For driving me to ballet or swim lessons or baseball practice. For smiling when you're tired. For reading to me. And singing to me. And praying for me.

Sometimes mothers think that no one notices all of their efforts. A thank you for the little things is something they all love to hear.

Second, **I'm happy.** I'm happy in school. I have great friends. I love our home. I have just what I need. My new job is working out. I like my life. I like myself.

The well-known saying is true: Parents are only as happy as their least happy child. This doesn't mean that mothers don't want to hear their children's complaints and troubles. But make sure to frequently share the good news too. When her child is happy, a mother's heart soars.

Third, **I know you love me.** Even when you don't know how to say it. Even when you aren't sure how to show it. Even when you are distracted. Or tired. Or busy. Or frustrated. I know you care. Even when you can't give me exactly what I need, I know you want to.

Mothers don't always know how to tell their children what gifts they are in their lives, but they want to hear that their children know it anyway.

Fourth, **I need you.** When I do something great, it's your applause I want to hear. When I make a mistake, it's your reassurance I search for. I need you to show me where I came from and to believe in where I am going. I need you to understand me when no one else can. To love me even when I'm not lovable. To give to me even when I cannot give back. To see me the way only a mother can.

After spending years tending to children's myriad needs, mothers want to hear that they still play a special, crucial role in their lives.

Fifth, **I admire you.** I admire how you helped that woman on the street. How you set such a beautiful table. How you spoke at the conference. How you juggle all of your roles. I admire your strength. I admire your courage. I want to have your warmth. Your perseverance. Your grace.

² Proverbs 31:28-31 (NRSV)

Most of us know that children crave their mothers' approval, but few of us realize that mothers want their children's admiration. They want to know that their children see their strengths and are proud of their accomplishments. There is nothing sweeter to a mother's ear than: I want to be just like you.

My friends, we never start from scratch as people. We are a link in a precious chain of blessings that come from mothers and fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and so on. We can transcend our own limits and even our own strengths. We have this gift, and we are to share with our children, bestowing upon them our light so that one day they can find their own light. This is what every mother longs to see. Children born to their children's children. One light igniting another. Blessings echoing blessings. Perhaps, in the end, this is everything a mother wants to hear.