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Proverbs 31 "Lessons From My Mom" December 30, 2018

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to Proverbs Chapter 31.

The book of Proverbs starts with Solomon giving some wise words as a father to his son. The book of Proverbs ends with some wise words from a mom to her son. So the whole book is really designed to teach us how to walk with God. From the beginning to the end, the home is in God's estimation the bastion of the nation. As the home goes, so the homeland goes, and throughout the Bible, wherever you find God using the home as an example, it is always an example of the church. A small church really, where the family is the most important. The father is the high priest, leading his family in the ways of the Lord.

We don't know a lot about King Lemuel. We read in verse 1, "These are the words of King Lemuel, the utterances which his mother taught him." We don't know any more really about him than we knew of the prophet Agur in Chapter 30, but we know a couple of things: Number one, we know he had a great mom. He's kind of like Timothy in

that way. Paul was able to say to Timothy, "Your mom and grandma raised you in the ways of the Lord since you were a young kid. You've known the scripture's able to make you wise through faith in Christ unto salvation." So Timothy had that same kind of benefit as this young man had.

We also know that he was a king. We know that because verse 1 says so, and verse 5 talks about mom giving advice in verse 4 and verse 9 to the king. And so this is a letter, if you will, or some advice from a queen to her son, the prince, who is destined to be the king. Like Deborah, who had in Judges 5 her victory song recorded by the Lord, so mom writes a letter to her boy, and God takes it up and he puts it in the scriptures for us to learn from. She's been faithful and she wants to make sure that her boy doesn't forget the Lord.

So these are her words to her son, the king. And she begins in verse 2 by saying, "What, my son? And what, son of my womb? And what, son of my vows?" So he's not only her son, but he's the one of her vows, which is interesting because I think most moms will promise God just about anything for their kids, if he'll just turn out right. I will do, I promise. A mother's love for

her children is unparalleled. And so this boy had been the subject of much of mom's prayerfulness. She had talked to the Lord about him a lot. It reminds me a little bit of Hannah's prayer. She prayed for a long time for a boy, and when she finally got one, she just dedicated him to the Lord. In fact, she promised to do that long before she saw him coming along. And that's kind of where Lemuel was as well. He has a mom who was prayerful for him constantly.

Not only that, she didn't just pray, verse 1 says she taught him. It's one thing to pray, it's another thing to speak up. And prayer is good, but it needs to be accompanied with instruction and action. The practical side of godliness is a faith that instructs or that works.

The outline of this chapter's fairly easy. Verses 3 through 9 is the advice of a mom for the moral character of her boy. This is what she wants him to do and avoid, or not participate in. And then beginning in verse 10 through the end of the chapter, she just gives him a really long list of the kind of girl he should pick to marry. It really is a mom's wish for her daughter-in-law.

Before we get there, let me just say to you: It's a mom's list. I think it's almost impossible to achieve. But I also know that no boy is going to be good enough for your daughter, or no girl is going to be good enough, you know -- or man's going to be good enough for your -- you know what I'm saying. Three services, I -- anyway, you have high hopes for your kids. That's what I'm trying to say right there.

But let's start in verse 3 down through verse 9. These are advices to her boy as he heads for that throne. She says to him first of all, "Don't give your strength to women, nor give your ways to that which can destroy kings." It's interesting that both Solomon and this mom speak to their children about the illicit relationships that were available in the world; those that were driven by lust rather than by godliness.

Solomon, I should mention, who wrote much of Proverbs, didn't follow his own advice. You remember reading that when he got older, that a lot of his wives, pagan wives as they're called, turned his heart away from the Lord, and had it not been for God's grace, I don't know if he'd ever got back. But Ecclesiastes seems to say that at the

end, he comes back around and finds God's grace.

When Nehemiah took over as the governor in Jerusalem -- Nehemiah, maybe Chapter 13 -- he had gone away for a while and came back, only to find the Jews intermarrying again with the heathen and with their idolatry, and he was furious. In fact, he did something that you don't find many rulers doing. He went into their house, pulled their beard, and shoved them out the door. He was a hands-on kind of leader. He said to them in Chapter 13, "Didn't our father Solomon sin against God in doing this? Why would you do this?" So Solomon had good advice, but it's --, advice is only good if you follow it. And he didn't. Be careful, because there is an effect of surrendering your strength to these relationships and your place as a king, as an influence, can be undermined just by the choices that you make.

You remember David's sin with Bathsheba. When the Lord sent the prophet to David, he said to him, "You have taken a wife of some other person's wife. That's who she is. And then you've killed him with the sword. Because of that, the sword will never depart from your house." And really the consequences of even David in that place of making those choices hindered for generations to come

his children, his children's children, and the nation that he led.

There's just something to be said for sin giving in. It usually comes through lust. You've seen that, I think -- all you have to do is read the papers and see people that are in prominent places, how often they fall to lust. They might have all that the world can buy, but somehow, sin doesn't discriminate. It just comes after you in any form it can.

And mom says to her boy, "Don't give up your strength." Don't surrender to the lusts that you have. And be sure that you don't surrender yourself to the things or the ways that can destroy the king, which is kind of a big blanket statement, but, in the context it's you don't want to do anything that takes away from what God's called you to be.

Second of all, verse 4, she says this to him: "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for the kings to drink wine, nor princes intoxicating drink; lest they drink and forget the law, perverts the justice of the afflicted. Strong drink should be to him who is perishing, and wine to those who are bitter of heart. Let him drink and

forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more."

Second advice to her son is be careful about alcohol.

I am personally convinced there is nothing wrong with you as a Christian having a drink. I think there's a liberty there that you have. But having said that, let me add this, and don't quote one without the other: Your liberty to practice any kind of freedom in that regard has to be tempered by the fact that other people are watching you. And alcoholism is a horrible, besetting sin in our culture. So even though you're free to drink if that's what you want to do -- and by the way, no one ever gets drunk not drinking -- you should be careful about those that are around you that have trouble with alcohol, have come out alive instead of ruined a lot of their life through drinking, because you're not allowed to stumble your brother. So I'm all right with you, but you be careful about others. And if you can pull both of those things together, that's fine.

I've mentioned to you maybe on Sundays as well, if I look at Facebook and see somebody from our church at dinner with a beer on the table, it drives me nuts. I say, "I'm going to call this idiot." Well, this is -- now, my wife says, "You can't do that because you're a pastor."

That's what she tells me. But that's how I feel. You can't just throw around your liberty to the detriment of somebody else. Your liberty has to be limited the minute it hurts somebody else. So you're free to do whatever you want, but always with the understanding that there's other brothers and sisters you got to be an example to, and you got to make sure that they can follow your example. If you turn in the Bible to kings and rulers, you will find that drunkenness, besides lust, becomes a huge issue. With power almost comes that cavalier attitude towards, the place of having that influence. And wherever you turn in the Bible, you will find that to be so. Social drinking on Capitol Hill, in Congress, is a well-known fact. There's a reason why there are more bars around Washington, D.C. than anything else. It just comes with the territory.

Unfortunately, it's a warning that mom wants to be sure her son doesn't catch himself in. She warns him that wise judgments and well rulership, that you need to have a clear mind and a clear understanding.

There are several stories -- if you've read through -- we are starting on -- let's see. On Wednesday nights after Acts, to go back through the Old Testament history, so

we're starting at Ruth, and we've done the other ones, and now we're going to move forward. So I've been reading through the Kings and the Chronicles. It's interesting because it's narrative. You just -- it's easy to read through. But even this last couple of weeks, there's a story about a fellow who took over the northern kingdom of Israel, but his -- his commander, a guy named Zimri, had a bunch of guys over and they started to talk about, hey, let's kill the king and take over. But the description there in I Kings is that they were all drinking at the house of this commander. They were going -- they were all plowed and they -- well, we'll kill the king. Just the dumbness that comes with the drinking.

There's a story in I Kings Chapter 20 about Ben-Hadad, who was drinking on his command post with his soldiers, when the Lord's prophet came and says, "Come on, gather the people together. We're going to battle and I'm going to give you victory." And Ben-Hadad kind of goes, "Who's leading us?" The Lord said, "You are." "Yeah, okay." And while 232 leaders came together, he and 32 other guys stayed at the house and got drunk, and they weren't able to participate. It's easy to just read right by that because there's so much going on, but he gets stuck at

the command post, and he goes nowhere. He's a help to no one.

Wherever you see leadership, that tends to be an issue. Herod killed and beheaded John the Baptist at a drunken feast to please his drunken buddies. When Hosea was sent to the people to warn them about their lack of spirituality, to say the least, the Lord had Hosea say to the people, "You know the priests have become like the people. And so you're not finding any kind of an example for them to follow." And then he said, "Harlotry and wine will enslave your heart." But he said that about the priests, those people that were in a place of authority.

So mom wants to be sure that her boy, when he heads for this position, doesn't show up having given his power away, or sacrificed his strength, and went down that road that destroys kings.

If you get to the book of Leviticus, you find that all of that preparation for animal sacrifice and blood that will cover the sin is all prepared. The time comes for Israel to finally make a sacrifice, and the Lord lit the altar miraculously that first time. Nobody had a match or they

weren't rubbing stones together. Fire came out from the Lord's presence and lit the altar, and people just hit the deck. Wow, the Lord's here. Except for two of Aaron's boys, Nadab and Abihu, and they began to run around with strange fire and draw a lot of attention to themselves, and we read in the next chapter they were drunk. They were just not in their faculties. And the Lord had fire jump out of that fire, and it killed them on the spot. And people went, "Oh, this is a bad day." What had started out glorious turned out to be, oh, man. But the Lord said to Moses, to Aaron, "Don't you grieve for your boys, because if you come before me, I must be glorified. I should be exalted." And these guys came in the influence of these whatever they were drinking, in such a way that they drew attention away from the Lord. Read about Noah's drunkenness in Chapter 9 of Genesis, or Lot, I think, 10 chapters later.

So be careful, she says to her boy. I don't want you to go down that road. Be careful of the women, be careful of your ways, be careful of your drunkenness, and don't go down that path.

Now, notice in verse 6 and 7, there's a mention of give the strong drink to those that are dying or are of bitter

of heart. I don't think that's a recommendation, only because you don't find that anywhere else. But I think it is a comparison to say, look, if anyone needs to be dumb and numb and forget, those would be the folks that would maybe profit from it, but her point is you don't want to be that guy. You want to be in well control of your faculties. Drowning your sorrows is not really a biblical suggestion.

Then she says the third thing, verse 8, "And open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of those who are appointed to die. Open your mouth and judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and of the needy." So mom says to her boy, you're going to have great power. You're going to be the king. But in that place of power, don't forget mercy. And unfortunately, power sometimes changes people. They used to be gracious and kind, and then they're in charge and they're -- "Who are you? What happened to you?" And her boy, she didn't want that to happen. You still give people grace. You're in a position now to make a difference. You can speak up for those who can't speak up for themselves. You can defend those who on their own are powerless to do so. Use your position to bless. Understand the responsibility that comes with it.

I always think about Jesus' encounter with that woman that the Bible says in John 8 was caught in adultery, and then the Bible says "in the very act." And I think, great, they got both of them. No, they let the guy go, because these guys were clowns. That's not what the Bible calls them, I just -- that's me. So they all come to Jesus with this poor woman, "Can we kill her? Because the Bible says we got to kill her. She's caught in the very act." And the Lord looks at the poor woman. He has absolute authority. He bends down and begins to write down with His finger in the dirt. Doesn't tell us what He says. My assumption is He went down the list of these guys who were standing there pointing fingers at her. Started with the first guy, "Yeah, Tuesday night, 9 o'clock, remember where you were?" And then He has to go, and the next guy left, and it isn't long before she's there all by herself. And the Lord said, "Where are your accusers?" And she said, "They're gone, Lord." And then He said, "I don't accuse you either, but go and sin no more." God provides obviously a call for holiness, but He also provides mercy and grace. And so it's like that Psalm, I think it's Psalm 72, where the Lord describes Himself and He says, "I will help the needy when he cries, and I'll be there for the poor. And for those who

stretch out their hands where no one can help them, I will help them." It's almost like the mom is saying to the son, you be like the Lord is. You use your place to serve others.

Well, that leaves us with these last 22 verses. And it has been called the parable, sometimes just the virtuous woman, and all of her attributes. After warning her son against evil women and drunken living and lack of mercy, she now says, here's the list of what you should check off when you go to pick a wife that'll be the queen.

And I just would tell you up front, there's no way you're going to measure up to this. This is every mother's dream and every daughter-in-law's nightmare, I would think. I think whoever married King Lemuel, whatever mom was -- oh, man, mom has the -- look at the checklist here. Nobody's going to live up to this, I can't imagine. It is written as a 22 verse poem. It is an acrostic, which means every verse begins with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet; Alef, Bet, so you go through all 22. It was written that way, as many are, just for memorization purposes so it can get you on the right foot, but it is a -- it is a mother's list, if you will, of what she wants. And like I said, I don't think

-- if you -- you know, "I want to be the virtuous woman."  
Well, I'm sure you can be one without matching all of  
these, but yet they're pretty good suggestions. And for  
you that are looking to get married, you should be  
looking for these qualities rather than maybe the things  
that are on your checklist.

We read in verse 10 about this woman as mom talks to her  
boy. "Who can find a virtuous woman? She's worth far  
more than rubies." In other words, this kind of woman is  
rare. I say, doesn't exist.

My wife said to me, "Thanks for talking about me this  
morning." I said, "Which verse?" We play around that  
way. We're all right.

Rare, indeed. There is a verse in -- I think it's in --  
well, maybe it's in Proverbs 19:14 I should probably look  
them up -- that says, "Houses and riches can be the  
inheritance of your father, but to find a prudent wife,  
that comes from the Lord." In other words, rare, because  
God gives you this kind of woman. You want to wait on  
the Lord's work? This is the Lord's work. You can  
inherit a lot of things. Not even be, you don't have to  
do much to do that sometimes. Just have to be you. But

when it comes to marriage and it comes to a wife, that's where you want the Lord involved. So she's a rare find, and she's worth her weight in gold; right? A king should give a king's ransom for a woman like this. Far above rubies.

Unfortunately so often we settle for externals. We look at the outside of the cup. We want a beautiful woman, and -- or, whatever we're looking for. We have a list. And so often godliness is way down the list. When Abraham sent Eleazar, his servant, to go find a bride for Isaac, his son, he gave him a whole bunch of things to do. He told him where to go, and what to do, and chided him to pray often. And Eleazar, not wanting to be in trouble, said, "What if I can't find her?" "Well, you can't just come home without her. But this is what I want from you." And he went praying. But on that list was never the words "beautiful." And I'm thinking if I'm Isaac and my dad is sending out a guy to find me a girl, I would say to Dad, "Could you put beautiful on there? Long legs? Could you put long legs on that, and beautiful?" I mean, you'd want something. It didn't make the list. Because all that stuff kind of comes and goes. Those of you that are older, you were once good looking. Not so much anymore. I like the way I looked

40 years ago. I got pictures. I go, look at that guy. And then I'm sorry for the rest of my life. But isn't it good that that's not the value that God places?

So she says, find this rare gem. She's so valuable because of her virtue. That's the defining word; right? She is virtuous. A wife of valor is sometimes the way that it is translated.

By the way, do you know who else was called virtuous in the Bible? What other woman? Only one. Anyone? Just yell it out. What? Ruth is right. Boy, have we -- you third service people are going right in. The other people, not so good. One guy said there was nobody first service, so you guys. That's enough. You did really good. That's right. It's in Chapter 3. The first service nobody knew, so I said, "Well, I'm not going to help you. You figure it out yourself." And then I heard this "aw." So then I go, "All right. I give you one clue. It's in Ruth Chapter 3." They got it right away.

Second of all, not only is she rare, but she's trustworthy. Verse 11 says, "The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will lack no gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of his life." Her husband

is not to lose sleep over concern that maybe she loves him or she doesn't love him. She is dependable. Her love brings great gain into his life.

I had a guy maybe 10 years ago come in for counseling. He said, "I got a -- I need some help." I said, "What?" He said, "I don't trust my wife." I said, "Well, what's wrong with her?" "Well, I don't know. She's always coming home late. I think she's talking on the phone to people. I don't know what she's up to. I got to check up on her all the time." I said, "Did you ever find anything?" He goes, "No." I said, "Well, you sound like a miserable guy." And the Bible says jealousy is as cruel as the grave. If you're in a relationship where you worry about that, I'd get out of that relationship. Unless you're married. Then you're stuck. But, work on it or something.

I never worry about where my wife is, what she's -- who she's talking to, where she's going. I don't care. She's fine. I trust her completely, for 40 years. And she's been just faithful.

So find someone who you know loves you, where you don't have to work on all that, watch over. So this guy

started telling me about his wife, "I follow her to work and I tell her to stay by me when we're in places." And I'm thinking, this is not a marriage, this is -- I don't know. You're a captive somehow. I don't know. It's just frightening.

But notice -- notice what the mom says to her boy: Find a woman who loves you and you can safely trusting her, and there's no lack in your life. She does good. She's a blessing. And that's a good place for you to start. She's just interested in you. Because women have great influence. Think about Eve's influence, or Solomon's wives' influence, or Job's influence, or Jezebel's influence. Okay. I picked all bad women for -- bad influence, but influence for -- you know, that's for sure. So Lemuel, pick someone that you can depend upon.

Now, the rest of the -- well, for many of the verses going forward, are about her accomplishments. And so we'll just kind of read over them. Verse 13, it says, "She seeks wool and flax, works willingly with her hands. She is like a merchant ship." I wouldn't use that as a line with your wives. "She brings her food from afar. She also rises while it is still night, and provides food for her family, for her household, and even a portion for

her maidservant." What a cool picture of a queen in that power that gets up early to serve her family, and to serve her servants. That's quite a find, isn't it? Someone that hasn't been a snob or isn't prideful. This girl is busy. She likes it. She is a blessing to all who come to know her. She's a resourceful woman who still works with her hands, though she lives in a way that probably others could just serve her.

We read about her works in verse 16. "She buys a field after considering it; she takes a profit and plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms." So that's a go-to-the-gym verse. "She perceives that her merchandise is good, and her lamp doesn't go out by night. But she stretches her hands to the distaff, and her hands also to the spindle." So here's a business woman who can invest dividends. She's informed. She's healthy. Tries to keep herself in good shape. She's industrious. She takes pride in her work. She puts in long hours. She's quite a catch. You start reading this going, I want to marry a woman like this. And pretty soon you ladies go, I don't want to be this woman. She never sleeps. But again, it's just the wishes of a mom for her son. That's exactly what you would want for them. No one is good enough; right, for

my boy?

Verse 20, "She extends her hands to the poor." Here's her influence. "She stretches out her hands to the needy. She's not afraid of the snow for her household's all clothed with scarlet. She makes tapestries for herself; clothes herself in fine linen and purple." She is an amazing woman. She makes her own clothes. She has your clothes. She helps the poor. She's never home. She can't sleep. The word scarlet, by the way, is a word that means quality; right? That's a quality word in the Bible sense, that she's making good stuff. It's a great wish list for mom.

But her heart's in the right place. Look at verse 25. "Strength and honor are her clothing; and she rejoices in times to come." Oh, I skipped a couple verses. Let me go back.

Verse 23 says, "Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land." I love that. I mean, here's a woman whose reputation brings honor to her husband. Isn't that something? That the Lord would -- you go somewhere and they go, "Oh, we love that wife of yours. She's quite a catch. She's quite a find."

I was at something about eight years ago -- I won't even tell you where I was -- with a bunch of guys standing around the parking lot, when another man walked by, and one of the guys in the group said, "Pray for that guy." "Okay. Why?" He goes, "You don't know what he has to face at home." It's not exactly the same as this verse. You don't want to hear that. "Oh, you know who he's married to." That's not the virtuous wife. Her reputation brings honor to her husband.

Verse 24, "She makes linen garments and sells them, she supplies sashes for the merchants." And then this says of her life, "Her strength and her honor are what she is clothed in, and she is rejoicing in times to come." She has a present tense relationship with God, but she also has a future view, the things that are coming to her that makes a big difference. She lives her life with a right outlook; right? She's in the right place.

We are told in verse 26, "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and her tongue is like the law of kindness." That's pretty good. That's not gossip or slander or lies. That's James 3. She uses her mouth to say good things. She's quite a wife. So she's right in what she

says, verse 27, she's right in what she sees. "She looks over her household. She doesn't eat the bread of idleness." She isn't lazy. She's compassionate, hardworking. She's devoted. Goodness gracious, who can live up to all this?

Verse 28, "Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also praises her." She's getting a reward. I would think that for her, that the greatest reward would be to have her husband and her kids recognize what God has done in her life. There's no way to hide your reputation. In Acts Chapter 9 when Peter is traveling, he comes to Joppa, and he runs into this woman, Tabitha, and she's just -- everybody's going, "Oh, have you seen what Tabitha made? Look what Tabitha did. Have you talked to Tabitha?" She was, like, the talk of the town, because of her faithfulness.

So here's a mom and a wife who everyone that matters to her is singing her praises because of who she is. In fact, verse 29 says all daughters -- or "Many daughters have done well, but she exceeds them all." She's not one of the group. She's not one of the bunch. She stands out from the rest. Right?

And though "Charm is deceitful," verse 30, "And beauty is passing." Charm is, it works for a little while. It's charming when you're young. It's horrible when you're older. Beauty, forget about it when you're older. "But a woman who fears the Lord, she should be praised." Here's what lasts, your relationship with God. So find someone that has that going for them and you'll never be disappointed. You'll have a godly woman who is far more valuable to you than anyone else.

I feel that way about my wife. I don't think there's -- I've never met a more godly woman. I honestly believe that. What she's doing with me, I have no clue. I am a moron compared. But she puts up with me, and now she can't really leave me. It's 40 years; where's she going to go? But I'm pretty thankful that she's there to help me -- she does a lot of this stuff: "You can't do that. You can't say that. You can't go there. You shouldn't do that." Built in Holy Spirit. Perfect. And she practices what she preaches. I can honestly -- she is not here this service, so I can tell you -- I haven't mentioned it the other service -- but I'll get up at 3:00 in the morning and she'll be in tears in the living room praying for people that aren't saved, and I can't -- I just want to go to bed. "What are you doing up?" "I'm

praying for --" "Come to bed." "No." And I go right to bed. So if you really need prayer, you talk to her. I'm not kidding.