

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 5/8/94

Proverbs 31:1-9 "The Best Thing a Mother Can Give Her Children"

Intro: Our thoughts are turned towards our mothers today. I want to commend our mothers here today. The role of the Mother has not received its due honor in recent years. Yet God honors the role of motherhood. And today, I would encourage this special group of people.

I would like to thank our pre-primary and primary classes for their help. I asked them to draw a picture of "The Ideal Mother." The pictures are priceless. One child drew a picture of a lady holding a balloon, with her head drawn in the shape of a big heart. The caption below it read, "My Mother should not lie, be mean, and should have motherly love." (by Michelle Adams)

What's the best thing a mother can give her children?

Stephen and Janet Bly wrote a book entitled How to Be a Good Mom. In it, they identify some common assumptions that people hold when they think of a "good mom." "A good mom: --Appears instantly whenever any family member yells, 'Mom!' --Knows exactly which garment each child wants to wear to school each day and has it washed, mended and hung in the closet. --Never raises her voice. --Attends every T-ball and soccer game in hose and heels (fresh from the office, of course, or some other world-expanding venture). --Never leaves kids with runny noses in the church nursery. --Never says no to the PTA. --Keeps a regimented family schedule of daily tooth-flossing and Bible memorization." (from pamphlet, "A Good Mom Never Yells)

What is the best thing a mother can give her children? Before opinions start flying, let me rephrase the question. What does GOD say the best thing is a mother can give her children?

We'll find out this morning. We're going to examine the very special relationship one mother had with her son. She was an incredible mother. Yet I must admit this to you. We don't even know her name. Yet God saw fit to preserve the record of the gift she passed on to her son. Let's turn to Proverbs 31.

You say, "Oh boy, I know Proverbs 31. Another message from Proverbs 31 about the virtuous woman." Wait a minute. Most of us associate Proverbs 31 with the description of the ideal woman. Yet did you realize that description begins in v 10? Did you realize that vv 1-9 are the actual record of a virtuous woman? To be honest, I'm not sure I have ever heard a message on the first nine verses of Proverbs 31.

I am referring to Lemuel's mother. She was a remarkable woman. And she gave her son the best gift a mother can give a child. What is that gift?

Key: She prepared her child to live for God in the real world.

There's the mark of a successful mother (father, too). The greatest gift any mother can give to her children is to prepare them to live for God in the real world.

You say, "How does a mother do that?" In a world with problems like drug deals, and gang violence, and drive by shootings, and sexual promiscuity, how can a mother influence her children to live a godly life? How did Lemuel's mother do it?

Proposition: Proverbs 31:1-9 reveals two sources of influence a mother has, which she can use to prepare her children to live for God in the real world.

I. A mother can influence her children by her Godly Character (1-2).

II. A mother can influence her children by her Godly Counsel (3-9).

She talked frankly to her son about 4 areas of life...

A. Area #1: Women (3)

1. The wrong kind

2. The right kind (10-31)

B. Area #2: Integrity on the Job (3b, 4a)

C. Area #3: Alcohol (4-7)

D. Area #4: How to Treat People

Application: Let's expose two common myths about motherhood...

1. Being a mother is not a "real" job.

2. A mother shouldn't impose her values on her child.

By the way, even if your children are grown, you can still exert these two influences. What are these two sources of influence?

I. A mother can influence her children by her Godly Character (1-2).

Vv 1-2 "The words of King Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him..."

The book of Proverbs is the Wisdom Book of the Bible. God gave this poetic book to Israel. He gave them the Torah, the Law, to reveal for them His character and will. The Torah is full of commandments. The book of Proverbs fleshes out those commandments with practical counsel for real life situations. The book of Proverbs addresses the question, "How can I be wise life?"

Solomon wrote most, but not all, of Proverbs. Who wrote Proverbs 3? King Lemuel. Who was he? We don't know. This is the only place he is mentioned in the Bible. There is no record that Israel ever had a king by the name of Lemuel.

Where did Lemuel obtain his wisdom? From his mother. One Jewish legend identifies Lemuel as Solomon, and says the advice came from his mother, Bathsheba. But there is no evidence for this. Whoever it was, we know this mother had a great impact on her son. Her first source of influence was her godly character.

How do we know she exhibited godly character? Notice two clues in the text that reveal her godly character. The first clue is the name which was given to her son. Lemuel means "belonging to God." Lemuel's parents recognized that their child came from the Lord, and belonged to the Lord.

I see a second clue in the questions Lemuel's mother raised in v 2 (AV), "What, my son? And what, the son of my womb? And what, the son of my vows?" Notice the triad, "What, what, what?" My first thought is that this is a mother who is getting back at her son for all the questions he asked her when he was a toddler! Not really.

Those three phrases tell us that here was a mother who took two things seriously. She took motherhood seriously ("my son", "the son of my womb"). And she took her vows seriously. What vows? Obviously, she had made a vow before God, like Hannah did with Samuel. The phrase could be translated (see NIV footnote), "the answer to my prayers." She also had made a vow to her husband (unlike the "strange woman" of Pr 2:16-17).

Lemuel's mother taught him that he was no product of chance. She taught him that he was "the son of her vows."

Think of the impact that had on this young man. He grew up knowing he had a mother who had asked God for him, and had committed him to God. He grew up influenced by a mother who took her relationship with God seriously.

Here's where real influence starts. With character. That goes for fathers as well as mothers. If we want our children to grow up to live for God in the real world, they must see it in us first. eg--

Tran: There's the first source of influence a mother has on her children. Moms, you can influence your children by your Godly Character.

II. A mother can influence her children by her Godly Counsel (3-9).

Listen mothers. Whether for good or bad, you are the most influential counselor your children will ever have in life. You are molding your little ones by the counsel you give them (grown men say to their wives, "Mom didn't do it that way!").

You have to admire Lemuel's mother. Her aim as a parent was to prepare her son to live for God in the real world. She knew her son needed to know how to put God's wisdom to work in his life.

Listen. Children don't just "turn out." They need counsel, starting young, until they leave the nest (and beyond). Lemuel's mother knew that. She talked frankly to her son about real life. Lemuel recalls 4 areas. Guess what the first area was about?

A. Area #1: Women (3)

V 3 "Give not thy strength unto women..."

This is quite a conversation for a mother to have with her son. Blunt. To the point. She talked in down to earth language to her son, about women. She let him know there are two kinds of women.

1. The wrong kind

Remember, Lemuel would one day be king. What is it that destroys kings? His mother warned him in v 3 (NIV), "Do not spend your strength on women, your vigor on those who ruin kings."

Solomon was a great king, and the wisest man who ever lived. Yet do you remember what led to his downfall? 1 Kgs 11:1 reads, "But King Solomon loved many foreign women." 1,000 in all. Solomon wasn't the only man who has been destroyed by foe of unbridled sensuality. The numbers of men who have fallen prey to their passions, who have given their hearts to the wrong kind of women, are countless.

Over 100 years ago, the German commentators Kyle and Deilitsch made this observation, "But whoever will place himself amid the revelry of lust, is wont to intoxicate himself with ardent spirits; and he who is thus intoxicated, is in danger of giving reins to the beast within him (320)."

It's tough to grow up as a young person in a sensual world. Lemuel had this in his favor. He had a mother who told him beforehand about the danger of the wrong kind of woman. Proverbs is full of practical counsel about dangerous women:

5:2-3, 8 "For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil, but her end is bitter as wormwood...Remove thy way far from her."
6:20, 24-26 "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother...it shall keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a foreign woman. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart, neither let her take thee with her eyelids. For by means of an unchaste woman a man is brought to a piece of bread."

Moms and dads, whose responsibility is it to talk to your children about lust and sensuality? Their youth leaders? Guidance counselors at school? No. A generation of young people is growing up in America who desperately need for Dads and Moms to tell them the truth that MTV is not telling them, the truth that Planned Parenthood is not telling them. The truth that Lemuel's mother told him.

She warned him about the wrong kind of women. And then...

2. *The right kind (10-31)*

V 10 "Who can find a virtuous woman?" We don't know for sure who wrote vv 10-31. Maybe these words are not Lemuel's, and did not come from his mother. But isn't it interesting that v 3 warns about the wrong kind of woman, and vv 10-31 commend the right kind of woman?

In fact, vv 10-31 are an acrostic. Each verse begins with a successive letter in the Hebrew alphabet, from "aleph" in v 10 to "tav" in v 31. 22 letters, 22 verses, 22 virtues of a godly woman. In plain terms, vv 10-31 tell us how to identify the right kind of woman, everything from A to Z!

The point is this. Lemuel's mother offered him godly counsel, even about a delicate subject like women. Moms (and dads), are you helping your kids in this area?

B. Area #2: Integrity on the Job (3b, 4a)

Notice two phrases. In v 3, "to that which destroyeth kings." And repeated twice in v 4, "It is not for kings." That's significant. One day, Lemuel would have a job, an important job. His job would entail great responsibility. He would be a leader, a ruler, the king. That job would involve great privilege. As king, he would have at his disposal power, pleasure, and the best of earthly blessings.

And great temptation. He would face pressure to compromise his integrity. Sensual pressure, which we just saw, and another we will see in a moment.

But the point is this. He had a mother who gave him practical counsel about integrity on the job, BEFORE he ever got the job. Because of her, he was ready.

C. Area #3: Alcohol (4-7)

Vv 4-5 "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine."

You talk about a practical mother to son talk. Here it is.

Mother: "Lemuel, you shouldn't drink alcohol."

Lemuel: "Why not mother?"

Mother: "For three reasons. One, you're going to be a king, and leadership and alcohol don't mix (4). Two, as king, you will be responsible to uphold the law (5), and you must never allow your ability to uphold the law to be impaired. Alcohol can do

that. And three, as king, you are responsible for the well-being of others. Your goal is justice for all (5), and drunkenness blurs a person's judgment."

Do you see the balance here? Not, "Don't drink because I said so!" But "Stay away from alcohol, and here are the reasons." This is key. If we are going to help our young people to live wisely, we must give them more than "do's and don'ts." We need to help them to be able to make decisions when we're not around. They need reasons.

Lemuel's mother didn't stop there. She had more counsel about alcohol in vv 6-7, "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish..."

That sounds like unusual counsel! She tells her son not to drink, but then tells him to give strong drink to others. Is she inconsistent? Consider two questions:

1. To whom did she instruct Lemuel to give the drink? Two groups in v 6. First, to those who were going to die (terminally ill; condemned criminals). Second, to those who have "heavy" hearts (NIV "those who are in anguish").

2. Why would these two groups need the drink? To erase their pain and misery (7). In our society, we take aspirin when our head hurts, and tylenol when we have a fever, and nyquil when we can't sleep. When we experience physical and even mental pain, we take medication. They didn't have tylenol in Lemuel's day. But they had alcohol.

Objection: "What is the biblical view of alcohol? Can I drink?" Proverbs says, "That's the wrong question. The real question is this, 'Is it wise to drink?'" There are things I may be allowed to do that are not wise to do (eat 15 peanut butter sandwiches). In a culture where drinking-water was often contaminated, and where drug stores did not exist as we know them, alcohol is one thing. But in a society where alcohol is the #1 contributor to traffic fatalities, domestic violence...is it wise to drink?

And that's the point. Lemuel's mother taught him how to make wise decisions.

D. Area #4: How to Treat People

Vv 8-9 "Open thy mouth for..."

Remember, in a monarchical society, the king is in control. He has power. Lemuel called the shots. Early on, his mother instructed him, "Use your position to serve others, not yourself. Resolve to help others, namely, those who are powerless to help themselves. Don't hoard your power, Lemuel. Use it for good. And remember, to whom much is given, much will be required."

His mother taught him how to treat people. Especially those who are often victims in a dog-eat-dog world: the dumb (those who can't speak up to defend themselves), the destitute, and the poor and needy.

How was he to treat these groups? Notice three commands. First, "open thy mouth." Get involved. Speak up. Use your clout to help. Second, "judge righteously." Make decisions based on what is RIGHT, not on what is expedient. And third, "plead the cause of the needy." Get out of the palace once in awhile. Go to the slums, rub shoulders with the poor. And go to bat for them.

Parents, do you teach your children how to treat people? How to talk to people? How to respect people, especially the helpless? Lemuel's mother did.

Sum: What a mother! She prepared her son to live for God in the real world. How? By using two powerful influences: her godly character, and her godly counsel.

Application: Myths about Motherhood

Let me be frank. There are two common misconceptions about motherhood that are popular these days. Lemuel's mother exposes and disproves them both.

Myth #1. Being a mother is not a "real" job.

This myth is widespread (even in churches). It goes like this. Someone goes up to a young mother who has chosen to invest her life in her family instead of in a career outside the home, and says, "When are you going to get a REAL job, and make a contribution to yourself, to your family, to your society?" This is a pretty intimidating myth. Let's set the record straight. The Bible teaches there is a no more "real" job for a mother than to make her family her priority. Lemuel's mother did.

Myth #2. A mother shouldn't impose her values on her child.

Myth #2 goes like this, "A person's faith is a private and personal matter. I just let my children find their own way. I don't want to impose my ideas and values on them. That's between them and God."

Do you know what Lemuel's mother would say to that? A faith that is so private that it doesn't impact your life isn't much of a faith! Parents, your children are like sponges. They soak up their values from someone. If not you, who?

James Dobson, in his book Dare to Discipline, offers this counsel, "The parent has got to convince himself that discipline is not something that he does to the child, but something he does for the child. His attitude toward the child must be, 'I love you too much to let you behave like that.'" (29-30)

An unknown humorist suggests that a big part of the problem with today's juvenile delinquency is the result of parents trying to train their children without starting at the BOTTOM (D. Jeremiah, 69).

Conclusion:

What is the best thing a mother can give her children? The same thing Lemuel's mother gave him. She prepared her child to live for God in the real world.

Is it possible to be this kind of mother? Is it possible to be this kind of son, a son like Lemuel who learned to live for God in the real world?

The answer is NO. Not apart from a relationship with THE Son, Jesus Christ. Why is it impossible? Because from birth, we are enslaved to our sin and self-centeredness. Only Jesus Christ can set us free. Only Jesus Christ can enable us to be the kinds of mothers, and fathers, and sons, and daughters that please God in the real world. Do you know Christ as your personal Savior and Lord?

I'd like you to think about a couple of penetrating questions. One, do (or did) you have a mother like Lemuel's mother, a mother that prepared you to live for God in the real world? If so, thank God. And if possible, thank your mother today.

And to you who are mothers. Are you like Lemuel's mother? Is your #1 aim in life as a mother to prepare your children to live for God in the real world?

I want to offer this challenge. If your children are still under your roof, don't sell out for personal gratification. Don't let the world pull you into its deceitful trap. Don't buy the lie, "You owe it to yourself to find self-fulfillment. Let your kids fend for themselves." Allow God to use your character and counsel for the good of your children, and for the glory of God.