

Mother's Day, 2007

General George Smith Patton Jr. is recognized as one of the greatest military heroes in our nation's history. *Old blood and guts* he was called. Yet he was more than just a soldier. Yes, he excelled at West Point and achieved countless decorations in both World Wars. But George Patton was more than just a soldier. He was an athlete, an Olympic contestant at age 26. He was a poet, he was an historian, he could recall in detail stories from the lives of great military men like Alexander, and Scipio and Cromwell, and he was also a devoutly religious man; he was a well-rounded person in every sense of the term.

They say that in the life of every great person, there was an adversary that needed to be conquered, a weakness that must have been turned into a strength. So it was for George Patton. For in his childhood, he faced a foe that threatened him when he was just a young boy. George couldn't read. He just couldn't get the knack of it. Was it a mental block? Was it a visual problem? Was it physically induced? Perhaps, we will never know for sure. But we do know that George Patton was not able to read words putting them together in meaningful sentences until he was 12 years old. And he was only able to read then because he had an ally who came to his defense. This ally was his mother. She recognized his problem at a very young age. So she read to him hour after hour- biographies of great military heroes. She taught him at home, patiently and thoroughly training him in the necessities of education. She taught him how to read when others had given up on him. And when he graduated from High School, she went with him to West Point, and sat in his classes with him. Can you imagine that? A military cadet at West Point what had his mother sitting with him in class, tutoring him with his schoolwork?

Later in life, when honors and praise were heaped on General Patton, he would be quick to admit that the true recipient of those honors should be his mother. She was the one who deserved all the medals for valor from the World Wars.

There are those today who are saying that mothers should not spend too much time with their children. That they should not try to be an influential part of their lives. After all, it is assumed, we wouldn't want our young men to grow up to be sissies. I don't think that I would call General George Patton a sissy, would you?

In God's design, there is nobody who can have a greater influence on a person in life than his or her mother. As great as peer pressure is, friends can and do put pressure young people, they still do not have the potential of influence that a mother has. As much time as is spent in the educational classroom, teachers certainly have an important role in the development of the child, they do not have the potential of influence that a mother has. As critical as the role of the church is in the spiritual training and development of children, the church does not have the potential of influence that a mother has. And so it is right and proper that we set aside this day each year, to lift up the institution of motherhood and to honor our mothers who have sacrificed so much for each of us. They have given to us that which money could never buy, and they deserve our lifelong thanks for their priceless gifts to us.

One of the renowned passages in the Bible on the theme of the morning is found in Proverbs 31. We find great spiritual truth in this passage as King Lemuel writes an enduring tribute to his mother. Now we wish that we knew more

about King Lemuel but his name only is found in this chapter in the entire Bible. There have been some who claim that he was an Arab king or chief from the tribe of Massa. The Hebrew word Massa means oracle or utterance and is translated so in the first verse of Proverbs 31. There have been some who have said that Hebrew word should not be translated here but rather transliterated as Massa. This would identify Lemuel as a Massaite from the lineage of Ishmael found in Genesis 25. Agur whose sayings comprise the 30<sup>th</sup> chapter of Proverbs would also have a similar lineage. But we certainly can't be dogmatic about Lemuel's identity because we just don't know enough about him. All we know is that the Holy Spirit desired for his contribution to be included in the canon of Scripture. It is very interesting to note that in an Old Testament world that has been criticized by modern scholars for not emphasizing the role of women enough, God would choose to conclude the book of Proverbs that gives such practical, common sense wisdom with a lengthy passage on the significant influence of women.

There are many characteristics or virtues found in this passage that could be brought forth for our edification and encouragement. I see 8 very clearly, and perhaps at a later date we can look at these in some detail.

But this morning, we want continue the direction of focusing on what is most precious or valuable to us in life as we look at the value of the institution of motherhood. For it is that sense of value has been attacked by the world in recent days. But it is being attacked to the detriment of many lives. Worth far more than rubies, worth far more than any material possessions is a godly woman, a loving wife, a mother of noble character.

READ Prov. 31:10

A wife of noble character who can find?

She is worth far more than rubies.

Now the word that is translated wife in this verse is equally translated woman or mother throughout the Old Testament. It really indicates one of the female gender as opposed to one of the male gender rather than indicating a specific relationship. That is the reason for your translation perhaps reading woman or mother rather than wife as mine does. The context of the entire passage then must dictate its specific meaning. And in the context of Prov. 31, we find that aside from the first characteristic- that of noble character- in verse 10, the vast majority of the other characteristics are given in the context of family relationships. Therefore, it is perfectly justified in the context to speak from this passage concerning motherhood because it is emphasized throughout these verses.

King Lemuel emphasizes first and foremost that a wife of noble character is worth far more than rubies. Now that term *noble character* literally means *strength* or *courage of moral virtue*. It comes from the root meaning *strength*. It is the same word in the original language as is translated *strength* in verse 3. In verse 3, King Lemuel warns his son not to spend his strength on women- obviously wayward women from the context. Do not sacrifice your moral strength and virtue on fleeting relationships which can destroy and ruin you. Now Lemuel turns around and uses this term in a positive sense to describe the wife of noble character. She is a woman of moral strength. She has solid virtue. There is a depth to her character.

We must note that the wife and mother of noble character is praised and counted to be of great value first of all because of who she is- not because of what she can do. Now Lemuel is going to talk about what she can do later on in

this passage – his will speak of her ability to work and shop wisely and cook and sew and do business and so on - but first and foremost he speaks of who she is- a woman of noble character.

There is a philosophy being promoted in the world today that says that inner morals and virtues are not as important as talent, achievement, outward skills. Many women today are buying into this philosophy thinking that if they can become more skillful in certain fields, then they will be recognized as having more value or worth. Now we must admit that there have been some artificially made role restrictions in the past that are not based upon the Bible and these should be abolished. There should be true equality between men and women- God has designed it to be that way. Men and women are truly equal in his sight. And there is no reason for women being restricted from certain professions because of gender. They should be free to pursue these and should be paid equally for the work performed. But pursuing and attaining any profession is not going to bring a greater sense of value and worth- because character comes from the inside, not from the outside. King Lemuel would not agree with today's prevalent philosophy. He begins by saying that the godly wife is far more precious than rare jewels because of who she is- she is a woman of noble character.

Now having established the value of the mother of noble character, let us ask the question- to whom is she valuable? Since the woman of noble character is of such precious value, she must be valuable to someone. Someone or something is of value because someone else accepts it as such. If nobody desires something, it is of no value. If everyone desires something, it becomes of great value. Who values the mother of noble character? I would address your attention to 4 who are given by King Lemuel who value mothers and we would use each of these groups as representatives giving praise to mothers as we offer our tribute to them this morning.

1. Look first of all with me at husbands who value wives of noble character.

READ Prov. 31:10-12

PR 31:10 A wife of noble character who can find?

She is worth far more than rubies.

PR 31:11 Her husband has full confidence in her  
and lacks nothing of value.

PR 31:12 She brings him good, not harm,  
all the days of her life.

King Lemuel says that husbands value wives of noble character because of their trustworthiness, because of their loyalty, because they can put their hearts into her hands with full confidence.

As you know, there are at least 2 most basic needs that every human being possesses. The need for significance or worth and the need for love and security. Every person needs at least these 2 most basic foundations in life in order to become a fulfilled person. When a man marries a wife of noble character, when he realizes that she is trustworthy, that he can place his heart and life into her hands without fear of being rejected, then he becomes a much more secure person. He knows that he is loved, he knows that he is accepted, he knows that he is secure in his relationship with his wife. This is a priceless gift that a wife gives to her husband, the gift of loyalty and confidence.

Now this security that is given to the husband releases him to be able to develop his own potential. When Lemuel

says that "her husband is respected at the city gate" in verse 23, he is speaking of a cultural practice. He does not mean that while the wives were working at home and in the fields and in the business community, that the husbands were sitting around in rocking chairs at the city gates, playing chess with each other. No, the custom of the time was for the recognized elders of the city, those who were worthy of being judges in very difficult matters, to be available for mediating disputes at the city gates. So those who sat at the city gates were those of the highest recognized positions in the entire city. And the husband could achieve this potential in complete confidence, not worrying about the state of what was going on back at home, because he had a wife who was completely loyal and trustworthy.

So then, it should not surprise us at all that most men who achieve success in life have a wife of noble character by their sides. In fact, it is such a common phenomenon that we have a saying, "behind every great man is a great woman."

Augustin of Hippo was one of the great leaders of the Christian church. Listen to the tribute that he gives to his mother, Monaca, in His autobiography entitled the Confessions. "Having been given over to her husband, she served him as her lord; and busied herself to win him to thee, revealing thee to him by her virtues, in which thou madest her beautiful, and reverently amiable, and admirable to her husband."

Monaca was a believer in Jesus Christ, but her husband and Augustin were not. But it was through her noble character that both were eventually won to faith in Jesus Christ. And both then praised her for her noble character.

Wives of noble character are of the greatest value to their husbands.

2. But notice also with me that King Lemuel says they are of great value to the needy and to those in the community as well. READ Prov. 31:20.

She opens her arms to the poor  
and extends her hands to the needy.

The mother of noble character is a generous and benevolent woman. Therefore, those in the community recognize her virtue.

Now it is important to note that there are 2 different words in the Hebrew language for hand. The first one (Kaph) literally means the palm of the hand. When it is used in a context such as the one we have here in Prov. 31, it almost always means benevolent giving. It comes, of course, from the practice of a poor person collecting alms by extending his hand with his palm up desiring some gift. That is not the word that is used here. Lemuel is not indicating that she extends her hands to the poor primarily in the giving of financial gifts to them.

The second term (yad) is the more general term for hand which includes the nerves, muscles, sinew as well as the wrists. This is the term used when labor or work is being emphasized. This is the term that is used here in this passage. Lemuel is not primarily emphasizing benevolent giving, although he certainly is not denying that, but rather he is stressing her help of the poor in every physical way. That is the reason for the LXX translating this verse "she opens her hands to the needy, and reaches forth her wrists to help the poor." The proverbial woman that Lemuel is speaking of here is like Dorcas of the New Testament of whom it was said "she was always doing good and helping the poor" (Acts 9:36). So then the mother of noble character is praised by the poor and needy, she is praised by those in her community because she is of great value to them also.

Why is this so critical for us to see? It is important to note because values in the home are primarily caught not taught. There is much instructional material, much doctrine that can be taught, but human, moral values are primarily caught by children. If a child is brought up in a home that is strongly prejudiced against a certain race of people, that child very likely will catch that human value system. On the other hand, if the child is brought up in an environment where he sees sincere compassion for other human beings, he will likely catch that value and make it a part of his own life. The mother of noble character demonstrates compassion for those who are less fortunate than herself.

3. But in the third place, notice with me that the mother of noble character is of great value to her children. Her husband values her because she is trustworthy, her community values her because she is compassionate, and her children value her because of her care for them and her provisions for their needs.

READ Prov. 31:21,28

PR 31:21 When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet.

PR 31:28 Her children arise and call her blessed;

In our personal celebrations of mother's day, each of us reflects back upon the contribution that our mothers have had in our lives. These memories are most interesting. As we reflect back upon our childhoods, we usually don't remember a panorama of the years, but rather there are certain snapshots that come into our minds. And these snapshots often have pictures of mom in them. That special birthday celebration when mom went out of her way to make the day special for us. That time when we ran inside crying after falling off of our bike and skinning up our knee only to find mom's open arms of comfort there. The listening ear and wise counsel that our mother gave to us around the kitchen table. The times when she firmly corrected us expressing her loving concern that we grow up to be good citizens. The encouragement that she offered, when we had failed miserably and we thought nobody recognized our potential- mom did, and she assured us that we were going to succeed. Yes, we remember those times when our mothers met a variety of our needs, and these memories draw our hearts towards her in gratitude and love.

A London editor was writing an article on the great Winston Churchill and his contribution to the nation of England. For the sake of accuracy he submitted a list of all those who had been Churchill's teachers for him to check lest he slight someone in the article. The list came back immediately with the words written across the top in bold letters - "You have omitted to mention the greatest of my teachers - - my mother."

Mothers labor in great faith and hope. It doesn't always seem that their children are going to rise up and call them blessed. And it is true that there might be periods of time when not much gratitude is expressed. But every child knows in his heart that his mother has sacrificed greatly for him, and every person values his mother for those sacrifices.

4. But finally, let us see one more who values the noble mother- and that is God himself. READ Prov. 30,31

PR 31:30 Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;  
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

PR 31:31 Give her the reward she has earned,  
and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

There are those who labor diligently on this earth who do not receive the recognition that is due to them from their

husbands, from their neighbors and from their children. They should, but sometimes it doesn't happen. Sometimes those around them are so wrapped up in their own selfishness that they can't see beyond their own egos. But King Lemuel says that the woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. God values the woman of noble character, and she is going to be rewarded by him for all of her sacrifices one day. God does not look at the superficial externals that the world places such a premium on today. God is not impressed with charm or beauty. He made everyone, he knows how temporary outward appearance is. But when a woman dedicates herself to inner character growth, when she becomes a woman who fears the Lord, God is pleased. God values that kind of dedication highly, and He will reward it one day openly.

Henry J. Heinz is a household word today. The company he started boasts the slowest ketchup in the world, and the many other foods under the umbrella of Heinz 57 variety food products have enhanced the quality of our lives greatly. After Henry Heinz passed away, his family was called together for the reading of his will. As the lawyer opened it and began to read, they all witnessed a most interesting first paragraph which I would like to quote for you in closing this morning.

"Looking forward to the time when my earthly career will end, I desire to set forth at the very beginning of this will, as the most important item in it, a confession of my faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior. I also desire to bear witness to the fact that throughout my life, in which there were unusual joys and sorrows, I have been wonderfully sustained by my faith in God through Jesus Christ. This legacy was left to me by my consecrated mother, a woman of strong faith, and to it I attribute any successes that I have attained."

Mrs. Heinz was worth far more than Rubies to Henry. Oh, yes, she gave to him the foundations for financial success. She gave to him a good self-esteem and security and a good educational background. But far more than that, she gave to him her faith, through word and through living example. And it is interesting that in his will, Henry doesn't mention the billions of dollars that he made- he rather mentions that which was most valuable to him- his relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, and his appreciation for his mother.

Just as each product under the Heinz 57 label is different, so each mother is different- each one is a unique creation of God. But the noble mother will share some characteristics in common with other noble mothers. And as she manifests strength of moral character, trustworthiness towards her husband, compassion towards those in her community, provision for her children, and dedication toward the Lord, she deserves and she receives this morning our praise and honor.