

Our Help

Proverbs 31 Woman

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Sharon and I recently watched "The Gilded Age." It is a New York version of Downton Abbey. And the storyline caught my attention and after some research, it actually turned out to be true.

Washington Roebling was the chief engineer of the Brooklyn Bridge, who became ill after spending too much time underwater studying bridge supports, and then surfacing too quickly. When he became bedridden, his wife Emily stepped in as a liaison between her husband and the on-site personnel. Now over time he became more ill and so her role became more and more prominent and she had to work and coordinate all of the construction and coordinate the communication between the suppliers, the engineers, and the city officials.

Now many wanted to shut this project down after her husband became ill, and many others wanted to hide her role because in the 1800s it was highly unusual for a woman to have any role of authority, let alone over something so technical. They were afraid that nobody would even want to cross the bridge if they knew it was built by a woman! But when the bridge was completed, thanks to Emily in 1883, she was the first to cross the bridge by carriage.

And just a few years back now—get this—in 2021, the Emily Warren Roebling Plaza opened, which is a public green space that provides a clear view of this engineering marvel that she was so much a part of. It took many, many years for her to get that recognition.

Emily's story is now told. But there are an innumerable number of women leaders, authors, artists, scientists, etc. that to this day do not receive any credit for their work. To name just a few British chemists, Rosalind Franklin should actually be credited for the discovery of the Helical DNA model, but it was two men who received the Nobel Prize in 1962.

In similar fashion, Jocelyn Burnell was the first to identify pulsars in space, but it was Anthony Hewish who received credit in the Nobel Prize in physics.

Throughout history, we see women treated as if they were inferior to men. In many cultures, they were considered substandard property actually belonging to men. And still to this very day, in some regions, in some households, women are not treated equally to men. Is this what God intended?

Please turn to the beginning of the Book where we will tie into John's [Reiss] sermonette a bit here. We are going to quickly cover the accounts of creation. And I want us to highlight God's common description of what is being created along the way. So we are going to hop and skip through here.

We know this pretty well.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Skipping to verse 3.

Genesis 1:3-4 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good.

So as God creates, He declares that what He made was good. Let us see this happen over and over again. Verse 10.

Genesis 1:10 God calls the dry land Earth, . . . and the waters He called seas. And God saw that it was good.

Verse 12. God creates grass, herbs, trees, fruit, and God saw that it was good.

In verses 13 through 18, God made the sun, moon, and stars, and again, God saw that it was good. In verses 20 through 21, God creates the sea creatures and the birds, and you guessed it, and God saw that it was good. In verses 24 and 25, God brings forth the living creatures on land, cattle and beasts and

everything that creeps [should have been a poet], and God saw that it was good. In verses 26 to 30, God makes man in His image to have dominion over the earth and all living things, and in verse 31 we read,

Genesis 1:31 Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.

God's creation was *very* good. But as we read on here in Genesis 2, there was one thing that was not good. Let us pick that up in Genesis 2.

Genesis 2:18 And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

We know that God is with Adam, so he is not really alone per se, but God's statement implies that Adam was lonely, that he was incomplete by himself and this was not good. Adam is surrounded by created animals, but that is not enough. Something is missing, and God tells us, "I will make him a helper comparable to him."

Now when we think of the English word "helper," what comes to mind? We probably think of an assistant. In fact, the dictionary defines helper as one that helps, especially a relatively unskilled worker who assists a skilled worker, usually by manual labor.

That is the English definition. So inherent in the English definition of helper is the concept of a superior and inferior laborer, we could say. And perhaps this is where the misguided concept of women being inferior to men originates.

But as we examine the Hebrew word here translated helper in the New King James, it is actually "help." In the King James Version, it is from the Hebrew #5828, *ezer*, meaning aid, help, or someone who provides help. And we find the first use of this here in Genesis 2:18. This is the first use of *ezer*, help. But what is interesting is how the same word is used to describe God as our help.

I will highlight just a few. You can turn there if you want. I am going to go quick though.

Deuteronomy 33:29 (KJV) The Lord, the shield of thy help [*ezer*].

Psalms 33:20 He is our help and our shield.

Psalms 70:5 (KJV) O God, thou art my help.

And in Psalm 115, verses 9, 10, and 11, we have a three-peat here. He is their help and their shield. Repeated three times in a row in three scriptures.

Psalms 115:9-11 He is their help and their shield.

Hosea 13:9 (KJV) O Israel, . . . in me is thy help.

So God is our help, our *ezer*, but He is in no way inferior or subservient to humans. God is uniquely positioned to be our help and so when God tells Adam He is going to make him a help for him, God is saying He is going to make someone who is uniquely positioned, qualified, and fully capable of being his help in both physical and spiritual pursuits. But there is more here to the story because God further describes the help He is going to make for Adam as comparable to him.

Now, our English word comparable fits pretty well here. *Webster's Dictionary* defines the adjective comparable as "capable or suitable for comparison" and "similar or like." The Hebrew adjective and adverb used here translated comparable for him in the New King James or meet for him in the King James is *Strong's* #5048. *Neged*, it sounds a bit like southern slang for naked, but it is not, I assure you. The Hebrew word *neged* means "in front of," "before," "in the presence."

Please turn to Exodus 34, as we see this word used. We are going to examine this second description of the help God will create. We are picking up after Moses makes the new tablets. The Lord descends in a cloud and stood with Moses as He proclaims the name of the Lord.

Exodus 34:10 And He said, "Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the

earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among you shall see the work of the Lord. For it is an awesome thing that I will do with you."

As God stands before all the Israelites now, He speaks, "Behold, I make a covenant." Note that, a covenant He is making. Before, Hebrew word *neged*, all your people I will do marvels, He says, and all the people will see the work of the Lord.

So wow! Here again, the same exact word God uses to describe Adam's help is used to describe God and Him standing before His covenantal people.

We will not turn there for the sake of time, but if you wanted to, you could go to Joshua 5 where we see it used again to describe the Commander of the army of the Lord that stood before Joshua-Jericho. The Lord stands before, same Hebrew word, *neged*, Joshua. He stands before Joshua as God provides Joshua comfort and instruction on how God will deliver Jericho into their hands.

Now, as we see these same words used to describe the helper used to describe our relationship with God, it should start to really give us some context here. It should start to help us appreciate what God has done in the creation of the helper comparable. God knew that Adam was up against a very powerful enemy and that he needed a help that was fit, comparable, complementary.

I will read now the Lockman Foundation's Amplified translation of Genesis 2:18. You can follow along with me.

Genesis 2:18 (AMP) "I will make him a helper [one who balances him—a counterpart who is] suitable and complementary for him."

Let us pick up back in verse 19 here.

Genesis 2:19-20 Out of the ground, the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all

the cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

You see that same phrase used before again to describe what God was creating for Adam. So God brings all the animals before Adam to see what he would call them. Adam observes them, and he promptly names them, describing their nature as he sees it.

But after all the animals are named, we read in verse 20 that Adam was not able to find a helper comparable to him. (So much for dogs being man's best friend.) So we see the same two Hebrew words repeated here in verse 20, used earlier in verse 18 to describe what was missing, what was not good. The animals were not going to fill this void.

God uses repetition to reemphasize how important, how critical it was for Him to fix the void in man. God was creating an *ezer*, someone uniquely positioned and fully capable of being Adam's help, both in his physical and spiritual pursuits. And this help was going to be his *neged*, created to be right in front of him, to be in his presence constantly as one who balances him, a counterpart who is suitable and complementary.

In Genesis 2:21-22, God causes Adam to go to sleep. (We know the story well.) He takes one of his ribs and He uses it to create a woman. And at the end of verse 22, God brings the newly-made creation to Adam, just as He done with all the created animals. He wants to see what Adam is going to name her.

Let us pick this up in verse 23. And Adam said, wow! Okay, not really, but I think that is what he was thinking.

Genesis 2:23 And Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

So unlike the animal names, Adam chooses a name that closely resembles his name. Because unlike the animals, Eve is the perfect complement, physically, mentally, psychologically, sexually. She is bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh.

Genesis 2:24 (KJV) Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.

The man is to leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife. We find the first use of the word "cleave" here as well. It is *Strong's* #1692, *dabaq*. It is a primitive root meaning to cling, adhere, abide, cleave, fast together, join together, and here again we see the same word used to describe our relationship with God.

In Deuteronomy 11, verse 22, you can go there if you want. We will go through a couple of these.

Deuteronomy 11:22 (KJV) For if you shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him;
...

Deuteronomy 13:4 (KJV) Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto Him.

Finally,

Deuteronomy 30:20 (KJV) That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him.

God's statement, it was not good for man to be alone, makes it clear Adam—man—is incomplete by himself. Man was created to be in an intimate relationship, and it is impossible to have a relationship alone. As we read in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, two are better than one, for if one falls down, the other is going to lift them up.

With the creation of Eve, Adam experienced the joy of love for another person. With the creation of marriage, God enables both men and women to learn what it is like to be God. A successful marriage, a successful

relationship with God or another person, requires learning godly, sacrificial love.

We just heard Clyde talk about this. It is sacrifice, not emotional love, that makes relationship work. Sacrifice of our carnal nature, sacrifice of the self to put what others want first is what makes a marriage successful.

This is what makes our relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ successful as well. We have to follow Their example of sacrifice. The man is to cleave unto the woman to form a relationship and marriage by which they become literally one flesh.

Turn with me to Ephesians 5. So from the very beginning, God makes it clear the woman was not created to be inferior or below man. She is man's *help*, and she stands before him, complementary. And we see here an early image of the bride and bridegroom that Clyde mentioned earlier.

Ephesians 5:31-33 For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Remember, our relationship with God is the very basis of our salvation, brethren. And one of the primary illustrations and teaching tools that God uses to create us in His image is His covenant of marriage, which mirrors the inseparable unity and intimacy that God wants between us and Him, between God and His covenantal people.

In Matthew 19:6, Jesus says, no longer two, but one flesh, speaking of marriage. So there is, again, nothing inferior about women. Genesis 1:27 is proof. Both men and women are made equally in God's image. Both men and women have the same spiritual calling, the same spiritual opportunity.

Jesus states in Matthew 22:30, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven." Now

Jesus knew the culture of the Jews very well, did He not? He knew they did not treat women very well, and He purposely surrounded Himself with not just men, but also with women.

Is it by accident that in John 4, Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman revealing His doctrine? Or Luke 24, is it an accident that it is a woman who is the original witness to His resurrection? All this was planned out, brethren, to teach a lesson.

Women and men are created equal, but they do have different physical roles in the family. Now I remember my wife sitting me down after she learned I was going to be home for COVID, working from home, and I could see she was a little bit concerned. She tells me, "Look, I have work to do too. I've got a lot going on, so don't think I'm going to be here just, you know, being your beck-and-call girl to do whatever you need." And I am like, "Okay, I got it, I understand."

So the first day, I burst through my office door like Kramer yelling, "Woman, where's my lunch?" I look and I see Lizzie's face like, Dad, what are you doing? I quickly yelled, "I'm just kidding!" as she leans over the side with her eyebrow raised a little bit.

Yes, the Bible emphasizes the woman's role as the godly homemaker, wife, and mother within the family structure. And yes, Ephesians 5:22 and Colossians 3:18 state that wives should submit unto your own husbands. Note, submission to your *own* husbands. It says *own* every time when it talks about submission there. I find that very interesting, not *all* men.

They are to do it unto the Lord. And Titus 2 adds, obedient to their own husbands. Again, *own* is added in there.

Now I will never forget standing with my groomsmen at my wedding after John Ritenbaugh married us. John must have used the word submit like 20 to 30 times, and they were all laughing and giggling. They tell me afterwards, "Hey, can we get him to like officiate our wedding too?"

But there is more to the story here, as we all know. We must not forget Ephesians 5:21 where Paul tells us we must all be submitting to one another

in the fear of God. Right? We are all to be submitting to one another in the fear of God. I Corinthians 16:16, submitting to all that help support the body of Christ.

Peter piles on in I Peter 5:5, all of you be subject, note this is the same exact word translated submit in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3. "All of you be subject one to another and be clothed with humility, for God gives grace to the humble." We are all called to submit to each other.

It is not just the job of the wife. Yes, it is true that in the marriage as recorded in Ephesians 5:22-24, the husband is head of the wife just as Christ is head of the church. But do we remember what Ephesians 5:25 reads?

Let us go there. Let us read this one.

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

Now the word "love" here is the sacrificial godly love that holds nothing back. It encompasses the warm affection, the positive attitude and thoughts that motivate and produce actions of good works to build up and care for our wives. Just as Jesus Christ gave Himself for the church, He sacrificed Himself, remember?

So too we extend that level of devotion and care to our wives. And if we do that, we will never just command them to do something because we can. If we truly love them, we will not debase them by suggesting their role is to care for the house, cook, clean, and raise the children.

If we love them, we will lend a hand around the house with the children, with the dishes, with the cleaning, with preparing the meal. We would approach decisions equally, seeking their counsel, and only in the most rare of circumstances when we could not come to an agreement and we had to have a decision, would we go against their desire; to be very, very rare if we are leading with sacrificial love.

Now during performance reviews, I often ask my team to reflect on the year and bring forward one example of when they would like to hit the redo

button to get a better result or maybe the same result with with less effort. And as I look back on my marriage, I would like to hit that redo button like thousands of times.

I always loved my wife dearly, but it has taken me many, many years to overcome my prideful attitude that wanted to call all the shots. I am embarrassed to say, I even bought our first house without counseling with my wife. Talk about stupid!

It has taken me many years to see just how selfish my human nature is, and I am not by any means done overcoming, none of us are. We must remember that when it comes to our sole reason for living, becoming like God and growing spiritually, we all have spiritual equality, men and women alike.

Please turn to Proverbs 31. You had to know we would get there at some point.

Now God places a very high value on the role of women as wives and mothers. They are absolutely critical to recreating the God Family, and we must never, and I mean *never* diminish the importance of the role of a wife and a mother. It is a critical role.

But a woman's value goes far beyond being a wife and mother. We should not discourage women from further education or employment outside the home as long as priorities are maintained. God, husband, family together, right, as long as priorities are maintained, there is nothing wrong with a woman working outside of a home. We are going to see this in Proverbs 31.

And not everyone will be married, nor will every married couple have children. Each of us are given different gifts, different opportunities to serve God and learn to become like Him in His way of sacrificial love that Clyde spoke about.

All right, Proverbs 31, verse 10.

Proverbs 31:10 Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.

Now, Proverbs 31 describes the ideal wife who is virtuous and fears the Lord. This word "virtuous" carries a meaning of force, virtue, valor, strength. And I am going to pull a few key highlights from Proverbs 31. We do not have time to hit them all, but you can follow along here as we read down through these scriptures, and I pull some things out.

The virtuous woman makes a profession of caring for her household, and she is clearly not doing it all from her home. Brethren, they did not have Amazon.com back then. She is highly intelligent, motivated, energetic, resourceful, productive.

She has a ton to offer both inside and outside the home. She is a very successful homemaker, mother, wife, and businesswoman. As we learn in verses 13 through 16, she seeks wool and flax and willingly works with her hands to provide for her household.

She is like the merchant ships trading goods, importing and exporting food and merchandise made by her hands. She rises up early to ensure her family has the necessary provisions. She makes decisions. She purchases a field for the family estate and deals with the business affairs to generate profits and plants a vineyard.

Now that is my kind of woman. Surprised that one got by my editor.

From verse 17, we learn she does not just sit on her hands either. She is not out of shape. She actively works to strengthen herself, to take good care of her physical body too. She is a good steward over everything God puts into her care, including her physical body.

In verses 18 to 27 (I will call out a few more), she takes time to make the best possible goods and services. Her candle burns all night. She works hard for her family with the spindle, working to produce good clothes that provide warmth in the winter and look nice and presentable with bright colors. On her tongue is wisdom and the law of kindness.

And note verse 23. Her husband's success, we could say, is largely due to how well she manages the household and children and the clothing that she makes for their home. And as we read the summary in verses 28 through 30,

she fears the Lord and teaches her children to do the same. Her husband and grown children all compliment her as blessed. And her works produce the good fruit that speaks for itself.

Brethren, both men and women are created in God's image with equal opportunities to live in a way that pleases Him, that brings glory to Him. Not behind but beside every successful man is a successful woman, a Proverbs 31 woman.

Time would not permit reviewing the accomplishments of women often accredited to men, nor the mistreatment of women, often as second class citizens. God stated it was not good for man to be alone. And God describes the being He will create with the same words He uses to describe our covenantal relationship with Him.

And so God creates for man an *ezer*, a woman uniquely positioned and fully capable of being our help in both physical and spiritual pursuits. She is our *neged*. She is created to be constantly with us as the one who balances, a counterpart suitable and complementary.

And we must cleave, *dabaq*, to our wives as the two become one in the covenantal relationship of marriage. One of the primary illustrations and teaching tools God uses to create us in His image is the covenant of marriage, which mirrors the inseparable unity and intimacy between God and His covenantal people.

As Christ, the Head loves the church, so too must we love our wives with the sacrificial love by which we become one flesh. And for those that are unmarried, remember, our sole reason for living is to grow into God's image of sacrificial love. Married or single, we are all on this same journey, learning together as we prepare the bride of Christ.

God-willing, we will build on this theme of our primary calling to sacrifice at the Feast as we talk about our fellowship with Christ's suffering.