

Proverbs 31:25-31
A Woman's Strength
WRCoB 5.8.22



On May 10th, 1908, Anna Jarvis
Organized the first Mother's Day celebration
In a Methodist Church in Grafton, WVA.

She did it to honor her late mother who spent the Civil War
Nursing wounded soldiers from both sides.

Anna thought her mother the epitome of motherhood.

Her mother gave up dreams of college
To care an older husband and raise four children
Bearing the loss of seven others with grace.

Anna strove to create a day of remembrance for mothers.

After much campaigning in 1914
She was able to witness Woodrow Wilson
Sign into law the second Sunday of May
As Mother's Day.

But as with many of the others major American holidays
Mother's Day has become a consumer event
Much to the chagrin of its founder.

We will come back to Anna Jarvis later.

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Our Scripture Lesson for today, Proverbs 31:10-31
Is often used to glorify mothers and wives
Two traditional roles women played since forever.

But if you look a little closer at the passage
You'll note some very nontraditional activities.

This woman's strength is in her entrepreneurship.

Really, she is not very traditional at all
In the way we think of woman's traditional roles.

Earlier in the passage, the author of Proverbs writes.

Proverbs 31:10-24 NIV

**14 She is like the merchant ships,
bringing her food from afar.**

**16 She considers a field and buys it;
out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.**

**17 She sets about her work vigorously;
her arms are strong for her tasks.**

**18 She sees that her trading is profitable,
and her lamp does not go out at night.**

**24 She makes linen garments and sells them,
and supplies the merchants with sashes.**

This woman's strength is not only
Her mothering and spousal skills

But her strength in entrepreneurial versatility.

This woman does everything!

She is quite a remarkable woman.

She is not just a spouse and a mother.

It appears she makes an important contribution
As a major breadwinner of the family.

She does it with grace and dignity.

Having said that, it is not easy for a woman entrepreneur
To cover all that is expected of her.

Admittedly, mothers and wives, women in general
Are overworked, underpaid and little appreciated.

Listen to what Lyz Lenz has to say
In an article in Time Magazine, August of 2020

Motherhood is valorized in American culture because we don't want to admit the truth: we have built an entire economy on the backs of unpaid and poorly paid women.

Even as gender roles have shifted in the U.S., the expectation that the mother will be the parent primarily responsible for maintaining the household and taking care of the children, no matter what else she has on her plate, is still as true today as [before]. Never has this been clearer than during the pandemic.

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It has been a difficult few years for everyone, for sure.

It has been particularly difficult for women.

It has been especially difficult for women of color.

The pandemic and its effects

Have disproportionately affected black and brown women.

The cost of child care one of the most difficult challenges.

From CNBC, February 28, 2022.

The ongoing child-care crisis has hit Black mothers especially hard during the pandemic, pushing a lot of women out of the workforce.

Black mothers tend to shoulder more child-care responsibilities than their white counterparts, according to [the Institute for Women's Policy Research](#), and are also more likely to be the primary wage earners in their families. Without access to affordable child care, many have had to quit their jobs.

This from Forbes, May 1, 2022

More mothers are primary income earners. For example, 47% of moms surveyed this year contribute more than half of the household income. In 2018, 37% of moms contributed half or more to their household incomes.

From the Institute for Women's Policy Research

*Among Black mothers, however, more than 4 in 5 or **81.1 percent** are breadwinners.*

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Our Scripture Lesson shows the multitasking
Women have had to do in society
To make ends meet.

What is also of interest to note
Is the husband's activities in today's passage.

**²³ Her husband is known in the city gates,
Taking his seat among the elders of the land.**

She is busy running around doing all these things
While the husband sits at the city gates!

She is the wife, mother, and now, breadwinner for the family.

Again, from Forbes, May 1, 2022.

Women have been layering roles - layering household, child care, and professional responsibilities with little additional support from society, corporations, or government.

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We need to restructure the woman's role in today's society.

Proverbs 31:10-31 clearly observes
That the role of women in society
Is greater than the two roles tradition dictates.

We need to find equitable solutions
For women in the workforce
And those who decide to stay at home.

We need affordable child care solutions
Equitable compensation for equal work
Safety networks for women and children in crisis.

We need to change our cultural expectations of women.

We cannot expect them to work fulltime
Be the primary caregiver for the children
And take primary care of the household.

Julie Canlis was working on a PhD dissertation
And was desperate for some help.

She had lost her grounding
And nothing made sense any longer

She reached out to Eugene Peterson
The author of the paraphrased Bible, *The Message*.

She writes.

I was trying to read my [to her] lifeless Bible, but I was interrupted 1,000 times by children needing to be fed, changed, read to, and more.

I begged [Peterson] to give me a spiritual discipline, some rope to haul me out of the hole I was in.

Peterson asked what had she been doing
That was already a disciplined part of her life.

She thought about her newborn
And the countless hours caring for her.

Her child had reflux
And everything that she fed her
Immediately and disgustingly came up.

And so, she said to Peterson.

“Nursing Iona is the only thing I can count on,” I said. “She makes sure of that.”

Peterson patted her hand

“Julie, that is your spiritual discipline. Now start paying attention to what you are already doing. Be present.”

She reflects.

In that moment and so many others like it, I was weakened by a very common and insidious temptation: I wanted to be for Christ instead of being in Christ.

I saw my familial responsibilities as obstacles to a godly life when in fact they were the very place he wanted to meet me.

Accordingly, I had to radically revise my view of obedience to include the simple act of abiding in Christ.

John 15:4-5 NRSV

⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

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Women, these past few years

Has been filled with frustration, anxiety and stress.

You have felt more isolated and alone than ever before.

But know help is there.

Not only in the form of husbands and grandparents
Colleagues and friends

Not only in the form of mental health care

Not only in the slow but steady changes within our society

But in the form of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says that if we abide in him
He will abide in us

By abiding in Jesus
We will enjoy the fruits of the Spirit.

**Galatians 5:22 . . . love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,
generosity, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.**

To maintain any kind of sanity in these days
Let us look no further than being in the presence
Of the only One that can give us peace

Jesus Christ.

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In closing, let me share the rest of Anna Jarvis' story.

After working so hard for a Mother's Day holiday
In just a matter of a few years
She regretted doing so.

She hated to see in so little time
What it had evolved into.

She hated to see the consumerism take-over of the holiday
With its mass-produced cards
And Mother's Day box of chocolates

She hated to see the white carnation flowers
Jacked up in price every time May came around.

Eight years later, in 1922, she wrote

A printed card means nothing except that you are too lazy to write to the woman who has done more for you than anyone in the world."

And candy! You take a box to Mother—and then eat most of it yourself. A pretty sentiment!"

May we recognize the hard role
Women have had to play these past few years.
And then do our part to support them.

And let us lift up our voices in praise
At how women have been the glue
That has held families together
Since the beginning of time.

Proverbs 31:31 CEV Show her respect—praise her in public for what she has done.