

THE CHRISTIAN
Mom's
idea book

Hundreds of Ideas, Tips, and Activities
to Help You Be a Great Mom

Ellen Banks Elwell

CROSSWAY BOOKS
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

The Christian Mom's Idea Book: Hundreds of Ideas, Tips, and Activities to Help You Be a Great Mom

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Published by Crossway Books

a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

Revised edition published in 2008 by Crossway Books

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Interior design and typesetting by Lakeside Design Plus

Cover design: Amy Bristow

Cover photo: Getty Images

First printing, 1997, revised edition 2008

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN13 978-1-58134-950-4

ISBN 1-58134-950-5

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Elwell, Ellen Banks, 1952–

The Christian mom's idea book : hundreds of ideas, tips, and activities to help you be a great mom / Ellen Banks Elwell.—Rev. ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-58134-950-4 (tpb)

1. Mothers—Life skill guides. 2. Mothers—Religious life. 3. Motherhood—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

HQ759.E47 2008

248.8'431—dc22

2007049265

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Preface

Motherhood is a fascinating subject to me—probably because I am the grateful mom of Chad, Nate (and Brit), and Jordan. They have brought great joy into my life, and I continue to learn from each of them.

When I was a young mother, I watched other moms closely, choosing to implement for myself the ideas and ways of relating that I valued and respected. I'm still extremely interested in how other moms think, plan, and relate to their children. What works for them? What might work for me? What can we learn from one another?

In the movie *Shadowlands*, one of C. S. Lewis's students remarked, "We read to know we're not alone." I strongly identify with this statement. I'm grateful for authors who have enriched my life, more than they'll ever know, by allowing me windows into their experience. I remember various times in early motherhood that were particularly lonely and overwhelming. Some of the books I read helped me realize that I wasn't the only mom with such feelings, and I was encouraged to take a more honest approach toward myself, God, and others.

This book of ideas, stories, suggestions, and interviews has been gathered from over eighty moms I admire—sharp ladies with children living at home who have positive attitudes, show respect for others, and enjoy learning. I have included many ideas from many moms, in their own words, realizing that no

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mother can possibly incorporate all of them into her life, but hoping you will find some to enrich yours. While compiling this material, I've had great fun trying out some of the ideas myself. I should have started this project nineteen years ago, *before* I had kids!

It is my hope and prayer that the contents of this book will be insightful, helpful, and encouraging. May your connections with the hearts and homes of other moms represented in this book be helpful to each of you in your particular stage of motherhood.

Introduction

Are you the perfect mother? I'm not. Do you wish you *could* be? Don't we all! I know I can never be a perfect mom, but because God gives wisdom when I seek it and instruction from His Word, I want to continue to learn and grow.

In this day when tolerance for any and all opinions is encouraged, I'm grateful for the Bible, my plumb line of truth. When wallpapering a room, hanging a plumb line on the wall is the first thing I do. Made by suspending a weight from a string, the plumb line provides an accurate vertical line. I don't depend on my eyes; relying on the law of gravity is much safer. After marking the first straight line on the wall, I continue lining one piece against the last, hoping I'll come out with attractive results at the end. Now, I didn't say the results would be *perfect*. Whenever my husband and I wallpaper together, about the eighth time that I comment, "Oh, no one will ever notice that," we look at each other and smile. Never perfect, we have nevertheless ended up with some good-looking wallpaper jobs. Motherhood is like that. If I approach it according to God's plan, there can be attractive results.

Making a cameo appearance at the end of Proverbs is a woman who is an excellent mother from a biblical perspective. The wife and mother described in this passage is quite a lady! She is not passive, fearful, helpless, or uninformed. On the contrary, she is described as being industrious, compassionate,

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wise, secure, loyal to her husband, blessed by her children—and the list goes on. It's interesting that the book of Proverbs begins and ends with women who are on a good track. The woman at the beginning represents wisdom, and the woman at the end is a portrait of a wise wife and mother. In between, however, we run into some women who are clearly on the wrong track.

It is better to live in the corner of an attic than
with a crabby woman in a lovely home.

PROVERBS 21:9

A beautiful woman lacking discretion and modesty
is like a fine gold ring in a pig's snout.

PROVERBS 11:22

A wise woman builds her house, while a foolish
woman tears hers down by her own efforts.

PROVERBS 14:1

Proverbs 31 opens with warnings to King Lemuel from his mother. She is anxious for him to avoid things that would trip him up and destroy his leadership. In the original Hebrew language, verses 10–31 were written as an acrostic (a poetic form that suggests a complete exploration of the subject at hand). Describing a rare and valuable wife and mother, the passage consists of twenty-two couplets, each beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Following along with that idea, I have compiled an acrostic on the word Motherhood, summarizing the characteristics of the wife and mother described in Proverbs 31:10–31, shared in the next chapter.

Part One

Connecting with the Bible

I once heard a story about four pastors who were discussing their favorite translations of the Bible. One liked the King James Version, and another liked the New American Standard Bible. Yet another liked The New Living Translation. When the conversation came around to the fourth pastor, he said that he liked his mother's translation the best. Acting surprised, the other three men said they hadn't realized his mother had translated the Bible. "Oh yes," he responded. "She translated the Bible into life, and it was the most convincing translation I ever saw."

John Wesley is reported as saying, "I learnt more about God through my mother than through all the theologians of England."

Each day we mothers sow seeds in our children's lives. These seeds can be for good or for ill. When we go to the Bible, we are provided with seed that has an eternal shelf life. The picture of motherhood found there inspires and equips us for our task today!

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An Acrostic on Motherhood



Merciful

The virtuous woman showed compassion and kindness to her family, but also to others around her. Proverbs 31 reveals that the hard-working woman of excellence was prosperous both spiritually and physically. But in her success she didn't shrink back from helping others. The same hands that were busy being successful reached out to benefit others.

A woman made unfeeling by wealth is a monster. If she is so busy holding the distaff (spindle) or the pen that she becomes hard and insensitive to the cry of misery, she has lost her glory.¹

When we mothers reach out to people outside our families, our own families receive a sense of security as a result of our deeds. Of course, this will be reassuring to our families only if we are first of all meeting their needs. If we're not, the family will understandably resent our gestures to others.

She sews for the poor, and generously gives to the needy.

VERSES 19–20,

I used to think of “poor” as meaning destitute or penniless, and it can mean that. But the broader meaning of “poor,” and especially of “needy,” is to lack or need something. My friend who just had surgery lacks energy. I can take her a meal or offer to vacuum her home. The neighbor whose husband lost his job appreciates phone calls, encouragement, and prayer. My friend who is experiencing depression needs my time and a listening ear. Having been the needy person before, I treasure in my heart the acts of love and kindness that were shown to me by my family and friends. They truly became the arms of Christ around me. The poor do not dwell only in the inner city or third-world countries. They are all around me, if I have the eyes to see their situation and ears to hear their cries for help.

God blesses those who are kind to the poor.
He helps them out of their troubles.

PSALM 41:1

Observant

She watches carefully all that goes on
throughout her household.

VERSE 27

Watching over the household is one of the most important parts of a mother’s job description. Listening is right up there with watching. This mom was observant, and she was also perceptive. Observing means seeing what is going on; perceiving is going a step further and understanding.

We observe in so many ways. Think back to the first night your first baby slept at home. You probably *watched*. I wasn’t quite sure what I was looking for, but I observed intensely. Even though our new baby slept right next to our bed that first night, I kept waking up and checking him. As our children grow, we continue to monitor their physical health and safety. We keep

an eye on their choices of friends and try to encourage them in good directions. We look out for their spiritual growth, their educational progress, and their emotional wholeness.

If your children are school-age, you'll understand how I can immediately pick up on what kind of day my children have had by watching the way they walk in the door and by listening to their tone of voice. Two examples come to mind.

Our sixteen-year-old son, Chad, had been dating a girl for some months. He's a pretty even-keeled personality, so when I noticed that he seemed a little glum one week, I wondered why. (I watch my children for the big patterns; isolated ups and downs will come and go, especially during the adolescent years.) One morning when I dropped him off at school, I knew that my husband, Jim, would be away for the evening, so I asked Chad if he'd like to go out for dinner together—he could choose the place. He accepted. That night, over dinner, he started talking. I don't know about teenage girls, but if you feed guys, they talk. When Chad explained that he and the girl he had been dating had decided not to be “an item” anymore, I better understood his behavior for the previous week. I listened a lot and asked a few questions. As we left the restaurant, I felt proud of him for having wrestled through some important issues, and I was thankful that I had been watching.

Years ago our son, Nate, then in junior high, tried out for his school's basketball team. He made the first few cuts and came up to the last day—the finals. Watching him come out of the gym door that afternoon, I could immediately tell by the way he walked to the car that he had not made the team. How disappointed he was! Displaying maturity in the way he handled the news, he didn't put down the coach or the other boys who made the team. But I was a little surprised when he started saying things like, “Well, I really didn't want to be on the team anyway.” I wasn't sure that he was being honest with himself, so I watched and listened. His sadness needed to come out eventually, I thought. Sure enough, it did.

That night before he went to sleep, I went into his room and sat on the edge of his bed. All I had to do was ask a few questions about how he was feeling, and the tears began to flow. It was a healthy release. For a while I didn't say much; I just rubbed his back. Then I told him that I appreciated the honesty of his feelings, and I shed some tears with him. Grieving is an important part of any loss—no matter what stage of life we're at. We prayed together that God would fill that empty spot with something else. The remarkable ending to this story is that after a few weeks, one of the boys on the team didn't qualify because of grades, and Nathan was invited on in his place. There was a lot of happiness in the house *that* night. (There was also a rather expensive trip to the store to purchase new basketball shoes, but it was worth it!)

As my sons were growing up, I sometimes grew weary and complained about the many hours I spent driving them to music lessons, school events, and sports events, etc. In my better moments, though, I tried to remember that motherhood is a privilege. Moms are blessed with the responsibility to plan for and observe the well-being of future leaders!

Trustworthy

Her husband can trust her,
and she will richly satisfy his needs.

VERSE 11

To trust is to rely firmly on the integrity and character of another person. I like Charles Swindoll's explanation of integrity: "the distance between life and lip." Do my husband and kids see a distance between what I say and how I act? Can my husband have confidence in my ability to manage the household?

When our children see trust modeled in their parents' marriage, they have a great foundation for personal security. The

child reasons, “If Dad trusts Mom and treats her with respect, he’ll treat me that way too. If Mom trusts Dad and treats him with respect, she’ll treat me that way too.” On the contrary, if children see Mommy intimating that “Daddy is a dummy” or hear Daddy suggest that “Mommy is an ogre” (or vice versa), they are quick to realize that their parents don’t have a united front, allowing for weak spots (more like gaping holes!) in the protective walls of the home.²

I have seen what uncertainty and mistrust do to people. When they cannot count on the systems of their community, when they see that the general motive of the world is selfishness, and when they suspect that nothing *has* to be what it says it is, that anyone might be deceiving them, (1) they fear the world, as though they were strangers in a strange land, and feel helpless. Or (2) they fight back; they themselves become selfish and uncaring on the premise that all existence is “dog eat dog.” In either case, the security of a trustworthy *home* could have protected them, strengthened them, and kept them virtuous in spite of the instability outside. People need to experience trust in order themselves to be confident and truthful. The dependable marriage is a fortress—not to keep them from the world, but to steady them, to strengthen them for entering into that world.³

I discovered that the Hebrew word used to describe the trust of this woman’s husband is the same word used in Psalm 25:3—“None who have faith in God will ever be disgraced for trusting him.”

The bond uniting husband and wife in a true marriage is not unlike that uniting us with God. Happy are they who by their trust in one another and the peaceful joys which it brings are led to united trust in a yet deeper love, mirrored to them in their own!⁴

If a husband can trust in the character, conduct, and speech of his wife, he is greatly blessed, and so are her kids.

Helpful

She will not hinder him, but help him all her life.

VERSE 12

The possibilities here are endless. I can be helpful to my husband physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. Listening and asking questions is a great place to start. What is he feeling and thinking? What's going on at work? Is something overwhelming? Maybe there's something I can do to help lighten the load. We might need an evening out for coffee, or maybe he needs a ten-minute nap after dinner. "The best relationships are built up, like a fine lacquer finish, with accumulated layers of acts of kindness" (Alan McGinnis).

The opposite of building up is tearing down, and unfortunately it is not difficult to fall into destructive patterns.

A worthy wife is her husband's joy and crown; the other kind corrodes his strength and tears down everything he does.

PROVERBS 12:4

A wise woman builds her house, while a foolish woman tears hers down by her own efforts.

PROVERBS 14:1

Have you ever come away from time spent with another couple having observed sarcasm (anger in disguise), put-downs, or mockery from one spouse to the other? How sad and how painful. That's an example of tearing the house down by one's own efforts.

In the creation account, God said that since it wasn't good for man to be alone, He would make a companion for him, a *helper*.

The fact that a spouse is termed a "helper" declares that marriage was never an end in itself, but a preparation. We've accomplished no great thing, yet, in getting married. We have not *completed* a relationship (though many a fool assumes that the hard work's

been done with the wedding and turns attention to other interests). Rather, we've established the terms by which we will now go to work. And it's in this "helping" one another that, ideally, we will grow more and more to be one. . . . When we love each other—when we are a help unto the other, in likeness and in unlikeness—then we are in fact also loving God, whose ordinance we are obeying.⁵

It's the small choices we make each day that accumulate in order to end up with the beautiful finish we all desire.

Energetic

She is energetic, a hard worker.

VERSE 17

The Proverbs 31 mother displayed vigorous activity. She found wool and flax and spun them. She bought imported foods. She got up early to prepare breakfast. She planted a vineyard. And the list goes on. (I get tired just reading the chapter!) Some mothers seem to have more of this commodity than others, but I believe energy has more to do with choices than we sometimes realize. When my schedule is under control, when I'm exercising regularly, when I'm digesting the truth of the Bible, and when I'm watching how I'm thinking, I feel more energized. Hindrances to energy include wrong attitudes, overcommitment, and poor physical condition. Each of us experiences times when energy is low—after childbirth, during an illness, when there's been a loss. But when we look at the overall patterns of our life, if a consistent lack of energy is a problem, we may need to look closely at choices we're making in order to discover and attain increased vigor.

Our example of excellence showed diligence in her sphere of influence first within her home and then within the community. The majority of a mom's work is done alone and in

humble situations—doing laundry, making meals, cleaning up messes, running errands. When my children were very young, I remember wishing that someone could be around to applaud me for doing all the small, motherly tasks throughout the day. Actually, Someone was.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

COLOSSIANS 3:23–24, NIV

Besides making good choices, I also must know where to go to get the energy and stamina I need to do the job.

Don't you yet understand? Don't you know by now that the everlasting God, the Creator of the farthest parts of the earth, never grows faint or weary?
No one can fathom the depths of his understanding. He gives power to the tired and worn out, and strength to the weak. Even the youths shall be exhausted, and the young men will all give up. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

ISAIAH 40:28–31

When I think of energetic women, I think of my mother, Betty Banks. Now in her seventies, she's still on the move. Several years ago she and my dad hired a gentleman to paint the outside of their house. After one week of watching her come and go, the painter said, "Your energy is incredible! If I'm ever in the hospital needing a blood transfusion, can I ask for some of *your* blood?"

Reverent Toward God

Charm can be deceptive and beauty doesn't
last, but a woman who fears and reverences
God shall be greatly praised.

VERSE 30

There's certainly a contrast here between what's temporary and what's lasting. Reverence for God is at the very foundation of this woman's excellent life. Everything she is and everything she does is guided by her respect for God.

Beauty recommends none to God, but it has deceived many a man who has made his choice of a wife by it. It is a fading thing at best. A fit of sickness will stain and sully it in a little time; a thousand accidents may blast this flower in its prime; old age will certainly wither it and death and the grave consume it. But the fear of God reigning in the heart is the beauty of the soul; it recommends those that have it to the favour of God, and is, in His sight, of great price; it will last forever, and bid defiance to death itself, which consumes the beauty of the body, but consummates the beauty of the soul.⁶

How do we develop the inner beauty of a soul that reverences God? Mary, the mother of Jesus, shines as a great example. In her Magnificat, recorded in Luke 1:46–55, Mary first praised God (vv. 46–48). Second, she acknowledged her humble state (vv. 48–49). Third, she built her life on God's plan—she obeyed.

Think about it. God wasn't sending Jesus to be born and raised by an experienced mother. Mary had *no* experience. God sent His only Son into arms that were young and fragile. But Mary had something else, something that was highly valued by God. Mary had reverence—reverence that produced obedience.

The benefits of reverence for God are the same now as they were generations ago:

- *Wisdom.* “Where is the man who fears the Lord? God will teach him how to choose the best” (Ps. 25:12).
- *Friendship with God.* “Friendship with God is reserved for those who reverence him. With them alone he shares the secrets of his promises” (Ps. 25:14).
- *Mercy.* “He is like a father to us, tender and sympathetic to those who reverence him” (Ps. 103:13).
- *Help and protection.* “All of you, his people, trust in him. He is your helper; he is your shield” (Ps. 115:11).

Honored

Her children stand and bless her; so does her husband.

VERSE 28

Don't we all like to be honored? Don't we all like to see our children recognized, or to be recognized by them? I appreciate encouraging words from people of all ages, but there's some-

Things I Really Like about My Mom

Grade 2: She gives me atenchen (attention).

Grade 3: She lets the cat sleep in my room.

Grade 4: She loves God.

Grade 5: She almost never looks weird on Saturdays.

Grade 6: My mom loves me and will never stop loving me.

Grade 7: She always comes to watch me play sports.

Grade 8: She doesn't lecture me.

Grade 9: She tries to be the best mother she can be. It's hard, because we don't make it easy.

Grade 10: She's a great cook.

Grade 11: My mom respects my dad. She's teaching me how to be a good wife by the way she relates to my dad.

Grade 12: She's giving me increasing freedom with age.

Things I Wish My Mom Would Do Differently

- Grade 2:** I wish she wouldn't talk on the phone so much.
- Grade 3:** I wish she would let us see her wedding dress.
- Grade 4:** I wish she'd let me quit piano. I hate piano!
- Grade 5:** I wish she wouldn't follow a stupid health book that doesn't work a single bit!
- Grade 6:** I wish she wouldn't pack so much luggage when we go on trips; everybody stares at us!
- Grade 7:** I wish she didn't put mushrooms in everything.
- Grade 8:** I wish she wouldn't tell me over and over how disorganized I am. Once is enough!
- Grade 9:** I wish she'd go easy on the "When I was your age . . ." speech.
- Grade 10:** I wish she wouldn't show such outward favoritism to my siblings.
- Grade 11:** I wish her supersonic hearing would go away. She always complains that my music is too loud, even when the door to my room is shut and I can barely hear it. She can even hear my dad blink!
- Grade 12:** I wish she would make fewer sweeping statements.
-

thing truly special about the honor I receive from my kids. Not only am I honored by their kind words and gestures but also by their lives.

I'll never forget the night Jordan (five at the time) told me he thought I was "lovely, beautiful, and heartfelt." Another never-to-be-forgotten moment happened on the day of my grandmother's funeral. Living to be 103, she was dearly loved by the whole family. At one point in the service I was getting rather teary, and Nathan (then ten) leaned over and put his arm around me, keeping it there for the rest of the service. I'll never forget that gesture as long as I live. Also etched in my memory is the Friday afternoon

that Chad (seventeen at the time) was chosen by his high school student body as Homecoming King. Hearing his name announced at the pep assembly, I alternated between crying and wanting to go ballistic! Jim and I were elated that Chad had been honored, and we also felt honored because we were his parents.

Even though I like receiving affirmation *from* my kids, I cannot live *for* their affirmation. The Bible clearly teaches that we parents aren't here to accommodate our children, but rather to love them, lead them, and teach them. They are constantly watching the quality of our lives.

There are some things my kids and I agree on all the time; there are other things we agree on only some of the time; and yes, there are a few things we never seem to agree on. That's okay. Our boys are encouraged to discuss with us anything that doesn't seem fair to them, and we're willing to take a second look. Some issues, they understand, are non-negotiable. But others are not "hills to die on," and we try to be as reasonable as possible. When we're not, we apologize. Kids don't lose respect when we make mistakes but apologize. They do lose respect for us as parents when we deny or rationalize our mistakes.

A challenge out of James Dobson's book *Dare to Discipline* hits me right between the eyes each time I read it:

If Christian parents are perceived by a child as not being worthy of respect, then neither is their religion, or their morals, or their government, or their country, or any of their values. This becomes the generation gap at its most basic level.⁷

How are we doing? Are we living lives before God that are worthy of our children's respect?

I will try to walk a blameless path, but how I need your help, especially in my own home, where I long to act as I should.

PSALM 101:2

Orator of Wisdom

When she speaks, her words are wise,
and kindness is the rule for everything she says.

VERSE 26

It's curious that the morning I worked on this part of the acrostic was a morning that I didn't do so hot in this area. As my two oldest children were getting ready to leave for school, my words were characterized more as impatient than kind and wise. I'm thankful that God, through His Word:

- *Catches me up short.* He shows me my sin, but I'm not left despairing. "The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is right" (2 Tim. 3:16).
- *Reminds me of His grace.* "But if we confess our sins to him, he can be depended on to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong" (1 John 1:9).
- *Encourages me toward good choices.* "But make everyone rejoice who puts his trust in you. Keep them shouting for joy because you are defending them. Fill all who love you with your happiness. For you bless the godly man, O Lord; you protect him with your shield of love" (Ps. 5:11–12).

What a host of choices we make in our speech every day—in our early-morning words, our getting-ready words, our telephone words, our reminder words, our mealtime words, our bedtime words. The actual words, the tone of voice we use, and the timing are all significant in communicating to those around us.

Not only does the woman of excellence run an orderly *house*, but she has an orderly *heart*, which flows into orderly *speech*. "The law of love and kindness is written in the heart, but it shows itself in the tongue."⁸ Like most issues in our lives, it all goes back to our hearts.

Connecting with the Bible

Wisdom and *kindness*. The two words sound beautiful, don't they? Both words are mentioned many times throughout the book of Proverbs. Listed below are some of these verses. I have written these on individual 3 x 5 cards, and I like referring to them often.

A wise man holds his tongue. Only a fool blurts out everything he knows; that only leads to sorrow and trouble.

PROVERBS 10:14

The upright speak what is helpful;
the wicked speak rebellion.

PROVERBS 10:32

Evil words destroy. Godly skill rebuilds.

PROVERBS 11:9

A gossip goes around spreading rumors,
while a trustworthy man tries to quiet them.

PROVERBS 11:13

Your own soul is nourished when you are kind;
it is destroyed when you are cruel.

PROVERBS 11:17

Gentle words cause life and health;
griping brings discouragement.

PROVERBS 15:4

Kind words are like honey—
enjoyable and healthful.

PROVERBS 16:24

Never forget to be truthful and kind.
Hold these virtues tightly.
Write them deep within your heart.

PROVERBS 3:3

If we moms want to unlock the door to wisdom in our speech, here is the key:

Yes, if you want better insight and discernment, and are searching for them as you would for lost money or hidden treasure, then wisdom will be given you, and knowledge of God himself; you will soon learn the importance of reverence for the Lord and of trusting him. For the Lord grants wisdom! His every word is a treasure of knowledge and understanding. He grants good sense to the godly—his saints. He is their shield, protecting them and guarding their pathway. He shows how to distinguish right from wrong, how to find the right decision every time. For wisdom and truth will enter the very center of your being, filling your life with joy.

PROVERBS 2:3–10

Of Noble Character

A wife of noble character
who can find?

VERSE 10, NIV

A noble woman exhibits the qualities of courage and generosity.

Courage means facing fear with confidence. As one person said, “Courage in people is like a tea bag. You never know their strength until they’re in hot water.” The opposite of courage is fear, a powerful emotion. In a crisis situation, fear gets the adrenaline rushing in our bodies, and we are mobilized for action. It can be helpful! But fear as a constant companion is highly destructive. Fear stops our success and inhibits our productivity. When we’re fearful, we worry. The word *worry* comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word that means “to strangle.” According to Corrie ten Boom, “Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow—it empties today of its strength.” If fear surrounds us, security is gone, because fear and security cannot coexist. When I struggle with fear, which I do more than I’d like to admit, I refer to reassuring Scriptures such as:

Connecting with the Bible

My protection and success come from God alone.
He is my refuge, a Rock where no enemy can reach
me. O my people, trust him all the time. Pour out
your longings before him, for he can help!

PSALM 62:7–8

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a
spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

2 TIMOTHY 1:7, NIV

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything;
tell God your needs and don't forget to thank him for his
answers. If you do this you will experience God's peace,
which is far more wonderful than the human mind can
understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your
hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6–7

Regarding *generosity*, the virtuous woman was liberal with her giving in many ways—to her own family first and then to others. My parents have always been generous people. I have experienced and appreciated this because I have been a recipient and also because I have seen their generosity extended to more people and families than I can count. They have shown special time and attention to widows, the disabled, their own parents in old age, missionaries, etc. I am grateful for their example.

I also have friends whose lives are marked by generosity. My friend Phebe helps keep a local bread company in business, buying freshly baked loaves of bread for her friends and dropping them off every few weeks. Another friend and her husband built a new home several years ago. They included two guest rooms, complete with bathrooms, kitchenettes, and a laundry area that they make available to various people who need a place to stay for a short while. These friends are a great inspiration to me! It's heartwarming to see people using God's resources for such acts of kindness.

Dignified

She is a woman of strength and dignity,
and has no fear of old age.

VERSE 25

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, *dignity* is the state of being worthy of respect.

The capable woman wins the respect and honour of her husband and children and those of the wider community, not least because her own commitment to God underlies this productive life of hers.⁹

Before we can accept respect from others, we must be able to respect ourselves. As a new bride struggling with questions about my role as an adult woman, I read the book *Ms. Means Myself* by Gladys Hunt. It is a book I have returned to over and over again. Many years after I first read it, I'm still appreciating some of her thoughts. For example:

We have freedom of knowing that our personal worth is bound up in God's character. Because of God's initiative in redemption, I'm free to accept myself because God has accepted me—and I can follow God's example in reaching out with love to others. I can also be free to forgive, because I am forgiven. . . . We make our own prisons. God's invitation is to come out.¹⁰

God gives us many invitations throughout Holy Scripture. One offered to the children of Israel many years ago is also His offer to you and me today:

“For I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, with the intention that you be slaves no longer; I have broken your chains and will make you walk with dignity.”

LEVITICUS 26:13

How hopeful this is for all of us! We don't have to live fearful, passive lives. We can live lives that are full of freedom, adventure, and dignity!

According to Proverbs 31:10, the woman described in this acrostic is worth far more than jewels. She's hard to put a price tag on, she's worth so much! As we consistently connect with God's wisdom and strength, we will make healthy choices leading to becoming mothers of great value.

Notes

1. Alexander MacLaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, n.d.), p. 292.
2. Sylvia Rimm, *How to Parent So Children Will Learn* (Watertown, Wisc.: Apple, 1990), pp. 84–85.
3. Walter Wangerin, *As for Me and My House* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), pp. 132–33.
4. MacLaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, p. 290.
5. Wangerin, *As for Me and My House*, pp. 60, 63.
6. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), pp. 976–77.
7. James Dobson, *Dare to Discipline* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1970), p. 15.
8. Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 976.
9. Wenham, Motyer, Carson, France, *New Bible Commentary, 21st Century Edition* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 608.
10. Gladys Hunt, *Ms. Means Myself* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1972), pp. 22–24.
11. Gladys Hunt, *Honey for a Child's Heart* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1969), pp. 17, 21.
12. Charles Bradshaw and Dave Gilbert, *Too Hurried to Love* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1991), p. 19.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 24. Emphasis added.
14. Elizabeth A. Carter and Monica McGoldrick, *The Family Life Cycle* (New York: Gardner Press, 1980), p. 296.
15. Frank B. Minirth, M.D., and Paul D. Meier, M.D., *Happiness Is a Choice* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 24.
16. Carter and McGoldrick, *The Family Life Cycle*, p. 297.
17. Lee Combrinck-Graham, M.D., *Children in Family Contexts* (New York: Guilford Press, 1989), p. 52.
18. Michael Jaffe, *Understanding Parenting* (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1991), p. 26.
19. Carter and McGoldrick, *The Family Life Cycle*, p. 306.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 14.