

## You Excel Them All

God has created us with amazing potential. Scientists tell us that we use less than 10 percent of our brains. I would suggest to you that we are using less than 10 percent of many of God's gifts, including the virtues of love, joy, peace, patience, and self-control.

We exist in space and time as complex creatures who may be viewed from the physical, the mental, and the spiritual perspectives. We are body, soul, and spirit. As with the triune nature of God, these three agree in one. They provide an astonishing mix of properties and potentialities.

Why did God make us so gifted and unique? God wants us to excel. We know this because of the careful instruction concerning how we may experience abundant life, unleashing the potential of our own lives. We know this because the inspired authors of the Bible are continually urging us beyond the status quo to a new plane of living. We know this because of the passion of the apostle Paul for reaching what is ahead. We know this also because we ourselves want to excel. It is built into us. We want to be good at what we do—the best, if we can. We hunger for excellence both in our work and our personal lives.

A model of excellence can be found in Proverbs 31, the sayings of King Lemuel, which constitute the first nine verses of this chapter. They are recorded as the words of the young king's mother to her son. The famous description of the Virtuous Woman is well known as a Mother's Day text, but it is separated from the sayings of King Lemuel by five chapters in the ancient biblical text, the Septuagint. Therefore, it is likely not part of the sayings of King Lemuel and should stand alone as an anonymous Hebrew acrostic—a poem that goes through the letters of the alphabet with each verse.

The woman of virtue is praiseworthy (NASB): "You excel them all." The NIV translates the sentence, "You surpass them all." We have in the inspired text that follows this declaration a rather detailed description of a person of excellence.

We are going to start with the first words of King Lemuel and move toward the famous text. We will discover actions of body, soul, and spirit that characterize and create excellence in human beings. They are true for both men and women, old and young, rich and poor. They apply across the board because they summarize the aspirations of God for the creatures that are the capstone of his creation.

## Day 1

*The sayings of King Lemuel—an oracle his mother taught him.* Proverbs 31:1

My mother is a powerful woman. She stands only five feet tall, but she is pure energy and dynamite. Everyone has a biological mother. Most of the time, she is a very special person to her child.

Kings have mothers who teach them when they are young. Mothers may or may not know the destiny of their sons and daughters. Some have unknowingly trained kings, and some have done it on purpose.

My mother trained us on purpose. She taught us that we were royalty—sons and daughters of God—so expected great things from us. She warned us of pitfalls and commended to us paths that lead to peace.

I was reading the work of a famous theologian recently. He said that he thought of Jesus as his friend. He learned this, he said, when he was a boy and his favorite song was “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” My immediate thought was this: here is a man who has studied the Bible and theology for fifty years and when he summarizes his faith, he goes back to his boyhood. It reminded me that the things we learn when we are young cast the longest shadows in our lives. When you change the trajectory at the very beginning of a journey, you cause enormous change in the end result.

That’s one reason the instruction of our mothers and fathers is so important. They are setting patterns, good or bad, that have tremendous staying power and long effect.

Parents and grandparents are well advised to remind themselves daily of this truth. “As the twig is bent so grows the tree,” a proverb observes. We are bending the twigs when we talk and walk and play with our children and grandchildren. Let’s bathe every moment with them in prayer. Let’s clothe our words in love. Let’s remember that we are training royalty—sons and daughters of God.

**Scripture Reading: Proverbs 1 and Hebrews 12:1-13**

*Prayer: Bless my time with the little ones. Help me point them toward you.*

## Day 2

*Oh my son, O son of my womb, O son of my vows.* Proverbs 31:2

A mother experiences her child in a way that is surely inaccessible to men and even fathers. She carried the child as a living presence for nine months. The child grows in her womb and comes from her body. Lemuel's mother reminds him of this very special relationship as she instructs him. She wants Lemuel to realize that she has only his best interest at heart. She is seeking to protect him and nurture him with words even as she protected and nurtured him physically when he was in her womb.

The world has learned that stem cells float in the amniotic fluid of the womb. These free-floating stem cells have been used therapeutically and demonstrate the same versatility that embryonic stem cells exhibit. This is important news because routine medical procedures already being practiced can provide stem cells for research and healing without threatening the life in the womb or requiring the destruction of human embryos. The womb is simply full of life. The developing baby floats in a sea of protective fluid with tiny bits of living tissue all around. What an amazing discovery this is! Scientists will spend years just getting a grasp on the healing potential in the womb.

Lemuel is the "son of my vows," his mother says. This means that he is the answer to her prayers. She made promises to the Lord in connection with her son.

Janet is my wife and the mother of our three children. Always, when I hear her pray I am reminded again of how central her children are to her heart and life. Parents should make their children always the object of their prayers.

### **Scripture Reading: Proverbs 2**

*Prayer: Thank you, God, for giving us mothers and fathers who love us and pray for us and seek to steer us away from danger and toward the good and true. Help me be such a parent, grandparent, and friend.*



## Day 3

*Do not spend your strength on women, your vigor on those who ruin kings.*  
Proverbs 31:3

The king's mother is concerned about his relationship with women. She has reason for concern given the pathetic chronicle of Israelite kings and their affairs and multiple wives. Whenever I think that our society is going down the tubes, a little reading from the Old Testament makes me feel better. What a mess they were—just like us!

The interesting nuance in this mother's warning is the phrase "do not spend your strength" and then "your vigor." Apparently, this mother feels that the power of a king is dissipated by sexual dalliances.

I think that former president William Clinton would probably agree with this mother and has often wished that he would have chosen a different course in his relationship with Monica Lewinsky. In the end, that sickening sexual liaison was a great drain on the leader of our nation, a terrible burden and a crippling distraction to the duties of governance. He spent his strength in a ruinous way.

The high and mighty have ample opportunity to exploit others to satisfy their own desires. It is an ancient story with many illustrations. They keep following this pattern, despite the warnings, because power is intoxicating and sexual desire is compelling.

I was astonished to read the opinion of Dr. James Dobson in regard to the sexual affairs of men. The main reason that men are unfaithful to their wives is "ego needs," Dobson asserts. This is true of both paupers and kings, I suppose. We are all trying to establish our power and presence. Sexual exploits may make us feel like conquerors, but the feeling is an illusion, as President Clinton would certainly testify.

Do not underestimate your own vulnerability to sexual sin. We are all thoroughly and conclusively sexual beings. Our maleness or femaleness is intrinsic to our identity and inseparable from who

we are. The power of sex is well attested. Therefore, we must be on our guard, as this mother suggests. If we are to glorify God with our bodies, then we will remain faithful to our spouses and faithful to the God who made us in this key area of love and life.

### **Scripture Reading: Proverbs 3**

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the gift of sexuality. Thank you for sexual expression within marriage vows. Guard my heart and mind. Give me wisdom and insight so that I remain true to my vows and true to you.*