



BRITISH UNION CONFERENCE  
**WOMEN OF VIRTUE**

**PROGRAMME MANUAL**



*Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.*  
*Proverbs 31:29-30 KJV*

Programme Founder and Director

© 2014 Sharon Platt-McDonald

Associate Director: Sandra Golding

British Union Conference Women's Ministries Department

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## **WOMEN OF VIRTUE PROGRAMME MANUAL**

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New King James Version.

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Principle Author

**Sharon Platt-McDonald**

Contributing Author

**Sandra Golding**

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# THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN

## King James Version

Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies.

The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and called her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

## Proverbs 31:10-31

### The Message (MSG) Version

A good woman is hard to find, and worth far more than diamonds. Her husband trusts her without reserve and never has reason to regret it. Never spiteful, she treats him generously all her life long. She shops around for the best yarns and cottons, and enjoys knitting and sewing. She's like a trading ship that sails to faraway places and brings back exotic surprises. She's up before dawn, preparing breakfast for her family and organizing her day. She looks over a field and buys it, then, with money she's put aside, plants a garden. First thing in the morning, she dresses for work, rolls up her sleeves, eager to get started. She senses the worth of her work, is in no hurry to call it quits for the day. She's skilled in the crafts of home and hearth, diligent in homemaking. She's quick to assist anyone in need, reaches out to help the poor. She doesn't worry about her family when it snows; their winter clothes are all mended and ready to wear. She makes her own clothing, and dresses in colorful linens and silks. Her husband is greatly respected when he deliberates with the city fathers. She designs gowns and sells them, brings the sweaters she knits to the dress shops. Her clothes are well-made and elegant, and she always faces tomorrow with a smile. When she speaks she has something worthwhile to say, and she always says it kindly. She keeps an eye on everyone in her household, and keeps them all busy and productive. Her children respect and bless her; her husband joins in with words of praise: "Many women have done wonderful things, but you've outclassed them all!" Charm can mislead and beauty soon fades. The woman to be admired and praised is the woman who lives in the Fear-of-God. Give her everything she deserves! Festoon her life with praise!

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## Proverbs 31:29 – 31

*“Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.”*



# FORWARD

## FOREWORD

*“There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.”*

Edith Wharton

The imagery of ‘light’ and ‘reflection’ are ones that mark the life of the Christian. As we emulate the character of Christ, who is the Light of the world, we become reflectors of His light. As Christian women, we can be both the candle and the mirror in this dark world to help illuminate the lives of others; pointing them to Christ. We also find a reference point from those whose exemplary lives have blazed a trail which illuminated the path and navigated the way for fellow travellers. The admirable life of the Proverbs 31 women is a beacon of light pointing Christian women to their Creator and their potential through Him. The portrayal of this Virtuous Woman has been an inspiration to me as she epitomises what it means to be a Godly, productive and influential woman who positively impacts her home and community alike.

As I analysed the outstanding attributes of this commendable woman it became evident that there were some principles on which we could build in order to enrich our role as women and enhance the ministry in our homes, churches and communities. It was this inspiration that propelled me to write a programme for women. Subsequently the birth of the *Women of Virtue Programme* and the compilation of this manual is the product of that vision of the Proverbs 31 woman. Realising the high calling on our lives; to fulfil God’s will for us and achieve our full potential as Christian women, I have formatted the programme around thirteen aspects of life that shape us as women. These are the foundational principles depicted in Proverbs 31:10-31 for which this woman is praiseworthy. Each chapter is based on one of these principles.

At the start of each chapter I have placed Case Studies which portray the lives of women who have experienced challenges on their journey to becoming women of virtue. This enables a realistic look at where women are coming from in their varied life experiences and how we can assist women in similar situations to reach up to God to transform their lives.

It is my prayer that as you read through this manual, utilise the complimentary materials and attend the accompanying seminars and workshops, you will become ‘lights’ that brighten your homes, churches and communities. In so doing may you reflect Christ as you develop into women of virtue to the honour and glory of His Name.

Your sister in Christ  
Sharon



## **HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL**

### **HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL**

The following guidelines are written to assist us in getting the most out of this manual and support the training that will accompany the Women of Virtue



Programme.

### **CASE STUDIES**

The case studies are written to bring an element of 'real life' into the programme. It is intended to demonstrate some of the real life issues women are currently facing. Whilst we all want to aspire to be like the Proverbs 31 woman the reality for many women is a life circumstance that is challenging and somewhat different from the ideal outlined in verses 10-31. How do we meet these women where they are currently? We need something that speaks to their place of reference and gives them hope to move forward.

These case studies are a compilation of real life experiences which have been adapted to protect the anonymity of individuals. Whilst there are fictitious elements, the case studies are drawn from the combined life events of various women. Discussion questions have been placed at the end of each case study for your personal reflection and to facilitate group discussions in your Women's Ministries programmes.

### **CHAPTERS**

The chapters are based on the attributes of the Virtuous Woman of Proverbs 31 detailing specific aspects of her life. Added to these are current issues faced by 21<sup>st</sup> century women that have been included to give some relevance and comparative analysis for today's women.

### **REFLECTION**

This is the reflective point in the manual which enables you to pause and consolidate what you have read so far. It is also a moment to make a relevant application where necessary.

### **ACTION POINTS**

The action points allow you to take some suggested steps based on the themes of the chapter. This gives an opportunity for some experiential learning. It also helps to strengthen the reflection points.

### **RECOMMENDED READING AND RESOURCES**

The identified books, magazines, websites and other materials are the recommendations of the authors. This is material that they have previously used for their personal nurture and development and also to accompany the workshops and seminars that they have undertaken. An augmented version of these listings have been placed in the bibliography section at the back of the manual.

### **PRAYER**

The prayer section is a place for you to connect with God as you reflect on the information you have read. You may choose to pray your own prayer of commitment asking God to assist your development in the areas of need or thanking Him for what He is already doing in your life.

### **NURTURE**

This manual is intended for the nurture and development of women on their journey to be all that God intends for them. It is the reference book for the Women of Virtue programme. The intention is for Women's Ministries leaders to go through the manual for them to become conversant with its content. Leading on from this will be the accompanying seminars and workshops that give additional information and offer experiential learning.

### **OUTREACH**

As a ministry tool, this resource can also be used to engage women in the

community. These are most likely to be women that you are currently working with or who have been invited to your church or Women's Ministries programme. They can also be invited to the associated events that will follow.

### **CHURCH DEVELOPMENT**

As this is a British Union Conference initiative we would encourage you to promote the use of this resource and programme in your Women's Ministries departmental programmes. As you implement the actions, attend the workshops and seminars and develop discussion groups around the subject matter in this manual, we pray that this will have a positive impact on your church. We pray also that the women who attend this programme will experience growth as they become the Women of Virtue God has ordained them to be.



**INTRODUCING THE  
AUTHORS**

# AUTHOR'S PROFILE



**Sharon Platt-McDonald** – *MSC.HS, DipMS, BCS.HS, RHV, RM, C.A.C.D.P, RGN.*

Sharon Platt-McDonald currently works as the Director for Women's Ministries, Health and Disability Awareness for the Seventh-day Adventist church in the British Isles. Influenced by Jesus' ministry of compassion she pursued a career in the caring profession and is a registered nurse, midwife and health visitor with many years experience as a Service Manger in the NHS.

Sharon has wide-ranging leadership experience developing and delivering programs for women, family life and health ministries and has written extensively on these aspects in numerous national and international publications. She has spearheaded various projects for adults and youth empowering them to embrace their full potential to become what God has gifted them to achieve.

Producing a range of resources for churches and communities, Sharon has developed health DVDs, manuals, booklets, leaflets, cards and health series for Christian Satellite TV channels and web video streams.

With a passion for the encouragement, empowerment and development of women, she has produced resources and seminars to assist the various life events and wholisitc wellbeing of women. Realising the importance of spiritual nurture and impact of sharing life stories, she has produced the first British Union Conference weekly devotional for women titled– *Light on the Path* Volumes 1 & 2.

As a motivational speaker, mentor, editor and author of several books, Sharon is enthusiastic about sharing the message of health, hope and healing and demonstrates this passion through health, community and women's outreach programs. Testimonies from her radio and TV interviews both in the UK and other countries reveal the positive impact that her ministry is making in the lives of individuals.

She is excited about the vision and future of Wholistic Ministries in the British Isles and feels that as we follow God's directive for emotional, physical, spiritual and

social wellbeing we will positively impact our churches and communities with the ministry of restoration to the glory of His name.

Married to Denzle - a member of the London Adventist Chorale they share a love for music through singing and playing the piano and violin. Sharon is thankful to God for Denzle's faithful support of her work and ministry and for his companionship as a life partner.

# AUTHOR'S PROFILE



## **Sandra Golding**

Sandra Golding is a member of the Luton North Seventh-day Adventist Church. Professionally she works as a Global Advisor: Business Management & Sustainability for an international health and human rights organisation. Previously to this role, Sandra worked as a business consultant working with non-profit organisations.

Sandra serves on the South England Conference Youth Advisory and Women's Ministries Council and the British Union Conference Women's Ministries Council in a volunteer capacity as the Women's Ministries Co-ordinator for Events, Training and Outreach Initiatives.

Her passion for ministry has allowed her to speak in the UK and overseas on women's issues, prison ministries, communication, leadership, youth needs and teaching excellence. She loves working with women and empowering them to pursue the best for their lives.

She also is actively involved in international development and humanitarian work and works as a volunteer for ADRA-UK. She believes that giving back to those less fortunate than herself is a blessing from God.



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In seeking to develop this Woman of Virtue Programme for women, I wish to acknowledge the significant impact of my wonderful mother who through all her life has modelled what it means to be a virtuous woman. Now 80 years old (at the time of writing) she has been a tremendous inspiration to my life, my work and my ministry. She is the essence of who I am as woman. A true role model and woman of excellence she has taught me how to strive for Godliness, to be productive and of benefit and to give back to others in faithful service. In the face of life's adversity, she has weathered every storm and has emerged to say her signature phrase – 'thank God for Jesus!' I salute her.

I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Sandra Golding who has written the manual chapter *on Singleness, Maintaining Your Appearance* and *Women as Investors*. She is Associate Director of the Women of Virtue Programme. Appreciation also goes to Dawn Tompkins for the work she undertook in formatting the manual.

I am grateful to Advent Press whose assistance in the design and printing of the manual has been invaluable.

I would like to thank the following individuals for their expertise in the proofreading of this publication. Thank you to Karlene Stevenson-Wright, Halcy-Ann Platt and Hopieann Platt for your critical eye in finalising this product.

To my patient and supportive husband Denzle, I am ever grateful to God for your encouragement, prayer and protective care for my welfare. You are a gift to my life.

Thank you to the friends, prayer partners and Women of Virtue Team who have upheld me in prayer, supported this initiative and have committed to travelling this journey with me as we go forward together to develop this programme across the British Isles.

My gratitude goes to God for inspiring me to formulate this programme and produce this resource for our women. May His Name be praised as we fulfil the vision of what God has ordained for us to become through Him.





**ENDORSEMENTS  
GENERAL CONFERENCE  
/ TRANS-EUROPEAN  
DIVISION  
ENDORSEMENTS FROM  
OUR WORLD FIELD  
LEADERS**

# **BUC WOMEN OF VIRTUE PROGRAMME**

**by Heather-Dawn Small**

Dear Sister:

Joyful greetings. We at General Conference Women's Ministries are always looking for resources written by women for women. It is not often that we find a resource that is so well written and so relevant and meaningful to the woman of today. Sharon Platt-McDonald together with Sandra Golding have written such a resource. "Women of Virtue" is based on the Proverbs 31 Woman, a woman I must admit who for many years seemed to me to be daunting in her abilities and most disconnected from me as a woman in today's world. But further study showed me that there was so much of this Proverbs 31 Woman that was also real in my own life. She became my mentor and advisor.



Sharon and Sandra, with God's guidance, have taken this Proverbs 31 Woman and made her real and applicable to each of us today. Every aspect of her life is relevant to our lives. As you go through these seminars I know you will be blessed, changed, motivated, inspired, and eager to attain the Godly standard set by this woman.

Amazingly, Sharon and Sandra also show that the woman of Proverbs 31 is really every woman. Whether married or single, homemaker or professional woman, whatever your role, this woman connects to every woman's heart and life.

So, dear sisters, to each of you who has read Proverbs 31 and felt frustrated by what seems to be an ideal and perfect woman, read this manual and realize that she is you, and you are her. As women of God we all have the potential to be the woman God calls us to be. God sees in each of us a woman who can be the best we can with God's help. That is my prayer and desire for each of us.

With love and joy,

**Heather-Dawn Small**

Women's Ministries Director

for the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

# BUC WOMEN OF VIRTUE PROGRAMME

by Raquel Arrais

Stephen Covey listed “beginning with the end in mind” as one of the habits of successful people. So understanding the last chapter of Proverbs is a good place for us to understand our role as women in today’s world.

Being a Proverbs 31 woman is not about being “perfect”. It’s about living life with purpose, diligence, forgiveness and repentance. But the question is: how can I become this woman in my world? How do I turn away from the inane role models and the wrong voices?



This Women of Virtue manual that you hold in your hands, (with the subsequent workshops and seminars which compliment the programme) explores all the facts and facets of the Proverbs 31 woman. This woman knows her worth; she knows her responsibilities to herself. She would not be able to provide for others if she neglected her own needs – physical, emotional and spiritual.

Her greatest strength is her wisdom – her accurate judgment about the world and her influence in it. And she is quick to share the wisdom she has gained to encourage others to reach their potential.

She is careful about her appearance, making sure it reflects her respected position as an influence in her community.

She knows that, as a partner in her marriage, she has a tremendous influence on her husband’s ministry. She can integrate her life – both domestic and professional – with her ministry in such a way that her husband has the freedom to serve within his own field. Her influence in her home is such that her children rise up and call her blessed.

The Proverbs 31 wife is a strong provider and protector for those she cares about. Though wise to the ways of the world, she lives by the wisdom of God. This is admirable.

As in the rest of the Proverbs, this example provides a metaphor for a larger truth. How each of us reveal these characteristics will depend on our situation, gifts and abilities. The key is in verse 30, just as it is in the beginning of Proverbs 1:7 which

states: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” This positive impact of fearing God is mirrored in Proverbs 31:30 which records: “But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.” That’s it – the key, the secret to living an abundant life and blessing others is being filled with and led by Divine wisdom.

Keeping our lives daily tuned into Christ enables us to reflect Him. Our Bible reading, prayer life and fellowship with the Lord allow us to take that thread in our hands and sew our pearls as we go through life. Walking daily in faith will make us strong, vibrant Christian women, like the Godly woman of Proverbs, with each of her attributes.

May this programme, based on the attributes of the Virtuous Woman of Proverbs 31, enable you to reach your goals and be the woman God designed you to be.

We thank you Sharon and Sandra for your vision in bringing these topics at such a time as this. May God bless all of you who start this journey. I am sure you will never be the same.

Blessings,

**Raquel Arrais**

Associate Women’s Ministries Director

for the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

# **BUC WOMEN OF VIRTUE PROGRAMME**

**by Clair Sanches**

There are many passages of scripture which we women can relate to but none, I daresay, portray a Godly virtuous woman as does Proverbs 31. Sharon has done a wonderful job of designing a programme, based on Proverbs 31, which will show us that what we read there is still worth striving for even today. What woman does not want to be respected by her children and husband? What woman would not want to be described as trusted, never spiteful, skilled, quick to assist, doesn't worry, industrious and most importantly she fears and loves God?



Some people say the Bible is an old book written for people 1,000's of years ago. Not relevant today they say. How wrong these people are. With the Virtuous Woman programme you can see that today we need the truths of the Bible more than ever. Principles to live by and to base your life on.

13 principles and issues have been prepared in this programme. When women follow this course they will be on their way to becoming a woman as God intended her to be.

Sharon Platt-McDonald (founder and director) will be working with Sandra Golding (associate director) to deliver seminars, workshops and complimentary materials as part of this initiative.

I highly recommend that all churches run this programme for their women. Let the words of God bless each of us as we strive to become who God intended us to be. Women of Virtue.

## **Clair Sanches**

Women's Ministries Director

for the Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

# BUC WOMEN OF VIRTUE PROGRAMME

by Deborah Harris

We are living in some of the most challenging days known to “womankind”. If it were not for the strength of women, the challenges facing our world would lead to the destruction of many. The question however is, what systems are in place to support the women who hold it together for everyone else.

I am thrilled about the programme “Women of Virtue” because it provides affirmation, support and encouragement for women like you and me who are carrying the world on their shoulders. “Women of Virtue” is designed to ensure we remain the virtuous women God intended us to be. It is designed to ensure emotional resilience, physical well-being and spiritual stamina.

I look forward to the outcome of this God ordained ministry. Thanks for your vision!



## **Deborah Harris, PhD**

Renowned Women’s Ministries speaker for events across the USA. President and CEO of Deborah Harris, Inc. “*Praying For Our Children*” is her God-given worldwide ministry.



**WOMEN OF VIRTUE SONGS**  
**Theme Song - Sharon Platt-McDonald**  
**Signature Song - Paulette Delisser-**  
**Marceny**

# Women of Virtue

by  
Sharon Platt-McDonald

British Union Conference Women's Ministries Programme

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# Women of Virtue

Words by Sharon Platt-McDonald April 2014

Music by Sharon Platt-McDonald April 2014  
Arrangement by Fiona D Pacquette

Gospel Feel

*mf*  
Wo-men

4  
of Vir - tue Re - deemed by God's grace, Wo-men

6  
of Vir - tue Be - hold-ing Christ's face, Wo-men

8

of Vir - tue — E - quipped for life's race, — You're

10

God's prec-ious jew - el, rise up take your place. — You're

12

God's prec-ious jew - el, You're God's prec-ious jew - el, You're

14

God's prec-ious jew - el, Rise up take your place, Rise

16

up take your place, *rit* Rise up take your place.

## WOMEN OF VIRTUE - SIGNATURE SONG

In this world of sin and shame  
We need a woman to bear His name  
Who will be strong and walk in His way

Blessings will follow her  
As she shares with others along the way  
Always keeping close to the Saviour

### Chorus

Walking the narrow way  
As you go along each day  
Women of virtue, may the Lord above  
bless you  
As you live with His Spirit we pray

### Repeat



**INTRODUCING  
THE  
VIRTUOUS WOMAN**

## Who can find a virtuous woman?

**Proverbs 31:10 (KJV) raises an interesting question - “Who can find a virtuous woman?” This question gives rise to a lengthy answer spanning 21 verses which unfolds a comprehensive explanatory outlay of what a woman of virtue looks like. Just imagine that, 21 verses describing one woman!**

In an attempt to give wise counsel to her son about what to look for in a good woman, King Lemuel’s Queen Mother sits her royal son down for a heart to heart talk. She wastes no words in helping him understand the worth of a female of high quality.

Commencing with verses 10 & 11, there is a descriptive introduction about her general virtues. This is followed with verses 12-28 providing an in depth look at varying aspects of her character as we begin to see a woman of great worth emerge. Finally, these highly valued components are brought to a conclusion with a winning summation of her attributes in verses 29-31 which sums up her accolades in the eyes of both God and man.

As you go through each segment of her character identified in the ensuing chapters, we are introduced to her varying roles and indeed it becomes evident that she is invaluable. As Proverbs 31: 10 (NKJV) states “...her worth is far above rubies.” No precious gem exists in quality or quantity that can be equated to her value.



I have often wondered why this Proverbs 31 woman is compared to rubies. With some research I found the answer. The ruby is classified as one of the most costly jewels. Gemmologists across the world place great value on rubies. Depending on carat weight, this precious stone in its natural form can range between £12000 - £35000 according to price scales at [AwesomeGems.com](http://AwesomeGems.com). As rubies are rare the art of finding one is a skill in itself as they are becoming increasingly rare. Also one can purchase a synthetic replica for under £10. It may look like the real thing but it is far from it.

When I think of rubies both natural and replicas, I think there is a valuable lesson for us all. Like rubies in their natural beauty, women can shine as jewels in God’s crown when they emanate Godly characteristics. However, like the ruby replicas, women can take on a form of Godliness that fades under pressure. It is not always easy to tell from outward appearance at first glance the genuine from the fake. But like a natural stone undergoing the process of cutting, shaping, faceting, polishing and carving the true beauty of the gem is revealed. As we allow God to form our characters our inner beauty is developed and this is displayed outwardly. Without God’s inner working in our hearts we are like counterfeit rubies. In our own efforts at best, we turn out like make-belief rubies – mere cheap trinkets. However, with God shaping our lives we are moulded into the ‘real thing’ - rare and precious gems.

The adjective describing this woman in Proverbs 31 has been translated in Bible versions and paraphrases as “virtuous” (NJKV), “noble character” (The Clear Word), “excellent” (NASB) and “good” (RSV). The word ‘virtuous’ comes from the Hebrew word *chayil* which means wealth, virtue, valour, strength. When the word *chayil* is used throughout the Bible in other contexts, it is used in reference to strength, power, might, valour, ability, uprightness, integrity, to be strong or firm – all verbs relating to positive action. This is indicative of the active, effective life of this woman.

It has been said that no woman anywhere in the world could ever live up to every aspect of the virtuous woman described in Proverbs 31. Yet here is a picture of a woman who finds her strength in God to accomplish all that she is able to do as no woman would be able to do what this biblical woman does in her own capacity. Philippians 4:13 reminds me that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Having read through the 21 verses describing this woman of excellence, you can be forgiven for wondering which aspect of her character is the most outstanding as she does everything so well.

Today our society places a lot of value on attributes that are demonstrable and so tend to grade an individual's significance based on the visible representation of their gifts and talent. We tend to applaud the externals of physical beauty and place a high value on academia and scholastic achievement. Our accolades are more geared towards those we feel are deserving of praise because of what they can give to society. But God applauds the beauty of the heart; the internals of spiritual excellence.

It is in the closing verses of this descriptor of a woman of outstanding virtue that we get an idea of what is really important; at least what is more important to God. Yes, she does a lot of things outstandingly well for as Proverbs 31:29 (NKJV) states: "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all." Yet verse 30 & 31 seems to sum up what is really important about being a woman of virtue. It states: "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates." A fusion of Godliness and excellent social standing along with a list of outstanding attributes and we have a virtuous praiseworthy woman.

May we too be praiseworthy as we seek to become virtuous women who are beneficial to humanity in our acts of selfless service to others and acceptable to Divinity as we turn our hearts towards God.

Who can find a virtuous woman? May you be found.



## THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN

### UNVEILING HER ATTRIBUTES

- She** fears and honours **God** (Proverbs 31:30)
- She is a virtuous wife** (Proverbs 31:10 NKJV)
- She** is trusted by her husband (Proverbs 31:11)
- She** does good and not evil (Proverbs 31:12)
- She** is an excellent housewife (Proverbs 31:13)
- She** is industrious (Proverbs 31: 13&14)
- She** is a good provider (Proverbs 31:15)
- She** is an investor and wise business woman (Proverbs 31:16, 23)
- She** is a woman of strength (Proverbs 31: 17)
- She** makes wise decisions (Proverbs 31:18)
- She** is a community activist and advocate (Proverbs 31:19&20)
- She** is not lazy (Proverbs 31:21)
- She** is a creative (Proverbs 31:22)
- She** is a seamstress (Proverbs 31:22,24)
- She** brings her husband respect (Proverbs 31:23)
- She** is productive and generates money (Proverbs 31:24)
- She** does not fear the future (Proverbs 31:25)
- She** speaks with wisdom and kindness (Proverbs 31:26)
- She** is perceptive (Proverbs 31:27a)
- She** keeps herself occupied (Proverbs 31:27b)
- She** is an honoured mother (Proverbs 31:28)
- She** is praised by her husband (Proverbs 31:28)
- She** is exceptional (Proverbs 31:29)
- Her** attributes are applauded (Proverbs 31:31)





**GODLY  
CHARACTER**

# DEVELOPING YOUR CHARACTER AS A GODLY WOMAN

*“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Colossians 3:17*

## EMOTIONAL

### ACTION:

- Ask God for wisdom to **balance** each aspect of your life
- Pray for a **positive mindset**
- Give your fears and anxieties to God and use scripture to **build emotional strength**
- Ask God to **keep your thoughts pure**
- Practice **forgiveness**
- Schedule some **reflective time** with God each day

### OUTCOME:

- A Godly thought life
- Peace of mind in times of trouble
- Emotional resilience
- Positive thinking and outlook
- A sound mind

## PHYSICAL

### ACTION:

- Ask God for the power of **self control**
- Eating **wholesome food** daily
- Regular **exercise / activity** most days
- Ensure adequate daily **sleep 7-9 hours**
- Schedule some **quiet time** daily
- **De-clutter** – get rid of excess

### OUTCOME:

- Preserving our bodies as God’s temple
- Maintaining physical wellbeing for God’s glory
- Increased energy and zest for life
- Body in balance
- Improved overall health and longevity

## SPIRITUAL

### ACTION:

- Begin and end the day with God in **prayer** and **devotion**
- Memorise **promise scriptures** and repeat them throughout the day
- Pray for **strength** to face each day
- Ask God to help you have a closer relationship with Him
- Pray for a **forgiving spirit**
- Find something to **give God thanks** for daily

### OUTCOME:

- Increased faith in God
- Hope in spite of present challenges
- Reliance on God and less on self
- Acceptance of God’s will
- Able to forgive readily and move on

## SOCIAL

### ACTION:

- Link with a prayer partner / mentor / buddy who are **spiritually mature**
- Participate in **women’s ministries / outreach** programmes
- Schedule **special time** for family and friends to **balance** your life
- Support those in need with your **time and resources**

### OUTCOME:

- Good spiritual and social support
- A sense of belonging and value
- Fulfilling our call to ministry through nurture and support

## GODLY CHARACTER

*"A woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised..." Proverbs 31:30*

"He does not want a girl whose Bible is an accessory to her wardrobe. He wants a woman whose hunger and thirst is to know the Lord, and who diligently feasts upon His Word."

Leslie Ludy

*"...when we acknowledge God's supreme role in our life and set our mind on Him, He enables us to be women of hope. Elizabeth George*



What constitutes a 'Godly' woman? A number of verses in Proverbs 31 allude to the attributes of the Virtuous Woman as it relates to her relationship with God. This is demonstrable both directly in the description of her fearing the Lord and indirectly in the praise of her character by those who know her. This is confirmed in the closing verses that give the summation of a life hidden in God and its resulting impact. After all the descriptive analysis of her glowing character from verses 10-29 the conclusion in verse 30 is "...a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised..." I see this as both a celebratory commendation from those whose lives she has blessed and also a demonstration of Divine approval as an applaud from heaven.

We see the Virtuous Woman as a model for us to emulate because of her standing in God and her reliance on Him. We can become Godly women only as we allow His leading in every aspect of our lives. It is from that Godly stand point that the efficacy of the Virtuous Woman is magnified. It is also clear that God sometimes allows us to go through certain situations which tests our faith in Him and stretches our capacity for growth. He can do this as He knows what we are able to handle.

Godly women are good women through whom God can work and who are willing to work with God. When we make ourselves available to Him, there is no limit to what we can become and do for His glory and the benefit of others.

Realising also that we are made in the image of God makes our strive for Godliness more possible. Coming to the understanding that we were created to live by divine design with a specific pattern to follow is key to us embracing God's will for our lives and letting Him lead. This is a revelation that will empower us on our spiritual journey.

As women with the many roles we have to juggle and the diverse challenges that we face, it is easy to feel like hiding ourselves away in a day to day existence. Yet God does not want us to merely exist, but live the abundant life. We may be content with merely surviving, but He is desirous of us thriving. He wants to see us

growing instead of stagnating so that we can be true reflectors of His glory and in doing so bear fruit.

I use this scripture often to maintain my focus on God: *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."* John 15:5

**Reflection:**

*"Keep your relationship right with God, keep your life disciplined, and with all your strength fulfill God's purpose for your life. Your constant contact with the Vine will make it possible".* John Maxwell

**Exercise:**

Review the worksheet on *Developing your Character as a Godly Woman* and do the following exercise:

In the space below use the worksheet to make a note of the aspects of your emotional, physical, spiritual and social wellbeing that you need to work on.

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Let's take an inside look as we see what the Bible says about the characteristics of a Godly woman.

***She is known for her good works***

*"And having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work".* **1 Timothy 5:10**

### Her behaviour is good

“Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers....” Titus 2:3

*“...to be self-controlled, pure, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled”.* Titus 2:5

### She looks good

*“Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.”*

### 1 Timothy 2:9 & 10

### She is a good mentor and role model

*“They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children,....”*

*Titus 2:3 & 4*



### She prioritises inner beauty

*“Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewellery, or the clothing you wear — but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.”* 1 Peter 3:3-5

### Reflection

- Read through the above scriptures again and list the characteristics you feel you are making progress on.
- Ask God to help you maintain these virtues.

In the space below make a note of the areas in which you feel there is room for development.

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In this segment of the manual we explore some tips for developing our walk with God. There are several lifestyle habits that will help to ensure our development of a Godly character as Christian women. At the end of this chapter you note the seminars and workshops that are available to facilitate your journey in your walk with God and encourage spiritual growth.

## **A Godly woman is honourable**

***“A gracious woman retains honour....” Proverbs 11:16***

***“Strength and honour are her clothing....” Proverbs 31:25***

Honour is about knowing what is morally right and doing it. In the context of our daily life it is also about living a life of integrity, respect, and demonstrating high principles as a Godly woman.

In Proverbs 31:25 I love the reference to honour being something that you wear. It is as though this Virtuous Woman dresses herself with honour. She chooses to ‘put on’ a covering of honour just as she chooses which clothes to wear each day. Integrity, respect and sound moral judgement and Godliness becomes a part of her. It is what she ‘wears’ naturally.

As Godly women honour – good Christian ethics is something that becomes and keeps us focused in all our decisions of life. It is something we should default to naturally and ‘retain’ in every situation as this guides our course of action.

We are faced with many choices each day and have a variety of ways in which we could respond to situations that we face. Asking God to empower our actions daily enables us to be honourable (upright and principled) in our intentions and actions. Our behaviour is one that commands respect and also brings glory to God’s name.

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## **Put God first**

### ***A Godly woman priorities God***

We honour God when we put Him first in our life.

The wall beside my bed has a poster with the following words:

*“Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, “Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.” This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate.*

*Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ". E.G.White – Steps To Christ Chapter 8, page 67.*

I decided to place this quote there to help me slow down in the mornings and take a little more time in my devotionals with God at the start of the day. For many years whenever I woke up in the morning I would hit the floor running as there was so much to accomplish. This was evident in the quick prayer and devotionals and speedy preparations for work. It seemed my life was on fast forward all the time.

As I went through the day I would communicate with God about things that were not going too well and send up a quick prayer when things went better than expected. It was not until I came across this wonderful quote in Steps to Christ that I began to slow the pace down to make more quality time with God. I took time to read through the quote and not only tell God all about my plans for the day and asked Him for His blessing and direction, but learned how to pause and listen to what He might be saying to me for that specific day. I learnt how to be more willing to lay down 'my' plans for 'His' purpose. In this way I was better able to be of service for God.

During this time of reconnecting with God in a meaningful way, I noticed also that my days unfolded more smoothly and even when I encountered difficulties I was more at peace and calmer in my response to challenges. I grew to look forward with anticipation to my longer devotional times with God, knowing that as a result I was drawing closer to Him.

It is clear from the summation of the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 that she places God as a priority. It is the fact that she fears God that brings her praise as recorded in Proverbs 31:30 "...but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised."

In our earlier description of the Virtuous Woman, we referred to some words that are used to describe her in the original Hebrew. *Chayil* the word relating to 'virtuous' meaning strength, might and power. The words *Kaph* and *Yad* are used to describe her hands. *Kaph* can indicate beseeching God or intercession for God's favour on those she is praying for. The word *Yad* also refers to warring hands. Put together all these words give a picture of a Godly warrior woman who is an intercessor fulfilling God's will for her life. This strong foundation is built on her knowledge of God gained through the study of His word and personal prayer.

A woman of virtue is one who seeks God with all her heart, her mind and her soul. She places Him first in her life and everything else follows. She seeks His will for her life and asks for His direction, then willingly follows where He leads. She is determined to seek God's way.

### **Reflection:**

When we prioritise God He makes our work effective.

*“The Lord has a work for women as well as men to do. They may accomplish a good work for God if they will first learn in the school of Christ the precious, all-important lesson of meekness. They must not only bear the name of Christ, but possess His Spirit. They must walk even as He walked, purifying their souls from everything that defiles. Then they will be able to benefit others by presenting the all-sufficiency of Jesus.” —Testimony Treasures, vol 2, 404.*

### **Quiet time with God**

In the hustle and bustle of life’s existence we need to slow down and press the pause button of activity to have some quality time alone with God. In order to do this we need to be in a quiet place, a place of stillness where we can sense God’s presence and hear Him speak with us.

The song writer Emily May Grimes wrote the words of the reflective words of a hymn:

“Speak Lord in the stillness, while I wait on thee. Hush my heart to listen in expectancy.”



### **Quiet place**

Being in a quiet place is more than environmental. You can be in a quiet place if your heart is in tune with God. It is here that you are at peace with God and connected to Him sensing His presence as you speak with Him

### **Prayer time with God**

I find prayer time so fulfilling because it is a time when I can log off from the distractions around me and focus on God. It is in this quiet time that I can truly allow God to minister to me.

*The second part of James 5:16 tells us: “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”*

The effective prayer is the prayer offered in faith and humility:

- You pray from a prepared heart as you come to God in prayer
- You seek forgiveness from sins before making your request so that nothing will hinder your prayer from being answered
- You make wrongs right and seek forgiveness from those *you* have wronged
- You forgive others who have wronged *you* so that you don’t harbour an unforgiving spirit which hinders the work of God in your life
- You speak those things that are not as if they were so you claim the promises of God which speak to that situation which you are praying for
- You pray with thanksgiving to God and thank Him for what He is about to do



Fervent prayer is persistent prayer:

- prayer that prevails against the odds,
- prayer that stands even though the storm is raging,
- prayer that holds out in the face of contrary evidence,
- prayer that enables faith to operate, for - *faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen*
- so even though you can't see what you are praying for, materialise
- even though the present circumstances have not changed,
- even when the situation looks as though it is deteriorating you press on in faith remembering the word of God which assures us that *we will reap if we faint not*. We will be rewarded if we do not lose heart,

If you are persisting in prayer, then pray on for God will answer your prayer. For an unhindered prayer life is a powerful life.

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## A Godly woman demonstrates wisdom

*"...she opens her mouth with wisdom..."* Proverbs 31:26

The Bible tells us that we generally speak what is in our heart.

*"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."* Luke 6:45

Wisdom is demonstrated both in what we say and what we do. Our words denote our character. Think about the conversation you have each day that speaks of who you are. If the words we speak demonstrates what is in our heart (who we are at the core) what image would it portray? Our words reveal our level of wisdom.

### How wise are you?

The way we talk to ourselves (self talk) and the conversations we have with others is an outcome of our thought life. The way we think impacts the decisions we make. This dictates our actions and behaviour. As women, many of us make choices that completely change the course of our lives. For some of us it may have been the wrong people that came into our lives when they should have been on the fringes. We need to choose wisely those we let into our inner circle as they influence our lives. Jesus had 12 disciples but Peter, James and John were the closest to Him.

Lack of wisdom in our decision making can lead to us making the wrong choices for our life. However just because a mistake has been made it does not mean that you should write your life off or feel that things will never get better or that you cannot go on to make something better of your life. Even when we have made unwise choices in the past we can ask God to cover that mistake and give us a new start.

## A Godly woman knows how to speak to people

*"She opens her mouth with wisdom, And on her tongue is the law of kindness."  
Proverbs 31:26*

Knowing how to speak to people is very important as words are impactful. This wise woman depicted in Proverbs 31 does not have a problem with her speech. Whenever she opens her mouth she has something good to say. She speaks with both wisdom and kindness.

As women we talk a lot! There is still debate in scientific circles as to how many words women and men speak per day. It was previously estimated that women talk almost three times as much as men, with the average woman clocking up 20,000 words in a day while men a mere 7,000. The difference of women speaking 13,000 more than the average man has been the butt of many jokes. These figures are now being contested as some reports suggests that men and women speak around the same amount of words, it's our descriptive analysis that is different. As women in our small talk we go into more detail about feelings, expressions and what things look like.

Deborah Cameron, an Oxford University linguistics professor with a special interest in language and gender, said the amount we talk is influenced by who we are with and what we are doing.

US researchers found that a protein in the brain could explain why women are more talkative than men. The findings of the research team from the University of Maryland revealed that a "language protein" called Foxp2 was found to be more prevalent in female brains.

### Reflection:

How many of the words we speak per day are filled with wisdom and kindness as the Virtuous Woman of Proverbs 31?

Consider the powerful impact of words:

*A careless word may kindle strife;  
A cruel word may wreck a life;  
A bitter word may hate instil,  
A brutal word may smite and kill;  
A gracious word may smooth the way,  
A joyous word may light the day;  
A timely word may lessen stress,  
A loving word may heal and bless.  
(Anonymous)*

**Take the time to do an inventory on your speech**

### Exercise:

- **Get a range of individuals to assess you on your speech (male, female, family, friends, work colleagues, church members etc)**
- **Ask them to comment on choice of words, intonation (tone), volume, impact and perceived intent.**

This will give you an idea of what people think of the way you speak to them and how it is interpreted. For example the emphasis you place on a word may come across as being genuine or false depending on the tone you use. This is further accentuated by other non-verbal's such as facial expression and body language. Both what we speak and how we speak it is important as we send out certain messages by the way words are used. This has an impact on how it is interpreted by the recipient or those listening in on our conversations.

### Forgiveness as a Godly principle

***We are most like beasts when we kill, most like men when we judge, most like God when we forgive. -Author Unknown***

When someone hurts badly we can find it hard to forgive them readily especially if the individual is close to us as we expect better from them.

One clear indication that the Virtuous Woman of Proverbs 31 knew how to forgive is evident in verse 12 when it states:

*"She does him good and not evil all the day of her life."*

This is in reference to her relationship with her husband. I can't imagine this woman living with her husband for a lifetime and never being hurt or having something to forgive him for. Yet she appears to have no thoughts of revenge to pay him back or harm him in any way.

When we hold on to hurt we become intolerant of others. However when we put in perspective that when we hurt God by our actions He readily forgive us, we can strive to be more ready to forgive others when they hurt us.

*"Be tolerant of one another. If someone has done you wrong, forgive him as the Lord forgave you the wrong you did to Him" Colossians 3:13 (The Clear Word)*

Forgiveness however does not come naturally to most of us. Most people will acknowledge that forgiveness is easier to talk about but more difficult to practice.

C.S. Lewis said, "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive."

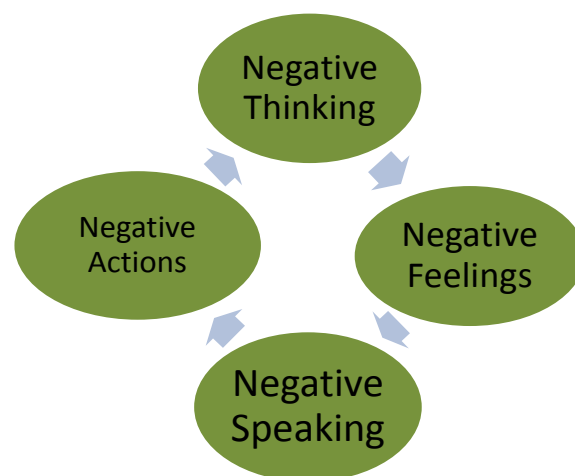
We are taught that we should forgive; it is a biblical directive. We know it is the right thing to do. However, the 'how to' and 'experience' of forgiving can be a challenging process. Although the decision to forgive may be immediate, the healing process may take time. This is one reason why forgiveness is often referred to as a journey.

I undertake a *Forgiveness as Healing* Seminar which looks at the therapeutic effects of forgiveness detailing the varied scientific reports which highlight the health benefits of forgiveness detailing the positive physiological, emotional and behavioural changes which occur as a result. It also examines the harm we do to our spiritual, emotional physical and social wellbeing when we choose not to forgive.

The following is an extract from the worksheets used in the Forgiveness as Healing Seminars:

Many people are trapped in the bondage of un-forgiveness. Look at the following diagram and think about the following in regards to harbouring an unforgiving attitude.

## Lack of Forgiveness leads to:



### ***Do I have to Forgive and Forget?***

- It is impossible to truly forget wrongs that have been committed against us because we cannot selectively "delete" events from our memory.
- The brain is like a computer - it absorbs data put into it through its neurological wiring (neurons) and stores it on the 'hard drive' (network of interconnected neurons) which technically is like a computer's memory.
- It is clear then that biologically we are wired to remember.

- Forgiveness does not necessarily involve a literal forgetting. Forgetting may not be a realistic or desirable goal. Forgiveness involves remembering in a different way. This happens when you recall the incident but the associated pain is no longer there with the same intensity of before. This includes reliving the initial hurt of the incident, feelings of resentment and desire to 'get even' whenever the incident is recalled.
- Despite the familiar cliché, 'forgive and forget,' most of us find forgetting nearly impossible. Although we forgive someone, the memory of what they did, may stay with us for a long time.
- However by 'reframing' or repackaging the experience differently, you recall the memory from a different perspective which enables you to see the whole picture and not just the act of what was done to you. Therefore we remember 'differently' and the act of remembering becomes more wholesome.
- I would say forgive and 'forget' (leave behind) the desire to get even or for revenge, the entitlement to be right and the relentless pursuing to ensure that the perpetrator will get their just reward.

### ***How Do I Cultivate Forgiveness?***

As you contemplate this question and the possible responses, take time to analyse the following:

- You can create conditions where forgiveness is more likely to occur. Begin by changing your mind-set.
- Remember that because of our imperfect nature every one of us at some point in our lives has caused hurt to others whether it was intentional or not and as such we too need forgiveness.
- Refusing to replay the hurtful incident over and over again helps you to move on from the past.
- However forgiveness does not mean condoning wrong behaviour, going into denial, or pretending the wrong did not happen.
- We forgive by acknowledging the wrong that has been done to us.
- We forgive when we acknowledge that we are also perpetrators.
- We forgive by forfeiting our 'injury story' and the self pity we attach to it. This enables us to get a more objective and healthy perspective which enables us to move on from the hurt.
- We forgive others as we have been forgiven by God.
- We forgive unconditionally when we remember God's unconditional love for us and His forgiveness of our sins on a daily basis.
- We forgive in full or not at all.

### ***Moving Forward:***

In contemplating your decision to forgive and the practical steps you will take to achieve this, it is useful to bear the following points in mind:



### **A PRAYER:**

Dear Lord, I realise I am most unlike you when I don't forgive and hold on to my hurts. Please help me to release the bitterness I may be harboring and any thoughts of revenge for the people who have hurt me. I claim your healing for every wound and hurt that has occurred in my life and ask that you will strengthen my resolve to forgive others as you have forgiven me. Amen

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## **She does no evil**



The calibre of our relationship with God and our ability to forgive is also reflected in our relationship with those around us. From the outgrowth of our connection with God, we are also good to people. This is reflected in the way this Godly woman in Proverbs 31 treated others. Speaking of her relationship with her husband Proverbs 31:12 states: *“She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.”* It is as though this woman defaults to ‘doing good’ as a natural expression and consequence of the goodness of her heart as a Godly woman. It demonstrates the intentionality of her actions. It is in her nature to be good to others regardless of how they are to her. This rules out negative behaviours like repaying ‘evil for evil’ - seeking revenge by getting back at others for what they have done to you and generally treating other people badly.

The result of have beautiful actions far outweigh the external beauty which is only for a time anyway. What is the value of being beautiful on the outside but ugly on the inside so that we drive people away with our negative behaviour and evil actions? As women we often pay a lot of attention to how we look. Whilst this is fine, just think of the positive impact if we were to pay even more attention to how we are and being beautiful in character which is more lasting than physical beauty.

Proverbs 31:30 sums it up like this:

*“Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised”*

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## **Sexual purity**

### ***A Godly woman is honourable in her sexual expression***

Another aspect of exhibiting Godliness as Women of Virtue is how we relate to our sexuality.

Popular TV soaps like *Sex and the City* have glamorised sex and relationships to read: "If it's available, have it; if it feels good, do it". Sorry, not for Christians! Our God has ordained a higher order; one that will enable us to preserve boundaries, enhance our holistic wellbeing and save our souls, whilst still remaining happy!

Numerous research has found that there is increased levels of sexual satisfaction amongst married couples who had no previous sexual relationships than those who engaged in premarital sex. The prevailing factors included issues around trust, self respect, guilt, impact of previous sexual experience affecting the current relationship sexual tendencies and stability. Laumann et al (1994) made comparisons between married and unmarried couples. His report found that married couples experienced higher levels of emotional satisfaction and physical pleasure during sex than cohabiting and single adult dating couples.

### ***Sex and the Bible***

From a biblical perspective, the ideal that God intended for sex was for it to be in a loving, giving relationship within the boundaries and sacredness of marriage. Numerous research from Christian authors indicate that when sex is entered into prematurely or outside of marriage, generally it is for selfish reasons and feeds lust. This could be in order to feel better about themselves, feel accepted, craving love and attention etc. These individuals seek sex in order to gain something. Within a loving marital relationship, the ideal is that sex is a giving, sharing experience in which you give to the other person because you love them not just focusing on your own needs and what you are able to get from them.

Sex as God intended creates physical, emotional and spiritual bonds (*Genesis 2:24, Mark 10:6-9, Malachi 2:15*) When this is experienced, it promotes wholistic wellness.

Hebrews 13:4 indicates that God created sex as a beautiful, pleasurable expression of love to be enjoyed within the bond of marriage between a man and a woman. Sex as God designed it, reflects his amazing love for humanity. Yet Satan continues to exploit sex and pervert it into something God never intended. He has succeeded through various ploys in causing this act to become for many an addictive compulsion. Additionally this fixation has been fuelled by society's corrupt view of sexual expression and lust-based activities such as viewing pornography.

As women aspiring to be virtuous we have to choose to develop sexual integrity and resist temptation whether we are single or married. This is covered in more depth in the chapter on A Strong Woman.

### ***Encouraging purity***

Benson, E. T. (1988, October) in his book 'The law of chastity', suggests the following pointers for sexual purity

- Decide now to be chaste.



- Control your thoughts.
- Pray for the power to resist temptation.
- If you are married, avoid flirtations of any kind.
- If you are married, avoid being alone with members of the opposite sex.
- If you are single and dating, carefully plan positive and constructive activities so that you are not left with nothing to do but share physical affection.

Our God is a forgiving God. Whenever we stray or fall, He provides a way back to Him and lifts us up. We need to be willing to be helped and recognise our need of God.

If you have fallen into sexual temptation, Benson makes the following suggestions as an aid to making better choices and protecting boundaries:

- Remove yourself immediately from any situation that is either causing you to sin or that may cause you to sin.
- Plead with the Lord for the power to overcome temptation.
- Let your priesthood leaders help you resolve any transgressions and come back into full fellowship with the Lord.
- Drink from the divine fountain, and fill your lives with positive sources of power.
- Remember that through full repentance, you can become clean again.

**Reflection:**

- Sex is a wonderful gift from God which demands responsibility, commitment, and total love.
- Sex is the most beautiful expression of a deep, selfless, loving life-long union between a husband and wife.
- Done God’s way, sex is worth waiting for!

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**A virtuous woman builds her faith through God’s word**

How do we build faith in God’s word? The answer comes in Romans 10:17 (NKJV)

*“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*

How do we hear the word of God?

- We hear God’s word by believing what His word says
- We hear God’s words by applying to our lives what His word says
- We hear God’s word by holding His word in our hearts, speaking those words over our lives and declaring them in every situation that we face.
- For every life situation, there is a word that God has for us at that precise point.

Let me ask you a question. What do you hear?

- Can you hear Him above the noise and turmoil of this world's distractions?
- Can you hear Him when your heart is in pain and there seems to be no earthly balm for your hurts and wounds?
- Can you hear Him in spite of life's disappointments and challenges?
- Can you still hear Him when the Dr has given you bad news and the prognosis is poor?
- Can you hear Him when your dreams and hopes turn out badly and you can't muster the strength to try again?

We can have the confidence that in every season of our life, whatever the circumstances, if we pause to listen to the still small voice of God, we will hear Him speak to us.

**We can hear God in our quiet time through prayer if we wait long enough in His presence and stop speaking so we can listen as we allow Him speak to us.**

I have learnt to pause in my prayer time and sit in silence for a while until I hear God speak. Often it is a text of scripture, a reassurance, a sense of peace, the words of a hymn or such a tangible impression of his presence. It is in those moments that my faith in God is built up because I experience Him in prayer and know that He is communicating with me.

### **Speaking God's word**

Using God's word is a powerful tool. Not only is there power in the written word of God but also the spoken word. From the beginning of time when God spoke 'and it was done' we see a demonstrable account of the limitless capacity of Divine pronouncement. From the spoken word at creation to the transcription of the 66 books of the Bible which we now hold as a compass for our life, we see the efficacy of the 'Word' to effect change.

We too can speak into being the things we wish for our lives by applying the promises of God to our life, for His word is life changing. Application of God's word will always bring results. Life experiences have the capacity to impact our present and shape our future to a greater or lesser degree depending on how we perceive the event and the significance we attach to it. How we 'speak' to those situations (what we tell ourselves - our self talk or what we audibly declare) can impact those situations. Proverbs 18:21 (NKJV) says: "Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue..."

As Christians, we find our centrality in God and in His capacity to keep us grounded in spite of changing life circumstance. Part of that stability is founded in the

immutable word of God which provides healing for hurting hearts, peace for troubled minds, and restoration for both body and spirit.

### Applying God's word



In the hallway on the wall by the front door of our home you will read the words of scripture taken from Deuteronomy 28:6 *“Blessed shall you be when you go out and blessed shall you be when you come in.”* Over the door another sign reads: *“The LORD will keep you from all harm— he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.”* (Psalm 121:7,8 NIV). In fact throughout our home you will find verses of scripture in varying places. For example in our kitchen one wall plaque bears the words *“Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.”* (Deuteronomy 28:5) In our prayer room the door sign reads: *“Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.”* (Jeremiah 29:12 NKJV)

We find assurance from God's word to suit every life circumstance. The passage of scripture in the hallway reminds us of God's protective care as we come and go each day. The kitchen scripture assures us that God will bless our provisions and daily food. The Bible text on the prayer room door assures me that every time I pray, God we always hear me. This not only gives me confidence in God's word it builds my faith, trust and confidence in God.

### Trusting God in difficult times

Godly woman, are women of vision who see with spiritual eyes beyond their present circumstances. This means that although their current situation is difficult and sometimes feel like a wilderness experience, they know that God has them in the palm of His hands

The question, 'why?' is often a prefix that accompanies our assessment of the harsh events that force their way unplanned into our life schedules, interrupting the equilibrium of our existence. As we pause to assess the timing, impact and repercussions of difficult 'issues' that face us, we often find ourselves with more questions than answers. Perhaps you have experienced the pain of family breakdown, redundancy, financial loss or struggling to cope with a chronic or debilitating health condition. Maybe a life crisis that you never thought you would have to grapple with now becomes your reality. What do you do when there appears to be no apparent answer to what you are currently experiencing? In the varied hurdles of life that I have encountered thus far, I have learnt to trust God even when I don't understand the 'whys' of my life. It has at times stretched my faith extensively and has been as equally challenging as it has been rewarding.

The virtuous woman is one of vision who has the courage that enables them to conquer and overcome in situations that would otherwise seem unconquerable.

They know that it is not in their own strength that they face each trial but in the strength of the Lord. This brings victory.

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## The Power of Gratitude

### ***A Godly woman is a grateful woman***

The following abstract from Psalm 103:2-6 gives you a list of things to begin being grateful for.

*“Bless the Lord oh my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.”*

Gratitude enables you to look up to God and connect with Him in a meaningful way. It focuses our thoughts on not only what He has done for us but who He is.



Gratitude is a super holistic healer. It has benefits for body, mind and spirit. Gratitude turns the table on negative thinking; feeling sorry for yourself and a mindset that can’t find anything in life to be thankful for. When we cultivate a grateful attitude we learn to appreciate and enjoy life more. It also motivates us to find a way around challenges as we give thanks that God is there to help us.

Research indicates a health boost when people live life with a grateful attitude. Happier people are healthier people both mentally and physically. The immune system is boosted by positive thinking and you become less susceptible to disease. Gratitude engenders a calmer approach to life even in times of difficulty as it keeps a positive perspective and allows us to think with clarity.

### **ACTION POINTS**

- Say thank you more often.
- Express your gratitude in positive actions and gestures. Note the response it has on the receiver and the satisfaction it gives you.
- Find something positive in your immediate environment to thank God for.
- In the space below list as many things as possible that you are grateful to God for\*
- Use the Women of Virtue Gratitude journal to plot your gratitude experience and answer to prayers.
- Be aware of slipping into a complaining attitude and try to stop yourself in your tracks. If something needs improving think of a way to make the situation better or at least try and minimize the negative impact.
- Practice praising and demonstrating gratitude like the Psalmist David when

he said: *“I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth” Psalm 34:1*

**REFLECTION**  
Gratitude induces happiness and gives purpose to life. Count your blessings and keep remembering all the things you are grateful for then thank God for them.

*\*Begin your gratitude list here*

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### Finding contentment in God

*“We will never be happy until we make God the source of our fulfilment and the answer to our longings. He is the only one who should have power over our souls.”  
Stormie Omartian*

Reflecting on my personal journey with God and my reaction to life's circumstances, I thought about the difference between happiness and joy and the significance I had placed on each. I realised that whenever I pursued happiness I was most unhappy, but when I chose joy, I had a sense of deep contentment and satisfaction in God regardless of what was happening in my life. Let me explain. Happiness requires stimuli whether external or internal stimuli. It depends on circumstances; something to create an atmosphere or produce a pleasant reaction. Whereas joy happens, 'in spite of'. In the absence of any stimuli or in the presence of pain, whatever the circumstance, joy rises like an uninhibited aroma, heavenward. As women striving for Godliness, when we let God be our focus we will experience fulfilment and joy will ultimately follow.

Perhaps one of the most powerful scriptures that have guided my satisfaction in life and contentment with God has been the following scripture.

*“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.” 1 Timothy 6:6 & 7*

**ACTION POINTS**

- Buy or create a Scripture Promise Box where you can pick out a scripture each day which speaks about God’s promises for us.
- Use a Prayer Diary to record your prayers requests and document the outcome by writing a prayer of thanksgiving to God for answered prayer.
- Make a Hope Chest where you place a list of your hopes, dreams and aspirations together with a scripture that speaks about God’s promise for your life.
- Alternatively you can write a letter to God with a request for what you would like Him to do for you. Place it in the Hope Chest and then pray over it periodically giving thanks to God that he will work out what is best for you.
- Use the Woman of Virtue Spiritual Journey journal to record your weekly walk and progress with God.

**REFLECTION**

- Take some time to go over the key segments in this chapter that speaks to an area that you need to develop in

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## A PRAYER

God of our life, our thoughts, our actions and all that we can become through you. Thank you for the privilege of being made in your image. This gives me great assurance to know that you value me enough to make me to reflect you. Help me to live up to the standard you require of me. Empower me to live each day in the knowledge that it is possible for me to live a Godly life.

Because I am reminded that I was made to look like you, may this thought keep me ever focused on you as I yield to your transforming power. May I be willing to be molded into the woman of virtue that you want me to become so that your glory will be reflected in me. Amen.

## RESOURCES & RECOMMENDED READING

- At Jesus' Feet The Gospel According to Mary Magdalene Doug Batchelor Review and Herald 2001
- Beautiful in God's Eyes: The Treasures of the Proverbs 31 Woman by Elizabeth George 0736915389 Harvest House Publishers 2005
- Day-Votions for Women Rebecca Barlow Jordan 0 310 32203 0 Zondervan 2009
- Daily Wisdom for Women Practical, Biblical Insight for Today's Woman Carol L Fitzpatrick 1 55748 937 8 Barbour Publishing
- Designed for Living – Life as God intended by Jeannette Barwick and Helena Wilkinson
- Every Woman's Battle – Discovering God's Plan for Sexual and Emotional Fulfillment (Shannon Ethridge)
- From Jesus with Love For Women Maria Fontaine (ed) Aurora Production 2007
- God's Design for Women Biblical Womanhood for Today Sharon James EP Books 2010
- God's Word as Therapy – Sharon Platt-McDonald
- Life Management for Busy Women Living Out God's Plan with Passion and Purpose Elizabeth George 978 0 7369 0191 8 Harvest House Publishers 2002
- Light on the Path Volume 1 A Weekly devotional for women by women Sharon Platt-McDonald Advent Press Limited 2012
- Light on the Path Volume 2 A Weekly devotional for women by women Sharon Platt-McDonald Advent Press Limited 2014
- Raising a Daughter After God's Own Heart Elizabeth George Harvest House 2011
- The Power of A Praying Woman Stormie Omartian Harvest House Publishers 2002

- Women After God's Own Heart Elizabeth George 1 56507 533 1 Harvest House 1997
- Woman Alive - The Magazine For Today's Christian Women
- When a Woman Meets Jesus Dorothy Valcarcel 978 0 8007 3379 7 Revell 2009
- Woman Alive The Magazine For Today's Christian Woman
- [www.hopecalls.org](http://www.hopecalls.org)

#### SEMINARS / WORKSHOPS

- Becoming a Godly Woman
- Enriching your Prayer Life with God
- Overcoming in Spiritual Warfare
- Prayer Series: Because You Have Known My Name
  - My Heart An Altar
  - Teach Me To Pray





**WOMEN AS  
SINGLES**

## CASE STUDY FOR WOMEN AS SINGLES

It seemed that everybody but her was pairing up. Casey found herself left out and alone as all her church friends were now dating.

She often wondered what was wrong with her in that the young men in the church were pleasant enough with her but did not seem to be interested in forming a relationship. However when Philip from work began showing her specific attention, her interest in him peaked. He appeared to be a nice young man. However when he asked her out Casey knew that she would have to refuse as Philip did not attend church and did not appear to be interested in religious matters.



A few years previously Casey was badly let down by one of the church boys she was dating. After a few dates with Jacob, who was the son of a well respected pastor, he began to make physical advances to Casey which she was uncomfortable with. One day when they were alone together he had suggested that they progress their relationship to becoming sexually involved as he stated they would then know if they were suited to each other for a more long term relationship. Casey flatly refused explaining her stand for purity and to honour God and her future spouse by saving herself for marriage.

However when Jacob persisted with his advances to become sexually involved, Casey broke off the relationship. Jacob was offended and angry at her response and told his friends that she in fact wanted him to sleep with her but he had refused. The news hit the rumour mill and spread like wild fire. Despite the rumours Casey held her head up knowing that God would vindicate her. Jacob then went on to date her best friend as a way of getting back at her. However within six months her friend became pregnant with Jacob's child.

Casey resolved even more to stick to her commitment to be sexually pure and honour God in any relationship she would form. Yet the temptation to push the boundaries she had set was always there, particularly as some of her associates did not share her 'strict' stance on purity. Her friend shared that in order to cope with their sexual desires they would sometimes engage in watching pornography and masturbation as a form of sexual release.

Casey was torn between what she knew to be right and the curiosity to experience some of the exploratory experiences her friends talked about. Whilst she did not want to engage in sexual intercourse before marriage (as she had in fact kept herself pure up to that point) she often wondered how far she could go without overstepping the line.

Through times of prayer, fasting and devotional time with God, Casey became convicted that God wanted her to be the best she could be, both for Him, for herself and as an example to others. She decided that she would wait for the man God had

ordained for her no matter how long it took. She befriended an older woman in the church whom she asked to mentor her and to commit to praying for her daily so that she would maintain her purity until marriage.

**Discussion questions:**

- What are your thoughts about single women maintaining their sexual purity?
- Do you think that men often put pressure on women to become sexually involved?
- Do you think it does not matter how far you go as long as you don't actually engage in sexual intercourse?
- What were some of the positive influences which enabled Casey to remain sexually pure?
- Do you feel your church is a safe environment to discuss matters relating to sexuality?
- If you are struggling with issues relating to sexual temptation is there someone you could turn to for advice and prayer support?
- In relation to the challenges Casey encountered what advice would you have given to her?

## WOMEN AS SINGLES

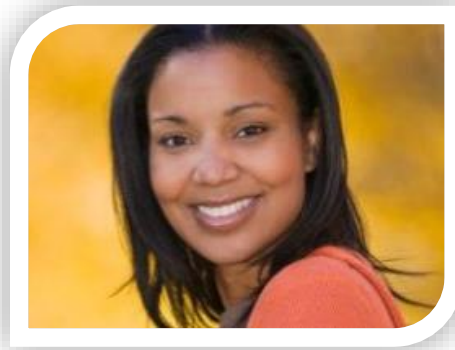
*"For you are complete in Him..." (Col. 2:9-10)*

**"Being single isn't a time to be looking for love. Use that time to work on yourself and grow as an individual. - [www.livelifehappy.com](http://www.livelifehappy.com)**

When you think of the word single adult what comes to mind? Single adult means: "unmarried adults, ages eighteen or older, who happen to be single by chance, change, circumstance, or choice, whether theirs or someone else's choice." Dennis Franck

There are primarily five broad categories of single adults namely:

1. Never married
2. Formerly married (divorced)
3. Widowed
4. Single parent
5. Separated (the separated person is legally married but living a single lifestyle)



Single adults represent a variety of ages, have a multiplicity of life experiences and face a diversity of challenges. No two peoples lives are the same, even though they may have similar experiences.

Each sub-group will have different aspects that they have to deal with. However, there are similarities that every single woman has in common and that is what you will need to concentrate on, as women of virtue.

### Question

**What are some of the challenges/issues that single Christian women face?**

- ⦿ Loneliness
- ⦿ Potential financial instability [one income]
- ⦿ People's comments/lack of understanding
- ⦿ Misunderstanding by married people
- ⦿ Stigma
- ⦿ Lack of support
- ⦿ Emotional insecurity
- ⦿ Controlling sexual desires
- ⦿ Low self esteem
- ⦿ Socialization - having friendships
- ⦿ Etc.

This is an example of some of the areas and the list varies according to the individual and there are additional items that could be included in the list.

There are different dynamics to being single in your 20's, 30's, 40's, 50's etc.

For too long singleness has long been considered as a malady to be treated rather than a stage of life to be enjoyed and cherished. As single women of virtue how can you learn to embrace your singleness and be complete in Christ? It ultimately lies in keeping your eyes focused on Jesus and not focused on finding a mate. If it is God's will for you to have a mate, then He will provide. He has said in His word "...no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." (Psalm 84:11).

## A Single Person is Complete

What does it mean to be complete as a single woman of virtue?



As a single woman of virtue you have to learn how to be content and fulfilled by yourself. You should not look to another person to 'complete' you. Your completion should be found in Christ. Colossians 2:9-10 "...for you are complete in Him." Making the most of being single means being comfortable on your own. *It's just you and God.* Being single is about discovering who you are – spiritually, physically, emotionally and intellectually. It is about setting personal boundaries, knowing your likes and dislikes, your passions and the desires of your heart.

You have to ask some of the following questions

**Spiritually** – How is my spiritual life? What does Christ personally mean to me? What can I do to have a deeper spiritual connection and to grow daily? What am I looking for spiritually in a potential partner? What can I do today to help someone spiritually? How can I make a difference in someone's life?

**Physically** – What do I like or not like about my body? What would I want to change about my appearance in order for me to feel better about myself? What changes do I need to make in order to be more physically active and improve my lifestyle? What are the challenges that you face sexually as a single woman?

**Emotionally** – Think about what you think about often. Are your thoughts more positive than negative, or do you constantly focus on the problems that you face? Do you find that you get upset very easily? Do you hide your emotions or are you open about your emotions? How often do you feel lonely?

**Intellectually** – Do I know what your temperament type is? What qualities about yourself do you like or do not like? What qualities do you look for and like in other people? How important is it for people to relate to you intellectually? Is it important for someone to have an educational background? What are you doing to personally develop yourself?

The list of questions can go on and on but I am sure that you get the picture. Within each of the sub sections, there are key questions that only you can answer about

yourself.

If you don't know the above things about yourself, you are more than likely going to end up dating the wrong person, if dating is what you want. You will end up living a story that is unintended for you.

As you travel through life you often grapple with the question of "Who am I?" Each person has different personal identities but understanding who you are will help you to become complete as a single person. Each of us are unique so you have to understand what it means to be complete and discover who you are apart from your job, apart from the roles that you play in your life and apart from the opinion of others.

When you are complete as a single woman it will definitely help you if you enter into a relationship with a man.

## Healthy Self Concept

When you think of the term 'healthy self concept' what comes to mind? It is the understanding and knowledge of who you are and how you see yourself in relation to others and to your surroundings.

In order to possess a positive or healthy self concept you must:

- Know yourself – know your strengths, weaknesses, talents, potential and your spiritual gift/s
- Love yourself – know whose you are in Christ Jesus and that you can improve your life through the help of the Holy Spirit
- Be true to yourself – the ability to be honest with yourself and to be true to who you are and what you value

Having a healthy self concept means that you have to take deliberate steps and concentrated effort.

Have you worked on the emotional baggage that you carry or have carried? If you have not dealt with the areas in your life from the past, you will carry them forward into your relationships and it could potentially cause many problems.



## Be in Pursuit of God's Purpose

As a single woman of virtue you need to learn to study God's word daily. You have to learn to develop a meaningful prayer life. You have to be in pursuit of God and His purpose for your life! This is a key aspect of being a single woman of virtue. You will need to draw on the strength of the Lord to help you through the situations in your life. There will be days and nights when you are struggling with the challenges of being single – spiritual, emotional, physical, loneliness, sexuality, etc. and you can only get the answers from God.

God will point you in the right direction but you have to know Him personally and listen to Him talking to you. Psalm 46:10 says, *“Be still and know that I am God.”* Sometimes we want to run ahead of God, but we have to learn to be patient and trust in God’s timing that He will provide us with the things that we need and desire. He will show you if a man that you are interested in is the right person for you or He will lead you to the right marriage partner. You have to seek His face and ask Him to direct your steps.



If you do not already do it, then start journaling. There are so many benefits to journaling. Some people find it hard to talk about what is going on with them and by writing down their requests and their concerns, it helps to bring peace to their souls. You could write a prayer journal or a praise and thanksgiving journal or a gratitude journal. When you look back and reflect on what God has done for you, it will make you grow stronger spiritually as a woman of virtue.

You have to know who you are and whose you are in Christ Jesus!

## **Fulfill the Purpose of Your Season of Singleness**

Many times women who are single will question why they are single. If I was as nice as people said I was, why is no one asking to spend the rest of their life with me? Is there seriously something wrong with me? Whether you are single by choice or circumstance, as a woman of virtue you have to learn to enjoy your singleness and to not sit around waiting for Mr. Right to come along.

## **Loneliness and Alone**

Differentiate between loneliness and being alone. Having feelings of loneliness are a normal part of life. It does not matter if one is single or married; we all have times when we experience the emotion of loneliness. A young lady who got married at the age of 41 made the following comment, *“it would be far better to be single in the will of God and experience some moments of loneliness than to be married out of the will of God and experience a lifetime of chaos.”*

Take the time that you are alone to seek the will of God and listen to Him talking to you.

## **Sexuality**

God created you as a sexual being so having sexual desires is normal. Even people who are committed to celibacy are sexual beings. *“Our sexuality is who we are, and we were made with a body, mind, heart, and spirit, not just a body. Therefore, sexual integrity is not just about physical chastity.”* – Shannon Ethridge (Every Woman’s Battle).

As single women of virtue how do you keep sexually pure and maintain sexual integrity when you have the sexual desires? What do you do if you find yourself

emotionally focusing on impure thoughts and desires that go against what you believe as a Christian? What do you do if you find yourself being drawn more and more to pornography or to sexual romance books?

Too many times as human's you often want a list of do's and don'ts, can's and can not's, etc. You may want to know: "How far can I go? What can I get away with? What's too far?"

As a woman of virtue you need to make a covenant with the eyes of your heart not to look at other people (real or imagined) to fulfill your emotional needs and desires in ways that compromise your sexual integrity.

You have to have boundaries in place that protect your heart, mind and spirit as well as your body.

### **The Gift of Singleness**

Celebrate the gift of singleness and embrace the task/s that God has for you. You have to learn to do the will of God until He allows you to be married, if that is what He wants for your life. Do not sit around waiting for 'Mr. Right' to come along. Think of the phenomenal ministry that Mother Teresa had in her lifetime as a single woman who voluntarily chose the path given her as a single Christian.

Let me share something with you from my life. I love to travel and I have a passion for humanitarian work, so I have embraced that as a single woman. I have been blessed to be able to travel to over 30 countries in the world. Some has been for pleasure and some has been doing missionary and humanitarian work. It has been life changing for me and it has taught me so many things about myself. I now know that for me if God allows me to have a husband, he needs to be someone that is spiritual, enjoys travelling and doing missionary/humanitarian work. This is non-negotiable!

There are so many things that you can do as a single woman that you cannot do as a married woman, so go ahead and enjoy the blessings that God has allowed you to have as a single woman.

### **Maximize Your Potential**

In order to maximize your potential there are several key things that you have to learn to embrace, as you grow as a woman of virtue in your singleness.

### **Being Confident**

Too many times as a single woman you can lose your confidence especially if you are around a lot of married couples. Confidence is something that attracts people



to you. Men adore women who are confident about whom they are as a woman and especially a spiritual woman of virtue.

If confidence is something that you struggle with then learn to surround yourself with confident women that can mentor and coach you.

Also ask God to give you a confident spirit. He will not withhold anything good from your life.

### **Deportment & Dress**

Carry yourself with class and dignity. Dress appropriately and stylish.

People are naturally attracted to people that dress well. We are also attracted to people who move and stand in a certain manner. It is important to hold your head up and walk tall. You are a daughter of the highest King, a princess and a special diamond!

You need to know what style of clothing suits your body type. Experiment with different colours to suit your complexion and skin tone. Make sure that your clothes are neat and ironed and that you look presentable at any given time.

### **Be Happy**



Too many single women walk around with an unhappy disposition. Happiness is not something that just happens, you have to be intentional despite your circumstances. You cannot depend on someone else to make you happy because they can in a split second do something to upset you and make you unhappy. You have to create the happiness in your life.

### **Be a Servant**

Give back in service to others. Learn to volunteer with an organization that offers a service to clients that you enjoy or you have a passion for e.g. a woman's refuge or ADRA-UK. Start off by giving two hours of your time per week. You will see the difference it makes in your life. Helping someone else takes your mind off your 'single situation' and makes you focus on others and their needs. You will grow as a woman and you learn so many different things about whom you are and you will also develop new interests and skills.

### **Be Friendly**

Proverbs 18:24 says "A (woman) that hath friends must show (herself) friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a (sister)."

Too many times as women we can be unfriendly towards each other and especially if that 'person does not fit in with your group'. You need to learn to embrace each other and be friendly. Learn to affirm another woman and tell her what you appreciate about her.



You can start a singles friendship group that could meet once a month or once a quarter, either just for socialization or for bible studies etc. You will see how valuable it is to have friends around to not only support you but also to hold you accountable through your walk in life.

Friendship is an important key. We are encouraged to mentor and support the younger woman. (See Titus 2:3-4).

### Find a Coach

Find an older woman or a wise woman who can guide you and help you in your life challenges. Find someone who speaks with wisdom who can impart her experiences and life lessons to you. Look for someone who is empathetic and sympathetic and is not negative. Preferably find a Christian woman to act as your coach and finally it has to be someone that you can trust and you have a good relationship with.

### Be a Woman of Integrity

"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold." Proverbs 22:1.

#### Question

**Do you like your name and what it symbolizes about you? If not why? What would you change about yourself or what name would you choose?**

People should know you because of the high standards you have and the way that you conduct yourself. Make sure that you are a woman who is honest and trustworthy and that people can rely on.

People will always remember the good things that you do in life and the things that has an impact on them and helps to change their life.

#### How to be More Confident

1. Stop Comparing. Stay focused on you.
2. Relax, go with the flow and don't stress the little things.
3. Love yourself. You are a gift. Nothing would be the same if you didn't exist.
4. Be positive and look for the good in every situation.
5. Do what you love. Life is too short to waste your time doing anything otherwise.

- Words of Wisdom for Women

### Pearls of Wisdom

Jeremiah 29:11, "I already know the plans that I have for you. I will help you, not hurt you. I will give you a future and a hope."

You can become a strong woman of virtue as a single woman. Learn to embrace and enjoy your single life till God allows you (if it is in His will) to find your first Adam or your second Adam (who is Jesus Christ)!

### **ACTION POINTS**

- ⦿ Revisit the section 'A Single Person is Complete' and think about the four areas. What can you do to improve your single life spiritually, emotionally, physically and intellectually? Write down 1 goal that you would like to work on for each of those areas.
- ⦿ Think about a project or activity that you can start as a group of single women within your church or community that can help to empower each other.
- ⦿ Reflect on your single life to date. How might your view as a single woman change if you start to look at embracing your season of singleness as something positive and not negative?

### **REFLECTION:**

In the space below write down three things that you can do to grow and develop as a single woman of virtue.

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### **A PRAYER**

Dear Jesus thank you for making this woman reading this prayer your daughter. Father God I am asking you to bless this single woman in a very special way. Watch over her in her moments of sadness and loneliness and bring her peace of mind. Embrace her with your love and let her know that she is never alone, as your Holy Spirit is there to comfort and guide her. Show her how to be fully complete in her singleness and how she can become the woman of virtue that you have called her to be. Provide for her needs and give her friends to walk along side of her and to support her.

Father if it is your will for her to find a mate, then Lord I ask that you choose the right man, that will be the spiritual head of the home that will love her and cherish her, just like you love and cherish your church. These things I ask in your precious name. Amen.

### **RESOURCES & RECOMMENDED READING**

- ⦿ Every Woman's Battle by Shannon Ethridge
- ⦿ Reaching Single Adults by Dennis Franck
- ⦿ In Search of the Proverbs 31 Man by Michelle McKinney Hammond
- ⦿ The 5 Love Languages by Gary Chapman
- ⦿ Things I Wish I'd Know Before We Got Married by Gary Chapman
- ⦿ Love Is A Verb by Gary Chapman
- ⦿ Teach Me How to Love You by Thomas Weeks III
- ⦿ I Kissed Dating Goodbye by Joshua Harris
- ⦿ Pure Heart: A Woman's Guide to Sexual Integrity by Shellie R. Warren
- ⦿ [www.charismanews.com](http://www.charismanews.com)
- ⦿ [www.singleness.org](http://www.singleness.org)
- ⦿ [www.thesinglenetwork.org](http://www.thesinglenetwork.org)
- ⦿ [www.todayschristianwoman.com](http://www.todayschristianwoman.com)
- ⦿ [www.singlechristianwomen.wordpress.com](http://www.singlechristianwomen.wordpress.com)
- ⦿ [www.onfirefastmovement.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.onfirefastmovement.blogspot.co.uk)
- ⦿ [www.thesinglewoman.net](http://www.thesinglewoman.net)

### **SEMINARS / WORKSHOPS**

- ⦿ Single, Sassy & Saved
- ⦿ Matched Right or Wrong – How to Choose the Right Mate [aimed at 16-21 year olds]
- ⦿ Being Fulfilled as a Single Person
- ⦿ Single & Unmarried – How to Find the Proverbs 31 Man
- ⦿ Divorced and Single – Looking at the Next Chapter in Your Life
- ⦿ Single and Separated – How to Move Forward With Your Life
- ⦿ Widowed and Single – How to Embrace the Future
- ⦿ Single Parent – Balancing Your Role as a Parent and Finding Love
- ⦿ How to Set Up and Run a Single's Ministry in Your Church, Community or Area



**WOMEN AS  
WIVES  
HELPER/SUPPORTER**

## CASE STUDY FOR WIVES

Chantal had been unhappy in her marriage for some time. A passionate individual, vibrant and having a love for life she would light up any room she entered. People were drawn to her warm nature and fun loving demeanour. However she had a problem. Her husband Fred was generally more reserved and sometimes appeared cold and distant. Most of all she felt he lacked affection. This Chantal found very difficult to come to terms with as she was a tactile person who loved to be hugged and kissed. On occasions when she approached Fred for a cuddle he would often



withdraw or appear unresponsive. One day Chantal received a message that an old family acquaintance had died. In fact the deceased was the mother of George, a young man that Chantal had liked very much. She sighed when she thought of George. They had attended the same church growing up and their parents had migrated together several years previously. Although their parents were aware that there was an attraction between George and Chantal they did not encourage the friendship as George's family were very affluent and Chantal was from a poor working class background. Both George and Chantal were disappointed but did not wish to go against their parents' wishes so allowed their friendship to cool down.

Eventually George and his family moved out of the area and away from that church. George and Chantal lost touch and went on to date other individuals and eventually married someone within their social network. Chantal however always held a soft spot for George as she saw him as her first true love.

When Chantal received the news that George's mother had died she felt sorry as she had liked his mother. In fact it was his mother that had been more keen on her and had not minded her friendship with George, but her husband had been adamant that their sons affiliate themselves with individuals in their 'class'.

George had been very close to his mother and now she was gone he felt somewhat lost. This feeling intensified as he was not particularly close to his father and now that his mother was no longer around, he realised how much the impact of her loss had made on his life. It was George's father that had encouraged him to marry a young lady that he felt was most suited to his family but that marriage had ended in divorce.

Chantal had been out of touch with George's family for some time and was sad to hear of the death of George's mother. She felt it was important to attend the funeral to support the family as she had got on well with George's siblings as they were growing up together so many years ago.

When she saw George at the funeral he looked so forlorn and heartbroken. He was glad to see her as they had not seen each other for several years. They greeted each other with an embrace but somehow Chantal sensed that the hug lingered a

little longer than it should even though it was meant as a compassionate hug of consolation given to someone who was grieving.

After the funeral she received a text message from George thanking her for her support and for helping out at the funeral. She responded with a text message to which he followed up and this began a series of electronic conversations between them. Chantal soon realised that she began anticipating the next contact and was often disappointed when she did not hear from George. At first Chantal felt happy that she was 'supporting' George who stated that she was the only person he felt comfortable sharing his feelings with and in fact had stated that he trusted her. This made Chantal feel both significant and needed.

Soon the text messaging progressed to telephone conversations. At first Chantal felt a little guilty that she was not including her husband Fred in these 'conversations' but felt that as George and herself were simply talking they were not doing anything wrong. However one day during one of their talks, George mentioned that since he saw her at the funeral he had began wondering what life would have been like had she been his wife. He also stated that when they had embraced at the funeral he felt as if he did not want to let her go. Chantal did not respond to this comment but in her heart she knew that she too had wanted the 'hug' to linger.

It was at that point that Chantal realised that she had become emotionally involved with George and felt worried that she was feeling more for him than a married woman should. Nevertheless each time she thought about cutting her ties with George, she consoled herself that since she was married to an emotionally cold man she deserved some attention and warmth in her life as it made her feel good every time she spoke with George. She also began to think how unfair it was for both George's parents and hers to have stopped them dating and developing their relationship when they were so connected and felt that they were suited to each other all those many years ago.

In an attempt to capture 'what might have been' and console herself with the rekindled connection and bond she felt and had redeveloped with George, Chantal made the decision to keep up her connection with him.

One weekend Chantal attended a Women's Ministries Retreat for women in her region of the country. The visiting speaker presented a number of moving presentations. However it was the one on faithfulness in marriage that convicted Chantal that her 'friendship' with George was potentially dangerous. The speaker was very transparent in her presentation and listed the books that had helped her overcome an emotional attachment she had had with another man during the years she endured an emotional abusive marriage. One of the books mentioned was *Every Woman's Battle – Discovering God's plan for Sexual and Emotional Fulfilment* by Shannon Ethridge. As the book was on sale at the Retreat Chantal bought it –

just to see whether there was anything that would speak to her current situation.

Chantal began reading the book on the journey back home from the Retreat. By the time she got home she had resolved to cut her emotional ties with George and sent him her final (tearful) text message informing him of her decision.

**Discussion:**

- Discuss the emotions that are evident in this scenario on both the part of Chantal and George
- Do you think Chantal is attracted to George in an unhealthy way?
- Is Chantal being unfaithful to her husband Fred?
- If so when do you think this attraction commenced?
- What do you think she should do?
- Is there ever a situation where you think a married woman can be friends with another man that she 'likes'?
- What do you think could happen if Chantal and George met up?
- Do you think that it is important for Chantal to cut her connection with George? If so why?
- If you were Chantal what would you do?
- What advice would you give to Chantal?





## WOMEN AS WIVES

"Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor from the LORD"  
(Prov. 18:22).

A wife of noble character who can find? Proverbs 31:10 (NIV)

Who can find a virtuous and capable wife? Proverbs 31:10 (NLT)

An excellent wife who can find? Proverbs 31:10 (EST)

### Finding her

Over the years I have listened to several discussions on what Christian women should be like, how to be the kind of woman a man would look for and other qualities in the long list of prerequisites. In that time I have noted that very little- if any attention is paid to the *kind* of man who is looking for this 'perfect' female. So let me get to the point without hesitation and give the headlines to the men. Here it is:

***Any young man looking for a godly woman needs to ask the question "How can I find her?" then put on 'Godly' spectacles so he can be more discerning. The next question needs to be "Who am I?" IT TAKES A VIRTUOUS MAN TO FIND A VIRTUOUS WOMAN!***

So, let's get started by analysing these headlines. I have placed the steps in bullet point so that it can be clearly shared with the men as this will be your assignment for this segment of the chapter:

- To begin with a man in his quest for a wife needs to trust God to find her, and then in his looking from a Godly perspective, he can better interpret what he is seeing.
- The next step is a moment of revelation. He needs to comprehend that a woman who is virtuous is not going to want just *any* man! She undoubtedly is going to want a man who himself is virtuous. The meaning of the word 'virtuous' (as discussed in the introduction of this manual) comes from the Hebrew word *chayil* which refers to characteristics such as strength, power, might, valour, ability, uprightness and integrity. In the Bible whenever these references were made using the word *chayil* it was used to describe the men.
- Then here's where the lights go on! Men who are looking for a gem need to be a gem themselves! Put simply-they need to be the kind of man who will be noticed by a Godly woman and whose character will be suitably matched to that of a woman who is striving to serve God. If you are a gem, you will know how to treat a gem! The cry of many women today is: ***"Who can find a virtuous man?!"*** To some females it would appear that on the list of endangered species we could place *Homo sapiens 'pious'* (Godly Men)! We are not far of the point because Psalm 12:1 states ***"Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men"***. The prayer is that the existing few will not die out but that God will raise up godly men who will stand and be counted. This is the same plea for us as women.
- The Biblical mandate for us; both men and women alike is for us to "...exercise yourself toward godliness" 1 Timothy 4:7 (NKJV). In so doing we will learn the fear of the Lord. The resulting impact is that instead of us prioritizing 'essentials' such as good looks, money, job, status and sex appeal, we will seek to make Godly choices

that will undoubtedly enhance our life and the life of the one we unite with in marriage.

An integral part of the workshops that I conduct for women involves asking questions which helps to facilitate reflection. In the workshops for single women some of the questions I get women to reflect on are these: "What do you find attractive in a man?" "What characteristics would you be looking for in a husband?" "How would you know that the man you have chosen is right for you?" The answers are often very revealing.

As women we need to raise the standards, set the tone and see ourselves as the valuable, virtuous women that God intends us to be. In so doing we will get the respect of the men and they will not be able to treat us like cheap gaudy trinkets that can be easily cast aside, replaced or upgraded. When a man chooses to walk away let it be because he has poor vision and not because we have diminished ourselves. Even when a man does not discern that he has a jewel, that should not negate our duty to shine as the jewel we were intended to be - reflecting the glory of God in our lives.

Men who have a gem and do not know it are in need of help. This does not mean that single women should lower their standards to fit into the base perspectives of men who are pursuing them, but do not realise their true value as women of God. Equally it does not mean that wives should be dragged down in their relationship with a man whose behaviour demonstrates that he has no desire to be Godly. Instead as women of virtue in these situations, we should ask God for the strength to be what He ordained for us and with a revelation from God the men will follow. However, if the men choose not to follow, you just remain standing in your place of virtue and the men who are unable to discern your true value will make the inevitable choice. Whatever the outcome, God will sustain you for He truly has your interest at heart.

As Godly women preparing to be wives, there are some observations that should be noted.

- The Bible voices the question – "Who can *find* a virtuous woman?" In this modern age women are putting themselves forward and 'aggressively' searching for men. There are many opinions on this. However the emphasis on being **found** is sometimes overlooked in the anxious drive to be *seen*. A discerning man should be able to '**find**' the jewel God has for him if he is looking from a Godly perspective. A Godly woman should not be difficult to find if she is reflecting His character. It should be obvious to the Godly discerning man. In the process of a virtuous woman being discovered, a man still has to 'search' amongst the many women because some are Godly and some have a *form* of Godliness. What makes the 'discovery' in the *search* crucial, is the rare qualities that become evident on a closer inspection of the true woman of virtue.
- Who we are and what we portray is also important. Imagine a woman walking down the street. If she is a Godly woman this should also be reflected in her dress code. What ought to be covered should be covered! If her dress code is such that everything is on show, she has lost her mystery as nothing is hidden. In the physical sense, a young man hoping to *find* her does not have much to 'discover' as it is all

on full view. Some women in their effort to be noticed attract the wrong type of attention when they dress provocatively. The precious aspects of their femininity are cheapened with their loud dress statements which says 'look at me' and in some cases the statement shouts – 'I am available'.

As women of virtue we need to be careful about our representation realising that we are created in the image of God and as such we should reflect that.

### Exercise

In your programmes on preparing for marriage use the above segment to generate your discussions and create opportunities for reflection.

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### A Holy Union

*"From the diversity of male and female God brought order, oneness."* E.G.White  
Marriage was created by Divine design. **This union is the culmination of God's design for a man and woman to experience the ultimate intimacy in the joining of two lives.** It is one of life's most significant events. Through the joining of two lives that become one, this fusion creates a new life together in a journey of unity.  
*"As God by creation made two of one, so again by marriage He made one of two."*

#### Thomas Adam

The Bible gives God's directive on the significance of a wife in this process of creation. From the outset He announced why He gave the woman to a man in this holy union called marriage.

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

*When God speaks, He never wastes words. Each word is stated with intentionality, carries deep meaning and makes an impact. I can imagine when God makes a declaration the entire universe strains to listen. Additionally when He introduces something new it comes with instructions. This directive found in Genesis 2:18 is the first announcement He makes concerning companionship and why women were created. Here are the elements of the first lesson in human relationships.*

- 1. Firstly He made an observation about man's wellbeing. The conclusion was that it was 'not good' for the man to be alone. God intended for man to be a social being who connects with another. His communication and connection with God was one of reaching up to a superior being. Now God wanted something else for mankind – to be able to connect with someone like himself on his own level in a tangible relational bond. So He created a soul mate for Adam. This indicates that God did not create us to function in isolation. It also emphasizes the importance of reciprocal communication particularly in marriage. This is discussed further in the accompanying seminar to this chapter titled 'When God gave woman to man'.*
- 2. Secondly the role of woman in a marital union was clearly set – that of a helper. It is said about creation that God did not have to improve on anything He had made. Yet when He made man (although complete and perfect) God wanted to add something to Adam's life to make it richer. To complete the equation of mankind, there needed to be something to enhance the role and life of a man and God gave him a woman! God's gift to Adam was Eve. This is outlined in detail in the 'Take You Place' seminar that accompanies this chapter.*

3. *The third point to note indicates the status of this role of helper and also identifies who this woman is in relation to the man. God states the helper he made for man would be '...comparable to him'. The word comparable means 'likened to' or 'similar'. This relates to both male and female being made in the image of God. Women are not the same as men but of the same species of Homo sapiens. As we are not alien to men there is an expectation that our togetherness will work. Additionally the word 'comparable' denotes an equal quality. In the eyes of God who made us both we are of equal comparison. Man was not made a little higher than women or visa versa. We were created equal.*

*In light of the above we have to take note of the Biblical mandate when it comes to the position of women within a marriage. The word 'submission' has been given much press release over the century and diverse views exist and continue to do so with changing times. However as Christian women even when the world changes we continue to look to a God that never changes and who will not change His word. So how should a wife see herself in this Godly union called marriage?*

*The word 'husband' has been used since Old Testament times and means 'lord' or 'owner.' The feminists would probably sprint to their feet at this point. However let's examine Genesis 3:16:*

*"Unto the woman he said, ....and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."*

*It is clear here that a woman as a wife should not usurp authority over their husbands as he is the designated leader. We are told how to work under this leadership in Ephesians 5:22-24*

*"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything."*

*It is interesting to hear the responses from both men and women in relation to this scripture. It has been used by some men to forcefully "put women in their place" and for husbands who brutally dominate their wives to continue doing so. Many women also have responded negatively to this scripture feeling that it gives men the license to treat them badly. Additionally some pastors have used this scripture out of context to justify even difficult cases like domestic abuse and advise women wrongly - that even if they are beaten by their husbands they have to endure it and comply with his wishes as he is the head of the home!*

*However as I thought through the varied discussions on this topic over the years, the revelation of the true interpretation of this passage came from 4 words at the beginning: ".....as to the Lord". This is submission in the context of the Lordship of Christ. The comparison here is with Christ as an example and therefore submission is possible when both the husband and wife submit to God. The elements of submission and how a Christian wife should respond is covered in the Take Your Place seminar.*

*For further information on this topic, please read an insightful article from Christianity Today magazine titled "What's So Scary about Submission".*

*<http://www.todayschristianwoman.com/articles/2008/september/whats-so-scary-about-submission.html>*

## *Exercise*

Take a moment to reflect on the points discussed in this segment and record your thoughts in the space below. Use the following scriptures Genesis 2:18, Genesis 3:16 and Ephesians 5:22 as a discussion point on the role of the Christian wife.

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### Trust - a heart matter

*“The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her.” Proverbs 31:11*

Mutual trust is a beautiful demonstration of oneness. Sadly today not every husband is able to say that they can safely trust their wives and likewise not all wives are able to say this of their husbands.

One of the fundamentals of a God-centred marriage is one with a foundation built on trust. In Proverbs we see a wife whose husband not only trusts but can feel safe in that trust. This can be on several levels

- He trusts her to be faithful within the marriage
- He trusts her with his secrets, that she will keep his confidence
- He trusts her with the vulnerable side of himself to such an extent that he is assured she will not belittle him in any way or treat what he tells her flippantly
- He is able to discuss heart matters freely with her as he bears his heart to her knowing that she will connect with him and not judge him in any way
- He knows that she can take care of business in the home and can trust decisions to her safekeeping so she makes adequate provisions for himself and their home
- She is not a liability to him
- She has a good understanding of his needs
- He trusts her with the family budget knowing she will make wise choices about expenditure

The rest of verse 11 explains the impact of this trust. In the next segment we see that his level of trust in his wife causes him to flourish.

#### *He thrives*

*“.....so he has no need of spoil ...” Proverbs 31:11 (KJV) “.....so he has no lack of gain” (NKJV)*

Because her husband trusts her explicitly he will have ‘no need of spoil’.

Analysing the root meaning of the phrase "no need" we find that it is used in the same context as the phrase found in Psalm 23:1 "I shall not want." In both instances it means to not be in need or lacking in anything.

This is like saying because the LORD is my Shepherd, then I won't be in need because He is my provider and supplier of everything I need. I trust him wholeheartedly to deliver. Likewise if a man has a Godly wife he will not be lacking in getting his needs met as a Godly man.

The word 'spoil' here refers to the plunder or capture of resources obtained following a battle when the conquering party would take away valuable goods from their defeated enemies. This would be seen as 'gain' and they would subsequently come away richer as a result of the battle. In the context of a wife in whom a husband can safely trust he does not need the 'spoil' or 'gain' as his efficient wife is such an asset to the family that she makes them financial secure, even profitable.

### Do no evil

***"She does him good and not evil all the days of her life " Proverbs 31: 12***

King Lemuel's mother in her counsel to her son about the virtues of a good woman takes time to make this statement of comparison about what she does and does not do. She does good and not evil. From this scripture we note the following:

- It makes a point of stating that evil is not in her intention for her husband.
- She has his happiness as her focus.
- She is consistent with her goodness. Not good one day then evil the next, depending on how she is feeling or how he is to her. She demonstrates unconditional love.
- The good that she does is life long - "all the days of her life". This denotes the continuous good nature she emanates for the duration of their lifetime together. Doing good comes naturally for her.
- The faithful acts of a Godly woman pay dividends. Out of the goodness of who she is as a Godly woman; she does good.

Have you every listened to hurting women speak about their husbands? The tales are woeful as they pour out the bitterness of their experience. Whilst I would never wish to minimize a painful marital experience and the hurt that women often have to grapple with, it is how they choose to handle it that is being discussed here. Often the desire for revenge leaved them embittered as they seek for ways to pay back their husbands for the hurt they have caused. This gives rise to 'doing evil'. However it is not an easy task enduring a difficult marriage whilst still trying to 'do good' and having to exercise kindness when it is not reciprocated. Is this possible? To answer this, consider the following questions in the following segment and write down your responses.

### **Doing good when life (or when he) is not good**

- Is it necessary to do good to your husband when he does not do good to you?
- How do you remain faithful to a husband that is not faithful to you?

- How do you intentionally default to doing good under adverse circumstances living at close quarters with a husband who hurts you?

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In the case study scenario at the beginning of this chapter we shared the story of Chantal and Fred. Chantal as you remember was in an emotionally cold marriage with a husband who did not meet her emotional and intimacy needs. She had reconnected with George an old ‘friend’ whom she now shared an emotional bond through their occasional telephone contact. However following a Women’s Ministries Retreat she was convicted to cut her ‘emotional ties’ with George and subsequently terminated their telephone contact resolving to try even harder to connect with her husband.

However although Chantal put a lot of effort in trying to makes things work with Fred things did not improve. In fact it deteriorated when she discovered that he was accessing pornographic websites and chat lines connecting with other women. This explained his cold reaction towards her and emotional withdrawal. She was devastated. Seeking professional help and counselling they struggled for many years to make the marriage work. Along the way Chantal spent many lonely and tearful hours coming to terms with the fact that the emotional connection and intimate side of her marriage was a disappointment. As she continued to pour out her heart to God and ask him for the strength to let go of bitterness, learn to forgive and continue to serve her husband faithfully she used 1 Peter 3:1 as a foundation to do so.

*“Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives” 1 Peter 3:1 (ESV)*

**Exercise**

Use the following statement on forgiveness to ascertain the views of several women on how to survive a marriage where you are exposed to hurt.

“Forgiveness is not a one off decision; it is a journey and a process that takes time, determination, and persistence. Forgiveness is not forgetting; it is simply denying your pain the right to control your life.” Corallie Buchanan

Learning how to forgive the hurts done to us is discussed in the chapter titled *A Godly Woman*. This is also covered in the seminar on *Forgiveness as Healing*.

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### She brings him respect

**“Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land”**

**Proverbs 31:23**

The virtuous woman as a wife is known not primarily because of her role as wife but the impact that it has. The emphasis is more on how her husband benefits from her excellent exemplification of her role as a Godly wife and less on what being a good wife does for her. The impact of this virtuous woman’s life is far reaching. Her husband’s standing is increased because of her.

Proverbs 31:23 makes reference to her husband sitting at the gates. What was he doing there? The city gates were an important place in Bible times. It was the place where cases were judged. It was essentially the courtroom for the city. It was also the place where major business transactions took place and the centre of much activity. Here we find this husband of the virtuous women having a place of notoriety and respect amongst the men of influence. He has a position of influence as a prominent elder. He is not only respected in his own rights by virtue of his position but also because he is known as the husband of this woman of virtue. This Godly woman brings out the best in her husband and adds to his respectability.

### Reflection

*“A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband, but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness to his bones” Prov. 12:4 (NKJV)*

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### Wifely wisdom

A wife who is wise to the gender differences in marriage will be better able to meet the needs of her husband and also get her needs met. Here are some points to consider in terms of the gender differences and how they might impact marriage.

#### Gender differences

*“Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’” Matthew 19:4 (NKJV)*

You may have read the book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* or the religious alternative - *Men are from Israel, Women are from Moab*. If so, you would have concluded that gender differences are quite significant. A large body of scientific evidence exists which highlights the psychological, physiological and sexual differences between men and women and the emotional, experiential and health factors that underpins them.

In this section we compare and contrast some of these differences in the area of communication, emotional response, romantic and sexual expression.



## Communication differences

<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Men tend to talk less. Some research states they use approximately 7 thousand words per day	Women generally talk more. They average around 20 thousand words per day according to some reports
Typical conversational topics for men include latest technology, sports, current news, politics, music, women	Key topics for female discussions are relationships, future plans, health issues, food, clothes, family matters
Men are more factual in their expressions	Women express more feeling
Men tend to withdraw to solve a problem or engage in solo activities to help them process it	Women seek connection and need to talk through their problems
Men are solution oriented and approach problems with an outcome in mind	Women discuss their problems in order to be heard and find release
Men use the dominant hemisphere (usually the left side of their brain) for language	A larger number of women are able to use both sides of their brain for language -hence the challenge to stop women talking!

**Communication** - Generally girls develop conversational skills much earlier than boys. MRI scans show that the corpus callosum, which regulates communication between the brain's hemispheres, is larger in females than males.

## Emotional response

The differences in how men and women express thoughts, feeling and emotions can influence the experience of emotional wellbeing and impact relationships. The Mind Survey (12th May 2009) found the following variations between the genders in how they communicated feelings and emotions.

<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Men were only half as likely as women to talk to their friends about their problems	Women share feelings readily and find it natural to talk over their problems with friends
Men were less likely to express emotions	Women were five times more likely to feel tearful than men
45 per cent of men believe they can fight feeling down	36 per cent of women stated they were able to fight low moods
4 per cent of men aged 18-24 years old would see a counsellor if they felt low	13 per cent of women of the same age would seek counselling for low moods
If they felt low for over two weeks only 23 per cent of men would see their GP	Women indicated that they were more likely to seek medical advice for emotional challenges

**Emotional expression** – The brain’s deep ‘limbic system’ is responsible for emotions and bonding and is larger in females than males. As a result, women create bonds easily, are more expressive and in touch with their feelings than men.

**Depression risk** - A larger deep limbic system however makes females more susceptible to depression, particularly at times of significant hormonal changes such as puberty, menstruation, postnatal period, and at menopause.

**Sexual response and expression**

<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Males are more sexually motivated from the onset of puberty	Females become more sexually motivated as they develop confidence about their sexuality
Men are more visually stimulated as a component of sexual desire	Although some women are visually stimulated, emotional, romantic and relational issues are key triggers
Men deepen their emotional connection through sexual intimacy	Women tend to seek emotional connection as a precursor to sexual intimacy
In general men tend to have sexual thoughts several times a day	Women can go for several hours, even days without having sexual thoughts
Men tend to view sexual intimacy as an expression of love	Women generally want to experience love before expressing sexual intimacy
Following an argument, he wants to make love in order to make up	She needs to make-up before making love
Anger does not necessarily impair sexual desire in men	Anger impairs sexual desire in women
Sexual withdrawal in some men has been linked to damaging developmental experiences	Sexual withdrawal in women is commonly related to negative emotions
He watches a movie or sports after lovemaking – or falls asleep	She wants pillow talk following sexual intimacy and to be held while you share your feelings with her
Young men in particular long for sexual fulfillment	Young women place love and romance before sexual fulfillment
Research on religious beliefs and sexuality identified that there was no difference in sexual desire of male church attendees and those not attending church	Research indicates that women who regularly attend church are less likely to have permissive attitudes about sex.

**Male talk** - what men say they want

Much research and analysis has been undertaken in order to determine what men want. Numerous books and articles have been published seeking to enlighten and bring understanding between the sexes.

Here is a list of the some of the most commonly expressed wishes men vocalise when identifying what they want in a woman.

- Fun and exciting female companion
- An attractive woman
- Great sex – frequent, consistent and passionate
- A woman who will treat him with respect
- Someone who listens to him and makes him feel like a man
- A woman who is supportive and shows interest in their area or work and career
- A feminine woman who knows how to look after herself, looks good
- A woman who does not act masculine, or who is loud and aggressive
- A confident woman
- A trust worthy woman
- A sense of humour
- A spiritual woman (if the man is a Christian)
- A woman who is gentle and kind
- Share similar interests
- Allows them space to spend with other males, private time for them to unwind and engage in sports and hobbies and sports
- A woman who is domesticated
- A woman who they come home to, relax and share a meal with particularly if it is home made
- A woman who is committed to them

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### **Female talk – what women say they want**

I have followed with interest several surveys which sought to ascertain what women want for themselves in life and also what they want from men. The usual list of love, romance, attention, security commitment, etc always appear to top the list.

One of the most intriguing surveys however, was one that I evaluated during a women ministries program I was invited to speak at. A survey titled: *What Women Want* was conducted posing three key questions. These were:

- 1) Do women have an insatiable appetite?
- 2) Has women's needs changed?
- 3) Are women losing their femininity?

An extensive debate ensued which indicated the divergent views of both men and women in this area. It was interesting to note that more men stated that women did not know what they really wanted and that they were hard to please. The jury was out on whether women's needs had changed as equal numbers agreed or disagreed.

Equally interesting was the revelation that both male and female felt that because of societal influences some women were losing their femininity and becoming more like men. Linked with this was the fact that some women felt that due to the shortage of suitable men, women were becoming more self reliant and therefore no longer looked to men to meet all their needs.

As part of the survey a fourth question was asked: - 'what three things do women want the most'? They were asked to rate their responses in order of first, second and third expressed-needs.

Of the respondents answering all three questions the top ten were rated in order as follows:

- Love
- Godly husband
- Good relationship with their spouse
- Security
- Attention
- Happy home
- Respect
- Money
- Honesty
- Happiness

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### **Meeting needs**

*"But he who is married cares about.....how he may please his wife.....she who is married cares about.....how she may please her husband" Corinthians 7:33,34 (NKJV)*

Prior to my marriage, if you had asked me what my image of meeting a husbands needs were, I would have said something like this: "When he comes home, his slippers should be by the door, the bath set, the table laid and the dinner ready to serve. You sit down to a tasty meal together while you listen intently to him talk about his day – showing great interest of course. You then share a shortened version of your day, being careful to keep the atmosphere light so that when he say's "let's go upstairs" there's no opportunity for headaches." You're waiting to hear what I think now? Keep reading!

With the blurring of gender roles over the years and competing agendas of both men and women in relationships, it is not surprising that we still have divergent views as the struggle to understand the sexes continues.

### ***His needs, her needs***

I was once asked to be the Master of Ceremony at the wedding reception of a friend. In preparation for the role I decided to do some research on expectations in marriage and what both the male and female brought to the relationship. In my research I came across an interesting quote which read: "The man decides on the landscape the woman sets the climate."

It was interesting to analyse what a marriage landscape might look like; the environment in which love is nurtured or neglected and needs are met or left unmet. Additionally, if the climate was not favourable what impact would that have on the landscape and vice versa?

To some extent, marriages that experience ‘extreme climates’ and ‘harsh environments’, usually have at their root- selfishness, unmet needs and misunderstandings.

In his book *His Needs Her Needs* Dr Willard Harley presents how the gender needs are expressed. The prevailing theme of the book is that both husbands and wives need to learn about the very diverse needs of their spouse as well as feeling affirmed in their own needs and the freedom to express them.

The following table identifies what Dr Harley felt were the five most basic marriage needs for men and women.

Male needs	Female needs
1. Sexual fulfillment	1. Affection
2. Recreational companionship	2. Conversation
3. An attractive spouse	3. Honesty and openness
4. Domestic support	4. Financial support
5. Admiration	5. Family commitment

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## RELATIONSHIPS AND INTIMACY

God knew our need for connectivity when he stated: *“It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper [and completer] suitable for him” (Genesis 2:18).* Although in this context the comment specifically applied to the male, both genders can be blessed by relationships.

Key to successful relationships between husband and wife are the aspects of spiritual, emotional, physical and sexual intimacy.

You may have heard one definition of the word intimacy as ‘into-me-see’. Indeed when individuals become intimate their connection is such that they become vulnerable as they bear themselves allowing the other to see them as they are, connect with them and have their needs met reciprocally.

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### Emotional intimacy – engaging minds

*“Come now and let us reason together....” Isaiah 1:18*

Behavioural scientists agree that within the communication process there are generally 4 key elements. These are:

- What we say – content
- What we mean – context
- What we hear – message received
- What we understand – interpretation and perception

In a marital relationship these aspects are key to listening intently to each other and processing what is said. When we are unsure of what is being said, seeking for clarity is helpful before drawing conclusions as this enables the other person to feel

that they have been understood or at least given the opportunity to express what is on their heart.

Communication difficulties are a major factor in the breakdown of many marriages. When effort is made to improve communication this enhances the emotional bonding,

### **Emotional bonding and expression of love**

*“When I found him whom my soul loves; I held on to him and would not let go”  
(Songs of Solomon 3:4)*

Research indicates that women tend to seek emotional bonding and closeness more than men. However emotional connectivity is important for men also.

The Bible emphasises the interconnectedness between man and woman in the marital relationship as it helps to strengthen the marital tie. *“The heart of her husband safely trusts in her” (Proverbs 31:11)*

#### **Love language**

Christian counselor Dr. Gary Chapman, and author of *The Five Love Languages* writes about the importance of being able to express love to your spouse in a way that your spouse can understand. This he feels is possible using a type of communication he calls The Five Love Languages. These he identifies as:

- Words of affirmation – positive statements about your spouse’s appearance or achievements which helps to build their self –esteem and boosts confidence
- Quality time – giving undivided attention to your spouse by spending time with them and engaging in activities that they enjoy
- Gifts – is an expressive way to saying ‘I love you’ and provides a token of your appreciation for your spouse
- Acts of service – practical demonstration of love by doing something for your spouse that they would appreciate or helping them in a way that enables them to feel you are partnering with them
- Physical touch – holding hands, hugs, kisses or back strokes enhances physical bonding and lets your partner know that you appreciate them

Which love language do you speak? Understanding which of the above is more closely aligned to your needs will enable you to share with your spouse what is important to you and how you would value them expressing their love to you. Equally important is your awareness of your spouse’s love language so that you can express love to them in a way that meets their needs.

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#### **Physical intimacy – the power of touch**

In our society hugging is generally used to express affection, appreciation, happiness or love on a platonic level.

Women in particular value non-sexual touching. It helps them to feel connected and valued and provides a sense of comfort and reassurance. For some it is both soothing and affirming and gives a feeling of warmth and security.

Men however, touch in a different way. Observe men in a setting where they are congregated as a group you will notice that their touch is more solid and heavy. Black slaps, punches and firm handshakes are their general mode of communication. Generally speaking, for men, soft gentle touching can easily be misunderstood-as to them it has sexual undertones. Touching in a gentle manner can make some men feel vulnerable, dependent or even threatened. This is because men have been socialized to be tough and masculine.

This area of physical touch in marriage can cause conflict when the women expresses a need for non-sexual touch as a key part of communication and the husband interprets the gentle touching as leading to something sexual.

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### **Sexual intimacy – fusion**

The Biblical account of sexual expression found in the book *Song of Solomon* is not the subject one would usually hear for a Sabbath sermon. However it is an enlightening transcript that couples can read together to enhance their relationship particularly if verbal expression of love is their love language.

Whilst the King James version flows with the imagery and beauty of poetic expression, other modern translations brings a more direct message to the reader about the joy of sexual expression:

*“How beautiful and pleasing you are! How pure are the delights of your love! You are as graceful....as a palm tree. Your breasts are like clusters of dates. I will climb the palm tree and take hold of its fruit. May your breasts be to me like clusters of grapes, the smell of your breath like the fragrance of ripened apples, and your lips like the taste of fresh apples” (Song of Solomon 7:6-8 The Clear Word).*

### **Sexual desire**

Libido – the term used to refer to sexual desire or sexual drive. Libido varies from person to person and there are differences between male and female.

Hormonal influences are at the heart of sexual desire. The role of oestrogen and testosterone are the biological drivers and are identified as the key players for the differences that exist between men and women.

During lovemaking, the hormone oxytocin is released at the point of orgasm by both male and female heightening sexual pleasure and increases bonding.

Recent research suggests, another hormone-vasopression which is secreted during the male arousal phase has been linked to the male drive for sexual expression.

Both male and female sexual motivation is influenced to some degree by feelings and thoughts. However men’s sexual arousal and desire tends to be more spontaneous than that of women, whose triggers have more relational factors.

Most studies report that women value emotional connection as the key to sexual desire. Additionally the studies show that women are significantly influenced by social and cultural factors as well.

Dr Edward Laumann, professor of sociology at the University of Chicago and lead author of a major survey of sexual practices captioned, *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States* says: "Sexual desire in women is extremely sensitive to environment and context." So it seems then that candles, scents and oh yes the spouse doing the dishes first, helps to set things up for a good night.

Esther Perel, a New York City psychotherapist and author of *Mating in Captivity*. "For women there is a need for a plot -- hence the romance novel. It is more about the anticipation, how you get there; it is the longing that is the fuel for desire." By contrast however, men appear not to need as much imagination.

Generally for men, sex drives peaks in the early 20's and women in the late 30s and some in their forties.

### **Low libido**

For some spouses the words "not tonight darling....." becomes the frequent response they hear to their initiation for sexual intimacy. There are varying reasons for reduced libido but the following is a list which sexologists highlight as key factors leading to an ongoing reduced sex drive.

- Alcohol
- Depression
- Erectile dysfunction
- Lack of intimacy
- Low testosterone
- Medication
- Menopause
- Obesity
- Other family commitments (caring for young children or aging parents)
- Poor body image
- Sleep deprivation
- Stress

### **Frequency**

"Unlike vitamins, there are no daily minimum requirements," said Weiner Davis, who wrote *The Sex-Starved Marriage*. "If both spouses are satisfied with having a sex-lite marriage, that's great. However, it's much more often the case that couples are polarized, that one person is unhappy with the quality and quantity of their sex life and the other is saying, 'What's the big deal? Get a life.'"

From his study, Weiner Davis identified that only 40% of married couples reported being very satisfied with their sex lives. Generally research demonstrates that although medical problems and some medications including some antidepressant and contraceptive pills can cause loss of sexual desire, most problems revolved around differing and unfulfilled sexual expectations.

What does research show in regards to sexual frequency?

- one in five couples are living in "sexless" marriages, sex experts say, meaning having sex fewer than 10 times a year
- one-third of married couples struggle with the problem of mismatched sexual desire.
- It's the main reason couples seek counselling
- working long hours to pay high mortgages or are desperately searching for jobs during a recession, fatigue and stress only make matters worse
- having sex once or twice a week is considered average. However if trying for a pregnancy practitioners suggests at least three times per week



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## **Health benefits of sexual intercourse**

It's official. Good sexual health can enhance physical health.

Scientists have analysed the health benefits of sexual intercourse and research have identified 10 key health outcomes that can be experienced as a result. Here they are:

### **Calorie burner**

Did you know that thirty minutes of sex burns 85 calories or more? That may not sound a lot but it all adds up. Patti Britton, PhD, a Los Angeles sexologist and president of the American Association of Sexuality Educators and Therapists states "Sex is a great mode of exercise," however from a physical and psychological viewpoint it takes work to do it well but it's worth the effort.

### **Cardiovascular Health enhancement**

It is commonly thought that the energy expended during lovemaking can be harmful to some individuals particularly those with heart conditions or older people. Fear of heart attacks or stroke has kept some individuals away from this amorous activity. This is discounted by UK researches. Scientists followed 914 men in a longitudinal study over a 20 year period. The study published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, revealed that sexual frequency was not associated with stroke.

Interestingly, the heart health benefits of intercourse extend further. The researchers also found that compared with men who had sex less than once a month, having sex twice or more times a week reduced the risk of fatal heart attack by half.

### **Immunity booster**

Engaging in intercourse once or twice per week has been linked with higher levels of an antibody called immunoglobulin A or IgA for short which is known to protect against colds and other infections

Scientists at Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania USA took samples of saliva, containing IgA, from 112 individuals reporting their levels of sexual frequency. Four groups were studied. Abstainers, those engaging in intercourse less than once a week, those engaging once or more times and those indulging, three or more times weekly. It was found that those in the "frequent" group having sex once or twice a week, had the highest levels of IgA.

### **Improves Intimacy and bonding**

Intercourse and having orgasms increase levels of the hormone oxytocin, also known as the love hormone, which enhances bonding and building trust.

In a study from the University of Pittsburgh and the University of North Carolina, researchers evaluated 59 premenopausal women before and after intimate contact

with their husbands and partners. The results revealed that oxytocin levels rose with increased contact.

Lead researcher Britton states. "Oxytocin allows us to feel the urge to nurture and to bond."

Studies also show a link between a feeling of generosity and high oxytocin.

### **Pain relief**

As oxytocin rises, endorphins (the feel-good hormones) also increase. This causes pain to decline.

Research findings from one pain study were published in the *Bulletin of Experimental Biology and Medicine*. In the study, 48 volunteers who inhaled a vaporised form of oxytocin followed by their fingers being pricked found that their pain threshold was lowered more than half.

### **Prostate Cancer Risk reduced**

Australian researchers published a study in the *British Journal of Urology International* where they follow men with and without cancer. Their sexual frequency was also studied. The study concluded that frequent ejaculations, especially in 20-something men, may reduce the risk of prostate cancer later in life.

Similar findings were found in another study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. The study comparing older men who had frequent ejaculations (21 or more a month) were compared with less frequent ejaculations (four to seven monthly). The lower prostate cancer risk in older men was linked with their increased ejaculation levels.

### **Pelvic Floor Muscles strengthened**

Research has identified that when women undertake exercises or the pelvic floor exercises known as Kegels offers a number of health benefits. Firstly it strengthens the muscles in that area and preventing urine incontinence particularly later in life. It also improves sexual pleasure both for the woman and the man and can enhance sexual performance.

To do a simple Kegel exercise the woman needs to tighten the muscles around the vagina and back passage (at the same time) and lift them upwards as if trying to stop the passing of water or wind. For slow contractions, hold for around five seconds then release or one second for quick contractions.

Men can also do pelvic floor exercises in a similar manner described above

This exercise can be done at any time during the day. It can also be done whilst engaged in lovemaking which further enhances pleasure.

### **Self-Esteem booster**

In a study undertaken by the University of Texas, researchers analysed the various responses people gave for engaging in sexual intercourse. They found that boosting

self-esteem was one of 237 reasons people gave for having sex. The study was published in the *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*.

Commenting on these findings Dr Gina Ogden, a sex therapist and marriage and family therapist from Cambridge, Massachusetts stated that generally even individuals who already have good self-esteem say they sometimes have sex to feel even better. "One of the reasons people say they have sex is to feel good about themselves.....great sex begins with self-esteem, and it raises it. If the sex is loving, connected, and what you want, it raises it."

### **Sleep Better**

During orgasm the hormone oxytocin is released. Research shows that this helps to promote sleep. So if you have been wondering why men find it so easy to fall asleep after lovemaking, here's the reason.

Additionally an abundance of scientific evidence exists which demonstrate the health benefits of sleep which includes maintaining a healthy weight and blood pressure amongst the many other positive health outcomes.

If you have difficulty falling asleep at night lovemaking can enhance sleep.

### **Stress reliever**

Researchers from Scotland found that a major health benefit of sex (particularly frequent intercourse) is lower blood pressure and overall stress reduction. Their findings were reported in the journal *Biological Psychology*.

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Being spiritually connected with your husband will inevitably enhance deeper intimacy in your relationship. This will be demonstrable in your emotional, physiological and sexual connection.

### **Spiritual connection – *The God, man & wife triangle***

Spirituality encompasses belief, morality, basic values and behaviours. A spiritually compatible relationship has God at the centre and promotes a union which seeks to build connection to God in each other's life. It is on this premise that the strength of the marriage is built.

Mutual core beliefs shared in a nurturing environment is essential to the long-term survival of a couple's relationship. Therefore building each other up spiritually is vital.

Life itself provides tests which sometimes challenges all that we believe and hold dear both individually and as a couple. It is at such times that a shared belief in God will smooth the way ahead and help to solidify the relationship even during the most difficult and fragile times.

What level of spiritual support do you give to each other? Think about what is important to you in regards to your own spiritual growth and how you would wish your spouse to enable you further. Then ask how you could be of support in their spiritual growth.

Many times after a hard day at work my husband would come home and share the events of his day with me. Interestingly, those would be the very days when I have felt particularly led to pray earnestly for him. Whenever I told him I have been

praying for him during that particular day he would often reply “I know. I felt your prayers”

Here are some measures that we have found beneficial.

- **Special days of fasting and prayer.** We usually fast for half a day on a weekly basis. Sometimes it is for something specific like a personal need or request for an individual, other times we just dedicate that time for thanksgiving to God.
- **Text messages** with promise scriptures or inspirational quotes that we send to each other
- **Audible affirmations and blessings.** My husband often places his hands on my head and offers a spontaneous prayer or blessing over me. Sometimes he just speaks into my life words of favour or passages of scripture relating to God’s promises. I also do the same for him.

### She gains his praise and blessing

*“...Her husband also, and he praises her Proverbs 31:28*

This is a lovely representation of how appreciative this husband is when he considers the virtues of his godly wife. He is so blessed by who she is as a person, who she is to him, who is to her family, household and community that he praises her for it. Not only does he praise her because of the virtues she exhibits as an excellent wife but when he compares her to other women and the wives of his peers she outshines every woman he has ever known!

He is not conservative with his praise but uses the most generous of terms to communicate the high regard he has for her. In an exuberant outburst of affirmation and praise he exudes:

*“Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.” Proverbs 31:29*

In essence he is stating that she is the best woman in the entire world as she is incomparable to every other woman. None of them could ever match up to her. Reading the twenty-one verses in Proverbs 31 that described her we would be inclined to agree with him.

### Reflection

Piety will dispose a man to think meanly of himself, in comparison with other men, but highly of his wife, when he compares her with other women George Lawson

### Exercise:

If you are married write down the best thing that your husband has ever said to you and how that made you feel:

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If you are single write down some of the praise comments you have heard husbands give of their wives. Next, think about how important affirmation is and as a single woman what you would like to be said of you in terms of the impact you are making.

**Praise for wives:**

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**Praise for you:**

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As you reflect on the aspects of women as wives think about the following action points and what impact they could make by implementing these suggestions in your marriage.

**ACTION POINTS**

- Have a weekly family night that you spend alone with your spouse
- Read 1 Corinthians chapter 13 together in your family time together
- Use the 150 Romantic Ideas for Loving Couples by Jansen and Gloria Trotman and share them with your husband. Try at least one of the ideas each week and note the impact it makes in your relationship
- Think of a couple you know who has a positive marriage and spend some time with them
- Look over the lists of books in the bibliography section of the back of this manual for resources that can help to enhance the quality for your marriage
- Seek the counsel of an older female who can be a mentor to you
- Have a trusted prayer partner who will cover your marriage in daily prayer

**A PRAYER**

God of our marriage, our love, our hopes and dreams; we give thanks for your example of love. Because of the love you demonstrated by sending Jesus to die in our place we can learn to love unconditionally. Teach us how to be better wives as we give selflessly to our husbands, committing to doing him good as long as we both

live. May our behavior always be fitting of Godly women that your name will be glorified in our relationships.

We ask for your covering over the lives of our men so that as we commit to becoming the women of virtue you have ordained us to be, they too can rise to the standards that you require of them as priests of our homes.

Teach us how to understand the needs of our husbands and how to adequately meet them. May we learn to listen to your voice of wisdom when we encounter challenges in our marriage so that we are guided by you as we seek positive resolutions.

As we value who you made us to be- as women created in your image, we celebrate our gift of femininity and the blessing this can be to our husbands.

We bring before you also the single women who are desirous of marriage that they will allow you to guide them in their choices. We remember also those women who once married are now separated, divorced or widowed. May they realise that as their Maker you will be a

We pray that as we strive to become women of virtue, the significant men in our lives will see these qualities in us and will also strive to be men of virtue. In your name we pray. Amen

#### **RESOURCES & RECOMMENDED READING**

- Boundaries in Marriage Dr Henry Cloud, Dr John Townsend Zondervan 1999
- Designing Your Dream Husband How to Build Your Man Up and Release Him to His Full Potential  
Amie Dockery Regal Books 2004
- Gender and Grace Women and men in a changing world Mary Stewart van Leeuwen Inter-Varsity Press 1990
- Hand in Hand Devotions for the Later and Lately Married Kay Marshall Strom & Daniel E. Kline Servant Publications 2003
- His Needs, Her Needs Building An Affair-proof Marriage Willard F. Harley Monarch Books 1986
- His & Hers – The Little book of Intimacy Sharon Platt-McDonald Autum House 2011
- Love and Respect The Love she most Desires Dr Emerson Eggerichs Integrity 2004
- Marriage Bible Readings for Special Times Anna and Nick Brooker The Bible Reading Fellowship 2005
- Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus John Grey 0007152590 Harper Element 1992
- Men are from Israel, Women are from Moab Dr Norm Wakefield & Jody Brolsma Kingsway Publications 2000

- **Partners for Life Making a Marriage that Lasts** Gene & Elaine Getz Regal Books 1998
- **The Power of A Praying Wife** Stormie Omartian Kingsway Communications Ltd 2001
- **150 Romantic Ideas for Loving Couples** Jansen and Gloria Trotman Calligrafix Design Ltd. 2002
- [www.godlywives.com](http://www.godlywives.com)

#### **SEMINARS / WORKSHOPS**

- **Becoming a Godly Wife**
- **Enriching your prayer Life with God**
- **Love language for women**
- **Love language for men**
- **Overcoming in Spiritual Warfare**
- **'Honey, I need to talk to you'**
- **The A-Z of Intimacy**
- **'Take your place'**
- **When God gave woman to man**
- **When he does not lead**



# HOMEMAKER



## WOMEN AS HOME MAKERS

Elizabeth was not the tidiest of individuals. Even as a child and during her teenage years her bedroom was always chaotic.

As a wife and mother Elizabeth struggled to maintain an orderly environment. She seemed to thrive in clutter.

As you walked into her bedroom you could tell which side of the room was hers. Her husband's dresser was an orderly assortment of aftershaves, hair and body care products neatly arranged by height and colour. His wardrobe doors were firmly closed and clear of any objects to their access. On the other side of the room Elizabeth's dressing table was strewn with an array of items piled on each other. Her wardrobes were bulging with clothes, bags and shoes all stuffed together so that she was unable to close the wardrobe doors. Her dresser drawers had items of clothing peeking out from the top, bottom and sides of each drawer. Every crevice and corner of the room had items squeezed against the walls. Her daughters rooms were equally cluttered, but her son's room had some semblance of order.

Her husband Jack had spent many years of trying to encourage her to make their home more presentable and had given up on the idea of ever changing her apparent comfort with clutter. Jack's frustration had spilled over when he realised that the cluttered pattern of the bedrooms had spilled over into the living spaces downstairs and soon there was no tranquil environment where he could feel rested or invite his friends. Subsequently he spent a lot of time with woodwork in his garage – clutter free.

One day after spending time searching for a new pair of tights she had bought, having removed the pile of clothes on the floor by her bed she found them hidden amongst the bundle. Elizabeth was cross with herself for the length of time she had lost looking for something that had been misplaced. It was then that she realised that she needed help with being more organised. Many times she had blamed her lack of organisation and messy rooms to a lack of household space. However her bid to convince her husband that they needed a bigger house or an additional build to extend their home fell on deaf ears.

Once when she had asked her husband to help her get more organised, (as he often complained about the clutter and untidy environment) he had suggested sorting through all her household items to see what they could give away or take to the charity stores. Elizabeth had refused as she wanted to hang on to everything she had and had become upset when her husband labelled her as a hoarder.

She decided to ask her friends what they did to keep organised at the next opportunity she had. She did not have wait too long as a few days later she received an invitation from Janet (one of her close friends) to come over for a girly weekend with a number of their other friends. Elizabeth was delighted as Janet had what she called a 'show home'. Not only was it beautiful in its structure, it was equally beautiful in maintenance. Janet had a place for everything. She was so organised

that she knew where every item was. If she needed anything in another part of the house and gave instruction to anyone where to find it, sure enough it was where she said it was and one did not have to dig through clutter to reach it either.

Jack secretly hoped that the weekend visit to Janet's home would help inspire Elizabeth to make a change once and for all. He had noted that friends did not come around much and their daughters spent a lot of time at their friend's home which was not reciprocated. He wondered whether their cluttered home was keeping people away. Unable to contain his subtle wish for an ordered house, when he hugged Elizabeth goodbye for the weekend he encouraged her to enjoy herself and 'pick up a few tips' whilst she was there. Elizabeth had laughed but was a little envious that she was being compared to her friend. Nevertheless she took Jack's comment seriously.

The weekend away turned out to be a turning point for Elizabeth. Not only was she wowed by the palatial appearance of Janet's home (including the children's bedrooms) but also with the efficiency with which she ran the house whilst being a mother, career woman and dedicated wife. How did she do it all and not look frazzled? Elizabeth felt deflated but managed to find the confidence to discuss her organisation skills and her husband's poor view of her homemaking skills. Janet was gentle and understanding and as a genuine friend did not seek to make Elizabeth feel any further diminished but sought to empower her.

As part of their weekend together, a shopping trip and spa day had been organised for the Sunday. The spa was certainly needed as they had shopped till they almost dropped. During the shopping expedition Janet pointed out some of the hardware stores she visited and the items she purchased to keep each room in the house tidy. Elizabeth followed suit and what she was unable to buy and bring back with her she made a note of to order on line when she returned home.

Fast forward a year later and we see Elizabeth sitting in a home that has had a make-over. It was painful at first particularly having to give some of her belongings away and throw other things out. Elizabeth realised that she had indeed been a hoarder as her husband had stated. She had developed the habit of holding on to things following a childhood where funds were low and resources were scarce. Subsequently her mother had held on to household items including food long after they were no longer fit for purpose in an attempt to make ends meet. Throwing things away even when they were no longer seen as useful was considered wasteful. With this mindset, Elizabeth had held on to everything and even felt it hard to give anything away to charity 'just in case' she needed it sometime in the future. No wonder her home had become so cluttered.



Now when you walked into her bedroom you knew which side was hers from the 'girly products' on her orderly side of the room. Her daughter's bedrooms were equally transformed and her husband and children now had their friends visiting more frequently. Happy home.

**Discussion:**

- Do you think it matters that much whether you have an orderly household or not? Surely it's not a matter of salvation so why place an emphasis on it?
- What do you think about being good stewards of time if we spend a lot of time looking for items that are lost because of clutter and poor organisation?
- Do you think Elizabeth's love of clutter and lack of organisation was affecting her marriage and family life? If so, how?
- What message do you think she was passing on to her daughters about their living space?
- Do you know anyone who lived like Elizabeth before the home makeover? How would you approach that individual?
- Is there anything that resonates with you about Elizabeth's homemaking skills or are you more like Janet?
- What did you learn about Janet's approach to Elizabeth in order to assist her to become a better homemaker?



## WOMEN AS HOME MAKERS

“Intelligent Christian women may use their talents to the very highest account. . . . Wives and mothers should in no case neglect their husbands and their children, but they can do much without neglecting home duties. . . .” —Welfare Ministry, 164.

*“She supplies her house with wool and linen and does her work eagerly...” Proverbs 31: 13*

*“She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants” Proverbs 31:15*

*“...For all her household is clothed with scarlet. She makes tapestry for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple.” (Prov. 31:21-22)*

*“She watches over the ways of her household...” (Proverbs 31:27,*

### **At home with the virtuous woman:**

Most women reading the wide ranging domestic skills of this Virtuous Woman would be in awe that she gets so much done within a 24 hour day. She seems to have it all together, not only for herself but for her family and entire household including the domestic help that she has. I smile when I read that she has maidservants because it would be hard to believe that one woman could possibly do so much by herself or accomplish at least half the tasks recorded in this chapter.

Just taking a look at her home life would leave your eyebrows permanently arched in surprise:

- Everything seems to run in perfect order like clockwork
- There is a place for everything and everything is in its place
- Her child appear orderly and well turned out
- Her husband is the ideal man who never complains about his wife but instead exudes praise for her and responds appreciatively
- She works from dawn to dusk attending to household chores
- She plans her days work and manages her household well
- She participates in the cooking even though she has domestic help
- She does community work and volunteers to help others
- She is creative both in the home and in external business matters
- She is a wife, a mother, a business woman and a house wife without the neglect of any of those roles
- She is the ultimate energetic multi-tasker with a well-kept home *and*
- She manages to looks good 24 / 7 both in the home and in public

It's easy to look at this glowing account of this exceptionally organised woman and what must have been a show home, and feel bad about your own housekeeping skills or guilty that you don't seem to have everything together.



Whilst I don't wish to minimize the giftedness of this incredible Proverbs 31 woman I realise that she works intelligently by delegating tasks and getting help where it is needed – handmaids, an inviting thought. Although some professional women today have domestic help, many women can't afford to get cleaners and housekeepers to assist them with household tasks.

Occasionally when I get very busy with work meetings and assignments related to my professional job role at the expense of household chores, I quickly remind myself and my husband that at least the Proverbs 31 woman had maidservants!

However when I compiled the list of all her attributes in *Unveiling the Virtuous Women* (in the Introductory chapter of this manual) I wondered if this ideal woman was so busy with the exhausting list of activities she participated in, what did her handmaidens do?

I often also wondered whether her husband rubbed her feet at the end of the day! Well he should do. At least after sitting with the elders at the gates and hearing the respect she brought him, I can't imagine that he would need any prompting to cater to her needs and offer some well deserved pampering!

For those single ladies reading this, you may wish to invest in a home foot spa so that at least when you come home after a busy and tiring day your feet can feel appreciated.

## An organised household

*"Since both men and women have a part in homemaking, boys as well as girls should gain a knowledge of household duties. To make a bed and put a room in order, to wash dishes, to prepare a meal, to wash and repair his own clothing, is a training that need not make any boy less manly; it will make him happier and more useful" (E.G.White – Letters to Young Lovers)*

Keeping an organised household is a team effort with all family members doing their part. It is clear, though that good homemaking skills need to be modelled. As we saw from the case study Elizabeth struggled to keep her home organised and tidy and this had a negative impact on her household. Elizabeth's daughter also

modelled her tendency to hoard and clutter. However when Elizabeth took timely advice from her best friend, embraced some good housekeeping tips and invested in resources to help her, it had a positive impact on the family.

The National Association of Professional Organizers reports:

- we don't use 80 percent of the stuff we keep
- we wear 20 percent of the clothes we own
- the other 80 percent of our clothes hang there just in case
- 25 percent of adults say they pay bills late because they lose them.

If any of the above applies to you then what follows might be of help.

The *She Knows Home and Garden* magazine produced an article titled [52 Ideas to organize your home: An organizing tip a week](#) itemising 52 actions suggested to maintain an organised house. These can be found at:

<http://www.sheknows.com/home-and-gardening/articles/6420/52-ideas-to-organize-your-home-an-organizing-tip-a-week>

Referring to the list of 52 interventions the article goes on to state:

*“The goal of organizing isn't to make your home pristine, but rather to make your life more calm and functional. Work with the above ideas and you will end up with less clutter, a neater home, improved productivity and - most important of all - more quality time for yourself and your family.” (She Knows – Home & Garden)*



Another wonderful website that provides guidance for homemakers is: [www.biblicalthomemaking.com](http://www.biblicalthomemaking.com) Among the ideas shared, are tips for clutter busting, organizing the larders, pantries and also how to get your children to follow suit.

The Women of Virtue Seminars - *Creative home – creative life* and *Get Organized!* cover areas such as Productivity in the Home and Prioritising and organising your day with tips for your ‘to-do’ list.

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## Healthy Living In A Safe Environment

### How to have an eco friendly home.

In his book *Planet Wise – Dare To Care For God's World*, Dave Bookless makes the case for being good stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us. He makes this statement. “This earth is our God-given home, and the creator cares about his house-guests’ behaviour”.



Developing eco-friendly habits in the way we manage our households as women helps us to become good stewards of our resources and better home makers. This segment will tell us how. But first, here are some eco facts about how to make your household healthier and save money in the process.

#### Did you know?

- A 2007 Canadian study indicated increased asthma rates from extra dust when rubbish was collected less frequently. (*Asthma.ca Asthma Society of Canada*) The World Health Organization guidelines recommend that rubbish is collected weekly in countries like Britain.
- You can cut emissions by simply switching off electrical supplies when not in use, replacing an old boiler for a more energy efficient one or not over-filling the kettle when making a hot drink
- Lighting up the home accounts for 20 per cent of the average electricity bill. Energy saving bulbs which will add savings on your annual energy bill. Additionally because an energy saving bulb last up to 10 times longer than a standard bulb, you won't need to replace it as often which could realise you a saving of around £45. Add that figure for each light bulb in your home and you can accrue a significant saving. Good news for credit crunch.
- Residential households in the U.S. spend more than 5 billion dollars annually on standby power alone-which is 5% of all the electricity consumed

Looking for some economic and green tips for living in a safe, environmentally friendly and cost effective household? Try the following:

#### ECONOMIC HOUSE KEEPING TIPS

- Save used paper or plastic bags to line your dustbin or dispose of rubbish hygienically. If one ton of plastic bags were to be reused, the results would be dramatic. The energy equivalent of 11 barrels of oil would be saved, and 17 trees spared.
- Unplug appliances when away on holiday.
- Set outside lights on timers or motion sensors rather than having them on throughout the night
- Save paper. Go online to view and pay bills
- Recycle your old newspapers

- Exchange your plastic bags for cloth bags which last longer, are more economical in the long term and will cut down on the amount of paper and plastic in our landfills
- Each time you bring something new into your environment try finding something old to eliminate if possible in order to prevent a build-up of clutter
- Take shorter showers to reduce water wastage
- Don't keep the tap running whilst brushing your teeth
- Don't let the water run needlessly whilst washes dishes
- Use energy efficient setting on the dishwasher
- Maintain water heaters in your home to save on energy bills
- Keeping fridges and freezers full where possible helps to maintain the minimum temperature

### ***IS YOUR HOME MAKING YOU SICK?***

Scientific research continues to alert us to the environmental impact of modern-day lifestyles. Additionally, some of the commonly used domestic products have come under scrutiny in relation to their long term use and our safety.

One such research assessing the impact of domestic chemicals - The Environmental Protection Agency states: *"50% of all our illnesses can be traced to indoor pollution, which is ten times more toxic than its outdoor counterpart"*.

Chemicals and harmful substances in the home have been linked to the following:

fatigue, headaches, allergies, skin irritations, depression, memory loss, confusion, respiratory problems, asthma, nausea, dizziness, changes in genetic structure, birth defects and cancer.

On the list of 'hazardous' products in the home are: Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), formaldehyde, phosphates, ammonia, chlorine bleach, petroleum solvents, abrasives, aerosol propellants, deodorisers and high emissions from electromagnetic fields.

It has been suggested that many ingredients in cleaning products make indoor air unhealthy to breathe, irritate the skin and eyes, harm the respiratory tract, as well as damage the natural environment. Comparative studies have been undertaken on the use of biodegradable, least-toxic cleaning products.

### **Eco friendly cleaning solutions:**

Suggested suitable eco-friendly alternatives are naturally derived cleaning products like:

- tea tree solutions
- baking soda,
- white vinegar,
- salt,
- essential oils,
- lemon juice and other citrus solvents which are safe and cost effective.



## Healthy living in your immediate environment

Reduce electromagnetic fields by doing the following:

- Avoid electric blankets
- Sit at least 4-5 ft from your TV screen
- Avoid sleeping next to electronic equipment.
- Avoid over exposure to electromagnetic fields by sitting 4 feet away from operating appliances
- Sit 2 feet away from computer screens and take regular breaks from the computer
- Cut down on microwave use. Stand away from microwave when it is in use and wait for 1-2 minutes before eating the food.
- Place a cushion on lap when working with a laptop computer

## Mould and mildew prevention

- To reduce excess moisture fix leaks promptly.
- Increase ventilation naturally by opening windows and using fans.
- Clean and dry spills on carpets quickly to prevent mold growth

## Avoid artificial air fresheners

- These contain multiple chemicals and hazardous solvents to achieve the fragrance.
- Diluted essential oils are a safer option

## Don't idle vehicles

Idling cars release more pollution than moving cars and the exhaust fumes affects both health and environment.

## Healthy Living Environment

Your living space can impact your energy levels. Research from the American Demographic Society found that cluttered, disorganized and unpleasant surroundings are energy drainers. Their data revealed Americans wasting more than 9 million hours daily looking for lost and misplaced items! This they indicated was a source of emotional and physical drain.

Research on the impact of sights, sounds and smells has yielded interesting data. For example, citrus smells were found to help overcome feelings of tiredness by releasing an energizing brain compound called norepinephrine which has a reviving effect. (*Janice K. Kiecolt-Glaser et al; Olfactory Influences on Mood and Autonomic, Endocrine, and Immune Function Psychoneuroendocrinology 2008 April 33;(3): 328-339*)

## ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH TIPS

Here are three eco-friendly ways to enable you to enhance healthy living in a safe environment.

- For non-toxic cleaning of dirty or moldy surfaces, spray distilled white vinegar and leave for 10-15 minutes before rinsing
- A mixture of salt and lemon juice act as a good non-toxic stain remover for dishes and cutting boards
- Baking soda as a non-toxic cleaning agent for surfaces and household items.

You might find other effective eco friendly practices which you can add to this list.

### PERSONAL CARE NATURAL PRODUCTS

Here is a sample of some eco friendly UK products to try:

PRODUCT	INGREDIENTS / COMMENTS
<b>Bentley Organic Hair Care</b> <a href="http://www.bentleyorganic.com">www.bentleyorganic.com</a>	Provide a range of Soil Association certified organic products <b>Conditioner</b> - Sunflower & Shea with Chamomile Aqua, Cetearyl Alcohol, Betaine, Coco-Glucoside, Butyrospermum Parkii (Shea Butter)*, Olea Europaea (Olive) Fruit Oil*, Helianthus Annuus (Sunflower) Seed Oil*, Cocos Nucifera (Coconut) Oil*, Potassium Sorbate, Simmondsia Chinensis (Jojoba) Seed Oil*, Aurantium Dulcis (Orange) Peel Oil*, Citrus Medica Limonum (Lemon) Peel, Chamomilla Recutita (Matricaria) Flower Extract*, Alcohol Denat*, Limonene*, Glycerin, Citrus Aurantium Dulcis (Orange) Fruit Extract, Citrus Grandis (Grapefruit) Fruit Extract, Reticulta (Tangerine) Fruit Extract, Tocopherol, Xanthan Gum, Latic Acid, Citric Acid, Ascorbic Acid.  * Certified Organically Grown Ingredient
<b>Dishmate</b> <a href="http://www.earthfriendlyproducts.co.uk">www.earthfriendlyproducts.co.uk</a>	Purified water, coconut based surfactant, salt, almond and cherry oils.  <b>Dishmate Almond</b> is fragranced with almond and cherry essential oils. It is a powerful neutral pH plant-based washing-up liquid which is mild on sensitive skin.
<b>Green People Toothpaste</b>	Calcium carbonate (chalk), Aqua (pure water),

<p><a href="http://www.greenpeople.co.uk">www.greenpeople.co.uk</a></p>	<p>micro-filtered), Glycerin (derived from plant materials), Xanthan gum (corn sugar gum), *Mentha piperita (peppermint oil), Ascorbic acid (vitamin C), Commiphora myrrha (resin from myrrh), *d-Limonene (from essential oils). *Organically grown</p>
<p><b>Lavera</b> <a href="http://www.lavera.co.uk">www.lavera.co.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Lavera</b> was the first manufacturer worldwide to produce 100% mineral-based <b>organic and natural sun protection</b>, which includes creams, sprays and tanning products. <b>Lavera</b> products are 100% free from synthetic filters.</p>
<p><b>Male organics</b> <a href="http://www.male-organics.com">www.male-organics.com</a></p>	<p><b>Male-Organics.com</b> reportedly stock the best and most sustainable male grooming products available in the UK. <b>Shave Now</b> (shaving cream) is a light cream with a lovely aroma of grapefruit, mandarin, clove and geranium. Contains Decyl glucoside a natural plant derived surfactant.</p>
<p><b>Natracare</b></p>	<p>Natracare provides organic cotton wipes, natural sanitary pads and panty liners, certified organic pure cotton tampons. All products are made from chlorine-free, natural and sustainable biodegradable materials and are free from plastics, latex, polypropylene, parabens and petroleum</p>
<p><b>Nutshell Natural Paint</b> <a href="http://www.nutshellpaints.co.uk">www.nutshellpaints.co.uk</a></p>	<p>Nutshell uses only naturally sourced raw materials including oils, herbs and minerals. Does not contain VOCs (Volatile Organic Compounds). Nutshell Natural Paints are microporous, and allow moisture to pass through the surface . Rooms painted with Nutshell Emulsions do not have to be vacated during painting</p>
<p><b>SoOrganic</b> <a href="http://www.SoOrganic.com">www.SoOrganic.com</a></p>	<p><b>Natracare baby wipes</b> Pure organic cotton wipes with organic apricot oil, chamomile and linden <b>Creamy coconut cleanser</b> A synergistic blend of dynamic plant oils, this organic skin-conditioning cleanser combines coconut &amp; olive oils with essential oils</p>

<p><b>Yes pure intimacy</b>  <a href="http://www.yesyesyes.org">www.yesyesyes.org</a></p>	<p>Made from plant extracts, Yes is the world's first and only range of certified organic intimacy products. Not tested on animals and has no parabens, glycerine, glycols or mineral oil</p>
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### Eco health tips for a 'green home'

- **Appliances.** Be energy efficient. Before buying another appliance check out suitable alternatives. [www.coolproducts.eu](http://www.coolproducts.eu) or [www.which.co.uk](http://www.which.co.uk)
- **Electricity.** For green energy visit [www.greenelectricity.org](http://www.greenelectricity.org)
- **Foods. Chose local over imported.** For seasonal products try [www.farmersmarkets.net](http://www.farmersmarkets.net)
- **Grow your own.** Allotments, herbs and vegetable gardens are great for organic products [www.nsalg.org.uk](http://www.nsalg.org.uk)
- **Heating.** Turn down the thermostat . Try [www.eco-boiler.com](http://www.eco-boiler.com)
- **Junk food.** Most fast foods, takeaways and ready meals have excess packaging, and high carbon footprint. Avoid them. Get cooking with inspirational cookbooks!
- **Plastic bags.** Reduce plastic waste and stock up on reusable bags. Visit [www.plasticbagfree.com](http://www.plasticbagfree.com)
- **Recharge.** How to reuse, repair reduce or recycle batteries. Visit [www.recyclethis](http://www.recyclethis)
- **Vintage.** Forget latest fashions and visit [www.clothesagency.com](http://www.clothesagency.com) and [www.fasionexchange.co.uk](http://www.fasionexchange.co.uk)

**ACTION POINTS**

- Look at the above listed areas again and make a list of the ones that interest you
- Once you have visited the websites make a note of the advice and place the suggestions on your to-do list of activities
- Commit to trying at least one of these suggestions per week / month as your schedule, family life and resources allow

**REFLECTION**

Reflecting on the Proverbs 31 woman’s homemaking skills think of what you can doing to become more organized as a homemaker. Write these in the space below.

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### **A PRAYER**

God of our home, our family life and all that we have and own. Be our protector, our defender and our keeper. Thank you that you gift us with so many wonderful resources. We accept these bounties as you lavish them upon us each day. Help us to be good stewards of these blessings. Teach us how to manage our time wisely and balance our life so that we make effective use of every 24 hours with which you bless us.

Thank you God that you have placed us in the family setting we now experience. As we grow and mature in these settings may we be beacons of light to those around us; becoming the Virtuous Women that you have created us to be. In your name we pray. Amen.

### **RESOURCES & RECOMMENDED READING**

- Managing Your Home (Chapter 9) in Life Management for Busy Women
- Life Management for Busy Women Elizabeth George Harvest House Publishers 2002
- Eco Health – Healthy Living in a Safe Environment Sharon Platt-McDonald Autumn House 2012
  
- <http://littlehouseonthevalley.com/2013/01/winter-decorating-ideas-to-bring-coziness-and-warmth/>
- [http://www.creativehomemaking.com/organizing/closet\\_organizing.shtml](http://www.creativehomemaking.com/organizing/closet_organizing.shtml)
- [www.biblicalthomemaking.com](http://www.biblicalthomemaking.com)

### **SEMINARS / WORKSHOPS**

- Creative home – creative life (part 1)
- Get Organized! (part 1)

- Healthy Living in a Safe Environment
- Making the ordinary fun (part 1)
- The Household Queen



**PROVIDER**

## WOMEN AS PROVIDERS

Rosealine had always been thrifty with money and frugal with whatever resource she had. Growing up she had come from a less than affluent family. In fact she never knew of a time when, along with her siblings, she did not have to go without something. They all had 'hand me down's' whether it was clothes, shoes or accessories. She remembered rarely receiving anything new throughout her childhood.

Labelled as poor, Rosealine's family was looked down on in the neighbourhood and as children they were bullied at both school and church. However, Rosealine did not let this impact her negatively and used the fact that they did not have much, to value what they did have and be extra careful with resources.

She observed the wisdom of her mother who also seemed to be able to provide a good meal no matter how little money and food they had. Equally the household items though old were well preserved. These lessons would prove to be beneficial in later years.

As Rosealine pursued her career she did well and God blessed her with a good job. Yet she never forgot where she was coming from. Rather than let her humble beginnings cause her to become materialistic or extravagant with money, she kept a tight rein on her resources. She soon realised that if she budgeted well and managed her finances by planning her expenditure, she could save steadily and have what she termed as 'rainy day' money for emergencies.

When she got married and had children she continued her principles of good stewardship and shared them with her family.

During the worldwide economic downturn which occurred in 2008 a number of her friends and colleagues struggled to make ends meet. However as she had always learnt how to be careful with money, not wasteful with food and take care of their resources, Rosaline found that both herself and her family were still able to cope.



When her husband was made redundant and was subsequently out of full time work for 6 years things became even more difficult. However, in spite of it all, the family still had regular meals and the bills were paid albeit sometimes late. She learned to adapt in hard times and provide for her family even in the absence of her husband having a job. They were able to survive on their savings and still had a little rainy day money left. When the economy began to pick up and her husband finally got a job they realised how blessed they were with the wisdom God had given them to be good stewards of resources which paid dividends through lean times.

**Discussion questions:**



- What were some of the key stewardship skills that Rosealine developed throughout the years?
- What were some of the strengths Rosealine demonstrated which enabled her to become a good provider?
- What can you learn from this case study that could help you provide for your family in difficult times?
- If you feel that there are areas as a provider that you can improve on, think of ways that you could demonstrate better stewardship in the way you provide for your family.
- How would you advise another woman who is struggling to provide for her family in the absence of her husband losing his job?



## WOMEN AS PROVIDERS

**A Woman of Virtue recognises the needs of her family and responds appropriately.**

*“She provides food for her household...” Proverbs 31:15*

*“She watches over the ways of her household” Proverbs 31:27*

Both of these verses give an indication of the aspects of this Virtuous Woman’s role in her household. In verse 15 we note her culinary skills are used to serve meals which nourish her family and extend hospitality to others. Then in verse 27 we get a glimpse of her broader supervisory role under the description ‘watches over’. This denotes her ability to oversee, manage and respond appropriately to the expressed, felt and perceived needs of each family member. In so doing she provides direction, nurture and spiritual instruction.

It is important to state that women are ‘providers’ in different contexts. For single women, they may be the provider for themselves or for their child or children if they are the sole parent. Married women are also providers in the context of their marital role as supporter and helper for their husbands.

### Provision through nutrition

*“Many mothers who deplore the intemperance that exists everywhere do not look deep enough to see the cause. Too often it may be traced to the home table. Many a mother... is daily setting before her household rich and highly seasoned food, which tempts the appetite and encourages overeating.....” - E. G. White, in Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene, pp. 75, 76*

The phrase ‘Nutritional Gatekeepers’ has been used to identify the individual who cooks the family meals and is responsible for the nutrition of the household. Research over the years has revealed the extent to which this influences the family concept of nutrition and the subsequent choices they make. This is what they found:

- An average of 72% of the quantity and quality of food children eat is estimated to be either directly or indirectly determined by these nutritional gatekeepers. *(Brian Wansick 2006 – “Nutritional Gatekeepers and the 72% Solution,” Journal of American Dietetic Association)*
- The gatekeeper was found to have both a direct and indirect impact on what their children eat outside the home. This was demonstrable when their

children's lunches were made and equally whenever the child was given money to make their own choices about their lunch and the snacks they wanted. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/17/health/17well.html>

- The nutritional gatekeeper also influenced the restaurant orders of their family. This was evident in what they recommended to other family members and by what they themselves ordered. (*Safety, Nutrition, and Health in Early Education* by Catherine Robertson)

The British Nutrition Foundation has produced guidance on healthy eating for the Life Stages of men, women, children, teenagers and older adults. Drawing on years of research the data identifies the recommended dietary guidelines for nutrition across the spectrum of life development for both males and females. It highlights the importance of adequate nutrition and its impact on the physiological, intellectual, emotional and social wellbeing of an individual.



Concerns about the eating habits of children and teenagers and the level of nutrition they were getting from home meals, led the British Nutrition Foundation to conduct a survey. This survey was designed to ascertain the number of children who ate breakfast on a given morning. This was what they found on the day of the survey:

- 8 per cent of primary school children said they hadn't eaten breakfast that morning
- this increased to 24 per cent (almost a quarter) in 11-14 year olds
- 32 per cent (over a third) of 14-16 year olds skipped breakfast that day

When questioned about their general eating habits including whether they had breakfast every morning, 6 per cent of primary school children, 19 per cent of 11-14 year olds and a quarter of 14-16 year olds reported that they did not eat breakfast every day.

The implementation of the Life Stages dietary guidance is to empower households to take charge of their nutrition and to encourage individual accountability for dietary choices in relations to their health and wellbeing.

#### **Exercise:**

Visit the following website to ascertain the dietary guideline that is required for your Life Stage and that of your household members:

<http://www.nutrition.org.uk/healthyliving/lifestages>

God's plan for our wellbeing through dietary choices is one for which He has given guidance. Note the following statement:

*“God will cooperate with His children in preserving their health, if they eat with care, refusing to put unnecessary burdens on the stomach. He has graciously made the path of nature sure and safe, wide enough for all who walk in it. He has given for our sustenance the wholesome and health-giving productions of the earth.” - E. G. White, Counsels on Diet and Foods, p.39*

There is however more to providing a family meal than just the nutritive value of a home cooked meal. The social impact of eating together has far reaching influence. An article in The Huffington Post by Dr Mark Hyman April 2014 identified the following benefits from sitting around the family table to eat together.

- Children who have regular meals with their parents excel in all aspects of their life, from better grades, to healthier relationships, to staying out of trouble.
- They are 42 percent less likely to drink.
- 50 percent less likely to smoke and 66 percent less like to smoke marijuana.
- Regular family dinners protect girls from bulimia, anorexia, and diet pills.
- Family dinners also reduce the incidence of childhood obesity.

Whilst Proverbs 31:15 refer to the Virtuous Woman providing for her family’s health needs through nutrition, there are a number of other factors that impact family wellbeing. From a wholistic standpoint this relates to the wider maintenance of body, mind and spirit through nurturing the physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and social aspects of the family. This has been possible through Lifestyle intervention programmes such as NEWSTART which is an acronym for Nutrition, Exercise, Water, Sunlight, Temperance (balance) Air, Rest and Trust in God. Other lifestyle programmes like CREATION HEALTH and CELEBRATIONS incorporate the aspects of social support, personal integrity and emotional wellbeing.

Many people have found these programmes beneficial for enhancing the wellbeing of their families. As a result of the reported physical and emotional changes, some individuals have even gone on to make long term decisions for their spiritual lives including commencing church attendance and recommitting to God.

Reflection:

We are reminded that "one of the greatest aids in perfecting pure and noble characters... is sound physical health." Therefore, "it is of the highest importance that men and women be instructed in the science of human life, and the best means of preserving and acquiring health."--*Messages to Young People*, p. 233

## She watches over her household

*A Woman of Virtue protects the family interests*

Proverbs 31:27 gives a picture of the Virtuous Woman carefully and intently watching over and seeing everything that is going on in her household. She is able to interpret what she observes and come to wise conclusions about what she sees. She keeps an eye on every aspect of her household and is vigilant and proactive. She is perceptive, sensitive, discerning and responsive in her evaluation.

In the New Testament the value of women being influential in their household was also highlighted. This is particularly evident in the aspect of 'guiding' the household that we see in this scripture.

*"I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." 1 Timothy 5:14*

The duties of home life were also such that it kept the woman engaged and this was accompanied by exemplary behaviour as indicated in the following scripture:

*"To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed." Titus 2:5*

In her book Life Management for Busy Women, Elizabeth George outlines what she states as 10 Disciplines for Home Management for women who are providing for their families needs. She lists them as follows:

1. You should be dedicated to managing your home
2. You shall be a woman of prayer
3. You shall be aware of the basics
4. You shall follow a schedule
5. You shall be organized
6. You shall be there
7. You shall be the best
8. You shall be reading
9. You shall be frugal
10. You shall be creative



The principles in the list above prompted an time of personal reflection for me. I went through the list and assessed where I was in relation to the above 10 principles, then personalised them to make them relevant to me. Here were the questions I asked myself in my assessment of the 10 key areas.

1. Am I offering due diligence and service to God through the way I look after my home? Am I rendering a spiritual service or a half hearted one?
2. Am I praying about every aspect of my home life and asking God to go before me in all my tasks including making decisions about my home?

3. When I consider the basic needs such as clothing, food, safety, cleanliness and other responsibilities to my family, is God being honoured in my actions?
4. Is my daily, weekly, monthly and annual schedule balanced and reflective of a temperate lifestyle? Am I organized regarding the smooth running of the home including when bills are due, how they are paid, etc?
5. Is my life one constant rush trying to catch up with outstanding chores or do I know when it is time for things to get done and do them promptly?
6. Am I away from home more than I am present? If I were to schedule the amount of time I am out of the home would it be a cause for concern?
7. Am I putting my whole heart into everything I do and doing it with excellence as did the Proverbs 31 woman?
8. Am I reading material than can improve my skills as a homebuilder and provider?
9. How do I handle money? Do I demonstrate thrift and wise management of the resources God has given?
10. Am I open to opportunities to be creative and develop my skills in the home?

**Exercise:**  
Use the above list and subsequent questions to reflect on your own circumstances. Then in the space below write down the areas in which you feel improvement is needed.

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**God’s directives for providers**

In overseeing the needs of her household and responding effectively and efficiently she follows God guidelines for a biblical home.

## She builds her home

*“Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands” Proverbs 14:1*

## She provides wisdom to her family

*“..wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established, And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches.” Proverbs 24:3-4*

## Women as carers

*Taking care if you are a carer*

Providing care for a dependent family member can take its toll if you do not have sufficient support networks around you. Carers UK - The Voice of Carers is a national organisation that offers guidance, support and help for families who care for a relative who is dependent on them.

Carers UK -The Voice of Carers\* revealed the following statistics:

- Every day another 6,000 people take on a caring responsibility - that equals over 2 million people each year.
- 58% of carers are women and 42% are men
- Over 1 million people care for more than one person



People providing high levels of care are twice as likely to be permanently sick or disabled

- 625,000 people suffer mental and physical ill health as a direct consequence of the stress and physical demands of caring.
- Over 1.3 million people provide over 50 hours of care per week

[\\*http://www.carersuk.org/professionals/resources/briefings/item/2729-facts-about-carers-2012%20%20](http://www.carersuk.org/professionals/resources/briefings/item/2729-facts-about-carers-2012%20%20)

It can sometimes be overwhelming for women who are carers of dependent adults or children especially if it is a long term or lifetime role. Seeking the support of agencies such as Carers UK and connecting with the support groups and initiatives they provide, will help to sustain and safeguard the wellbeing of the carer and those being cared for.

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## Value what God has made you to be

### ***A Woman of Virtue values her role as provider***

One of the enemy's tactics used to distract us from God's plan is tempting us to compare our lives and circumstances with those around us. It is important to understand what God has equipped and called us to do and embrace that calling gladly.

Several years ago, I attended a training session on how to be successful in life. This was particularly aimed at women in leadership. The training consultant shared with us an experience she encountered in her last training session with a group of women. Accustomed to delivering training across five continents she interacts with women from all walks of life and in various settings. She felt that this gave her a broad platform on which to develop her consultancy and also a wider perspective on the global needs of women.

She explained that on one particular training event as an ice breaker she had asked the women to introduce themselves stating their name and profession. This was to be a telling exercise on how women viewed themselves and what they deemed to be important.

One by one the women recounted their job roles and titles to the appreciating nods and smiles of the other women in the group. Amongst them was a housewife who sat quietly listening to what sounded like women far above her. With each grand introduction and important sounding job she sunk lower and lower in her chair feeling somewhat inadequate. She began wondering what in fact she was doing there sitting amongst these obviously very important women and feeling out of their league. The consultant noted this woman's hunched position and realised that she was feeling somewhat out of place in the group. Wanting to reassure her she tried to engage with her but the woman kept her eyes downcast.

Wanting to disappear into a corner this concerned housewife wondered what the response of the other women would be when she announced that she was simply a housewife and felt sure that she would be looked down upon. Being a Christian she breathed a prayer and asked God to represent her so that she would feel as valued as He made her to be. Realising that her turn was coming up to introduce herself, she asked God to help her accept who she was and to share with the women something that they would be able to take away as valuable. In that moment God gave her a revelation of the importance of her role as mother, wife and provider for her home and in fact how instrumental she had been over the years to their current level of success. This gave her a boost and she adjusted her posture to a more confident pose. She saw herself as God saw her, a woman of value whom God had given the privilege to positively impact her home. Being a housewife was in fact a significant role. As far as she was concerned, she was as equally important as all those women sitting around with their high flying careers.

When her turn came to introduce herself the consultant trainer noticed that she sat upright in her chair squared her shoulders and stated "Hi my name is... and I'm a



domestic consultant!” Now having not been familiar with that line of career the other women were curious as to what the job role of a domestic consultant entailed. The woman smiled and proudly explained that having brought up her four children whom she nurtured through the formative years and into successful careers, she was now an expert in childrearing. Then after many years of keeping an organized household, maintaining the family budget and providing for the household needs she was now a proficient homemaker. Added to that, following many years of marriage looking after her husband, finding ways to keep the relationship fresh so that he was still smiling – in her direction, she was identified as a supportive and engaging wife. Then to top it all, she had gained significant skills in people management negotiating and fulfilling the diverse requests of husband, children and in-laws. That array of skills constituted a classification as a domestic consultant.

When she concluded her introduction there was a spontaneous applause. The point was clearly made. Providing for your home is a skill in itself. The role of a housewife is indeed significant.

## Reflection

How do you see yourself and your current role as a women / provider of your home?

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## ACTION POINTS

- Use the case study at the beginning of this chapter as a discussion opener in your women’s ministries programme that focus on the role of women.
- In your group work sessions, you may wish to share your individual experiences and observations about your role as provider in the home.
- Think about how the roles of women may have changed over the years and give

your opinions on why this has happened. Take some time to think about how this currently impacts the lives of Christian women.

#### **A PRAYER**

God of our provisions, our gifting and all that we are and hope to be; we praise your name. For your watchful care over our households for the wisdom that you give and the strength to undertake our daily tasks; we give thanks.

As we think about the place we currently live and call home, we invite your presence to transform our dwelling places so that it is what you would desire it to be. May our lives be a blessing to those around us and to those who enter our homes that they may see the love of Christ reflected in us. We pray for family members who are not yet of the household of faith that they will be won by our kindness, our good behavior and our unconditional love. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen

#### **RESOURCES & RECOMMENDED READING**

- Life Management for Busy Women Elizabeth George Harvest House Publishers 2002
- The Adventist Home E.G.White Ellen White Estate 1952
- What on Earth am I Doing? Pattiejean Brown 1 55452 437 7 Guardian Books 2009

#### **SEMINARS / WORKSHOPS**

- Women of Virtue as Providers
- A woman's Role
- Creative home – creative life (part 2)
- Get organized (part 2)
- Making the ordinary fun (part 2)
- What's in your cupboards?
- Tips My Mother Taught Me!



**WOMEN AS  
MOTHERS**

## WOMEN AS MOTHERS

From the time Jonathan was born Ruby and her husband, Clement, knew that their child was different to their other two children. To begin with he was quite premature and required several months in hospital. When he was finally allowed home they were anxious about caring for him as he was a sickly child. They had waited several years to have another child and as Ruby had suffered three previous miscarriages before Jonathan, he was considered a special and 'longed for' child. This was particularly so as the doctors had informed Ruby that she would not be able to have any more children. Subsequently when she became pregnant both she and Clement were ecstatic.

As he grew up Jonathan became a wilful child. His parents often made excuses for his behaviour. They found it hard to discipline him and say no to his demands because they did not want to hurt his feelings and felt that he had already suffered too much as a child due to ill health. Therefore they told themselves that if they demonstrated more affection to him rather than having to correct him all the time they felt he would feel better cared for.

However when friends, family members, church and school associates began to complain about Jonathan's behaviour, Clement realised his son was becoming more difficult and decided that something needed to be done. He suggested to Ruby that as she was with him most of the time she needed to set more boundaries for him in order to instil some discipline. As Clement's work took him away from the home frequently, Ruby felt overwhelmed with the task of trying to set boundaries and enact discipline. She found it easier to let Jonathan do what he wanted most of the time.

However this lack of discipline led to Jonathan becoming completely out of control, lacking in respect for authority and choosing friends who took him down the wrong path. As a consequence he made poor decisions which changed the trajectory of his life.

Finally when Jonathan found himself in court again, he was eventually issued with an anti-social behavioural order (ASBO). When he failed to comply with the terms of the ASBO and went on to become involved in a robbery he was arrested and placed in a Young Offenders Institution. One day whilst speaking with his social worker she asked him why he found it difficult to respond positively to authority, obey rules and respect boundaries. He stated that he was not used to these expectations as his parents had not taught him how. He then surprised the social worker by saying that he knew his parents loved and cared for him, but would have wished they had not given in to his demands as much as they did and allowed him to have more structure and boundaries which would have helped him to make better decisions outside the home.

**Discussion questions:**

- Many parents state that because they love their child they realise the importance of disciplining them. Is it possible for a parent to love their child too much that they are afraid to discipline them, or is that just poor parenting skills?
- Can you understand why Ruby and Clement were 'precious' with their child given his poor start in life?
- What coping mechanisms do you think they could have drawn on during this time?
- If you were their neighbour or church member what support could you have offered them?
- Discuss issues that Ruby faced as the primary carer for Jonathan in his formative years
- How would you have helped Ruby and Clement to set more boundaries for Jonathan?
- Realising that both parents would be feeling guilty about the outcome of their child, how could you be of support to them?
- Think of ways in which you can be of help to Jonathan.



## WOMEN AS MOTHERS

*Motherhood is the closest thing on earth to being in partnership with God. "The king upon his throne has no higher work than has the mother. The mother is queen of her household. She has in her power the molding of her children's characters, that they may be fitted for the higher, immortal life. An angel could not ask for a higher mission; for in doing this work she is doing service for God. . . . Let her realize the worth of her work and put on the whole armor of God, that she may resist the temptation to conform to the world's standard. Her work is for time and for eternity. E. G. White The Adventist Home pp 231 232*

In the book *The Adventist Home* author E. G. White dedicates ten chapters to the role of mothers. The section of the book entitled *Mother- Queen of the Home*, examines the influence of a mother on her child's emotional, spiritual, social and educational development.

Ellen White commences with the following statement:

*"Woman should fill the position which God originally designed for her, as her husband's equal. The world needs mothers who are mothers not merely in name but in every sense of the word. We may safely say that the distinctive duties of woman are more sacred, more holy, than those of man. Let woman realize the sacredness of her work and in the strength and fear of God take up her life mission. Let her educate her children for usefulness in this world and for a home in the better world." (Mother- Queen of the Home, The Adventist Home. p 231*

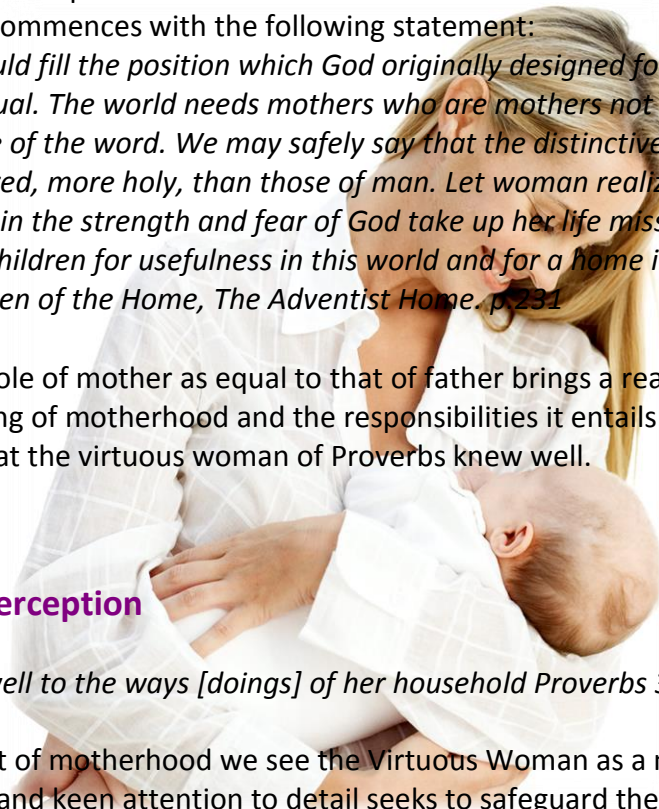
Viewing the role of mother as equal to that of father brings a realisation of the high and holy calling of motherhood and the responsibilities it entails. This was something that the virtuous woman of Proverbs knew well.

### Maternal perception

*She looketh well to the ways [doings] of her household Proverbs 31:27*

In this context of motherhood we see the Virtuous Woman as a mother whose watchful eye and keen attention to detail seeks to safeguard the wellbeing of her family. This would entail protecting them from negative influences.

Christian mothers in the twenty-first century need to be very vigilant as there are many elements in society which pose a threat to their children. This could be through friends – the negative influence of peers or through entertainment such as music or media influences. Today easy access to the internet poses a threat to the safety of many children and teens. There are many parents who are not aware of



what their children are viewing on television or the internet and so they are unwittingly exposed to elements which can negatively impact their lives.

In Proverbs 31:27, the phrase 'looketh well' means to keep watch, look out for. When used in a biblical context in references like 2 Kings 9:17 and Ezekiel 3:17; 33:7, it refers to the way a watchman looks for enemies and 'spies' or anything that may endanger the city. Similarly, the Godly, discerning mother seeks to gather information to steer her children away from danger.

Today, mothers as well as fathers should 'look well' to establishing the foundation upon which their children can build a sound Christian faith which will be reflected in the development of a Godly character. With a wealth of information on how to raise the best children, parents are constantly met with new theories and parenting tips from many experts. However the greatest parental consultant of all times is God our Father. It is said that with all the combined knowledge from all the experts in the world, none can match the depth of truths and knowledge found in God's word.

We have to acknowledge though that with the best will in the world and with all the effort Godly parents put in, children still have the freedom to choose their own path. Some of the decisions made are not what parents would have hoped.

We are often quick to quote Proverbs 22:6 which states *"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it"*. This does not guarantee that individuals (young or older) will not veer of the path outlined in scripture, but that if a solid Biblical foundation has been laid during the formative years it will act as a compass – guiding the way back to safety.

### A prayer

Father God,

Thank you for being the ultimate example of the perfect parent. We are strengthened by your unconditional love, your enduring patience and your continued care and guidance in our lives. As we look to you, help us to reflect these qualities as we parent the children you have gifted us with. We dedicate them to you and pray your protection over their lives. Direct their steps and help them to always seek your will and follow your leading in their lives. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen

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## Parental communication

The relationships that we form help to shape our perspectives on life including how we view ourselves. Think about the individuals that are close to you; your family members and relatives, your friends and those acquaintances like colleagues and church members. Have they helped to influence your current world view or impacted your life in some way? I am sure you will be able to identify at least one aspect of life that they have impacted in some way.

Looking at the impact of parenting many studies have examined the power of communication in the home especially as it relates to both the maternal and paternal roles.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) produced a document in 2012 titled *Social determinants of health and well-being among young people - International Report From The 2009/2010 Survey*. Here is some of the research data in regards to the impact of parental communication on young people.

### Parental communication impact

*Parents who invest in high-quality communication with their children can contribute to their overall health and well-being.* The following was also found:

- Young people who reported ease of communication with their parents were more likely to report positive body image, higher self-rated health, not smoking, higher life satisfaction and fewer physical and psychological complaints. They are also less likely to participate in aggressive behaviours and substance use.
- A “warm, open” communication style is associated with less aggression and violence among boys
- Parental communication appeared to decrease significantly with age, with parents’ influence decreasing as peers’ influence increased.
- Factors that facilitated good communication with mothers include a mutually interactive communication style in which the mother and young person felt free to raise issues, the mother demonstrating effective non-judgemental listening and being perceived as trustworthy.
- Young people who spent more time with their mothers perceived them as more accessible for sharing feelings, concerns and to provide emotional support.



- The quality of the relationship when the father does not reside in the main family home or is leading a single-parent household was found to have significant effects on young people's life satisfaction.
- Good communication with fathers has a protective role in maintaining emotional well-being and a positive sense of body image, particularly among girls.

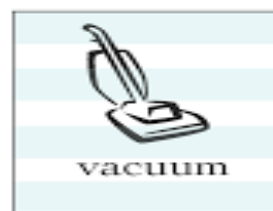
### Communicating everyday tasks

#### ***A practical example***

One of the challenges parents (especially mothers) reports is the frustration of repeated instructions to their children which often fall on 'deaf' ears.

There are various ways in which to communicate such as verbally, through written instructions, even an affirming or threatening look which brings with it the promise of things to come! Whilst some children respond to gentle coaxing others require a more firm approach. This is dealt with in more detail in the seminar which accompanies this chapter titled *Steer them right*.

In regards to developing good household habits children often require direction and repetitive instructions. Some mothers refer to the tedious challenge of trying to get their children involved with simple household tasks and teaching them the importance of daily chores. For some, the use of pictorial aids may assist in communicating daily reminders. The following website contains some useful tips where downloadable chore cards can be accessed - [www.biblicalthomemaking.com](http://www.biblicalthomemaking.com) Here is an example:



free printable chore cards  
[biblicalthomemaking.com](http://biblicalthomemaking.com)



## Exercise

Think of your current communication style and the way you communicate with your child, noting the way they respond. Write down your observations in the space below.

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The advent of children brings with it a mix of emotions - joys, fears, changes, challenges, excitement and anxieties all at once. In this segment we share a personal perspective from one mother as she recounts what it was like to bring a child into the world.

### **MOTHERHOOD – A REFLECTION**

By Catherine Anthony Boldeau

‘Two of you will go in, and three of you will come out!’



The words were said as encouragement, support and congratulations, but all I felt was terror and dread. Motherhood was never on my agenda and the thought that I would be responsible for bringing another life into the world and also be responsible for care, education, values and teaching her about God, her Creator, filled me with dread.

Eleven years, eight months and one day later, I am still on the journey of motherhood and it’s exciting, but challenging and I’m constantly learning. Motherhood is a God-given responsibility, something that it took me quite a while to grasp. I returned to work six weeks after my child was born and delegated my responsibilities to my mother. I loved my child, but to be brutally honest, I was very



## A prayer

Dear Lord,

We commit ourselves to you as mothers seeking your guidance and direction as we raise our children. Teach us how to lead them in the paths of righteousness for your name's sake. We ask that you equip us with the skills to minister to their ever changing needs in a way that will enhance their emotional, spiritual, physical and social wellbeing. May the experience of motherhood enrich our lives and give us a deeper revelation of who You are.

In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen

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## A HOLISTIC APPROACH

In seeking to give our children the best possible start in life a holistic approach to meeting their needs has been found to be beneficial in assisting them to be well adjusted in all aspects of their lives.

We look now at how to support their developmental needs in the areas of physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing. Using the NEWSTART lifestyle intervention programme I have sought to include current research as it relates to each aspect of the programme and its impact on children. We will be analysing how the aspects of nutrition, exercise, water, sunlight, temperance, air, rest and trust can benefit our children.

## NUTRITION

Food has never been more exciting! It comes with high pitched marketing, brightly coloured, attractively shaped in enticing packages with hidden treasures inside to tempt the young and compel parents to buy. The problem is that not all the attractive looking foods on the shelves, fast food outlets or television are necessarily the most nutritious. No wonder children are spoilt for choice and parents challenged to encourage healthy eating. The questions are, what are they eating and is it actually healthy?

The UK-based journal *Obesity Reviews* (July 2008) reporting on an in depth study of 367 children's food products revealed that 89% of them provide poor nutritional quality. However in spite of this 62% of these products continues to make health

claims. This means that nine out of ten common food items aimed specifically at children has nutritional deficit due to the high levels of sugar, fat or sodium.

Numerous researches has demonstrated that children who eat diets that are high in sugar fat, salt, and refined carbohydrates suffer from a lack of mental alertness, do less well in school and are often very tired by the end of the school day. Urgent action is needed to reverse this trend.

Why the need for change? Poor eating leads to poor health. Mounting medical and scientific evidence continue to demonstrate that poor diet also increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure later in life.

Recent health research from the International Obesity Task Force has predicted that 1:3 adults and 1:5 children in the UK will be obese by 2020. Additionally this will affect steep increases in Diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and other long term diseases which could reduce life expectancy. (*Fat Nation. The Big Challenge- Janette Marshall 2004*)

That's the bad news. The good news is that this can be reversed by healthy foods which are both nutritious and exciting.

So, how do you as a parent get your child to reduce their high sugar cereals, cakes, fizzy drinks, salty savouries and high fat snack intake and replace them with healthy options?

**Start with what your child is used to and adapt slowly.**

The first step is realising that habits are formed by repetition. This means it will take time and consistence to replace old practises with new healthier ones. Don't rush. It only reinforces rejection.

When introducing a 'new idea' (new food taste, texture, smell, presentation) to your child, give time for them to get used to the new idea. As a health visitor, this was key advice we gave to mothers weaning their babies. It works for children too. Think about it. As adults I'm sure you'll agree that there were things we started off not liking several years ago which we now love.

**To teach your children new healthy eating habits start with some of the suggestions in the table below.**

Old behaviour	New behaviour
Giving in to the child's demands for unhealthy foods and frequent snacks	Share a healthy alternative. Offer fruits, yoghurt or juice if genuinely hungry
Craving for high sugar intake	Offer low sugar, honey or high fruit jams
Snacking when bored	Find an activity or favourite game to engage the child
Regular fried foods	Grill, bake, dry roast, steam, boil or poach as much as possible
Rewarding your child with food. This can lead to children (and later as adults) turning to food for comfort	Offer alternative treats like privileges, small gifts or choice of fun things to do
Turning mealtimes into a battleground by nagging, using threats and forcing the child to eat when they genuinely dislike a food or is not hungry	Remain objective about food. Present a calm pleasant atmosphere so that mealtimes are not emotionally charged. Motivate, gently coax and reinforce health benefits

Giving pocket money to buy sweets and snacks

Spice up their lunch boxes with savoury mini pizzas, savoury popcorn, pretzels, cereal bars, flapjacks, yoghurt, fruit pieces and smoothies and fruit juice

### ☀ **Shopping gems**

Be a label watcher. Understanding the labelling and nutritional value of food will enable you to choose the best foods for your child. It also helps avoid harmful additives known to cause behavioural problems.

Use shopping as an opportunity to teach your child to make wise choices. Ask them to pick out the foods they think are healthy and the ones that are not. Additionally let them identify options and experiment with new healthier foods.

### ☀ **Cooking tips**

You don't have to be an excellent chef. You just need to know what works. Here are some tested and tried tips that have proved successful:

😊 Learn how to hide vegetables and other nutritious essentials that your child would usually refuse by disguising them in the foods your child likes. For example, grated carrots, parsnips, swede and cauliflower pieces can be disguised by mixing them into dishes such as lasagne, shepherd's pie, mild curries or even as pizza topping.

😊 Work with textures that your child finds pleasant. Lumps don't usually go down well and if you introduce a new food that has even one lump in it you may find that dish will always be rejected even when you present it lump free the next time.

😊 Hide fruits in cakes and muffins or use in fruit crumbles

### ***In order to encourage and maintain progress try the following***

- Lead by example. Modelling healthy eating reinforces good eating habits in your children
- Eat together as a family as often as possible,
- Include your child in the preparation of food. This will enable them to enjoy mealtimes better.
- In choosing alternative options give time for your child to develop the taste. Introduce the new idea consistently up to 3 times per week and keep going for a month
- Reward progress. Make it relevant to the age of the child e.g. stars under 5's or an age relevant reward for older children
- Keep treats on the menu. The only difference is that you are making it a healthy treat
- Avoid 'snack attacks' as much as possible
- Exercise parental power; you *can* say 'no'
- For younger children, get exciting books on food that depict children enjoying food or story books with foods as characters



- Maintain healthy eating habits even while on holiday. Take some health snacks along to avoid too many temptations.

### **Preparing a healthy packed lunch**

So, what's in a regular lunch pack and why do children love it so much?

Well, one would usually expect to find the traditional crisps, chocolate bars, biscuits, cakes or fattening pies and sweetened drinks which would normally be considered as treats. Of course there is nothing wrong with the occasional treat. The problem arises when it forms part of the everyday lunch packs.

And it would seem that the much loved packed lunches children gravitate towards are not very healthy. In fact some concerning statistics have emerged such as the following:

- Nine out of ten children are taking food to school that contains too much sugar, salt and saturated fat (Food Standards Agency Survey – October 2003)
- In a typical week one in five children eat no fruit at all (National Diet and Nutrition Survey, young people aged four-18 years – 2000)
- Obesity amongst children is on the increase (Health Survey for England 2001)

### ***Achieving a healthy packed lunch?***

Looking at the options for packed lunches available in the supermarket the question is raised as to how healthy they really are. It is always advisable to read the labels carefully paying close attention to fat, sugar and salt content before making your decision and go for the most natural option with minimal or no additives, colouring or artificial ingredients.

With so much information about what is unhealthy, what help can parents get to create fun but healthy packed lunches for their children which will entice them to actually eat it?

Let's start first by identifying what children actually like and using that knowledge to help parents identify common ground with their children when it comes to engaging them in healthy eating.

Children like variety, shapes, colours and things that taste nice. Your idea of 'nice' though may not be the same as your child's so you need to exercise caution when trying to influence them.

I have identified some key themes to consider in order to make the lunch box interesting. Incorporate them in your planning:

**Colour** - Bearing in mind that children are visually stimulated it is a good idea to have bright, naturally coloured foods. This could include mixed peppers as garnish or finely diced or cubed as part of a pasta or noodle dish. A variety of coloured vegetables in small portions can look attractive.

Fruit salads are pleasant on the eyes if you have a variety of their favourite fruits. This could include cherries without the stones, pegged tangerines, green or red apple, strawberries, peaches, plums or kiwi and other exotic fruits like mango pieces if they have the taste for it. You may include a naturally sweetened yoghurt if this improves the taste or encourages the child to eat the fruits.

Encourage as much fruits and vegetables as possible in a form that is most palatable and attractive for the child. Remember both fruits and vegetables provide vitamins, minerals and fibre. Additionally, eating fruits and vegetables in place of too much starch or sugary foods is healthier for body weight and dental health and can help develop good eating patterns into adult life. Most importantly, a daily intake of fruit and vegetables can reduce the chance of developing coronary disease and many cancers, particularly bowel cancer.

**Shape** - For younger children it will be exciting to have small triangular sandwiches, star shaped vegetables or carrot sticks, cubed fruits or round melon balls.

**Size** - Varying the size of food types in the lunch box can add interest. Use both small and large food items in the lunch box. This could include a whole banana or whole apple, half a pear or variety of savouries of different sizes including whole wheat pizza strips alongside a moderate salad. Using thickly sliced bread for sandwiches is quite filling and will reduce the need for snacking.

**Texture** - Wholewheat bread and savouries is more filling and the additional texture and fibre is good for healthy bowels. Using different textures may be more interesting for the adventurous eater. This could include adding couscous or wheat based croutons to salad.

**Choice** - Allow your child the flexibility to choose foods that they like within the parameters that you have set until they have the knowledge about wholesome foods and can make healthy choices for themselves. Rather than choosing what your child will eat for the week, include them in the decision-making. This will enable them to take more interest in their packed lunch and enhance the enjoyment of eating it.



### **Healthy eating for children**

It is important to bear in mind the impact packed lunches have on maintaining healthy eating in childhood. Four key benefits are identified as follows:

**Increased energy** – When young bodies eat healthy foods, they have increased energy for both mental and physical work and play. This extra energy enables them to cope with life's demands and is particularly important if your son or daughter participates actively in sports.

**Academic performance** – You may have heard the caption “healthy body – healthy mind”. Well this is certainly true in terms of healthy eating as numerous studies



have demonstrated a link between good nutrition and a positive impact on academic performance. They have reported good eating habits and good health forming the foundation for learning as well as enhancing focus and concentration. A variety of studies have indicated that in particular children who consume a healthy breakfast are more ready to learn and can concentrate better and focus more effectively. This good start to the day should be followed up by a healthy packed lunch to maintain efficacy.

**Obesity prevention** – The best defence against excessive weight gain is making healthy eating choices and being physically active. Research has shown that children and adolescents that become overweight have a greater tendency to be overweight as adults. This sets them up for a life time struggle both mentally and physically, with excess weight-related health issues.

**Enhanced self esteem and confidence** - Shopping with your child for the ingredients of their packed lunch includes them in the process right from the start and gives them a sense of responsibility and joint ownership of their health.

Children who make healthy food choices and see the benefits of those choices will gain confidence in their decision-making skills. They will also be able to make the right choice for themselves when they are out with their friends and in a social setting. Additionally their self-esteem is raised if they have a positive body image.

As we work with our children to make and enjoy healthier choices we will develop a nation of individuals empowered to provide for their own healthy diet. Here's to a healthier nation.

### **Fast Foods**

Research from the University of Alberta found that large amounts of fat and salt in fast foods may irritate children's airways resulting in wheezing and shortness of breath. This was evident even in children who had been breastfed who demonstrated significant symptoms of asthma. The researchers concluded that a consistent diet of fast foods can undo the benefits of breastfeeding in regards to its asthma protecting properties.

### **Building immunity through food**

Children are more prone to viruses and infections due to their maturing immune system, smaller nasal and sinus passages, hygiene practices (or lack of it) which make them more vulnerable than older children and adults. Infections gradually diminish as they grow so coughs and colds should decrease. Helping to build their immunity is good protection whilst they are young.

The top foods rated for building immunity in children are:

- **Berries** - serve as they are, sliced onto cereal, crushed and stirred into low-fat natural yogurt (with a teaspoon of honey if preferred). Alternatively, blend with bananas to make exciting smoothies
- **Citrus fruits** – excellent vitamin C source good for immune boosting and wound healing

- **Garlic** - has antibacterial and antiviral properties Its also great for cardiovascular protection. Onions are a good alternative if garlic is disliked. Add to sauces, salads, soups, pizza etc or use in dips like humus.
- **Nuts and seeds** – high in Vitamin E (especially brazil nuts, almonds, pumpkin and sunflower seeds) also rich in the minerals zinc and selenium. Grind the seeds and nut and sprinkle them on cereal or blend into a smoothie. Caution is advised in children with allergies or choking in infants.
- **Red peppers** – rich in vitamin C (orange and yellow peppers are good too) Also high in antioxidants which help protect the body’s cells from damage. Serve raw and sliced into strips as a snack. For some adventure add to low-fat yogurt for a dip, or with tomatoes for a mild tomato salsa.
- **Tomatoes** – good source of vitamin C also, also as power antioxidant rich in lycopene for cell and disease protection. Us in sauces, salads, sandwiches and stews.
- **Wheatgerm**- great source of vitamin E. Sprinkle on cereal, blend into smoothies, or add to baking recipes.

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## EXERCISE

### ***Building bones through play***

High impact activities such as skipping and jumping have been found to improve children’s bone health. It has been found that 80% of bone mass is built up in the first 20 years, therefore consistent exercise and a balanced diet is crucial for building a healthy skeletal frame in youth



### **School walk?**

In 2008 a campaign titled ‘Power Up!’ was the focus to get children energized by walking to school. The campaign was advertised as The Walk to School Month and was implemented around the country with excellent results. For more details of the campaign visit [walktoschool.org.uk](http://walktoschool.org.uk)

### ***So why the emphasis on walking?***

There are many well researched health, social, and environmental benefits of taking to your feet and walking whilst undertaking the school run.

**Health:** Escalating rates of childhood obesity and associated serious chronic illnesses such as type II Diabetes can be prevented through regular walking. Studies show that walking helps protect the body from many serious illnesses later on in life including cancer. Reports indicate that generally the minimum one hour a day of physical activity recommended by the Health Education Authority is only achieved by 50% of children. A brisk walk to school will enable them get their quota of daily exercise with the added benefit of being both refreshed and energized at the start and end of the day.

**Social:** A child's emotional wellbeing can be enhanced by walking. Great results are emerging from various projects aimed at getting children to walk more. One such success is *'The Walking Bus'* which is a new concept facilitating the walking of large groups of children to and from school, by providing a safe, healthy and environmentally approach to alleviating school run traffic congestion. This initiative was developed due to concerns that driving children to and from school on a daily basis was encouraging them to become insulated and lethargic.

The campaign evaluators heading this innovative project reports: *'According to a study on 'walking buses' there was very strong evidence that walking to school improves children's social development. This related to social contacts, independence and road sense. The walkers reported a happy, jolly social experience.'* This is exciting results which if replicated fully across the country will bring real benefits.

**Environmental:** Assessing the environmental cost is another factor. According to data analysis from the campaign, the average drive to school and back releases 800g of CO<sub>2</sub> into the air which is enough to inflate over 60 balloons! They state *'Walking to school once a week can save 20 per cent of CO<sub>2</sub> gas produced by driving every day. If every child did it, we would save as much as 400,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> a year.'*

**Economical:** Following the 2009 global economic downturn financial acuity is critical. Just think of the cash you could be saving by on petrol and transport fare by encouraging your child to walk to school!

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## **WATER**

With the average body weight comprised of 50 to 70 per cent water, it is clear that it is essential to life. However water can play a very important part in the classroom too. Researchers studying the impact of water intake on children saw a correlation between how much they drank and test scores. Studies undertaken at the University of East London revealed that children given a 250ml glass of water before a test did better than those who did not drink any water. The study concluded that because water hydrates the brain cells it enables them to function more effectively.

### ***Why is water so important to learning?***

**About** 80% of the human brain is made up of water molecules. When dehydration occurs it naturally leads to thirst, which scientists suggest can cause mental performance to deteriorate by up to 10 per cent. Studies indicate that even slight dehydration of the brain can raise stress hormones which in term impacts memory over time. If dehydration is not relieved, it can cause tiredness, irritability, lack of focus which can affect a child's concentration whilst trying to learn in a classroom setting. However if they remain hydrated throughout the day, children are able to concentrate for longer and stay alert throughout lessons.

### ***How much water is adequate?***

- The standard recommendation for children is 1.5-2 litres per day,
- Encourage a glass of water on waking in the mornings
- Children spend half their waking hours in school, so at least half the daily recommended amount of water should be drunk at regular intervals during the school day
- During warm weather or periods of exercise this can add to the process of dehydration so plenty of additional fluid should be drunk
- Encourage more fruit and vegetables as they have high water content

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## SUNLIGHT

In a comprehensive report titled: *Sunlight Robbery* Oliver Gillie from the Health Research Forum provides evidence which demonstrate that most children in the UK have deficient levels of Vitamin D as a result of lack of exposure to sunlight and the associated resulting negative health impact.

Although Cancer Research UK has reported on the dangers of overexposure to sun and the risk of skin cancer and given guidelines on sun safety, new research has indicated that we may have gone to the extreme in sun protection. Some health experts are now suggesting that fear of skin cancer, prompted by campaigns in the UK such as "SunSmart" ([www.sunsmart.org.uk](http://www.sunsmart.org.uk)) may have led to children spending less time exposed to sunlight subsequently reducing opportunities for the production of vitamin D in the skin. This appears to be resulting in a consequent detriment to bone health.

In an editorial published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) titled 'Do white British children and adolescence get enough sunlight?' the article argues that taking into consideration safe levels, some sunlight exposure is beneficial to health.

Dr Bataille, a consultant dermatologist at Hemel Hempstead General Hospital and a researcher at Kings College London, suggested that people with darker skin may need an increased exposure to sunlight but on average people can make enough vitamin D from just 15 minutes exposure to sunlight while wearing a T-shirt. However she stated that this would need to be increased during the winter months when sunlight is lower. This advice is borne out by the British Association of Dermatologists whose recently issued guidance with the National Osteoporosis Society recommends that people get 15 to 20 minutes of sun exposure daily.

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## TEMPERANCE (balance)

Yes, its official, studies are now being done of the (school) work-life balance of children. With the increasing pressures of society to 'perform' be 'productive' and

'meet targets', the heat has spilled out of work places and adult lives into the childhood environment.

We teach children from an early age, how to balance their (school) work and their personal lives. First there's school and its associated homework, then there's playtime both at school and home to reward the learning activities, an outlet for pent up energies and to facilitate bonding for social development. (Of course we realize that children can learn through play as well.) Then there is an array of after school and weekend activities just to keep life interesting and stimulating for the child, some of which has become less about enjoyment but more about competition. Whilst some competition is necessary to promote a desire to excel, the pressure in some instances can become too much.

So here we have it; school and after school activities to help bring the balance between academia and play / social / emotional development. Getting the balance right though is not always easy but it has been found to be critical for children's wholistic development.

Research has revealed that children who have multiple activities in their lives are better rounded, have high levels of confidence and are able to relate better with other children in various settings. In contrast children who appear to be focused on a single area of life, either school or play, were likely to have some 'issues' or emotional deficits in later life, which impacted either their social or work life.

Additionally children identified with either mental illness or antisocial behaviour was also found to be children from chaotic homes where there was little or no sense of balance. It was found that these children were simply unable to balance their lives between the stresses of school (academic targets), the social school environment (socialization / bonding/ acceptance etc) and "play" time which included games which were sometime competitive.

A useful approach to helping to balance children's life is for adults to be good role models. The following is some practical tips to help both children and adults to gain a more balanced life.

- Be realistic about what can be accomplished – this ensures you do not put too much pressure on yourself or others
- Have a schedule but keep it flexible- an organized life is an enjoyable life; however room for spontaneity keep life fresh
- Ensure your weeks (even days if possible) is able to accommodate a spiritual, physical, mental, social, emotional (relaxing) activity
- Learn to pace yourself when you feel the pressure is too much (This includes learning to say 'no' to over demanding requests)
- Ask for help (practice the art of delegation)
- Evaluate your use of time – this ensures you are creating a good life balance of varied activities.

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## AIR

Environmental pollutants and poor air quality has been blamed for respiratory diseases in children across the globe. Recent data collected by The National Institute of Environmental Health Science (NIEHS) found alarming evidence of air pollution impact the lung development of children. Their research showed that children who live in highly polluted communities are five times more likely to have clinically low lung function—less than 80% of the lung function normal for their age. The data analysis from scientists at the University of Southern California suggest that exposure to pollutants in vehicle and fossil fuel emissions may hinder lung development and limit breathing capacity for a lifetime.

Numerous other studies have linked air pollution as a cause of Asthma in children.

### **Asthma – breakthrough treatments**

- The UK and Ireland has some of the highest rates of asthma in the world with 1.1 million children affected. Amongst the suggested causes has been the rise in inner city air pollution, climate change including global warming and the general rise in allergies in the developed world. A recent study from Egypt analysing asthma effects in children found that a combination supplement of omega-3, vitamin C and Zinc may help ease asthma in children. The report revealed that the nutrients improved lung function and reduced inflammation. The report concluded that here was a link between high intakes of omega 3 in fish oils and the nutrients in fresh vegetables and fruits with a lower risk of asthma including improvements in the symptoms.
- A breathing technique called buteyko breathing has emerged with findings indicating its efficacy in encouraging better breathing for asthmatics. Specific exercises are taught which enable children to focus on their breathing which assist with helping to manage the symptoms.
- Additionally regular moderate physical exercise in unpolluted open air spaces has proved beneficial for some asthma sufferers.
- A 2009 study published in the Journal *Respirology* suggested that swimming may be an effective non-pharmacological intervention for the child or adolescent with asthma. The study investigated the benefits of a 6 week swimming intervention on pulmonary function tests (PFT) and severity of asthma in children. Young asthmatics were randomly assigned to the experimental or the control group with equal children in both groups. In addition to regular treatment for asthma, the experimental group received swimming training for 6 weeks for control group received not swimming

training. At the end of 6 weeks there were significant improvement in the experimental group compared with the control group in relation to the occurrence of and severity of asthma incidence. Wang Jeng-Shing who authored the report states: "Unlike other sports, swimming is unlikely to provoke asthma attacks. In addition to improving asthma, swimming promotes normal physical and psychological development, such as increasing lung volume, developing good breathing techniques and improving general fitness," He added, "Not only is swimming an excellent form of exercise for children with asthma, the health benefits reaped continued to be observed for at least a year after the completion of the swimming program."

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## REST

Research reports that in young healthy volunteers, chronic sleep deprivation results in the following unhealthy body responses:

- increased appetite and energy expenditure
- increased inflammatory markers (indicative of immune suppression)
- increased risk of infection
- disturbed nervous system
- increased reduction of digestive secretions,
- increased heart rate and blood vessel contractions
- increased blood pressure
- increased evening cortisol (stress hormones) levels,
- Elevated levels of insulin and blood glucose
- Increased irritability and aggression
- lower levels of concentration
- reduced memory recall
- cognitive decline (affecting ability to learn)
- increased risk of accidents
- hyperactivity in children
- high risk of obesity in both children and adults



The message: sleep deprivation sends the body and brain into confusion.

### ***So how much sleep do children need?***

Children aged five to 12 require between 10-11 hours of sleep per night. With the increasing demand on their time from school (e.g., homework), sports and other

extracurricular and social activities these activities which sometimes becomes stressors can impede on the quantity and quality of their rest.

School-aged children today have become more interested in TV, computers, the media and Internet all of which create excitement and sometimes an over-stimulated mind which can have a negatively impact on sleep. With the addition of caffeine products (often given in the evening) this too can lead to difficulty falling asleep, nightmares, disrupted sleep and generally poor sleeping patterns. In particular, research has found that watching TV close to bedtime has been associated with children's bedtime resistance, difficulty falling asleep, anxieties relating to sleep and reduced hours or sleep. In June 2008 Research Brief produced a comprehensive report examining the sleep trends in children and the negative impact of media as a leading cause of sleep deprivation in children.

Getting children used to a consistent bedtime routine is advantageous to the health and wellbeing of the entire family. Here are some quick suggestions to assist.

### **Sleep Tips for Children**

- Commence early teaching of school-aged children the value of healthy sleep habits. This enables them to understand its importance and begin to take responsibility early for making healthy choices
- Be consistent in emphasising the need for regular and consistent sleep schedule and bedtime routine. Children often look for loop holes and ways of getting out of routines
- Set limits that are consistent, communicated and enforced and stick to them.
- Make child's bedroom conducive to sleep. This should be an uncluttered, pleasant atmosphere with adequate heating, ventilation and lighting suitable for bedtime cool-warm temperature, dark or minimal lighting (door slightly open to let in any outside light) and quietness is the best atmosphere
- Keep TV and computers out of the bedroom as research indicates these as major distracters
- Avoid coffee and caffeinated beverages as these acts as stimulant and encourages wakefulness

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### **Relaxation**

Assessing the importance of relaxation and the need to encourage and teach children to relax, Marneta Viegas of *Relax Kids* states: *'Tension is so bad for concentration... it can affect children's performance in school, their interaction with adults and peers, and the way they perceive themselves.'*



Encouraging relaxation in children enables them to have a 'restful' attitude and enjoy life more. Studies indicate that children who are more relaxed are able to think more constructively and positively, have greater confidence levels and are more successful in school.

***Tips for encouraging relaxation in children***

- Try not overload your child with too many out-of-school activities as this can sap their energy, prevent them from relaxing or enjoying social and family activities.
- Create a therapeutic and comfortable home environment. This should be a special space for your child to relax in and could include their favourite toys and objects that bring them comfort, favourite colours and activities that they enjoy.
- Include your child in creating their special space as this creates a sense of ownership and responsibility. Great also for helping to focus a hyperactive child
- Work with your child's emotion and level of energy to decide with them what their needs are at that particular moment
- As part of their bedtime routine you can help your child relax with a warm bath, bedtime story, prayers or reflection from gentle music CD's.

Encouraging children to learn and experience relaxation techniques has been identified as a means to remedy imbalances and enhance their emotional literacy.

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**TRUST**

***“How people feel is not an elusive or abstract concept, but a significant public health indicator; as significant as rates of smoking, obesity and physical activity” (Department of Health 2001).***

In this health context, trust refers to the expressed feelings and behaviours, the emotional resilience and stability a child exhibits, their positive relationships with others and demonstration of faith or spiritual awareness that brings them gives them a sense of peace and wellbeing.

Affirmation, acceptance, promoting inclusion, facilitating participation, empowerment, respect, choice, is some of the key factors (adults display) that

engender trust in children and help to enhance their mental and emotional wellbeing.

Encouraging children to express themselves and share what they are feeling without judging them gives them the confidence to confide in and learn to trust others. This affords them the space to be reflective, evaluate who they are and understand how they fit into the world around them. It encourages them to share their vulnerabilities and appropriately ask for help. As a child is given the scope to recognize and respond to feelings in positive ways it encourages emotional maturity and mental wellness.

As children develop, the more positive their immediate environment the more they are equipped to handle stress and negative emotions such as anger, sadness fear etc, as they move through to their teenage years and young adulthood.

Current statistics reveal 10 per cent of children suffering from some form of mental health problem. In 2006 just under 170,000 UK children were seen by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). This gives some indication of the scale of the problem. Additionally, many others fall through the net, in particularly those with complex needs and are unable to articulate their needs. Gender issues also play a part as some boys find it more difficult to ask for help than girls. Understanding these issues will enable adults to be more sensitive to and responsive of the emotional and mental needs of children as they develop.

Recognizing the importance of good mental health to facilitate good learning and development in children, Health minister Alan Johnson at the launch of a review of CAMHS in March 2008, stated: 'it enables children, young people and adults to make the most of their opportunities in life'

### ***How do children interpret trust?***

In a poll at quibblo.com, a quiz site popular with preteens, respondents were asked the question "Who do you trust"? They were asked to choose from the following and responded in that order with media as the least trusted

- yourself
- friend
- God
- boyfriend
- girlfriend
- parents
- animal
- church
- media



It was encouraging to see trust in God high of the list for these pre-teens as building trust in God is key to spiritual wellbeing. The development of trust is a crucial task for children. Psalm 22:9 says,

“[You] led me to trust you at my mother’s breast” Trust sets the foundation for all other social and emotional tasks to come. When children realize that God, their environment, and the people around them are trustworthy, they feel secure, hopeful, and optimistic. Trust is key for spiritual development. Early experiences with parents and the church impact children’s perceptions of God. When kids feel safe and loved, they can trust that God loves them, too.

The following have been identified as useful steps for helping children to build trust:

**Develop and model trustworthy relationship.** This encourages children to learn to trust other adults. You can develop this by exposing your children to nurturing and trustworthy people, like grandparents or church nursery staff. Keep your promises is another crucial step in getting children to understand the meaning of trust

**Demonstrate appropriate touch.** Expressions of affection like reassuring hugs, cuddles and kisses especially when children are hurt or sick enable them to feel valued and cared for.

**Engage in trust-building games.** This is particularly effective with younger children; games like Peek-a-Boo is quite effective For older children more complex games which help them to rely on and feel connected to others is also helpful and encourages bonding and social development.

**Foster trustworthy environments.** Children thrive in safe, engaging and nurturing surroundings. This gives them a feeling of security and the reassurance that they are being taken care of taken care of and that their needs are being met. They learn that people and relationships are more important to them than temporal things.

**Building a foundation of faith.** With growing understanding, children learn to trust what they see (tangible positive relationships etc) and from this base you are better able to create a foundation for children to recognize God (whom they can’t physically see) begin to build their own trust in God and reliance on a being more powerful than themselves.

### A prayer

Dear Lord,

Thank you for the children you have entrusted to our care. Help us to become trustworthy caregivers as we reflect you in all that we do. We ask you to reassure our children that you deeply care for them and will always keep your promise to

bless their lives.

As we demonstrate wisdom in the choices we make in order to meet our children's physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs, may you bless our efforts as we are led by your guidance.

In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen

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### **Praise for motherhood**

*"Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. "*  
*Proverbs 31:28*

Your family members are the ones who know you best and so would have the most accurate judgement of you. Here, this admirable woman's children give an assessment of who she is as a mother and a woman of God. Having observed her at close quarters they are in a position to come to a conclusion about how she really is and what they see they are pleased with. This results in them praising her not only for what she has done, but for who she is.

It is not clear at what point or stage in their lives her children give their appraisal of her, but the term 'rise up' could indicate a level of maturity or age of understanding where they can give a credible evaluation of her. It could also indicate that after she has reared them and they look back at their childhood there is an acknowledgement of her true worth. Maybe they now have homes or children of their own and realising what it means to be a parent returns to give thanks for a truly remarkable woman whom they were blessed to have as mother. Recalling their formative years and seeing the positive impact that such a mother has made on their lives, now as parent's they endeavour to train their children as they themselves were trained. Whatever the time or occasion it is clear that this woman has made an indelible mark on her children and having invested in their lives is now receiving the benefits of grateful children who appreciate her and reward her accordingly.

It is also evident that the children of this virtuous woman have developed into settled and happy adults. With the positive home life that they experienced as children they would have seen their mother praise God and demonstrate gratitude for His leading in their life. This element of demonstrating thankfulness would have had a positive impact on their spiritual, psychological and social wellbeing. With a

mother who knew how to say 'thank you' to God and extend grateful praise in her daily life, this positive example demonstrating appreciation would not have gone unnoticed by her children. In fact emulating what they have seen, they too would have learned to become grateful children and grateful and happy adults.

There is research that demonstrates that children who have learned to be grateful mature into to happier adults. It appears that instilling gratitude in your child has far reaching implications for their psychological wellbeing. Researchers conducting a study in 2003 at the University of California, Davis, found that grateful people not only reported higher levels of optimism and happiness but also lower levels of stress and depression.

A further study found that children who practice grateful thinking have more positive attitudes toward school and their families (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008).

Life coach May Jane Ryan – Life coach and author of Attitudes of Gratitude (Conari, 1999) states: "No one is born grateful," Recognizing that someone has gone out of the way for you is not a natural behavior for children -- it's learned."

This evaluation is also mirrored by Melissa Leonard New York City etiquette consultant and mother of two young daughters. She says "good manner and gratitude overlap" and teaches parents how to raise grateful children. On the evidence that children model their parents in everything they do, she encourages parents to use the words 'please' and 'thank you' when talking to their children and encourage the child to also use those words.

## Reflection

Proverbs 31:30 states: *"A woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised"*

Here we see this virtuous woman and exemplary mother being praised on a number of levels:

- She is praised because she is Godly and that in itself results in blessings.
- She is also praised (by her children) because they have learnt gratitude from her.
- Her influence as a mother surrounds her adult children daily in the tasks they now undertake as parents themselves. Her godly example and holy life, her loving disciple, her wise counsel and gentle guidance now become the model on which they raise their own children and model their household. They continue to call her blessed and also to bless the Lord for her and thank Him for this invaluable gift to their lives which we be perpetuated for generations.

### **ACTION POINTS**

- Think of a woman you know whom could be classified as an exemplary mother and send her a note of appreciation, a card, gift or flowers
- Now think of a woman you know who is struggling in her role of motherhood and send her a note of encouragement, a card, gift or flowers to affirm her, let her know you are thinking of her and willing to offer support where necessary
- Commit to praying on a daily basis for the mothers in your church and communities
- Plan a Women's Ministries programme which affirms the role of mothers
- Work with your local Family Life team to present programmes on parenting
- Invite your Conference Family Life director to undertake Parenting Seminars for your church and community members

### **A PRAYER**

Dear Lord

Thank you for the gift of life in the children that you have blessed us with. We ask for your guidance as you teach us how to become better parents. As you guide us in directing them may we become positive influences in our homes. Show us where we are deficient and may we be willing to make the necessary changes.

As mothers we are aware of the pressures we face in raising children in these modern times and the many distractions that would seek to lure them away from the Christian principles of the home.

We pray for unity in the way we seek to nurture and discipline our children with the support and direction of our spouses.

We are mindful of those women who are mothers in household where they parent alone. We ask you to be to them everything that they need. Lead them to the assistance that they need through caring individuals and relevant agencies from whom they can receive support.

As we become the Godly mothers that you desire us to be, may this be reflected in the lives of our children and may they too rise up and call us blessed. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

## RESOURCES & RECOMMENDED READING

- Adventist Home E.G.White The Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.1965
- Child Guidance E.G.White Ellen. G White Estate 1954
- Deliver Our Children From the Evil One Noel & Phyl Gibson Sovereign World 1992
- Families at the Crossroads *Beyond Traditional and Modern Options* Rodney Clapp InterVarsity Press 1993
- Growing Strong Daughters *Encouraging Girls to Become All They're meant to Be* Lisa McMinn Monarch Books 2001
- The Little Book of Health for Children & Teens The Stanborough Press Ltd. 2010
- The Ready-Made Family *How to Be a Stepparent & Survive* Andre Bustanoby Zondervan 1982
- Train Up Child Nancy Van Pelt Stanborough Press Ltd (1 Dec 2008)
- Raising a Daughter After God's Own Heart Elizabeth George Harvest House 2011
  
- [www.biblicalhomemaking.com](http://www.biblicalhomemaking.com)
  
- [www.eden.co.uk](http://www.eden.co.uk)

## SEMINARS / WORKSHOPS

- **Steer them right**
- **Train Up Child**
- **Growing honorable daughters**
- **Christian Parenting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**



# **MAINTAINS HER APPEARANCE**

**CASE STUDY ON GUARDING OUR APPEARANCE**





Most people thought of Renetta as being attractive. Even as a girl growing up she would get many compliments about how she looked. Realising this, her parents not wishing her to become vain, decided to dress her as plainly as possible with simple clothes (which were not in fashion) and simple hair styles as they did not want her getting too much attention. As she grew into her teenage years her mother would choose outfits which made her look dowdy and as a result she was bullied at both school and church and became the laughing stock of her peer group. As a result Renetta became resentful towards her parents.

Renetta decided that the first chance she got she was going to make up what she had 'suffered' growing up. One day whilst in her final year at college, the form teacher announced that as part of the art class experience, there would be a makeover session and official photographs were going to be taken. Pupils could wear anything they choose for that session. There was much excitement as both boys and girls excitedly planned their outfits and how they would style their hair. Renetta panicked at the prospect of the proposed makeover event as she knew she would not have anything appropriate to wear. Sadly even her best church outfit was out of date and dowdy. She decided that maybe it was best to opt out all together.

The class anticipation of the forthcoming event seemed to heighten daily. Her friends would bring in samples of what they intended to wear and try them on in the ladies toilets to get each other's opinion as to which was the best outfit to wear for the photo shoot. When her friends realised that she did not have anything 'suitable' to wear they arranged to take her shopping one lunch time. The shopping expedition proved to be a turning point for Renetta and opened up a world of opportunities for her. She saw herself in a new light. Having tried on the 'suggested' clothes, Renetta was surprised to find that she had a good figure and that indeed the clothes she had been wearing had hidden her shape and with that, her personality as well.

The idea of clothes framing or exenterating one's personality was exciting to Renetta because she realised that an individual's attire was a way of making a statement about themselves. It also became evident to her that as a young lady she would get more attention if she dressed a certain way. This was particularly heightened when the attention was from males, much to the displeasure of her parents.



As time went on Renetta began to dress more for male attention and when she left home for university, began to make the most of her 'freedom'. Living away from home though was more challenging than she thought. There were times when she wanted advice and guidance but had to rely on what she felt was right which sometimes conflicted with what she thought her parents would approve of. When it came to her attire she often thought what she wore would not meet the approval of her parents, but she loved the autonomy she had in being able to choose for

herself. It was not until men started to treat her in less than a respectful way, particularly when she wore revealing clothes, that she realised that maybe she was sending out the 'wrong' signals.

One particular Sabbath whilst in church she was approached by an older woman who called her aside to speak with her about life at university and what she wanted to do with her career. At the end of their conversation she shared with Renetta that she had observed her style in dress taking a particular slant over the years and asked her to think about why that was. The next week the older woman brought a book for Renetta to read. It was titled: *Secret Keeper – The Delicate Power Of Modesty*.

When she went home and read through the book, it was a complete revelation. However it was the section captioned *The Fashion Challenge* that held her attention most. It posed a series of questions to test modesty in dress choice and gave some practical solutions. One section was titled 'Raise and Praise' which involved an exercise of standing with your arms extended upwards as in worship or a praise session at church. It suggested that if during the raising of your hands your belly skin was on show then that outfit required something underneath it. Without that addition, it would compromise your modesty and certainly be a distraction in church!

Amongst the other tests were exercises involving bending over, leaning forward, sitting down and crossing ones legs etc to ascertain whether modesty was compromised. There were also personal questions like "Is my shirt too tight?" "Can you see my underwear?" "How short is too short"? Accompanying questions such as these were various checks and tests to help answer the question and assist the reader in making a decision about the modesty of their attire.

On completing the book Renetta felt convicted to rethink her wardrobe; gave some of her clothes to charity and resolved to have modesty in mind when she next went shopping.



#### **Discussion questions:**

- As a Christian woman are you happy with all the items of clothes you own?
- Can you raise and praise in your outfits without revealing any flesh?
- Are you always appropriately dressed for the situation?
- Do you dress in a way that will catch the eyes of a man?
- As a woman do you feel any different when you receive a compliment from a man than when you receive it from a woman? Is there a danger in this?
- If there is someone in your church whom you think dresses inappropriately would you feel comfortable to approach them about it? Have you developed a friendship with the individual to speak with them on that level?
- Are you a role model for other women (especially young females) in the way you dress?

## MAINTAINS HER APPEARANCE

*"She makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine..." Proverbs 31:22*

**"The badly dressed woman, people remember the clothes. With a well-dressed woman, they remember the woman." – Coco Chanel**

A woman of virtue is a woman that takes her appearance seriously. She aspires to ensure that she maintains her looks and is well-groomed at all times.

As women we are constantly bombarded with images from the media about the way that we should dress or what is considered to be the perfect body. These messages can have negative effects on some women and leave them feeling inferior and with a low self esteem.



**Question: When you look into the mirror who do you see looking back at you? {Remember this is in relation to dress and body image}**

Write your answer in the space below

Who do you see? Do you see?

- A fashion conscious woman?
- A slim and trendy woman?
- A woman who does not like her body shape?
- A confused woman?
- A woman that wished she had someone else's body shape?
- A contented woman?
- A woman who loves her body shape?

Sometimes when we are going through difficulties, it can affect our appearance. We tend not to want to make any effort with how we look.

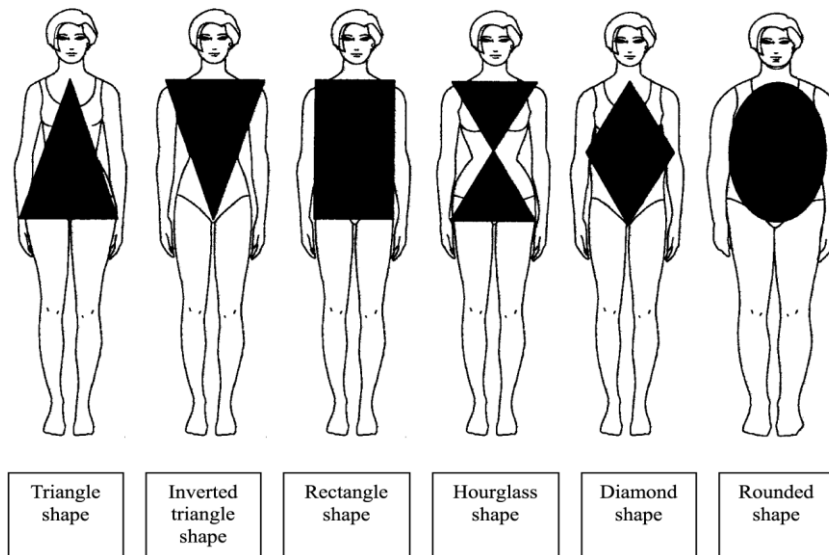
What challenges or difficulties are you going through that could be affecting your appearance? If you are not going through any challenges think back to a time in your past when your appearance was not at its best – were you going through a difficult time?

Looking and feeling good about our selves go hand in hand. True beauty is much more than beautiful clothing, perfect makeup or a great hairstyle. It is about maximizing your potential – spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically.

If we feel good on the inside, then this is reflected through to the outside.

## What's Your Body Shape?

Let us look at the different type of body shapes



Which body type do you associate with?

Clothing is constructed along straight lines, which give a garment a more rigid, structured form, or along curved lines, which give a more fluid shape that tends to follow the curves of the body shape.

You cannot alter your basic bodyline by diet or exercise. It will remain essentially the same throughout your life because your bodyline is based on your skeleton as well as your genes.

It is never about size but about shape and how we dress according to our body shapes.

Your body is in two halves, shaped like a vase. We have to learn to focus our eyes on the best part of our bodies. For example never have your top finishing at the widest part of your body. Your eyes are automatically drawn to it. Suggestion: either make the top higher or lower. If you have a wider top and a slimmer bottom put bolder colours at the bottom. If you wear make-up it should be light and give the impression that you are not wearing any.

Below you will see a fuller description of the body shapes and tips on what to wear in order to accentuate your body shape.

### **Triangle Shape [Also known as Pear Shape]**

Do you:

- ☉ Wear a larger size on your bottom half than your top?

- ⦿ Have a clearly defined waist?
- ⦿ Have narrower shoulders than hips?
- ⦿ Carry weight on your hips or thighs?

#### Tips on what to wear

- ⦿ You can extend your neck and your shoulders by wearing scoop, sweetheart, and v-necklines.
- ⦿ Wear light colours on top, dark colours on the bottom. Simply put, dark colours hide, whilst light colours magnify.
- ⦿ Buy separates, since a triangle body type needs a different size on the top than the bottom, separates are a great choice.
- ⦿ Pencil skirts work well for you and you will always look great in wrap around dresses, A-line and flared skirts.
- ⦿ Find a good tailor. This especially applies to large busted triangle body types. In order to get a good fit, it is sometimes necessary to have some clothes properly altered.

#### Inverted Triangle Shape

Do you:

- ⦿ Wear a larger size on your top half than your bottom?
- ⦿ Have wider shoulders than hips?
- ⦿ Have a straight ribcage?
- ⦿ Prefer an uncluttered look?



#### Tips on what to wear

- ⦿ Elongate your neckline with either a V-neck, deep scoop and shawl collar.
- ⦿ Choose bottoms that flare to balance out the upper half of your body. Skirts and trousers with a flare add the illusion of size.
- ⦿ Flatter your ample bust with tops that have less detail. Details draw attention to the top, and will make an inverted triangle's top even more noticeable.
- ⦿ Wear darker colours on the top and lighter colours on the bottom. This will minimize the top half.
- ⦿ Show off the curves that you have with form-fitting silhouettes, fitted tops, pencil skirts, wrap and belted dresses and A-line skirts.

#### Rectangle Shape

Do you:

- ⦿ Have shoulders and hips in line?
- ⦿ Have no waist definition?
- ⦿ Have flat hips and bottom?
- ⦿ Carry any extra weight around your middle?

#### Tips on what to wear

- ⦿ Wear necklines like sweetheart, V-necks, crew, asymmetric, cowl and jewel neck. These will accentuate your femininity.
- ⦿ Choose shirts or blouses that taper in at the waist instead of being loose fitting. These will show off your curves rather than making you look rectangular.
- ⦿ Define your curvature with belts and cinchers, and wear fuller, bias, crystal pleated or pencil skirts.
- ⦿ Harmonize your silhouette by wearing straight or slightly flared legged trousers. Try not to choose a tapered trouser that will cling to your rectangular shape.

- ⦿ Don't be afraid to add some colour to the skirts or trousers that you wear. You can get away with it!

### Hourglass Shape

Do you:

- ⦿ Wear the same size top and bottom?
- ⦿ Have a clearly defined waist?
- ⦿ Have a clearly defined bust?
- ⦿ Have a curved bottom?



#### Tips on what to wear

- ⦿ You can try flattering your neckline with ruffles or softly draped details, open collar and fun asymmetrical cuts that will expose your neckline.
- ⦿ Choose tops that define your small waist. Wrap tops, tie waist tops, empire waistlines or belted tops are great examples of this.
- ⦿ Try wearing single piece outfits such as dresses. They don't break up the figure like a two-piece outfit, which flatters the hourglass body type's curves.
- ⦿ Learn to balance the hips with flared, wide and bootleg trousers and flared skirts.
- ⦿ Find jackets that hit either above or below the bottom. Anything that hits directly on the bottom will make an hourglass figure appear larger.

### Diamond Shape [Also known as Apple Shape]

Do You:

- ⦿ Have narrow shoulders?
- ⦿ Have small bust size?
- ⦿ Carry any extra weight around your middle?

#### Tips on what to wear

- ⦿ Clothing on your waist should be fitted. For jackets or sweaters, make sure that the waist is nipped in where the centre of the midriff is smaller than the top and bottom.
- ⦿ Avoid wearing patterns on your belly, tight tops or tops with collars and big belts. These will actually draw the eye to the stomach area, which is what you want to avoid.
- ⦿ Empire cut tops will elongate your midriff.
- ⦿ Wear dark bottoms with simple or no pockets this is what works best on the diamond shape.
- ⦿ All bottoms that you wear should be a relaxed fit that falls from the widest part of your hips.

### Rounded Shape

Do you:

- ⦿ Have rounded shoulders?
- ⦿ Have fullness in the tummy area?
- ⦿ Have wonderfully shapely legs?
- ⦿ Feel uncomfortable when clothes are tucked in?

#### Tips on what to wear

- ⦿ Elongate your shape by showing off your neckline with cowl, scoop and V-necks.

- ⦿ Clothing lines needs to be straight, and fabrics soft to avoid any unnecessary volume or bulkiness.
- ⦿ Keep any detail above the bust line and below the hip line.
- ⦿ Make sure that the clothes you wear hang from the shoulders.
- ⦿ Accentuate your lower half with lighter bottoms, flat-front trousers, and dropped waists.

Managing your appearance is an important part of who you are. It tells people about your personality and your lifestyle. Nobody can deny that, in today's world, image matters.

More and more emphasis is placed upon looking the part and dressing for success. We all make quick assessments based upon how people look. This is not the best method to make a judgement but it is important to acknowledge that clothing and personal appearance are a form of communication.

Being well dressed does not have to mean dressing expensively or being at the cutting edge of fashion. There are five key points that define a well-dressed woman.

Your clothes should:

- ⦿ Complement your colouring
- ⦿ Flatter your body lines, scale and proportions
- ⦿ Be appropriate
- ⦿ Match your style personality
- ⦿ Look current



**[Source: colour me beautiful]**

Whatever your budget, the fashion choices are endless. However, too much choice can be overwhelming and confusing. The key is to know and understand why some pieces of clothing can work better than others.

Clothes are wonderful tools that you can manipulate to present yourself to advantage regardless of your size and proportions.

By recognizing your physical assets – and limitations – you can explore the many ways in which clothing can be used to draw attention, to conceal, to camouflage and to create optical illusions.

In addition, we are all individuals with a personal style that governs the way we wear our hair, apply make-up and the use of accessories e.g. tie a scarf around our neck.

“Once you know you look good, you are ready to face the world – or any situation that calls for poise and control.”

## **Transformational Power of Colour In Our Lives**

**Question: Do you have a signature colour or a colour that makes you happy?**

We all have colours that are better for us and others which make us look less dowdy.

When you wear colour near your face, the light reflects it upwards; this can cast either flattering tones or dark shadows, depending on the mix of colour and your skin tone.

It is important therefore for you to understand what your dominant colouring type is and discover which are the right colours for you.

Image consultants can help you with finding out what colours compliment your skin tone.

Did you know that: Most women wear only 20 per cent of their wardrobe 80 per cent of the time?

Colour is defined by the

- **Hue - Undertone**

This may be warm (yellow based or cool (blue based). Colours such as red, pink and green can be described as having either a warm or cool undertone.

- **Value - Depth**

The value of a colour refers to its depth, giving a measure of its lightness or darkness.

- **Chroma - Clarity**

Chroma indicates the purity or clarity of a colour. Some colours are bright and vibrant and reflect the light, while others are dusty or muted and seem to absorb light. The type of fabric will also determine whether light is absorbed or reflected; for example satin reflects light, while wool seems to absorb it.

In the book *Colour Me Beautiful* it outlines the psychology of colour and the ways in which different colours affect our everyday lives. See the colour explanations below and see which colours best suit you.

<b>Black/Grey</b>	<b><i>Black can portray an air of authority and it is worn by many women as a uniform for business</i></b>
Wearing black from head to toe every day is easy and safe, but may give the message that you lack imagination. It also implies that you are hiding behind the colour. It might be a good idea to wear black with another colour for greater impact. For example, a little black evening dress can be a winner; if black is not in your palette, wear it with accessories near your face that compliment well with your natural colouring. A pashmina or chiffon scarf in your colours will be perfect. Or, you could wear a suitable grey – either charcoal, medium grey or pewter – instead.	
<b>Brown</b>	<b><i>Brown, the colour of the earth, is a great colour to wear when you're in a relaxed mode</i></b>
The brown family comes in many guises: chocolate, coffee, mahogany and golden, to name but a few. Brown denotes a friendly, down-to-earth, though serious attitude. We are often told that brown is 'this season's black', and it	



provides an excellent alternative for those with Warm colouring, especially when you want to appear less threatening. Brown may be considered boring when worn on its own, but mixing it with other colours can bring it to life and it could become a staple of your casual and work wardrobe.

Make sure you choose the correct shade for you by checking which tone of brown is in your dominant palette.

<b>Beige</b>	<b><i>This family of colours is a great substitute for black and browns in summer</i></b>
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The beiges run from stone to camel via taupe, pewter, cocoa and natural. All of these tones are non-threatening, friendly and approachable; they are excellent when you want people to open up to you. They are ideal colours for anyone who works with people, for example in counselling, human resources and nursing.

If your colouring is either Deep or Clear, beige generally needs to be worn together with contrasting colours.

The joy of these tones is that they may be worn all year round with the fashion colours from your palette.

<b>White</b>	<b><i>White denotes purity and freshness</i></b>
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Everyone needs white in their palette, whether worn head to toe for a special outing or as a contrast against other colours from your palette. It can be a hard colour to wear in its purest form, but there are shades of white to suit everyone, from soft white to ivory and cream.

Wearing white in a textured fabric will often soften its appearance. Linen and silk, for example, are rarely a pure white, although cotton can be. White is an ideal colour to wear in hot climates, as it reflects light – the challenge is keeping it clean and fresh-looking.

<b>Blue</b>	<b><i>Blue, the colour of logic, activates the mind</i></b>
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Blue conveys trust, peace and order – it could be considered safe. When a leading British scarf retailer commissioned a survey to find out which colours sold best, blue came top. Dark navy is often associated with authority and law and order; many police forces use navy for their uniforms.

Medium shades of blue such as cornflower, lapis and sapphire, are all great colours to brighten up your wardrobe throughout the year. The lighter shades such as powder blue, eau de nil, bluebell and sky blue, make wonderful colours for special occasions when a feminine look may be required. Teamed with darker shades [navy and grey], they become great colours for shirts and tops.

<b>Pink</b>	<b><i>Wearing pink suggests gentleness and empathy; it brings out the femininity in every woman</i></b>
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All women need some pink in their wardrobe, whether it is for a dressing gown, some underwear or a pashmina. Wearing a powder pink outfit will not be your most powerful look, but a blush pink or cyclamen pink worn under a business suit will give you authority. Or, wow them on the dance floor with any shade of pink from apricot to fuchsia – but not worn head to toe.

Pink is a great colour to wear when you are feeling a little off colour, as it gives a flattering lift to any complexion.

<b>Purple</b>	<i><b>In its pure form, purple shows creativity as well as indicating sensitivity</b></i>
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The purple family runs from softest lavender to deepest damson. It is a great alternative – and a more exciting one – to black and navy. Beware that its creative signal does not compromise a situation where you want to appear conformist. In its lighter forms, the lilacs and soft violets promote a general sense of relaxation.

Many people fight shy of purple, but if you've never worn it, give it a try in a scarf or pashmina. You'll be amazed at the effect it has on others.

<b>Red</b>	<i><b>Red is the colour of energy; wear red and you will feel confident and in control</b></i>
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The red family has many variations, from raspberry to tomato, so getting the undertone right is crucial. Is it warm [yellow-based] or cool [blue-based]?

Wearing red will bring excitement into your day. It is the colour of stimulation, showing a sense of exhilaration but also suggesting a demanding character. It is a great colour to wear at the end of the week when your energy levels may be flagging. Do not, however, wear red when trying to calm children at bedtime.

<b>Green</b>	<i><b>Green, the colour of grass and leaves, conveys a sense of calm and reassurance</b></i>
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When wearing green, whether olive or lime, or anything in between, you show creativity and imagination. In the world of fashion, green brings another dimension to the wardrobe. With all its various shades, green may be used for virtually any garment, from a winter coat to a fun pair of shoes.

With green, it is particularly important to understand the undertone and to know whether you are better in a warm [yellow-based] green, such as moss or apple green, or the cool [blue-based] green of spruce or sea green.

### **Things to Remember**

1. Make sure that your clothes flatter you by knowing what the shape of your body is.
2. Regardless if you make or buy your clothes, a woman of virtue is always striving to be a well-groomed woman.

3. Know what colours compliment your skin tone and your body type and how best to wear them. Be adventurous and try colours within your colour palette that you have never tried before.
4. If you do not know what your colour palette is then you can arrange for an image consultant to show you. You can turn it into a fun time by having a 'colour party' and invite your girlfriends to come and learn about their colours too.

### ACTION POINTS

- ⦿ Look in your wardrobe and assess your clothing. Do you like the clothing that you have? Are the clothes appropriate for your body type? Do they compliment you or do they accentuate the 'wrong parts'?
- ⦿ Go through your wardrobe and lay aside clothes that you have not worn for more than one year or clothes that are tight and you are waiting to lose weight to get into or clothes that do not flatter your body. If the clothes are in good condition then give them to a friend, sell them and give the money to a charity e.g. ADRA-UK or give the clothes to a charity shop. By decluttering your wardrobes you will see the difference it will make.
- ⦿ Look at your clothes and see if you have what we call 'investment buys' or staple wardrobe clothing. These are items that you want to remain in your wardrobe for as long as possible. Investment buys are most likely to be coats, suits, jackets and trousers and could also be a handbag. I like to consider these items as classic items that can withstand the time of fashion trends. **Check what 'investment buy' clothing that you have. If you don't have any, then invest in these items that you can mix and match for many years to come.**

### REFLECTION:

In the space below write down your thoughts on your current appearance when it comes to dressing like a woman of virtue. What are some of the changes that you need to make in order to know what suits you, for you to be a well-groomed woman?

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### A PRAYER

Dear Father in heaven I ask you to bless this woman of virtue reading this article.

May she be a woman who maintains her appearance and a woman who puts on the garment of praise for the spirit of heavy burdens.

Bless her with the spirit of discernment to know how to dress her body with the

clothes that flatter her and clothes that show her well-groomed appearance. May the colours she chooses accentuate her skin tone, but most of all may her appearance be the adorning of the Holy Spirit that will draw others to you.

As she develops and grows as a woman of virtue give her your peace and your joy. Amen

### **RESOURCES & RECOMMENDED READING**

- Colour Me Beautiful by Colour Me Beautiful the Image Consultants
- How Not to Look Old by Charla Krupp
- [www.colourmebeautiful.co.uk](http://www.colourmebeautiful.co.uk)
- <http://www.wikihow.com/Dress-for-Your-Body-Type>
- <http://www.youbeauty.com/body-fitness/dressing-for-your-body-type>
- <http://www.pinterest.com/trendymodest/dress-your-body-type/>

### **SEMINARS / WORKSHOPS**

- Fashionista Diva [aimed at 16-21 year olds]
- Dress for Success – How to Dress for Your Body Shape
- What Colour Do You Wear? – Finding the Best Colours to Wear to Compliment Your Skin Tone



# **A STRONG WOMAN**

## A STRONG WOMEN SCENARIO

It was not clear when the abuse started, but somehow it was known that at some point she had become 'the battered wife'. However, the story started much earlier than that. Here's what happened.

Lynne had grown up as an only child and had secretly longed to have a brother or sister with whom to play. When this did not happen she craved attention from her parents; which they were able to give her due to their very busy working life. As a result Lynne spent many hours alone in her room with only her toys for comfort.

School life was equally lonely. Being slightly small for her age she was picked on by the other children. Soon this turned to bullying when they realised that she did not stand up to them or fight back when they harassed her. With no one to play with at school and a lonely home life she began to feel badly about herself.

Although she was a bright girl she would often hold back in school and not answer the questions even when she knew the answers as this would cause even more negative attention from her bullying classmates. If the teacher asked her a question and she answered correctly she would be called 'teacher's pet' and teased in the playground. This progressed to some of the more aggressive classmates forcing her to do their homework or answer their questions in class. Lynne obliged hoping that it would win them over, but instead they pitied her.

One November evening, her class attended a school firework display along with other year groups. Things commenced well as Lynne was able to connect with some students in the other year groups.

Just as she was enjoying herself, the core bullying team from her class came over and began insulting her in front of the students with whom she was speaking. Seeing that she was being picked on and not wanting any trouble to start the other students moved away from her. Having Lynne to themselves they began taunting her and stated that in order to demonstrate her bravery she would need to go and light the next set of fireworks. When Lynne objected reminding them that only the teachers were responsible for them they threatened to spread lies about her around the school. Feeling pressured, Lynne gave in to their demands.

At an opportune moment during the evening when the teachers were talking amongst themselves, the devious classmates guided Lynne to the area where they wanted her to light the fireworks they had brought with them. She nervously followed the instructions they gave on how to set the firework. On doing so it appeared that the firework had not ignited so Lynne was asked to go back and check as they did not feel she had done it correctly. She was pushed forward to go and inspect the area. As Lynne approached and looked down to where the firework had been placed it exploded and Lynne was thrown to the ground in the blast.

Needless to say pandemonium set in as students ran screaming in all directions. There was some delay before it was discovered that Lynne had been hit by the exploding fireworks. Her cries for help were initially obscured in the din of the other students shouting. The ambulance was called and she was taken to hospital as her class tutor rang Lynne's parents to inform them of what had happened.

Lynne remained in hospital for several weeks fighting for her life. She was subsequently moved to a specialist burns unit for treatment of the third degree burns she had sustained in the accident. There followed months and years of treatment and surgeries for skin grafts to the damaged areas of her body.

In time, and with rehabilitation, Lynne began to recover both physically and emotionally as she learned to come to terms with her debilitating injury. She had to learn how to write again as her muscle tissue and tendons on her hands had been damaged. However it was a long road to recover. When she dressed and combed her hair she avoided looking in the mirror as she was unable to cope with the image she saw. Her parents arranged for home schooling as she refused to return to school. She became a recluse in her home and avoided social settings.

One day her parents attended an evangelistic meeting and invited her to attend along with them. She ventured out and enjoyed the meetings. Her parents began having bible studies and Lynne joined them. She loved the bible stories and was uplifted by the promises of a better life in the hereafter. It was the knowledge of God's love that drew her to keep reading the bible and she felt a happiness that she had never known before.

It was a joyous day when they all got baptised together as a family. Lynne began to build her life back and felt at home with her newfound Christian family. Lynne loved the church music and the wonderful hymns and discovered that she had a gift for music. She learned to play the piano and when the choirmaster asked her to join the choir she was overjoyed as he informed her that she sang very well. She became one of the regular soloists and was invited to sing in concerts both locally and nationally.

It was a new experience for Lynne to feel so appreciated and loved by everyone and it did not appear to matter to them that she had a facial disfigurement as a consequence of the skin grafts. Their acceptance of her boosted her confidence tremendously and soon she began to feel less self conscious. Knowing also that God loved her just the way she was also lifted her spirits.

When the choir master began to take a special interest in her, both Lynne and her parents who were trusting of this senior church member reciprocated the kindness and they spent time in each other's home. So when the choirmaster invited Lynne to spend the weekend with himself and his wife they considered it a kindly Christian gesture and agreed. However that weekend the choirmaster's wife had a women's meeting to attend and Lynne was left at home with the choirmaster. When he requested that she fetch a vase from the guest bedroom he sprang into the room and raped her.

In the trauma that followed, Lynne's confidence in people and God was shattered. This was intensified when Lynne's attack was not dealt with appropriately and the Choirmaster was allowed to continue in his church role. Distraught and disappointed her family subsequently moved away from the church and settled in another area.

It would be years before Lynne could begin trusting people again even after several rounds of counselling. She became depressed and withdrawn and struggled to finish her education. She finally went away to university to study and it was there that she rekindled her faith in God when she joined the Student's Christian Union.

On finishing her studies she went on to secure work in a large organisation where she worked her way up the ladder of success and into management. She continued to attend church and made friends with the young adults in the local church. There she met a foreign young woman with whom she became good friends. As Lynne could never pronounce her name properly, she called her NG for short as it was the name by which she was known. As NG's family lived abroad she would travel back home periodically to her homeland to visit her family.

On one of these return visits NG's brother Enoch accompanied her. He was much older than NG and Lynne was curious as she had never heard NG speak about him before. However when Enoch became friendly toward Lynne she withdrew as she had never been able to form relationships with men following the traumatic attack as a teenager. Nevertheless when Enoch continued to show an interest in Lynne they became friends. Lynne relaxed when she realised that Enoch did not appear to be daunted by her facial skin graft and felt flattered when he told her she was beautiful regardless of her scars.

Enoch and NG became regular visitors to Lynne home where she still lived with her parents. They were unsure of him at first but when Enoch informed them he was in love with their daughter they softened a little towards him. It was a surprise to them however when he came to ask for their daughter's hand in marriage not more than 6 months after they had met him. Feeling somewhat concerned they counselled with Lynne to take things slowly and wait to get to know Enoch a little better before deciding on such a major decision. When Lynne shared this with Enoch he informed her that God had told him they should not delay in getting married as he would soon have to return home to sort out some important papers before returning and he would rather marry before doing so. She was never clear about what the papers were.

Lynne decided to pray about the matter and along with her parents they sought counsel with God and close relative. When Enoch stepped up the pressure saying an old girlfriend had called and he did not want to be drawn away toward her whilst waiting for Lynne's decision, she felt cornered. Lynne was torn between the thought of waiting and losing him to the old girlfriend not knowing anyone else would approach her again, or going ahead and marrying a man who she realised she did not know all that much about. What did continue to worry her was that he seemed to evade questions about his history.



When NG informed Lynne one evening that Enoch was hurt over her delay in agreeing to marry him, Lynne decided it was time to make a decision and so the date was set for the wedding. Lynne's parents resented the fact that Enoch was rushing their daughter through such a major life event as marriage, but despite their reservations they decided to support their daughter's decision. The marriage went ahead and they moved into a property that Lynne had bought.



Not long after the marriage Lynne realised that there were problems. At first she put it down to them getting to know each other, but when the difficulties continued she sought help from NG. To her surprise her once close friend began to cool. Then one day when Lynne was complaining about how badly Enoch was treating her NG informed her that she should be grateful that her brother had married her with her disfigurement especially when there were so many other women who wanted him. She stated that there were in fact other women currently pursuing him! Lynne was surprised and hurt by her friend's harsh reaction but not surprised by the revelation regarding other women approaching Enoch as she had begun to suspect that this was happening.

The marriage continued to deteriorate but Lynne was unable to share what she was suffering and hid her 'accidents' from her parents. Eventually her visits to her parent's home became less frequent. They became worried as she kept reporting that she had fallen, hurt herself so was resting at home and would visit them the following week. However, each week, the visit was postponed to the following week. They decided to visit her.

It was on these visits that they noticed she often wore her fringe directly over her eyes or wore tinted glasses. They became suspicious. One evening following a visit when Lynne's mother hugged her as she said goodbye, Lynne flinched. Both women's eyes locked knowingly. The tears commenced as Lynne revealed that Enoch had been hitting her – repeatedly.

Lynne's parents tried to get help for her but she refused, stating that she was trying to things work. However, when Lynne suffered a miscarriage following a violent outburst from Enoch her parents took action and reported him. During the course of the 'investigation' it was then that the full story came out along with the alarming details. It transpired that he was in the country illegally, as the 'papers' had never been sorted out. The greater shock however was the revelation that he was already married with a family in his country of origin. It transpired that following the breakdown of that marriage he travelled abroad to commence a new life. Lynne unwittingly provided that opportunity.

Broken and disillusioned once more Lynne wondered why life kept knocking her down so brutally. In a crushing, parting note, Enoch wrote that she had been his worse mistake and that their marriage had happened because he had taken pity on her as no one else wanted her. These words had hurt her more than the blows he

had inflicted on her. She found it hard to pray but gained solace from the hymns she had learnt as a teenager many years earlier.

For months after Enoch was deported, women kept calling the home. The final straw came however when a woman arrived one day on the doorstep with a baby in her arms announcing that it was Enoch's. Lynne was devastated and humiliated. Unable to live any longer in the home they had shared for those few turbulent years, she sold the house and went back to live with her parents.

For several weeks she cried out to God asking Him for strength to go on and to help her overcome the bitterness and intense anger she struggled with. Her short conversations with God were filled with pain and resentment for the years of heartache she had endured. Why would a loving God allow her to have experienced so many tragic life experiences?

One night as she knelt by her bedside weeping and struggling to pray, she felt an overwhelming sense of God's presence. Pausing to acknowledge what she was experiencing she pleaded with God to take away the deep hatred she felt for Enoch and heal her from the wounds of the past. She asked God to quell the anxieties she held for what felt like an uncertain future and to let her experience once again the faith and trust she had when she was baptised. Remembering again the exuberance she had felt at her baptism she also asked God to help her recapture the joy of that moment, for it had been the happiest moment in her life up to that point. She yearned to be happy like that again and to feel the peace she had known back then. That night she poured out her heart to God earnestly asking for Him to transform her life and help her emerge from this dark episode so she would be able to move forward once again. God answered her prayer.

The process to her full recovery took some time, but with the support of her parents and Christian counselling Lynne's life began to improve. She regained strength to trust in God and move forward with her life.



The turning point however came when she attended a workshop on Emotional Resilience. The visiting presenter shared some moving testimonials about individuals who had undergone traumatic life experiences yet on surviving their ordeal emerged with a new purpose and strength to build a new life. Lynne felt a deep connection with the topics discussed at the seminar and on returning home asked God to reveal to her His purpose for her life. Once again God answered her prayer.

Today Lynne is coaching on Emotional Resilience and counsels victims of domestic abuse and rape. Her faith remains strong in God.

*Due to the sensitive issues portrayed in this case study, it is advised that you have prayer advocates and counsellors as part of your workshop group to offer support where necessary when this scenario is being discussed.*

## Discussion questions

1. What were some of the early childhood experiences that impacted Lynne's self image?
2. Do you think her childhood experience of loneliness had an impact on her life? If so, in what way was this evident?
3. At what point in Lynne's life do you feel she became 'vulnerable'?
4. Reflecting on the input Lynne's parents had on her formative years what impact do you think it had on Lynne's development?
5. Review each traumatic incident Lynne encountered: the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree burn, the rape, the domestic violence and betrayal. What do you see? Is there an emerging pattern in regards to her vulnerability? Or do you think she was just unfortunate?
6. Do you feel that some individuals appear to have a harder 'lot' in life than others? If so what do you think the explanation could be?
7. Was it evident that God was with Lynne during the most traumatic moments of her life? If so how could you have convinced her of His love even during those desperate times?
8. What do you think was responsible for Lynne 'bouncing back' each time she encountered a tragedy even though she had a difficult time going through it?
9. Realising that you may encounter women who have experienced some or all of the issues related in this case study, how would your women's ministries team minister to such women?
10. How does your church deal with the emotionally wounded? What can you do to ensure your church community is a healing place for the hurting?

## A STRONG WOMAN

“Finally....Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” Ephesians 6:10 (NKJV)

### The virtuous woman as a woman of strength

*“She girds herself with strength and strengthens her arms” Proverbs 31:17*

When I read this passage I get a vivid image of a woman standing firmly, with her sleeves rolled up and perhaps her hands on her hips with a ‘I’m ready for the task’ look on her face. Girding herself with strength denotes her ability to look at life and say ‘Bring it on. Through Christ I can handle it’. She is strong to deal with the issues of the past, strong to carry today’s challenges and strong to face the challenges of the future. She is strong for whatever life may bring her way, because she knows that God is always with her and empowers her to keep going regardless of obstacles, the difficulties or the pain. It is God who is her strength.

It’s important to note that she is not claiming strength in her own power but in the power of the Lord. This is a biblical directive.

*“Finally my brethren, be strong in the Lord and the power of His might” Ephesians 6:10 (NKJV).*

There are a number of notable qualities that are critical to the success of any army. Amongst them are physical strength, stamina, endurance, mental agility and emotional resilience. These are the same qualities that enable women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to both survive and thrive. It certainly takes a woman of substance, purpose and virtue to withstand the turbulent and changing times and the unpredictability that life brings.

### DEVELOPS PHYSICAL STRENGTH AND WELLBING

Reading this description in Proverbs 31:17, we get a picture of a healthy woman who expends energy in every task she takes on. She puts her whole strength into her work. She is serious and intentional about everything she puts her hands to do. She has the capacity to do this because she not only takes care of her body but also of her mind. I can imagine she would have been a woman who paid attention to her holistic wellbeing, avoiding that which would harm her body, mind and spirit but rather chose that which would enhance every aspect of her life.



In this segment of the manual we look at how to care for our physical, emotional and spiritual health.

## Safeguarding our health as women

Several health conditions can negatively impact a female's life. Here are some health facts to consider.

### *Did you know?*

- One in six women and one in five men die of coronary heart disease in the UK making it the number one killer.
- Research from the European Heart Journal reveals that women with high blood pressure have an increased rate of cardiovascular and other diseases.
- They found that women with hypertension are up to three times more likely to develop diabetes than those with low blood pressure. Studies have also identified that co-enzyme Q10 supplements, beetroot juice and hawthorn berries can help to lower blood pressure.
- The charity - Wellbeing of Women (WoW) have estimated that over half of the women in the UK will experience a problem with their reproductive organs at some point during their lifetime.
- Around 30 per cent of women in the UK suffer from menorrhagia (heavy menstrual flow) or *Dysmenorrhoea (painful periods)*
- 80% of women are not doing enough exercise to benefit their health.  
*Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation*
- Research data is revealing that many of us are not getting sufficient levels of vitamin D to maintain good health. One study for example, a 2007 research of childbearing women in the Northern U.S. found insufficient vitamin D levels in 54% of black women and in 42% of white women.
- The Vitamin D Council - a scientist led group suggests that vitamin D treatment may be useful for the treatment of or preventing conditions such as autism, autoimmune disease, cancer, cardiovascular disease, chronic pain, depression, diabetes, flu, hypertension, neuromuscular diseases such as multiple sclerosis and bone diseases like osteoporosis.
- In 2010, Cancer Research UK found that 10,068 women under the age of 50 in the UK were diagnosed with the disease 2,356 more than in 1995.
- More than 14,000 British women are diagnosed with gynaecological cancers each year.

Breast cancer is currently the most common form of cancer in the UK and leading cause of cancer deaths in women. It is also the leading cause of deaths amongst black women over 30. Worldwide, over a million women are diagnosed with breast cancer every year.

- One in five breast cancer cases are now among women under the age of 50, says Cancer Research UK.

#### **Top 10 cancers for women in the UK in order of incidence\*:**

1. **Breast** - (leading cancer death in women and deaths in black women over 30)
2. **Bowel & Cervical** - (17,000 new cases of bowel cancer in 2006 alone & Cervical cancer is the 2<sup>nd</sup> most common cancer in women under 35 in the UK)
3. **Lung** - (more than 16,600 diagnosed with lung cancer in 2006)
4. **Uterus** - (6,891 cancers diagnosed in 2005)
5. **Ovary** - (Ovarian cancer more common in women who have never had children)
6. **Malignant Melanoma** - (deadliest cancer in women with 51% increase in incidence and second fastest increasing cancer 2007 -2009)
7. **Non Hodgkin Lymphoma** - ( 11% increase amongst women – 2007 - 2009)
8. **Pancreas** - ( 7% increase between 2007 - 2009 )
9. **Kidney** - (31% increase - 2007-2009)
10. **Leukemia** - ( 3% decrease 2007 - 2009 )
11. **Other** - *Thyroid cancer is the fastest increasing cancer in women in the UK*  
*\*(Statistical data acquired from Cancer Research UK)*

#### **Factors which reduce cancer risk:**

- Vegetarian or mostly plant based diet
- Non smoking history
- Non drinker
- Daily physical activity or exercise most days per week for a minimum of 30 minutes
- Ideal body weight
- Avoidance of sunburn
- Reducing exposure to toxins
- Good stress management
- Adequate rest and sleep

### **Keeping a check on our work-life balance**

With the list of growing attributes we read about in Proverbs 31 depicting the virtuous woman, we could be pressured into thinking that as women we have to excel in all those facets of life as she did. With a mindset like that we run the risk of burning ourselves out or beating up on ourselves trying to match up to the picture of this 'perfect' woman. When I think of the Proverbs 31 woman I see someone

whom God has gifted in many areas and who has dedicated her life to being the best that she can be, for God herself and her family and her community. I too can do the same with my own list of gifting be it half of hers or even one of two. The pressure to be more and do more can lead to overwork and undue stress on our physical health. As women we pride ourselves as being multi-skilled and able to multi-task well. This can lead us to become over worked which leads to ill health.

#### **Workaholics are more likely to be:**

- depressed
- anxious
- angry
- more health complications
- shorter life expectancy than non-workaholic counterparts
- significant physical & mental problems

#### **Mood and food**

When we are overstretched physically and mentally it negatively impacts our mood and this can lead to poor eating habits. We tend to crave foods which are high in sugar and fats - foods which are usually low in nutritional value. This can negatively impact our mood.

In several studies on eating habits, the nutritional aspect of food has been found to affect mood. For example: A UK study by Benton and Cook (providing similar results to several other studies) demonstrates an association between low selenium intake and a significantly greater incidence of depression and other negative mood states. Junk food full of sugar, fat and salt are generally low in selenium.

Additionally, several studies report changes in eating patterns when individuals are stressed. This generally leads to comfort eating where we opt for processed foods over natural foods.



#### **Steps to ensuring a more balanced life:**

##### **ACTION:**

- Pace yourself
- Say 'no' to the unimportant
- Know your limitations





## A PRAYER

God of our strength, sustainer and restorer. We thank you for the gift of life and the resources you so lavishly bestow upon us each day. Give us the wisdom to make wise decisions about our lifestyle so that we will honour you with our bodies in all that we do.

Where there is ill health we ask for healing according to your will. We thank you that you become our strength when we are weak and you give us the power to press on in spite of our challenges. Help us to remember you are ever with us in all that we do and for this we give thanks. Amen.

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## DEVELOPS EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

*“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Romans 12:2*

*“Part of the preparation for the battles of life is not only to acquire the right equipment to wear on the body but also to make proper preparations of the mind”  
John Maxwell*

In the psychological sense, people who are resilient have the ability to ‘bounce back’ after encountering life difficulties or traumatic situations. One definition of emotional resilience by The American Psychological Association explains it as:

*“The process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, threats and even significant sources of stress – such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stresses”*

- Resilience does not take away life’s stressors or eliminate difficulties.
- Instead, it equips individuals with a strength and resolve to face and deal with problems directly in a way that enables them to overcome adversity and move forward in life.

### Why is resilience important?

*"We do need to prepare ourselves, for life has a way of surprising us with adversity when we least expect it."* Steven M. Southwick, M.D. & Dennis S. Charney, MD.

Knowing how to bounce back also is key to our success in life.

*"More than education, more than experience, more than training, a person's level of resilience will determine who succeeds and who fails. That's true in the cancer ward, it's true in the Olympics, and it's true in the boardroom"* (Coutu, 2002)

Dr Steven M. Southwick and Dennis S. Charney has written an enlightening book titled : *Resilience – The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges: Ten key ways to weather and bounce back from stress and trauma*. In it they identify the following interventions for building resilience.

1. Optimism: belief in a brighter future
2. Facing fear: an adaptive response – coping with and confronting fear
3. Religion and spirituality: drawing on faith
4. Social support: learning the tap code
5. Role models: providing the road map
6. Training: physical fitness and strengthening
7. Brain fitness; challenge your mind and heart
8. Cognitive and emotional flexibility
9. Meaning, purpose and growth



*Each of these aspects are covered in depth in the Emotional Resilience seminars conducted by the British Union Conference Health and Women's Ministries departments and a team of individuals who are being trained to run these seminars.*

### **God's word for building emotional resilience:**

#### **Romans 8:35-39**

**35** "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

**36** As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

**37** Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

**38** For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

From this passage of scripture it is clear that the Apostle Paul was able to develop a resolute confidence and fortitude in the face of severe and ongoing tribulation. He

is able to speak from experience and testify that no matter the trial or hardship, if we are truly rooted in God there is nothing that we can ever encounter that will be strong enough to sever our connection from God.

Knowing that whatever we go through God is with us, we have a sense of victory even in the heat of the battle.

*“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphant procession in Christ”* 2 Corinthians 2:14.

### Reflection:

“In all my perplexities and distresses, the Bible has never failed to give me light and strength.” ~ **Robert E. Lee, American Military Officer**

### Dealing with hurts

The reality of life is that each of us at some point will experience pain in any of its varied forms. When that happens, know that our loving, compassionate, and attentive God is there with us in the moments we find difficult to bear. He will take the pressure as He brings us release from the pain.

There are times when life can seem overwhelming and leave us feeling weak from the pain we are experiencing. We often feel emotionally drained by the uncertainty of our current situation. Yet there is always hope when we turn to God. He has promised He will do for us what you cannot do for ourselves. He is able to turn our wounds into wellbeing; our hurts into healing; our pain into praise; our tests into a testimony; our battles into breakthroughs and your trials into triumphs.

In some cases of extreme pain and trauma we may need to seek the intervention of a Christian counsellor or other supportive agencies to get us through the situation we are facing.

If you have suffered from tragic life circumstances, hurt, disappointments of abuse in any of its forms, Jesus has the remedy. Your compassionate Saviour is waiting to apply the prescription that you need. Isaiah 61:3 states: *“To console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness...”* Isaiah 61:3 (NKJV).

Do you have a burden today that you need the Lord to relieve you of? Well reach out in faith, through prayer and tell the Lord about it. He has the prescription for our pain.

One touch from him can bring:

- Healing for every broken area in your life
- Deliverance for every captivity and circumstances that has bound you
- Recovery from every loss, hurt or deficit and restoration for your mind
- Liberty from every situation that has come against you and held you back

We are reminded in this beautiful passage from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, “The very trials that task our faith most severely and make it seem that God has forsaken us, are to lead us closer to Christ, that we may lay all our burdens at His feet and experience the peace, which He will give us in exchange.” (p. 129).

## A Positive outlook

In October 2011 whilst travelling on a work related engagement, I sustained a head injury which significantly impacted my life. I had to take some time off work due to debilitating symptoms which impacted my ability to speak, mobilize and concentrate for any period of time as I suffered from extreme drowsiness. I struggled with the enforced activity as I had so much to do and was uncertain about how this would impact on my work long term. The fact that I was unable to go into work (even when I was well enough to commence working from home) made me feel somewhat diminished. I also wondered what people were thinking when my symptoms persisted and my recovery appeared to be taking longer than expected. This made me very low.

One day as I was wrestling with God and feeling sorry for myself, I received a text message that boosted my spirit. It stated:

*Take this time of healing as a special time for you to focus on God and reach up to Him for strength, blessings and guidance.*

*Do have a good rest as this is one of the blessings that can come out of this experience.*

*Let go of any feelings of guilt because you are not at work, you have done a great work. Sometimes we give and we never stop to receive from God and He has to hold us down to get us to come to Him just for our own personal care.*

*Spend some time with your heavenly Father like you have never done before.*

*Let God heal you through rest of thoughts, body, emotions etc.*

Needless to say after reading that text message I felt boosted in my spirit. It was a turning point for me as I asked God how this situation can be used for good. It was then that the passage of scripture came to mind in Romans 8:28:

*“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”*

During my time of convalescence the devotional book *Light on the Path* was published. God had taught me through my time of pain that something good could still come of it and used my experience and that of many others to share His love.

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## BUILDING EMOTIONAL STRENGTH

There are several factors that help to safeguard our mental and emotional wellbeing.

In the book *Mind, Character and Personality*, E.G.White states: *'The mind needs to be controlled, for it has a most powerful influence upon the health.'* (vol 2, p. 681). The study of psychosomatic disorders mirrors this quote. Psychoneuro-immunology – the effects of thought processes and its impact on the immune system leading to disease. Negative thoughts and emotions flood the body with hormones that depress the immune system.

Conversely, positive thoughts and emotions release immune-enhancing hormones which have a beneficial impact on our body.

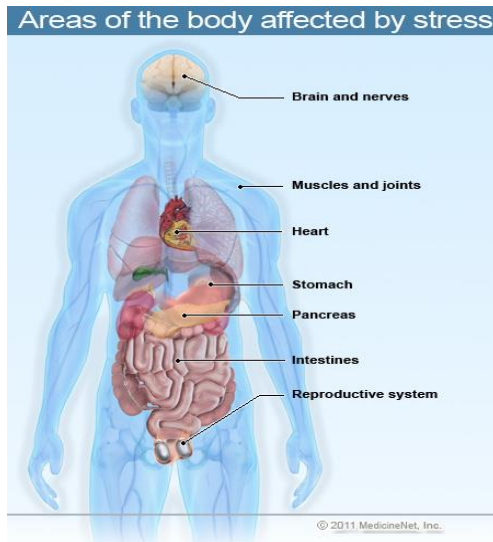
Proverbs 17:22 advises: *"A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones."*

Keeping our bodies healthy with adequate rest, sleep, exercise and good nutrition also helps to build our emotional strength through challenging times.

### Stress management

Stress is the body's natural response, psychologically and physiologically, to events whether they are positive and negative that upset our natural equilibrium or personal balance in some way. We experience stress when the pressures we experience outweigh our ability or perceptions to deal with it.

What makes you stressed? Whatever it is, it needs to be managed effectively as ongoing stress can have a negative impact on our entire wellbeing be it physical, emotional, social or spiritual. The following diagram shows some of the organs of the body that are affected.



A stressful lifestyle can also affect mental wellbeing by causing symptoms like poor memory, irritability, moodiness and depression. Stress also has negative physiological effects. A less stressful life ensures a healthy mind, body and spirit with stronger defences against illness.

Having gone through a particularly stressful moment in my life many years ago, I sat down and asked God to give me the wisdom to deal with what was happening at the time. One of the revelations I received was the fact that my life was over spilling with activity and trying to meet the demanding schedule of an intemperate diary filled with too many appointments. My life was out of balance with too many 'must do's and not enough time to rest and really enjoy living.

As I thought about how I might change that destructive pattern I was inspired to use the word peace as an acronym to slow down my hectic pace of life. I wrote P.E.A.C.E first for myself and when I had practiced it enough to experience its efficacy for myself, I then presented it as a workshop. Here is the basic format which is covered in more depth in the seminar titled *PEACE Please!*

P.E.A.C.E.- a recipe for tranquil moments of reflection.

- P – Pause
- E - Environment
- A - Attitude
- C - Calm
- E - Exercise

P – *Pause.*

- Stop and be still. Delight in the fact that you choose to 'be' rather than 'do' at this moment.
- Don't feel guilty about this time of seeming inactivity. Just enjoy it. Learn to relax – it eases tension.

- Think of this time as renewal where your energies are being replenished and you gain new strength to go again.
- Diary 'me time' into your schedule on a weekly basis.

*E – Environment.*

- Retire to a treasured spot where you can easily unwind.
- Ensure that the lighting, the temperature and the furniture is comfortable and enhances a relaxing and reflective mood.
- Make this your personal area, a safe haven of retreat.
- You may wish to choose some appropriate music which adds to the ambience and aids your restful mode.

*A – Attitude.*

- Detox your mind. Getting rid of negative thoughts helps you to think more clearly and enhances general wellbeing.
- With a positive mindset you can face life with all its challenges, conquer the past with its disappointments and embrace the future with hope.
- Encourage yourself and others. It lifts your mood and reminds you of what is possible

*C – Calm.*

- The ability to bring body, mind and spirit into a state of rest.
- Prayer is a powerful exercise which releases the pressure and allows you to express hopes, hurts and joys. It enables you to connect with God, reflect and pace your thinking as you gain strength and wisdom to continue the journey of life.
- Contemplate on beauty in nature, listen to relaxing music, read something interesting.
- Try a soothing herbal tea like camomile known for its calming properties to relax the nerves and induce sleep.

*E – Exercise.*

- Engage in regular exercise; it's a great stress buster.
- Exercise improves the circulation, boosts immunity and maintains good health both mentally and physically.
- It also enhances rest which is crucial for good mental health.



## **A women of virtue demonstrates emotional intelligence**

### ***What is Emotional Intelligence?***

Emotional Intelligence, EQ, has been heralded as another breakthrough in understanding human behaviour. It is a relatively recent behavioural model which rose to prominence with Daniel Goleman's 1995 Book titled 'Emotional Intelligence'.

Daniel Goleman defines Emotional Intelligence as:

“The capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.”

Emotional intelligence can be described as a set of acquired skills and competencies exhibited by individuals which enhances their emotional development and positively impacts their interaction with others. This results in a greater measure of success in one's domestic life, family relationships, career and work experiences. It has been

observed that people who possess a greater level of emotional intelligence are healthier, less depressed, more productive at work, and have better relationships.

#### **Components of Emotional Intelligence**

- Knowing our emotions – the ability to identify them and predict their impact on self and others.
- Managing our emotions – the way we respond to life events; appropriate and effective expression of feelings; not giving free reign to emotions; developing positive self talk.
- Recognising emotions in others – the awareness of other people's emotions and the appropriate response to them.
- Managing relationships with others – dealing effectively with different personalities in a way that fosters good relationships and engenders positive outcomes.
- Motivation – the ability to inspire positive action in self and others.

#### **Facts:**

- Whereas IQ is associated with genes, EQ (Emotional Intelligence) is not inherited. Therefore it is possible to improve it over time as EQ is largely learned and can grow with experience.
- Research now points to EQ being more responsible for success than IQ.

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### **WOMEN SURVIVING AGAINST THE ODDS**

"Life is not easy for any of us. But what of that? We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something and that this thing must be attained."

**Marie Curie**



When you think of women who are strong emotionally, which women come to mind? What do you think made them strong as they faced difficult life circumstances? Hold that thought.

Before we get to the good news bit in regards to overcoming the odds, let's take a look at some of the challenges that face many women across the globe.

To begin with I think of the many women around the world who are often powerless to withstand the forces that oppose them. Ugly giants such as slavery, poverty, abuse, poor health, discrimination, prejudices, illiteracy, adverse working conditions including withholding opportunities for development and leadership dominate the lives of many women worldwide.

I am mindful of the legacy of slavery perpetuated through some political and social systems and demonstrable in the racism, the prejudice and the discrimination that exist worldwide. We are reminded of the reality of modern-day slavery which still impacts women and children today through forced domestic slavery and child labour.

However against the backdrop of this dark picture I am reminded that women can be empowered to overcome mountains of difficulties that face them.

I am also reminded that God still uses women of strength and stature today to bring hope and value to their lives and the lives of others. We see it in the prominence of the matriarchal families worldwide in households where fathers are absent or deny their responsibilities and mothers step up to fill the gap. We see women's strength of leadership and determination that the suffering of their fore parents will not be the portion of their offspring for generations to come. We see it in the self-sacrificing of their own needs for the comfort, security and progression of their families in order to cushion them from undue suffering and pain and propel them into a future of hope. We experience it through the emergence of successful and positive individuals from homes where vision and bright dreams replaced the nightmare of past hurts and torture to embrace a future where the best is within their grasp and not in the hands of another. Yes women can overcome barriers and defy the odds to succeed.

### **Strong at the broken places**

**"The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places...."**  
**Ernest Hemingway**

How do you remain strong in the face of life's challenges and changes that negatively impact you? We hear of various individuals who having gone through

experiences, such as the untimely death of a child, subsequently form a support group for other parents who have lost their children.

This is what scientists call 'Post Traumatic Growth.' This is defined as the positive change that occurs as a result of coping with a traumatic event.

NATAL, Israel's Trauma Centre for Victims of Terror and War, has come up with these 5.

Researchers defined 5 dimensions in which Post Traumatic Growth can be expressed:

- Firstly, some people report that new opportunities become available to them which were unavailable prior to the traumatic event.
- Secondly, some people report that they feel an affiliation with certain individuals and have a strong connection with others who have also experienced traumatic events.
- Thirdly, for others they subsequently report an enhanced sense of self resiliency for example "what doesn't kill me makes me stronger".
- The fourth aspect is that post traumatic growth is demonstrated by a greater and fuller appreciation of life in general.
- The fifth area is a spiritual one, where people feel a deeper spiritual commitment to their lives even if this commitment involves a significant change in their set of beliefs and values.

In times of trauma, pain or loss you too can find purpose and meaning. This is possible not only in the strength that you can draw from the experience but the fact that God empowers you.

"My flesh and my heart fail; *But God is* the strength of my heart and my portion forever." Psalm 73:26.

#### REFLECTION

*"We must never forget that we may find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation"* Viktor Frankl' - Holocaust survivor

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#### Facing the future without fear

"Strength and honour are her clothing; She shall rejoice in time to come." Proverbs 31:25 (NKJV).

Another version states:

"Strength and dignity are her clothing, And she smiles at the future." Proverbs 31:25 (NAS).



What makes this virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 look in the mirror and smile at herself in anticipation of what is yet to come; whatever it brings? The answer: The virtuous woman uses both her strength and dignity she possesses to build a positive picture for her future.

How can this lesson from the virtuous woman help us to look forward to the unknown with confidence and expectancy? Perhaps the answer is to be found in this scripture. Matthew 6:34 *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."*

This does not mean that we should not plan for tomorrow or make arrangements for our senior years. What this does mean is that we should not look forward fearfully or look forward with worry or concern about what will happen to us.

Just think about it; each day itself brings with it its own change and challenges which is more than enough for us to concern or busy ourselves with. Many of us find it hard enough to cope with what each day brings us much less trying to take on the maybe's or the what if's of forthcoming days.

The word tomorrow can simply mean the next day or the future in general. As tomorrow is not promised to any of us whether it means the next day or many days to come, God is already covering our today and if he grants us tomorrow, then He has grace enough to sustain us there. Hold on to that hope as the following quote reminds us:

*"We have nothing to fear for the future, except we forget the way the Lord has led us and His dealings in our past experience."* E.G. White

## Embracing aging

"Aging is not 'lost youth' but a new stage of opportunity and strength."  
— Betty Friedan



How do we face aging positively?

What would make you smile as you look ahead and imagine yourself 10 or 20 years from now?

As we age as women, there are so many facets for us to grapple with. The physical changes in our body, losing our 'beauty', adjusting psychologically and physiologically to the changes that growing older brings can be challenging. However there is always help available. In the seminars on Seasons of a Woman's Life and Managing Menopause, we look at this in more detail.

However, above the varied coping strategies that we may employ to cope with all the changes that come with aging, maintaining our connection with God gives us an advantage. This has been verified scientifically.

"Older women are more grateful to God than older men, and they receive greater stress-buffering health effects due to this gratitude" states a research report from the University of Florida in Gainesville and Wayne State University in Detroit. It was found that older adults particularly women use prayer more than any other alternative therapy for health. The results revealed 96% of study participants using prayer specifically to cope with stress.

In numerous studies prayer and spirituality have been linked to:

- Better overall health
- Less cardio-vascular diseases like hypertension
- Less stress, even during difficult times
- Less depression
- More positive feelings
- Better psychological well-being
- Greater ability to handle stress



**Marge Jetton at age 104**

I had the privilege to meet with and interview Marge Jetton before she died at the grand old age of 106! She was truly an incredible woman who loved people and was greatly loved in return.

Amongst the factors she credits her longevity to are these: walking at least a mile every day, lifted weights, eating oatmeal and a plant-based diet including oatmeal for breakfast, observing the Sabbath, loved her husband despite the bumps in the road, volunteering generously and demonstrating faith and gratitude to God. Now that's a winning formula to embrace as we age.

### **Understanding the seasons**

Expect to have hope rekindled.  
Expect your prayers to be answered in wondrous ways.  
The dry seasons in life do not last.  
The spring rains will come again.  
-- Sarah Ban Breathnach

Sometimes when we encounter 'dry seasons' of life, it can be easy to act as if this is how life will always be. We sometimes allow the present difficulties to mar our vision for a brighter future.

The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 did not appear to have this problem. We are not told of the difficulties that she might have grappled with or daily challenges that she may have encountered although she must have had some. What we are told however is how she faced the future and that was with confidence.

*"She shall rejoice in time to come" (v 25).*

This scripture suggests that because of the strength that she has developed (emotionally, physically, spiritually and socially), she has a good foundation on which to face the future whatever it brings.

Our standing in Christ today will impact the capacity to which we are able to stand in the future if we build our life in Christ and in the power of trust and faith in Him whatever season of life we face.

As we follow God's will for our life, he may lead us through seasons of challenge. However, there is nothing that happens on each 24hr schedule that He does not know about. He has predestined some things to happen, for He knows the end from the beginning.

Face your life with the conviction knowing that with God all things are possible. Remember it takes both rain and sunshine to make a rainbow, so rest assured that whatever you encounter in life, God has a plan for you and His plan is perfect. Recall His promise in Jeremiah 29:11 when He said:

*"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."*

In spite of what we go through and the challenges we are called to face in this life, God's love brings release from our yesterday, strength for our today and hope for our tomorrows. With Christ we can face life and all its difficulties with purpose and a resolve to keep going. He enables us to conquer the past with all its disappointments, live in the present with joy in spite of hardships and embrace the future with hope regardless of the current outlook.

Even when bad things happens, God can make it that it turns out for your good.



## Stands firm in adversity

“People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within.” **Elizabeth Kübler-Ross**

Even when you are chosen by God life can still be challenging. As Christian women this is a hard fact of life that can make us complain about our lot. ‘Why is this happening to me?’ or more to the point ‘Why has God allowed this to happen?’ When the answer is not forthcoming, we can become discouraged or even worse, disappointed with God.

Even when we can’t understand what is happening or make sense of the pain of life, the God who sees and knows is masking sense of it all. We may not have the answer to the ‘why’s’ of life but standing firm under the pressure is the opportunity for God to handle that question and for us to trust Him to do what is best even when it is painful for us. What is clear is that He will bring us through the difficult times. We can be assured of this because of the many Bible promises which affirm His commitment to our care and watchful attention to our needs. His promise is that He will never leave us or forsake us. Our part is to be strong for the battle and He will do the rest. As Deuteronomy 31:6 affirms:

“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He *is* the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.”(NKJV)

The Psalmist David was able to attest to this in Psalm 34:19 when he wrote:

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.”

No matter what problems you face in life, no matter how dark the road ahead, God is at work in your very circumstances and uses them for His ultimate purpose.

Even in the fiercest storms, a lighthouse will always point to a way of escape. You just have to look out for the beacon and follow its direction to navigate you to the safety of the shore.

God can use adversity to manoeuvre you and put you in strategic positions which at the time you may see as traumatic. God understands the pain but He interprets your situation from an eternal standpoint so that if you remain faithful in spite of pain God will use the very challenge for your ultimate good for the triumph of His purpose.

### Exercise:

Think of a time when you had a seemingly insurmountable challenge but God intervened and turned the circumstances around so that it worked in your favour.

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## Reflection

When under pressure we need to remember that God uses even the bad things in our life to bring about a greater good

### A blessing in the storm?

As a child I was always afraid of storms and would find a place to hide where I thought I would be safe from the thunder and lightening. Even though I was inside the house and out of the reach of the storm, the loud thunder claps and the crackle and flash of white light would instil fear in me. Once the thunder and lightning subsided I would emerge from my hiding place feeling more secure now that the storm was over.

In a storm when the ships are out on the turbulent ocean being tossed about by the boisterous wind and waves, the safety of the craft and those on board is of paramount importance. The captain and his crew then look outside of themselves for hope of safe arrival by following the beam of the lighthouse which directs them through the dangerous waters.

Even in the fiercest storms, a lighthouse will always point to a way of escape. You just have to look out for the beacon and follow its direction to navigate you to the safety of the shore.

Mankind has always sought for meaningful ways to turn dark circumstances around, to secure happiness and embrace a brighter future. When seeking to find meaning in the midst of pain, it is sometimes helpful to ask yourself the question, 'How can I use this experience to my advantage...?' 'Is there something I can learn from my present circumstance that could help others...?' These are the beacons of light that shine a light on your path and the way out of your present darkness.



Is there some great obstacle in your life that you are struggling to find a way around? Let God be your navigator. Is there a relationship difficulty that is breaking your heart and threatening to crush you? God will be your burden bearer. Have you been diagnosed with a physical, mental or psychosomatic illness? God can become the prescription that you need. Rest assured that whatever you encounter in life, God has a plan for you and His plan is perfect. I have found this to be true. In all the life challenges I have experienced so far, when I have immersed and looked back I can see God's hand at work and I now have a story of transformation to share of how the experience changed my life for the better. In some circumstances it also brought productivity to my life. One such occasion was a result of my head injury, God used that negative experience to allow me to share my pain and invite other women to also testify of God's goodness during the challenges of their life. As a result the devotional book titled *Light on the Path* was birthed.

In your time of reflection today, simply ask God to allow your time of difficulty and pain to work for His glory. As you do, reflect on this scripture:

*"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28 (NKJV).*

May God show you His blessing even while you are in the storm.

### **Strength in stillness**

"Be still, and know that I *am* God" Psalm 46:10

When we are still before God, we hear Him more distinctly as we are quiet enough in both body, mind and spirit to connect with Him in a more meaningful way. In the absence of any other distractions the peace we enjoy in the quiet stillness brings strength to our entire being.

Being still is not generally one of my strengths, but God has been working with me on this. One of the scriptures that enabled me to pause in the business of life on a daily basis is the following scripture:

*"Jesus said to them, 'Come away, to a quiet place, and rest awhile.' For there were many coming and going, so that they had no time even for meals." Mark 6:31.*

Just as we require quiet to refresh our physical body when we are tired, so we need the space to be still when we are worried and troubled to gain quietness of mind in place of our anxious and turbulent thoughts.

God's plea to us is to be still; quiet in His presence, confident in His power, assured in His love so that we can truly know who He is – healer, restorer, deliverer – everything we ever need. When we give over to God our restless minds, troubled hearts and hurting souls, He will give us rest for our restlessness, tranquillity for our troubles and healing for our hurts.

The reassuring words of Isaiah 26:3 brings us hope:

*"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You; because he trusts in You."*

You can be assured that whatever has transpired in your past experiences, whatever your present circumstance and whatever the future holds; God can give healing for yesterday, help for today and hope for tomorrow.

### Reflection:

"You must learn to be still in the midst of activity and to be vibrantly alive in repose."

— Indira Gandhi, first female prime minister of India

### Trusting in God's promises

It has been said that a promise is only as good as the person who made it! The character of the one stating the promise is what gives that promise its value. When God makes a promise we can hold Him to that promise for all His promises are true. He follows through on what He says in Isaiah 55:11: *"So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."* (NKJV)

On the window sill in my kitchen there is a plaque which reads: *Your future is as bright as the promises of God*

I smile whenever I read that because I know we can trust the promises of God. Why? Because we know His character; we can trust what he says because he has proven Himself to be trustworthy.

### Prayer time with God

One of the ways we can build our faith through prayer is to use God's word as the basis of our prayer. I do this by praying the scripture. So if I am praying about a financial challenge I quote a scripture relating to God's provision and thank Him for providing the means by which my financial deficits will be alleviated. I then claim God's promise of answered prayer when we pray in faith and according to His will. As I acknowledge my belief in Him and hold on to His promise I leave the outcome with Him.

As I go about my daily tasks during the day, I find moments of prayer time where I undertake a conversational prayer with God. This makes me feel closer to Him as I include Him in my daily tasks as I talk to Him about what I am doing. In my general prayer time I often quote a promise and then pray through that promise and claim it in prayer for the issue I am praying about.

Having God's word around me has always been very precious to me. For this reason I keep a Promise Box (with Bible scripture promises) in every room in the house. This has proved to be beneficial so that in times of difficulties or when I feel somewhat below par I can reach for God's word at short distance as it is easily accessible in whatever room I may be in. Sometimes I read the scripture verse audibly, at other times silently then lift a prayer to God about the verse I have just read and ask Him to embed the message of the promise in my mind as I make it relevant to my life.

Every time I pick out one of those Bible promises, it gives my faith a boost and I am encouraged to trust God more. I also carry some of the promises in my handbag that at any given moment when the need arises I have a scripture promise for that situation. Praise God for the power of His word to affect change and impact any situation that we encounter.

As part of my prayer time, I also use a Gratitude and Prayer Diary as a point of reflection. This enables me to thank God for His blessings in my life and for His many answers to my prayers.

You may also use a Spiritual Journey Journal to record your walk with God and place your prayers to Him about each experience you are encountering.

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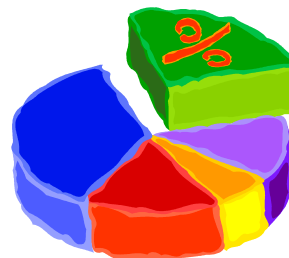
## Balancing the segments of your life:

### A strong woman is a balanced woman

In this segment of the manual we have looked at the physical the emotional and the spiritual. Maintaining physical wellbeing, developing emotional resilience and building spiritual stamina are crucial elements in our aspiring to become virtuous women.

We need to learn how to balance each segment of our lives to live holistically.

- Spiritual nurture
- Physical environment
- Emotional and mental capacity
- Career
- Money
- Health
- Family & friends
- Significant others
- Personal growth & contribution
- Fun and recreation





knowledge that you will never leave us or forsake us and with you we can finish well. Thank you for directing our past, sustaining our present and securing our future. May we ever be faithful to you in every aspect of our lives. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen

#### RESOURCES & RECOMMENDED READING

- A God For All Seasons Sue Haydon-Knowell 1 85424 480 9 Monarch Books 2002
- Becoming A Woman of Excellence Cynthia Heald 0 89109 066 5 NavPress 1986 Becoming A Woman of Purpose Cynthia Heald 08910 97902 NavPress 1994
- Daily Wisdom for Women Practical, Biblical Insight for Today's Woman Carol L Fitzpatrick 1 55748 937 8 Barbour Publishing
- Embracing the Challenges of Life And Loving it! Susanne Mornan Vaughan & Sharon Platt-McDonald 1 9005621 41 8 Pen Press
- Empowering Women Living life in the power of God's Spirit 1 85345 326 9 CWR 2005
- Especially for a Woman Encouragement, support and advice for the important issues in a woman's life 0 85009 676 6 Word Publishing 1994
- Questions Women Ask in Private H. Norman Wright 0 8307 1637 8 Regal Books 1993
- Resilience The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges Ten key ways to weather and bounce back from stress and trauma Steven M. Southwick, MD & Dennis S. Charney, MD 978 0 521 19563 8 Cambridge University Press 2012
- Seasons of A Woman's Life Helping women to understand and appreciate their emotions Jean Lush with Patricia Rushford 0 340 49544 8 Hodder and Stoughton 1987
- The Little Book of Health for Women Sharon Platt-McDonald 1 904685 86 2 The Stanborough Press 2010
- Woman to Woman Edna Ellison & Tricia Scribner 1 56309 949 7 New Hope Publishers 2005

[www.fabafterfifty.co.uk](http://www.fabafterfifty.co.uk)

#### SEMINARS / WORKSHOPS

- Burnout – Recognition and Prevention
- Cancer – The Facts
- Depression in Women

- Detoxing for Life
- Developing Emotional Resilience
- Emotional Resilience for Women
- Emotional Resilience for Older Adults
- Emotional Resilience for Men
- Embracing the Challenges of Life and Loving it!
- Foods for Females
- Forgiveness as Healing
- Health Matters for Women
- Managing Menopause
- Midlife Crisis
- Mind Makeover
- PEACE Please!
- Resilience for Daily Life
- Seasons of a Woman's Life
- Stress- How to Handle the Pressure Effectively
- Total Restoration



**WOMEN WHO  
ARE  
INDUSTRIOUS**

## INDUSTRIOUS:

Karla had a passion for baking and creating culinary delights both for her family and for special events. Her kitchen was a hive of activity filled with wonderful aromas and appetising dishes which captivated the eyes and tantalized the taste buds. Her food was always good. It was hard to rival her creative, well prepared and beautifully presented dishes. Sitting at her table and savouring the creative dishes she prepared was always an absolute delight.

For as long as she could remember Karla had always been interested in cooking and experimenting in the kitchen. Whenever there was a special programme at church or a community event she was always called on to spearhead the provision of the food. Working well in a team and coordinating individuals was another skill she possessed so invariably people loved to work with her and would always be there to support should she require help.



Over the years a number of individuals would suggest that she develop her hobby into a business idea. She would think about it periodically but due to family and work commitments she was unable to follow through with the idea. Instead she prayed about opportunities to use her catering skills to help others and support the work of the church.

Following a family reunion one year, her aunt presented her with a cookbook of recipes that she had compiled and had published several years previously. This gave Karla an idea. She decided to make a list of all the dishes that people indicated they loved to eat and had complimented her on when she made them. She added to this her own favourites from the creative menus she had developed over the years. As she had nieces and nephews who were computer literate she talked with them about the idea of desktop publishing her special recipes into a cookbook. And so it was that at the next church fare, Karla's recipe booklets were on sale. Knowing how well she cooked, all the recipe books were purchased swiftly.

At future church and community events Karla decided that she would both sell her cookbooks and some prepared dishes so people had an idea of what the recipes in the book were like. Again her products were sold out within a short space of time. Her cookbooks and food items became very popular at these events. Some were purchased as a raffle or as gift items at the fare. Many people brought for their own pleasure whilst others purchased to place in gift packs for hospital visits or departmental programmes taken to retirement and nursing homes.

Karla was grateful to God for allowing her hobby to be such a success. As she had a heart for ministry she made a commitment to God that any profits from her sales were donated to church and community initiatives as that was a dream she had



always held – to be able to use her talents for the benefit of others and for the service of the Lord. In giving back financially from the sales of her hobby Karla saw other ministries develop as a result as the money was utilized to benefit other projects.

Often whilst her dishes were being cooked, Karla would take the time to create items of clothes and household goods as she also loved to sew and knit. These she also began to add to her collection of goods for church sales and community fairs and over time they too became popular.

**Discussion:**

- Think of a programme that you would like to run at your local church or an event that you would like to put on for the community. If you are short of funds why not enlist the help of skilled individuals to make various products for sale to help raise funds for your special event.
- Do you know the skill set and talents of the women (and men as well as children) in your church who could contribute to such an initiative?
- What skills do you have that you could use creatively to raise funds for church and community projects?
- Does your church seek to utilize the various creative skills of the membership particularly in outreach events?



## AN INDUSTRIOUS WOMAN

***"It is not enough to be industrious; so are the ants. What are you industrious about?"***

Henry David Thoreau



'Busy doing what?' was the title of a seminar for women that I conducted a number of years ago. Whilst it generated some interesting and humorous responses, the point was clearly made. Sometimes we can be busy with nothing to show for it.

***Activity does not always equal productivity!***

This Proverbs 31 woman however had a lot to show for her busy life. She was ultra productive and demonstrated a love for life, zest for living and Godly wisdom in all her actions. This chapter gives an overview of the many roles and tasks she undertook as we will see later on.

### **The principle of productivity**

The level of productivity of this outstanding woman of Proverbs 31 has been a source of discussion throughout the centuries. What was the secret to her resourcefulness and exceptional output? A deep connection to God and a reliance on His strength, would have been the foundation for allowing her to accomplish so much and undertaking it so well. Yet there is something about the way she attends to her task that grabs my attention.

To begin with-her mindset is right. It is one that seeks to be active and not stagnant. There is a level of diligence and attention to detail that is the signature of everything that she does.

Proverbs 31:27 states:

*"She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness"*

Bread making in bible times was a process that involved time and effort. They didn't have instant bread mix in those days. The reference here to eating the 'bread of idleness' is an interesting one. 'Eating bread' could be interpreted as eating what you have worked for and produced yourself. You have extended the effort and now the reward is enjoying the fruits of your labour. On the other hand 'Eating bread' whilst being 'idle' is another matter entirely. This paints a picture of benefiting from what someone else has produced without putting anything into the equation. It could be seen as gain at someone else's expense. You are benefitting from someone else's labour to feed your need without giving anything back.

The message is that she works well and she feeds well. Her household is fed because she has extended the effort to do so.

She is also wise about the way she goes about her work. She is both efficient and effective- making the most of every moment. She knows that idleness is the slippery

slope that could lead to other distractions which might not be wholesome, as well as creating an atmosphere of unproductiveness. Additionally she is aware of the scope of duties attending to the needs of the home. This has been an area that is sometimes lacking in families where a young woman has not been taught how to be industrious.

*“There are very many girls who have married and have families, who have but little practical knowledge of the duties devolving upon a wife and mother. They can read, and play upon an instrument of music; but they cannot cook. They cannot make good bread, which is very essential to the health of the family. They cannot cut and make garments, for they never learned how. They considered these things unessential, and in their married life they are as dependent upon someone to do these things for them as are their own little children. “ (E.G.White Letters to Young Lovers)*

Teaching our young women the practical aspects of being a virtuous woman is important for family life. This industrious Proverbs 31 woman made her home a delight as she is well resourced by her varied skills.

She also has an organised mind in the way she went about her 24 hour schedule as we will see later in this chapter. This is the key to her productivity.

Fast forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and we see many writers capturing the essence of how to be effective as women. Natalie Klejwa a writer for the magazine - *Keeper of the home*. Here is her list of how to become more productive.

1. Get a Good Start (Your day ahead starts the Night Before!)
2. Eliminate Distractions ( Don't let 'time wasters' steal your time)
3. Plan to be Productive (Keep an ongoing list of the things you want to accomplish)
4. Make a Routine Work for You (Find what works best for you)
5. Little by Little (Do the small tasks / steps along the way to completing bigger goals)
6. Recruit and Delegate ( Get your children / spouse to help)
7. Trouble-Shooting the “Bad Days” (Finding God's plan when yours are stalled)

For an in depth look at what these 7 tips entail, visit the following website:

<http://www.keeperofthehome.org/2011/11/seven-strategies-for-having-more-productive-days.html>

## Reflection

Being organised in every aspect of our life enhances our productivity.

## Choosing products

*“She seeketh wool and flax.....” Proverbs 31:13*

Wool is sometimes used to weave into the fabrics of clothes which make the garment warmer. Even today we wear woollen sweaters or mittens to protect us from the cold.

Doing some research on flax, I found that it is a fibrous plant that is used in spinning. The fibres from flax can be pulled out and twisted into yarn or used in the manufacture of linen. In Bible times flax was valued highly and grown under the best conditions in Egypt to produce premium quality linen. Even today it continues to be known as the fine linen of Egypt and is the best quality available.

Both wool and flax are amongst the basis materials used in the production of clothes. The word "seeks" in KJV version of Proverbs 31:13 is translated "selects" in the NIV bible. This indicates that she "selects" the best quality wool and flax or looks with care in order to find them. There is a sense here that this woman not only cares for her family but she takes care in what she provides for them.

The products you choose to work with can be insightful. Here was a woman who knew the value of material she works with and decided on the best, taking time to ensure that it was the right quality. ***This excellent woman of Proverbs 31 makes excellent choices.***

## Reflection

The choices we make reflect who we are.

## Happy working

*"She willingly works with her hands...." Proverbs 31:13*

The word "willingly" is derived from the Hebrew word for "delight or pleasure." This describes a woman who takes great delight in her work. In spite of all she has to do and the effort she has to extend ~~to do so~~. We don't hear her complaining about her lot or wishing she would rather be doing something else. She is diligent to accomplish anything entrusted to her care.

Instead of seeing her tasks as boring or laborious, she finds her work enjoyable and takes pleasure each day in rising up to fulfil her chores. There is a lesson here for each of us. We too can find both satisfaction and enjoyment in the work we do. Toil does not have to be tedious.

With such an attitude in our daily tasks and personal affairs, we can reflect the same attitude in our work for God.

## Reflection

"All who work for God should have the Martha and the Mary attributes blended — a willingness to minister and a sincere love of the truth. Self and selfishness must be put out of sight. God calls for earnest women workers, workers who are prudent, warm hearted, tender, and true to principle. He calls for persevering women who will take their minds from self . . . and will center them on Christ, speaking words of truth, praying with the persons to whom they can obtain access, laboring for the conversion of souls." —*Testimony Treasures*, vol. 2, 405. —

## Early start

*"She riseth also while it is yet night..." Proverbs 31:15*

This woman is up and doing even before sunrise; a clear indication that she is not lazy as indicated in verse 27 of Proverbs 31. An economist of time with such an early start, she is able to accomplish much in her 24 hour day. With the long nights and short days typical of that region, it is not uncommon that after the sun has set, families would spend a portion of the evening undertaking domestic tasks. Then they would get up the next morning before daylight and prepare the food for the day. This was considered the quietest point of the day with the least possibility of interruptions.

These early hours were also a time when the food would be apportioned to those going out to work in the fields and also the time for feeding the flocks. This was also the time when chores for the day would be decided and delegated to the maidservants. This included supplying the resources necessary to get the work done. She had a precise, orderly and effective schedule which everyone benefited from.

There are additional benefits to getting up early. At this tranquil time of day free from distractions, it is an ideal time to focus on God. Spending these quiet moments in prayer and meditation is a wonderful way to commence the day with God and sets the tone for the day. With Him at the start of our day we can be sure that He goes ahead of us to prepare the way and equip us for the hours ahead.

The habit of rising early was one that the Psalmist David applauded when he wrote: *"In the morning shall my prayer come before thee"* (Psalm 88:13). Our best example however is that of the Lord Himself. Mark 1:35 states: *"And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."*

Getting up early enables a better start to the day as it gives ample opportunity to get more done. Rising late because you went to bed late the previous night is a sure way of being less productive, less effective or efficient for the duties of the day

ahead. A late start is a poor start as by the time one gets going, it feels as though a good portion of the day has already gone. You can either end up rushing to catch up and not doing your work as efficiently or thinking that since there is less time to do what needs to be done- no effort is made to commence it. The key to a productive day is beginning the day well.

### Exercise:

Think of a time when you got up early and as a result experienced a productive day. Or you may wish to recall an occasion when you had a late start and subsequently was unable to accomplish much. Write down what you felt about the experience in the space below.

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### Resourceful through creativity

***“She layeth her hands to the spindle and her hands hold the distaff” Proverbs 31:19***

***“She makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple” Proverbs 31:22***

Here again reference is made to working with fabrics such as wool and linen. The spindle is what is used to turn and twist the fibre into thread. The ‘distaff’ is the instrument or staff on which the wool or flax is held and rolled. She uses her left hand to hold the spindle whilst securing the distaff in the crook of her left arm. The right hand is used to assist the twisting of the thread whilst she draws down on the thread with the fingers of the left hand. We get the picture here of busy hands doing intricate work. Both hands are occupied and needed to complete the job.

As I read this explanatory note of the process involved in making garments, I realised the level of detail required.

As the most ancient of all the instruments used for spinning or making thread, the spindle and distaff was replaced with the spinning-wheel. This was subsequently taken over by spinning machinery.

Today we see the equivalent of a seamstress working at the sewing machine to create various garments either for her family or for sale outside the home.

She is interested in dressing well and takes time to produce clothing that bespeaks her. She does not wear ordinary line her linen 'fine'. She also knows what suits her so wears the best colours that compliment her complexion and personality. In this case her colour is purple. Knowing what colour suits you helps to enhance your appearance. This will be discussed in detail on the chapter *Maintaining your appearance*.

This is a woman who knows what she wants and keeps her hand busy making the best products.

### Reflection

Are your hands busy doing good work?

### Seasons and productivity

***"She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet." Proverbs 31:21***

This is a woman who is not afraid of the elements. Bad weather does not deter her from making her family needs a priority. The seasonal changes do not affect her. She is resolute in her goal to take care of the family regardless of the weather.

She ensures that the family is appropriately clothed for the season. She is not concerned about the effects of the snow and the coldness it brings because she has made preparations ahead of time. The suitable winter clothing of wool provides warmth and the scarlet as a dark colour traps heat. The bright colour of scarlet is also uplifting during the winter months. I like this attention to detail. A woman - King Lemuel's mother is telling her son what colours suits the olive skin. It also signifies that as women who are Godly, we don't have to dress in drab colours and dowdy clothes. Unattractive dressing does not enhance spirituality. Yet we are to dress tastefully but modestly.

Sometimes it might be necessary to even work late into the night. This could be regarded as intemperate if done on a consistent basis as it has negative health repercussions. However when something needs to get done it could involve a time of extending ourselves in order to accomplished what needs to be done. We see this in verse 18:

***"Her lamp goeth not out by night."***

In Bible times homes were illuminated by olive oil lamps at night. If you were to pass the house of this Proverbs 31 woman, you would see that her lamp was still burning at night. If it were questioned what was she doing up so late at night at least the findings would have been positive. She was up doing good! The sentence referring to her 'burning the midnight oil' as we say today is in reference to her preparing her products for merchandise – to take to sell to the traders. *“She perceiveth that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out by night”*

### Reflection:

This Godly woman is diligent both day and night. It can be said of her that both her daytime and night-time activities are good and productive. When she has cause to stay up late it is for a good cause.

Are your night time activities both productive and Godly?

### Foods from distant places

*“She is like the merchants' ships; She bringeth her food from afar.” Proverbs 31:14*

This industrious woman not only shops for local products, she realises the value of global cuisine- bringing creativity, variety and discussion to her dining table. I can imagine mealtimes bringing a buzz of appreciation, as everyone delighted in the various food items and culinary creations.

I find this reference to merchant ships an interesting simile. The virtuous woman being compared to the merchants' ships is indicative of her resourcefulness. The merchants are traders buying and selling their products for profit. Their ships are laden with diverse goods from distant places. Likewise we see a picture of this industrious woman bringing her items of clothing and linen to trade for the international foods, spices and other delicacies that her household would relish. This would bring variety to their diet and make mealtimes special as they savoured foods from different places. This brings an appreciation of the bountiful gifts God had given His children around the world to enjoy.

### Reflection:

What international foods do you enjoy and prepare for yourself or family?

### Business Acumen



*“She considereth a field, and buyeth it; from her profits she plants a vineyard.  
Proverbs 31:16*

*“She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants”  
Proverbs 31:24*

Because this Godly woman has a plan for her family, she carefully thinks about all their needs both immediate and subsequent. This is clear in the way she undertakes business transactions. Possessing good business acumen, she does not make rash judgements and poor financial decisions. The word ‘considers’ indicates that she takes time to come to a conclusion, so that what she purchases will be beneficial both for the present and for the future.

Deciding that a field would be a good investment, she chooses carefully because she has already thought ahead about its purpose. The conclusion is that a prosperous vineyard would be the most beneficial venture this is how she invests her profits. It is clear also that she is knowledgeable about how to handle her investment. To cultivate a field and maintain a vineyard is labour intensive work. There is an important message here- that before we make major purchases or take on any projects, we need to consider the implications of all that is involved.

As a business woman she has to be wise about any type of investments and thinks about what the future will be as a result. It’s interesting here that we see a woman making such a key financial decision for her family. In verse 11 of Proverbs 31 we read that *‘the heart of her husband safely trusts in her’*. If she did not know how to handle money or make good decisions (financial or otherwise) I am sure her husband would not let her loose with the family treasury! Instead it appears that he has such confidence in her that she can go ahead and take action on behalf of the family – and their future security. This is admirable! Yet,-from what we know about this Godly woman, she would not have made such a key decision independent of her husband. She would have discussed it with him and received his advice, guidance and blessing.

We all have different strengths and skills and it is apparent that some wives are better at managing the family budget than their husbands. They pay bills on time, keep an accurate record of expenditure and are detailed about every financial transaction that is made. In such cases it is advantageous that the husband delegates this responsibility to his wife. In homes where the man is not present many women have to take on this role.

A key point to note is that she was able to make this purchase and investment because she had worked to provide the means to do so. Proverbs 31:24 states:

*“She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants”  
Proverbs 31:24*

Her productivity has brought her financial gain. She is also a notable trader as she is able to get people to buy her products. The quality and value of her products is also known both by herself and others.

Verse 18 states *"She perceiveth that her merchandise is good"*. Therefore based on the value of her goods she knows at what price to sell them. The price is obviously right as those buying are glad to make the purchase.

This woman is repeating the rewards for her diligent labour and as such would undoubtedly receive a good return on her investments, her time and her products.

### Reflection

God will bless the faithful work of those who take time to put in the effort and ask for his blessing and guidance.

Study the chapter on *Women as Investors* for a more in depth study, taking note of the questions and action points.

### Multi-tasking?

An online report in The Guardian (6<sup>th</sup> March 2014) by Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett carried the caption: *'If women are great multi-taskers, it's only because we have to be'*. The report goes on to chronicle some of the reasons why women have had to take on more than one task at a time.

The article commences with a humorous opening paragraph which makes the point: *"Stop what you're doing. Unless you're a woman, in which case keep doing what you're doing, and also read this. The venerable ladies of Britain have been declared multitasking champions of Europe, so talented are we in our ability to combine paid work (some), unpaid work (lots more), childcare (most) and, "me time", to which we apparently dedicate six and a half hours a day. This six and a half hours, surprisingly, is not time spent sleeping."*

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/06/women-multitasking-gender-equality>

The phrase 'multi-tasking' has been the subject of much discuss, humour and derision over the years. Busy though we may be in this 21<sup>st</sup> century hectic lifestyle- with the resulting pressures on family life, we have cause to pause for reflection when we think of the Proverbs 31 woman. Take time to look at the list of attributes and activities she undertakes which take up a full page in the segment of this manual titled *Unveiling the Virtuous Woman*.

Most women would admit that if they spent too much time looking at that list they could begin to feel less than adequate. The point is we do not have to do it all. This is not God's requirement of us. What He does require is for us to give our all by doing the best we can with what we have and the gifting He has given



us. **Giving our all (putting in all the effort it takes) as opposed to doing it all (and burning ourselves out in the process) sounds both more manageable and realistic.**

## Reflection

The message from this portrayal of what a virtuous woman should be like is that she honours God in everything that she does. She also makes the best use of each new day God blesses her with; giving every 24 hours the best of her productivity.

## ACTION POINTS

- As you go over the segments in this chapter write down your reflections of the way this industrious woman went about her work and how you can apply this in your life
- Reflecting on the case study in this section think about a hobby, gift or skill that you can develop which would bring you profit but also be beneficial to others
- Start writing a plan that could make your hobby or skill more productive

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## A PRAYER

Dear God we thank you for the blessings that each new day brings. Help us to start our days well as we embrace the day with you. As we go about our duties, I pray that we will give of our best as we work with diligence. Bless our efforts so that what we produce will bring glory to you and be of benefit to others. For this we pray. In Jesus name, Amen.

## RESOURCES & RECOMMENDED READING

- Adventist Home E.G.White Ellen White Estate 1952
- Becoming A Woman of Excellence Cynthia Heald NavPress 0 89109 066 5 1986
- Becoming A Woman of Purpose Cynthia Heald 08910 97902 NavPress

1994

- Life Management for Busy Women Elizabeth George Harvest House Publishers 2002
- The Best You Can Be A Woman's Guide to Personal Growth Dorothy Eaton Watts Review and Herald 1993
- <http://www.keeperofthehome.org/2011/11/seven-strategies-for-having-more-productive-days.html>

#### **SEMINARS / WORKSHOPS**

- **How to be productive**
- **Making the most of you**



**INVESTOR**

## CASE STUDY FOR INVESTOR

When Rebecca decided to start her own business, she shared her plans with her prayer partner and they committed themselves to fasting and prayer for God's direction and guidance.

Realising that she needed God's wisdom to proceed, Rebecca reached out to her family members for their prayer support. Some were supportive, others were sceptical.

Rebecca was committed to be true to God in all her business dealing and was confident that God would be true to His word and lead her even when the outcome was not clear. Added to this, both family members and friends warned her that stepping out in this venture could lead to failure in these uncertain economic times.

With good advice from business experts, the prayer support of dedicated prayer intercessors and a conviction of God's leading, Rebecca stepped out in faith and committed her plans to God.



Soon it became evident that God's favour was on the business. On Fridays, even though they closed early, the shop sales were twice that of the other week days and were the busiest day for customers. Then on Sundays, although they had the least amount of customers, these customers spent more than the average shopper who attended during the week. So Fridays and Sundays turned out to be the best days for sales. God indeed made up for the closure of the shop on a Sabbath but making the two days either side of Saturday their best sales day. The loss that the other business owners had predicted never materialised. In fact they were dumbfounded to see the success of the business. Instead of using it as an opportunity to gloat, Rebecca took the opportunity to witness about the Sabbath and returning a faithful tithe and how God had blessed her as a result.

To her surprise and delight Rebecca was thrilled when some of the other shop keepers took up her invitation to visit the church when special programmes were happening.

Additionally Rebecca invested her profits into charitable organisations locally and abroad and would offer sponsorship for relief agencies whose work required a steady stream of funding.

As a result of her generous outreach and response to humanitarian aid she engendered the community to her even more and this encouraged more people to support her business.

**Discussion questions:**

- What do you see as the key attributes Rebecca demonstrated which made her business venture successful?
- What were the potential hurdles to Rebecca being successful in launching her business?
- What can you learn about how Rebecca went about following through with her dream of owning a business?
- Imagine a female in your local congregation who has aspiration of becoming an entrepreneur and keen to start her own business. She shares her dreams with you. What advice would you give her?

## INVESTOR

*"From her profits she plants..." Proverbs 31:16*

**"Spend less than you earn and do it for a long time and you will be financially successfully." – Ron Blue**

When we look at the woman of virtue we can see that she has the qualities of a woman who uses biblical principals not only in her business affairs but also in her household affairs. She knows that she is a steward or manager of the money that she has been blessed with.

She is a giver – she follows God's principal where it says you are more blessed by giving than receiving.

A woman of virtue knows that her top priority should be paying God. God should always get the tithe from her earnings and investments. Tithe in biblical terms means a tenth of your gross income. She returns this so that she can support the ministry of the church. She knows that this is a small percentage of all that God has blessed her with, and is symbolic of the whole of her money, income etc. which belongs to God. See Malachi 3:10 KJV *"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."*

She understands that it is okay to be in business and to make a profit, as there is no biblical admonition against making a profit. There are many examples in the bible of Christians being wealthy e.g. Abraham and Lydia. They knew where their blessings came from but they also supported the church through their tithes and offerings.

It takes money to eat and to pay the rent or mortgage, the taxman, the supermarket, etc. Our attitude to money and our past or current lifestyle may need an adjustment by us. Financial disruptions and difficulties can put a strain on our relationships and marriages and these can affect us emotionally, physically, socially and spiritually.



In years gone by, the man used to be the main breadwinner and he would take care of the bills etc. Roles have changed and many women are now financially independent. Within some families both husband and wife are working and balancing the financial responsibilities.



The woman of virtue in Proverbs 31 was also a woman who worked hard to bring finances into the home. Let us look at some of the ways that you too can become a woman of virtue who is a good investor.

### **She is business minded**

A woman of virtue knows that her mindset has to be one of how best she can invest her money so that she can be profitable. She makes a budget and she tries to stick with it. She works within her means. When she makes a profit, she reinvests it into her business or she will put some aside and invest it in another forum in order to make a greater return.

A woman of virtue needs to know basic business principles that will set her up for success and not failure. She needs to be organized and therefore she makes a financial plan – she knows what her income and expenditure is. She needs to know her customers' needs and how best she can sell her product or service to get the greatest return. She also knows what the market is for her product or service, so that she can grow and develop her business ideas.

#### **Question:**

- ⦿ Do you keep a monthly budget?
- ⦿ Do you know what your income and expenditure is?
- ⦿ Do you know if you have any additional resources that you can use to start or run a business venture?
- ⦿ Have you ever thought of running your own business?
- ⦿ Have you ever written down your business idea or taken steps to develop it?
- ⦿ What is stopping you from running your own business?

Starting your own business can be very daunting but it can also be very rewarding and fulfilling. You have to start with a business idea then develop it into a business plan. There are three main headings within a business plan e.g. marketing, operations and finances. These headings are then broken down into sub headings, which you develop in order to have a detailed business plan. The business plan of itself cannot help your business to grow, but it will give you a strategic focus and will assist you when you want to apply for funding to help you start or develop your business.

There are many places that will provide free assistance to write a business plan such as your local chamber of commerce or enterprise agency, your local voluntary sector development agency, your bank and of course you can get free templates online.

Running your own business takes a lot of time and hard work but it is certainly worth the investment.

*“The purpose of any Christian in business is to glorify God, not just to make a profit. One key to being faithful to the Lord is making decisions on the basis of God’s Word and not on circumstances, feelings, or what is acceptable to society.” – Larry Burkett, Co-Founder, Crown Financial Ministries, 1939-2003*

## She realizes monetary value

### Question

**How are you using the money that has been given to you? Are you using it wisely or foolishly?**

A woman of virtue looks at creative ways she can make her money stretch and work for her and her family. She is resourceful and does not want to waste money. She thinks carefully before she buys things. She thinks do I need this item or do I want this item? Many times if we used this approach we would not get caught up in impulse buying.

A woman of virtue is wise and does not want to go into debt and be at the mercy of the credit card companies, so she will look at the best way that she can provide for her household.

A woman of virtue knows that there are many different things that she can do to help to stretch her money on a monthly basis and not over extend herself. She looks at ways that she can help her family to be self sufficient and productive.

One method that she can use is the use of a 'Cash Envelope System'. This is one way of learning to use cash instead of credit. There are three areas most people overspend and these are [1. Food. 2. Clothes and 3. Recreation]. If these are important to you, then every payday set aside an allocated amount of money [cash] in the marked envelopes. When the money has been spent against these areas, then you will have to wait until the next payday. This will limit the amount of money that you spend on each area and will help you not to overspend or go into debt.

Another example could be to buy in bulk at bulk buy shops. If it is too much for one person, then share the cost with a family member or friend/s. Utilize shops such as Costco, Macro and cash and carry warehouses. Look for 2 for 1 deals at the supermarkets, especially on products that have a long shelf life. If you do not personally require all of those items, then you could help out a family or a friend who is in need, by still buying them and passing them onto a food bank or as a food basket.

Whatever method she chooses, she knows that she can be a resourceful woman.

## She plans for the future

A woman of virtue knows that she cannot just live in the present and not think about planning for her future, especially if she has children. There are so many different ways that you can invest in the future. You have to know what your financial situation is and what you can and cannot afford to set aside each month.

Where possible, try and save between 10-15% each month so that you can build up a 3-6 month reserve emergency fund. Even if you cannot stretch to 10%, at

least get into the habit of putting something aside each month as savings. When investing your savings, think carefully where and how you will invest your money. Don't let the fear of losing money; fear of failure, or fear of the unknown stop you from investing. Start off small and then build up. Get good financial advice from a Financial Services Authority accredited organization [see [www.fsa.gov.uk](http://www.fsa.gov.uk)].

Always get good financial advice. Speak to two or three financial advisors so that you can have a comparison to look at. Make sure that the Financial Conduct Authority has accredited these organizations. [See [www.fca.org.uk](http://www.fca.org.uk)].

A wise woman of virtue ensures that she has a will in place. Many women do not have a will and this is even more important if you have children and also own property. Wills are easy to draw up. You can speak to a solicitor or a will specialist and you can even get a will pack from W.H. Smiths etc. Always ensure that as your circumstances change that your will is kept up to date.

### Makes wise investments

Tahira Hira from Iowa State University in her research looking at the differences between men and women when it comes to investing found out that women enjoy learning together in a nonjudgmental setting while "men will find the information on their own and go ahead and make a decision based on that," Hira says. "They really don't need much validation from someone else, relatively speaking."



So as women of virtue we can learn to come together and form a woman's investment network club where we can learn about how to invest our money and how to get the best rate of return on our investments.

You should only invest what you can afford to invest. Maybe you only have £50 to invest. Then start with that and move forward. There are many different choices and it is good to see a financial advisor who can tell you what your options are.

Try investing in a tax free ISA [Individual Savings Plan]. Most banks and building societies offer these on an annual basis and you will need to sign up before the start of the tax year in order to benefit from the tax savings.

Another form of investment is to buy houses and rent them out. This will be able to bring in an annual payment from anything from three percent and upwards. It is a safe way to have residual income coming in to help you. Maybe you cannot afford to do it by yourself then you could partner with someone that you trust and move forward together.

As a woman of virtue you can speak to a financial advisor who can explain to you the best way that you can invest your money so that you can provide for the future.

## Closing Thoughts

We have to remember the words of T.D. Jakes “although God does indeed bless us with financial success, we should be mindful to worship the Giver and not the gift.”



Practical matters coupled with faithfulness to God and His Word will help to unlock the blessings of the Lord. We must learn to combine faith with practical works. Learn from your money mistakes and become the woman of virtue that God wants you to become. Your financial security is dependent on your attitudes and beliefs about money.

You can start small and build your way up. Start planning for the future to ensure that your family is provided for. If you feel that you cannot do the project by yourself, then do it with someone that you can trust and has an entrepreneurial attitude. Seek the help of a business advisor that is available through your local voluntary

*Matthew 7:7 says “Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”*

Let us daily learn to take God at His word and to exercise our faith. Corrie Ten Boom says, “Faith sees the invisible, believes the unbelievable, and receives the impossible.”

Finally and this should be the first thing that you do is to learn to seek God’s face and to find the direction that He has for your life financially by seeking Him in prayer. If you have a business idea, present it to Him and ask Him if this is what He wants you to do. If you want to make an investment, seek God’s face. If you need to know who you should seek financial advice from, ask God to guide you to the right person. God is interested in every aspect of your life and He wants to give you His daughter the best. When you learn to be still, He will show you the answer/s that you are seeking.

## ACTION POINTS

- Revisit your finances and write down where you feel you have been successful financially and where you have not been successful. Write down everything you feel is a problem or in need of a change of decision. What steps can you take to move forward and to be a wiser investor when it comes to the use of money?
- The next time that you think you need to purchase an item, wait for 30 days and see if you still ‘need’ the item, or was it something that you ‘wanted’.
- Think about creative ways that you can use to manage your money and to make your money stretch. For example start a women’s savings club or buying bulk products in conjunction with another woman or a group of women.

### REFLECTION:

In the space below think about where you could add a little stretch into your financial planning? Ask God to lead you as you record below what you sense are the right steps for you to take with your finances.

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### A PRAYER

Thank you Father for speaking to me through your holy written word, the Bible. It is wonderful and a beautiful miracle that you are interested in every aspect of my daily life including how I handle my finances. As a woman of virtue I want to learn how to apply your financial principles in my life – give me a fresh hunger for your word, open my ears to hear and give me a willing heart to obey and change my ways to your Kingdom ways. I know that you are Jehovah Jireh – The God who meets our needs. May I learn to trust you more day by day, knowing you want to give me the very best. In the precious name of Jesus name. Amen.

### RESOURCES & RECOMMENDED READING

- The Great Investment by T.D. Jakes
- The Money Devotional by Mark Lloydbottom
- [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)
- [www.growthaccelerator.com](http://www.growthaccelerator.com) [Government initiative]
- [www.princes-trust.org.uk](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk) [Help for under 30 year olds]
- [www.fsb.org.uk](http://www.fsb.org.uk) [Federation of Small Businesses]
- [www.apprenticeships.org.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk) [National Apprenticeship Service]
- [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk) [Can provide help if you are unemployed and want to start your own business]
- [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) [Health & Safety Executive]
- [www.ukti.gov.uk](http://www.ukti.gov.uk) [UK Trade & Investment – can provide help if you are interested in importing and exporting]
- [www.msduk.org.uk](http://www.msduk.org.uk) [Minority Supplier Development UK]
- [www.investorchronicle.co.uk/guides](http://www.investorchronicle.co.uk/guides) [Getting started in investing]
- [www.fca.org.uk](http://www.fca.org.uk) [Financial Conduct Authority – gives information on the types of investments and firms to use etc.]

## **SEMINARS / WORKSHOPS**

- Recession Proof Woman
- How to Start Up Your Own Business
- Writing a Successful Business Plan for Your Small Business
- Financial Planning for Your Family – How to Set a Budget and Stick to It
- Finance God's Way
- Bank of Mum [aimed at 13-18 year olds, together with their mothers]



**COMMUNITY  
ACTIVIST / ADVOCATE**

## WOMEN AS ADVOCATES.

As a child growing up Vanessa was always known for her tender heartedness. She would take the time to notice all the stray animals and look out for injured creatures when they came to her attention. When she was old enough to care for pets, her parents noticed her patient and caring attitude and dedication to looking after them. She demonstrated a commitment rare for her age.

Very soon this caring nature became evident in her interaction with people. Even her teachers noticed that whenever someone was upset in class the other children would send their tearful classmate to Vanessa for comfort. As she progressed into teenage years people would gravitate to her with their personal problems. She was known for her excellent listening skills and the ability to assist individuals to finding a resolution for their challenges. She was indeed a natural counsellor and had a knack of putting people at ease.

Vanessa was also gifted with the ability to decipher complex situations and able to speak on behalf of individuals who were disenfranchised arguing for their rights and representing their case. It was this particular skill which drove her to pursue studies in International Aid and Overseas Development work. Following a brief spell working abroad on Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Mission Trips, Vanessa returned to England with an enthusiasm to get her church involved in supporting both overseas projects and local voluntary initiatives. These were mainly to assist individuals from poor social economic backgrounds and support individuals suffering from trauma due to war, poverty or poor health.

After some period of time Vanessa was able to create a team of like-minded individuals who were willing to give some time volunteering in community initiatives to enhance the wellbeing of individuals in need. They worked alongside the Community Services and Deacon and Deaconesses departments on both church and community projects. This covered a range of activities from homeless feeding programmes to community activist initiatives to support just causes for those who had no voice.

During this time the team raised funds and acquired relevant resources for a number of Charities. They undertook programmes and events to which they invited community members and government personnel as a way of galvanising support and bringing other people on board with the work they were doing.

Vanessa continued this selfless service for many years until she contracted an illness which prevented her from leading out in the work that she so loved. However because she had built a team around her, they were able to carry on with the work she had started. When she died people came from across the world to attend her funeral. There was hardly even standing space at the ceremony celebrating the impact of her life.



Amongst the many tributes that poured in from individuals and from all strata's of society was a simple message from a child which simply read: "Thank you for helping me to live."

**Discussion questions:**

- What are some of the key characteristics that marked the life of Vanessa?
- What impact are you making on the lives of those around you?
- Do you have a heart for the hurting? If so, is this reflected in the use of your time and resources?
- Are you involved in any initiatives to help others in need? If not, why not?
- Think of the various initiatives in the community or within your church to which you can become affiliated. If your time is limited to be involved in volunteering work, make a commitment to support a 'worthy cause' with the resources that you have.
- If your church is not community oriented, how can you help your church to be more ready to reach out to individuals in need?
- What legacy are you leaving behind you in terms of the impact your life has made in your home, your church or your community?



## A COMMUNITY ACTIVIST AND ADVOCATE

**“She extends her hands to the poor, yes she reaches out her hands to the needy”**  
Proverbs 31:20 (NKJV)

“I see Jesus in every human being. I say to myself, this is hungry Jesus, I must feed him. This is sick Jesus. This one has leprosy or gangrene; I must wash him and tend to him. I serve because I love Jesus.”

— [Mother Teresa](#)

**Proverbs 31:20 reveals another wonderful attribute of the virtuous woman.**

The Clear Word paraphrase version of Proverbs 31:20 reads “She gives generously to the poor and helps those who are in need”.

The Message Bible (another paraphrase of the same verse) says it this way: “She’s quick to assist anyone in need, reaches out to help the poor”

Whichever version appeals to you, they all reveal a woman who has a heart for the disadvantaged and the hurting. She loves people.

This is truly a beautiful imagery of a charitable woman. Not only does she have time for her family and those of her household, she cares even for those who are not in her immediate sphere of influence.

A close look at the New King James version of Proverbs 31:20 give an insight into not only *what* she does but *how* she does it.

**“She extends her hands to the poor, yes she reaches out her hands to the needy”**  
**Proverbs 31:20**

There are two clear actions here where her hands are the main focus. Firstly, ‘she extends her hands’ and then ‘she reaches out her hands’. The act of stretching out her hands (extending and reaching) not only denotes generosity, but generosity at close range. I can image that she was not a remote or long distance benefactor; one who did kind deeds from afar of. I can see her coming close enough to touch, to be part of, to mingle with the poor and the hurting.

To ‘extend’ her hands sounds welcoming as if she wanted to embrace them with her love. It’s more than an act of giving goods. It is an act of fellowship, just as we extend our hands for a handshake on meeting someone. Even whilst she is giving to them to meet their temporal or material needs, she is giving of herself; she imparts love to them. In *extending* her hands she is closing the gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have not’s; those who have a lot and those who have nothing. What a beautiful

expression of charity to extend oneself as we cross the boundaries to care and demonstrate compassion.



Secondly the scripture states, 'she reaches out her hands to the needy'. This second act of reaching out is as if she is saying 'I am here for you'. Not everyone has the gift of reaching out to or connecting with those in need. A person in need requires someone to come close to them. If a need is to be truly met, then there

needs to be an accurate understanding of the situation to be able to minister effectively. It requires an investment of time to come close and connect and listen to the individual we are trying to help.

Sometimes it is evident that an individual is 'in need' in light of the obvious essentials that are missing from their life. In other situations people present as 'needy' in the sense that they have multiple needs or there is never enough that can satisfy their situation. In such cases you sometimes require large hands to hold all that comes to light when you seek to minister to such individuals.

It appears that this virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 had no fear of the extent to how much need a person had or why that need came about. In her genuine, unconditional, authentic non-judgemental approach she gave out of love. I am sure she did not have to arrange a community meeting to discuss individual situations to ascertain who was most worthy of her resources. She took the initiative to act on her compassion and gave out of the abundance from which she received from God.

This woman is truly charitable. As she has received so she gives. As many blessings as she has received, she pours out into the lives of others

Three original words describe the Proverbs 31 woman's act of giving. The word 'yad' refers to one hand denoting giving to relieve the general poor. The word 'yadeyha' refers to giving with both hands to the needy and 'leaney' to the afflicted poor.

This is a woman who recognises **need and responds appropriately. Not only does she act for the needs that are seen and visible, she also acts for justice, for those who have no voice and who are vulnerable.**

### Beautiful hands

As women, our hands are a focal point as generally, many of us talk with our hands. We tend to be quite expressive and gesticulate as we are speaking. But more than having well manicured nails and soft hands well nurtured by delicate moisturisers, their physical appearance may be admirable but how much more so if they are also identified as caring hands.

Along with a welcoming smile when someone introduces themselves to us is the gesture of an outstretched hand. It says so much - 'you are welcome in my presence', 'we value you...' - 'you are included in this circle'.

The virtuous woman was one who made others feel welcome, included and valued as she reached out and extended her hands; the non-judgemental hands of compassion.

You can have beautiful hands by emulating what she did, by stretching out your hands to those in need in order to connect with them, give them your time and demonstrate their value by meeting their need.

### Reflection:

You *can* make a difference where you are. Think of all those simple acts of kindness that we sometimes overlook.

### Action

- visiting a sick person even if we don't know them very well
- assisting someone in need with household tasks or errands
- helping to paint the neighbours' house
- offering to help with their gardening,
- doing the shopping for an older person living nearby

...the list is endless.

### Exercise

Using the space below make a list of some of the simple ways that you feel you could reach out to individuals in your neighbourhood.

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We may see these simple acts as not necessarily noteworthy but they can make a significant difference to the recipient. Very often we don't have to travel very far to see a need. People requiring assistance are all around us. We just have to open our hearts to respond.

We live in an age where people overlook the small things of life. We are so used to the sensational headlines that the 'simple' things in life society are passed off as insignificant. However what man may fail to notice, God pays attention to. We are here to touch lives in the way Christ did whilst He was here on earth. We can do it

one life at a time with each act of kindness. As we touch others with God's love we touch Him also.

In so doing, these are the affirming words we will hear recorded in Matthew 25:40:

*"And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'*

.....

In this next segment we look in a little more detail at some of the outreach work we can become engaged in.

### **Mission outreach.**

As a woman of virtue it is important that you get involved in doing an aspect of mission work. Some people like to call it humanitarian or international development work. Either way it is all about reaching out, touching people's lives that are less fortunate than we are, in order to make a difference and leave an impact!

It is also about showing the love of Jesus to a world that needs to know about Him. We are His hands and feet and we have been called to reach out and love our 'neighbours' – be they near or far. "Jesus said to his followers, 'Go everywhere in the world, and tell the Good News to everyone.'" Mark 16:15 NCV.

Being involved in mission work does not necessarily mean that you have to go overseas. You can be involved in your own community for example at a homeless shelter or a woman's refuge centre. You will probably get to help someone else but you will definitely gain more than you give. Mission work has a way of bringing a group of people closer together and it certainly brings you closer to God. A mission trip will give you a fresh perspective on life . . . and those are just a few of the benefits that you will gain.

It is important to ensure that our motives are right for doing missions work and that we are utilising our spiritual gifts and talents when doing missions work. If you have the skill of working with children, then maybe a children's evangelism team would be a good fit. If you are not exactly child-friendly, maybe another position on the team would work better. Or not! Maybe this is the time to try something new, get out of your shell, and your comfort zone and take a chance. Mission work especially overseas, will test who you are as a person. However, we are not called to always be in comfortable positions.

If you are not physically able to go on a mission trip, you can help financially by supporting a mission project or a humanitarian organisation. ADRA-UK (Adventist Development & Relief Agency-UK) is an Adventist charity that has been and is doing an amazing job in changing the lives of those less fortunate. Why not consider giving a monthly donation or by doing special projects throughout the year to raise

funds or by donating a gift box for the annual gift box appeal. Whatever little you can give will make a difference to those less fortunate than we are. You can even become an ADRA-UK volunteer and visit one of the countries where they are undertaking projects.

Finally as a woman of virtue remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:40, "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Let us continue to pray without ceasing and continually ask God to direct our steps to the right person or project where we can be a missionary for Him.

### **Sandra's testimonial**



I have been very fortunate to have gone on several mission trips to places including Burkina Faso, Ghana, Haiti and India. In fact the trip to Ghana was a Women's Ministries mission trip. There were fifteen of us that went including four school children [ages 16] from Eden School in London. It was truly life changing for them as they experienced life from a rural perspective and realized how much they took for granted in the UK. One of the young men got baptized when he returned to the UK and is still active in youth ministries. We undertook social projects at two

high schools and one primary school where we painted a classroom, a dining room and painted a mural in the art room. We also carried out health checks with the aid of several nurses who came on the mission trip and finally we did a week's evangelistic outreach at Adgiss Girls High School. See the photos outlining what we did.



I want to share with you some examples of community outreach work that I have personally undertaken:

#### **Women's Aid in Luton**

Giving gift bags. The bags had personal hygiene kits that could be given to the women who come to the organization seeking refuge from an abusive relationship. I also gave them a bag with toys and colouring books, crayons and pencils for children.

In building a relationship with the organization I have arranged for them to come to our local churches to give a presentation about their work and how we can assist them further. We will also be going to the shelter to act as counsellors and a support 'sister' for the women. It is important that you have a current CRB [Criminal Record Bureau] check, in order to be involved in this type of community outreach project.

### **Prison Ministries**

I have been involved in prison ministries for many years now and it gives a wonderful joy to go in and speak with the prisoners and to help bring some light to their dark world. If you are interested in this work you can contact the Prison Ministries Director at your local church conference.

### **Mentoring Programme**

I have been involved in a mentoring programme for young women. This is a really good opportunity to work with younger women and to pass on your legacy and to show them how to become productive women and good citizens. I still undertake programmes within my local vicinity. I have been blessed to be able to meet with teens and young people, both male and female to talk about issues that affect them and how they can be upstanding individuals. You will need to be a friendly and open person because they have stories to share with you that may shock you, but it is the reality of the world we are living in. They do really want our support and guidance, so this is a good opportunity to work with them.

### **Advent Shelter**

Some friends and myself [16 of us] decided to help out in London at the Advent Centre Homeless Shelter on Christmas Day by cooking and serving Christmas Lunch to the homeless people who were staying at the shelter. It was such a blessing to see the joy on their faces and to take the photos to capture the fact that they too could have a hot meal and be in the warmth and not in the cold. Even the deputy High Commissioner of Barbados came along to help out!



These are just a couple of areas that I have been able to work in. The list can be endless. You will need to find something that you are passionate about and follow that leading, but always pray for God's guidance in how best to approach that project.

Some suggestions for community projects are:

- Clothing Centres
- Summer Day School
- Supplementary School & Tutoring
- Family Support Services
- Counselling Service
- Older People Programmes
- Teenage Mothers & Single Parent's Classes
- Health Education & Health Checks
- Food Bank
- Homeless Feeding Programme

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What are you doing to help others? Are you fulfilling your life assignment?

Your call or assignment may not take us to foreign lands or far from home to work in challenging circumstances. He calls us to make a difference where we are, to fulfil the purpose He has ordained for our lives.

Indeed we are called to serve, service to God and service to mankind and that we execute that assignment with a willing and joyful heart and in so doing bring Glory to God

When we reach up to God we draw strength and wisdom from Him in order to reach out and bless the lives of others.

Women who reached up to God through a life of devotion, prayer and worship were then able to fulfil their assignment in reaching out to those around them in a life of selfless service.

**Abigail**, a woman of tact & poise (1 Sam. 25)

**Deborah**, the fearless judge (Jdg. 4-5)

**Dorcas**, a devout philanthropist (Acts 9:36-43)

**Elizabeth**, the priestly mother (Luke 1:6)

**Esther**, the providential princess (Esther 4:14)

**Lois & Eunice**, mothers as exemplary mentors (2 Tim. 1:5; ;3:14-15)

**Lydia**, an hospitable business women (Acts 16:12-15, 40)

**Mary**, whose life exemplified the magnificent (Luke 1:28)

**Phoebe** a committed Christian commended for her service to the church

### **Exercise:**

Now add your name and think of a sentence that would be descriptive of you and write it in the space below.

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As you wrote that descriptive note about yourself think about what impact you are currently making in your church, work, home and community. What is the reach of your influence?

At the end our life on earth, we will stand before God in judgement and He will undertake an evaluation of how well we have served others with our life. Why not commit today to the task God has for you as you seek to know His will for your life and fulfil it.

When God chooses you, He chooses you for a purpose, not for yourself, but for the service and blessings of others.

C.D Brooks puts it this way:

*"God opens doors for us, we must enter, then allow ourselves to be used to open doors for others"*

May we in our lifetime display the words of Foss when he wrote:



*"If I can help somebody as I pass along then my living will not be in vain."*

#### **ACTION POINTS**

- In your prayer time, spend a few moments in silence to listen to what God may be impressing upon your heart in terms of the service He has called you to.
- Ask God to show you someone who is already doing some form of outreach work. Why not make contact with that individual as a starting point to see what you could learn from them.

#### **A PRAYER**

God of unconditional love, compassion and grace; may my actions reflect who you truly are. Not just to those around me who can return an act of kindness but to those who have nothing to give and to whom I may never be able to return an act of kindness. Help my motives be pure and true so that your character can be seen in me. Make provision for those who are suffering so that their needs can be met. May I have a heart for the hurting and use the gifts you have given me to be of service to them, in your name I pray. Amen.

#### **RESOURCES & RECOMMENDED READING**

- When Helping Hurts [How to Alleviate Poverty Without The Poor And Yourself] by Steve Corbett & Brian Fikkert
- [www.adra.org.uk](http://www.adra.org.uk)

#### **SEMINARS / WORKSHOPS**

- Women of Virtue projects
- Mission Trips
- Community Outreach initiatives
- Involvement in Advocacy programmes



**PERSONAL  
DEVELOPMENT**

## WOMEN AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Barbara loved books. From the time she was a child she had been drawn to the information hidden in the pages of books, magazines and newspapers and took every opportunity she got to have someone read to her or attempt reading for herself. Her parents, friends and family would often smile when they found Barbara in the family library room sitting in the large office chair which engulfed her small frame struggling to open a broad sheet newspaper with her father's glasses perched on her nose. She was 3 years old!

As a result of her passion for reading, her vocabulary was advanced for her age and she had an ability to recall information readily. Storytelling was another gift she held. When asked to lead out in a story in class, she had both students and teachers captivated. The level of detail with which her stories would unfold was a delight to listen to; painting in depth pictures of sights, sounds and smells bringing her stories to life.

As she entered her teenage years and her friends became absorbed with fashion, going out and interest in boys, Barbara was often found with her head in a book even on a day out with friends to the shopping centre. Needless to say she earned the title 'bookworm'.

Her love of books engendered a desire to become a writer some day. However her parents had other plans for her. When she shared her desire to write and become an author they told her that writing was not a 'proper job'. They wanted her to become a nurse. Barbara was disappointed as she felt that due to family expectations her life goals would be crushed. Nevertheless, as Nursing was in fact the 'other career' choice she had explored she went on to work in the Caring Profession and qualified in many areas such as Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting. She spent many years working in hospitals, clinics and community settings and finally settled into health care management where she excelled surprising herself in the process.

Yet she never lost her passion for books and the hidden desires to one day become an author. She often doubted whether she would be able to write well enough to engage the attention of reader. She was also concerned about the expense of trying to get a book published as her savings were minimal due to the support she was giving to needy family members.

Over the years she would do some writing for various publications at church and work and received some favourable comments. Yet she would feel daunted by so many excellent books on the market and the notoriety of other writers who had become successful as an author. Realising that her self confidence was low she asked a friend to join her in prayer as she put her request to God to see what His will was and to give her the courage to step out and write if that was where God was leading her.

During this time she would repeat bible promises such as Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (NKJV). This gave her the assurance that she could accomplish this goal if God gave her His blessing as He would empower her to be successful. She also realised that if she became a success it would be all to God's glory and not her own.

Another special scripture which she also embraced during this time was that found in Psalm 37:4 & 5 which states: "Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring *it* to pass". She was confident that as she placed God first in her life everything else would fall into place just as Matthew 6:33 her favourite scripture assured: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you."

An additional boost for her was remembering the comment from one of her teacher's many year's previously. He was her English teacher and had a lot of confidence in her ability to succeed. Barbara remembered being shocked and delighted to receiving an A+ for a piece of work that she had produced in English Literature (her favourite subject). Alongside the grading were the comments "You have the ability to go very far....the sky is the limit!". She had never forgotten those words.

She remembered also that those encouraging words had come at a very difficult time for her. Another form tutor had asked her what she wanted to do when she left school and when Barbara told her she wanted to be a nurse and it was also her parent's wish, the form tutor had laughed and informed her that she would never become a nurse because she was 'too weak'. She "was not strong enough to handle Nursing"! For weeks Barbara thought over what the form tutor had said and felt crushed. How could she tell her parents that their wish for her to become a nurse had been scoffed at by her form tutor. If her teacher did not think she could become a nurse as her chosen career and as her parents wished, and they would not permit her to write for a living what would she do?



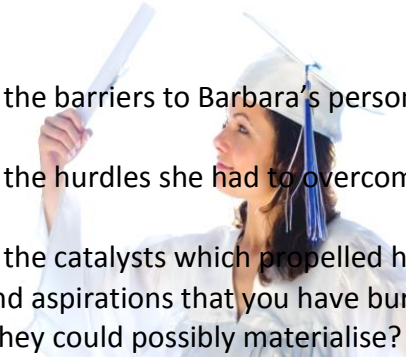
Barbara had cried for weeks and prayed to God to help her be a success at nursing as she felt she had the ability to do so. God answered that prayer beyond her wildest dreams and having left school she was accepted in Nursing at one of the most prestigious hospitals in the country. She excelled in nursing and other related fields even receiving national recognition for her work in Nursing and Health Care Management.

When the long hours and stresses from health care management began to take its toll on Barbara's wellbeing, her thoughts once again turned to writing. Oh how she longed for the quiet reflection of writing and the joy of being able to minister through the power of words to bring hope and healing to others. This was where her life dreams lay. Would she ever see them materialise?

But God had heard her prayer from the first time she put this dream to Him. Through a series of 'miracles' Barbara was able to work for a Christian organisation where her strategic role enabled her to create many programmes and author a range of products both for the church and the community. At long last her dream was realised and testimonies of healing and renewed hope have begun to immerge as a result of God's favour on the work she now does. Barbara is glad she held on to her dreams of pursuing her goals to develop her writing and it is yielding many blessings for which she gives God thanks.

**Discussion:**

- What were some of the barriers to Barbara's personal development in her chosen field?
- What were some of the hurdles she had to overcome in order to become successful?
- What were some of the catalysts which propelled her towards her goals?
- Are there dreams and aspirations that you have buried or put off because you don't see how they could possibly materialise? Ask God to direct you as you prayerfully place your life goals before him
- If you are currently in a 'place of waiting' to see when your dream will materialise what inspiration can you take from this case study?
- Is there a dream that you would like to see come to fruition? If so, who are your supporters cheering you on? Who are the prayer advocates in your life that you can turn to for prayer support? Where can you go to seek advice?
- Seek out someone with whom you know is in need of support to see their dream realised and ask God to help you be of assistance to them on their journey of personal development



## A WOMAN WHO ENGAGES IN PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

*"Whatever your hands find to do, do it with your might..." Eccl 9:10*

*"What you get by achieving your goals is as important as what you become by achieving your goals." - Henry David Thoreau*

### Fulfilling your purpose and life assignment

"Why Am I Here?" This is the most important question of life and in many ways it is the most difficult question of life. "Why Am I Here?" is to look to your creator, your intelligent designer, God Himself and seek His guidance in living a purposeful life.

Jesus Himself at the end of His 3 ½ year assignment was able to state that He had accomplished the purpose for His being on earth. In His prayer to God the Father He was able to give a positive report. This is indicated when He prayed:

"I have glorified You on earth. I have finished the work You have given me to do"  
John 17:4.

This is the example we have to follow; being purposeful in action and faithful to our calling and reason for being. The Virtuous Woman of Proverbs 31 is also an excellent example of purposeful living in the demonstrable acts of service to her family, her community and her God.

### Live life with purpose

What do you live for? What are your life goals? Having a goal gives you a focus and something to work towards. Living a purposeful life enhances mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing. Research by Fr Bernie Siegel (renowned physician, paediatric surgeon, author and speaker) found that cancer patients who verbalised their purpose for living were far more likely to survive than patients who felt that they had nothing to live for.



When you live life with purpose you fulfil God's plan for your existence. Like the Psalmist David says in Psalm 138:8 (NIV) you can declare – *"The LORD will fulfil his purpose for me"* God has a purpose for you. He wants to fulfil His purpose in and through your life.

- Only by accepting God's assignment for your life will you be doing something significant.
- Only by accepting God's assignment for your life will you be part of making a difference in the world for good.

- Only by accepting God's assignment for your life will all the pieces of your life fit into place.
- In completing your assignment for your life, you give glory to God.

The point of our life existence, bringing glory to God, is key to not only living our life with purpose but finishing well. This point is poignantly made in the Message (paraphrase) version of the Bible when Jesus said to God His father:

"I glorified you on earth by completing down to the last detail what you have assigned me to do" John 17:4 (MSG)

When I first purchased the book *The Purpose Driven Life*, and scanned through the pages, at first glance I was excited that here I would be able to discover my purpose in life and become very effective at it. However, having had a chance to read it at a more measured pace, I realise the succinctness of the message and it is this. We were put on this earth to make a contribution, not just to consume resources. God designed us to make a difference with our life; to have an impact. He wants us to live life to its full potential but also to live the life He maps out for us for the blessing of others and for His glory.

While many books offer us advice on how to 'get' the most out of life, that is not the primary reason we were made for. We were created to give something back not just take from it. This point is clearly made in the book *The Purpose Driven Life* when it states:

"You were created to *add* to life on earth, not just take from it. God wants you to give something back. This is God's fourth purpose for your life, and it is called your 'ministry,' or service." (The Purpose Driven Life - Warren, 227)

Author Rick Warren also goes on to say:

"Whenever you serve others in any way, you are actually serving God and fulfilling one of your purposes." (Warren, 228)

## ***Mentoring***

One of the characteristics of a virtuous woman is her ability to mentor others.

Many years ago I was introduced to an organization called *Operation Reachback*. It carried the caption "Climbing Upward – Reaching Back". It was these words that grabbed my attention and as I thought about the scope and vision of this forum I began asking myself some probing questions:

- As I climb the ladder of success and progression, do I take the time to look behind me to see who is on the first rung of the ladder or yet to get on it?
- If so am I willing to assist their ascension?

- Do I take the time to offer a helping hand to others in their pursuit of life goals to the extent that they are able to move forward in life?
- Am I giving back to my community and if so what impact is it making?
- What am I contributing to the life of another individual, organization or community initiative?

### Exercise

Think about the aforementioned questions and in the space below make a note of people, projects or community initiatives that you could assist in their development.

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### What's on your bookshelf?

Some time ago I decided to look through my bookshelf taking an inventory of the various books I had read over the years and those yet to be read. I was struck by the amount of books I had that detailed how to be better women, better wives, better females in leadership and so the list went on. There is always something more that as women we need to do, to reach for, to aspire towards, to attain, to change. It became evident not only on my bookshelf but the many other book depositories that I had opportunities to peruse both via bookshops, or on the web, how few books are available about how to improve as a man. I thought where are the books on how to be better men, better husbands, better men in Christian leadership or in the home. Why was it that there appeared to be so many more books on enhancing ourselves as females in comparison to those written for men?

Whilst trying to answer the question on why there were copious and varied books on coaching women to become better in themselves and better at life, I stopped to ask myself the question about my own level of personal development. What had I done with the knowledge from the many books that I had read on how to improve my life? Was I a better woman as a result? How had what I read impacted me? Was I passing on the useful information I had gleaned?

An inventory of the many books over the years indicated not only that I was an avid reader but that I had a healthy appetite for self development. I also found joy in passing on the information to others. Yet there was more that I could do in terms of some aspects of my life and in how I planned for the future. It was with this knowledge that I begun devising tools and strategies to further assist my development. When I realised their efficacy and the fact that they actually worked for me, I was excited to share them. There followed a new found interest of



conducting seminars on self development and how to achieve life objectives. It has been rewarding to hear the success stories from individuals who attended those seminars.

Take some time to look over the books on your bookshelf. You might be surprised at the results!

## Reflection

"Don't let anyone rob you of your imagination, your creativity, or your curiosity. It's your place in the world; it's your life. Go on and do all you can with it, and make it the life you want to live."

— Mae C. Jemison, (first African-American woman astronaut)

In the case study at the beginning of this chapter, we read about Barbara's journey of self development and how she was able to attain her life dream of becoming a writer. Go over the discussion question at the end of the case study and reflect on where you are currently in terms of your personal development.



## Setting goals

Having looked over the Case Study questions, I hope it has inspired you to reflect on your own personal development journey. As you think about your life goals and dreams take some time to reflect on the following questions:

- How do I want my future to look?
- Have I committed my goals and dreams to God and asked for His direction and blessing?
- What goals have I set for my life and have I begun taking the steps towards achieving them?
- Where or who can I get help from to propel me towards my goal?
- Are my goals SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic /Relevant and Time-bound)?

In the *SMART Goals for Women of Virtue* seminars that you can sign up for, we look at the details of how to reach your goals. This entails identifying the significance of your goal and analysing its specific components so that you are clear about what it is you want to achieve and how you will get there. We will also look at the detail of how to track your development so you know what progress you are making. We work with you to make your goals action-oriented to ensure you take positive steps to attaining them. We look at how to make goals both rewarding and relevant so it becomes more engaging and realistic so that you enjoy the process. A crucial aspect will be to set the time frame and create a time line to keep you on track with an end date in mind.

## Exercise

**Think of three major goals that you would like to achieve:**

- 1) A personal goal e.g. to speak a new language within 12 months.
- 2) A financial freedom goal e.g. to pay off a store card within 6 months.
- 3) A spiritual goal e.g. to get up a little earlier each morning to spend more time with God in prayer and devotional time.

In the space below commit your goals to God by writing a prayer for His direction and blessing.

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**Reflection:**

In fulfilling our purpose for living it is useful to remember the following:

- We were created to *add* to life on earth, not just take from it.
- What really matters is not the *duration* of our lives but the *donation* of it - what we have *given*, instead of what we have *received*.
- It's not *how long* we have lived that counts but *how* we have lived; the statements that our lives make.
- When God blesses you, He blesses you for a purpose, not just for yourself, but for the service and blessing of others.

**Putting in the effort**

As a child growing up, my parents spent many hours praying for us and encouraging us to strive for excellence in everything we did. As part of the regular 'lectures' we would receive and to boost our aspiration for learning my mother would often recite poems from great authors about attainment and achieving in life. One of them was this well known poem by Henry Longfellow:

"The heights by great men gained and kept  
Were not attained by sudden flight  
But they, while their companions slept,  
Were toiling upward in the night."

Needless to say I have memorized this poem and now have to work hard not to be intemperate by staying up too late into the night!

Attaining one's goals may not come at a cheap price. Often there are sacrifices to be made, hurdles to overcome and having to undergo long hours of work to be tenacious in accomplishing the task. Everyone's assignment is different, of course, but no matter what it is we can't let anything keep us from it.

Our mighty God determined our end from our beginning and He has a purpose for our life. If we are wise to the will of God and His directives for our lives and strive to be all that He intends for us to be, He will guide us and bless our efforts. We need to be willing to let Him lead. As such I have embraced the following scripture throughout my personal development journey.

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." Proverbs 3:6*

This scripture has helped to keep me grounded and to also remember that whatever success I attain in life, it is through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and not my own intelligence. I commit the outcome to God and keep in focus that all my accomplishments are for His glory and not my own.

Another Bible text that I have been led by is the following:

Jeremiah 29:11

*"For I know the plans I have for you says the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

Looking at the historical context of this scripture I realise that it was a word from God for His people during their captivity in exile. However it can also be an excellent reference for us today in relation to our personal development and the direction we take in life. When we realise that God has already set plans for us, it humbles us to be submitted to His will for His ways are always better than our ways and His plans far exceed any plan we could have for our life.

## Reflection

- What is God's plan for your life? Have you ever thought of asking Him to share His plans for you with you?
- What is your purpose in life?
- What is your vision?
- What has God called you to do / be?





### **A PRAYER**

God of all knowledge, wisdom and understanding; I commit my thoughts, my dreams, my entire life to your care, direction and keeping. You know what is best for me. Teach me how to humbly submit to your will and your way that in so doing, I will be led by you to the future you have for me. In the present, help me to walk closely with you, listening to your voice in my daily activities of life.

As you bless me, help me also to be a blessing to others. May I give you the glory for any achievements I gain and be humble in my demeanor so that my life will be a true reflection of you. Lead on, oh Lord for in you I put my trust. Amen.

### **RESOURCES & RECOMMENDED READING**

- Personal Development God's Way by Dough Addison Destiny Image Publishers INC 2010
- The Best You Can Be – A Woman's Guide to Personal Growth Dorothy Eaton Watts, Review and Herald 1993
- Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential. Joel Osteen, Warner Faith (October 12, 2004) ISBN 10:0446532754. ISBN 13:978-0446532754
- The 8<sup>th</sup> Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness. Stephen R Covey, The Free Press (15 November 2005) ISBN – 10:0743287932. ISBN – 13: 978-0743287937

### **SEMINARS / WORKSHOPS**

- Becoming the best you can be
- SMART goals for Women of Virtue
- Goal setting for your spiritual life
- Goal setting for your personal life
- Developing your mind



**ENCOURAGING  
AND  
AFFIRMING  
EXCELLENCE**



## A TIME TO CELEBRATE

*The scene is set. The music is lowered, the lights are dimmed and a hush falls across the expectant audience. Dressed in their finery, invited guests, family friends and associates have come to witness this special event to acknowledge the work and worth of women who are making a positive impact in their communities, their work and church life. An air of excited anticipation is palpable in the lowered whispers and interaction of the attendees. Then as the curtain rises and the host presenter walks forward, a spontaneous applause erupts. The award ceremony has begun.*

Just imagine that you are seated in the audience on that special evening. You enjoy the varied speeches, key note presentation, quality entertainment and good food but the focal point of the evening is the nominations for the awards. Organised by the Women of Virtue programme directors to acknowledge and celebrate women of excellence, the awards are placed into four categories:

***The Woman of Virtue Award*** – For a woman who has shown outstanding development in several aspects of her life and is a role model to other women.

***The Dr Deborah Harris Award*** – For women who are contributing significantly to the wider community through leadership, business venture or who have succeeded against the odds to make a mark on society.

***The Heather Haworth Award*** – For women who have demonstrated excellence in leadership within Women's Ministries in their local church, Conference or Mission.

***The Julia Smith Award*** – For innovation in Women's Ministries and encouraging the empowerment of women.

### **Discussion:**

- As you read through each category, can you think of a woman whom you could nominate?
- Can you see yourself as fitting any of the above categories?
- Is there someone whom you can mentor so they can develop in their specific area of expertise or particular sphere of influence?
- Do people see you as an encourager or affirming of others?
- Realising the value of team work and partnership, who can you support in their work / projects / initiatives within the local church, community or work setting?
- You don't have to wait for an award ceremony to appreciate the women you know who are making a positive impact in the lives of others or contributing significantly in their areas of expertise. Why not send them a card, flower or a small gift to let them know that you value them and are appreciative of the work that they do.

## ENCOURAGING AND AFFIRMING EXCELLENCE IN WOMEN

Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit." **Aristotle**

### *"Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all" Proverbs*

What a wonderful summation of the virtues of this unique and blessed woman. This is the 19<sup>th</sup> of the 21 verses that describes this outstanding woman and the evaluation of her life is a glowing tribute from her husband. We can conclude that it is his heartfelt applaud of her virtues because the proceeding verse states "...her husband also and he praises her:" It then follows with "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all." She is excellent and she excels. She is both excellent in who she is and excellent in what she does. Excellent in character, excellent in speech and behavior, excellent in her reputation, excellent in her commitment to her family, excellent in her service to others and excellent in her devotion to God.

When her husband looks around he is aware of others who have done well also, but they are no comparison to his wife. "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all." (NIV) She is second to none. It is as though he is saying that she has executed every aspect of her life to such an extent that she has taken the word excellent to another level. What she does and who she is cannot be compared to anyone he has ever seen or read about! Wow! I can imagine most wives thinking what a joy it would be to hear their husbands say something half as winsome to them.

### Going beyond the expected

As I read and re-read this verse it emphasizes the point that that mediocrity will not do. It reminds me of the 'lectures' we would get as children. Our parents would inform us that whilst others may be satisfied with average, that was not a goal that we should be comfortable with. Then they would follow swiftly with "give of your best to the master".

In verse 29 of Proverbs 31 the words "You excel them all..." indicated that his woman strives to go beyond the reach of what is expected. She has indeed exceeded the mark.

What is also clear to me is that the habit of aspiring for excellence is not something that comes overnight, it has to be worked at diligently and demonstrable even in the mundane things of life. Excellence as I see it, is not necessarily doing great and outstanding things, it is about doing even what appears to be insignificant in an outstanding way.

### Reflection:

What simple task of life are you currently engaging in which you can do well?



**"If you are going to achieve excellence in big things, you develop the habit in little matters. Excellence is not an exception, it is a prevailing attitude." Colin Powell**

***"Give her of the fruit of her hands and let her own works praise her in the gates"***  
***Proverbs 31:31.***

It is often said: "self praise is no recommendation". When you excel at something you don't have to 'blow your own trumpet'; your work will speak for itself. Let others praise you. This is a biblical principle.

"Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips." Proverbs 27:2.

The Proverbs 31 woman has made such excellent efforts in every aspect of her life that her work is noticeable and brings applause. What she has done will be spoken of for years to come. The reference to her works praising her in the gates is indicative of the positive example she will become publically. Her life will be open as a memorial to her existence for the eyes of everyone both male and female. Every woman be they single, wife, mother; every man will have an example of what is possible.

Another revelation that came to me is that when you work well and attain excellence, your life will be productive. You will always have something to show for the years of your existence and your productivity will sustain you. Your excellent output becomes the 'fruit of your hands' in that you reap the rewards. In other words you will enjoy the fruit of your labour as life reciprocates. You have expended excellence in your efforts and you receive excellence outcomes as what you have invested in life comes back to you.

### **Reflection:**

Having taken an in-depth look at the attributes of this outstanding woman, it is clear that there is much we can celebrate, not just about what she has achieved but also who she is.

**In our striving for excellence we should never lose sight of the fact that what we do, we should do for the glory of God. Scripture reminds us of this fact. "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." Colossians 3:17 (KJV)**

In my seminars on *How to Be Excellent* I have coined some motivational phrases to which I add some famous quotes as a boost to encourage individuals to aspire for excellence. Here are a few of them.

**Do it well**

"If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way" - Martin Luther King Jr.



**Do more good**

"People of excellence go the extra mile to do what's right." — Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential*

**Travel the distance**

"We should not judge people by their peak of excellence; but by the distance they have travelled from the point where they started." Henry Ward Beecher

**Be innovative**

"Excellence is to do a common thing in an uncommon way." Booker T. Washington

**Do it right**

"Anything worth doing, is worth doing right." Hunter S. Thompson

**Take time**

"If you don't have time to do it right, when will you have the time to do it over?" John Wooden

**Find your 'good'**

"People simply feel better about themselves when they're good at something." Stephen R. Covey, *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness*

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As we seek to affirm, encourage and empower the women around us, I want to share a formula that I have used to inspire women to become their best. Using the word 'celebrate' as an acronym, I have identified 9 key words which are indicative of the steps to success that I have used to propel me forwards in life. I have shared this formula with others who have attested to its efficacy.

**C.E.L.E.B.R.A.T.E**

**C- CHOICES; E – END; L-LINKS; E – ENCOURAGEMENT; B-BELIEFS; R- RECIPROCITY; A- ATTITUDE; T-TIME; E- ETERNAL**

**C = CHOICES**

**A Woman of Virtue makes excellent choices.**

***She chooses with heaven in mind***

Choice not chance, determines your destiny; so choose wisely.

- What choices are you making on a day to day basis?
- Be careful what they are as they will impact your life.

Intelligence is not everything. Many people have the intelligence to reach their goals, but not the wisdom to maintain it. You see IQ may be what it takes to get you there, but EQ (emotional intelligence) is what keeps you there.

The choices you make are the standards that you live by. What standards are you living by? Your values and ethics are the standards against which you measure the decisions you make, your reaction to the world around you. It also impacts the world to come. Realising that our ultimate goal is heaven our choices now will impact out eternal destiny.

### **E = END**

#### **A Woman of Virtue has the end in mind:**

***She is far sighted. She is focused on her goals and relentlessly pursues it.***

Set your sights on what you want to become and do in life; aim for it and get going. Visualize your desired goal. If you don't begin you will never win in life. Set your goals, visualise what it will look like to achieve your aim then 'go for it'

Knowing God's will for our lives is key to fulfilling our assignment.

I read a caption sometime ago which read: "Blessed is the man who knows which way God is moving and gets moving in that direction." We need God to direct us don't we? If we leave Him out of the equation for success, we are in danger of running in the wrong direction; and running alone. With God to guide us up ahead, we ensure that our feet are placed in the right steps, our direction is well navigated and we have a guide who directs us away from the pitfalls along the way.

Keeping the goal post or finish line in sight also ensures that we become less vulnerable to distractions and keep a 'single eye' on what we are aiming for and follow with purpose, commitment and resoluteness in spite of hurdles because

we have a prize to attain.

To know the will of God is the greatest knowledge, but to do the will of God is the greatest achievement.

### **L = LINKS (NETWORKING)**

#### **A Woman of Virtue forges excellent links:**

***She aligns with individuals who are where she is trying to get to.***

Life is often depicted as a race where every effort is exerted to attain the desired goal. A race is a very competitive event. It is every man for himself. In the race of life we have to be careful not to become so self centered that we miss out on the joy of selfless interaction with others.

Connecting to others is important. Not just for the goal of bettering ourselves but to positively impact their life also. Additionally we all need support on the journey of life so being a lone track runner is far from ideal. You lose the impetus to strive for the best if you run alone as you don't have the competitiveness of the other track runners to spur you on to do more; to extend yourself. Running alone is also isolating and can be stagnating.

Some questions for reflection:

- Who are your track mates?
- Who is running alongside you in the race of life?
- Who are your competitors?
- Who are your encouragers?

If the people running alongside you are not encouraging you and offering support then you need to distance yourself from them and align with more positive running partners who will enhance your journey.

## **E = ENCOURAGEMENT**

**A Woman of Virtue is an encouragement to others:  
*She also knows how to encourage herself.***



Encouragement is one of the spiritual gifts mentioned in the Bible. It is referred to as exhortation in some translations. The Bible instructs us to use the spiritual gifts we have in our ministries to build up the body of Christ.

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: ....he who exhorts, in exhortation;...”  
Romans 12: 6 & 8.

Using our spiritual gift of encouragement assists individuals both in their positive walk with Christ and in their daily life. This is reflected also in the following scripture:

“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing...”  
I Thessalonians 5:11.

Life is often very challenging. Having someone come alongside us to give us encouragement especially at times of difficulties will help to strengthen us and give us courage to face the onward journey.

## Reflection:

Who do you encourage?

Christians are like the several flowers in a garden that have each of them the dew of heaven, which, being shaken with the wind, they let fall at each other's roots, whereby they are jointly nourished, and become nourishers of each other.  
John Bunyan

What happens when we can't seem to find genuine encouragers? Even when you have no-one to encourage you, you can encourage yourself.

The Psalmist David had this very experience. The Bible records:

*“And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God. 1 Samuel 30:6 (KJV)*

Self talk is a powerful motivator. Our seminars on *Emotional Wellbeing* and *Building Emotional Resilience* deals with our inner dialogue and how to speak to ourselves in a way that is affirming, uplifting and empowering. We do this not to become our own gods but to acknowledge the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives to enable us and to claim the promises that God has given us to build our faith.

### **B = BELIEFS**

***A Woman of Virtue believes in the power of God to empower her:  
She uses that belief to speak life into circumstances***

What do you believe? Whatever your mind can conceive you can achieve. There are some key people in my life who have influenced my pursuit for excellence – it's what I call the 'possibility factor'.

My mother has always been a positive and empowering influence in my life. She would always tell me *“You can be anything you want to be – you have the ability.”* This helped to build my confidence and face possibilities even in the face of negative realities.

My father had a slightly different perspective. He would attempt to encourage from the opposite end of the spectrum. Whenever I came home with my report and got a B+ he would ask me: “what happened to the A?” Once, I got an A- for an assignment when everyone else in the class got B or C and below. I was excited to show my Father the A even though it had a minus beside it because no one else in the class had an A on their paper. My father told me the minus had detracted from the A so it

was not a true A after all! I had missed the mark! Rather than believing that I had missed the mark – I chose to believe that I could become anything I wanted to.

At school I also had opposing influences. My English teacher was one individual who helped to positively shape my belief system. Once I received an outstanding grade for an assessment and beside the grade were the words: *'This is an excellent piece of writing. You can do far; the sky is the limit'*.

Another teacher – my form teacher told me I would never be a nurse because I was not 'strong enough'. This was my chosen career and I had no other career options at the time.

I chose to believe my English teacher that indeed the *'sky was the limit'* and went on to achieve my career and personal development goals. However, over and above my mother's belief in me and my English teacher's encouragement, I upheld the biblical perspective on what God thinks I can do recorded in Philippians 4:13. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (NKJV).

### Reflection:

People with a positive belief system deal well with the opportunities and obstacles that they encounter in life

In life our Christian journey and in our personal or professional life we are faced with both opportunities and obstacles.

It is said that an optimist sees an opportunity in every obstacle but a pessimist sees an obstacle in every opportunity. If you were in dialogue with the optimist they would tell you "yes I see the obstacles but here's a way we can get around it". Whereas when you present the pessimist with an opportunity he will always see an obstacle – a reason why it won't work or can't happen.

Life is strange. It has a way of turning the positive to a negative and a negative to a positive. It's amazing how quickly your opportunity can become an obstacle and your obstacle an opportunity. I have experienced both.

presenter for a Women's Ministries Retreat. I saw it as an opportunity to meet with and share with other women as well as visit a country I had never been to before. It was an opportunity not to be missed. However whilst on board the flight, I sustained a head injury when a large and very heavy suitcase fell onto my head. The injury had a negative impact on my general wellbeing and I was subsequently diagnosed with protracted post concussion syndrome.

During the months when I was unable to go into work, I convalesced at home and out of that time a devotional book titled *Light on the Path* was birthed along with a

number of other products. The injury was an obstacle to my regular schedule and setback to some of the timetabled goals I had at that time. However out of that negative experience an opportunity to do more writing emerged and a new project was born. Additionally that experience has helped to develop my character in ways that I could not have conceived of and given me a wider perspective on life.

Face all your obstacles with the assurance that when you give your challenges to God He has possibilities that you would never dream of. Scripture tells us in Mark 10:27:

*'And Jesus looking upon them said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible"'*.

### **Reflection:**

Putting God into the equation makes you a winner

### **R – RECIPROCITY**

**A Woman of Virtue gives unconditionally and receives graciously:**

***She knows when to give and when to receive***

**What is reciprocity?** It is defined as the act of demonstrating a reciprocal interchange of favour. That means you eagerly give to others as readily as you are to receive.

- Is there someone that showed kindness to you at a crucial time in your life? Then return an act of kindness to them.
- Who was it that helped you on the path to where you are today? Pause to acknowledge that individual's impact in your life and let them know it.
- Who is it that continues to bless your life with their positivity and productivity or is an inspiration to you? Surprise that person with a compliment or a small gift.

### **Reflection:**

The great women of the Bible were those who never forgot where they were coming from and chose to reciprocate the kindness shown to them. We see it in examples such as Ruth who returned kindness to Naomi and Esther who returned favour to Mordicai

It has been said that 'Service is the pathway to real significance'. Rick Warren in his book *The Purpose Driven Life* talks about adding and contributing to life. He states:

"You were created to *add* to life on earth, not just take from it. God wants you to give something back. This is God's fourth purpose for your life, and it is called your 'ministry,' or service." (Warren, 227)

## **A – ATTITUDE**

**A woman of Virtue has an excellent attitude.**

***She is schooled in humility so she can rise with grace***

Step up humbly so that you can step down graciously. My favourite motivational quote is this:

*'Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude'.* Zig Ziglar

Your attitude determines how high you will climb. If you have an attitude of an over-comer it means that you will face all obstacles, all challenges with a positive mindset. It is this that enables you to keep going in the face of difficulties.

### **Reflection:**

*Perseverance and persistence* are words that become your companion when you have a vision to succeed. When you persevere and persist against all odds, it produces positive results.

It also means being tenacious and sometimes pushing the boundaries to get results:

*"You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it."* Maya Angelou.

However if we have a fearful attitude it dwarfs our progress. If we want a negative outcome we just have to continue nursing our fears and the picture of our life that we most fear will become our sad reality. The enemy of our soul, Satan, delights to use fear against us because he knows how powerful our thought life is and the impact a negative attitude can have on our outlook and future.

Mirroring this thought, Gary Busey puts it this way: *"Fear is the dark room where the Devil develops his negatives."*

We need to tune out the distraction of the devil to defeat us in our thinking. As we do this we let go of limited thinking and reach out to expand our potential.



*“There is no passion to be found playing small – in settling for life that is less than the one you are capable of living.” Nelson Mandela.*

We need to enlarge the coast of our horizons to embrace the possibilities before us. Embracing scriptures that remind us of what is possible with God is a boost to our mindsets in our strive for excellence. We become what we think about.

## **T – TIME**

**A Woman of Virtue knows what time it is:**

***She also knows what to do with the time God has given her***

Asking yourself some key questions on your journey to excellence helps to keep you focused as you navigate the path ahead. It also enables you to do some self-evaluation to ensure you are on the right track.

- What time is it? Is it time to plan, to work, to reap or to rest? Knowing what time it is enables you to make the right decisions at the right time.
- Know your season. Are you in the spring, summer, autumn or winter of life? What are you doing with your season of life?
- What is happening at your life at the moment that you can learn from? What are the messages from your current experience?
- How are you using the 24 hours in each day?
- What proportion of time do you devote to God, to yourself and to others?

*Sometimes people become disillusioned when they look at where they are currently and feel that life has passed them by. It is never too late to do something, even if it is something small. While we have breath we can effect change to some degree. While there is life; there is hope. It is never too late to make a start. You can redeem the time that you feel may be lost by taking one small step to do something within your current sphere of influence.*

*In our seminars on self development we look at how to make ‘the rest of your life the best of your life’. Never be disheartened by the fact that you are starting out late in life. There is still hope for you.*

*Even when life knocks you down and you have had a bad experience this should not stop you. Many of us are haunted by the failures of the past and it dwarfs our potential to try again. Asking God for the wisdom on how to proceed and the right time to do so is key. Knowing the time to move on from past disappointments can catapult you into action.*

*“You may not be responsible for **getting knocked down**, but you're certainly responsible for **getting back up**.” Wally Amos.*

*Move forward with God’s direction and His timing and make the best of your life.*

## **E – ETERNAL**

## The eternal perspective

**A Woman of Virtue has a sense of the eternal and God's perspective for her life:  
She knows how to match the temporal to the spiritual**

- Why do you do what you do in life and how do you see yourself accomplishing it?
- Have you identified God's plan for your life and are you walking in it?
- What is your purpose in life and do these match the eternal perspective of preparing ourselves for God's kingdom?



You may note that these questions are similar to the ones in the previous chapter on Personal Development. I have repeated them again here as I think it is so important in our striving for excellence that we do it with the right motive.

Having a 'God perspective' keeps our eyes on the real goal and that is heaven. Yes there is a purpose for our existence on earth and we need to give our best in aiming to accomplish it. Yet the hereafter is what we are really after and therefore we need to not only be excellent for ourselves, our families, our church, our communities but excellent for God as He is the one we ought to be pleasing above yourself or anyone else.

We need a clear vision of what God created us to be. With a clear vision of God's ideal, we will have a standard by which to measure our aspirations and ourselves.

*"And whatsoever ye do, do [it] heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." Colossians 3:23 & 24.*

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### REFLECTION:

Reflecting on the CELEBRATE format, in the space below make a note in relation to any of the aspects of Choice, End, Links, Encouragement, Beliefs, Reciprocity, Attitude, Time and Eternal that you need to further develop in.

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**Release your potential for excellence as you CELEBRATE what God has placed within your grasp.**

To strive for excellence demands decisive action and we need to begin today:

There is a dream for you to follow – follow it

There is a goal for you to set – set it

There is a plan for you to undertake

A project for you to begin

An idea for you to action

A possibility for you to explore

An opportunity for you to grab

A choice for you to make

Tomorrow is within your grasp. Reach out and embrace each day God blesses you to experience as you face your life with the conviction that with God all things are possible!

**So women of virtue, women of purpose, women of vision and destiny; arise and take your place for God, to be all that He has gifted you to be; for you have the potential for excellence!**

#### **ACTION POINTS**

- Each day tell yourself that you can become a woman of excellence and in your prayer time with God ask Him to empower you to achieve this goal.
- Think of someone you have always admired for something good that they do. Send them an affirming note, a card, some flowers or a gift to let them know how much you appreciate them and the work that they do.
- You may wish to nominate a woman who has excelled in service (either in her church or community) or her specific area of work or for the Woman of Virtue Award.

#### **A PRAYER**

God of all possibilities, thank you for creating me with the potential for excellence. Because I am created in your image there is no plan that you have for my life that I am not able to achieve through you. Help me to believe all things are possible when I rest in you.

As I become the woman of excellence you created me to be, may my life be a witness to the honour and glory of your name. Amen.

## RESOURCES & RECOMMENDED READING

- Becoming A Woman of Excellence Cynthia Heald NavPress 0 89109 066 5 1986
- Becoming A Woman of Purpose Cynthia Heald 08910 97902 NavPress 1994
- Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential, Joel Osteen Warner Faith (October 12, 2004) ISBN **10**: 0446532754 **ISBN-13**: 978-0446532754
- The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness Stephen R. Covey, The Free Press (15 November 2005) ISBN-10: 0743287932 ISBN-13: 978-0743287937
- Strengthen Your Church Through Women's Ministries Tamyra Horst Advent Source 19198
- Be Your Best Joyce Meyer 0 446 58246 8 Faith Words 2007

## SEMINARS / WORKSHOPS

- How to Be Excellent
- Making the Rest of Your Life the Best of your Life

# A WOMAN COMPARED

<b>A WOMAN OF VIRTUE</b>	<b>A WOMAN OF VICE</b>
<b>DESCRIBED IN PROVERBS CHAPTER 31</b>	<b>DESCRIBED IN PROVERBS CHAPTERS 1-9</b>
<b>SHE HAS A HOME</b> <b>HER HOME IS SAFE (Proverbs 31:27)</b>	<b>SHE HAS A HOUSE</b> <b>HER HOUSE IS A TRAP (Proverbs 2:18,19; 7:27)</b>
<b>SHE IS LOYAL (Proverbs 31:11)</b>	<b>SHE IS LEWD (Proverbs 6:24; 2:17)</b>
<b>SHE MAKES A HOME (Proverbs 31)</b>	<b>SHE BREAKS A HOME (Proverbs 7)</b>
<b>SHE IS HARD TO FIND</b> <b>(a rare gem) (Proverbs 31:10)</b>	<b>SHE IS EASY TO FIND (Proverbs 7:10-12)</b>
<b>SHE IS PRECIOUS (Proverbs 31:10)</b>	<b>SHE IS CHEAP (Proverbs 30:20)</b>
<b>SHE HAS INNER BEAUTY</b> <b>Heart attraction (Proverbs 31:30; 1 Peter 3:4)</b>	<b>SHE HAS OUTER BEAUTY</b> <b>Surface attraction (Proverbs 6:25)</b>
<b>SHE WORKS WITH HER HANDS</b> <b>(an active, selfless life producing loving deeds) (Proverbs 31)</b>	<b>SHE WORKS WITH HER MOUTH</b> <b>(lips that speak deceit and destruction) (Proverbs 2:16; 21:9,19; 25:24)</b>
<b>SHE IS GODLY (Proverbs 31:30)</b>	<b>SHE HAS A FORM OF GODLINESS</b> <b>(Proverbs 7:14)</b>
<b>SHE LOVES THE HOME (Proverbs 31:15, 18 &amp; 27)</b>	<b>SHE LOVES THE STREET</b> <b>(Proverbs 7:11-12)</b>
<b>SHE DOES HER HUSBAND GOOD</b> <b>(Proverbs 31:12)</b>	<b>SHE DOES HER HUSBAND HARM</b> <b>(Proverbs 7:19)</b>
<b>SHE IS IN HER OWN HOME AT NIGHT</b> <b>READY TO RISE EARLY (Proverbs 31:15)</b>	<b>SHE IS OUT ON THE STREETS AT NIGHT</b> <b>(Proverbs 7:9, 18)</b>
<b>SHE BLESSES HER FAMILY (Proverbs 31:28)</b>	<b>SHE DESTROYS HER VICTIMS (Proverbs 7:23)</b>
<b>SHE LIVES BY LOVE (Proverbs 31:20)</b>	<b>SHE LIVES BY LUST (Proverbs 7:10)</b>
<b>SHE IS WISE (Proverbs 31:26)</b>	<b>SHE IS FOOLISH (Proverbs 9:13)</b>
<b>SHE IS WILLING TO WORK (Proverbs 31:13)</b>	<b>SHE IS IDLE (Proverbs 7:12; 9:14)</b>

**SHE LOOKS TO THE FUTURE (Proverbs 31:25)**

**SHE LIVES IN THE PRESENT (Proverbs 9:14)**

**SHE POINTS OTHERS HEAVENWARD (Proverbs 31: 30)**

**SHE LEADS OTHERS TO HELL (Proverbs 7:27)**



## CONCLUSION

*"Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates"*  
*Proverbs 31:31*

One of the significant lessons that I have learnt from the life of this virtuous woman is the power of influence. In the summation of her attributes we see the impact of what she is known for and the scope of her standing in the public eye.

She has learnt to be excellent at home and now her excellence extends to the gates of the city.

Earlier in the chapter, in verse 23, we have a reference to 'the gates' where her husband holds a position of authority and is well respected. *"Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land"*. In biblical times the city gates were the central point of various activities for the city. It was there that business transactions of importance was undertaken, court was convened and town criers made public announcements.

It is significant then that Proverbs 31:31 states: *"Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates"*. We get the image here of her far reaching impact and the level at which she is known, respected and acknowledged. Her 'works' known around the city and at the 'gates' where people come and go, also indicate that visitors to the city would have heard of her. In her transactions with merchants (both local and overseas) her status as an astute and talented business woman would have gained her notoriety.

Additionally the reference 'let her own work praise her' is indicative of the fact that she does not have to blow her own trumpet. Her good reputation goes before her and the excellent accomplishments she is known for are publically announced at the gates – the place of influence.

What is the scope of our influence as women striving to be virtuous? We may not all get a public acknowledgement at any time in our life but our quiet influence in our immediate environment should be noted. **A Godly life is an influential life.**

In evaluating the impact of one's life, the question is often asked, "when you die what would you like to be said of you?" Another similar question might be, "what words would you like inscribed on your grave stone?" This is the summation of what you were known for; essentially what others thought of you.

What is your purpose for being? What impact has your life made so far and what impact would you like to continue making? Our time on this earth is not meant to be a passing phase where we enter and exit un-noticed.

It was Henry Longfellow who said:

*"Lives of great men all remind us, we can make our lives sublime  
And, departing, leave behind us, footprints on the sands of time"*

The portrait of the Virtuous Woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 is one that exemplifies the life of an impactful woman whose influence is noticeable. As you strive to be the woman God has created you to be, may your life indeed leave footprints in the sands of time.



The sum total of why we are here as Christian women is to be beneficial to humanity and acceptable to Divinity. By reaching out and touching the lives of others through impactful service, we become beneficial to society. By reaching up to God through grateful worship, a Godly life and praise of who He is, we become acceptable to Him.

God is looking for women who are available to carry His purpose, to fulfil His will for their lives. He is nurturing something in women to be birthed and released at the appointed time. May you discover your purpose, your time and your potential as you embrace God's call on your life.

And so, as we pause to reflect on the learning we have gleaned from the chapters of this manual, we thank God for this vision of an exemplary life through the portrayal of the Proverbs 31 woman.

We see earth rising in a standing ovation to give due tribute to her excellence but most of all I hear heaven applaud as the voice of Him who sits on the throne exclaims "Well done thou good and faithful servant enter into the joys of your Lord". Then heaven reverberates with the spontaneous applause of angels who are witnesses to a life well lived.

My prayer for us a women, wives, daughters, sisters, aunts, nieces, friends, girlfriends, (whatever category we answer to;) is that we too might one day hear the words of Proverbs 31:29

*"Many women have done excellently, but you excel them all"*

May you too, hear heavens' applause as you become the Virtuous Women He has designed you to be.



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