

OF HIGH VALUE

BY

HAZEL NORTON

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INTRODUCTION

A few years ago it was my privilege and honor to publish a book by sister Hazel Norton entitled, "Stumbling Blocks or Stepping Stones." This has been a very popular book and I know that it has done a lot of good.

Although sister Norton passed away in 1981, she had completed most of this present book and very much wanted to see it put into print. The family members and friends have been determined to see that this became a reality. Again, I am happy to have been chosen as the one who would print it.

I have personally known the Norton family for a number of years and have visited in brother and sister Norton's home in Lane, Oklahoma. My family and I have crossed paths with their son, Glenn Norton, on a number of occasions. We have always loved the family and have held them in high esteem.

Sister Norton was a beautiful wife, mother, and homemaker. She also served as a teacher, school cook, and a Bible teacher. In her community, she was on the Atoka County election board, held several offices in the Home Extension Club, and eventually served for a number of years as the devotional chairman of the Atoka County Home Extension Club. Later she was appointed the Oklahoma State devotional chairman but her bad health prevented her from accepting this office.

Members of the extension club encouraged her to compile her devotionals and in 1981 her first book was printed. Although she became very sick, she was determined to complete her second book and this work is a result of those efforts.

I want to commend this volume to your reading and I hope you will share it with your friends. I am sure that

INTRODUCTION

there are many lessons in these pages for each one who reads them. This truly is a fitting memorial to sister Norton's life and to her family.

J. C. Choate
Winona, MS
June 17, 1985

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TALENTS

In Matthew 25:14-29, the apostle Matthew quotes Jesus as he talks to his apostles on the mount of Olives. Verses 14 and 15 read thus: "The kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey."

I realize that when he spoke of talents, he was speaking about money, but since Jesus likens this unto the kingdom of heaven, I don't believe we would be doing an injustice in speaking of talents as the ability to do something well. Notice that none of his servants was left out, when each was given at least one talent. How many talents were you given? How many do you have now? Let's talk a little about what these talents are - you may discover you have more than you thought you had. Some are given the ability to speak before a group, some preach, some teach, others have the ability to teach one to one. Some can sing melodiously, some can lead singing. We can't all sing well, but we have all been given the commandment to sing. In Colossians 3:16 the apostle had this to say, "Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs, *singing* with grace in your hearts unto the Lord."

Now let's go outside worship services and look for talents that can be used for the Lord. Jesus said in Matthew

10:42, “Whosoever shall give a drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.” So you see, our talents don’t have to be outstanding - just use what we have for the Lord. In Titus 2:5 the apostle Paul said women should be “keepers at home.” This doesn’t mean women shouldn’t work outside the home, but they are to be keepers at home. Husband and children can help, but on the woman lays the responsibility. So if it is done well, it becomes a talent. Some women are very good cooks, while others are able to fix only a few dishes well. Some women sew, paint, crochet - the list goes on and on. No matter what your talent, find some way to use it for the Lord.

Now, let’s go back and read the rest of the story and find out what happened when the lord of those servants returned. Let’s begin reading with verse 16 and read through 30: “Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, ‘Lord, thou deliverdest unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.’ His lord said unto him, ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.’ He also that had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, thou deliveredst

unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.' His lord said unto him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.' Then he which had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering there thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.' His lord answered and said unto him, 'Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with interest.' Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

You will notice that the five talent man and the two talent man each used and doubled theirs, but the one talent man was afraid so he hid his talent and didn't use it. So it was taken away from him. Does this seem unfair? It really isn't. Think just a minute - an athlete trains and is very good in all sorts of sports. Something happens and for a year he is unable to walk. What happens to his talent? It is lost. A great concert pianist must practice constantly or he will lose his talent. The list goes on and on.

Likewise, our talents increase as we use the ones we have been given. Remember when you first married, you

probably weren't very good at cooking and sewing; but as you put to use the talents you had, you became better - you gained other talents.

I have heard people say God left them out - they just didn't have any talent. This isn't true; actually they have become the one talent person and have buried their talent.

We probably all feel as if we should be doing more for the Lord. But even if we feel we have no talent, there is one thing we can all do and that is be present during every worship service possible. We can occupy a seat and give our undivided attention to the service.

YE ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

In the sermon on the mount, the apostle Matthew quotes Jesus in Matthew 5:14, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

You know, when different words of a sentence are accented, the sentence takes on a different meaning. Let's try it with this one. "Ye are the light of the world." With the accent on the first word, it reads, "Ye are the light of the world." That means you are - you and you - me - *I* am the light of the world. You mean *I* am the light of the world to death? That scares me to think that *I* am the light of the world. In order to be that light, I must know God's word well - really well. That means study, and I'm afraid none of us studies as we should.

Next, we put the accent on the second word, "Ye *are* the light of the world." Not "have been" or "going to be", but are right now. It doesn't make any difference what great things we have done in the past nor what great plans we have for the future. It's what we are doing right now that counts.

Then: "Ye are *the* light of the world;" not a light, not one of the lights, not Buddhism, not Moonies, but *the* light. Christianity is the *only* light. If this sounds narrow, remember Jesus said it; not I. And we can only teach his word.

Next: "Ye are the *light* of the world;" light as

opposed to darkness; right as opposed to wrong. We can only reflect the light of Jesus. In order to do so, we must do as the apostle Paul told Timothy in II Timothy 2:15, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of God." If Timothy, a preacher, needed to study, certainly we do also.

Last of all: "Ye are the light of the *world*." How much of the world? All of it? Yes, all of it. From our neighbor next door to people half way around the world. Of course, we can't all leave home to teach elsewhere, but we can help support someone with our money and prayers. And we can all be a light to our neighbors.

So let's remember to: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

WHY DO THE WICKED PROSPER?

Today I would like to talk about an age old question: One which we have all heard, and perhaps, even asked ourselves. That is: “Why do the wicked prosper while the God-fearing person has to work so very hard just to make ends meet?”

I don't know the answer to this question but I do have an idea. If one has a product to sell, the best advertisement is a satisfied customer. The devil does have something to sell and has the power to reward those who will fall down and worship him. In John 12:31, the apostle John calls him, “The prince of the world.” I'm sure you remember one of the temptations of Jesus in Matthew 4:8-10 when the devil took him to an exceeding high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. He said he would give them all to Jesus if he would just fall down and worship him; and the devil could have done just that. Of course we know Jesus didn't worship him. He answered thusly: “Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written, ‘Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve’.”

The devil can also give wealth and power to those today who will bow down to him. There is money - lots of it - to be made in dope, prostitution, murder, etc. The one thing he doesn't promise them is true love and peace. Those are not part of his nature. Everyone who bows to him doesn't prosper, but enough do to make it enticing to others.

I'm not saying that all wealthy people are evil nor that all poor people are Godly; certainly this isn't so. We all know Godly persons who have done quite well financially and we also know poor people who are evil. An example of the first group is Abraham. He was very rich in this world's goods and was also a God fearing man. But this is not a question of today only - it has been around for a long time. David pondered about this problem in Psalms 73. Please read it beginning with verse one. He has a problem and states it in verse three as being envious at the foolish when he saw the prosperity of the wicked. That's exactly what we were talking about. In verses 4-16 he seems very distressed and is wondering if it is all worth it. In verse 17 he finds a solution to the problem and we can too. He went into the sanctuary of God - we might say we went to worship services - and there he understood the destiny of all mankind. Verses 26-28 reveal consolation David found and we can feel also, "My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works."

Matthew tells us of this in this writing (Matt. 25:46), "And these (the wicked) shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

This life may seem hard at times and there are lots of things we just don't understand, but this we do know for sure: Life on earth is short compared to eternity and the blessings of spending eternity with God is worth any suffering we may have to endure here on earth.

HOW WELL DO YOU LISTEN?

A lady gave a party and decided to test her guests to see how well they listened. As she passed around the punch, she said, "Do try this, I put rat poison in it." Not one single guest refused the punch, but just continued their conversations with one another. Those who commented said simply, "It's delicious, I must have your recipe."

Since we think about five times as fast as we speak, it's only natural that our minds wonder sometimes while we are trying to listen to something. This is a shame too, for being a good listener is very important in ALL walks of life, whether at home, at work, or social activities.

I'd like to tell you how well I listen:

Sunday morning while I'm fixing breakfast, it's time for the radio church program. As I go about fixing breakfast, I drop an egg and am quite concerned about cleaning it up. Finally I get the eggs on cooking and the toast in the oven. I wonder if I'll burn it as I did yesterday. I open the refrigerator and wonder what kind of jelly we'll have today - apple or grape. Finally, I decide on grape as we had apple yesterday. After setting out a few more things from the refrigerator, I think, "Oh, is that the toast burning?" Finally breakfast is over. I do the dishes and put them away. By this time the church program is over. I doubt if I could tell you one complete sentence that he said - but I listened to it! I go to my bedroom to get ready for

church services, and I turn on the TV to watch our local preacher on this morning's Bible program. I go to the closet to select the right dress, "Shall I wear the brown one or blue one?" Finally I decide on the blue one as it is warmer and the weather is rather cool this morning. My hair won't do right; I don't know why. I work with it quite awhile and finally I am ready to go. The TV program is going off the air. I really wonder what he talked about; I was so pre-occupied with myself. We arrive at the church house in time to take our seats before services begin. The first song we sing is "Bringing in the Sheaves." I don't even have to look at my book as this is an old song and I know it from memory. Although I don't miss a word, I keep thinking about how hot it was last summer. If it is that hot this summer, there won't be any sheaves to bring in from the fields. With song service over, brother Brown gets up to lead the opening prayer. I close my eyes and bow my head reverently and try to listen. Just then the "brat" in front of me starts cutting up. I open my eyes, and "horrors!" I am wearing my brown shoes with my blue dress. I had bought the blue shoes especially to wear with this blue dress. I hope no one else will notice my mistake. Then the preacher gets up to preach. I hope he won't preach very long; I don't want the roast in the oven to be overly done. The little fellow in front of me starts acting up again. His mother gets up and takes him out. I hope she wallops him one. She leaves his sister unattended. Although she is quiet, she is really making a mess

with her cookies. I hope the janitor doesn't mind cleaning it up. Finally the last "Amen" is said. On my way out, I shake hands with Mrs. Smith and ask her how she has been feeling. She begins to tell me about the hurting she had in her side last week. I interrupt her with about how bad I felt last week, not giving her a chance to finish; and I went on and on. I stop Mrs. Jones to show her the latest pictures of my grandchildren. She starts to tell me something about one of her grandchildren - I wonder why I can't remember what she said. I talk my way to the car. On the way home my husband asks how I enjoyed the service. I tell him I hadn't gotten a thing out of it. I suppose we really need to get a new preacher.

I realize that none of us is quite this bad in not listening, but we all can and should improve our listening ability as is stated in Psalms 46:10, "Be still, and know that I am God."

THE VALLEYS

“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff do comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalms 23). A most beloved Psalm, one I committed to memory several years ago and have repeated it often. But now I couldn’t get through more than a verse or two. It wasn’t that I couldn’t remember it; I just couldn’t concentrate on any one thing very long. And the song, “How Great Thou Art” has such beautiful and deep meaning words, I couldn’t sing because of a tube in my throat, but I couldn’t think my way through even one verse. The reason? I’m not sure. Some have called it depression. It was as if my mind were in shock. I had never experienced anything like it before. You see, I was in the hospital - my third bout with cancer. A five weeks stay this time - major surgery, pain, discomfort.

I have debated with myself as to whether or not I should write on this subject. Memories bring back pain and I wasn’t sure I was up to it. On every hand people have encouraged me to do so. All the books and articles written

about cancer tell about the positive side and this is good, but one has to go through the valley in order to reach the mountain. Sometimes those valleys are very deep and the space between mountains so wide that the journey hardly seems worth the effort. But we keep on, somehow and *finally* reach the mountain. It has to be climbed in order to reach the top. Sometimes the trip up can be hard to make. One often falls and would rather just stay there, but we get up and try again. Eventually, one reaches the top. But we know we can't possibly stay there forever. There will be other valleys, but we try not to think about that. We try to stay on the mountain as long as possible. I'm sure there are others who have reached low points, so I have decided to write so others will know they are not alone when they pass through these valleys.

Let me go back to the beginning. The year was 1974. We had several lessons in Home Extension work on self-examination for breast cancer. That is how I discovered the lump in my breast. At first I told no one, hoping it would go away - it didn't. Finally, I told my husband and youngest daughter, Linda, who was 20 at the time and married. In a few days, I made an appointment with our local doctor. When he came into the examination room, I told him my problem and told him to please tell me that if I ignored it, it would go away. After an examination, he sat down and very seriously said he was sorry, but he couldn't tell me what I wanted to hear. He said all seemed to point to malignancy. He made an appointment for me to see a specialist the next day in Ada, a city about sixty miles from our house, and where there was a much larger hospital. After a few days of tests, the doctor told me, "I'm sorry but it is cancer."

A radical mastectomy was performed. My health was good and that made it easier for me to accept. Only once, while in the hospital, did I break down and cry. Getting my right arm to working was quite painful and took a lot of time in special exercises. I didn't mind doing them, as I could see progress being made. This was followed by twenty-five Cobalt treatments. I went to Lawton for these because they had to be done every day and I could stay with kin-folk there. More time away from home bothered me most. I did, however, get to go home for Christmas.

My health was good, so I bounced back quickly and was soon doing my regular work on our farm and loving it.

All went well until the summer of 1978. A small lump about the size of a navy bean raised up on my chest. I went to the specialist in Ada, who had performed my surgery. He did a biopsy and said he'd let me know the result, but he was pretty sure it was benign. He never notified me. Although more small lumps arose, I waited until my regular checkup appointment date to go back to see him. When he came into the examination room, he seemed real angry and asked why I came back to see him if I wouldn't do as he said. I had no idea what he was talking about. He said when he called to tell me the biopsy showed the lump to be malignant, I told him I refused further treatment. I assured him no such phone call was received. After he and his secretary talked privately, he said I had called him. I assured him I had not called. When they left the room I sat down and cried; it seemed like too much. They changed their story several times. I checked with the phone company to see just what calls were reported. I asked the doctor's secretary and nurse to

let me see their phone bill; she refused. It was plain to see they had forgotten to call, since the secretary had gone on vacation about the time the biopsy was made. I dropped the matter. He did, however, send me back to Lawton for further treatment. The doctor there said I had received as much Cobalt in that area as my body could take. So they gave me what they called, xray therapy. Another lump arose. This time I was sent to Oklahoma City where there was a good cancer clinic. After several tests in the hospital, it was decided to remove both my adrenal glands and ovaries, since both produce estrogen, that was feeding the type of cancer I had. Surgery was performed. This was followed by a year of Chemotherapy. I didn't understand Chemotherapy and asked the doctor just what it was. He said it was a poison and they would give just as much as the body would tolerate without killing a person. It took longer to bounce back this time and some of my farm duties had to be curtailed. At first the treatments were once a week for eight weeks and then every six weeks. It was by no means easy, but somehow I got through it.

All during the Summer of 1980 there seemed to be something not quite right in my abdomen. I always ate a good breakfast, but as the day progressed, my stomach seemed to swell and everything I ate felt like a dead weight. I told the doctor I thought something was wrong but he couldn't feel anything. I began having severe pains in my right side about thirty minutes after going to bed at night. It finally got so bad I had to get up and sleep in a recliner. Sometimes I could go back to bed by 3 or 4 a. m. and sleep there the rest of the night. The doctor said it may be gall stones, but tests showed that to be negative. He

recommended and gave me a prescription for a Jewet back brace. One of our daughters, Nancy, said she would pay my expenses if I would go see a chiropractor. After several treatments, the pain in my side went away and I was able to get a good night's sleep. The back brace relieved the pain in my back too.

Monday after Thanksgiving 1980 I was busy with house cleaning, since all our children and grandchildren were to come for Christmas. Almost suddenly I began feeling bad and was sick to my stomach. We had gone visiting for the Thanksgiving holidays and I thought I had just pushed myself too hard. So I left off the house cleaning for a few days and rested a lot. The problem persisted. Finally, I called my doctor in Oklahoma City and he advised taking an antacid. This helped the nausea somewhat but not the tired feeling. He also advised me to come for a checkup soon after the first of '81.

When I went for the checkup, a small lump on my shoulder near my collar bone was discovered. He sent me to the hospital for a biopsy. Malignancy of the lymph nodes was the diagnosis. He then put me on chemotherapy pills. They weren't bad, but were very expensive. I kept telling them something wasn't right in my abdomen, but they couldn't feel anything.

About the middle of February I began vomiting every evening. I wasn't nauseous, it just seemed food wouldn't go past my stomach. After about two weeks I knew I couldn't go on this way much longer - I was getting so weak I could hardly stand. February 25th I called my doctor and he said to come immediately, he'd have a hospital bed waiting. When we arrived, after a three hour

drive, we had to sit in the waiting room for over an hour. I felt so bad, it seemed much longer.

They put me through so many tests I felt I must surely glow in the dark. After a week and a half of testing, a large tumor was discovered in my abdomen. It reached from one kidney to the other and had pushed against the opening from my stomach, closing it completely. It had also closed the openings from my gall bladder, liver and spleen. The doctors decided to make a new opening for my stomach and also do by-passes on the other three organs. My doctor talked with my family and me for quite awhile the day before surgery. If the tumor was too bad, they wouldn't do any repair work - just sew me back up and let nature take its course. They thought and hoped it wasn't that bad and Chemotherapy, much stronger than I had taken before, might help. They gave it a 45% chance of helping. I was so sick and didn't like the odds. I prayed over and over for God to let me die. My soul was prepared for death and I knew I would be better off. I told my family I was ready to change this old house (my body) for one not made with hands, if God saw fit. He didn't. Somehow, I made it through surgery. So many of my family and friends were in the waiting room during the four hours of surgery. All had expressed their love for me. I told them I felt bathed in love. It made me feel better. I can't say why God let me live, but rather He made me live! I didn't understand why, but I knew it was up to me to find the reason. One of our four daughters, Betty, suggested maybe He wanted me to write another book. So when my mind cleared somewhat, she wrote down on paper what I told her. Two chapters were done this way before I was able to

write for myself. Of course, this was only a guess on our part. There may be several reasons.

Progress after surgery was painful and very slow. I always felt God to be near. I knew the pain I was suffering did not even begin to compare with the suffering Jesus did on the cross, and he was God's Son. During my hospital stay, I received sixteen bouquets and pots of flowers, almost two hundred cards and numerous letters, all expressing their love and prayers for my recovery. With so much love and concern, I knew I had to do my best to get well, although there were times I wondered if it were all worth the effort. My husband's sister, Mary, stayed with me constantly. Every day our daughters, Betty and Della, came; one staying several hours and then the other taking over. Another daughter, Nancy, who teaches school, came and stayed a week during Spring break. Linda took over my duties at home, taking care of her family of a husband and two young sons, while spending days and nights too, most of the time, helping her Dad with washing, cleaning, cooking, etc. Whenever they could, they would drive the one hundred fifty miles to visit me.

After nearly five weeks stay, I was told Chemotherapy would be started and I could go home soon as I felt like it. The first treatment was given on Monday. Wednesday, April 1, five weeks exactly, I was taken to Betty's until after my second treatment, which was to be eight days after the first. I still had to have help walking but kept trying. The day before my second treatment I began having diarrhea and a temperature. The doctor said it was a virus and sent me home without a treatment. The next day I spent with a high fever and vomiting. It was

miserable! The following week, my husband came after me so I went home, after being away for seven weeks. I knew the true meaning of, "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home." I was afraid my two pet poodles would have forgotten me, but they nearly took me down when I entered the house.

At first I was completely dependent on someone doing everything for me, but gradually I began to do some things for myself. I had always been very active at home, church and in community affairs. It was very hard doing next to nothing with the end nowhere in sight. I had to resign as Atoka County Extension Homemaker's Council President and also Inspector of the Lane election board. For years I had wanted to be State Chaplin for Extension Homemakers. Soon after coming home from the hospital, I received a letter from the State President saying their Chaplin had resigned and asking me to take her place. Of course, it was impossible now - but just being asked certainly gave me a lift.

My entire family had been so patient with me and friends and neighbors called or came by often; almost always bringing goodies of some kind and sometimes complete meals. Linda did all the canning, mostly by herself, and a neighbor lady helped freeze the corn.

It seemed after every treatment I came down with something - virus, cold, urinary infection, always something. It seems I would be up walking pretty well and then down again; one step forward and two backward. It was very discouraging.

After four months of treatments, tests showed the tumor was shrinking. It seemed to make it all worthwhile.

MY CUP RUNNETH OVER

One of the best loved and oft quoted Psalm is the twenty-third. Most of us committed it to memory when we were children and still repeat it often. Many lessons are taught within this psalm, so today let's look at a few of them. It was written by David, as he tended his father's sheep and contains six short verses.

Beginning with verse one, it reads, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." The Lord is "my" shepherd. *My personal* shepherd - not just someone else's - but mine! What a wonderful feeling it is to have someone leading me in whom I can have complete faith and trust. That's *my* shepherd! However, we don't automatically become one of his sheep just because we want to - there are conditions. In John 10:11, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd." Backing up to John 10:4, He says, ". . . he goeth before them and the sheep follow him for they *know his voice*." Over and over again throughout both the Old and New Testament we are warned against false teachers. For example in I John 4:1, John says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are from God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." The only way we can "try the spirits" is to compare their teaching with the Bible. In order to do that, we must do as Paul told Timothy in II Timothy 2:15, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." If we do this, we will know whether it is Jesus' voice we are

hearing or whether it is one, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9).

The last part of verse one reads, "I shall not want." If we took a piece of paper and drew a line right down the middle and on one side we write our needs and on the other side we write our wants, I dare say, our want list would be much longer than our needs.

Just a few examples: We need food, or bread; we want butter on it. We need transportation to get to our jobs; we want a fine looking new car. We need shelter; we want a fine house with modern furniture. We need a covering for our bodies to protect us from the elements; we want beautiful clothes and the best. We might add health to the want list. I won't put it on the need side as Paul prayed three times that God remove the thorn in his flesh but was told in II Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." So although we all want good health, and certainly it is all right to pray for it, it isn't something we really need. As long as the Lord is my shepherd, he will supply my needs and I shall not want.

The first part of verse two reads, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." How good it is for sheep to graze in a nice green pasture - to have their fill and lie down in the midst of plenty. That's the way the Lord does us - we are surrounded with plenty of food - good nourishing food for the soul. We can eat our fill and still be surrounded with lots of love, mercy, kindness, etc.

The second part of verse two, "he leadeth me beside the still waters." Not turbulent swift water where we might be swept off our feet and washed out to sea, to drown; but still water, where we can drink all we want and have nothing

to worry about. Jesus said in Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: For they shall be filled."

Going into verse three: "He restoreth my soul." We all know how good it is to sit down to a good nourishing meal after a hard day's work, and at night to lie down and get eight hours of peaceful, restful sleep. These restore our physical body. Likewise our Spiritual body or soul can be restored. In II Corinthians 4:16 the apostle spoke these words, "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." And Jesus tells us how in Matt. 5:6 which we have quoted a few lines back.

The remaining of verse three: "He leadeth me in paths of righteousness, for his name's sake." In I John 3:9, the apostle John said, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." Isn't it wonderful to know there is a place where no sin can reach us? As long as we keep our eyes on the Good Shepherd and let him lead us in paths of righteousness, we will not sin. It is only when we stray from this path that we commit sin. Remember, the Shepherd never drives, he leads - following is entirely up to us. If we do follow him, we bring glory to his name.

Verse four: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff do comfort me." Death is something each of us will face eventually - some soon, some later, but all will come in contact with death. It is comforting to the Christian to know he will not have to face it alone - "for thou art with me." In Rev. 14:13, the

Bible says, "I heard a voice from heaven saying, write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord - what a consoling thought. Again in Psa. 116:15 he says, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." So, we *can* face even death with no fear whatsoever, "For thou art with me."

Verse five: "Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies." Just as in verse two, we are surrounded with blessings on every side. We enjoy a "peace that passes all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). All this happens in the presence of enemies of Christ and they can see none of it; nor will they listen when you try to tell them.

The remainder of verse five, "thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." Just as God's especially chosen ones were anointed with oil, so are we as his followers. "My cup runneth over." I like that - I like to think of each of us as carrying around a cup. Some cups are full of the works of the flesh as Paul mentions in Gal. 5:19-21: "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, strife, jealousies, wrath, factions, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like." While others' cups are full of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23): "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance." There is a song that says, "My cup runneth over with love." A Christian's cup should be like that - running over with love.

It seems that every organization has something that lets the world know who they are - it may be an emblem, an

arm band, hoods and long robes, a cross on a chain, pins, or whatever. When one sees this, he knows right away that the bearer is a member of that certain organization. Likewise, Jesus has given Christians a sign to wear - it is love. In John 13:35, Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." So by showing love one to another, we are showing the world that we are followers of Jesus and our cup runneth over with love.

Verse six: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." If I am a sheep of the Good Shepherd, the goodness and mercy of God will always be with me no matter what my lot in life. That does not mean we will have an easy life - we have not been promised a bed of roses. But with God at our side even the rough spots seem easier to bear.

"And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Forever, and ever and ever . . . a mighty long time compared to the short time we spend on earth getting our souls ready to spend the forever some place. A place where there will be no sorrow or pain. It's certainly worth any sacrifice we may be called upon to make in this life.

Now let's all say the entire Twenty-third Psalm. Read it if you like; better yet, repeat it from memory.

"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the

presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

PROMISES

What does making a promise mean to you? To some it means keeping that promise no matter what. To others it means keeping that promise if something else doesn't come up. Let me give you a couple of examples.

A father promises to take the children to the circus on Saturday. All week the children look forward to Saturday with great anticipation. They can hardly wait – they were sure of going because Daddy promised. Come Saturday, the boss calls and says there is an important client in town this morning. They are to play golf and it is very important that he be there. Father apologizes to the children for not being able to take them to the circus and goes to get his golf clubs. “But, Daddy, you promised, you promised!” “You’ll just have to understand. Maybe next time.” And he is gone, leaving heart broken children behind. Heart broken not only because they won’t be going to the circus, but also because Daddy broke his promise.

Another example: Friday is Johnny’s birthday. He loves chocolate cake and asked his Mother if he could have one for his birthday. She agreed to bake one for him. “You promise?”, Johnny asks. “I promise to bake a chocolate cake for your birthday,” Mother replies. Come Friday, Mother has a million things to do, it seems. There is PTA meeting in the morning, some shopping to do for a birthday present for Johnny and a bridge club in the afternoon. Finally she arrives home and rests awhile before

beginning dinner. As she starts to bake Johnny's chocolate cake, she discovers that she is out of cocoa. She is just too tired to go to the store – Johnny will just have to settle for a white cake. As the cake is brought in, after dinner is finished, Johnny can hardly believe what he is seeing. He had been waiting all week for this moment only to be very disappointed. "Mother, you promised." "I'm sorry," she replies, "maybe next time."

What are the children learning? I doubt if they are learning that it is important to keep a promise.

One last example: A couple stands before a preacher and promises, before God, "Until death do us part." Too much of the time, within five years they are divorced and going their separate ways.

I would like to tell you a story about a man who made a rash promise and felt compelled to keep that promise; although it's fulfillment meant much heartache to him.

This story is found in Judges chapter eleven and the man's name is Jephthah. He is a mighty man of valour but as we first meet him, he is living in exile. The Ammonites have made war against Israel, so they send Japhthah to lead them. He made them promise that, should he win the war, they would make him their judge. They promised they would.

As he led them into battle, he made this vow to God, "If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's and I will offer it up for a burnt offering" (Judges 11:30, 31).

The Lord did as he asked and Jephthah won the war. Upon returning home, his daughter, who was an only child, came out to meet him. He realized the folly of such a vow, but carried it out because he had made a promise and knew he must keep it.

MY FAVORITE SEASON

During the dead of winter, when the temperature is below freezing and the north wind is blowing so that the chill factor is near zero, snow and ice are on the ground so it is hazardous to get out of the house. But you have to because you have animals to tend to. You put on as many clothes as you can get around in and venture outside. You feed the animals (it takes so much more feed when the weather is like this) and you feel so sorry for them. Finally you get through and head for the house but it is so cold that you are sure that you will freeze to death before you can possibly get there. At that time I wouldn't hesitate to say that my favorite season of the year is summer, with warm days and nights. You can shed all those sweaters and coats, along with the gloves and overshoes; even shoes and socks and go barefoot. You can go to the garden and pick buckets of fruits and vegetables. You eat all you can, and can the rest. A wonderful time of year! Truly my favorite!

Then when summer rolls around with weather as this last summer, with weeks and weeks of no rain and the temperature over 100 degrees everyday for over two months, your garden dies from the heat even though you try to keep it alive by watering it. Several of your animals die from the extreme heat . . . it is times like that that my favorite season is winter when the windows and doors can be closed to the cold, you build a nice wood fire and sit around it eating popcorn and drinking hot coffee. You relax by reading or crocheting all day. Yes, no doubt about it, during the hot

summer, my favorite season is winter.

During the Spring of the year we have such storms. Have you ever noticed that most of these come at night when the children are all asleep? If you have never tried to get several sleeping children to the cellar before a storm strikes, you just haven't lived I remember some fun things that have happened at our house when our children were young. Once when we were all safely in the cellar, we discovered that one of the girls had her bedspread. Sometimes we would discover that socks had been put on over shoes or clothes on backwards. Seeing the humor in anything makes life worth living.

It seems impossible to get to the cellar before the rain hits and if we do make it, the storm goes around us and it seems the trip to the cellar is in vain. However, when hail completely ruins your garden so that you have to start over and a tornado takes most of the things you have worked a life time to obtain . . . I know for sure that Fall is my favorite season when everything seems to be slowing down. You bring in the last of the fruits and vegetables. The weather is most always just perfect and with nature painting the forest with such lovely colors, I just know I will enjoy Fall . . . when it is Spring.

And then Fall rolls around . . . and I leave my house plants out just one night too long . . . the first frost of the season gets them all. All those lovely plants that I have been caring for so long. The tomatoes I had intended to pick, now are beginning to turn black. Now, Spring is my favorite season.

So . . . you see . . . I really do have a favorite season, it just depends on what season it is now.

When I was a young girl, I remember hearing a saying that was supposed to be from the Bible. It went like this, "The time will come when you can't tell the seasons except for the falling of the leaves." When I got old enough to search the scriptures for myself, I found that quotation was not Biblical. In fact, God says quite the opposite in Genesis 8:22. Here He says to Noah after he and his family had left the ark, "As long as the earth endures, seed time and harvest time, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."

So you see . . . no matter what is your favorite season, God promises that it will be around as long as time endures.

UNTIMELY DEATH

I would like to tell this story in first person as if it were of my life. Of course, it isn't.

I shall never forget that heart breaking day – December 15, ten days before Christmas. It dawned cloudy and cold. The north wind was blowing and there were snow flurries in the air. The temperature was a little below freezing but with the wind blowing, the chill factor was quite low. It was the kind of day when one should sit by the fire and relax, but it just wasn't to be that way with us.

In the afternoon, as my husband and I sat in the cemetery, under partial protection of a canopy, we were completely unaware of the miserable weather. We stared with unseeing eyes at the casket that held the lifeless body of our seven year old Timmy – our only child. We saw the gaping hole in the earth ready to receive our baby. I know it sounds silly, but I kept wondering who would ride the shiny new bike we had hidden in the attic for Timmy's Christmas. He was so sure of getting one that one of the neighbors was teaching him how to ride so he'd be all ready for the new one – “make it blue,” he had said. So we had purchased a new, blue bike just his size. We were as excited about being able to give it to him as he was to receive it.

There were lots of flowers and many, many friends to show us they cared. Most everyone said very little except to express their love. But I remember one lady in particular. I know her intentions were good, but what she said to

me was very upsetting. She said, "My Dear, you will just have to accept Timmy's death as God's will." I just couldn't believe that our God of love could want our baby to die. I decided to some day give the subject some research.

Timmy's untimely death was so uncalled for. One minute he was running and playing, then the next minute, he lay dead. Why? Why did it have to happen?

Timmy had asked if he could go see his grandmother, who lives only three houses down the same block. She always had cookies and milk waiting for him. He called her first to make sure she was home, then happily ran out the front door and began skipping down the sidewalk. I turned and walked back into the house. Just then I heard a loud commotion and went to see what it was all about. There lay Timmy on the sidewalk, knocked down by Ed Pinter's old beat-up pickup. He had been drinking, as usual, and was going too fast to turn the corner properly. His pickup ran up onto the sidewalk just as Timmy was walking past. The doctor said he was killed instantly. Of course, Ed hardly got a scratch. The whiskey advertisements show beautifully dressed men and women in lovely surroundings. If they would just show a scene such as this – the result of one's drinking, some people might think twice before taking that drink. Of course, they will never do that!

We gave the bike to a little boy whose father was out of work and it looked as if there would be no Christmas at their house.

Days dragged into weeks. I decided it was time I put my mind at ease about Timmy's death. With my Bible in one hand and a few good helping books such as a concordance and a Topical Bible, I began my search for some

unanswered questions.

I found several examples of where God had required someone's death. There is the account in Leviticus 10:1-2 of Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, who offered strange fire before the Lord. Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them.

In II Samuel chapter six, we read about King David moving the Ark of God on a new cart. In verses six and seven it tells of the oxen nearly upsetting the cart, whereupon Uzzah reached out toward the Ark of God and took hold of it. The anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down for his irreverence.

Going into the New Testament, there is the case of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. They sold some land and pretended to give all the price to the Lord. Instead, they kept part of the money for themselves. In verse four Peter said this to Ananias, "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man, but to God." God took his life immediately. Three hours later, his wife, Sapphira, not knowing of her husband's death, told the same lie to Peter, and God took her life also.

There are many, many examples of God's requiring someone's life in both the Old and New Testaments, but in each, sin had been committed and we can plainly see the reason for God's actions.

Someone has said when it comes our time to die, we'll die regardless of anything and they quote Ecclesiastes 3:2. But, in my opinion, that is not the meaning of this verse but just that every living thing has a different life span.

For some it is but a few days, while others live for hundreds of years. For man it is seventy years, according to Psalms 90:10. This subject will be discussed further in another chapter.

I spent many hours searching for answers and have finally come to a conclusion. Man has the freedom of choice. He is free to ride in a car or walk, take a plane or bus, go somewhere or stay home – on and on. We are constantly standing at the crossroad and having to make a choice. Sometimes the choice we make turns out to be disastrous. But the choice was ours to make and we made it.

There is one verse of scripture that I always fall back on when I can't find a definite "Thus saith the Lord." It is found in Deuteronomy 29:29 and reads thus: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons"

I AM WOMAN

How do you feel about being a woman? Are you satisfied with your lot in life as a woman? Or are you one of those who are constantly saying, "I wish I were a man!"?

The apostle Paul said in Philippians 4:11, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." This could, very well, apply to our state of being a woman.

God did not create man and woman equal and it is folly for us to try. When God created man, there was not found, among all other things created, a help mate suitable for him. So God created woman. She is the only thing God made for which there was a specific need. You might say she was the crowning glory of His creation. God could have made another man so that Adam would not have to live alone, but he needed much more. Eve supplied all the qualities Adam lacked. Likewise, Adam supplied the qualities Eve lacked. Together, they made a whole person.

In trying to be equal to man, there are many things woman would have to give up. She could no longer be sweet, pretty and feminine. She should no longer bear children. There are many of us who appreciate men opening doors and letting us walk through first. Personally, there are too many things I'd have to give up to be equal to man.

A person should be able to glorify God and give Him the glory He deserves whether man or woman.

Not wishing to seem to place ourselves above nor even equal to man, let us look to some examples in our

Bible that should make us feel proud to be “just a woman.”

We have already mentioned Eve as God’s crowning glory to creation. Because God created her, she must have been very beautiful and perfect in every way.

Next there is Noah’s wife. We know next to nothing about her, but we do know that Noah was a preacher of righteousness and was one hundred twenty years building the ark. Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives were all God fearing people. Noah was a very busy man and without a good wife by his side, his family may have turned out differently.

In Judges chapter four, we read about Deborah, wife of Lappidoth, who became the fourth and only woman judge of Israel. She was also a courageous military leader.

Ruth is an example of a wise and hard working woman. We read about her in the book that bears her name. When her husband, Naomi’s son, died, she decided to leave her native country, family and friends to go home with Naomi. She said to Naomi the words we have often heard quoted, “Where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God, my God.”

Likewise, we read of Esther in the book of Esther. She became queen to King Ahasuerus, who reigned over one hundred twenty provinces from India to Ethiopia during the seventy years the Southern kingdom was being held captive by Babylon. She risked her own life by standing in the King’s presence, but thereby saved the lives of her people, the Jews. The feast of Purim is still celebrated today in remembrance of that day.

In I Kings 17 we read about the widow of Zarephath

who took the last of her flour and oil to make a meal for Elijah during a great famine. Neither the bowl of flour nor jar of oil were used up even though Elijah, she, her son and their household ate for many days.

In I Samuel 25, Abigail is called a woman of good understanding and of a beautiful countenance. When her husband, who was very wealthy, refused to feed David and his men as they fled from Saul, Abigail took it upon herself to see that they received food. After her husband died, she became David's wife.

Then there is Mary, the woman whom God chose to bear his son and our savior. What a wonderful woman she must have been to receive such an honor!

Mark tells us in Mark 16:9 that after Jesus' resurrection, he first appeared to Mary Magdalene, a woman! An honor? Very definitely!

In Mark 12 we read about a widow who gave all she had, which was only a mite, into the Lord's treasury. How dedicated she must have been and how trusting in the Lord to give all.

We read about Priscilla, Aquila's wife, in Acts 18. She worked beside her husband in their occupation of tent making. She also was a great help to her husband in his teaching of God's word.

Finally, in II Timothy we read how Timothy's grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice, instilled in him a great faith in God.

These are but a few examples of wonderful women. But lest we feel too exalted being a woman, we read in I Corinthians 11:11-12, "Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.

For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman: but all things of God.”

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

Let's suppose, for a few minutes, that one day you are watching television and your program is interrupted with a very important news bulletin: "The Fountain of Youth, for which Ponce DeLeon spent much of his life searching in the then New World, has been located on a remote island in the Atlantic Ocean."

On the TV screen they showed a lovely fountain surrounded by green grass, beautiful flowers and trees, completely untouched by man. I thought, "Surely this must have been what the garden of Eden looked like."

They brought an elderly man in his nineties to the pool. Men had to help him down into the water. He took a few big swallows of the water and then dipped himself into it. He came up out of the water a young man, full of vim, vigor and vitality. Again and again we saw the aged emerge from the pool young and healthy. Each was given a container of the water and sent home with the instructions to drink exactly one half cup daily and the youthful state would continue. More would be sent as needed.

What would be your reaction to such news? I'm sure some would be skeptical while some would sell everything they owned to make the trip.

Of course, this will never happen as God has made our bodies in such a manner that we do grow old and die, making room for the new generation coming on.

However, he has given us two bodies. The physical body that we wear on the outside and the spirit or inner

body, which keeps the physical body alive.

There may not be a fountain for our outer body but there definitely is for the inner body.

The apostle Paul tells us about it in II Corinthians 4:16, "But though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

Jesus told us how to renew the inner body in his sermon on the mount. This is one of the beatitudes he gave that day. In Matthew 5:6 he had this to say, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled."

So, you see, there is no need for our spiritual body to be anything but strong and healthy. All we have to do is to give it proper nourishment, just as we do our physical body. Very few of us would think of missing several days without food. If we did, we'd be too weak to do our work.

Let's imagine that we are wearing our bodies wrong side out. That is, the physical body on the inside and the spiritual on the outside. I wonder how many of us would even be able to get out of bed in the morning?

Now let's go through a typical week for most of us and see just how we feed the spiritual body. Remember, we are wearing it on the outside; that is, it is the one we move with.

We get up on Sunday morning and there's no time for breakfast. Oh well, we will get two hours of feasting later in the morning. That is, if we can keep our minds on the lesson and not be thinking of dozens of other things. Sunday evening we go back for another feast. Monday we just don't have time to take any nourishment, there is too much to do. Vegetables must be gathered from the garden and

canned or frozen, and dozens of other things to do. The same thing happens Tuesday and Wednesday. By Wednesday evening we are getting so weak, we can hardly drag ourselves to the church house. But after an hour or so of feasting, we feel pretty good. Thursday, Friday and Saturday pass much the same as the first of the week. Too much to do to stop for food. Late Saturday evening we pick up the Bible and decide to study the lesson for tomorrow. But after about five minutes, we get so sleepy that we put God's word aside and get ready for bed.

Now this may or may not be your life style, but the fact remains that too many of us take much better care of our physical bodies than we do our spiritual, and this is a shame. Because no matter how many years we live here on earth, it is very, very short compared to eternity.

There's one more point I'd like to make. In my opinion there is nothing sweeter nor more precious than a tiny baby, but how often have we said or heard someone else say, "I just wish I could keep him this way." We can't really mean it, as there is nothing more pathetic than a baby or small child that does not grow in mind and body.

How often we see new babes born into God's family and we leave them alone hoping they will grow all by themselves. The truth is we all need help and encouragement to grow in the Christian graces we read of in Galatians 5:22, 23.

STRESS

Let's talk a little about stress and how it effects our bodies. First I'd like for you to help me with an experiment. Make a fist, just as tight as you can. Now with your fist tight, hold your arm straight out until it begins to hurt.

We are all familiar with the TV commercial of the pain reliever. It tells of tension, pressure, pain, and that is the way it goes. First we are disturbed about something and there is tension. It causes pressure and then we have pain. A pain killer may take care of the pain for awhile but it cannot get to the tension. We must find out what is causing it and do all we can to get rid of that.

Tightened muscles can produce great pain. By now you are finding that out. You may put your arms down. It really hurt, didn't it? That is what emotional stress does to our bodies. If our stomach muscles are tightened for too long a time, it can produce ulcers and a great many other disturbances. It has been said that more than half of the afflictions of mankind are caused by emotional stress.

Holding a grudge is a stress we can do without, but many of us just will not let go. The minute we start hating someone, we become their slave. Our hatred fills our every waking minute and often robs us of much needed sleep. It can get to the point where we don't enjoy our job or our leisure time. All we can think about is "How can I get even?" James tells us in chapter 5, verse 9 that we are not to hold a grudge against one another. The apostle Paul tells us how to get even with someone in his letter to the Romans,

chapter 12, verse 20, "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing you shall heap coals of fire on his head." So if there is someone that you would just like to heap coals of fire upon his head . . . just do something nice for him. You might be surprised at the results.

Jesus said we are to forgive seventy times seven. However, he didn't mean that after that number we are free to knock his head off, but He knew that if we have forgiven that many times, it would become second nature to forgive and we would do it automatically. The apostle Paul gave us some good advise in Romans 12:18. There he said, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." The cost of getting even is just too high, and it is up to us as to how we go about living peaceably with all.

I would like to give you three examples of stressful situations and how they are handled. As we talk about them, I would like for you to ask yourself this question, "How would I have handled it?" The first one is about an elderly couple who decided, as a hobby, to raise a few hens to produce eggs. They bought a dozen hens and as they began to lay, they found that they couldn't use all the eggs, so Mr. Smith said he would buy some of them since he had to buy eggs anyway. All went well for awhile then they received a nasty letter from a neighbor, Mr. Brown. He produced eggs for a living and had been selling eggs to Mr. Smith. He told them that they knew all that and were just trying to be mean in taking away one of his customers. Although they went to church together, Mr. Brown refused to speak and would turn around and go the

other way when he saw them coming. It wasn't long until the elderly couple began to have headaches and sleepless nights. They felt tired much of the time. Finally, they decided to go to a doctor. He gave them some pills, which helped a little but not much. They went to another doctor and then another. Finally, they went to a psychiatrist. He questioned them at great length about when their trouble began and their daily lives. After much questioning, the elderly lady took the letter from her purse that Mr. Brown had written. She told the doctor that the trouble began shortly after receiving this letter but they hadn't thought about its being the cause of their trouble. She suggested that perhaps they give up their egg business. The doctor said it might be worth a trial. Although they were within their rights to keep the hens, for their own peace of mind, they sold them and they were able to stop taking sleeping pills and the aches and pains disappeared too.

Is it foolish to give up our rights? Perhaps it is not foolish, since in giving up our rights, we insure our health and happiness.

In another case: Two families lived side by side in town but couldn't agree on the boundary line between them. There was one foot of ground that they each claimed. One would put a fence up and the other would knock it down. There were bitter words and they finally took it to court. The one foot of ground was given to one of them. But actually, which of them won? I think they both lost as they never spoke to one another again and each lived in an emotional state of stress the remainder of their lives.

The last situation I would like to tell you about is of someone we have all heard about: John D. Rockefeller. He

was strong and husky as a young man but he drove himself very hard for the possession of money. At the age of 33 years he had made his first million. At 43 he was the biggest businessman in the world, and at 53 he was the world's richest man, the only billionaire at that time. It is said that his weekly income was one million dollars. However, in the process of climbing the money ladder, he had ruined his health. He lost all of his hair, eye lashes and brows, couldn't sleep, and even with all his money he could eat only milk and crackers. The doctors said he was in such ill health that he couldn't possibly live more than another year. During one of his many sleepless nights, he thought a lot about what the doctor had said and he made a startling discovery: when he died, he wouldn't be able to take even one thin dime with him. And like Scrooge, he decided to do something worthwhile with his money. On his way up he lacked consideration for others and often crushed the helpless to make a bigger profit. Now he decided to help the underprivileged people. He had the Rockefeller Foundation set up. With his money he helped rid the South of hookworm, and we have him to thank for the discovery of penicillin. Without his money, these and many more good works would not have been done. He derived much pleasure from helping others. His health began to return and he was able to sleep and eat normally. In fact, he lived to the ripe old age of 98 years.

Our thinking is beginning to catch up with the man of Galilee when He said in Matthew 19:19, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Without love, we lose the will to live. It is up to us as individuals as to how we make love a part of our lives.

EVE

In Genesis chapter one we read of the creation of our universe. How God made light, and divided it into day and night. He made the heavens, our atmosphere and beyond where lie the stars. He hallowed out places in the earth for the seas and made all plants and trees to grow on the dry land. He set the sun and moon in place. All manner of living things He created; creatures of the sea and those that fly. On the sixth and final day of creation, He made the creeping things, cattle and beasts of the fields and then He made man. In verse 26 He said man was to rule over all His creation. We will notice in Genesis 2:7 that God breathed into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life and he became a living soul. This is not said of any of the other living things He created; for each was programmed to do God's will. Only Adam had a soul and was given a choice to obey or disobey. The animal kingdom today is still doing exactly as God intended. Man, alone, has chosen to disobey.

In Genesis 2:19, 20, God caused each living creature to pass before Adam and he gave everything a name, but there was not found among them a helper suitable for Adam. So God caused Adam to sleep deeply, and taking a rib from his side, He created woman. How beautiful and perfect this man and woman must have been because God created them. He made them full grown. They must have loved each other on sight. Everything God created served a purpose, however, woman is the only thing created for which there was a specific need. God could have created

another man so that Adam would not have had to live alone, but . . . he needed more. He needed someone to supply the qualities he lacked - and that someone was woman. She was not a man and didn't act like one. Likewise, today we shouldn't want to be like men - nor even equal to them. God didn't make us like that. Let's be satisfied with ourselves - as God's crowning glory of creation - to be "just a woman."

God planted a garden eastward in Eden and there He placed man to take care of it. It was a perfectly lovely place to live - all they wanted to eat grew there and everything was beautiful (Gen. 2:9). Can't you just see Adam and Eve as they tended this lovely place - they must have swum in the rivers and played a lot among the trees and flowers.

There was only one tree of which they were not allowed to eat and that was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The promise was made by God, that if they ever ate of it, they would die.

We have no idea how long they lived in the garden of Eden since this information isn't recorded, but eventually the devil, in the form of a serpent, caused Eve to believe a lie and she ate of the forbidden fruit and caused Adam to eat of it also. I Timothy 2:14 says Adam was not deceived, but that Eve was. Satan knew exactly when Eve was most vulnerable and that is when he made his attack. Remember God said, at Eve's creation, that she would supply qualities Adam lacked. The reverse is also true. Adam, as a husband and man, would supply those qualities woman lacked. The devil attacked Eve when she was alone and her husband had no influence on her decision.

Likewise, today, important, and sometimes not so important decisions should be made together.

Their eyes were opened to the fact that they were naked so they sewed fig leaves together to form aprons. Later (Gen. 2:21) God made them garments of skin to wear.

When God confronted them with the fact they had disobeyed Him, each put the blame on someone else. However, each received a curse to bear from the Lord. To the serpent, he would no longer walk upright, but would forever crawl on his belly.

To the woman: the pain of childbirth was greatly multiplied. Also, she was told in 3:16 that her husband should rule over her.

To the man: the very ground that he should toil was cursed. He was to have to work hard to feed his family.

In Genesis 3:22 it says, "Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil, and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat and live forever" - therefore God sent them out of the perfect and lovely garden of Eden - out into the world, never to return.

I wonder if sometimes, when Adam was so weary he could hardly go - if he ever said to Eve, "This is all your fault, you know." I feel certain that she must have said that to herself many times.

What heartache she must have felt when Cain killed Abel; and when Cain, having a curse placed upon him, was driven away from his home.

In Genesis 5:4 we learn that Adam and Eve had several children. Each time one was born in pain, she must surely have cried out, "This seems more than I can bear,

however, I know it is my fault, I brought it all on myself.” She also, probably said to herself many times, “If only I had it to do over again!”

Eating a piece of fruit seems, in our sight, such a little thing. But in God’s sight there are no big and little sins - either we obey and inherit eternal life or disobey and suffer the consequences. As Joshua said in Joshua 24:15, “Choose you this day whom you will serve . . .” The decision is in our hands - let’s not one day have to say - “I brought this all on myself.”

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Do you think there is nothing in a name? A lot of people say they do. Shakespeare said, "A rose, by any other name would smell just as sweet." I'm sure that may be true of a rose, but how about you? What would be your reaction if someone called you a liar, or a communist, un-American, said you were very ugly, or some other uncomplimentary name? We may do nothing but it would certainly effect our feelings for that person. On the other hand, what if they told you how they admired your beauty, not only in body, but in your actions as well? I dare say, you would have different feelings toward them. How would your new husband have felt after the wedding ceremony if you had told him you didn't like his name but chose to wear the name of a former boy friend? I'm sure he would feel a name should be worth something.

God must have thought there was something in a name as he changed some people's names and gave names to some others. For example: in Gen. 32:28, after Jacob had wrestled all night with an angel of God, it says, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men and hast prevailed."

In Genesis 17, God told Abram and Sarai that they should bare a son in their old age and promised Abram that he would become the father of many nations. In verse 5, he said, "Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham, for a father of many nations have I made thee." In verse 15, "As for Sarai, thy

wife, thou shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be.”

In Proverbs 22:1, Solomon said, “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.”

In Isaiah 62:2, God declared, speaking in prophecy, “And thou shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord shall call.” This prophecy was fulfilled in Acts 11:26 where we read, “And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”

Back to the Old Testament for a few more references: in Hosea 1:4, God speaking to Hosea concerning his first-born son, said, “Call his name Jezreel for yet a little while and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel.” In Hosea 1:6, God told them to name their first-born daughter “Loruhamah.” A second son was given by God, his name was Loammi, in Hosea 1:9.

In Luke 1, we are told about Zacharias, a priest, whose lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. He and his wife, Elizabeth were quite old, and she was barren. However, he was promised by an angel of the Lord, that they would have a son and that they were to call his name *John*.

Later in Luke 1 the angel, Gabriel, told Mary she would have a son and should call his name *Jesus*.

Do any of you still believe there is nothing in a name? If so, I have here a check for you in the amount of \$100.00. It is from the Atoka State Bank, where my husband and I have an account and I assure you, we have enough in our account to cover this check. “But,” you say, “it isn’t signed.” That’s quite all right, since you believe there’s nothing in a name; you sign it with your name.

LET'S LIVE

Before I begin today's lesson, I'd like to explain it just a little.

In my story I will depict sin as being in just one place. Of course, we all know that the devil walks to and fro, up and down the earth, all over, deceiving as many as he can. With this in mind, I'd like to tell this story in first person, although it isn't of my personal life, but life in general.

I grew up on a farm where life was relatively simple; where serving and pleasing God was commonplace. My parents went to church worship regularly and so did I; not because they made me but because I wanted to. Pleasing God was very important in my life.

Time passed and I grew up. I graduated from high school and went off to college. After one year, I decided this wasn't my cup of tea, especially since it put such a financial strain upon my parents. I decided the best thing for me to do was to get a job and support myself. So over protests from my family, I chose the big city because I thought opportunities were more plentiful there. I found a nice apartment right off. It didn't take long to locate the church nearby, so I began to attend regularly. I became involved with the young folks and attended their youth meetings and parties. I always enjoyed these and being with this group of people. They had the same aims and goals in life as I did and always had.

I located a job up town in an office. I liked the people I worked with although they were not Christians.

I thought they were nice. There was one thing that bothered me; every day on my way home from work I passed by a huge building. Its magnitude and beauty seemed to draw one toward it. The door was wide and multitudes of people were going in, but no one was coming out. I wondered how one building could hold so many people. There were people from all walks of life; rich people, poor people, people of high education, people with little or no education, people from all nationalities. Even people I knew were going in. Up above the door in flashing neon lights were the letters "L-I-V-E". It looked very enticing. I even heard the people say, "Let's live!, let's live!" I was tempted to go in but I went on by because I felt a deep chill in my soul. I knew I must hurry on by.

Each day when I passed by, it seemed more enticing and my fear became less, especially since my friends at work had been encouraging me to go in with them. Finally my friends convinced me. I reasoned within myself, that since my life had been so simple, I deserved to live a little. As we started in I began to pull back in fear. But they said, "Oh don't be chicken, come on." So I marched on in with the group. Once inside, the building was so large it seemed to encompass the whole world. I noticed there were different rooms – large rooms scattered about. My friends and I entered one. Someone handed me a drink. I had never taken a drink before, but I liked it. "Maybe this was living," I thought. We went from room to room taking part in the action and it was fun. However, I noticed that the farther we went, the more violent the rooms were. People were using guns and knives and there was blood on the floor. Then I noticed signs above the entry ways of the

rooms. The signs read "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings," and on and on the rooms went - all bad.

I realized that Paul had said in Galatians 5:19-21 that these were the works of the flesh and that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. I noticed, also, that none of the works of the Spirit mentioned by Paul in Galatians 5, that is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control were there. I said to myself, "What am I, a Christian, doing in a place like this?" I looked up at the neon sign and realized that LIVE spelled backwards spells EVIL. At that moment I heard the most hedious laughter I had ever heard. I looked around and there was a sign I hadn't seen before. It read: "Price of admission: your soul." I threw my glass down and ran toward the door. I tried frantically to get out, but there was just no way out. Again and again I tried until I was exhausted. I was horrified and scared to death. I dropped to my knees, buried my face in my hands and cried over and over again, "God, forgive me, a sinner." After what seemed a long period of time, I looked up and realized that I was outside on the sidewalk. I got up and ran as fast as I could. I ran and ran, finally, exhausted, I came to the church building. I entered and fell face down on the carpet. There I made a solemn promise to myself and to God. "Never again would I deliberately walk into sin with my eyes wide open."

ECCLESIASTES 3

I realize the subject matter I have chosen is controversial today. Many of you will not agree with me. That is alright, as I know I do not have all of the answers. This lesson will be found in Ecclesiastes, chapter three.

The first verse reads: "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven."

The second is where the disagreement begins. The first part reads: "A time to be born, and a time to die." Some people think "a time to be born" means within a period of time. I remember when I was expecting my first baby, I had run over my due date, this very wise woman said it would be born during a certain phase of the moon. Well, he was not born then. It seems to me it means everything has a gestation period. Some animals' gestation periods are very short, while others are quite long.

The second part of this verse, "and a time to die," causes the most problem. There are two views with which I do not agree. One of which is: if it is a person's time to die, he will die regardless of what he does. If this statement were true, there would be no need to protect ourselves. The other view is: it is God's will that one die. This has worried me quite a bit. Try to explain to a young child that it was God's will that his mother died. He, who has always thought of God as love, now develops a hateful attitude toward God. "A time to die" simply means, in my opinion, that all species have a certain life span. For the fly it is very short, for the elephant it is quite long, and for

man, it is three score and ten (Psalms 90:10). Few live to exactly that age. I have thought about this subject at great length. Finally, I have come to the conclusion that man has a free choice of how he wants to travel or where he wants to be at a certain time. If it happens to be a dangerous place, he has just simply made a bad choice. Everybody and everything dies, but not at the same rate.

The last part of verse two reads, "A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted." Every person plants in a special season and harvests in another season. No one plants one day and goes out to harvest the next day. He waits for nature to let his seed grow and then he can enjoy the fruits of his labor.

Verse 3 reads, "A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up." Both to kill and heal, and to tear down and to build up could apply to war and post war. A time for killing could also mean animal slaughter for food. Also, sometimes a little lame duck needs its wing healed. The second part of the verse could also mean tearing down an old useless building and replacing it with a more modern one, when necessary.

Verse 4 reads, "A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." One would not think of going to a funeral and laughing. It is a time to weep and mourn with those who are still living. But when one sees something funny, he laughs and does not cry. He also shares in joys with others. It has been said that crying because of stress, such as death, releases ten different chemicals into the body's system. This relieves tension and pressure that could cause actual physical or mental illness. It has also been said that when one laughs, it gives him an

internal workout. Humor contributes to one's physical well-being. It exercises muscles, diaphragm, thorax, abdomen and face muscles. One's heartbeat, breathing and circulation also speed up. Following laughter the heartbeat slows briefly below the normal range and the entire body relaxes. There is also evidence to show that humor may help relieve pain and inflammatory conditions like arthritis and simple tension headaches. Most importantly, humor can relieve the mind of stressful conditions. However, there is always a time and a place for humor. One must face reality.

Verse 5 reads, "A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing." This could mean to throw stones when one is playing a game or removing stones from a field or throwing stones of criticism at other people. One gathers stones to build a building or receives stones of criticism to improve oneself. The last part of the verse could mean that one embraces when he is happy or needs comfort; but he shuns from embracing when he is angry or needs to be alone.

Verse 6 reads, "A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away." One can search for something so long and eventually he must give up. Some of the time, it turns up eventually anyway. One should keep things he uses. My grandmother used to say, "Keep things seven years, and if you have not used it by then, throw it away." I have seen times when I have kept things that long and thrown them away, then I have needed them. One has to use his own judgment how long to keep things and when to dispose of them.

Verse 7 reads, "A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak." To tear apart may mean one may need rags for bandages or may have to tear apart family or friendship ties for the sake of a marriage or for the love of the Lord. To sew together may mean to make clothing or mend family or friendship ties. To be silent may mean that there are times if one would keep his mouth shut, he would appear to be more intelligent (Eccl. 10:12-14). But there are times when one must speak out, such as when the apostles did for Christ (Acts 4:31).

Verse 8 reads, "A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace." One should always love the individual but hate his evil deeds. One should never start a war, but sometimes we get drawn into them. But, of course, we all are always at war with Satan.

Let me conclude, by quoting the author of Ecclesiastes in chapter 12, verses 13 and 14. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

OF HIGH VALUE

This devotional is dedicated to the memory of the author, Hazel Norton. She passed from this life December 13, 1981, when she lost her seven year battle against cancer at age sixty-two. She was dedicated to finishing this book as she was dictating to me, her daughter, Betty, just three days before her death. She was able to complete this book up through this chapter, verse 16. Some of her last words were, "Please finish what I have started." My prayer is that I may adequately complete this devotional. We, her children, husband and loved ones are dedicated to fulfilling her last request.

Proverbs chapter 31 beginning with verse 10 reads thus: "Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies." Isn't it wonderful to know that if we are the kind of wife that we should be in God's sight, we are worth far more than precious jewels.

Verse 11: "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil." She learns how to balance the family budget and lives within the means of their income.

Verse 12: "She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life." She never speaks a word of criticism against him but always encourages him. It has been said that behind every successful man there is a good woman.

Verse 13: "She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willing with her hands." She looks for whatever work needs to be done with her hands." She looks for whatever work

needs to be done with her hands and she does it. In all of this, she finds pleasure.

Verse 14: "She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar." She does not mind going farther than usual if she can obtain a bargain.

Verse 15: "She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens." She is never lazy but rises up early to see that her household is fed properly before they are off to their daily work.

Verse 16: "She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard." If she earns money, she does not spend it foolishly, but puts it to the best use for her family.

Verse 17: "She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms." She is always prepared physically, with good health; and mentally, with knowledge and being alert, to help her family.

Verse 18: "She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night." She looks after her business to see that it is honest and profitable, even if she must work into the night.

Verse 19: "She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff." She is an efficient manager of both time and money, even to the point of making things from scratch.

Verse 20: "She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy." Her love is not just for her own family, but for others as well. When she sees someone in need, she shares what she has to help their lives be a little better.

Verse 21: "She is not afraid of the snow for her household; for all her household are clothed with scarlet." She plans ahead and has her family prepared for unpleasant weather before it comes.

Verse 22: "She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple." She is conscious of looking nice and neat. She has knowledge of kinds of material, colors, and styles in order to please the eye of her husband.

Verse 23: "Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land." She has much influence by her actions and communication with others. She only speaks good of her husband to them; therefore, he is held in good standing in his community.

Verse 24: "Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come." She has adorned herself with qualities of confidence and good reputation. These qualities will follow her through her old age and into eternity.

Verse 26: "She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness." Having accomplished much in her life and being successful at it, she has gained much wisdom and is able to impart it to others. She thinks of other's feelings and is careful to be considerate and thoughtful of them. She does not gossip.

Verse 27: "She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness." She is busy looking after the welfare of her family and does not sit by and feed off the work of others.

Verse 28: "Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her." Her children and all whom she has helped regard her as a blessing in their

lives and hold her in high esteem. Her husband also acknowledges the blessing her devotion brings to the welfare of their family and to helping others.

Verse 29: "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all." Many women have worked hard for their families and for others and have developed good character; however, this woman has exceeded even all of these exceptional women.

Verse 30: "Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised." Being kind only as a convenience, is not being truthful, and caring for only the looks of the outside of oneself, is meaningless, for the flesh shall pass away. In contrast to these deceptive appearances, this woman has put God first in her life, fearing Him and keeping His commandments. Both those who know her and God praise her for good deeds and righteousness.

Verse 31: "Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates." She deserves honor and commendations of those who know her. She should be given credit for the good deeds she has performed, and all people, both now and to come, will know of her righteousness.

I do not feel this chapter would be complete without telling you about my mother. She was truly "Of High Value," patterned after the woman in Proverbs 31.

Mother was born in 1919, the youngest of six children. Many of her summers as a child were spent in hay camps. We loved hearing her tell the stories of those days. She became a Christian at age thirteen and remained true to that conviction until death. Not only was she interested in

studying the Bible, but secular education was important to her also. It was difficult for her to attend high school in town while her parents lived in the country. She always said, "Where there is a will, there is a way."

On March 15, 1936, she married our father. Lonnie Curtis Norton. Over a span of sixteen years they had five children. Mother was an efficient manager of both time and money. She contributed to the household economy by sewing and gardening. She taught school for one year and substituted teaching for several years. She was also a school cook for a few years. She was a dedicated Bible teacher of young children, teenagers, and ladies Bible class. She was a great asset to our father in his church work as an elder of the Lane Church of Christ. She also worked along his side on the farm. Over the years they raised broilers, had hens and an egg delivery route, and raised several kinds of dogs. Her favorite kind of dogs was poodles.

Mother served on the Atoka County election board. She held several offices in her local Home Extension Club and later served several years as devotional chairman of the Atoka County Home Extension Club. Fellow club members encouraged her to compile her devotionals into a book, so in 1980 her first book "Stumbling Blocks or Stepping Stones" was published. She was voted Atoka County Homemaker of the Year in 1979. In 1981, she was appointed the Oklahoma State devotional chairman, but ill health prevented her from accepting the office.

Her seven year battle with breast cancer began in 1974. She had four major surgeries, radiation treatments, and many kinds of chemotherapy over this seven year

period. Even though she experienced some low periods, her sights were always set on her goals of keeping God first in her life and serving others. For an example, during the last year of her life she wrote this book and crocheted five afghans - one for each of her children. I remember when she told me about the first lump she found in her breast, as I began to cry, she said, "Betty, please don't be upset. I have prepared for this journey all of my life." That statement was so true. As far back as we can remember, she had been looking forward to spending eternity in Heaven with her God. We never saw fear in her eyes during her last few days of life even though it was evident her life was passing from her. The doctors and nurses even commented that she was not afraid to die. Her lack of fear of death was due to her strong faith in Christ Jesus and her faith in His Word. She lived the command of Revelation 2:10 . . . "be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life."

The greatest honor her husband, son, and four daughters can give her is to dedicate Proverbs 31 to her memory.

I close with these verses as a special tribute to her: Verse 28: "Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her; verse 29: Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all; verse 30: Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised; verse 31: Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates."

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