



by Ray Straub

Solomon's question is probably rhetorical. It is asked for effect without anticipating a direct answer. He asks, "Who can find a virtuous woman?"

Virtuous is the adjective used in the King James Version. It is strong, challenging!

James Moffatt states plainly, "A rare find is an *able* wife." This version seems weak when reading the descriptions that follow. There are lots of able wives. Solomon is looking for a woman of rare quality.

The New English Bible asks, "Who can find a capable wife?" This is the same expression as Moffatt's in question form. The question sparks curious interest, but provides little motive to engage in diligent search.

George M. Lamsa betrays transparency with his question, "Who can find a diligent woman?" He prefers the ambitious!

The American Standard Version (1901) sees Solomon searching for a "worthy woman."

The rendition found in the Revised Standard Version, "A good wife, who can find?" is disappointing, and the New American Standard Bible fails to stimulate any passion in search of the model woman.

The author of Proverbs 31:10-31 radiates a fervor in describing a virtuous, capable, diligent wife. This ardor is felt in what the words communicate as well as in the passage's format. Symbolism abounds. The active mind finds a luxuriant garden here.

The list of descriptions given of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 forms an acrostic, each virtue delineated beginning with a successive letter of the 22 character Hebrew alphabet. This suggests ponderable probabilities.

Obviously much care, deliberation and artistry were invested in wording these descriptions. They had to be precise. The description of the perfect wife was to be completed in no more nor less than 22 definitions. There are no thoughts or words out of place here.

A closer look at the text provides insight into the portrayal of the ideal wife and mother. The passage deserves reading, studying and contemplating. But, no matter how much of that takes place, intense efforts to "digest and clarify" this passage will hardly provide improvement in its verbalizing of the model woman. Hence, commentary is offered cautiously.

A virtuous woman is an advantage to her husband. He trusts her and gains from her. She is a positive, beneficial, growing, productive, profitable influence. Her relationship with him is giving, anticipating needs, calming inner storms, providing perspective in confusion, and encouraging when his ways are right.

She is a separate person with a good feeling about herself. She is not a servant trapped into a "job," but she is an independent person bearing gifts. She finds her own identity, not being content to live obscured in her husband's shadow with no sense of her own personality.

The excellent woman is industrious. Her hands show willingness to work.

Have you ever had a job picking fruit? This is not just to stand under a tree or a vine to eat all you pick. This is gathering fruit hour after hour and day after day. It can be miserable!

After a day of discomfort and drudgery in the sun, dust and sweat, struggling to harvest a respectable amount, one always seems to find that mothers in the crew are complaining least and picking more. They get more done than we realize. They have good hands.

Like a ship extending its journey beyond shores, the ideal mother is contemplating and plotting the use of resources outside the home. She does not fear long hours if they are

needed to get what the family needs.

She is not too fragile to work in the field when such employment is of value. She labors among those who plant fields and orchards. Should there be opportunity she may buy the field to earn maximum profit from her efforts. She's sagacious. She knows how to succeed and relishes the opportunity to do so.

This desirable wife and mother maintains good health. Wholesome activity provides the strength needed to meet the long day's demand for stamina and skill. From the time her breasts offer nourishment to her young through the maturing of her family, she seeks and administers cures. She does not anticipate being taken care of.

Besides her family, the poor and needy are also on her heart. Her concerns are not limited to providing sustenance to her family. She cares for others outside the home. The cry of the needy finds her stretching in their direction. A mother has a soft heart which prompts her to care and share.

The warm, productive summer doesn't last all year. The days will shorten and warmth from the sun will diminish. The good times are wisely used to prepare for more adverse conditions forthcoming. When it begins to snow the family's comfort will not be threatened because the mother is prepared to provide shelter and warmth. How much we would suffer if mothers forgot to get ready for winter!

The paragon sees to it that nothing detracts her from maintaining her neat and attractive appearance. She dresses in "silk and purple." The *role* of a mother and wife must never usurp attention from her personality. Loveliness draws attention to the individual and provides person-to-person warmth. A good wife and mother accepts admiration and love because she is deserving. She enjoys elegance.

The virtuous woman has poise. Her emotional thresholds are high enough to tolerate stress without imposing hysteria on those close to her. She realizes that it is her

responsibility to be in control, to be gentle and patient.

A surprising quality listed here is the ability to be enterprising. In her orderly and skilled manner, she produces salable merchandise and markets it profitably.

Wisdom is heard in her speech. Her words reflect sincerity and kindness. Talking sparingly, she expresses herself discreetly and what she says helps. Listeners have learned that her contributions to conversations merit attention.

Her children are proud of her. To them she will always be someone special.

Motherhood is an occupation that tends to leave time and energy for little else. How well she handles being thrust into servanthood by small children depends upon her own sense of well-being.

Where there is lack of self worth, the mother may wish to compensate for her own weaknesses by struggling to succeed through her children. This invites management of the offspring's life. She may communicate the conditions under which she is willing to and capable of bestowing the greatest love.

Ideally, mothers love out of their own resources, out of the richness

twisted values, mothers have opportunity to restore good vision. A disillusioned society needs influential members who know patience, kindness, beauty and love. We need to see them, hear from them and learn from them.

Our woman of supreme virtue has her priorities in order. It is becoming for a woman to appreciate her beauty and the privilege of being admired, but she is also aware that these externals have their limitations. Above all, she knows about God, His qualities, His demands, His benefits. This invites her to become acquainted with and reverence Him.

Has anyone found a woman such as is described in this passage? Perhaps someone would honor his wife by considering that she fits well into this inventory of complimentary qualities. Others might feel that it would be difficult to live with such majestic perfection! They feel more at home living with someone who seems more "human." Commentators have wondered whether King Solomon found such virtue in any one of the 1,000 women in his harem.

It would be a poor use of this passage to point out to any woman

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of their lives. They realize they cannot totally make and mold another human being, but they show wisdom in providing good physical, emotional and spiritual diets. Mothers see potential and figure out means to develop it.

No task is more worthwhile than to teach children what is good, honest and true. In a world of

her inadequacies, to discourage and scold. It is a good use of this acrostic to appreciate and see opportunity for improvement.

Whatever application may be made, the final counsel in Proverbs 31 may be followed by all: "Give her the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates."

BA



The DEATH OF DEATH

by Rick Straub

DEATH! How uplifting! It's an inspiration! Death, the ultimate experience!

Of course this is ridiculous. Death is not inspiring — it is depressing. Death is revolting, ugly, morbid and cold.

Why even bring up the subject? Let us talk of something more enjoyable!

Unfortunately we cannot escape confronting this topic. While more enjoyable topics exist, few are as important as our view of death — especially our own. Dreading death is one of the heaviest of burdens. Our view of death shapes our view of life and life's meaning. Consequently it determines our behavior and the way we relate to ourselves, to other individuals and to God.

At the age of nine, I became burdened with the idea I was going to die — SOON! Never mentioning these feelings to Mom or Dad, I remember praying for God to let me live at least until I finished the book I was currently reading and preferably until I reached the grand old age of ten (double digits)! Thoughts of death are sobering. All of us at times ponder our existence and the inevitability of death. But how often do we consciously consider how our view of death is reflected in our behavior?

Death is not a topic to be explored only by the terminally ill and dying or the recently bereaved. It is a subject with profound influence upon the living of all ages and conditions. Death

must be confronted and handled for what it is! Let us examine some responses to the difficult problem death poses for mankind. We shall look at man's failure to solve this problem and at God's solution, total victory and the death of death.

How does man respond to imminent death? Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, in her book, *On Death and Dying*, speaks to this question. After studying and interviewing dying patients, she summarizes five sequential psychological stages the dying experience. The first stage is DENIAL. When first confronted with death individuals refuse to accept death, denying reality. The second stage, ANGER, produces a resentment toward everybody and everything. Patients lash out at doctors, nurses and family. This stage signals a partial acceptance of imminent death. In the third stage, BARGAINING, a desperate attempt is made to buy more time from doctors or from God. Individuals confronted as never before with the temporary nature of life seek an extension, hoping to live just a little longer. DEPRESION is the fourth stage. It is a difficult period produced by sorrow over failures, and disappointment over elusive goals. It is a time of questioning the meaning of life. The final stage, FULL ACCEPTANCE, is spent in quiet expectation of death. The individual confronted with death comes to grip with the inevitable.

These stages vary in length and intensity. Not always so distinct as this general outline might lead us to believe, these stages may overlap as individuals move from one to the next. Some individuals may vary from this sequence of stages altogether. Looking at these stages gives indication of the psychological difficulty we as mortal men face when confronting death.

In contrast to this agonizing picture of man responding to death through five psychological stages, there have been and are men whose response to death is drastically different. Men of diverse

backgrounds and cultures have viewed death as preferable to living "an undistinguished life. Through the ages they have sacrificed their lives with the conviction that the manner and meaning of their death was of greater value than the quality of their life. Early Christian martyrs anxiously welcomed the opportunity to die, witnessing their faith in Jesus Christ. They begged others not to interfere with their martyrdom! The wisdom of such individuals might be subject to questions, but not their faith.

We live in an age in a martyrless culture, which views death with fear. In our society the common response to death is avoidance at all cost. We fail to comprehend our own mortality realistically. Death is viewed as a threat which only grasps at the "other guy." Our distaste for death surfaces in our avoidance of any direct mention of death. We politely speak in euphemisms: "he passed on," "he expired," "he was fatally injured," "he is no longer with us." Jokingly we speak lightly of death as, "he kicked the bucket," or, "he bit the dust." When preparing for our families in the event of our death, we refer to the insurance in case of death as "life" insurance. Our closest contact with death comes when we see it on television. There we see death as temporary, staged and pretended. We can lose focus of death's true meaning! When death strikes, society helps us avoid its impact. The funeral home deals with death, we merely deal with the disappearance of one we loved.

Are reactions of denial and avoidance wrong? Should we welcome death as martyrs? These are difficult questions. We run into trouble at either extreme. Before we can understand what our response to death should be, we must comprehend what death is.

Death — The Foe of Permanence

If death seems harsh, that is because it is. Death is one of man's greatest enemies. Caused by sin and sponsored by Satan, death

robs us of the gift of life God breathed into us. It saddens and frightens us that such a priceless gift can so easily be stripped from us. Death was not part of God's "very good" creation, but a phenomenon brought about by the sin of Adam and Eve. It is a curse sinful man deserves and yet detests and denies. We avoid thoughts of death because it is natural to fear such an awful and awesome power: A power committing us to rest in the grave; separating us from ones we love; ending our efforts to accomplish the goals we desire to attain.

We as Christians must overcome our squeamishness about death to confront and deal with the problems it generates. Not the least of these problems is what might be termed "lack of permanence." This problem causes one to raise the question, "What use is living if everything is temporary?" Life is temporary. Soon it is over and that is it — only silence remains where once a unique individual moved and breathed, worked and played. Not only is life temporary, but life's

clesiastes. Life is but a short breath, a vanishing vapor. Everything we do *seems* pointless. Permanence is what the author of Ecclesiastes seeks. Man's most persistent search through the ages has been to find that permanence in his temporary existence.

The Search for Permanence

Human history illustrates man's search for that which is lasting. Man has ingeniously found answers, nearly always the wrong answers.

The ancient Egyptians built majestic monuments to last the ages, to be permanent memorials of their mighty power among men. They mummified their rulers and important dignitaries to secure for them a life beyond death. The memorials are now evident, but only as eroding shadows of the splendor once displayed. Mummies and their sacred chambers have been ransacked and destroyed. Ironically, these "immortal" mummies have at times been found in the hands of engaging enterprisers who have ground them into a powder to be sold as a

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accomplishments are temporary. They are soon destroyed or forgotten. Life's possessions, so patiently and purposely acquired, are lost as ownership disappears with the disappearance of life.

In our temporary world, where is there meaning for our existence? Soon we die and what remains? NOTHING! All is as though we never existed, never laughed or cried, never lived or died. "All is vanity" is the theme of the Preacher in the book of Ec-

cure-all. Such instances display the futility of man's own efforts to gain immortality. The Egyptians' answer to the problem of man's temporary nature failed.

The ancient philosophers of Greece argued that the soul of man was immortal. One could rest comfortably, knowing the soul possessed a permanence which continued after the body died. The Platonic idea of the soul existing in a dismembered state has a wide influence, even within Chris-

tianity. But as a means of confronting man's mortal existence it too fails. It is an idea based purely on speculation and circular reasoning, not on meaningful or Biblical reality.

The eastern religion, Hinduism, teaches reincarnation. This doctrine resembles the Greek philosophers' explanation of the immortal soul. We are told the world we see is "maya" (illusion). It is the mortal soul which is the reality. This reality leaves the body at death to be reborn into another creature, whether man or beast. These reincarnate souls inhabit bodily forms until they reach the "ultimate reality," thus become a part of the "world soul." This answer may relieve anxiety over impending death, but is only a fantasy, not a reality.

Continuing in this vein, modern science has given rise to those who proclaim their faith in "medical immortality." In 1962 C. W. Ettinger wrote a book entitled, *Prospect of Immortality*. He echoes the feelings of many who believe it only a matter of time before man eradicates all disease, including

save lives through cryonic suspension.

What of the question, "Has man advanced in the past four thousand years?" We must wonder when men of science advocate the practice of preparing frozen mummies. Men continue to place faith in deceptions which relieve tension concerning death but which are outside of reality.

What alternatives exist to these fantasies? Society's humanistic philosophy would have us believe man's only god is himself. There is no answer to the temporary state of our existence. There is no hope! Man is a biological machine having as much chance at permanence and eternal life as an electric can opener. Humanism thrives on the selfishness so apparent today. Enjoy all you can at any cost! That is what life is all about. How shallow, unfulfilling and hopeless is life based on such hedonistic reasoning.

True Permanence Found in Christ

Are we left then without hope? Paul stated, *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all*

ward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (I Corinthians 15:23-28).

The key to confronting death is found in the hope which is real — a hope founded on the true revelation of the one real God. Faith in Jesus, the "Prince of life," whom the grave could not hold, is our hope. Our death is but a rest out of which we are awakened at the return of our Saviour in power and glory. As the grave could not contain Jesus neither will it contain from resurrection God's children. If any passage of Scripture should cause us to rejoice, what Paul wrote in I Corinthians 15:51-57 should.

Behold, I shew you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:51-57).

How reassuring it is to know that through Jesus, life is not temporary but permanent, and death

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the disease of aging. At that point man is believed capable of extending life indefinitely. Ettinger advocated those interested in immortality be frozen upon death at temperatures considered low enough to stop the decomposition of body tissues. When cures for death are discovered people suspended in this frozen condition could theoretically be thawed and cured. This "cryonic movement" has voiced an appeal to the churches of this world to join the effort to

men most miserable (I Corinthians 15:19). The "IF" in this statement is of utmost importance, for we do have hope because of what is stated as we continue reading this passage. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive (verse 22). Christ's promised return gives assurance death will be destroyed. We find permanence in the eternal reign of God.

But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; after-

THE DEATH OF DEATH

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is not permanent but temporary. The following sonnet written by John Donne in somewhat archaic language stresses death's fate.

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee

Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;

For those whom thou think'st thou doest overthrow

Die not, poor Death; nor yet canst thou kill me

From rest and sleep, which but thy picture be,

Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow;

And soonest our best men with thee do go —

Rest of their bones and souls deliver!

Thou'rt slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate me,

And dost with poison, war and sickness dwell;

And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well

And better than thy stroke. Why swell'st thou then?

One short sleep past, we wake eternally,

And Death shall be no more: Death, thou shalt die!

Death is harsh. It is our enemy. It cannot be ignored. We need not be preoccupied with death, but we should confront and deal with it realistically. Death is not a happening we should constantly fear and deny. Paul knew this when he wrote,

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (I Corinthians 15:58).

Paul admonishes that our behavioral response to death be one of standing firm in the Lord. May we serve God steadfastly, knowing what is done for Him is not in vain! Our labor for Him has beneficial consequences enduring beyond death. Should we then despair of death? No, let us rather delight in our Deliverer! Let us summon all our energy to run the race of life leading to victory. Let death not lead us into depression but instead give us the motivation to seek the Giver of life.

This response has meaning because it is based on a lasting and permanent hope. It is behavior which reflects victory over death through Jesus Christ. Indeed, because of Him we shall be living when death is dead! **BA**

YIELD NOT TO TEMPTATION

his wife, Eve, gave him (Genesis 3:6); Noah, who was counted as righteous, became drunk with wine after the flood subsided (Genesis 9:21); Moses, usurping God's power to produce water from a rock, took power upon himself and struck the rock which produced water (Numbers 20:10, 11); and David, the man "after God's own heart," yielded to temptation, and adulterously took Bathsheba for his wife (II Samuel 11:2-5). Obviously, the purpose of these examples is not to condone such ungodly living; rather, it is to make us aware that even godly people — including Christians today — do, in fact, sometimes yield to temptation and sin.

Fortunately, sin that results from yielding to temptation can be forgiven. Perhaps the most reassuring words in Scripture regarding the forgiveness of a believer's sin were written by John:

My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, ye have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (I John 2:1, NASB).

Praise God! Sin can be forgiven! Christ, our Mediator, who was Himself tempted in all things as we (Hebrews 4:15), sits at the right hand of God as our Advocate, our Intercessor, when we sin. Because Christ can sympathize with our weakness, the writer of that well-known hymn can confidently proclaim, "Ask the Saviour to help you, comfort, strengthen, and keep you: He is willing to aid you, He will carry you through."

We as Christians are admonished to refrain from worldliness and defiling habits. Christian conduct is a lifelong pursuit. Though this pursuit is not easy, we cannot simply "throw in the towel" and give up. We can, indeed, live holy lives with the help of the Saviour. As Christians, we can resist temptation, and, indeed, should. Because of what Christ has already accomplished on our behalf, let us, then, "keep seeking the things above, where Christ is."

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