

What is worth more than a large inheritance? (19:14)

House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.

THE TEXT (NASB)

House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.

House and riches are the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife is from the LORD. KJV - Proverbs 19:14

INTRODUCTION



An inheritance is often overrated.

Its monetary value may be high, but for an heir, it may prove of minimal benefit—or even harmful. And believe it or not, that can all depend on the spouse of the heir.

Why?



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COMMENTARY

Whom we live with is much more important than how much we inherit. A good life partner is worth more—and should be cherished more—than a large inheritance. So what's the point of this proverb? Does it advise parents to leave a big portfolio for their children? Does it raise their children's expectations for their legacy? Is it promoting sales for the life insurance industry? Let's look at it carefully... starting with the tiny word, "but."

In Hebrew, the conjunction *u* can be translated in a number of ways. Here, the KJV and Webster both translate *u* as "and," while the NASB and most English, German, and Spanish versions translate it as "but." Yet, the translation "but" provides a clearer contrast between the worth of a house and wealth, and the real benefit of a prudent wife. What indeed is worth more to a man? A large inheritance, or a sensible and capable spouse? A foolish or greedy wife can burn through any legacy in no time at all. And the same could be true of a silly husband.

Skills Trump Stuff



Parents usually do as much as they can to secure their children's future, but they may not always leave them both "house and wealth" (as a quick read might suggest). In our own family, giving each of our ten children their own house and portfolio is simply impossible. Humanly speaking, the cost would be prohibitive, and even worse, too much wealth, given too easily, will weaken the kids' work ethic. They need to learn to work and save.

We all treasure what we work for and earn, more than unearned freebees. Parents want to help their children get started, but giving them gifts on a silver platter does the opposite. As the outstanding Salvation Army missionary Henry Gariepy puts it, "The greatest legacy we can leave to the next generation is our faith and trust in God." In a sense, faith and trust are "skills," while house and wealth are only stuff. Yet the proverb here contrasts that very stuff with the blessing of the managerial skills of one very special woman. The Tanakh (1985) translation puts it: "Property and riches are bequeathed by fathers, but an *efficient* wife comes from the Lord."

Father or Fathers



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The text praises a prudent wife, but what of the value of a sensible husband? Don't these truths apply to the opposite sex as well? Of course! You must remember that Proverbs is written initially for men, because God wants men to be the spiritual leaders. Irresponsible men would prefer be off hunting or partying, because guiding the household seems trivial, annoying, and more trouble than it's worth. Women who complain about "patriarchy" have the problem backwards; they have good reasons to complain about men, but God's servant patriarchy is the solution, not the problem.

Note the word "fathers" is plural, implying fathers and grandfathers, because there's no Hebrew word for grandfather. While the bride's father provides the bride, the groom's father provides the wealth. Some men do start out wealthy by being born into it. They don't work for their money; it comes as an accumulated blessing from the past. Many fathers, suffering war, natural calamity, or economic disaster, simply cannot leave their children a financial legacy. But all good dads can teach their children responsibility and discipline early in life.

The Ideal Wife



Note that the LORD gives a wife who is "prudent," not necessarily beautiful or sexy. When the LORD wants to give a man a great wife, he puts more emphasis on her character than her looks. But men often fail to see things God's way. Man's natural tendency is to emphasize physical beauty. It's an old problem and a serious one—putting lust ahead of love. By confusing lust and love, the human male may pick a mate mostly for her looks, and she later becomes less attractive, as her character emerges. The kids may not be properly nurtured, so all of society suffers.

Foolish Marriages Lead to Global Destruction

Foolish marriages were once the cause of a global catastrophe: Noah's Flood. At the dawn of history, we learn that "the sons of God [godly descendants of Seth] saw that the daughters of men [ungodly clans] were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose," Genesis 6:2. The lawless culture, spawned of foolish, lustful marriages, provoked the global flood of Noah's day. The "good men" from the line of Seth picked wives merely on their outward appearances, rather than seeking the LORD's will in their choice of a mate. They forgot that beauty is only skin deep. Of course men are drawn to physically attractive women. Women know this and work hard to look pretty. But a good woman quickly becomes attractive, very attractive. God can and does provide wives both beautiful and wise, as we see with Abraham's



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wife, Sarah. But a good character is an essential part of that beauty.

Brains over Beauty



God ordains marriage, and he wants it to last a lifetime, but the LORD warns that prudence trumps prettiness. “Looks aren’t everything,” because beauty is brief, while prudence endures. God always gives the best to those who leave the choice to him, as shown in Proverbs 18:22: A wife is a “good thing,” and a “favour from the LORD.” But the prior verse here in Proverbs 19 says, “the contentions of a wife are a constant dripping.” A constant dripping. A foolish, nagging wife can cause a man much more pain than her beauty brings pleasure. Ask any divorce lawyer. Parents should teach sons to live with discernment and to recognize prudence. But how?

Recognize Prudence

The Hebrew word for prudent, משכיל (măś•kā•lēṯ, pronounced “mas-ka-leyth”), stems from the verb, שכל (śā•kāḵ, pronounced “sah-kal”), meaning “to be prudent.” It occurs sixty-three times in the Bible, first in Genesis 3, where Eve sees the Forbidden Fruit and thinks it will make her “wise.” Its fullest exposition is found in Proverbs 31, where the woman is “a rare gem of exceeding worth,” with tremendous industry, steady time management, and financial skill in managing the household.

If all a woman has to offer is charm and good looks, her husband will suffer financial hardship. An attractive but silly woman often seeks a rich husband, because she has neither the ability nor discipline for productive work. Marry rich—that’s her strategy! Pity her husband!

Marry Very Carefully

Some families, especially wealthy ones (like the Bennets in Jane Austen’s 1813 novel, *Pride and Prejudice*), try to arrange marriages in their children’s youth. Planning for the future, they want to keep the wealth within the family. However, according to this proverb, a prudent wife is from the LORD, not from parental matchmaking. Prudence is essential for a happy lifelong



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marriage. While individuals may be born into wealth, they are not born into prudence. You cannot tell whether a toddler will be prudent or foolish in her adulthood.

This text has a message for the unmarried, especially single men from poor families. While they may not expect a large inheritance from their parents—or they may dream of one from their bride's parents, they can always find themselves a prudent wife. The message is the same: Marry a girl more for her mind than her money. A prudent wife (or husband) is priceless.

The Best Legacy



This proverb suggests that parents, motivated by love, will help their children as best they can—including with house and wealth. God Almighty, also motivated by love, will give them an even greater treasure if they want it—a prudent spouse. A sensible spouse is worth more than any inheritance. A foolish and wasteful wife or husband will ruin even an enormous inheritance. Work and pray more at having your children marry well than making them rich.

OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus will marry, too.

The bride of Christ is His Church (Ephesians 5:25-27). Someday, a magnificent, celestial marriage feast will be celebrated between Jesus and His mate. Jesus bought this bride with His blood, and she'll surely be prudent. How will that work? Don't know, but I plan to be there.

How about you?

APPLICATION



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- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Pray hard for your child's future spouse rather than just saving hard for their inheritance.
- Develop prudence in both your sons and daughters.
- Teach your children to admire character over charisma, cuteness, and especially, over cash.

Which of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take now? Ask Him.



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KEY WORDS

family, divorce, estate, folly, house, inheritance, insurance, LORD, marriage, more assets (quantity), rich, wealth, wisdom

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Prudent Pauline?



Prudent Pauline is a planner. She looks before she leaps, she thinks before she speaks. Her favourite mottos are: “Haste makes waste,” “brains over brawn,” and “don’t jump to conclusions.”

When Pauline first heard that famous maxim: “The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step,” she said NO! It begins with a good map. The map must be studied and the best route plotted. Consider road conditions, terrain, rest stops, refuelling, hostile territory, expected weather, travelling companions, clothing, supplies, and many more factors, including (if necessary) a guide.

She has studied the wisdom of Solomon and even helped teach him a thing or two. Solomon wrote these words about 3,000 years ago in honour of Prudent Pauline. “Whatever your hand finds to do (no matter what you are doing) do it with all your might (give it your full ability and energy) for there is no activity or planning or wisdom after you die—it will be too late.” Pauline says, “First comes wisdom, then comes planning (her favourite activity), and then comes activity.”

Pauline makes the time to do tax planning. She does a work plan every day. She uses a day



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timer or planner to assign priorities to her activities. She and Diligent Daniel are an incredible pair. Pauline does all her homework before she starts an activity.

