

G O D ' S
M A S T E R P I E C E

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WEAVING TOGETHER THE PIECES OF YOUR LIFE

COLETTA PATTERSON



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This book is dedicated to my daughters, Olivia and Jady, who propel me to achieve my destiny; to my mother, who shaped me into the woman I am; to my grandmothers, who were a source of laughter and inspiration in my life; and to all the women who will read it and be inspired and empowered to become God's masterpiece.

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INTRODUCTION



PROVERBS 31 IS a familiar portion of Scripture that is commonly referred to as the “virtuous woman/wife.” Proverbs 31:10–31 characterizes a woman who has it all together, and many women would go so far as to say she is the perfect woman. Realistically, we wonder how such a seemingly ordinary woman can be so perfect. Why is this woman’s example included in the Bible? More importantly, how can we put her example into practice?

Most of us have a difficult time seeing ourselves as the “Proverbs 31 woman” because we are looking through our natural eyes. We see our weaknesses apart from God’s strength. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, Paul says, “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” We unknowingly

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place ourselves in a box and limit God's power working through us. Ephesians 3:20 says, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us..." God desires to work in situations that look impossible so His glory may be revealed.

In response to Mary's unbelief when the angel told her she would bear a son and call His name Jesus, the angel said, "For nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). Usually, our first reaction is to look at our own abilities. We tend to focus on how the situation will look to other people rather than trusting God's ability to bring it to pass.

In this book, as we study the Proverbs 31 woman's example, we will discover how God created us and find practical ways of tapping into the greatness within us. We will determine how we can bring all the pieces of our lives together to become the masterpiece of God's creation. Do not be afraid to take an introspective look at your life and spend time reflecting on and praying about how you can allow this book to minister to you. Refer to the Questions for Reflection at the end of the book to assist you in making the most of this journey.

Historically, the "Proverbs 31 woman" was written as a model for men on what a godly woman was and the kind of woman a godly man should marry. Today, it is still an excellent model for that and for us as women to examine practical truths that will help us exemplify the life God desires for us. It is not to be taken literally in that every woman has to do exactly what the Proverbs 31 woman did, but rather each of us

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is to apply the principles she used to achieve greatness in our own lives. The journey to greatness never ends, but it is my prayer that this book will serve as an inspiration and a guide for achieving God's best in our lives. Ultimately, when we tap into the greatness within us, others will rise and call us blessed and our works will bring us praise.

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GOD HAS CREATED each of us with a divine and unique purpose. It is for this reason that we have been placed on earth. Unfortunately, many of us never find out what our purpose is, or if we do find out what it is, we never achieve it. Discovering our purpose is the first key to joy and fulfillment in life. On the journey to greatness, we must discover and fulfill our destiny. Destiny is the fabric of our lives that weaves everything together, so we must answer the question, *What is my destiny and unique purpose?*

Our purpose is unique to us. There is no one else who has our same purpose, and we were each created with an assignment. Jeremiah 1:5 says, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” Psalm 139:13 tells us, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.” God has given each of us unique assignments designed to

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complement our personalities and talents, with the end result of bringing others into His kingdom. Paul encouraged Timothy not to neglect his gift (1 Timothy 4:14). Our gifts were given to us to increase God's kingdom. God's kingdom is larger than we, our churches, and our workplaces are. It encompasses the universe and is God's way of doing things. We are reminded that "the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men" (Romans 14:17-18). We become fulfilled as we discover and fulfill our purpose on earth and walk in our assignment.

People who are driven by purpose live their lives according to the assignment God has given them. "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8-10). Paul continues in Ephesians 5:17, "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." People who live according to God's will are not motivated by money, fame, guilt, or selfishness, but purely by a desire to please God. Paul accepted his call to preach and was not moved by people's opinions or his own desires. He said:

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it;

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rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

—Galatians 1:10–17

Paul did not consult others about his calling. He knew what he had been called to do. He was not swayed by the feelings of others because the Lord had given him an assignment and a purpose that only he could accomplish. He took assurance in this faith and pursued his purpose and became one of the greatest apostles of all time.

Just like Paul, the Proverbs 31 woman was motivated by purpose. She was not concerned about pleasing people. She learned the importance of prioritizing and putting God's agenda first. Because of her commitment to His will for her life, she was able to accomplish many things. She wasted little time on things that had no bearing on what God had called her to be (i.e. an excellent wife, mother, and entrepreneur, etc.). For us, that means there are good opportunities that may come along, but they are not meant for us to do at that particular time. If you pursue things that distract you

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or get you off course from your purpose and specific assignment, you will only delay God's best for your life. To balance that statement, God will allow us to pursue things that do not line up with His perfect will for our lives, but we usually will not experience true fulfillment. Once we know our purpose, it becomes easier to discern what assignments God has for us in the various seasons of our lives. Ecclesiastes 3:5 tells us that there is a time to embrace and a time to refrain. There are times to embrace opportunities and times to refrain from opportunities.

I remember a few years ago when I came across an opportunity to teach part-time at a local community college. As a child, I always envisioned myself teaching and thought this was the perfect opportunity. After all, I would be able to earn extra money and do something I enjoyed. Halfway into the semester, I began to think I had made a mistake. Although the opportunity was good, I had overextended myself. I had a full-time job in addition to my teaching job, and all of my spare time was spent preparing for my lectures and grading exams. I hadn't realized how much of a commitment teaching would be. Even though it was a great opportunity for me, it was not the right timing, and I was not fulfilling my purpose at that time. Because I did not follow God's plan for that season in my life, I experienced unnecessary stress and wasn't fulfilled. However, because I am a child of God, He allowed me to pursue the opportunity, and I learned some valuable lessons from it. Thus, God worked everything out for my good. I'm learning how to follow God's perfect will, not His permissive will, for my life on

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a daily basis and not get distracted by things that God didn't design for me at that time.

Discovering our purpose is an individualized process. No one can tell us what our purpose is. It can be confirmed through others, but God is the only one who can tell us what our unique assignment is. Since He's the only one who knows our destinies, we will only discover them through spending time with Him. Paul discovered the secret of living a fulfilled life—one that was gained through spending time with the Lord. He wrote, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Philippians 3:10).

First, we have to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and build a relationship with Him. Through prayer, worship, and reading God's Word, we discover God's personality and become more like Him. Isaiah 55 encouraged the Israelites to return to the Lord and get to know Him:

Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near... For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

—Isaiah 55:6, 8–9

Every day we should endeavor to spend time with the Lord so we become more and more intimate with Him. As we become more intimate, we develop more trust and learn God's ways and thoughts towards us.

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In our relationships with our spouses, if we don't ever spend time with them, we become roommates rather than friends and lovers. It takes two-way communication to build intimacy and trust. If the only time we spend with our husbands is ten minutes during dinner, how well will we really know them? And if in those ten minutes we do all the talking, how will our husbands feel?

Sometimes, that's how we treat God. We spend ten minutes with God praying on the way to work or during our child's nap time and expect Him to share His most intimate thoughts and plans with us. We have a list of things we ask Him about, and when those ten minutes are up, we are off to the next task. No fruit is produced from this kind of relationship. That's not the type of relationship the Lord wants with us. He wants to be our closest friend and share the mysteries of the Gospel with us:

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

—John 15:13–15

The Lord also desires for us to trust Him. We can only trust Him when we know Him well enough to experience His goodness. Once we've seen the Lord in action in our lives, we develop an unwavering trust in Him, and nothing can convince us otherwise. However, if we haven't spent enough time with Him to know His

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ways, His thoughts, and His character, our trust will always waver.

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for... By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going... By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise... By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice.

—Hebrews 11:1–2,8,11,17

Abraham had an unwavering faith in God and knew God would do what He said He would do. Regardless of the situation, Abraham knew God would not let him down. He cultivated this relationship with God, and in so doing, fulfilled his purpose. We cannot discover our purpose if we don't know the Lord's voice, which is developed through spending time with Him. So our first step in discovering our purpose is getting to know the Lord.

Once we get to know the Lord, we become comfortable with His voice and don't have to ask for signs or confirmations to know what He is saying. When He speaks, we will have a confidence in knowing it is His voice. Just as we can pick out our children's voices in a crowd, we should be able to pick out God's voice when He speaks.

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Usually, when God shows us our destiny, He gives us a glimpse of the picture. We very rarely see the whole picture. It's similar to a puzzle. When you are putting a jigsaw puzzle together, you have a picture of the completed puzzle on the box. Inside the box, there are many puzzle pieces. You can refer to the picture as a guide to see where the pieces go, or you can just start trying to put pieces together through "trial and error" without referencing the picture.

The Lord showed me that walking through our destiny is like putting a puzzle together. He gives us a glimpse of the end result (puzzle picture), and we are given many pieces (i.e. tests, trials of life) to work with to bring the end result to fruition. Through our daily journey, some of life's pieces fit together instantly, and others take longer to piece together. We have God's Word to refer to, but the instructions in the puzzle (God's Word) don't tell us the exact location of where each piece will go, nor does it tell us which piece to start with. God leaves the choices up to us. These challenges build character in us. We must piece it together on our own with God's guidance through the Holy Spirit. We must be careful not to get discouraged or leave the puzzle undone. Over the course of our lives, one by one, the pieces begin to line up and make a beautiful picture. We begin to see what God is doing in us and through us as we accomplish our purpose. The "picture" we received earlier from the Lord begins to manifest in our lives.

Along our journey, there are many puzzle pieces that will be thrown our way that are designed to get us off course and distracted. Some pieces will not fit the vision

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(picture) we were given. We get into trouble when we try to make the pieces fit. We have to stay focused on our purpose and discard the pieces that don't fit. For example, that may mean changing our friends if they distract us from our purpose or leaving a job that is not God's best for us. Spending time with God will help us know which pieces fit and which ones do not.

In the online devotional "Today God is First: Daily Workplace Inspiration" (October 15, 2003), Os Hillman says,

God often gives us a picture of our future so that we will remember this picture when we are being tested to trust Him in the valley. This picture usually does not reveal how God intends to bring about the visions for our life. However, none of us really derive the character qualities God desires for our lives while we are on the mountain. It is in the valley where the fruit is planted and harvested. Jesus hoped that He might be able to avoid the valley that caused Him to sweat blood. There is a valley that each of us must enter, usually unwillingly, in order to experience the God of the valley—and to experience His faithfulness in the valley. Once we have spent time in this valley, we come out with something we would have never gained if we had not entered it. The valley brings much fruit into our lives so that we might plant seeds into the lives of others. God does not waste valley experiences. If we are faithful in the valley, we will enter a new dimension with God that we never thought possible. There is a harvest of wisdom and virtue that can only be grown in the valley.¹

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In our valley experiences, we are learning principles that will help someone else make it through a valley experience. Our attitude should be, *What can I learn from this experience?* Once we get through the valley, we'll find ourselves in situations where we can minister to others who are going through a similar valley experience. This is the place God wants us—the place where He can count on us to minister to others and expand His kingdom.

Knowing God's purpose for our lives is so critical to our success. Living the kind of life God has for us is tied into living a life of purpose. We cannot live according to our plan and expect God to bless the results. He is only concerned with one thing—that we fulfill our destinies.

Once we know God's purpose for our lives, we can begin living in purpose and accomplishing God's plan. Living in purpose means we are living in God's perfect will. His perfect will is what He created us to do. Sometimes we slip into His permissive will—a place that is not designed for us—but God's grace protects us while we are out of His perfect will. For instance, God does not condone sex outside of marriage, but if a Christian makes the choice of having sex outside of marriage, He will forgive them and protect them while they are out of His perfect will for that moment. However, His perfect will is that we remain sexually pure until we are married. Achieving our purpose is a journey that is challenging, exciting, and rewarding. This is the first step to becoming a woman of excellence on the journey to becoming God's masterpiece.