Proverbs concludes with these verses. They also form the conclusion of the acrostic which we have been studying, describing the ideal woman. Proverbs has described her as faithful, productive, strong, wise, and contributing powerfully to the good of her community as well as that of her family. Her character, as we have noted previously, is pure and righteous. She reflects Christ. This is an especially appropriate description when we consider the ideal woman as a metaphor for God’s church! And we see some of these same ideas carried through the closing words. Her family calls her blessed and her husband praises her. She works hard for the good of her family. In particular, she is excellent in virtue. The works of her own hands praise her because she is, as this poem tells us from the beginning (v. 10), ***eshet chayil***, a woman of valor. (Translated in the KJV as a “virtuous woman.”) She is simply a woman doing the everyday tasks common to women of the time, but she pursues her tasks with commitment and excellence, and always in accordance with God’s will. One does not have to be a wife or mother to have such a descriptor! Interestingly, the same phrase is used of Ruth by Boaz when he encounters her at the threshing floor. He says “…for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman” (Ruth 3:11). At the time, of course, Ruth was a widow, and childless. She spent her days gleaning in the field with the poorest of the poor. This is rather unlike the domestic picture here in Proverbs. But in both cases, we see a woman who completes her tasks with courage and integrity. We can all be people of valor: virtuous people properly belonging to God’s church who go about their everyday tasks in excellence and fear of the Lord.

**Proverbs 31:28-31**

**Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.**

**Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.**

**Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.**

**Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.**

**Olios Coenobitus**

This small spider lives in the thorny, succulent bushes found in the south of Madagascar. It’s true that one side of the island of Madagascar is lush jungle, with massive and frequent rainfall. But a mountainous spine running the length of the island ensures that there is very little moisture in the clouds that reach the other end of the island. In the south it may not rain at all for more than nine months of the year. In such a dry climate, a small spider is at risk of drying out. Ants are also a threat, as they regularly scour the ground for creatures suffering from the heat of the sun. Fortunately, God has given these small spiders a brilliant strategy. They locate snail shells and use them as shelters from the drying power of the sun. But the shell can’t be left simply sitting on the sand, because of the ants. Instead, these remarkable spiders use silk to move the shells. They suspend the snail shells from bushes, and then use them as shelters. There, they can hide from both the ants and the desiccating power of the sun. But the mechanics of this procedure are not so simple! The shell is heavier than the spider. Silk threads must be attached in a particular way, affixing the shell to the bush from several angles so that it will not be blown around by the wind. Mastering this skill takes hard work and a bit of practice, so the spiders don’t always get it right on the first try. They have to work at it! Virtue takes the same kind of dedicated practice. Doing the right thing—being virtuous—helps to protect us in a complicated, sinful world. It keeps us from bringing destruction down on our own heads. But it’s not just a matter of hunkering down inside our shell of virtue and waiting out the world. We have to keep hauling ourselves up! And we have to keep ourselves firmly anchored in God’s Word. Otherwise, like a poorly anchored shell, we’ll spin out of control and fall back to the ground. We must work constantly to keep ourselves in alignment with God’s will. And that’s what it really means to be a woman—or person—or church of valor! This whole poem is about serving God through the humble, common, ordinary tasks of daily living. Everything we do can be done with valor if we do it with courage, integrity and the conviction that God is a part of even the simplest jobs that we have to do.

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Madagascar

Season 1

Episode 3: “Island of Marvels”

Start: 43:29 (7:38 from End)

End: 45:49 (5:18 from End)