

*The Power of a
Virtuous Woman*

ALSO BY PAULA PENN-NABRIT

*Morning By Morning:
How We Home-Schooled Our African-American Sons to the Ivy League*

*Exploring a New Synthesis:
Business Ethics & Diversity*

As For Me and My House

*Sankofa:
Look to Your Past Forgotten Heritage*

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The Power of a Virtuous Woman

PAULA PENN-NABRIT

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my mother, Sister Mildred Penn, who continues to teach me daily just how much power a virtuous woman has; my late mother-in-law, Mrs. Vernice Nabrit who confirmed that teaching relentlessly for the 35 years I knew her; and my husband, C. Madison, who continues to inspire me to strive to be a powerful woman of virtue-even when I fall far short of the mark. Thank you, Peace & Blessings!

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heartfelt thanks to each and every sister who has ever been a part of our class, from the first 9 who met back in 2007 to the 25 of us “regulars” who meet together now. Thank you for your prayers, your participation, your probative questions and most of all for the genuine sisterhood we have created, developed and nurtured together. It is a rare and beautiful thing and I am blessed to be a part of it.

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Introduction

I began writing this book in 2007 for our Sunday School class. The original objective was to explore holistically the purpose, function and true nature of women and of virtue – all through the lens of Proverbs 31.

One chapter of one book of the Bible doesn't seem like enough to warrant weeks of study and discussion. Especially considering the fact many of us have been "in church" most, if not all of our lives. We know this chapter and have heard it, and the supporting Scriptures discussed numerous times. And I am certainly NOT holding myself out as some perfected example of a virtuous woman. But I think we, as a community of sisters, can, help each other "dig a little deeper" in God's word, especially as it relates to us.

We know a lot already, at least on some level; and much of what we know we learned from our mothers and grandmothers and great-grandmothers. But some of what we have been taught we have discarded. Some we discarded without thinking; some we discarded because of outside influences. It's easy to forget the admonition in 2 Corinthians 6:17 "*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate.*" Some we discarded out of a lack of respect for the work our mothers did and the paths they laid out for us. Regardless of the reason(s), maybe we need to go back and retrieve, at least, some of it.

In Asanti, a Ghanaian language, "Sankofa" loosely interpreted means "look to your past, forgotten heritage". What did our foremothers

know about the word of God and how did they use it to do such great things with such limited resources? I'm not advocating a return to long dresses, closed shoes and unprocessed hair—well, I am kind of an advocate of unprocessed hair, but we need to go back and examine our past and the Word of God.

I want a deeper understanding of Holiness as a theology of liberation. I want a deeper understanding of submission as strength. And while I love Aretha Franklin's "Natural Woman", I want more than a feeling brought about by the closeness of a man. I want to explore the process of becoming the natural woman God intended me to become. How can I help (or love) someone else without first knowing who God intended for me to be?

I don't immediately flash to a theme song when the topic of Sunday School comes up, but in thinking about this class, an old song just kept running through my mind. I can't remember the last time I heard anyone actually sing it but the lyrics are perfect for a class about the power of virtuous women.

*"I've got a river of life flowing out of me,
makes the lame to walk and the blind to see,
Opens prison doors, sets the captives free.
I've got a river life flowing out of me.*

*Spring up O well, within my soul,
Spring up O well, that makes me whole,
Spring up O well, and give to me,
More life, abundantly."*

My Sisters, Thank you for agreeing to take this journey of exploration with me.

CHAPTER 1



*"Mean what you say and
say what you mean."*

*Terminology & Definitions: Secular, Spiritual
& Colloquial.*



English is a precise tool. That fact is far from obvious in today's society where people incorrectly conjugate verbs, refuse to match verb tense to subject, mispronounce words and generally abuse the language, making up words as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs as they go. Granted language is constantly evolving, but there remain rules of grammar, syntax and punctuation that exist to help us communicate. When those rules are broken whether intentionally or out of ignorance, the process of communication can be compromised. Nowhere is that more apparent than in the area of definition. How

can we dictate “Mean what you say and say what you mean” if we all have different definitions of the words we are using? So, as a point of clarification, I want to begin with an examination of the terminology (term: *a word or group of words designating something*, terminology: *the terms belonging to a specialized subject*) and definition (define: *to state the meaning of a word or a phrase*; definition: *the act of defining or making definite, distinct, or clear*) of the title of this course. In the weeks to come I will try to be careful to define and clarify all the words that I use. That way, if we disagree, and no doubt we will, at least we will know about what we are disagreeing.

The course title seems simple and self-explanatory, The Power of a Virtuous Woman. But what do these words really mean? How has God defined these terms? What do we mean when we use them? And most importantly, are our meanings compatible with God’s meanings? Let’s examine our words carefully, because “death and life are in the power of the tongue.” Proverbs 18:21.

Grammatically, *The* is a definite as opposed to an indefinite article; it indicates specificity as opposed to generality. Spiritually, we see this distinction when we read John 1:1 “*In the beginning was the Word,...*” It doesn’t say “*In the beginning was a Word.*” It is written with specificity. All world religions have their own holy scriptures, but we know the Bible is *The Word* of God. Here is a secular example of the specificity of the definite article. I have a husband, a father, an older brother, a brother-in-law, five adult nephews and three adult sons, but whether they’re all over for a cook-out or I am home alone, my husband is *the* man of the house. I love the other men I listed, but they are each but *a* man in relation to me and my household. Finally, we hear the colloquial distinction between the definite and indefinite article all the time when folks refer to someone with authority as “*The Man!*” And in the black community we certainly know there is a world of difference between dealing with “*a*” white man and “*the*” white man.

Power is a part of speech known as a noun, a person, place or thing, and is defined as the ability to do or act; strength, might, force. Spiritually, those of us who have received the infilling of the Holy Ghost, evidenced by speaking in other tongues can and should “act” on the promise stated in Acts 1:8 “*But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you...*”. But even in the Old Testament there is the promise of boundless, regenerating power actualized by faith seen in Isaiah 40:29. “*He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.*” Colloquially we often hear people say, “*Girl he got it like that*” and as the receiver of the message we infer the person actually has power to make things happen.

Of is a preposition, a word used as a modifier to indicate derivation, origin, connection, qualities or attributes. Spiritually, we see the critical use of the preposition as indicative of the origin or source of our ideal state of mind in 2 Timothy 1:7 “*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*” Colloquially we may hear a mother berate her child with “*You know you know better-What were you thinking of?!*”

A, an indefinite article, i.e., there is more than one. Spiritually, we have to be careful not to think or believe that we are the only one. In 1 Kings 19:14 Elijah makes that prideful mistake, “*and I, even I only, am left...*”. But God shows him in 1 Kings 19:18 “*Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.*” We can and should strive to be *a* virtuous woman, in the broadest sense of the word, but we should never, ever think of ourselves as *the* virtuous woman, for there are in fact many virtuous women among us in the body of Christ.

Similarly, in the colloquial, when the song says “*She’s a brick house*” we know that means the woman has *a* beautiful body, but not the only beautiful body. That is an important distinction to remember

because physical beauty is not only temporal or fleeting, it is also a rather common occurrence. There are many beautiful women.

Virtuous is an adjective defined as conforming to moral and ethical principles; having or showing virtue. *Virtue* is a noun and there are two forms or categories. One category refers to the *natural virtues*, namely any moral virtue of which humankind is capable, especially the *cardinal virtues* justice, temperance, prudence and fortitude. The other category refers to *theological virtues*, i.e., faith, hope and charity; and these, by definition, are infused into the human intellect and will by a special grace of God. These are the secular definitions of virtue and virtuous. We see more detailed definitions in the Scriptures. In different translations of Mark 5:30 we see virtue used as a synonym for power. The King James Version reads “*And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes?*” Yet in the New American Standard Bible and many other translations, the text reads, “*Immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched My garments?’*”. 2 Peter 1: 5–7 also seems to equate *virtue* with power “*add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.*” Patience, kindness and charity would have been known to Peter as natural or moral virtues so his earlier admonition seems to equate virtue with power just as we saw in Mark.

Elsewhere, we see proof of virtue as its own reward in Philippians 4:8, “*Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*” **Virtue** is not gender-specific and is a valid and noble pursuit for men as well as women. Spiritually, one

thing is absolutely certain, virtue encompasses a broader vista than just the sexual purity of women!

Woman is a noun defined as the female human being or an adult female person. This secular definition is primarily biological in its scope. But we exist as more than merely physical or biological beings. How did God design and define woman? Genesis 1:27 illustrates God’s design for woman as identical to that of man in that both were created by God and in the image of God. “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*” God’s design included a strategic plan for our time on the planet and our interaction with the other life forms He created. Genesis 1:28 “*And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*” God’s process for the design of woman was derivative or taken from man thus ensuring biological compatibility. Genesis 2:22 “*And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.*”

So there we have it, a detailed analysis and examination of our course title, The Power of a Virtuous Woman. Now that we have deepened our knowledge/wisdom, let’s look at our applications as critical indicators of our understanding. “*Wisdom is the principle thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.*” Proverbs 4:7.

CHAPTER 1 QUESTIONS

1. Are you comfortable thinking of yourself as a powerful person?

2. How does your sense of yourself as a powerful person (or not) affect your relationships with others?

3. What are your greatest strengths?

4. How do your strengths benefit others?

5. Where do you desire to be strengthened?

6. Are you comfortable thinking of yourself as a virtuous woman?

7. Do you think others view you as a virtuous woman?

8. Which virtues do you possess?

9. How do your virtues benefit others?

10. Which virtues do you want to acquire?

