

WEEK 13
05.27.18

THE PROVERBS 31 WOMAN



FOCUS VERSE

Proverbs 31:10

Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies.

LESSON TEXT

Proverbs 31:10-30

10 Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.

11 The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.

12 She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

13 She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.

14 She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.

15 She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.

16 She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.

17 She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.

18 She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night.

19 She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.

20 She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.

21 She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.

22 She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.

23 Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.

24 She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.

25 Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.

26 She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.

27 She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.

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

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

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



FOCUS THOUGHT

The virtuous woman is kind, loving, generous, honorable, trustworthy, wise, industrious, strong, and fearless.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Value

“Just across the border of Louisiana, entering the state of Texas, is a mileage sign showing the distance to El Paso, Texas, to be a little over eight hundred miles. And those who have driven those long miles, making their way from east to west, have no doubt noticed the wide-open desert plains.

People unfamiliar with West Texas would probably not see much value in the land. The dull, brown, sandy surface with minimal greenery would cause most individuals to conclude that the land is desolate, barren, and unimportant. They would not see its value because they would see only what is on the surface.

However, what is beneath the surface makes much of that area worth a fortune. Though the

naked eye sees no value, what is pumped to the surface by powerful machines proves that the West Texas land, like that near the Davis Mountains, is highly valuable (www.the-american-interest.com/2016/09/07/billions-of-barrels-of-oil-discovered-in-texas/, accessed November 2016).

In the same way, people have the tendency to look at those of another race, nationality, or gender, and fail to see them as valuable because of judging them from the surface only. However, the fact that we all bear the image of God gives us great value. It is important for us as believers to look for God’s image and see our neighbors as valuable and precious in the eyes of the Lord.

OUTLINE

I. THE VALUE OF A VIRTUOUS WOMAN

II. THE QUALITIES OF A VIRTUOUS WOMAN

- A. Kind, Loving, and Generous
- B. Honorable and Trustworthy
- C. Wise
- D. Industrious
- E. Strong and Fearless

III. THE REWARDS OF A VIRTUOUS WOMAN

- A. Her Husband and Children Praised Her
- B. She Received Praise Because She Feared the Lord
- C. Her Own Works Praised Her
- D. She Received the Benefits of Her Own Works

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is a much-contemplated figure. Could such a woman have existed? If she did, who was she?

At the outset of today’s lesson, the point should be made that this passage of Scripture was not written to women but to a young

ruler. This single young man, King Lemuel, would not be looking for a wife with all the attributes and achievements listed in Proverbs 31. His search would be for a single maiden, a girl who would eventually become his wife. The word translated *woman* in the passage is used to describe females of every age and condition, married or not (*Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon*).

As we study the Proverbs 31 woman, we find an abstract of a “woman in the making.” The young man would not find such a person ready-made. She would have no children, no husband sitting at the gate, and likely no thriving entrepreneurial enterprises. What she would have is character, and that is the subject today’s lesson: The admirable attributes of a virtuous woman.

A person’s character is the key to a successful, happy life. Each person can learn from the conduct and character of the ideal woman of virtue.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. THE VALUE OF A VIRTUOUS WOMAN

A reading of the entire Book of Proverbs provides a picture of contrasts. The women

recorded in its pages can be easily classified into one of two categories: a woman of folly, or a woman of wisdom. Throughout the book, wisdom is personified as a “she,” and as we look at its final chapter, we find Scripture painting a picture—drawing a sketch—of a wise, virtuous lady in action. This, the Word lets us know, is the sort of woman a godly man should choose for a wife.

It could be stated that Scripture’s virtuous woman illustrates a materialization of all the wisdom contained within the writings of Proverbs. The twenty-two-line poem gives an illustration of applied wisdom—how it is lived out and its effects on others. The passage may actually provide many portraits of what a godly woman might look like.

As we examine this ideal woman given in a distant culture and time, we can superimpose a picture of today’s virtuous woman over the sketch King Lemuel’s mother provided for her son. The picture, although drawn according to ancient Eastern customs, details attributes and characteristics we should find in today’s Christian. As we proceed, consider that some regard the virtuous woman as a prophetic representation of the bride of Christ, which includes both male and female, as she exemplifies loving servanthood, fidelity, and influence in her world. If that is the case, this portrait of the virtuous woman is just as relevant today as when it was written, and not just to women, but to all believers.

Applying this concept to our focus thought would mean the church is to be kind, loving, generous, honorable, trustworthy, wise, industrious, strong, and fearless as she brings honor, renown and pleasure to her Lord.

Because the word picture of the virtuous woman was painted in Hebrew language in the form of an acrostic, each verse beginning with a letter of the alphabet in sequence, the traits are not necessarily listed in order of importance or in a continuous thought. Some have suggested that this form of writing might indicate that the date of the chapter’s authorship is more recent than that of other chapters in Proverbs, but several psalms and the beginning chapters of the Book of Lamentations use the same poetic form. Most likely this portion of Scripture was written using this poetic device as a tool to assist in committing its

content to memory. The poem’s importance is highlighted by the fact that even today in many traditional Jewish homes it is memorized and sung by the men at weekly Sabbath meals as a song of praise to the women in their lives.

The term *virtuous woman* can take our thoughts down many paths. In *Strong’s Concordance*, we find the word translated *virtuous* has to do with valor, strength, riches, wealth and power. The *New International Version* translates the same word as *noble*.

Nobility, in a traditional sense, is something one is born into or marries into; but nobility is more than just being a part of an exclusive physical bloodline. To be sure, the Bible gives illustrations of both wise and foolish kings as well as honorable and ungodly royalty.

Being a noble person is about living a righteous life, and that opportunity is available to every believer regardless of social status or gender. It is about being people of courage who are willing to serve others in such a way that their lives bring honor to their families, their God, and even returns honor back into their own lives.

What are the qualifications that result in a person’s being found virtuous? As we look at them in our lesson today, we would do well to remember that virtue cannot be compartmentalized in one area and closed off from another. It has a broad application that speaks of the entirety of a person’s virtuous life.

II. THE QUALITIES OF A VIRTUOUS WOMAN

The Proverbs 31 woman is clearly well-off and upper class, as would most often be the case for a woman being considered for marriage by a king. This observation alone gives the indication that the attributes in the poem do not comprise a universal checklist that can be applied to every individual in every situation. What can be practiced by everyone, regardless of their social standings and resources, are devotion and diligence.

A. Kind, Loving, and Generous

The Proverbs 31 woman was hardworking and enterprising as she managed her large household. As she went about her day-to-day activities, she was productive and also kind

and loving. She showed her love for her family by acts of service; for example, she rose to feed them while it was still dark. With capable hands she spun wool and made clothing. She provided for their needs.

This woman was generous. Although Scripture portrays her as a person interested in making an income from her work, her desire to be profitable did not prevent her from giving to those less fortunate than she. The virtuous woman did not allow her business or busyness to close off her heart to those in need around her. She stretched out her hand to the poor. With open palms, she distributed resources to the needy and afflicted. She reached out her hands to those who were destitute, oppressed, or abused. The Hebrew language used in the last part of verse 20 indicates a sending out of blessings. The word translated *hand* is often related to the “hand of God” as it is upon someone to bring aid or blessing (*Strong’s Concordance*).

B. Honorable and Trustworthy

The virtuous woman was both honest and trustworthy. Her husband had the utmost confidence in her. He trusted her and he kept on trusting her. She did not give him cause to stop trusting; instead, he was satisfied. Her conduct not only blessed him personally, but it also brought the fruits of peace and tranquility into his home. She was a fountain of good to all and certainly a tremendous asset to her husband.

The virtuous woman’s husband respected his wife’s judgment and gave her the independence to make decisions in her own business ventures that took place both inside her home and out. She proved herself to be competent and trustworthy, running successful business enterprises, seemingly always looking for new opportunities to expand them and to try new things. Surely her entire household was blessed by her industry. They were clothed with scarlet and enjoyed a home well furnished with carpets and cushions. Her husband was esteemed among the elders in the city gates.

C. Wise

Although the virtuous woman’s business dealings occasionally took her away from home, she was wise, planning ahead to

provide for her family’s needs even as she considered the business enterprises she would develop and engage in. She was wise in that she thoroughly evaluated the possibilities before making the major purchase of a field. That is wisdom in action.

In addition to her shrewd business skills, verse 26 tells us that when she gave advice, she did it with gentleness. We see here a blending of insight and poise delivered with discretion. She conducted herself with grace as she administered counsel. She was wise enough to know that regardless of how truthful her words might be, if she expressed herself rudely, coarsely, or boisterously, they would not be well received. The virtuous woman knew that her voice affected the environment around her. She was tactful and exercised self-control as she gave advice to others. The laws of love and kindness were evident in her words.

The *New International Version* translates verse 26 this way: “She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.” It seems this businesswoman and housewife was also a competent teacher issuing “faithful instruction.”

D. Industrious

It is clear the virtuous woman was not lazy. She was constantly busy with various projects and was an industrious woman who successfully combined her business enterprises with keeping her house. She was a salesperson, handling her own dealings with merchants in her home-based business. Although she prospered, she seemed to be ever on the lookout for her household and new business ventures. After she made money in one enterprise, she would invest it in another, developing and continually expanding new sources of revenue.

Not only did she work diligently, but she also took pleasure in her work. The word translated *willingly* in reference to her work in verse 13 speaks of “that in which one takes delight” (*Strong’s Concordance*). She either loved her work, or loved what her work produced to bless others—or both. When individuals love what they do, or understand the deeper reasons why they do what they do, that love makes work a pleasure. Regardless of a person’s position or profession, when

they see their work as profitable, it encourages them to do more.

E. Strong and Fearless

The virtuous woman was a woman of strength. This refers to both strength of body and strength of mind. Verse 25 records her as wearing strength and honor as clothing, a metaphor for her character. She was covered in both. The garments of strength and honor are always lovely and need not unravel or wear out over time.

Scripture says the virtuous woman rejoiced in time to come. She was confident and had an expectation of good for her future because she carefully prepared for her family's needs. She did not fear what the future might bring. She was not afraid her family would be impoverished or hungry, because she had worked so diligently to provide for their needs.

In addition to being fearless of the future, she had a courageous soul. In Scripture the word *virtuous* was applied more often to a warrior than to a woman. In the Hebrew language, it is the same word translated in describing Israel's "mighty men of valour" (1 Chronicles 12:21) and Egypt's trained army (Exodus 14:28).

III. THE REWARDS OF A VIRTUOUS WOMAN

A. Her Husband and Children Praised Her

Those who knew her, especially those closest to her, praised the Proverbs 31 woman and stood to honor her. Her husband declared her to be the "best of the best" of all women.

While some have exalted the twenty-two-verse poem in Proverbs as a "wife wish list," the only true instruction in all its passages is given to its readers, which includes the young man searching for this elusive lady. "Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates" (verse 31). In other words, the woman should be honored for what she has accomplished. It is because of her own works that she should receive praise in the same city gate where her husband was renowned.

B. She Received Praise Because She Feared the Lord

It is interesting to note the contrast in verse 30, especially as it relates to the comparison of the woman of folly and the woman of wisdom in the Book of Proverbs. The charm of superficial beauty is both deceptive and empty, but a woman who fears the Lord is a woman of substance. She shall be praised. More than what she did, what she earned, or what she said, her reverence for God and respectful obedience to Him were her most praiseworthy attributes. Physical beauty has deceived many into making a wrong choice for a wife. Standing in awe of God and giving Him the reverence, honor, and respect due Him brings true beauty to the soul—beauty that never fades.

Time will have its way on every face and figure. One accident, and the physically beautiful could become instantly disfigured. In one quick moment, a person's ability to perform could be snatched away. The most important thing in the lives of individuals is their fear of the Lord. When that is present, it will be followed by progressive character development. This explains why the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Without it, there is nothing to build on.

Noble character is not something that sprouts up on its own. It is the result of a person's continued commitment to doing what is right—even when it is hard, when no one is watching, and when it is not what everyone else is doing. Scripture simply does not support the idea that being a person of virtue could possibly be intrinsically intertwined with a person's marital condition, parental status, career, or gender. In Christ's kingdom there is "neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Jesus is our groom, and He is coming back for a bride. He is worthy and deserving of a lady of noble character who is clothed with dignity and faithfully working for the good of others because of the love she has for Him and His people.

C. Her Own Works Praised Her

The virtuous woman earned a good reputation for her quality workmanship and business

acumen. It was only fitting that she should have enjoyed the benefits of her labor as well as receiving credit for the things she accomplished. Not only was her husband known and respected in the city gates, but because of her achievements, she was honored in the same way.

D. She Received the Benefits of Her Own Works

It appears the concluding two verses of Proverbs 31 are not a continuation of the husband's words of praise begun in verse 29. Instead, these verses are a summary of sorts that recognize beauty is beautiful, but it is shallow and fleeting. A wise man looks more deeply into the heart of a woman to discover her true beauty that grows more lovely with age.

The most critical factor a wise, godly man should use when choosing a wife is her authentic fear of the Lord. Regardless of her housekeeping skills or business savvy, a home will be truly blessed when a woman of virtue creates an environment of faith for her family. As she blesses others, the virtuous woman should receive both the tangible and intangible rewards for her labors, including things like honor, respect, and a peaceful home.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

The virtuous woman is the crowning conclusion of the entire book of wisdom. Throughout its pages, the Book of Proverbs gives God's people the tools needed to make sound decisions, apply good judgment, and live fruitful lives. A survey of the book reveals that men and women have basically two contrasting choices: living a life of wisdom or living a life of foolish rejection of God.

When we read the accounts of wisdom and folly in the Book of Proverbs, we should be inspired to live as the virtuous woman did. She blessed her world. She sheltered her family and others. She was generous and kind. She was faithful and supportive. She was sensitive and observant. She was diligent and productive. She was peaceful, and she was confident that she and her loved ones were prepared to face their future. This is a beautiful picture of a blessed life, the result of living wisely and building a life on the strong foundation of

reverencing God while serving others.

While Proverbs 31 gives a picture of the many attributes of a virtuous woman, it concludes by giving the most important, foundational aspect of her character: her fear of the Lord. A person's highest calling will never be based on marital status, the ability to procreate, a profession, or keeping the best home in the county. A believer's highest calling is knowing, loving, and reverencing God.

God called King David a "man after mine own heart" (Acts 13:22). John was called the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23). The Lord does not define people by their accomplishments, but by their relationship with Him. At the same time, He calls His people to noble character and good works. His desire for His church is that she would be like the Proverbs 31 woman, growing in her abilities and influence while blessing others in an expanding sphere of influence.

The Proverbs 31 woman was most likely not one woman, but she gives us something to aspire to—and inspires us to rise above the bar of mediocrity and live a life that brings glory to God and blesses others. Whatever part played, whatever hat worn or function performed, all believers can be assured they are well equipped to accomplish their calling with dignity, virtue, and valor.

While we will likely never see Proverbs 31 as the theme for a Christian men's conference, both men and women would do well to read and apply the lessons in this passage of Scripture. What the virtuous woman represents to all is a life lived in wisdom along with its blessings and rewards.

Some women may look at Proverbs 31 and think they could never measure up. A person could get exhausted just reading about this woman and all her achievements. Keeping and running a lovely home is admirable, but making sure the toothpaste is stocked or the kids have clean socks bears little weight in the light of eternity. Although a person may never have the stamina and drive of the Proverbs 31 woman, it is possible to have the same type of noble character.

Male or female, those who make their goal loving the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and strength can surely be as praiseworthy as the Proverbs 31 woman. ■

REFLECTIONS

- How does viewing Proverbs 31 as a celebration of wisdom in action instead of a checklist for a good wife influence your thoughts about the passage?
- Considering that living a virtuous life is not as much about what you do, but why and how you do it, how does that affect your paradigm about your life situation right now?
- Being perfect is an unattainable goal, but being virtuous is not. Explain the difference and how that plays out in a life.
- The husband of the virtuous woman empowered her to grow and develop her gifts. Knowing that God wants the same for you, in what areas does this inspire you to stretch yourself?
- How can a gentle influence have a greater impact than a forceful, domineering approach?
- When the prince's mother was writing her acronym in Proverbs 31, she was writing about what a virtuous maiden could become. How can realizing we are all works in process help you better respond to your own shortcomings, people who have setbacks, or those who are young in their faith?
- How could the husband's lack of support have affected the Proverbs 31 woman's ability to grow, develop, and be a blessing to others?