

## Snapshot of a Virtuous Woman [Slide 1] Proverbs 31:10-31

Read Sarah Drew quote.

Today is Mother's Day. I am obviously going to focus on mothers but I want to make some balancing comments so that what I say in praise of mothers is not misapplied. The importance of women and their contributions to society and the Kingdom of God go beyond just their relationships to children and to husbands. Women can have a direct positive influence on life even when they are not married or do not have children. I am sensitive on Mother's Day of those women who either are not married or do not have children. I do not want you to feel that the Scripture has nothing to say to you from the passage that we will look at today. Most of the character qualities that we will look at do not require marriage or children in order to be exercised.

[Slide 2] Second, the passage we will look at certainly presents an ideal, a standard of perfection that the human author may have never fully observed himself. What we have in Proverbs 31 is Superwoman, Wonderwoman, and Mother Teresa all wrapped up in one. As we go through the study you may be tempted to get discouraged and feel you can never measure up to the woman described. That is probably true. God provides this ideals not to beat up on us for falling short, but so that we will have a target to shoot at, so that we will have a standard to work towards. These descriptions are signposts placed by a loving Father so that we will know which direction to head. When you are traveling on vacation and you see a mileage sign that says you still have a hundred miles to go on your destination you may feel discouraged that you still have such a long way to go. But at least you know which way to go. Thank God for his mileage signs. We have a mileage sign in Proverbs 31:10-31. The sign points to a virtuous woman. It contains one of the longest explanations of a godly woman in all of Scripture.

Turn in your Bibles to Proverbs 31:10-31. Proverbs is in the Old Testament a little more than halfway through. The easiest way to find it is to open your Old Testament at the half way point which should bring you to the Psalms. Then flip forward one book to Proverbs. Proverbs 31:10-13.

[Slide 3] While you are turning there, let me address one other cultural challenge that makes applying this passage so difficult for today's woman. Proverbs 31 is set in an agricultural society where the wife rarely worked outside the home. The husband through his labor could provide for the family and if he could not, the wife could supplement with a business from her house. There was no such thing as offices or corporations or manufacturing where the work location was separate from the home. Even shopkeepers and merchants lived within a short walk of their shop or their shop was attached to their house.

[Slide 4] We have a systemic problem in American culture. The problem is entrenched in the whole system and fabric of American life. The problem is that there are too many jobs that do not pay enough to support a family on one income. The second problem is divorce and unwed mothers. These two problems together force many women to work outside the home, even when they might not want to do that.

My point in all of this before we ever look at our passage is this: Women, if you are working outside the home and have young children, you will not be able to come close to what Proverbs 31 describes. There is no way you can work a full time job and accomplish what the woman in this passage does. You do not have the time or energy to do it. So if you are working because of economic necessity, do not beat up on yourselves for not achieving the picture of the virtuous woman this passage describes. Rather look at this Scripture and see in what areas you can work and improve.

If you are working outside the home and have children and you don't have to work, then you need to consider whether your values and priorities are what they should be. Working so that you will have a nicer house or a newer car or more things or for other reasons instead of investing in raising your children is a very poor choice. Your legacy to this world will not be your possessions. It will be what you did for the Lord and what you provided the world through the kind of children you raised.

Now, let's look at the passage. I invite you to turn in your Bible to Proverbs 31:10-31. I'm going to cover this passage verse by verse.

[Slide 5] Verse 10. Read. This verse provides a general description of what she is like. I checked the translations and they all use similar but different terms in describing this woman. NASB says "excellent wife." The NIV says "wife of noble character" and King James says "virtuous woman." The primary meaning of the Hebrew word means strong, able or efficient. The Hebrew Lexicon for this verse defines the word as ability or efficiency often involving moral worth." As we go through this passage we are going to see that this woman is highly capable in domestic and business affairs, efficient in what she manages, and of great moral ability so that she brings renown to her husband when he sits at the city gates with the city leaders. It is hard to pin the Hebrew word down to just one English word equivalent and that is why the various translations slightly differ in how they describe this woman. Her life and character impresses us so that she wields great influence and when she talks, people stop to listen.

Her value or worth is far above precious gemstones or jewels, meaning this kind of woman is rare. The proverb asks, "Who can find her," indicating she is not easy to find.

[Slide 6] She is trustworthy, verses 11-12. Read. Her husband trusts in her and does not lack gain. Not only does she manage well the family resources to meet the family's needs, but she actually increases the family finances by her efforts. We will see in it minute how she does that. Her husband trusts her because she consistently and completely deals out good to him. She promotes his well-being and does nothing to harm or hurt him. She doesn't gossip about him behind his back. She doesn't embarrass him in public. She doesn't lie to him or deceive him. He is completely confident that she will act for his benefit.

[Slide 7] Then we have a lot of verses that describe how industrious and capable she is. Verse 13. Read. She seeks for wool and flax to purchase and works them with delight. I checked You Tube videos on spinning wool and flax into yarn and learned that you spin wool differently from flax, but both use a spinning wheel. So the wife takes pleasure in spinning wool and flax into yarn which she will then use to make clothing and bed coverings. She probably sings or hums or whistles while she works.

Verse 14. Read. The wife is compared to a merchant ship that brings food to the family from afar. She has an enterprising spirit, not limiting herself to the nearest circle

of opportunities, but rather broadening her horizons to search out new possibilities to provide for her family. She probably has a trigger happy Google finger.

Verse 15. Read. She places care over comfort, rising up before the crack of dawn to make breakfast for her family and even for the servants who work for her. So, she has people working for her, over whom she supervises, but for whom she also provides. This verse about the mother cooking for her family reminds me of the following story. Tell story of boy carrying his mother to cook.

Verse 16. Read. This wife is a savvy businesswoman. She researches property and then from money she has made herself, she purchases the land and the supplies and materials to plant a vineyard. In other words she establishes a long-term income generator for her family. This is one way she is adding to the family's wealth.

Verse 17. Read. The reason she can accomplish so much is because she keeps herself in good physical condition. She no doubt had a membership in the local gym or rec center.

Verse 18. Read. She takes pleasure in her accomplishments and because she feels so good about the fruit of her labor, she is inspired to work later into the night. This is no slacker.

Verse 19 probably describes what she does in the evening. Read. Rather than watching TV she is back at her spinning wheel, probably now spinning the wool and linen threads from before into cloth which she can then use to form clothing and covers.

Verse 21. Read. The wife is not afraid of cold weather because she has supplied her family with all the warm clothing they need and not only has she provided what is functional, she has provided high quality, expensive clothing. The scarlet colored clothing represents clothing of high value and price.

Verse 22. Read. She makes bed coverings and for herself clothing of fine linen and purple. She has also provided high quality, expensive clothing for herself.

Verse 24. Read. Another source of her income is through the sale of some of the garments and items she makes. So with the vineyard and the clothing items we see multiple income streams she has established.

Verse 27. Read. The wife watches over the conduct of the family and the household servants so that all live in harmony and are playing their proper role in the family. She stays busy and does not give into laziness or wasteful pursuits.

What we have here is a picture of a high capacity woman who is industrious, capable, shrewd, and who plans ahead. The typical modern mother also performs a number of tasks and jobs as a mother. Forbes magazine carried an article on the annual value that mothers bring to their families. Listen to these results. Read. This woman in Proverbs 31 did have servants to help her. Most of you ladies don't, so give yourself some credit. According to the article I just read, if you were paid what you're worth, you could be bringing in more income than your husband.

The verses I covered so far focus more on the woman's capabilities, but the other verses focus more on her character. Let's look at them.

[Slide 8] She is gracious and merciful. Verse 20. Read. She is not just aware of the needs of her own family. She sees the needs of others and gives help to them. Twice the verse says that she stretches her hands out. I believe the double repetition and the reference to her hands indicates that her giving is personal, not impersonal. She takes

time to talk with people and hear their story, perhaps to sympathize, encourage and pray for the person. This is so important because the poor need personal affirmation and interaction as well as money. They have needs of the soul as well as needs of the body. I had a lady come into my office this week who had some deep financial, health, and emotional needs. She was talking fast. Twice I asked her, “What do you want from me?” The second time I asked, she answered, “I just want you to listen.” I prayed with her at the end and she left.

We often do not make ourselves available to the poor on a personal basis because more valuable to us than our money is our time. Most needy people don’t have just one need. They have a sinkhole of needs and facing that sinkhole is overwhelming to them but also to us. So, we don’t want to get involved. We walk by or drive by. I know I have. The godly woman was generous with her possessions, but she was also generous with her time.

Verse 26. Read. The NASB translates kindness being on her tongue. It is the Hebrew word *chesed* which is the OT equivalent of grace. She speaks wisdom and grace to people. What a wonderful combination. How her children must have bloomed under her parenting because she spoke with grace. Too many children grow up screamed at, mocked, ridiculed, criticized, and devalued. But to grow up in a family where grace permeates the atmosphere is such a healing place for the soul. Whether it is at the Supper table or putting the kids to bed at night or family devotions, I think there needs to be at least one time in the day when only grace rules. At this time we will conduct no discipline, no criticism, no confrontations. This is the time when we put away anger and resentment and frustration and we extend grace and kindness to one another.

[Slide 9] She makes a good impression. Verse 23. Read. The implication in this verse is that her husband is known and respected by the city leaders in part because of her. Because of her moral virtue and her capability she has earned respect for her husband. Maybe those city leaders were thinking, “If she sees something in him so as to marry him, then there must be more to him than we realized.”

A related Proverb, Proverb 12:4 says this. “Read.” A virtuous woman enhances the reputation of her husband.

[Slide 10] She is dignified. Read. Verse 25. She conducts herself with dignity and decorum. She is courteous, respectful, and well-mannered. She is not uncouth, doesn’t interrupt people, pays respectful attention to others, and does not draw attention to herself.

[Slide 11] She is wise. I have already read verse 26 where it says she speaks with wisdom. She lives life skillfully, knows how to make good decisions, evaluates fairly, and knows the most important things in life revolve around serving God.

[Slide 12] She has the love and respect of her husband and children. Read verses 28-29. Those who know her best, know her strengths as well as her weaknesses, praise her and call God’s blessings down upon her. Jennifer Tatum tells the following story. Read.

[slide 13] What is this woman’s secret? What is her trick? How did she become such a dynamo of a person? Was it because of her stunning beauty? Was it because she was a social charmer? Was it because she went to all the best schools? Was it because she was born into the right family and received good training? No the source to her success is found in verse 30. She feared God. Read.

To fear God means I reverence and respect God so much that I change to live by his rules. I will follow his directions and I will aim to please him in all that I do. I will confess my sin and turn from it, I will pursue righteousness, and I will honor God with my life. That is what it means to fear God. God blesses those who fear him and he empowers them to live lives that impact others for good.

[Slide 14] What then does this kind of woman deserve? Let's read verse 31. She deserves to enjoy the fruit of her labor both the economic rewards as well as the rewards of a grateful family who praise her. But her fame and renown will not be limited to the walls of her home. She will become known in the gates of the city. The wider public will become aware of her righteous life and her good deeds, and she will be honored and respected by all and so are you this day. Stand and applaud. Children, youth, and men would you join with me in applauding the women of our church? Close in prayer.