

The Virtues Of A Godly Wife

Proverbs 31:10-31

Intro: *Our study this morning is devoted to offering up a special note of praise and thanksgiving for our mothers.* Our text is taken from **Proverbs 31:10-31**, a marvelous poem extolling the value and virtues of a godly wife and mother. She is described as a woman of excellent, noble, or virtuous character, who diligently cares for her household, the extended family unit including servants, business associates, and those she helps in the society in which she lives. A careful reading of this passage demonstrates that this woman's virtuous character is derived from her possession of godly wisdom (v. 30), which proves beneficial to her family and to the community as a whole. *Jewish husbands and children traditionally recited this poem at the Sabbath meal on Friday evening.*¹

The theme of this poem, which praises the woman of noble character, reiterates the theme of wisdom that has filled the book. Look at vs. 30, "A woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised." The book concludes as it began, praising the wise person who fears the LORD (1:7).

Today, we want to honor you our mothers. We want to praise and thank you for your faithfulness and love! —Film Clip—

Look with me briefly this morning at this poem in **Proverbs 31:10-31**, extolling the virtues of a godly wife and mother, who fears the LORD.

Scripture reading:

- 10** An excellent wife, who can find?
For her worth is far above jewels.
- 11** The heart of her husband trusts in her,
And he will have no lack of gain.
- 12** She does him good and not evil
All the days of her life.
- 13** She looks for wool and flax,
And works with her hands in delight.

¹Y. Levin, "The Woman of Valor' in Jewish Ritual [Prov. 31:10-31]," *Beth Mikra* 31 [1985/86]: 339-47).

- 14 She is like merchant ships;
She brings her food from afar.
- 15 She rises also while it is still night,
And gives food to her household,
And portions to her maidens.
- 16 She considers a field and buys it;
From her earnings she plants a vineyard.
- 17 She girds herself with strength,
And makes her arms strong.
- 18 She senses that her gain is good;
Her lamp does not go out at night.
- 19 She stretches out her hands to the distaff,
And her hands grasp the spindle.
- 20 She extends her hand to the poor;
And she stretches out 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 makes coverings for herself;
Her clothing is fine linen and purple.
- 23 Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sits among the elders of the land.
- 24 She makes linen garments and sells them,
And supplies belts to the tradesmen.
- 25 Strength and dignity are her clothing,
And she smiles at the future.
- 26 She opens her mouth in wisdom,
And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
- 27 She looks well to the ways of her household,
And does not eat the bread of idleness.
- 28 Her children rise up and bless her;
Her husband also, and he praises her, saying:
- 29 “Many daughters have done nobly,
But you excel them all.”
- 30 Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,
But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.
- 31 Give her the product of her hands,
And let her works praise her in the gates. **AMEN!**

Literary form:

This poem closing out the Book of Proverbs is a skillfully crafted piece of literary art. It is both an acrostic (each verse begins with a successive letter of the 22 letters comprising the Hebrew alphabet), and it is arranged in a chiasm. According to Duane Garrett “The integration of both of these literary devices is nothing short of astounding” (*Proverbs*, 248).

First of all, the literary form of this passage is an alphabetic acrostic. In the Hebrew Bible each of the 22 verses of this poem begins with a consecutive letter of the 22 letters comprising the Hebrew alphabet: Alef, Bet, Gimel, Dalet, He, Vav, etc.

hrkm Mynynpm qjrw axmy ym lyj tC
a 10 Alef

rsjy al llCw hlob bl hb jf **b** 11
Bet

hyyj ymy lk or alw bwf whtIm **g**
12 Gimel

hypk Xpjb Cotw MytCpw rmx hCr **d**
13 Dalet

hmjl aybt qjrmm rjws twynak hty
h 14 He

hytronl qjw htybl Prf Nttw hllyl
dwob Mqt **w** 15 Vav

The second noteworthy literary feature of this poem is its chiastic arrangement:

Chiasmus of Proverbs 31:10-31

- A Surpassing value of a good wife (v. 10)□
- B Husband benefited by wife (vv. 11-12)□
- C Wife works hard (vv. 13-19)□
- D Wife gives to poor (v. 20)□

- E No fear of snow (v. 21a)□
- F Children clothed in scarlet (v. 21b)□
- G Coverings for bed, wife wears linen (v. 22)□
- H Her husband is highly respected (v. 23)**
- G' Sells garments and sashes (v. 24)□
- F' Wife clothed in dignity (v. 25a)□
- E' No fear of future (v. 25b)□
- D' Wife speaks wisdom (v. 26)□
- C' Wife works hard (v. 27)□
- B' Husband and children praise wife (vv. 28-29)□
- A' Surpassing value of a good wife (vv. 30-31)

The Hebrews used these literary devices to aide in memorization. The acrostic in this poem piles up noteworthy elements of praise. One biblical commentator suggest that “The author of this marvelous poem strings together 22 pearls of praise to extol the woman of noble character, who fears the LORD.”

Allen Ross surmises that *the woman of noble character* in view in this poem “is a wealthy aristocrat who runs a household estate with servants and conducts business affairs—real estate, vineyards, and merchandise—domestic affairs, and charity. It would be quite a task for any woman to emulate this pattern. In fact, **The woman/wife in this poem is praised for her fear of the LORD (v. 30).**

The fact that this poem is written in the form of an alphabetic acrostic makes it hard to outline. Therefore, I have chosen to arrange the poem into eight qualities of a godly woman.

1. She Is Extremely Rare And Equally Priceless (vv. 10-12)

- v. 10 The poem begins with a rhetorical question: “*An excellent wife, who can find?*” This question is intended to establish the point that such a noble or excellent wife is extremely rare. **Ruth** is described as “*a woman of noble character*” (Ruth 3:11). It is also interesting to note that a woman of God is priceless: “*For her worth is far above jewels.*” She is more valuable than rubies (cf. 3:15; 8:11).

vv. 11-12 The wife of noble character inspires the confidence and trust of her husband. v. 11 “*The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he will lack nothing of value. For, his wife does him good and not evil, All the days of her life.*” Her careful household management adds to the families wealth and well-being. She is not contentious and self-seeking, but does her husband good all

the days of her life. **She is totally committed to the welfare of her husband and family! *She is self-sacrificing* (v. 15).**

STORY: A teacher asked a boy this question: “Suppose your mother baked a pie and there were seven of you—your parents and five children. What part of the pie would you get?” “A sixth,” replied the boy. “I’m afraid you don’t know your fractions,” said the teacher. “Remember, there are seven of you.” “Yes, teacher,” said the boy, **“but you don’t know my mother. “My mother would say ‘I don’t really want any pie.’”**

2. She Provides For Her Household (vv. 13-15)

v. 13 She is very industrious, in that she ***“searches for wool and flax, And accomplishes her work with delight.”***

“Wool and flax” were commodities of the eastern economy. Her working with her hands brought her great pleasure and delight.

v. 14 ***“She is like merchant ships; She brings her food from afar.”*** The point of the simile is that she goes wherever she needs to go, near and far, to gather in all the food for the needs and the likes of the family. She would no doubt be a coupon sniper, and would look for the best deals. Be it at Consumers, Harter House, Price Cutters, or Walmart.

v. 15 Even though this woman is depicted as a wealthy woman over a large household, she is actively involved in the daily activities. ***“She rises while it is still night, And gives food to her household, And portions to her maidens.*** Her self-sacrificing attitude is reiterated once again. *Jesus repeatedly told His disciples that the key to greatness, position, and honor in the coming Kingdom of God requires sacrificial service here and now!*

3. She Pursues Business Opportunities (vv. 16-18)

vv. 16-18 Portray the woman of noble character as a shrewd and successful business woman. ***“She considers/studies a field and buys it; From her earnings she plants a vineyard.”*** There is no foolish purchasing nor indebtedness here.

v. 17 literally says that she ***“girds her loins with strength And makes her arms strong.”*** The virtuous woman is an energetic worker. The

girding-up of one's garment is an expression for preparation for serious work.

- v. 18 ***“She senses that her gain is good; Her lamp does not go out at night.”*** It seems best to take this line “she burns the midnight oil” literally to mean that she works throughout the night when she needs to complete a business deal.

4. She Provides For Her Family And The Poor (vv. 19-22)

- v. 19 speaks of the domestic activity of spinning wool: ***“She stretches out her hands to the distaff, And her hands grasp the spindle.”*** The “distaff” refers to the straight rod that holds the raw wool, and the “spindle” is the circular part that receives the spun wool. She “holds out” or “stretches out” her hands to the work to provide clothing for her family.
- v. 20 Not only does the woman of noble character hold out her hands to work for the needs of her family, she is charitable. ***“She extends her hand to the poor; And she stretches out her hands to the needy.”*** She literally “opens her hands” to help meet the needs of the poor; she gives to the poor with liberality.
- v. 21 ***“She is not afraid of the snow for her household, For all her household are clothed with scarlet.”*** The virtuous woman does not fear the cold, for she provides her family members with clothing that is both warm and attractive.
- v. 22 ***“She makes coverings for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple.”*** She not only sees to the needs of her family, she sees to her own appearance by dressing in expensive garments. Garments dyed with purple indicate a person of unusual wealth and high rank. One is reminded of the rich man in Luke 16:19, who also was clothed in purple and fine linen. The problem was not with the man's clothing, but with his greedy and selfish heart.

5. She Is A Crown Upon Her Husband's Head (vv. 23-24)

- v. 23 The implication of v. 23 is that the virtuous woman helps advance her husband, who sits among the elders of the land. She serves as a crown or ornament upon her husband's head.

- v. 24 The woman's industry finds expression in business. ***"She makes linen garments and sells them, And supplies belts to the tradesmen."*** The poet did not think it strange or unworthy for a woman to engage in honest trade. In fact, weaving of fine linens was a common trade for women in Israel from antiquity.

Christ wore a very expensive and unique one-piece robe. It was probably a gift from one of His wealthy women supporters. Lydia was a business woman from the city of Thyatira who dealt in purple fabrics (Acts 16:14). The church of Philippi first met in her house (16:15), and may have been permanently established in her home.

6. She Clothes Herself With Strength And Dignity (vv. 25-27)

- v. 25 *"Strength and dignity are her clothing, And she smiles at the future."*
 v. 26 She is able to impart wisdom, because she has learned godly wisdom.
 v. 27 She manages her household well,
 And refuses to eat the bread of idleness.

7. She Is Praised By Her Family (vv. 28-29)

- v. 28 "Her children rise up and bless her." I would like to encourage you to praise your mother today. Don't wait until she is gone to thank her for all she has done for you. Bless her with words of love and praise today and every day.
- v. 29 This woman surpasses all other women. Her husband also praises her, saying in v. 29 "Many daughters have done nobly, But you excel them all."

Encourage and praise your mothers, for praise is medicine for the soul.

8. Concluding Praise (vv. 30-31)

- v. 30 ***"Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,
 But a woman who fears the LORD,
 she shall be praised."***

These words could be the husband's, but may better form the poet's own summation of the matter. In any case, what is valued in the woman/wife of

excellent, noble, or virtuous character is her domestic efficiency and her piety rather than charm and beauty. Physical appearance is not necessarily dismissed—it simply does not endure as do those qualities that the fear of the Lord produces. Beauty is deceitful, and one who pursues beauty may very well be disappointed by the character of the “beautiful” person.

v. 31 Give her the product of her hands,
And let her works praise her in the gates.

The woman of noble character shall exhibit works of godliness that shall bring her praise from the leaders that gather at the city gates.

The Book of Proverbs concludes with an emphasis on the same theme with which it began *the “fear of the LORD”* (1:7). Those who fear the LORD shall be crowned with godly wisdom.

Here then is the foundation of Jewish society. Over both man and wife stands God in whose honor these proverbial collections were made and reverently placed into the biblical canon, so that later generations might listen, learn, and live to the praise of God Almighty!

Applications:

1. I want each of us to encourage and praise our mothers today because *praise is medicine for the soul*.
2. Remember, those who fear the LORD, *live to respect and bring God glory*, shall be crowned with wisdom.
3. Commit your way to the LORD, and spend time in His Word and in His presence every day. Be like Susanna Wesley and pull your prayer-apron up over your head, as you set aside time each and every day for the LORD.

We salute the godly mothers among us this morning, who in piety, in devotion, in love, and with skill and diligence have built their home; and have helped us to build our own homes.

Closing Prayer

Closing song: *Because You Love* by Celine Dion

Would you please stand and recite together with me the words of Proverbs 31:30?

**“Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,
But a woman who fears the LORD,
She shall be praised.**

Hug a Mother before you leave here!