

The Heart of the Proverbs 31 Woman

Summit Woods Women 2017

In response to the feedback we received from our 2017 Summit Woods Women's retreat in March, we have revised the weekend's Proverbs 31 Bible study booklet to allow the ladies who were not able to attend the retreat to complete the study as well. While you can go through the study entirely on your own, we strongly encourage you to get together with other ladies to discuss what you have studied and to pray for one another. As we said throughout that weekend together, our purpose with this study is to begin a conversation that will continue as we encourage and disciple each other to live as godly women who fear the Lord.

In this modified booklet, items that pertained specifically to the retreat itself have been removed, a transcript of the Introduction material has been added, and the section titles for the Bible study questions have been altered since the section titles in the retreat booklet related to when we completed those sections (such as Afternoon Discussion Time). The content of the Bible study questions is the same.

Dear Summit Woods Women,

During 2015 and 2016 we had a singular, uniquely feminine focus teaching the mandates to women in our body from Titus 2:3-5, pursuing a singular method of discipleship: older women teaching younger women.

For 2017 we would like to bring in another passage to deepen the teaching of Titus 2:3-5. That passage is Proverbs 31.

We would like to ask the question what is a godly woman who fears the Lord?

Our answer comes in this text which shows a variety of characteristics of a godly woman who fears the Lord. This woman principles, coordinates, and lives her life in the fear of the Lord and for the benefit and the delight of others within her sphere of influence. This year, we want to explore this passage during our times of fellowship through general teaching on the passage and specific application.

This text holds forth a beautiful example of a faithful woman who is praised because she fears our Lord and lives her life accordingly. As we explore and apply principles in Proverbs 31, our aim is that each woman of Summit Woods Baptist Church would

1. have a personal value of her uniquely feminine mandates and roles as God's Word teaches;
2. be compelled in her life and in the body at Summit Woods Baptist Church to see these roles lived out among older and younger women; and
3. hold fast to these truths emphasized to her in the Word of God despite the world's teachings and examples.

Our emphasis for 2017 includes taking direction from the excellent Proverbs 31 woman. Therefore, a Summit Woods Woman will seek to

1. manage her life, which includes her soul, her schedule, her home, her roles, and her work, and may include family, a husband, children, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and others within her sphere of influence;
2. walk in the fear of the Lord, being sustained by His grace for it all; and
3. be directed by the Bible in her thoughts, prayers, attitudes, and efforts, displaying her faith and fear of the Lord Jesus Christ who has called her and will equip her to fulfill her God-given roles in the practical day-to-day activities of her life.

These are our aims and plans. But our hope is in the Lord who works out His good pleasure among us. We're trusting Him to do that this year in each one of us. We hope you will pray that as well.

Sincerely,

The Summit Woods Women's Leadership Team

Proverbs 31:10-31 (ESV)

- ¹⁰An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.
- ¹¹The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.
- ¹²She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.
- ¹³She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.
- ¹⁴She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar.
- ¹⁵She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.
- ¹⁶She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
- ¹⁷She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.
- ¹⁸She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.
- ¹⁹She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.
- ²⁰She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.
- ²¹She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet.
- ²²She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.
- ²³Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.
- ²⁴She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant.
- ²⁵Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.
- ²⁶She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
- ²⁷She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.
- ²⁸Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:
- ²⁹“Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.”
- ³⁰Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.
- ³¹Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

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INTRODUCTION

Setting the Stage

Our church's mission statement is "Magnifying God by Making Disciples of Jesus Christ." So one of the primary goals of everything we do as a church is to help us better understand what disciples of Jesus who magnify God look like.

The Bible is our primary source for knowing God and for knowing how He intends for us to live. This means that if we really want to be faithful disciples – learners, followers – of Jesus, then we have to be good students of the Bible.

In our women's ministry, our retreat days let us talk specifically about what that looks like for us as women. During the last two years, our retreat days focused on understanding Paul's instructions for women in Titus 2. With those teachings under our belts, we thought it would be good for this year to talk in more detail about what those characteristics look like when lived out in real daily life. That has led us to Proverbs 31, which is a poem written to extol the virtues of an excellent wife. The tangible ways that she lives and works each day are given as the evidence that she is a valuable asset and a blessing to those around her. And Proverbs 31:30 tells us that honoring the Lord is her motivation for the way she lives. Throughout this year, we hope to highlight Proverbs 31 in our Summit Woods Women events.

Before we turn to focus on Proverbs 31, let's talk about studying the Scriptures in general.

Studying the Scriptures

The time we spend in the Word together as a whole congregation focuses on how we are to live as Christians in general from throughout the Scriptures. This gives a broader context to our retreats, where we take time to pause and talk about ways that the Scriptures specifically address us as women. Likewise, our own devotional times should expose us to all that the Bible says so that we have the broader context in mind when we stop to consider a particular topic, like godly womanhood.

Being a good student of the Bible, like being a good student of anything, takes time and effort. Sometimes it seems easier to let others spoon-feed us, but the sweeter fruit that comes from digging in ourselves is worth the effort.

A few reminders about studying the Scriptures...

What sets Bible *reading* apart from Bible *studying*? Both are important. We need to simply *read* the Bible regularly – to constantly expose ourselves to its God and His ways, being able to say "I *know* what the Bible says." But we also need to invest time *studying* the Bible – absorbing its truths deeper into our lives, being able to say "I can *explain* what the Bible says and how it *impacts* life."

Every season of life should include regular reading of the Word, and some seasons of life better allow for more extensive study of the Word than others. As we have opportunity, it is important to work on learning the skills for effectively studying the Bible so that we are prepared to dig in at any time.

Studying the Bible involves spending more time in a particular passage to ask questions, to think carefully, and to search for answers that may not readily jump off the page.

Studying the Bible begins with understanding WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS and then goes deeper to understand WHAT THE BIBLE MEANS by what it says and WHAT WE ARE TO DO as a result. It involves OBSERVING the content and context, INTERPRETING the meaning, and APPLYING the lessons, instructions, and implications to our lives.

In this study, we will touch on these areas, but we won't cover everything. We encourage you to keep digging into Proverbs 31 throughout the year and to keep talking with each other about what you are learning.

Introducing Proverbs 31

When we study God's Word, we first want to pray and ask Him to illuminate our minds and soften our hearts as we read and study. *Pause now to pray to the Lord.*

For this study we are providing some background information instead of having you search it out, but when you study a new passage, these are the types of things you want to ask as you begin.

The Context: Remember Pastor Bret's Old Testament surveys during the last few summers? In his overview on Proverbs, he pointed out that Proverbs (especially the latter section) was primarily written as a guide to instruct the young princes so that they would be good kings. The wise instructions are useful for everyone, but they were initially directed to those young men.

Definitions: Look up words that you don't know. For example, this passage uses some words related to spinning and weaving that are unfamiliar to most of us today.

Verse 13 says that "she seeks wool and flax." The fibers from the flax plant are used to make linen cloth. And the mention of both wool and flax speaks to her making garments for all of the seasons.

Verse 19 mentions the distaff and spindle. These are tools for spinning yarn (from wool or flax or other fibers like cotton). The distaff holds the unspun fibers and the spindle holds the spun yarn.

The Genre: What genre is this passage? It's in the book of Proverbs, which is Wisdom literature. And more specifically, these verses are a POEM. This passage is a great example of how understanding the genre of the writing makes a big difference in how we approach the passage. Proverbs 31:10-31 is a poem. And not just any sort of poem. It was written with TWO different poetic structures happening at the same time. Your booklet includes two additional printouts of the text to show you the poetic structures.

1st poetic structure: Chiasm

A chiasm is a symmetrical literary structure where key words or ideas build to a central point and then the same (or similar) key words or ideas are repeated in reverse order after the central point to highlight that central point, which is not repeated in the sequence. A chiasm is often depicted as ABCB`A`.

That definition sounds complicated, but you can visually see it in your handout on page 7.

Have you ever read these verses and thought that verse 23 about her husband sitting in the gates seemed a little out of place right there in the middle? It makes sense when you understand the context and the poetic structure in play. Look at the chiasm handout and see how the ideas build up to point "H" and then walk back out in parallel.

The chiasm structure lets us know that this is the central point in the poem (her husband being known among the elders of the land). And remember that the context was instruction to a young prince to prepare him to be king.

The truth it proclaims is useful for all of us, but that was the original context. The book of Proverbs ends with this poem that praises the kind of woman who will be a blessing to her husband (as opposed to the kind of women Lemuel's mother warned against in 31:3 who destroy kings).

So the structure says, "Hey, young man, if you really want to be respected in your community, get yourself a woman who will be a blessing and not a burden, an asset and not a liability, and get yourself a woman who fears the Lord."

So then, by implication, it lets us as women know what it looks like to be a blessing and an asset and to live a life that is worthy of praise and emulation. And not just a woman who does the right things but who does them *because* she fears the Lord. This is why she is praised; the rest of the poem illustrates the practical outworking of her fear of the Lord in her daily life).

2nd poetic structure: Acrostic

An acrostic is a poem in which the first letter of each line spells out a word or phrase or follows the order of the alphabet. Proverbs 31:10-31 is an acrostic that follows the Hebrew alphabet. Look at the acrostic handout on page 8. On the handout, the words highlighted in red indicate the word that starts each line in Hebrew.

John Piper provides helpful insight on this poem:

“You all know what an acrostic is, don't you?
M is for the million things she gave me,
O means only that she's growing old,
T is for the tears 'twere shed to save me,
H is for her heart as pure as gold,
E is for her eyes with love-light shining,
R means right and right she'll always be.

That's an acrostic. Why do people write acrostics? Because there is something in us that loves to praise what we enjoy. We like to pile up the praiseworthy attributes of people we love. Well, that is what was happening in Proverbs 31. Verses 10–31 are an acrostic. Every verse begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. [something like:]

Aleph is for woman full of virtue,
Beth refers to trust her husband shares,
Gimmel is for work she does to help you,
Daleth stands for how she seeks her wares.

And so on through all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. **This is helpful to know because it tips us off that the author is not building an argument like Paul does in Romans. Instead he is stringing pearls.** He has set himself the task, as he says in verse 30, to praise the woman who fears the Lord. To do this he tries to think of 22 praiseworthy things to say about her.”

(from “A Woman Who Feels the Lord Is to Be Praised” May 10, 1981; emphasis added)

So, the acrostic structure lets us know that this is a list of snapshots or highlights about this woman (Piper’s “stringing pearls” word picture).

The implication for us is to see that this is a poem of PRAISE. It should INSPIRE and ENCOURAGE us, not leave us stressed or in despair. That doesn’t mean we won’t experience some conviction along the way, but because of the gospel, conviction does not lead us to condemnation. By God’s grace and through the Holy Spirit, it leads us to growth in godliness and to the joy of the fruit of the Spirit increasing in our lives. We should approach these verses looking for encouragement, not judgment.

A few more things to keep in mind as we look at this passage:

1st: Her actions reveal her CHARACTER – and that’s what we want to emulate, her character. The way this noble character displays itself in practical actions may look a little different for each of us, but we can learn from her example.

It’s about living out the impact of the gospel in our daily lives. Since God has saved us, what kind of people are we supposed to be? Since God’s Holy Spirit indwells us, what kind of people are we able to be? Since God has saved us for His glory, how can we live in ways that exalt and honor Him?

2nd: Our MOTIVATION: As we have tried to emphasize in all of our gatherings, the goal is not just for us to look right on the outside. The goal is heart change – to let the Word of God shape our hearts to LOVE the Lord, to LOVE His Word, and to OBEY His Word with JOY. Getting our “insides” right will flow out to our “outsides”. We want to have FAITHFUL HEARTS of love and service. To use the words of Proverbs 31, we want to be women who “fear the Lord.”

3rd: Let’s talk a bit more about the FEAR OF THE LORD:

Proverbs 31:30 says that “a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.” So, what does it mean to fear the Lord? This is an important question to answer since it is the basis for WHY the Proverbs 31 woman lives the way she does. If we are to emulate her character, then we must begin by emulating her driving motivation.

We most often hear “the fear of the Lord” defined as having deep reverence for God. This is true, but let’s think a bit further about how that works itself out in more practical terms.

Fearing the Lord is about understanding who God is and the posture that our understanding produces in our hearts.

For unbelievers, this is an entirely negative thing.

They do not rightly understand who God is, and so they have the wrong posture towards Him. They do not understand His love, holiness, justice, wrath, mercy, compassion, grace, perfection, sovereignty, and authority – so their posture is shaking a fist in His face or ignoring Him with their backs turned or cowering in fear or trying to pay Him off, to name a few. And as a result they do not worship Him. These are postures that *run away* from God.

The Bible describes the lost as those who have no fear of God. They do not rightly see Him, so they do not fear Him, and so they do not worship Him. And the Bible says that for them it will be a dreadful and terrible thing when they stand before Him in the end.

But for believers, the fear of the Lord is a positive and beautiful thing.

As believers, we understand that God is holy and perfect and cannot tolerate sin. We also understand that He is gracious and merciful and has made provision for our sins through Jesus Christ.

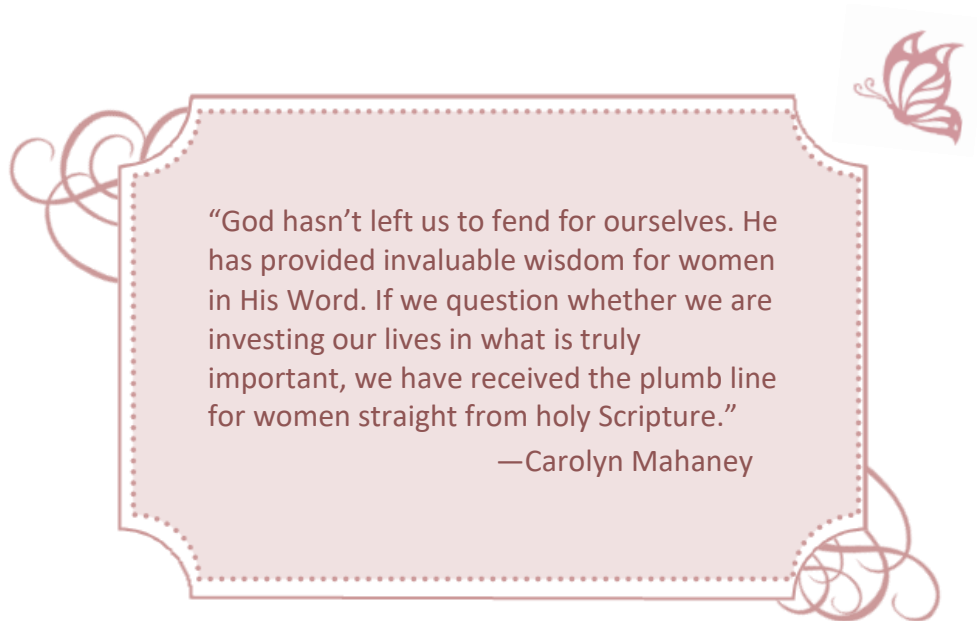
Our knowledge of God's wrath toward sin does not cause us to run away from Him because our knowledge of His mercy draws us in. On the other hand, our knowledge of His gracious forgiveness does not allow us to revel in sinful living because our knowledge of His sovereign authority leads us toward obedience.

So our correct understanding of who God is leads us to the correct posture of humility and submission and leads us to worship Him. These are postures that reverently *run to* God.

To summarize, what the Bible calls "the fear of the Lord" means having a correct understanding of who God is that causes us to run to God, not away from Him, and that leads us to worship and obey Him.

4th: An excellent WOMAN: This poem is written about a woman who is a wife and mother, but it is important to see that she is *not* an excellent and noble woman because she is a wife and mother. She is an excellent wife and mother because she is an excellent *woman*, and we can all be noble women who honor the Lord in the way we live in every context and stage of life.

That's a bit of background to set up our study of Proverbs 31:10-31.



Proverbs 31:10-31 – Chiastic Structure

¹⁰An excellent wife who can find?

She is far more precious than jewels.

¹¹The heart of her husband trusts in her,
and he will have no lack of gain.

¹²She does him good, and not harm,
all the days of her life.

¹³She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands.

¹⁴She is like the ships of the merchant;
she brings her food from afar.

¹⁵She rises while it is yet night
and provides food for her household
and portions for her maidens.

¹⁶She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.

¹⁷She dresses herself with strength
and makes her arms strong.

¹⁸She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
Her lamp does not go out at night.

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

²⁰She opens her hand to the poor
and reaches out her hands to the needy.

²¹She is not afraid of snow for her household,
for all her household are clothed in scarlet.

²²She makes bed coverings for herself;
her clothing is fine linen and purple.

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

²⁴She makes linen garments and sells them;
she delivers sashes to the merchant.

²⁵Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laughs at the time to come.

²⁶She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

²⁷She looks well to the ways of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.

²⁸Her children rise up and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:

²⁹“Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all.”

³⁰Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

³¹Give her of the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the gates.

A An excellent wife is valuable

B Her husband benefits by her

C She works hard



D She gives to the needy

E She does not fear the snow

F Because her family is clothed

G She makes linens

H Her husband is respected

G` She sells linens

F` She is ‘clothed’ well

E` So she does not fear the future

D` She gives wisdom and kindness

C` She works hard

B` Her husband and children praise her

A` An excellent wife is to be valued



Proverbs 31:10-31 – Hebrew Acrostic

Hebrew is read from right to left. The first character at the far right of each line follows consecutively through the Hebrew alphabet. The words in **red** indicate the Hebrew word that begins each line.

- אִשְׁת־חַיִל מִי יִמְצָא וְרוּחַק מִפְּנֵינִים מִכָּרָה:
¹⁰A worthy **woman** who can find? For her price is far above rubies.
 בָּטַח בָּהּ לֵב בְּעֵלָהּ וְשָׁלָל לֹא יִחְסָר:
¹¹The heart of her husband **trusteth** in her, And he shall have no lack of gain.
 גָּמְלָתָהּ טוֹב וְלֹא־רָע כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיהָ:
¹²She **doeth** him good and not evil all the days of her life.
 דְּרָשָׁה צֹמֶר וּפְשֵׁתִים וְתַעֲשׂ בַחֲפָץ כַּפְיָהּ:
¹³She **seeketh** wool and flax, And worketh willingly with her hands.
 הִיטָה כְּאֲנִיּוֹת סוֹחֵר מִמְּרָחֵק תָּבִיא לַחֲמָה:
¹⁴She is like the merchant-ships; she bringeth her bread from afar.
 וְתָקֵם בְּעוֹד לַיְלָה וְתִתֵּן טָרֶף לְבֵיתָהּ וְחֶק לְנַעֲרֹתֶיהָ:
¹⁵She riseth **also** while it is yet night, and giveth food to her household, and their task to her maidens.
 זָמְמָה שָׂדֶה וְתַקְחָהּ מִפְּרֵי כַפְיָהּ גָּטַע כָּרֶם:
¹⁶She **considereth** a field, and buyeth it; with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.
 חֲגָרָה בְּעוֹז מִתְּנִיָּה וְתֹאמֵץ זְרַעוֹתֶיהָ:
¹⁷She **girdeth** her loins with strength, and maketh strong her arms.
 טָעַמָּה בִּי־טוֹב סָחָרָה לֹא־יִכָּבֵד בְּלִיל גְּרָה:
¹⁸She **perceiveth** that her merchandise is profitable: her lamp goeth not out by night.
 יָדֶיהָ שְׁלָחָה בְּכִישׁוֹר וְכַפְיָהּ תִּמְכּוּ פֶלֶד:
¹⁹She layeth her **hands** to the distaff, and her palms hold the spindle.
 כַּפָּה פָּרְשָׁה לְעֵנִי וְיָדֶיהָ שְׁלָחָה לְאַבְיוֹן:
²⁰She stretcheth out her **palms** to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.
 לֹא־תִירָא לְבֵיתָהּ מִשְׁלֵג כִּי כָל־בֵּיתָהּ לְבֶשׂ שָׁנִים:
²¹She is **not** afraid of the snow for her household; for all her household are clothed with scarlet.
 מִרְבָּדִים עֲשֵׂתָהּ־לָהּ שֵׁשׁ וְאַרְגָּמָן לְבוּשָׁה:
²²She maketh for herself **coverings** of tapestry; her clothing is fine linen and purple.
 נוֹדַע בְּשֻׁעְרִים בְּעֵלָה בְּשִׁבְתּוֹ עִם־זִקְנֵי־אַרְץ:
²³Her husband is **known** in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.
 סָדִין עֲשֵׂתָהּ וְתִמְכֹר וְחָגוֹר נִתְּנָה לְכַנְעָנִי:
²⁴She maketh **linen** garments and selleth them, and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.
 עוֹז־וְהָדָר לְבוּשָׁה וְתִשְׁחַק לְיוֹם אַחֲרוֹן:
²⁵**Strength** and dignity are her clothing; and she laugheth at the time to come.
 פִּיהָ פְתֻחָה בְּחֶכְמָה וְתוֹרַת־חֶסֶד עַל־לְשׁוֹנָהּ:
²⁶She openeth her **mouth** with wisdom; and the law of kindness is on her tongue.
 צוּפְיָהּ הַלְיִכוּת בֵּיתָהּ וְלֶחֶם עֲצָלוֹת לֹא תֹאכַל:
²⁷She **looketh** well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.
 קָמוּ בָנֶיהָ וַיֹּאשְׁרוּהָ בְּעֵלָה וַיְהִלְלֶיהָ:
²⁸Her children **rise up**, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her, saying:
 רְבוֹת בְּנוֹת עָשׂוּ חַיִל וְאֵת עָלִית עַל־כָּל־נָה:
²⁹**Many** daughters have done worthily, but thou excellest them all.
 שָׁקַר הַחַן וְהַבֵּל הִיפִי אִשָּׁה יִרְאֵת־יְהוָה הִיא תִתְהַלֵּל:
³⁰Grace is **deceitful**, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth Jehovah, she shall be praised.
 תִּגְוֹלָה מִפְּרֵי יָדֶיהָ וַיְהִלְלוּהָ בְּשֻׁעְרִים מְעֻשִׂיהָ:
³¹**Give** her of the fruit of her hands; and let her works praise her in the gates.

Proverbs 31:10-31 (ESV)

¹⁰An excellent wife who can find?

She is far more precious than jewels.

¹¹The heart of her husband trusts in her,

and he will have no lack of gain.

¹²She does him good, and not harm,

all the days of her life.

¹³She seeks wool and flax,

and works with willing hands.

¹⁴She is like the ships of the merchant;

she brings her food from afar.

¹⁵She rises while it is yet night

and provides food for her household

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¹⁶She considers a field and buys it;

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¹⁷She dresses herself with strength

and makes her arms strong.

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and does not eat the bread of idleness.

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³⁰Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

³¹Give her of the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the gates.



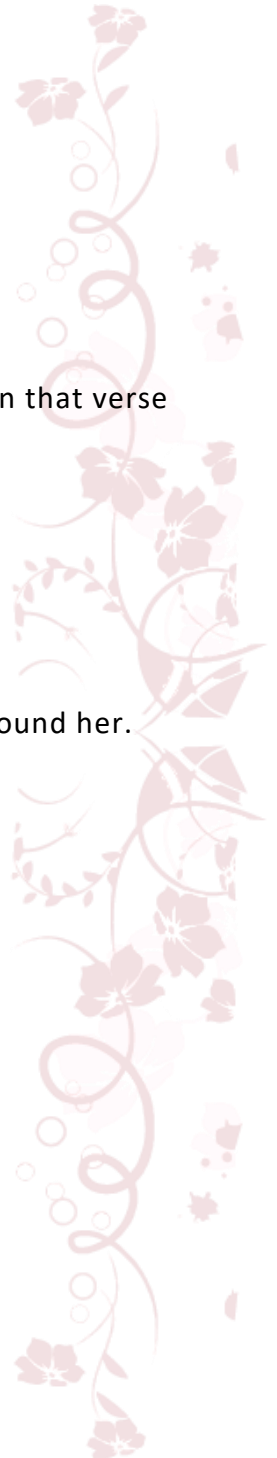
The Heart of the Proverbs 31 Woman

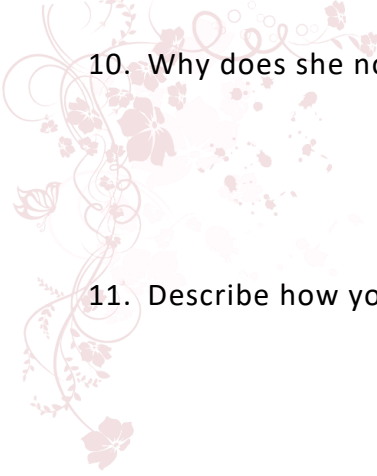
GENERAL OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

Thinking through the Passage

Read Proverbs 31:10-31 again.

1. What kind of literature is this passage?
2. Who was the original audience?
3. Why would such a poem be included in instructions to a young prince?
4. For each verse, list at least one character quality that the actions described in that verse demonstrate. Use the lines provided by the passage on pages 9-10.
5. Look through the passage and list all of the different people she impacts.
6. Describe how she cares for both the “insides” and the “outsides” of those around her.
7. Describe how you see her prioritizing the care of her family.
8. Describe how you see her being a good steward of what she has.
9. How does her husband describe the way she cares for her family?





10. Why does she not fear the snow (verse 21) or the future (verse 25)?

11. Describe how you see her taking steps to be prepared for whatever may come.

12. How does our society view charm and beauty?

a. What does our passage say about charm and beauty?

13. How does our society view those who fear the Lord?

a. What does our passage say about those who fear the Lord?

14. Look again at all of the things she does. Could a woman do these things in ways that are charming/deceitful or for beauty/vanity as opposed to in the fear of the Lord? Explain.

15. Look at verse 18b. Some have paired this phrase, “her lamp does not go out at night,” with 15a, “she rises while it is yet night,” to say that she works tirelessly. But scholars point out that the poet has already paired it with the first part of verse 18, regarding her finances. They note that even today in cultures without electricity, those who can afford to do so keep one lamp burning all through the night as a “nightlight” for anyone who may need to arise in the dark. This demonstrates that she has managed her resources well in order to provide this practical blessing to her family. List at least one practical way that you can bless your family through managing your resources well.
16. How do this woman’s character and priorities demonstrate that she is a woman who fears the Lord?

Connecting the Dots across the Scriptures

17. The characteristics from Titus 2:3-5 are listed below. Look back at Proverbs 31:10-31 and note the ways you see the Proverbs 31 woman practically living out each of these characteristics in her daily life. (Some are more direct; others will be implied.)
- a. Reverent in her behavior
 - b. Not a slanderer
 - c. Not a slave to much wine (or anything else)
 - d. Teaching what is good



e. Training younger women

f. Loving her husband and children



g. Self-controlled

h. Pure

i. Working at home (working for the benefit of her household)

j. Kind

k. Submissive to her husband

l. Honoring the Word of God

“Obedience is not a one-time decision. Obedience is a life-time discipline. But it does bring a simplicity to life because it settles the issue of who is in control. It enables us to decode the confusing events in our lives. When a woman is absorbed with God’s glory, she will interpret her life according to His truth. God’s grace enables us to know our mission in life and empowers us to fulfill our mission.”

— Susan Hunt

The Heart of the Proverbs 31 Woman

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS



To help each of us think about how the example of the woman in Proverbs 31 applies to our real daily lives, we will be asking some challenging questions that encourage us to take an honest look at our hearts. With the Lord's guidance, we will each be noting both areas where we are doing well and areas where we need to grow.

We will also be thinking about and praying through how the gospel both deals with our failings and enables our growth.

As you think through the questions, rejoice in the areas where you are doing well! But do not be discouraged when the Lord brings conviction in your heart in some areas. He does not convict His children in order to condemn us but so that we can become more like Jesus. Therefore, the Holy Spirit's conviction is a blessing when we submit to His work in our hearts. He convicts us with love and kindness to prune us and shape us for the Lord's glory and for our joy in Him.

As you begin, **pray** and ask God to illuminate your mind as He speaks to you through His Word.

Read Proverbs 31:10-31 using one of the poetic structure handouts.

Now **read Proverbs 31:10-31 again** slowly from your own Bible, intentionally meditating on the Word as you read.

1. Based on all of the character qualities you observed in this passage, summarize a description of the Proverbs 31 woman in one or two sentences. Be sure to focus more on who she is than what she does.
2. Think back to what it means to fear the Lord from the Introduction section. How should this impact the way we approach each day?
3. What difference does it make to approach Proverbs 31 looking at this woman's **character** and not just her actions?



A Time for Personal Reflection

4. Read verse 11. What character quality/qualities did you observe from this verse?



Heart Question: Can others trust you deep down from their hearts with all that they are and all that they have?

5. Read verse 13. What character quality/qualities did you observe from this verse?



Heart Question: Do you do your work, whatever it may be, willingly or begrudgingly?

6. Read verse 15. What character quality/qualities did you observe from this verse?



Heart Question: Are you willing to sacrifice your own comforts for the benefit of others?

7. Read verse 20. What character quality/qualities did you observe from this verse?



Heart Question: Are you generally inclined to be generous or stingy?

8. Read verses 21 and 25. What character quality/qualities did you observe from these verses?



Heart Question: Are you inclined to be a fearful and fretful worrier, or are you prepared for whatever may come (not just physically but more so in your soul)?

9. Read verse 26. What character quality/qualities did you observe from this verse?



Heart Question: Do you speak wisdom and teach kindness or speak foolishness and teach self-centeredness?

10. Read verse 27. What character quality/qualities did you observe from this verse?



Heart Question: Are you often idle rather than productive?

11. Read verse 30. What character quality/qualities did you observe from this verse?



Heart Question: Are you inclined to use your charm and beauty to manipulate others?



How do you demonstrate humility and dependence on the Lord as you go through your day?

12. Read verses 28-30. What character quality/qualities did you observe from these verses?



Heart Question: Would those closest to you say that you strive to do things with excellence or mediocrity?



How do you approach the tasks of your day as an opportunity to love and serve the Lord through the way that you love and serve those around you?

Living in Light of the Gospel

It is essential that we get *cause* and *effect* correct. In considering the woman described in Proverbs 31, it is important to recognize that her godliness (her fear of the Lord) is the *cause*, and her actions are the *effect*, not the other way around. She lives the way that she lives *because* she is a woman who fears the Lord.

In connecting this to our lives as Christians in light of the gospel, this is the same as understanding that we are not saved because of any good works that we do but that our acts of godliness flow out *as a result* of our salvation. The *cause* of one's salvation is faith in the atoning work of Christ on the cross. One *effect* of salvation is a life that is being shaped into greater Christlikeness through obedience to the Lord. And both are gifts of God's grace.

13. Read the following verses, and note how each shows that obedience follows as a result of salvation.
 - a. Ephesians 2:8-10
 - b. Titus 3:4-8
 - c. 1 Peter 2:24

14. Look back through the Personal Reflection questions, and list two areas where you are doing well.
 - a. Rejoice in the grace that the Lord has shown you in these areas. Write out a short prayer of praise and thanks to God.
 - b. List one way that you can be an encouragement to other ladies in our congregation who are struggling in the areas where you are doing well.

15. What is one area of sin in your life that the Lord has graciously shown you through this study?

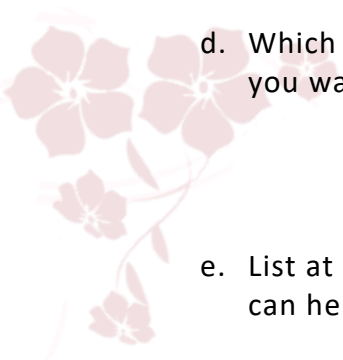
- a. Read 1 John 1:9. When we see sin in our lives, what are we supposed to do? And what has God promised to do?
- b. Pause now to confess your sin to God.
- c. Thank God for forgiving you and for cleansing you from your sin and unrighteousness.
- d. Read Romans 8:1. Express your praise and thanks to God that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

16. Write down two character qualities that you observed in Proverbs 31 that you would like to see the Lord grow in you.

- a. How will growing in these areas help you to better honor the Lord?



- b. Read John 14:15-17. Who has the Lord given to us to be our Helper?
- c. Read Galatians 5:22-23, and write down the nine characteristics of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.



d. Which of the fruits of the Spirit most directly relates to the character qualities in which you want to grow?

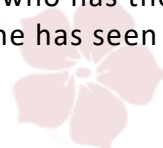
e. List at least one practical way that intentionally thinking about that fruit of the Spirit can help you to live out that godly character quality.

f. Ask God to guide, strengthen, and enable you as you seek to grow in these areas.

g. Read Philippians 2:12-13. Who is going to work in you as you make efforts to live out your salvation in obedience to God?

h. List at least one practical step you can take in the next week to work out your salvation by pursuing these godly character qualities.

i. List someone you know who has the character quality you desire to grow in. Commit to talk to her about how she has seen the Lord develop that quality in her life.



17. Look up the following verses, and for each one write down at least one thing that encourages you as you seek to walk in obedience to the Lord.

a. Philippians 1:6

b. 2 Peter 1:3

c. 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

18. Submit to God in prayer as you ask Him to help you take these steps of obedience, and praise Him for His promise to work in you right in this moment. Write out your prayer below.



19. Has this study helped you to make a spiritual connection to some of the activities of your daily life that you had not seen before? Explain.

20. Prior to this study, what was your initial reaction when you thought of “Proverbs 31”?



21. After this study, what do you find to be most encouraging about this passage?

22. Read Titus 2:11-14, and let it guide you as you pray. Write out each of your prayers below.

a. Praise God for His grace appearing to you.

b. Thank God for how His salvation instructs you.



- c. Ask God to make you into a woman who denies ungodliness and worldly desires and who lives uprightly with godliness in this present age.



- d. Look willfully to Christ as your great God and Savior, and praise Him that He has redeemed you from lawlessness and purified you for Himself.

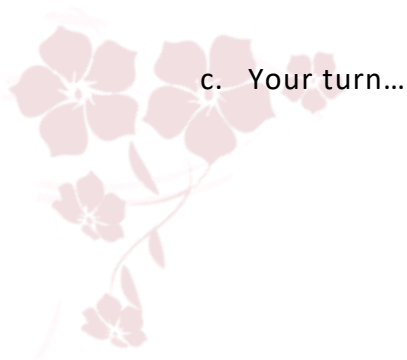
- e. Ask God to make you zealous for good works.



Remember, our goal in discipleship is not just to adjust our outward behavior but to see our hearts changed as the Lord brings His Word to bear in our lives. Taking an honest look into our hearts can sometimes be an uncomfortable task when it exposes things we wish were not there. But praise be to God! Since we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, we are no longer enslaved to the sinful inclinations of our flesh. We are no longer shackled to those weights but are free to live to the glory of God! His love, mercy, and grace are abundant and sufficient for our every need.

Talking Together about God's Work in Us

- If at any point in this study you have realized that you need to talk to someone in more detail about how to become a Christian or what it means to be a follower of Jesus, please talk with one of our church elders or one of our Summit Woods Women leadership team members. It would be our greatest joy to talk with you!
- In the next few weeks, intentionally talk with other ladies in our body about what the Lord is teaching you today.
- If you are not already meeting regularly with a group of ladies in our congregation, consider joining a Titus 2 group or a Wednesday Night small group. These groups are wonderful opportunities to talk and pray together with other ladies in our church body as we work out the truths the Lord is teaching us through His Word.



c. Your turn...

4. Look back at the Personal Reflection section. Come up with your own Heart Questions related to the character qualities displayed in the passage, especially for the verses that we did not cover. For example:

a. Read verse 12, and list the character qualities you observed.

Heart Question: Do you ever plot how to do harm rather than good to those around you?

b. Read verse 16, and list the character qualities you observed.

Heart Question: Are you careful, thoughtful, and purposeful in the way that you spend money?

c. Your turn...

5. Describe the Proverbs 31 woman in more detail.

a. How do we see that she is:

i. Physically strong?

ii. Mentally and Emotionally strong?

iii. Morally and Spiritually strong?

b. What does she value?

c. What does she prioritize?

d. Where does she invest herself?

6. Look back through the poem, and list some other ways that the same character qualities we see in this woman could be displayed through actions that are different from hers. (E.g., we don't all have to spin our own yarn to clothe our families and to be resourceful in providing for our families.)

7. List some examples of how a woman would display the various character qualities differently in her various seasons of life.



As the Lord reveals areas where you are doing well, be sure to praise Him for His grace and work in your life. And as the Lord reveals areas of sin and struggle, be sure to look to the gospel. Confess your sins, enjoy His forgiveness, and commit to walk in obedience to the Lord, trusting in His promise to work in you.

8. We all know that we will continue to face temptations to sin. How do these verses encourage you to persevere in the face of temptation?

a. 1 Corinthians 10:13

b. Hebrews 4:14-16

9. Find additional Bible verses that help you see the connection between faith and obedience, and write down how each one encourages you to obey. For example:

a. 1 John 2:3-6

b. James 1:22-25

c. Galatians 6:7-10

d. Your turn...

10. With whom will you share the things the Lord is teaching you?

PRAYER GUIDE



End your personal study time in prayer by following the suggestions provided below. When you meet with other ladies to discuss Proverbs 31, consider using this guide as you pray for each other.

❖ ADORE our God

- Spend a few moments in your favorite passage that praises God for who He is, and write down His attributes described in those verses.

- Now praise God in prayer for these attributes.

❖ APPEAL to our Lord for help

- Take a moment to write down one area of spiritual growth and maturity in which you would like to grow as a result of your study of Proverbs 31.

- Also write down at least one practical step that you will commit to take in the coming weeks to obey and apply Proverbs 31.

- Read Colossians 1:9-14 and use Paul's prayer as a model for your own prayer as you ask the Lord to help you to grow and obey in these areas.

❖ THANK our God

Close out your prayer time by thanking God for His Word that instructs us, for His Son, Jesus, who saves us, for His Spirit who enables us, and for His promise to lead, grow, and help us.

