



Loving Jesus, Loving People, Plowing a Counter-Culture

SERMON TEXT: Proverbs 31: 10-31

KEY POINT: The virtuous woman is a model for us all.

FOR LEADERS

- **Spring 2020 Season:** *The Spring 2020 Season will run for a total of 7 weeks, ending the week of Sunday, May 31st.*
- **Zoom Training!:** *If you would like help learning how to use Zoom to facilitate your group meetings each week, please reach out to your Campus Coordinator, or e-mail our pastor of Discipleship at Alex.Houser@emergencenj.org!*

GETTING STARTED

[1] Communities Video: Watch this week’s community extras video!

[2] Icebreaker: Name your favorite quality about your mother!

[3] Opener: What was one takeaway you had from the sermon this week?

MISSED, DISMISSED, DISCOURAGED

Ask for a volunteer to read Proverbs 31:10-31.

There are many folks who actually have an (understandable, yet misguided) aversion to this section of Proverbs. In the sermon, Ryan engaged some of the most common reasons,:

- *“The woman is a domestic homebody and irrelevant to the modern woman.”*
- *“The description of her is sexist.”*
- *“The woman is actually a personification of the figurative ‘Lady Wisdom.’”*
- *“The woman is unrealistically perfect.”*
- *“The woman is married with children, so she is irrelevant to single women, women without children, or men.”*

- [1]** What were some of your own impressions the first time you read Proverbs 31? Have you ever had any aversions to this text yourself?
- [2]** What is one thing that you feel is most challenging to you, personally, from this passage?
- [3]** What are some of the concrete descriptions of the virtuous woman that would suggest that she is, indeed, a real woman and not a personification of “Lady Wisdom” as some would object?
- [4]** How would you engage someone who feels that the woman in Proverbs 31 is either domesticated, or that the text is sexist or irrelevant?
- [5]** Many would object that the Proverbs 31 woman is “too perfect” to model ourselves after but, is that a bad thing? What about Jesus whom we follow as our example? What do you think about patterning our lives after ideals, even if we will never live up to them?
- [6]** In what way(s) is this text applicable to everyone, regardless of whether we are married, single, male, female, parents or not?



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THE FOUNDATIONS OF VIRTUE

Ask for a volunteer to re-read verse 30.

- [7]** In what way(s) does the fear of the Lord cause someone to be wise and virtuous?
- [8]** Do you think it's possible to be wise or virtuous without the fear of the Lord? Why or why not?

OUTGROWTHS

In the sermon, Ryan pointed out five things that grow out of the fear of the Lord in the virtuous woman's life:

- 1. She is trustworthy
- 2. She is diligent
- 3. She is a blessing to others
- 4. She lives with an accurate picture of beauty
- 5. She is free from fear and anxiety

- [10]** Verse 11 says that "the heart of her husband trusts in her." What are some things we can do in our own lives to give others reason to trust us?
- [11]** What are some other examples of diligence that you see in this chapter? How can you model your own life after these examples?

Verse 30 says that "charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised." There are similar passages in the New Testament, such as 1 Timothy 2:8-10 and 1 Peter 3:1-4. These Scriptures challenge the cultural norms of what makes a woman beautiful. It is ironic that modern culture fails to uphold what it so desperately seeks to affirm - that true beauty lies in the heart.

- [12]** In what way(s) does Scripture call us to uphold the inward virtue and fear of the Lord as what it most truly beautiful?
- [13]** What do you think verse 25 means by saying that the virtuous woman "laughs at the time to come?" What enables her to do this? How can we model these behaviors and attitudes in our own lives?

PRAYER

- [1]** Pray that those in your group would find encouragement, rather than discouragement from the portrait of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31.
- [2]** Think of two women in your own life whom you're grateful for, thank God for them, and then pray for them.



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LEADER'S COMMENTARY

- The entirety of Proverbs 31 is framed as advice from a mother to her son, who is a king named Lemuel. This king is otherwise unknown to us, which means he is not an Israelite. Since verse 30 roots the virtuous woman's wisdom in the fear of the Lord, we know that Lemuel and his mother were worshipers of the one true God. This is one of Scripture's many reminders that many other things have gone on in the world than those of which we read in the Bible.
- Some have argued that only verses 1–9 constitute “the words of King Lemuel.” This is unlikely, because this would leave verses 10–31 without a section heading, which is unparalleled in the book of Proverbs. Because there is only one heading here, all indications are that the entire chapter is a cohesive unit, making verses 10–31 King Lemuel's mother's advice on what kind of woman he should seek to marry (v. 10).
- Another common idea is that Proverbs 31 is actually about Lady Wisdom—a character who shows up especially in the book's prologue. The implication would be that this was never intended to be taken a description of a real woman. This is possible, but unlikely. To be sure, the virtuous woman of this chapter bears many similarities to Lady Wisdom—she is valiant, rare, precious, trustworthy, energetic, resourceful, strong, prosperous, kind to the poor, fortified, wise, loving, and pious (Waltke, NICOT, 518). Yet it is preferable to say that although the virtuous woman is an embodiment of Lady Wisdom, the description found here does indicate that it is not the intention of the text to portray her as merely an abstract ideal. She does many concrete activities, such as conducting business, making clothing, and feeding people. She is married (Lady Wisdom is not). She deserves good for her efforts (v. 31). And she fears the Lord, whereas Lady Wisdom *is* the fear of the Lord.