

THE NOBLE CHARACTER OF A GODLY WIFE

PROVERBS 31:10–20,30–31

Introduction

Of all the decisions that life demands, the most important one, of course, is the decision to receive Christ, to trust Him as LORD and Saviour. A crucial part of that equation is reverencing God and submitting to Him in obedience. As pointed out elsewhere in *Proverbs*, this is known as the *fear of the LORD*. This decision to fear the LORD and to receive Christ into our hearts determines our destiny not only in this life but also in eternity.

The second most important decision in life is our choice of a spouse. Like all mothers, Lemuel's mother desired happiness and success for her son. She realized that his happiness and success would be largely determined by his selection of a wife. This is her advice about what kind of woman he should marry. It stands as a timeless guide for all young men and as an enduring model for all young women.

The excellent woman described is the embodiment of all the wisdom instruction contained in the previous thirty chapters. Thus, this is a portrait of an exceptionally wise woman who fears the LORD (v. 30). Wisdom is to be learned, but more importantly, it is to be lived. The most important place wisdom is to be lived out, demonstrated, and taught is in the home. And because family relationships are the most important relationships in life, the character of the wife and mother is of utmost importance. Here is how a wise woman conducts herself within and outside of her home.

This last passage in *Proverbs* is a masterfully-crafted poem. It is an acrostic: each of its twenty-two verses begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in order. This was an often-used tool to aid memorization. Whether or not this poem was actually written by the king is unknown. It is possible that he dictated his mother's advice to a poet who penned and arranged the final product. Although we may not know its author, we know its source. Ultimately, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, who inspired and preserved it forever for all young men and women who seek to be wise; and for all husbands, sons and daughters who are exceptionally blessed to call such a woman *Dear* and *Mother*. This is, *A Godly Wife's Character: What It Should Be*, Proverbs 31:10-31.

- I. She has an excellent, noble character (vv. 10-12).
 - II. She manages her household well (vv. 13-16).
 - III. She is diligent and hard-working (vv. 17-19).
 - IV. She is compassionate and caring (v. 20).
 - V. She has keen foresight: She provides for the future welfare of her household (v. 21).
 - VI. She makes herself attractive (v. 22).
 - VII. She honours and respects her husband's ability (v. 23).
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VIII. She helps earn the family's income when needed (v. 24).

IX. She has a strong testimony (vv. 25-29).

X. She has a strong faith in the LORD (vv. 30-31).

I. *Proverbs 31:10–12 She has an Excellent, Noble Character*

The first and foremost quality of a treasured wife is not outer beauty but inner character. The subject of this lesson is introduced in the first verse of this passage: it is the *virtuous* woman — an excellent and capable woman of noble character. What is a virtuous woman? What qualities earn her this title and prompt others to classify her as such? The question is answered over the course of the poem, with each verse listing a specific quality of her noble character.

1. *She is very rare. (v. 10)*

Like wisdom itself, the noble woman is a rare and precious treasure. She is more valuable than rubies (3:15; 8:11; see notes, 3:15). The words “*Who can find?*” do not imply that noble women do not exist, but that, like rubies, they do not exist in abundance. Most people do not own expensive jewels because costly gems are the luxuries of the wealthy. Scripture is saying, then, that the value of a virtuous woman is far greater than rubies, and greatly to be desired. The man who is blessed with a godly wife is richer than a king. The statement also suggests that if a virtuous woman could be bought, the price would be so great that most men could never afford her. Indeed, she is a gift from the LORD (19:14).

2. *She is trustworthy: Her husband can rely on her. (vv. 11-12)*

The excellent wife's husband has complete confidence in her. He knows that her heart is completely devoted to him. This virtue alone is priceless. Her blessed husband never has to worry about her fidelity. He never questions her motives and he never doubts her word. He understands the nature of men, that his wife will sometimes catch the eye of other men, but it does not bother him. In his heart he knows that she would never betray him, never do anything to hurt him or cause him shame. She will always act in his best interests. His heart is secure in her lifelong faithfulness: *all* the days of her life she will be good for him and do good for him.

A trustworthy wife satisfies him and makes him content (v. 11b). Indeed, she enriches his life, enhances his esteem and meets his needs. She completely fulfills him. He is settled, stable and most satisfied with her.

Thought 1. All ladies should aspire to be the ideal woman described in this passage. This godly wife is a model, a pattern for every woman to follow. Wives and mothers in our modern world will not do everything exactly as this woman did. The passing of time has brought better and more efficient methods of caring for a family and running a household. It has also brought about the need for many, if not most, wives

to work outside the home. Therefore, husbands and wives now share many duties that were once exclusively performed by wives. As we study this passage, we all, men and women alike, need to keep the following facts in mind: we should not feel like failures if we cannot do everything mentioned in this passage. At the same time, we need to remember that virtues never change; godly character is timeless. We may perform our tasks differently or we may perform different tasks, but the principles that guide us all are to be the ones modelled by this treasured wife and mother.

The first principles that characterize the godly woman (or man) are *faithfulness* and *purity*. If you desire to be a *Proverbs 31* wife, you need to make the following commitment: that you will never behave in any way that would cause your husband to doubt your devotion. Guard your conduct and never give any signals to other men that could be interpreted as interest in them or availability to them:

- => Always dress tastefully and modestly.
- => Never wear anything that is suggestive or revealing.
- => Always behave appropriately around other men. Be extremely careful never to say or do anything that could be construed as flirting. Avoid carrying on long personal conversations with other men.
- => Do not have any contact with other men that could be interpreted as questionable or out of place.
- => Do not playfully discuss other men with your friends.
- => Never complain about your husband to others, not even to close friends or family members.

Our world is drowning in a sea of immorality. The scriptural values of God's holy commandments have all but been forgotten in many societies. Wedding vows are no longer sacred. A wedding ring and other symbols of marriage are no longer an indication that a man or woman is unavailable to others. Music, television, movies, books — all forms of media and communication now glorify adultery and promote it as normal behaviour in society. More than ever, we must be devoted to our spouses and carefully guard ourselves. We need to resolve never to say or do anything that would cast doubt on our commitment to our marriages.

As a wife, you need to be attentive to your husband's needs. Be sure that he is completely fulfilled through his relationship with you. In Ephesians 5:33, Scripture stresses the primary needs of women and men. The primary need of women is for love or affection. The primary need of men is for reverence or respect. As a wise wife or husband, one who loves the LORD and is committed to your spouse, you are to put your spouse before yourself. You should know your spouse's needs and constantly strive to meet them. Make your spouse fully content with you, so much so that he or she never has the desire to seek anything or anyone else.

1 Pet 3:2 *When they see the purity and reverence of your lives.*

Titus 2:4-5 *Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.*

Eph 5:33 *However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

Thought 2. Remember that the husband/wife relationship is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5:32). The church is the bride of Christ (Eph 5:25-27; 2 Cor 11:2; Rev 19:7-8).

=> The LORD Jesus values His bride above everything else. Two of Jesus' parables express the great value of the church to Him (Mat 13). He said that it is like a treasure hidden in a field, and that He gave up everything He had to buy the field in order to gain the treasure (Mat 13:44). He gave up all the glory, worship and service of heaven, and even His life for His bride, the church. Jesus also compared the church to a pearl of great price for which a man sold everything he had in order to buy it (vv. 45-46). Rubies in the Old Testament were more like pearls than like the glassy stone that goes by that name today (Job 28:18). Take a moment and meditate on this glorious truth: Jesus Christ is the heir of all things. The universe was designed in the mind of God as a gift to His beloved Son (Col 1:16; Heb 1:2). Yet Christ wanted more than a universe. He wanted a bride. And to gain a bride, He was willing to give up everything to become a man, so that He could give His life to purchase His bride (Eph 5:25-27). Oh, how the Saviour loves us!

=> Every one of us should be a trustworthy wife to our beloved bridegroom, the LORD Jesus Christ, for He gave Himself for us. Paul reminds us — the church — that we are espoused (betrothed, married) to Christ; therefore, we should be completely faithful to Him. We should live pure, chaste lives (2 Cor 11:2). Friendship with the world is committing spiritual adultery (Jas 4:4-5). Consequently, we should never become attached to the bright lights and the immoral and sinful ways of this world. Christ, our bridegroom, has assured us that we are completely secure in His love (John 10:28-29; Rom 8:35-39). He, in turn, deserves a bride whom He can safely trust.

Mat 13:44-46 *“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”*

John 10:28-29 *“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.”*

Rom 8:35-39 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

2 Cor 11:2 *I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.*

Eph 5:25-27 *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. To make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*

James 4:4-5 *You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?*

II. Proverbs 31:13–16 *She Manages her Household Well*

This capable woman is exclusively dedicated to her husband and entirely devoted to her home. These are her top priorities, given to us by inspiration of the Holy Spirit *in this order*. The home is founded upon the lifelong love commitment between a husband and a wife. Together they comprise the core of the homeland together they build a household — a family — upon their love. This family is the focus and the fruit of the godly woman’s life, next to her personal devotion to her husband.

1. *She provides clothing (selects and sews wool...).* (v. 13)

The worthy wife’s family is well-clothed by her hand. She uses wool to prepare warm clothing for her family for the winter and flax (what linen is made of) for fine clothing. Her family is both adequately and elegantly clothed with the creations of her *willing* or *eager* (chephets) hands. This word means pleasure, delight or desire. It is a word that conveys emotional involvement. (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. WORD search). It expresses that her work is not a duty, it is the desire of her heart; it is not drudgery, it is the delight of her life; it is not a punishment, it is a pleasure. All that she does for her family is truly a labour of love.

“In the state of society to which this description belongs, every kind of drapery for the person, the tent or the house, is manufactured at home by the women, who make it a [matter of] pride to be able to boast that their husbands and children are entirely clad by the labour of their hands; and the man’s robe clings the more sweetly to him, —

is warmer in the cold, and cooler in the heat — from his knowledge of the dear hands by which every thread has been prepared.” (John Kitto. *Daily Bible Illustrations: Job and the Poetical Books*. (New York, NY: Robert Carter and Brothers, n.d.), p. 1877).

As a loving mother, dressing your children in clothing that is clean and neat is not a testimony of your economic standing, but of qualities that are far more important. You instil in your children dignity and self-respect by the way you clothe them.

By preparing clothing for your family, you also teach your children what is appropriate to wear in various situations as well as what is acceptable in society. And, as you carefully select their clothes while they are young, you teach them the virtues of modesty and good taste.

The Proverbs 31 woman lived in a time when the best clothing available for her family was what she crafted with her own hands. She looked for the best bargains on thread and material to construct quality clothing for her loved ones. While in some cultures today this is still necessary, in most cultures quality clothing can be purchased ready-made. If the Proverbs 31 woman were clothing her family today, she would use every means available to be the best steward of her family’s resources. This includes her time as well as the family’s money. One factor remains the same today as it was in Solomon’s day, that is, that the lives of mothers are very busy. And though the activities that fill the day may differ significantly, then, as now, it seems there is never enough time to complete the day’s tasks. Being a wise wife and mother still involves making the best use of all that is available, affordable and convenient in caring for your family.

2. *She purchases food. (v. 14)*

The noble woman’s family is not only well-clothed but also well-fed. Scripture likens her food-shopping expedition to that of merchants’ ships that sail in from afar, suggesting that she fills her bags with an assortment of interesting items like spices from far away lands. No doubt, she delights in preparing menus filled with variety, so she uses a mixture of seasonings to flavour the foods she prepares. Like weaving and sewing her family’s clothing, making meals for them is a joy for her and gives her great satisfaction. As her family is nourished and strengthened by the wholesome and enjoyable meals she prepares, they are also nurtured by the love she has invested in preparing the meals.

Like the Proverbs 31 woman, women today are extremely busy, working both inside and outside the home. This means that preparing healthy, affordable and enjoyable meals for their families requires some effort and sacrifice. In many cultures, nutritious, affordable foods are readily available for purchase. Unfortunately, affordable, convenient options that are *not* nutritious are also available. All of us, men and women, need to resist the temptation to conveniently feed our families — and ourselves — a diet of fast, unhealthy foods. We need to take the time and make the

effort to assure that our families are properly fed. As parents and custodians of our own bodies, God's temple, we should do our best to plan and prepare healthy and economical meals for our families' enjoyment.

3. *She gets up early and prepares breakfast. (v. 15a)*

This noble woman has a family and a house to run and therefore cannot afford the luxury of sleeping late. She is up before daylight to prepare breakfast for her family. This was necessary in the Middle and Near East because men also had to begin their work early in the morning in order to rest during the oppressive heat of the day.

4. *She plans the day's work for her servants. (v. 15b)*

Another reason this capable woman has to rise so early is to prepare her servants for the day. *Portions* (Hebrew, *choq*, meaning what is appointed) may refer to the necessary meals for her servant girls or it may refer to their daily tasks. The Hebrew word is used in various applications throughout the Old Testament. Its mention along with food, and the fact that in Prov 30:8 it refers to the day's allotment of food, suggest it is referring to the meals for her servants. It would be unusual, however, for a woman with servants to do the cooking for them. Rather, in a household with servants, it is more likely that the wife rises early to plan the meals and to allot the food for her family and the servants, and that the servants actually prepare the meals.

As a busy wife and mother — or perhaps just one or the other — it is usually impossible for you to sleep late. You have to discipline yourself to arise early so you can complete all that is required of you. Furthermore, in most cultures today, few women have the privilege being stay-at-home wives and mothers. It is necessary for most women to work outside the home to help support their families. In these cases, an excellent wife and mother makes the sacrifice of rising early to see that her families' needs are still met. If your work schedule makes this impossible, sit down and discuss your schedule with your family. Together, come up with a plan to ensure that things continue to run smoothly in your absence. Explain that part of your duty before you go to bed is to make sure they are prepared for the next day with appropriate clothing and a healthy breakfast.

A wise wife and mother will enlist the help of those around her. It would be a marvellous thing to have servants to complete the household chores and prepare meals. In some cultures, it is still the practice to have household help. In most, however, this is not financially possible. The only servants most wives have are the small ones scrambling at their feet — the ones they have given birth to! As a wise mother, you should assign your children appropriate chores each day to assist you, but also to teach them responsibility — a work ethic — and how to accomplish necessary tasks. Organizing your home will make it run more smoothly, whether that means assigning tasks to household helpers or to your husband and children. This takes careful time, planning and preparation. Husbands, you must be willing to assist

your wife in the care of the home and children. This is especially essential when the wife has a job outside of the home. *Family* is a singular noun: all the members must work together as one to contribute to its successful operation.

5. *She takes care of household affairs (finances, purchases, gardens...). (v. 16)*

The exceptional woman is enterprising: through her labour and investments she contributes to her family's income. The wise woman develops a good mind for business. In this example, the wife has gained the knowledge to evaluate a field and judge whether or not it can be profitable. Notice how she obtains the funds to acquire it: she uses the money she has earned through her own labours — *the fruit of her hands* (v. 24). Instead of spending the money frivolously on herself, she invests it in something that will benefit her family. With her own money she purchases vines and turns the field into a vineyard. She will have enough wine for her family and also enough to sell at a profit. How pleased and proud her husband must be!

It should be noted that Scripture does not give any further detail about the vineyard as to where it is located, how large it is, or who works the field. It is probably safe to assume, however, that considering all of her other responsibilities and the wealth of her family, this dear lady hired someone to work the field for her.

If you want or need to contribute to your family financially, you can find ways to do so. Every person has God-given abilities that he or she can use to save and/or produce income. As will be seen, the Proverbs 31 woman uses her skills to help support her family (vv. 18, 24). The emphasis is her wise management of the family's resources. She is industrious and makes the best use of what she has. She is thrifty: she sees that by planting her own vineyard she can both save and make money for her family. She educates herself so that she will be able to make wise decisions that benefit her family.

Thought 1. The lesson for today's wives and mothers is this: learn how to make the most of your family's resources. Be thrifty, not frivolous or careless in your spending of money and your use of what you have. Find ways to save money on necessary purchases. Learn to conserve resources, to make much of what you have, and to stretch what you have to make it go farther. Always be reading, learning and working to acquire knowledge that will benefit your family. Always be willing to put forth the effort to turn little into much and to make the best possible use of what you have.

Thought 2. Consider these reflections for the church, the bride of Christ:

=> Like the noble woman who clothes and feeds her family out of love, we should willingly and joyously serve the LORD Jesus Christ. All of our service to Him ought to be a labour of love (1 Thes 1:3; Heb 6:10). Certainly, we can never repay the debt we owe the LORD, but He does not force us to serve Him. We should serve Him voluntarily because we love Him.

=> We should also invest our resources to advance the kingdom of the LORD Jesus Christ. As the wife sowed her earnings into a vineyard, we should plant our time, talents and treasure in whatever will produce fruit for the LORD — the fruit of love, joy and peace in society and the adding of more souls to His kingdom (John 4:34-36; 1 Cor 3:6-8; 2 Cor 9:6; Gal 5:22-23). How pleased He will be when He returns and finds us faithful and fruitful in His work (Mat 25:20-21).

Mat 25:20-21 *“The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’ His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’”*

John 4:34-36 *“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.”*

Rom 12:11 *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.*

1 Cor 3:6-8 *I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour.*

2 Cor 9:6 *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.*

1 Th 1:3 *We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

III. Proverbs 31:17–19 She is Diligent and Hard-working

Interestingly, slothfulness is one of the most ridiculed and despised vices in *Proverbs*. But the noble woman will never be accused of being lazy. Her industriousness is emphasized throughout this passage. She does not merely labour from light to light: her work begins before the sun rises and continues after it has set.

1. She is energetic and strong. (v. 17)

The praiseworthy wife is not afraid of hard work. While she is lovely and feminine, she is not delicate and pampered. She works tirelessly and vigorously. Two phrases are used to illustrate her strength. Girding the loins is a term used of warriors going off to battle and of men preparing for strenuous labour. Men would gather their garments above their knees and tie them with their belts to enable them to move

without restriction. In the same way, the strength of the virtuous woman enables her to work long and accomplish much. She *strengthens her arms*: develops the strength required for the work she has to perform.

In spite of her extremely busy schedule, the Proverbs 31 woman accomplished all that was required of her by taking proper care of herself. As a wise wife and mother, you too need to keep yourself fit and in shape to take care of your family. It is exhausting to think of everything that is required of modern wives and mothers, especially when they have to work outside the home. But like this excellent woman, you need to make sure you are able to perform the work you need to do. Mothers tend to neglect themselves in order to meet their families' needs. In contrast, the Proverbs 31 woman kept herself fit to ensure that she could meet her family's needs.

2. *She searches for bargains, plans ahead, and works late at night (v. 18).*

The noble woman is wise in her dealings and sees to it that she receives a satisfactory return for her investment of time and labour. The quality of her work is outstanding, and she knows there will be a strong market for the produce she grows and the products she sells. Her industrious spirit keeps her working late into the night, long after others have retired. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* compares this woman to the wise women in the parable of the virgins (Mat 25:1-13). They each had foresight and planned ahead.

3. *She stays busy weaving fabric and sewing clothes for the family and to sell to others. (vv. 18-19)*

While others sleep, she is weaving fabric on the spindle and sewing clothes, producing more and more garments. There is a demand for the fabric and clothes she makes. Long hours are necessary to meet the public's requests as well as the needs of her family. The point is that she willingly and thankfully stays busy.

Thought 1. The diligence of the praiseworthy wife is a shining example for the bride of Christ. We are admonished to be steadfast and busy in the LORD's work (1 Cor 15:58). The excellent wife labours long into the night because she knows she will make a profit and will be rewarded for her efforts. The promise of reward encourages her to persevere when she is tired. It also prevents her from becoming discouraged. The LORD promises to reward us for our labour. Wives and mothers as well as the rest of us must never forget that we will stand before the LORD Jesus and be rewarded for our faithful service.

1 Cor 3:8 *The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour.*

1 Cor 3:12-14 *If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.*

1 Cor 15:58 *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*

Gal 6:9 *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time He will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

Rev 22:12 *“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.”*

IV. Proverbs 31: 20 *She is compassionate and caring*

Note the hands of the godly woman: they are eager and energetic and are extended to the poor (vv. 13, 19, 20). She labours long and late into the night, not only to clothe her family but also to help others who are disabled, unemployed or poor (Eph 4:28). One of the most outstanding qualities of the wise and the righteous in *Proverbs* is their care for the poor (14:21, 31; 19:17; 22:9; 28:27; 29:7). As a noble woman, your heart should be soft toward the needy. You should train your eyes to notice those who need help, and you should extend your hand in love to help them.

In any church, neighbourhood or community there are always people who need assistance from a person who cares. Many families are affected by unemployment, illness or some other tragedy. Some suffer temporary setbacks and need help only for a season. Many older folks are lonely and cannot always care for themselves. Most of us labour hard and barely have enough for our own families. Still, we cannot allow this to cause us to be self-centred or stingy nor to ignore those who need help. If we truly trust the LORD, we will be compassionate and help others, even at great sacrifice to ourselves. We will believe God’s Word when He says He will repay us.

Thought 1. Acts 9 records the marvellous miracle of the raising of Dorcas from the dead. Dorcas exemplified the compassion and care of the godly woman. Note the record of her generosity and the deep love the widows felt for her:

Acts 9:36-42 *In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Please come at once!” Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.*

Rom 12:13 *Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

Eph 4:28 *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*

Heb 13:16 *And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

Deut 15:11 *There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be open-handed toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.*

Isa 58:7 *Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?*

V. Proverbs 31:30–31 She has Strong Faith in God

What makes the excellent, noble woman such a cherished treasure? What is behind all that she is and does? Lemuel's mother reveals the secret of her success:

1. She is not focused on deceptive and fleeting beauty. (v. 30a)

The value of the noble woman is not based on her pleasing personality, nor is it determined by her physical beauty. The Hebrew word for *grace* is translated *favour* or *charm*. It is most often used in the Old Testament with the word *find*. Here it refers to a personality or demeanour that results in her *finding favour* with others: she is popular and well-liked. But grasp the point of this verse: personality and popularity do not necessarily reveal a person's true character. A charming disposition is not necessarily genuine; it may be a sham. Many people are masters at deceitfully portraying themselves in order to get what they want from others. We should not judge a woman (or any person) by her (or his) personality. The most popular girls do not always make the best wives. Nor do the most gorgeous ones.

All men want a beautiful woman at their side. But the problem with physical beauty is that it does not last. It is vain (*hebel*) — transitory and fleeting. This is the word used so frequently by Solomon in *Ecclesiastes*. Nothing he tried was lasting or permanent. Unfortunately, this is all too true with physical beauty and charm. People age and people change. A woman's true value is not based on beauty. The virtuous woman is made of stronger, more important and permanent qualities.

2. She fears the LORD. (v. 30b)

Here is the secret of the noble woman, what makes her priceless and incomparable: she is praiseworthy because of her fear of the LORD, that is, her reverent, submissive relationship with the LORD. This honourable woman embodies the attributes of wisdom found throughout *Proverbs*:

- => She has an impeccable character and great integrity.
- => She is loyal and trustworthy.
- => She does good, not evil.
- => She is diligent and industrious.
- => She makes wise financial decisions.
- => She is compassionate toward the needy.
- => She is prepared for the future.
- => She is strong and honoured.
- => She is confident and bold.
- => She has great hope for the future.
- => She controls her speech, which is always holy and gracious.
- => She instructs others in truth.
- => She is kind and fair with others.

All of this is a result of her relationship with the LORD. Her exceptional worth is based on her fear of Him (1:7). Men who are wise do not choose their wives because of their popularity or beauty. They select a woman who is characterized by her genuine reverence for and humble obedience to God, a woman who demonstrates the behaviour and beautiful qualities spelled out in the list above.

Always remember this fact: it is our *fear of the LORD* that will direct our children — the fruit of our loins — to the LORD. We must teach our children to fear and trust the LORD by our own example. Our example will guide them in everything they do. We cannot be the parents God intends us to be without genuinely and wholly surrendering our lives to Him.

3. *She deserves to be rewarded: Her works are to be praised. (v. 31)*

The fruit of her hands refers to all that she has done throughout her life, both for her family and for the community-at-large. It includes...

- the garments and coverings she has sewn
- the house she has beautifully decorated
- the delicious meals she has prepared day by day
- the businesses she has started
- the maidens she has managed
- the needy she has helped
- the people she has counselled and instructed

Yet, this is not all she has done. It includes something much greater than these. She has put everything she has into raising and nurturing a family skilled in successful

living, one that fears the LORD and adores her with all their hearts. They are her *works*. They all praise her at the gates of the city, where deals are sealed, judgments are rendered, and laws are passed...where work of far lesser importance than hers is done.

Thought 1. *Proverbs* begins and ends with the *fear of the LORD* (1:7; 31:30). The secret of wisdom — skilful, successful living — can be reduced to one thing: a reverence toward *Jehovah* that leads to establishing a relationship with Him through His Son, which in turn results in living in submissive, obedience to His commands. Solomon — the wisest of all men — began his reign over Israel walking in the *fear of the LORD*. Tragically, he soon departed from the wise path of life the LORD had laid out for him — and for us all — to follow. Solomon turned away from the LORD and tried everything the world could offer him. Further and further away from Jehovah he strayed. Over the course of his reign he placed his trust in secular knowledge, power, wealth, great architectural and engineering feats, alcohol, carnal pleasures and monumental success. Despite all that Solomon tried and everything he possessed, his heart remained empty and unfulfilled. As a bitter old man he looked back on his life with enormous regret. Yet, apparently, he also remembered his childhood and the two key principles his godly father had taught him: fear the LORD and keep His commandments. It was then that Solomon wrote:

Eccl 12:13 *Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.*

The *fear of the LORD* is the secret to a successful, satisfying and blessed life. May we learn from Solomon's mistakes and equip ourselves for life by obeying the truths spelled out for us in the great book of *Proverbs*.

Prov 1:7 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

Prov 2:5 *Then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.*

Pr.9:10 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

Prov 14:26 *Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge.*

Prov 15:16 *Better a little with the fear of the LORD than great wealth with turmoil.*

Prov 19:23 *The fear of the LORD leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble.*

Pr.23:17 *Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the LORD. ■*