

# Proverbs 31

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'm turning, if you will, to Proverbs, chapter 31. Proverbs 31. Hope you've enjoyed the series! I've found it a struggle, but it's done me good. And I want to finish this evening by! talking about Proverbs and character. Wise words about character. That's where Proverbs ends. And character has, it's really everything, isn't it? Character is everything. Because it has to do with who we really are. Who we really are. Character is how you behave when no one else is looking, psychologists tell us. It's what the inside, what is on the inside, it's the reality. It is the real deal of what you are beneath the surface. What comes out when the chips are down? Or when it's just you and God and no one else? And perhaps surprisingly for us, as we've looked through the book of Proverbs, I think Proverbs ends in a surprising way, that it sheds a spotlight on female character. On the character of a wife and a mother. So

I want to begin with two introductory comments, because this focus is on one woman in Proverbs 31. And this one kind of woman. And that shouldn't be a stumbling block to any of us, no matter who you are. So first of all, Proverbs 31 speaks to all of us. Married, single, widowed, divorced, male or female, adult or child. What we've read from verses 10 to 31 is actually a poem. It's a very, very clever poem. You can see actually, even in the way that it's written in the English. It starts in verse 10, and it goes through to the end. And it begins with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in the correct order. So verse 10 begins with A, verse 11 with B, verse 12 with the equivalent of C, and so on. Of course, it doesn't come across that way in our English translations. Just like we might say, here is a poem about the A to Z of the most excellent wife. Here is the full picture. Here is the lowdown. Here is everything you need to know about being a woman, about being a wife. And remember what Proverbs is. What is the purpose of Proverbs? Proverbs is a book that is addressed to whom? To teenagers. But more than that, to young men. So the book of Proverbs is a book addressed to young sons about how to be wise in the world. And this woman in chapter 31 is the main character in the poem. But a young man is the main audience. Notice how every verse begins. It begins, she, she, she, she.

She, she, she. Apart from verse 23. Her husband. And that is the exact middle point of the poem.

It's deliberate. A young man is the audience of Proverbs 31. Notice how every verse begins.

She, she, she, she, she, she, she, she. And then verse 31, her husband. So in Hebrews, it's like an arrow that points you to the middle, the emphasis and priority. It is a book for boys. Here is a poem for boys. And the message is, get this kind of wife. Get this kind of wife. And I think that helps us with all those books that are written for women on Proverbs 31, which make you feel terribly, terribly guilty. It is a book for boys. Here is a poem for boys.

[ 3 : 50 ] Get this kind of wife. And so it speaks to all of us. Wise daughters. If you're a wise daughter, you will aspire to be like her. Wise sons will seek to marry her. Wise wives will seek to learn from her. Wise husbands will seek to husband her. They will nurture and tend and care and provide so that they praise their wives in the way that this woman's husband praises her.

So in families, gender issues never, ever solely relate to gender. Who we are, are as men and women and boys and girls, affects everybody else. Because we are always a certain kind of man or a certain kind of woman or a certain kind of child. There is a certain kind of woman, according to Proverbs, who is either crowned to her husband or rottenness in his bones. They are both affected by how she is.

Equally, chapter 30 and verse 23, the earth trembles under an unloved woman who is married.

Being a certain kind of husband will either make you like the gatekeeper of a dark dungeon or the guardian of a safe fortress. And when the Bible speaks to children and teenagers, it says this. It says, be like this. Honour and respect your parents. Because we are all affected. You are not an island this evening. A fool, says Proverbs. Old, young, male, female, married, single, adult, child. A

fool is like a whirlwind in society and home. It is a destructive force that is unleashed on others. And so, secondly, she speaks to all of us, but she speaks to help all of us. Do not fear this woman. Or be judged by this woman.

[ 5 : 53 ] Or intimidated by her. Especially if you are a woman tonight. She is superwoman, isn't she, as I read it. And we want to say that when we get to the end of the reading. Wow.

What woman on earth can possibly live up to this? But Proverbs 31 is not here to say to us that anything less than Proverbs 31 means that you are a crushing failure.

Rather, she is here, as Proverbs is, to give you a good direction. A good idea of the direction you should be going in. It is very, very easy, but very wrong, to let a good goal for the future be a crushing burden in the present.

Let me say that again. It is very wrong, but very easy, to let a good goal for the future be a crushing burden in the present. My friend was telling me recently, I was taking his children to bed.

And out of absolutely nowhere in bed, his five-year-old, Allah, dissolved into tears. Just cried out of nowhere. He said to her, what's the matter, Allah?

[ 7 : 03 ] She said, I don't want ever to leave you, Daddy. My friend said, you don't ever have to leave us, she said. But I want to get married and have five children, replied Allah.

In a child's mind, the noble aim of having five children had become emotionally too much in the present. Now, if my friend had said, now, well, sorry, Ella, about that.

It's right to be upset, because yes, one day if you have five children, you will have to leave us forever. It would be crushing. Now they say, you're not there yet, love.

Let the future take care of itself. Start here. When you're five years old. The ideal, the exemplary, the noble, the virtuous, is simply meant to be where you are heading.

It's not a weight to burden us with. Or a stick to be beaten with. And so I want to say to you, I want to say to you, there is, I think, Nancy Wilson's book on promise 31 is good.

[ 8 : 08 ] I've looked at a couple of others, I don't think the others are great, I'm honest. And so don't go to Amazon and just Google promise 31 and buy the books, because they'll make me feel terribly guilty. The words of King Lemuel here, teaching us the words of his own mother.

And here we have the words of Christ himself. And the Lord Jesus never ever speaks to crush us with unattainable goals. So three things to observe in this one. Her value, her activities, and her praise.

And then I want to learn three lessons from her. Three things to observe. This is 10 to 12. See her value. I want us to refer to this woman as the valiant wife. The valiant wife.

The word noble has lost in our culture, hasn't it? Some of its strength and its power. It's become a rather weak word. But actually the words here for noble, and in other places in the Bible, is translated as competent strength.

She's a strong woman. She's a woman of valour and courage. And the word here is used elsewhere in the Bible for warriors. She is a woman, verse 10, of valorous virtue.

[ 9 : 18 ] She's a warrior. Who can find her? And the implied answer to verse 10, can you see it? There's no one can find a woman like that. But rather nearly, well rather nearly no one.

She's very rare, isn't she? That's what you get from the second half of verse 10. She's far more precious than jewels. This description of value being greater than rubies and jewels.

The meaning is that she's rare. She's exceedingly precious. She's like a rare diamond buried in a seam of undiscovered rock. Who can possibly get a precious metal like that?

And the question is, meant to awaken the desire in a young man to find a woman like this. Do you see how it works? Like a fairy tale which begins, once upon a time there was a princess.

The most beautiful of all the princesses. But what happens in the child's heart is that girls want to be there. And the boy wants to marry her. Look at her value to her husband.

[ 10 : 25 ] He's got full confidence in her. In other words, his well-being stands and falls on her reliability. His heart trusts in her.

That's what it's saying. And he lacks nothing of value. Literally it is, he lacks no spoils. Here is a woman. Here is a woman.

Who plunders the world around her. in all the right ways for the people closest to her. So look at her value and look at her worth. And so here is the question.

Women, where does your worth come from? It's the tagline, isn't it? The L'Oreal adverts.

I don't even know when they're still on. But they all, they used to say at the end, the tagline was, isn't it? The shampoo, because I'm worth it. I don't know. Is that still the same? I don't know. It's still the same.

[ 11 : 24 ] Why are you worth it? Why are you worth it? Because of how you look. Because of your hairstyle. Because of your celebrity.

Because of your money. When feminine value is measured in those ways, well, how many women feel valuable when you see that? When you compare yourself to those women on the TV screen, how valuable do you find yourself?

Well, perhaps not many. But do you see what the Bible says? Do you see what Proverbs says? Where does this valiant wife, where does her worth come from? Her character.

When you're 12 years old. When you're 12 years old. God says, your worth comes from who you are. A young girl created in his image.

Growing up in his world. Not from how you look. And not from how you dress. When you're 26.

[ 12 : 33 ] God says, your worth comes from who you are. Not your job. Not how pretty you are. Not how much money you're making.

When you're married and caring for a family. Your worth comes not from being married. And your worth comes not from having children.

It comes from your character. From how you do the things God has called you to do. A character. Look at our activities. Verses 13 to 27.

Now this is where, isn't it? The guilt really kicks in. Verses 13 to 27. I don't know how you feel. But I'm overruled by her. She is discerning in her shopping, isn't it?

She never goes to Lidl. And gets distracted by what is going on in the middle. Claire came out of a suitcase from Lidl last week. You can buy anything there, can't you? You go in the middle of Lidl.

[ 13 : 28 ] And there's all sorts of delights. Well look at this woman. She never gets distracted in Lidl. Verse 12. She selects wool and flax. She's great with her hands. She's a businesswoman.

She buys a field. And out of that income, she generates a new business. A vineyard. Verse 16. She trades. She works. She buys. She sells. She spins.

She gives. She clothes. She teaches. And she instructs. And I think the fear factor, perhaps, for us in reading this, we think it's that I hate knitting. I couldn't make a covering for my bed.

Janet will tell you, when she first came to the church, isn't it, all the women in the night, she used to bake bread. And she couldn't bake bread, is it? Well, that is not the way to read Proverbs 31.

That pushes the poetic details into a kind of wooden contemporary form. Demanding exactly the same activities is not the way to hear what this woman is saying to you tonight.

[ 14 : 30 ] It is better to see the way her activities are described. And here's the vital thing. The domestic sphere for this woman is described in military terms.

So this woman is a domestic warrior. I've showed you that valiant is the right kind of stronger word than noble.

And her husband lacks no spoilers. Look at verse 15. She provides food for her family. Literally, it is pray for her family. She gets up while it's dark, one commentator says.

And providing pray for the family and servants is the activity of this lioness. Providing for the pack. The word for pray, food, represents provisions. Acquired after the exercise of great strength and prowess and ingenuity.

Verse 16, she is a strategist. Verse 17, her arms are strong for the task. And not only is she not afraid of anything. Verse 21, verse 25, she faces the future with mocking laughter.

[ 15 : 35 ] Like a conqueror deriding his enemy. The unknown future, with all its alarming prospects, is no source of anxiety or worry to her.

It's quite something, isn't it? And so thirdly, her praise. Look at verse 28. Her children rise up and call her blessed.

Her husband also, and he praises her. Many women have done excellently. That could also be valiantly. But you surpass them all.

And a woman like this receives praise in three different areas. You'll see it as you read through. You'll see it as you read through. She receives praise from her children, from her husband, and from her community. Verse 31, at the city gate.

Again, it's got the feel of a victory parade after battle. And her children rise up. Like the greatest of warriors.

[ 16 : 46 ] She surpasses them all. So three lessons for us there. I want to try and apply as much as I can of this view. So first of all, I want you to see that life is a war.

Life is a war. It's probably a surprising point, isn't it? This is talking about a wife. About a home. About a husband.

About children. Remember the poetic imagery. This is a valiant wife. This is a defended home with prey on the table. This is a husband who lacks no spoils.

The woman of the home is a sentry. Verse 27. She watches over the affairs of her household. She looks well to the ways of her household. She fears nothing.

And she mocks and she scorns the unknown. Do you see what Proverbs is saying? Do not mistake domestic labor for easy work.

[ 17 : 49 ] Or feminine character for soft weakness. Or marital roles for feeble passivity. Now here is a home to defend.

Here are children who teach. And instruct. And here is a woman that knows life is war. She's ready to fight. She's feisty. At the most basic level.

And doesn't this wife show us one of the great themes of Proverbs. That laziness will get you absolutely nowhere. Verse 27.

Laziness expects children to raise themselves. And the gutters to mend themselves. And the money in your bank to just somehow be there by divine right. So let me speak to the young people. The youngish folk. The best things in life are never ever given to you on a plate. Perhaps if you're really fortunate.

[ 18 : 53 ] You've gone to a good school. You're in a nice home. And you've had a great start to life. Maybe that isn't the case. And that gives you all you ever want. And more. But for the best things in life.

You have to work. You have to fight for them. And if you want to be a young man or a young woman. Who loves the Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel. And loves the Bible.

And loves his people. You're going to have to fight for it. You're going to have to fight for everything. And for everyone around you.

And everyone will tell you. Don't bother. Don't bother. And if you are a parent tonight. And you want to raise children who know the Lord.

And love him. Then you will know you have to fight for it. Because it will not just happen. They do not just become believers by magic.

[ 19 : 53 ] Do they? No life is war. And if you want a godly marriage. And you want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus.

You've got to fight for it. And I think lots of the pastoral problems. In the 11 years that I have had to deal with. Are because people just don't want to fight.

And Christian life is war. And so often I spend my time. Trying to patching up people. Actually who just don't want to fight. It's war on pride isn't it?

It is war on anger. It is war on envy. It is war on lust. And the deceitful words of our hearts. Isn't that what we see in Proverbs? There are only two ways to live.

Says the father is to his son. There is the broad road of folly. And there is the narrow road of wisdom. Says the father. And I know which one looks most attractive to you.

[ 20 : 53 ] But you must fight to be wise. Listen to my words. And Proverbs ends by saying to us. Here is a woman who fights.

Who fights on behalf of those closest to her. To provide for them. To teach them. To protect them. To honour them. To serve them. And this woman realises that this world does not owe her a living.

And that no one else is charged with providing a world of safety for her children. And so secondly I want us to learn this. This woman shows us. That character is death.

Character is death. Here is a wife. A valiant warring character. So what actually is that kind of character? How will you know it when you see it?

Here is. Here is this whole sermon in a nutshell. This woman gives herself away to her family and to her community with wholehearted selflessness.

[ 21 : 56 ] That's what she does. She gives herself away to her family and to her community with wholehearted selflessness. Isn't that one of the main strengths we want to say about her?

She works to get so that she can give. She brings her husband good, not harm. Like merchant ships she brings food.

She provides food out of her earnings she buys. Now when you pause to look at the chapter, which I really would love you to do this week. And you look at each of these verses.

Everything that she gives to someone else. Comes at great cost to herself. I don't know whether you noticed that. Everything that she gives to someone else. Comes at great cost to herself.

Good. Not harm to her husband. On birthdays and anniversaries. No. All the days of her life. Lifelong blessing.

[ 22 : 55 ] Poured out. On another person. How much is that going to cost? We're like shifts bringing food. From where? Have they come up around the corner?

No. From Australia maybe? From afar. There is no lengths. To which this woman won't go for her family. When the lion comes. Wake to eat.

It's because mum has been hunting in the night. Brothers and sisters. Female character. Is Christian character. Which is the way of the cross.

And so for young and for old. For single and for married. For male and for female. For adult and for child. Character is death to myself.

And to my needs. And my wants. And my desires. And my aims. And my goals. Do you recognize these words.

[ 23 : 53 ] Unless a man or woman. Hates even their own life. It cannot be my disciple. Why is a woman like this hard to find?

Why is a man like this hard to find? Or a Christian child. Or a Christian teenager. Like this hard to find. Because it's the way of death. Isn't it? And the way of pain. And the end to me.

And the beginning of you. And your needs first. And your priorities. Before mine. And it costs. It deeply costs. So it may be.

That you're on that stage. Where your thoughts have all turned already. To who you might be with one day. Finding the right person to marry. Well here is where to start tonight.

Start with being the right person. For someone else to marry. Start here. With the formation of cross shaped character. In your heart and soul and mind.

[ 25 : 00 ] Shaping you. From the inside out. Learn now. Give away yourself to others. Don't wait. Don't think.

I know when it all comes down to it. I'm like this. I'm this sort of person. But I'll be different when I'm married. Because you won't be. The extent. To which you are willing to die to yourself.

Will define the extent. To which you are one day praised. By the person you married. The extent. To which you are their greatest blessing. Or you become one of their greatest sorrows.

Sometimes it's said. Isn't it? The home is a woman's place. I hope you can see that. That is not the teaching of the Bible. That is not the Bible's perspective. Here is in Proverbs 31.

A woman of extraordinary skill. And strength. And ingenuity. But it is clear. In Proverbs 31. And in the Bible. It is saying. The home is her priority.

[ 26 : 03 ] And that is quite different. Isn't it? Between saying. The home is her place. And it's her priority. So she ranges. Far and wide. Outside the home.

To defend the home. To make the home. And teach the home. And love the home. I think that's a great courage. Isn't it? To those of you who are at work. Do you see that principle?

A woman's place is in the home. No. Her priority is the home. But she ranges far and wide. Outside the home. To defend the home. To make the home. To teach the home. To love the home.

And look at the radical extent. Of her giving. Look at verse 20. She opens her hand. To the poor. And reaches out her hands. To the needy. Isn't it amazing.

That the book ends. By setting a valiant woman. A valiant wife. Alongside a valiant king. In verses 1 to 9. What does the king do. In verses 1 to 9. She opens his mouth.

[ 26 : 59 ] To defend the interests of the poor. In court. But she opens her hands. And her arms. To feed the needy. What a word for sons to hear.

What a lesson. For daughters to learn. Find yourself a woman like this. Be a woman like this. Whose vision of life. Is cost to self.

Is always. Always outweighed. By love for others. And you have found a woman. Or you have become a woman. Who is worthy of the king's palaces. And is on a par.

With the best rulers. That God ever gave to his people. She is like royalty. But here is how I want to end. Not just this sermon. But a whole series on Proverbs. I want to say this. Male.

Female. Married. Single. Happy. Unhappy. Child. Or adult. There is one woman to love. And it's not this woman.

[ 27 : 57 ] Of Proverbs 31. The woman. To love. Is the same woman. That this woman loves. It's lady wisdom. Do you remember her?

Wisdom calls out in the street. Proverbs 2. She calls out her voice. She raises her voice. From the public square. She builds her house. She lays her table. With the finest of meats.

And spiced wines. And what does she say? She says this. Fear. Fear. The Lord. Listen to what God says. And you will be wives. Loving lady wisdom. Simply means to fear the Lord. And to love his words.

And to accept his instruction. The wife in Proverbs 31. She loves lady wisdom. She fears the Lord. Wives and women. Whether single or married. If you try to copy her.

[ 28 : 52 ] In her entirety. If you take Proverbs 31. And try to apply it. And think right. I'm going to do this. It will crush you. But isn't the truth this. If you fear the Lord first.

If you seek first. His kingdom. And his righteousness. And you seek to listen to him. And live by his words. Then you will find. Bit by bit. Week by week. This woman.

This woman's character traits. Begin seeping into your own life. Start small. Find this week. One new aspect.

Of dying to self. Which you can actually begin with. To begin to give yourself away to others. And do you know what?

On the other side of death. Do you know what you find? You find life. And if you have children at home. Then death to self. Probably shapes the entirety of your day.

[ 29 : 48 ] Isn't it? Well is it willing. And joyful. Or grudging and resentful. And if you don't have a family tonight.

Perhaps you have a career. And means. Or even without those things. Do you have something to share. Which currently resides.

Only with you. But this week. You can begin to give away. Husbands. Does your wife. See in you. The primary example.

Of death to self. In the home. I have met plenty of men. Who given half a chance. Would complain that their wife. Is not a Proverbs 31.

Kind of woman. Without being the kind of man. That a Proverbs 31. Well. Wives being a Proverbs 31. Whilst. Whilst being a kind of man. That a Proverbs 31.

[ 30 : 45 ] Woman would never ever. Dream of married. If you're young. And you're hoping to be married one day. Let me assure you men.

That a man. Who knows how to die. On the battlefield of self. Will be more attractive. To a woman. Than anything else. About you. Wherever we are.

Let's start here. Let's start by loving. Lady wisdom. By loving God's ways. And loving God's word.

Because then. Everything else. Absolutely everything else. Will fall into line. Because the fear of the Lord. Is the beginning of wisdom.

But fools despise wisdom. And discipline. That's right. Thank you.