

The Proverbs 31 Woman

LIFE FAITH FUSION DEVOTIONAL

SCRIPTURE STUDY

Genesis 2:21-23
 Genesis 38
 Joshua 2
 Proverbs 11:16
 Proverbs 12:4
 Proverbs 14:1
 Proverbs 18:22
 Proverbs 19:14
 Proverbs 31:10-31
 Hosea 4:12-14
 Isaiah 43:25
 Jeremiah 31:35
 1 John 1:9

DIGGING DEEPER

Surround, aid, succor, helper—all are Hebrew synonyms from Genesis 2:18 when God describes the woman's relationship to her husband.

PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Jesus,
 Help me to understand the depth of your love for the wives and mothers in my life.
 In Jesus' Name,
 Amen.



THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN

Women were not honored during the reign of King Solomon when Proverbs 31 was written. Unfortunately, throughout most of history, women were considered property or second-class citizens. Israel's idolatrous neighbors based their value of women on their pagan theology and worship practices. These societies had fertility rites that reduced women to three roles: the untouched virgin; the prostitutes who serviced the temples of their gods; and the married women who bore their children.

God warned His people to be separate from the other nations—but the Jews disobeyed His commands. As a result, the Israelite men often adopted their views of women from their pagan neighbors. In Hosea 4:12-14 God bluntly warns His people:

“My people...consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God. Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-laws to adultery....the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes—” (NIV)

In the Old Testament, God repeatedly warns with His people of dire consequences for their idolatry. Even in the Jewish faith, most Hebrew rabbis believed women played a secondary role. Such belief is reflected in the Jewish prayer: “I thank thee I am not a woman.” Contrary to rabbinical tenets, women did assume honorable ministries in both the Old and New Testaments.

Miriam, the sister of Moses, helped to lead the Jews out of Egypt (Exodus 15:20,21). Her song of deliverance is included in the Old Testament. Deborah, the patriotic military advisor and judge helped to deliver her people (Judges 4:4-10); Queen Esther, the wife of Xerxes, risked her life to save the Jews from Haman's hand in Persia (Esther 4:16), and Huldah, the prophetess who revealed God's secret message to national leaders (2 Kings 22:14).

The authors of Proverbs affirm the inestimable value of a righteous woman to God, to her family, and to her community.

- 12:4a "A wife of noble character is her husband's crown."
 - 14:1a "A wise woman builds her house..."
 - 11:16a "A kindhearted woman gains respect."
 - 18:22 "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord."
 - 19:14 "Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord."
(All from NIV)
- How does any form of idolatry cause us to devalue others?
 - From the Proverbs listed above, how is a wife described? What does she receive, according to these verses?
 - Have you been in situations and activities where you felt devalued or unloved? Read Psalm 139 and list the ways the Psalmist says that God loves you and values you.

THE NEW PARADIGM

In the beginning God made man and woman with different responsibilities, but equal before Him (Genesis 2:21-23). That plan was corrupted by the poor choices of Adam and Eve. God designed Eve to be a "helpmeet" for Adam. "Helpmeet" is not even a real word. The King James translators created the word because the definition is broader than a single description. The picture of "helpmeet" is interlocking fingers. Husband and wife are designed to complete each other. If you meditate on that image, the interlocking fingers image describes a marriage that would be stronger, closer, almost melded together. The common marriage vow states "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder." A struggle for dominance is not even an issue when two partners are surrendered to God and loving each other sacrificially.

God viewed His Israeli women and was saddened by their confining roles in society as virgins, temple prostitutes, or propagators of the race. He had envisioned so much more for them and their subjugation grieved His heart. God the Father wanted women to lead lives of incredible blessings and opportunities. Therefore, He inspired the author of Proverbs 31 to describe a woman's potential.

God took the "three-sided box" of property, prostitution, and propagation, and erased the words on the three sides. In its place, He opened the "box" to a whole new paradigm for women. The godly woman loves the Lord, is filled with wisdom, has foresight, possesses great integrity, is creative and cares for others. She has a healthy self-image, speaks wisdom instead of gossip and is virtuous. She makes sashes and sells them to merchants, she sees that her trading is profitable, she buys land, plants vineyards and buys wool and flax to make clothes for her family. As a concerned citizen, she sews for the poor, helps those in need and is an energetic, hard worker. This amazing woman is honored by her children, praised by her husband and valued by her community.

“A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (30 NIV).

- Imagine being with Adam and Eve before the fall. How would the role of women have changed if they had never fallen into sin? When we receive Christ, He makes us “new creatures.” How would knowing Jesus transform your marriage and your family? How would it impact the way you would treat each other? Is your home peaceful place, or is everyone jockeying for supremacy?
- Refer to the list of characteristics mentioned in the paragraph on the bottom of page two. Circle in red the ones you do (or your wife does) for your family. Put a box around the ones you’d like to do (or the ones you think you wife would like to do). How do you feel when you do this? Do you feel freedom or pressure?
- Women, are there any qualities listed in Proverbs 31:10-31 that you believe God is developing in your life? Men, are there ways you can appreciate or affirm these specific attributes and acts of service the women in your life perform? How can you instill in your children respect for their mother?

GOD’S PROMISE OF FORGIVENESS AND RESTORATION

Many women feel so inadequate when they read the list of amazing qualities the Proverbs 31 woman possesses. They often focus on their failures. However, God continually reminds us of His redemption and restoration. Rahab and Tamar were honored by being included in the genealogy of the Messiah in Matthew chapter one. If you study their life stories, you would conclude that they made some poor choices in their lives. Genesis 38 and Joshua 2 reveal the biographies of “less than perfect” women. Here are a few of their mistakes.

Playing “god”	Manipulative	Pregnant and not married	Lying for personal gain	[Tamar (Genesis 38)]
Prostitute	Worshiper of many gods	Liar	Deceiver	Low moral standards
				[Rahab (Joshua 2)]

Tamar and Rahab were ancestors of Jesus. If we were to choose Grandparents for Jesus, women with the above past histories would probably not be on the list. But God is the God of forgiveness and grace, and He chose them to be in His son’s family line. No matter what you have on your list, God is still the God of forgiveness and grace. In 1 John 1:9 we learn how to move off the above list and receive God’s mercy:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (NIV)

If you prayed through that scripture then your past is completely removed from God’s memory according to Jeremiah 31:35b and Isaiah 43:25:

“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” (NIV)

“I, yes, I alone am he who blots away your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again.” (LB)

You are now ready to read God’s previous list and experience the wonderful grace and freedom of the Proverbs 31 Woman. Take time to review this chapter with new eyes.

- Read slowly through Proverbs 31:10-31. Write on the back the new appreciation you have for the Proverbs 31 Woman and how you will apply it to yourself or to the women in your life.