

## Section 2: God's Good Pattern For Marriage (Part Four)

### Lesson 4: The Wife's Role: The Godly Woman's Picture

#### Introduction

**H**ave you ever wondered what made the world hate Jesus? Think about it: How could a man who never sinned against *anyone* be rejected by *everyone*—men of every stripe? How could a man who healed the sick, fed the poor, submitted to the government, and upheld the law be hated by the sick, the poor, the political, and the religious? The reason is not because there was anything wrong with Jesus, but rather *because there was nothing wrong with him*. Jesus' perfection revealed the glaring imperfection of everyone else around him. This was not because Jesus was a pious prig looking down his nose at others, but simply because the light always exposes the darkness, the straight always reveals the crooked, and the clean always makes plain the dirty. To be near the Lord Jesus Christ, and to be under his Word of truth, is inseparable from having the sins and failures of our own hearts and lives exposed. The light of his glory cannot but expose the depth of our depravity.

We might think that this conviction only happened for those who *physically walked with Christ* upon the earth. But that is not true. This same conviction of sin happened to everyone who heard the voice of Christ proclaimed through his prophets of old, even before his incarnation, (*that is why so many of them were killed*). Moreover, this same conviction of sin continues to happen to everyone who hears the Word of Christ proclaimed today (*that is why we still face persecution*). **To hear the standard of holiness to which we are called as God's children set forth plainly from his Word is, quite unavoidably, a sin-exposing experience.** The light of God's Word reveals the darkness of our hearts. The good and straight way of the Lord reveals the crookedness of the paths upon which we have all strayed. The cleanness and purity of the holy life described in the Scriptures makes the filthy stains of our failings stick out like a dead fly floating on top of a glass of milk.

This is no less true when it comes to our present exploration of the holy calling of God with respect to marriage and family. Spending these weeks drawing near to Christ through his Word and seeing the perfections of his will concerning marriage is exposing the failings of all of our hearts. None of us has lived the holy life we are called to live. None of us who are married have been sinless in our role as husband or wife. Even as believers, many of our marriages have deep wounds that need healed, sinful patterns that need broken, and bitter grievances that need forgiven. The fact is, the nearer we draw to Christ in this study, and the more clearly we see the perfections of his holy will for our marriages and families, the more we will be humbled through conviction because the glory of Christ's perfection always reveals the glaring imperfections of others. **The question is, how will we respond to the conviction we are all experiencing?**

Will we respond like the Pharisees of old who, rather than acknowledging their failings, sought to silence Christ's voice of conviction so that they could continue maintaining the illusion that they were good enough on their own? Will we avoid the light of truth, or even worse, try to snuff it out? Or, will we respond like the publican tax collector who fell down before the Lord in humble prayer, and beat his breast as he pleaded, "*Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.*" In Jesus' own words, "*I tell you, this man, rather than the other, went down to his house justified [in the sight of God],*" (Luke 18:14). Beloved, let us be like him.

But it is not only *our response* to our sin that is important. **We also need to ask: How will Jesus respond to us?** That is, how will Jesus relate to us in the exposure of our many marital sins and failings? Will we be rejected? Will we be cast out? Will he forsake us? We need not wonder long over these questions because the Bible speaks plainly to them. Do you remember the adulterous woman whose marital sin had been exposed as she was caught in the act and then thrust down before the Lord Jesus in John 8:1-11? How did Jesus respond to the exposure of her marital sins?

First, in tender compassion, Jesus drew the public humiliation and shame away from her by saying, "*Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone.*" With these words he reminded everyone present that the judgment they were about to give was a judgment that they themselves would be condemned by if it were held up to their lives.

Second, after all the men had dropped their stones and walked away, Jesus showed her in a very personal way that she was not alone in her failures by saying, “*Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?*” In other words he said, “*Look! They have all departed because not even a single one of them has lived a perfectly righteous life in my sight either.*”

Third, Jesus showed her that his heart is a heart of mercy toward the failing and that he was both ready and willing to offer her full forgiveness if she would turn from her sins to him. He communicated this by saying, “*Neither do I condemn you.*” Jesus was the only righteous person present that day—the only one who had a right to cast the stone. But he did not. Instead, he offered this guilty sinner his mercy. He showed her that even in her failings he was willing to love her.

But we cannot miss the fact that the conversation did not end there, did it? Jesus did not stop with forgiveness. He continued to minister to this sinful woman by calling her to diligently pursue the holy life which he has outlined for her in his Word. We see this in Jesus’ final words: “*From now on, go and sin no more.*” In other words, Jesus was saying, “*As a forgiven sinner, now I want you to strive after the righteous life I created you to live, not only in your marriage, but in every area of life.*”

***Dear ones, we must apply these same lessons to our own hearts as we continue our sin-exposing study of God’s good design for the marriage and family.*** Everything we are learning is exposing the sin in all of us, not just you. You are not the only one in the room who has fallen short of the glory of God in this area. Moreover, while this study is exposing our sins, (*as it should!*), we must also remember the abounding mercy and steadfast love of our Savior who would say unto every repentant heart this day: “*Neither do I condemn you.*” Our Lord is the God of all grace. He is “*a God ready to forgive*” all who truly turn to him in repentance and faith, (Neh. 9:17). And yet, that cannot be where we leave the matter because that is not where Jesus left it. Jesus is not only willing to forgive us of our marital sins, he is also keen on transforming our marriages and families to more fully reflect his holy will. Just as he said to this fallen woman, so he would say to you and I, “*Go and sin no more.*” Therefore, as we rest in God’s mercy for all our failings, we must also continue to press on in the power of God’s Spirit to be more and more conformed to God’s good and holy will for our marriages and families.

Today we will do this by beginning to consider the role of the wife. In order to do that, we will spend the balance of our time in Proverbs 31:10-31—the *quintessential text in all of Scripture for describing the picture of a godly woman*. We want to begin here because the most important thing a husband or wife can do to prepare for marriage and to be faithful in marriage is simply to strive to be the Christian man or Christian woman that God calls them to be in his Word.

## **Eleven Characteristics of a Godly Woman**

**L**arge lists always run the risk of being so numerous that much of what is said is forgotten. But each and every one of the characteristics described in this passage is important for the daughters of the Lord to diligently pursue—whether married or not. Therefore, I would encourage my dear sisters in Christ to take care in digesting what follows, and to return to it often. Do not think of this passage as an impossible standard that crushes your spirit. But rather, think of it as an inspiring picture that should motivate your prayers and focus your priorities as a growing Christian woman. Moreover, this teaching has great application for both genders and for every walk of life. If you are a single woman or a widow, these verses still outline the holy character that should define your walk with Christ. If, as a father or mother, God has blessed you with daughters, this is a picture of the woman you are called to help those daughters become by faith. If God has blessed you with sons, this is a picture of the kind of woman you are to encourage those sons to marry. After all, there is no greater guide for us to follow in discerning the qualities we should desire in a wife than that which is set forth in God’s Word. Therefore, no matter your station, these verses have a ministry of grace for each of us. Let’s look now at God’s beautiful description of biblical womanhood.

## **A Godly Woman's Picture (From Proverbs 31:10-28):**

### **1. She is Rare & Precious**

**Proverbs 31:10** | *An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.*

In a world of weeds, a godly woman is a beautiful fragrant flower in full bloom. She is *rare* in that she does not mimic the normal patterns of this sinful world in *her attitudes, her dress, her activities, or aspirations*. Rather, she exudes the character of her Savior from the heart and with sincerity. She endeavors for her life to be conformed to God's will, and that makes her shine with a beauty unlike all unbelieving women—no matter her physical appearance or form. By her faith in Christ, she possesses a beauty of heart and of soul that is not worthy to be compared with the fleeting attractions of the world.

Moreover, she is also *precious*. This is because the worth of her devotion and care toward her husband yields greater benefits to that man (and her family) than any other earthly resources ever could. The value of her selfless love and relentless sacrifice "*is far more precious than jewels.*" Even if they are poor in earthly treasure, a godly woman makes a home very rich indeed.

### **2. She is Trustworthy & Responsible**

**Proverbs 31:11** | *The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.*

Notice that this verse describes the virtue of a godly woman by the impact her character has on "*the heart of her husband.*" The husband of a godly woman is not beset by a nagging anxiety in the back of his mind about how his wife is conducting herself. Instead, he has peace and joy as he goes about his days because he "*trusts in her.*" He knows that she will be both *trustworthy* and *responsible* in the fulfillment of her role within the family. She will not be lazy or indulgent; she will not be careless or selfish; she will not be deceptive or divisive. Nor will she betray her vows. Instead, her persistent reputation of faithfulness gives "*the heart of her husband*" a quiet and steady confidence that through her honorable stewardship "*he will have no lack of gain.*"

***Q: Are you trustworthy and responsible in your stewardship? (Rhetorical)***

***Q: How do violations of "trust" cripple relationships?***

### **3. She Does Good To Her Husband & Not Harm**

**Proverbs 31:12** | *She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.*

While I recognize that it is not popular to say against the backdrop of feminism, it is the clear teaching of Scripture that a wife's life is not supposed to be centered on self-actualization (*that is, the accomplishment of her own goals for her own satisfaction*). Many women in our modern times have been told to live this way. Moreover, they have been promised that if they do live this way, it will set them free from the gloomy chains of traditionalism. Yet, not a few of the women who have taken that unbiblical advice have eventually found that even though they climbed the ladder of success according to the definitions of the world, somehow it has left them deeply lonely and unfulfilled. The reason for this is because that approach to life is contrary to God's normative design for women. God's design for the wife is that she gives herself away to her husband as a joyful servant of *his honor, his flourishing, and his success*. The fact that the statement I just made is offensive to many people shows just how far we have drifted from a happy acceptance of God's revealed will. Isn't that description simply another way of saying what Proverbs 31:12 plainly says: "*She does him good...all the days of her life.*"? Moreover, isn't this the very essence of the dignified title "*helpmate*" which God honored women to bear from the beginning, (Gen. 2:20)?

Sadly, some people will immediately think that such a calling is just another form of degrading servitude meant to oppress women. But nothing could be further from the truth. A woman who devotes herself to the "*good*" of her husband is not living a lesser life. Neither is she in any way degraded by her humble acts of selfless service—*did Jesus become lesser by "taking the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7)?* Much to the contrary, when a precious daughter of the Lord undertakes this life of servanthood by faith, she is embracing the pattern of life which God designed to bring her heart deepest joy and greatest fulfillment. She is embracing the role in which the resplendent beauty of all her gifts and graces will shine brightest and bear the most fruit. Moreover, when, by faith, she humbly conforms her ambitions to the revealed will of God, she is embracing the pattern of life which God designed for the flourishing of her marriage and family in Christ.

### **4. She is Industrious, Hardworking, & Willing In the Care of Her Family (8 Verses!)**

**Proverbs 31:13** | *She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.*

**Proverbs 31:14** | *She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar.*

**Proverbs 31:15** | *She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.*

**Proverbs 31:16** | *She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.*

**Proverbs 31:18** | *She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.*

**Proverbs 31:19** | *She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.*

**Proverbs 31:24** | *She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant.*

**Proverbs 31:27** | *She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.*

A godly woman is deeply devoted to the care of her husband and family. She thoughtfully “*considers*” the needs of the home and “*seeks*” out suitable materials—even “*from afar*” if necessary—in order to secure proper “*provision...for her household.*” Whether by *making*, *baking*, *selling*, or *trading*, her heart and hands are persistently set “*to the distaff and...holding the spindle.*” The “*planted vineyards*” of her efforts are always bearing “*fruit.*” The depth of her love for her husband (and children) causes her to “*rise*” early in the morning and to keep the “*lamp*” burning into the “*night.*” From sunrise to sunset she is tireless in her sacrificial service to her family. But most importantly of all, this comprehensive devotion brings her no bitterness of spirit, nor is complaint found upon her lips. She is not begrudging in her labors, nor does she perceive that a life of service to her husband (and children) belittles her value or stifles her joy. Instead, we are told that she “*works with willing hands,*” gladly spending and being spent so that those who depend upon her, and whom she loves more than her own life, will know no lack.

## **5. She Takes Care of Her Body**

**Proverbs 31:17** | *She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.*

I want to be very clear: this verse is *not* about the size or shape of a woman’s body. It is *not* saying that women need to look a certain way, or to fulfill whatever the culture’s current ideals of beauty entail. God has made all of his daughters beautiful in their own way and they do *not* need to feel pressured by anyone to be unhappy with the shape or form that God has given to them. That is *not* where a woman’s value is derived. As I Peter 3:3-5 teaches us,

*“Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and putting on of gold jewelry—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands...”*

Those sacred words are the definition of true and lasting beauty. Nevertheless, this verse *is* telling us that a godly woman takes care of herself. She seeks to maintain her body in such a way that, inasmuch as it depends upon her, she is “*strong*” and able-bodied for her family. The reality is, whether as a woman or a man, unhealthy lifestyles with respect to diet and exercise make us less helpful to others. We become tired more easily, we have a harder time focusing, we are limited in what we can do, and we even become unable to meet certain needs. No one can control their health fully, and it is foolish to think that we can. But we are called to be good stewards of our bodies so that we can better love and serve those around us. According to Scripture, this too is part of what it means to be a godly woman.

## **6. She is Generous & Compassionate To Others**

**Proverbs 31:20** | *She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.*

The heart of a godly woman is *primarily* focused on her own home and family, but it is *not exclusively* focused that way. She also sees the needs of others around her—whether in her church body or in her community—and she warmly “*opens her hand*” to them. A godly woman has a *generous* heart that is ready to share with others. And a godly woman has a *compassionate* heart that genuinely feels for the sorrows and struggles of others. These twin graces cause her to “*reach out her hands to the needy*” in all manner of service, sacrifice, and support. Thus, not only are the members of her family the beneficiaries of her godly character, but also the orphan, the widow, the stranger, and the lonely, etc. She is a vessel of God’s kindness to all around her.

## **7. She Plans & Prepares For the Days Ahead With a Heart of Faith**

**Proverbs 31:21** | *She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet.*

**Proverbs 31:25** | *Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.*

It would be easy to misread these verses as containing a tinge of arrogance. But that is not the message intended to be conveyed. The distinction set forth in these verses is not only in the *planning for the future*, but much more importantly *in the posture of heart that stands behind that planning*. The difference here is not so much in whether or not a woman plans, but in *how she goes about that planning*, (i.e. with “*strength and dignity*”).

Many women think about the future from a place of fretting anxiety and fear. It is their anxious contemplation of all the “*what ifs*” of tomorrow that drives them. The result is that, while they may still arrive at a good plan that meets the needs of their family, they will not have peace or joy in their heart in the process. This is because, rather than operating out of a settled dependence upon the Lord, they are foolishly trying to be the sovereign Lord themselves. They are acting as if the weight of their ‘*tomorrows*’ rests upon their shoulders. But notice that these verses set forth a very different picture of the godly woman. She too plans and prepares just as all women tend to do. But she does it from a position of faith, not fear—“*she is not afraid...*”—and from a posture of joy, not anxiety—“*she laughs at the time to come.*”

The godly woman works hard and plans diligently for “*the time to come.*” She considers the days ahead and the various contingencies they will bring. But she does so from a posture of peace, hope, and joy, because, in the end, she knows that all the ‘*tomorrows*’ of her family’s life are in the strong hands of her faithful Lord.

**Q: How does a wife’s anxiety, fretting, and fear about the future negatively impact the marriage and family?**

### **8. She Knows How To Be Frugal, But She is Not Austere**

**Proverbs 31:22** | *She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.*

This verse brings together an important balance in the life of a godly woman. She is certainly called to be *frugal*, not extravagant. She looks for ways to save money for her family and to “*make [various needed items] for herself*”—that is, by her own hands. But it would be wrong to think that this call to frugality and to heavenly-minded priorities means that she is *austere*—that is, that she has forgotten how to make time for beauty, pleasure, and luxury. No. The same woman described in Proverbs 31 as a garden-planting thrifter who mends her own clothing is the woman who also knows how to adorn a beautiful dress of “*fine linen and purple*” in order to bless her husband. She is the same woman who, at the right times and in the right ways, knows how to enjoy the good things of life that God has given. Her commitment to godliness does not make her gruff and unkept. Instead, it teaches her how to enjoy the finer things of life without finding her identity in them, or making them her god.

### **9. Her Character & Conduct Makes Her Husband’s Honor Increase**

**Proverbs 31:23** | *Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.*

This seems to be a strange verse to find in the midst of a chapter describing the character of a godly woman. Yet, it points out a particularly important aspect of God’s design. The character and conduct of a man’s wife will either increase his honor in the eyes of others, or diminish it. Her gentle spirit, joyful submission, prudent character, and loving devotion will not only greatly bless the heart of her husband, but it will also cause others to say, “*What sort of man must this be to be treated with such respect and honor by his bride?*” Sadly, the opposite is also true. A man’s honor can quickly be diminished when it is observed by others that his wife does not behave with dignity, or does not show him respect, or is reluctant to offer her submission. Those behaviors (and many more like them) will, in turn, cause others to say, “*What sort of man must this be that his own wife does not honor and respect him?*” Thus, a great position of influence has been entrusted to women, *and a godly woman will not abuse it*. Rather, she will take every opportunity to commend her husband’s honor by the character and conduct of her life.

**Q: Ladies, have you ever considered what a powerful position of influence God has entrusted to you in marriage? What are some ways that you can steward this well?**

### **10. She is Godly, Wise, & Loving In Her Speech**

**Proverbs 31:26** | *She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.*

Sadly, many women fail to recognize how deeply they sabotage their own happiness in the home by their unbridled tongue. It is common for women to think that if they can only pester, critique, and nag their husband enough, he will finally bend to their desire. But the opposite is true. A man will never be more inclined to die to himself in his wife’s service than when he

feels sincerely loved and respected by her words. There is little a man will not do for a bride who makes him feel honored, adored, and admired by her encouraging speech.

The speech of a godly woman is like a healing balm to a sore wound; a calming embrace to a fearful heart; an encouraging word to the downtrodden spirit; and a word of clarifying insight to the confused and overwhelmed. She does not use “*her tongue*” to erode her husband (and children) through nagging, complaining, comparing, berating, and critiquing. Instead, “*she opens her mouth with wisdom*”, knowing not only *when to speak*, but *what to speak*, so that her speech is “*seasoned with salt*,” and “*helpful for building up and not for tearing down*,” (Col. 4:6; Eph. 4:29). Her words are called “*wise*” because the truth of God’s Word is always guiding and undergirding her speech. Moreover, even in times of correction and frustration, her speech is guided by “*the teaching of kindness*”. This means that her intent, even when hard words must be spoken, is not to destroy, but to bless; not to cut, but to mend and strengthen.

### ***Q: How are you doing in this area? (Rhetorical)***

#### **11. She is the Joy of Her Husband & Children**

**Proverbs 31:28** | *Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.*

It is not hard to see why a woman who fits the description which has preceded this verse will be the joy and delight of her family. A woman whose character resembles the picture set forth in Proverbs 31 is a woman who will be the treasure of her husband and children. Together, the husband and children will “*praise her*” and “*call her blessed*” with hearts that overflow with thanksgiving for the manifold blessings she brings into their lives. And yet, they will also do more. They will also recognize where the blessings they are enjoying have truly come from.

A godly woman does not ultimately draw attention to herself. The beautiful character of her life gives testimony to the God who is re-shaping her heart by his love. And thus, not only will her family “*praise her*”, but they will trace the beam of her sunshine back up to its source and greatly bless the God of heaven for the unmerited kindness he has bestowed upon them through her selfless life. Thus, her life of devotion as a wife (and as a mother) will not have the ultimate aim of honoring herself, or even of making her family happy. Rather the chief end of all that she does is to bring glory to the God who has rescued her heart from sin through the gospel of his grace. She will joyfully receive her family’s words of affection, but her God will receive all the glory.

### **Conclusion**

**A**fter considering the multifaceted beauty of biblical womanhood, I must admit that it is very difficult for me to understand how anyone could think of this picture as *degrading* or *stifling* to women. Much to the contrary, the godly woman’s picture in Proverbs 31 is a description of God-glorifying dignity, strength, devotion, skill, sacrifice, determination, and selflessness that reminds us why womanhood is such a beautiful and desirable calling from God. While none of us reaches to the heights of holiness set forth in God’s Word, nevertheless, these are the things that *all women* should long for, pray for, and strive to be in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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

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

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

***Proverbs 31:29-31***