

5/10/26

## **The Portrait of the Wise Woman**

**Read: Proverbs 31:10–31**

### **Sermon Introduction**

There are certain moments in life when you see something so beautiful that it almost takes your breath away. That is how I felt a few years ago when I studied this passage in Proverbs to teach our youth during a series called “Building Godly Character.”

At the time, I used this passage to encourage the young ladies in the group. But as I studied it, I realized something important. While there is no doubt that Proverbs 31 gives us a female portrait of wisdom, the virtues displayed in this woman are reinforced throughout Proverbs and the rest of Scripture as characteristics all Christians should pursue.

That is one reason I chose this passage for this morning. Yes, this is a Mother’s Day sermon, and so it has a special focus for the women in the room. But my hope is that as we look at this portrait of a wise woman, we will all have our breath taken away.

And my prayer is that we will find much application for our own lives, while also learning to recognize and honor the wisdom of God displayed in the women He has so graciously placed in our lives.

**Main Point:** This passage portrays three elements of the wise women’s life so that we would value, honor, and pursue godly wisdom in every season of life.

### **Outline:**

**I. The Root of Her Wisdom: She Fears the Lord (v. 30)**

**II. The Fruit of Her Wisdom: She Displays Godly Character (v. 11-27)**

**III. The Honor of Her Wisdom: She Is Praised by Others (v. 10, 28–31)**

#### **I. The Root of Her Wisdom: She Fears the Lord (v. 30)**

We must begin with the end, because the end of this section shows us the motive behind everything we see in this woman’s life.

Look at verse 30 **“Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, *but* a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.”**

This verse gives us the basis for the whole passage. The woman of Proverbs 31 is praised because she fears the Lord. Something is influencing her priorities, motivating her labor, and giving direction to everything that she does.

**First**, we see a comparison. The first part says, “**Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain.**” Charm and charisma can draw us in and disguise what is really in the heart. Beauty is vain because it is temporary and isn’t ultimately what matters most.

The second part sets the contrast, “**But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.**” The wise woman possesses something true, lasting, and eternally significant. The fear of the Lord is the source of her character, the ruling principle of her life, and the reason she is who she is.

**Second**, we need to understand fear biblically. Have you ever thought about the effect of fear on our life? That is important because all fear has a governing, or you could say authoritative, influence on our lives.

**The person who fears heights (me) stays away from ziplines, rock climbing, and the edge of the Grand Canyon.**

**The person who fears getting a ticket slows down when they see a police car.**

**The person who fears confrontation may stay silent when they should speak.**

Fear is always at work in us. It governs what we avoid, what we pursue, what we value, what we trust in, and how we live. We often do what we do because we fear something.

We do not live without fear. The question is whether our fear is rightly ordered according to reality. The Scriptures tell us once we truly see and know God correctly, all our fear is properly redirected to Him.

**Third**, what does Proverbs teach us about the fear of the Lord and the life it produces?

The book of Proverbs shows us that the fear of the Lord is not a minor part of wisdom. It is the foundation, starting point, and root of a godly life.

The book reveals at least five different effects of the fear of the Lord on our lives.

**First**, the fear of the Lord is the starting point for all true knowledge and wisdom (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). True knowledge and wisdom begin when we know God rightly and live properly in light of that knowledge.

**Second**, the fear of the Lord is something we must choose and pursue. Proverbs 1:29 speaks of those who did not choose the fear of the Lord. That means the fear of the Lord can be rejected.

And Proverbs 2:1–5 teaches that we must receive God’s words, treasure His commandments, and seek wisdom like hidden treasure. The fear of the Lord increases in the heart that truly seeks Him through His Word and prayer.

**Third**, the fear of the Lord keeps us from evil (Proverbs 3:7; 16:6). And Proverbs 8:13 goes even further. The fear of the Lord does not just avoid sin because of consequences. It changes what we love, what we hate, what we embrace, and what we reject.

**Fourth**, the fear of the Lord produces uprightness, humility, and honor (Proverbs 14:2; 15:33; see also 22:4). A person who truly fears the Lord will desire integrity, honesty, and righteousness. The fear of the Lord makes us teachable, correctable, and submissive to His Word, and that is the path to true honor.

**Fifth**, the fear of the Lord gives confidence, refuge, life, and contentment (Proverbs 14:26–27; 19:23). The fear of the Lord gives confidence because when we know and trust God, we do not need to be ruled by the fear of man, circumstances, or the future.

**So this begs the question, is the fear of the Lord at work in your life? Do you know the truth about God’s holiness and justice? Do you understand that you are a sinner who has lived for yourself and rejected God, His ways, and His Word?**

**Scripture teaches that sin makes us guilty before God and places us at enmity with Him. He is perfectly just to punish sin because every sin is ultimately an offense against Him. And if that truth creates fear in your heart, that fear has a gracious purpose. It is meant to drive you to Christ.**

**When we rightly fear God, we should not run away from Him. We need to run to Him, because only in Christ can we find forgiveness, grace, mercy, and salvation. God is not only holy and just; He is also loving and merciful. In love, God sent Jesus Christ, God the Son, to become man, live perfectly in the fear of the Lord, and offer Himself as the sinless sacrifice in the place of sinners. He died to bear the penalty of sin and rose again so that all who repent and believe in Him will be saved.**

**That is why the hymn says, “’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.” Grace opens our eyes to the seriousness of our sin, and grace leads us to the Savior who alone can remove our guilt. So stop pretending you are good enough before God. You do not measure up to His perfect standard. Come to your senses, turn from your sin, and trust in Christ for salvation.**

So, Proverbs teaches us that the fear of the Lord transforms our whole life. It gives wisdom, turns us from evil, produces humility and uprightness, gives confidence and refuge, and leads to life and contentment. But those are general descriptions. In the rest of this passage, we see what

the fear of the Lord looks like in practice. For the specifics we will need to go to our next point...

## **II. The Fruit of Her Wisdom: She Displays Godly Character (v. 11-27)**

Before we begin, it is important to note that this section is an acrostic poem. Each stanza begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This structure likely aided memorization and emphasized the importance of the passage. In that sense, this is the A–Z of the wise woman.

I have organized these verses into four headings that highlight the godly character of the wise woman. Let's briefly walk through each one.

**First**, godly character is displayed in diligent service and compassionate care (v.13–15, 21–22, 27, and 20).

Look at verses **13–15**, **“She looks for wool and flax and works with her hands in delight. 14 She is like merchant ships; She brings her food from afar. 15 She rises also while it is still night and gives food to her household And portions to her maidens.”**

Verse **13** shows that she is diligent and joyful in her work. Wool and flax were used to make useful items for her household, and she does this work not resentfully, but **“in delight.”**

Verse **14** says **“like merchant ships,”** she is resourceful, willing to search, plan, and go beyond what is convenient to provide for her household. Verse **15** adds that she rises early to provide food and portions for her household. She plans, prepares, and organizes what needs to be done.

Look at verses **21–22** **“She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household are clothed with scarlet. 22 She makes coverings for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple.”**

Every season brings change, and every change brings its own challenges. Verse **21** says she is **“not afraid of the snow,”** because her household is clothed and prepared. Her diligence has produced readiness.

The wise woman does not respond to changing circumstances with fear or panic. She plans ahead. She anticipates what may come and makes wise, thoughtful preparations.

Verse **22** says her clothing is **“fine linen and purple.”** This shows that she gives attention to beauty, quality, and dignity. It is not a picture of extravagance or materialism, but of a life marked by thoughtful care. Her diligence shows up in the details, including how she presents herself.

Look at verse **27**, **“She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.”**

The godly woman faithfully watches over her household. The words **“looks well”** carry the idea of keeping watch or paying careful attention. She is not disconnected, distracted, or disengaged.

She keeps an active pulse on her family, remains sensitive to their needs, and gives thoughtful attention to those under her care. Even though she has commitments and dealings outside the home, she does not neglect the primary ministry God has entrusted to her in the home.

It also says she **“does not eat the bread of idleness.”** She rejects laziness, procrastination, excuses, and unproductive habits. She does not waste her life on empty pursuits. She is vigilant, productive, and faithful.

Look at verse **20**, **“She extends her hand to the poor, and she stretches out her hands to the needy.”**

The wise woman is generous and caring. The language of **“extends”** and **“stretches”** shows that she actively seeks ways to compassionately meet the needs of others.

In summary, this wise woman is not lazy or passive. She is the opposite of the sluggard. She is diligent, joyful, resourceful, sacrificial, and wise in the way she serves those God has entrusted to her care.

**Second**, a godly character is displayed in wise and productive stewardship. Look at verse **16**, **“She considers a field and buys it; From her earnings she plants a vineyard.”**

This shows that the wise woman has good judgment and initiative. She considers the field. She evaluates whether it is suitable, whether it will benefit her family, and whether she has the means and time to cultivate it. Then, with wisdom, she buys it.

She uses her earnings to plant a vineyard. She used wisdom and productivity and reinvested to provide further blessing. And planting a vineyard was no small task. It required planning, labor, and ongoing oversight.

Look at verse **24**, **“She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies belts to the tradesmen.”**

She is so capable and productive that she has a surplus to sell. And if others are willing to buy what she makes, then her work must be both useful and well made. This highlights her skill, excellence, and entrepreneurial wisdom.

Look at verse **18**, **“She senses that her gain is good; Her lamp does not go out at night.”**

She recognizes the value of her work, and therefore she is willing to continue laboring into the night. This is not procrastination or selfish ambition. It is faithful productivity.

She uses her abilities well. Her labor brings benefit to her household and value to others.

**Third**, a godly character is displayed in strength and dignity. Look at verses **17** and **25**: **“She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong... Strength and dignity are her clothing, And she smiles at the future.”**

The wise woman is not content with bare-minimum effort. To **“gird”** oneself refers to preparing for action. She gets herself ready for hard work, and she is not afraid of labor. She is strong, resilient, and determined.

But her strength is not only physical. Verse **25** shows that strength is also part of her heart and character. She is clothed with **“strength”** and **“dignity.”** In other words, these virtues mark her life in a visible way.

The word **“dignity”** points to a woman of honorable, noble, and respectable character. She has a moral excellence that is evident because she walks with God. Her strength is seen in what she does, but also in who she is.

Because of this, **“she smiles at the future.”** She is not controlled by fear, anxiety, or worry. She is not naïve about difficulty, but she is prepared, secure, and confident. Whatever comes, she faces it with wisdom, composure, and trust in the Lord.

**“Strength... is something God gives to His people... by His own personal presence with them. This woman walks with God and He dwells with her.”<sup>1</sup>**

**Fourth**, a godly character is displayed in blessing others with faithfulness and kindness. Look at verses **11–12**, **“The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil All the days of her life.”**

Because the wise woman is virtuous, her husband has full confidence in her. He trusts her wisdom, faithfulness, devotion, and diligence. She is trustworthy and reliable in the responsibilities entrusted to her.

Verse 11 says **“he will have no lack of gain.”** The word **“gain”** can carry the idea of spoil from victory. The victory of her labor brings blessing to her husband.

Verse 12 captures her heart: **“She does him good and not evil.”** She is a continual source of blessing, help, and benefit to her husband all the days of her life.

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<sup>1</sup> John A. Kitchen, *Proverbs: A Mentor Commentary*, Mentor Commentaries (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2006), 719.

Look at verse **23**, **“Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land.”**

Here we see that the wise woman’s reputation enhances her husband’s reputation in the community. To be **“known”** means he is respected, recognized, and held in good standing. His standing among others is elevated, in part, because he has such a wise and respected wife.

The city gates were where business and legal matters were conducted. This was the place of public leadership, authority, and judgment. So the fact that her husband is known among the elders is significant. Her character does not harm him; it strengthens and supports him.

This verse is also the structural center of the poem, which highlights the significance of this quality. The excellent wife is a precious gift from the Lord. **Proverbs 18:22** says, **“He who finds a wife finds a good thing.”** **Proverbs 12:4** says, **“An excellent wife is the crown of her husband.”**

Look at verse **26**, **“She opens her mouth in wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.”**

Up to this point, we have seen the wise woman’s character and conduct. Now we see how she speaks.

When she opens her mouth, **“wisdom”** is heard. Her words are truthful, gracious, edifying, and appropriate to the moment. She is the kind of woman others would seek out for counsel and instruction.

And her teaching is marked by **“kindness.”** (*Hesed*) This means her instruction is not harsh, careless, or self-serving. She speaks truth, but she speaks it with kindness. Wisdom is seen not only in what she says, but also in how she says it.

**Whether or not you are a Dodger fan, you have to admit that Game 7 of the 2025 World Series was baseball at its best. The Dodgers were down 3–0 early, then slowly fought their way back.**

**Max Muncy cut the lead in the eighth. Miguel Rojas tied the game in the ninth. Andy Pages made a spectacular catch in the outfield to keep the game alive. Then, in the eleventh inning, Will Smith hit the go-ahead home run, and Yoshinobu Yamamoto finished it off as the Dodgers won 5–4 in 11 innings.**

**It was dramatic, suspenseful, beautiful, and unforgettable. It was poetry in motion.**

**And in a much greater and more meaningful way, that is what we see in Proverbs 31. This passage is poetry in motion. It is a woman at her best. Not because she is perfect, and not**

**because she is meant to intimidate every other woman, but because she displays what the fear of the Lord produces in the heart and life of a godly woman.**

**Her diligence, wisdom, strength, dignity, kindness, compassion, faithfulness, and joyful service all come together into one spectacular portrait. This is an incredible display of the fear of God at work in the heart of a woman.**

And this passage not only shows us the root and fruit of her wisdom. It also shows us the honor of her wisdom. And that brings us to the final point.

### **III. The Honor of Her Wisdom: She Is Praised by Others (v. 10, 28–31)**

The focus of these verses is the honor that the wise woman is due.

**First**, we see she is praised by her children. Look at verse 28, **“Her children rise up and bless her.”**

The godly woman is honored and respected by her children. The image of them rising up is one of respect and praise. Like a standing ovation. The word can describe someone rising to make a public declaration. Her children stand to acknowledge how outstanding she is as a woman and mother.

**“The woman so concerned for others now becomes the central concern and praise of others.”<sup>2</sup>**

This praise is worth more than all the riches, possessions, or success she could gain with her hands. To have her children love and admire her is priceless. But her honor is not limited to her children.

**Second**, she is praised by her husband. Look again at verse 28, **“Her husband also, and he praises her, saying: “Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all.”**

The husband’s words are remarkable. The word **“nobly”** is the same word translated excellent in verse 10. In essence, he is saying, “Many wives are excellent, but you surpass them all. You are the most valuable and rare wife. You are the most excellent of them all.”

This praise is significant because it comes from her husband. Of all people, he knows her best. He has seen her life up close over many years. He knows her faults as well as her virtues. So when he praises her, the praise carries weight.

**Third**, she is praised by everyone who is impacted by her wise life. Look at 31, **“Give her the product of her hands, And let her works praise her in the gates.”**

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15–31*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 533.

This verse urges us to recognize and honor the faithful diligence and kindness of such a woman. Public honor at the gates was not normally given to women in Israel, but an unusual woman calls for unusual recognition. Her works speak for themselves. Her life has produced fruit that others can see, and that fruit becomes her praise.

Since we began with the end, it is fitting to end with the beginning. Verse 10 says, **“An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels.”**

The word **“excellent”** carries the idea of noble character, capability, strength, and valor. It is used of Ruth in **Ruth 3:11**, where Boaz says, **“All my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence.”**

So this woman is not merely admired for what she does, but for who she is. She has noble character and the capability to carry out her God-given role. Throughout this passage, we have seen her wisdom in providing food, making clothing, conducting business, planning ahead, serving her household, caring for the needy, and teaching with kindness.

But such a woman is rare. When the writer asks, **“An excellent wife, who can find?”** he is not saying godliness is impossible. He is saying true godliness is precious. Her worth is **“far above jewels.”**

**C.S. Lewis, in his reflections on the Psalms, makes a fascinating point about praise. He says, “I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment... the delight is incomplete till it is expressed.”<sup>2</sup>**

**That helps us understand the honor given to the wise woman. Her children, her husband, and the community do not praise her out of empty flattery or formal obligation. They praise her because her life is truly praiseworthy.**

**The fear of the Lord in her life has blessed them, and their praise is the fitting response. Their delight in her godly wisdom is incomplete until it is expressed.**

So women, pursue this kind of wisdom as you walk in the fear of the Lord. Husbands, honor this wisdom as it is displayed in your wives. Children, praise this wisdom as it is seen in your mothers. Young men, seek a woman marked by this kind of wisdom. And all of us should learn from her example and ask the Lord to produce this same wisdom in our lives.

Let's pray.

**Benediction: 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 (NASB95)**

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<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958), 93–95.

**<sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.**