



# The Woman of Proverbs 31

**HER CHARACTER:** She represents the fulfillment of a life lived in wisdom.

**HER JOY:** To be praised by her husband and children as a woman who surpasses all others.

**KEY SCRIPTURE:** Proverbs 31:10–31

## *Monday*

---

### HER STORY

*P*roverbs brims with less-than-glowing descriptions of women. There are wayward wives, prostitutes, women with smoother-than-oil lips, strange women, loud women, defiant women, wives who are like a continual drip on a rainy day or decay in their husbands' bones, women whose feet never stay home, brazen-faced women, and even a woman so repulsive she is likened to a gold ring in a pig's snout!

Any woman reading Proverbs may be tempted to conclude that its authors tended to blame women for weaknesses actually rooted in the male psyche, especially when it comes to sexual sin. But to balance things out there are also some odious descriptions of men, including scoundrels, villains, chattering fools, and sluggards. And Proverbs actually opens and closes with positive portrayals of women: first as wisdom personified and then as a woman who can do no wrong.

Just who was this woman on a pedestal described in Proverbs 31? Was she, as many think, the ideal wife and mother? In traditional Jewish homes, husbands and children recited the poem in Proverbs 31 at the Sabbath table. Written as an acrostic, each line

begins with a Hebrew letter in alphabetical sequence, making it easy to memorize. The poem describes a wealthy, aristocratic woman with a large household to direct. She was hardworking, enterprising, capable, strong, wise, skilled, generous, thoughtful of others, dignified, God-fearing, serene—a tremendous credit to her husband. She arose while it was still dark to feed her family. She looked at a field, considered its merits, and purchased it. She wove cloth and made linen garments, which she then sold. “Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ‘Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all’” (verses 28–29).

The description of the woman in Proverbs 31 offers a refreshing contrast to other ancient depictions of women, which tend to portray them in more frivolous and decorative terms, emphasizing only their charm or beauty. Still, the perfect woman of Proverbs 31 hasn’t always been a friend to ordinary women. In fact, she has sometimes been rubbed into the faces of lesser women by critical husbands and preachers unable to resist the temptation. What woman could ever measure up to her? And is a woman’s worth to be measured only by what she can accomplish in the domestic sphere? Or is the woman in Proverbs 31 a symbol of all the contributions a woman could make within the culture of her day? Regardless of how you answer these questions, there is more to her story than simply being the ideal wife and mother.

Before we can discover more about her true identity, it is worth posing a broader question: Are there really all that many women running around in the pages of Proverbs? Perhaps, in fact, there are only two main women in Proverbs: the wise woman and the woman of folly (as some have called her). The latter encompasses the adulteress and her many wicked counterparts; the former encompasses wisdom in the abstract and wisdom made concrete in the woman of Proverbs 31.

In Proverbs 3:13–16 a young man is instructed: “Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.” Here is wisdom in the abstract, personified as a woman.

Proverbs 31 echoes this praise: “A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.... She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls. She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard” (verses 10, 12–16). Here is a concrete example of what wisdom looks like in a person’s life.

By contrast, the man who welcomes the brazen-faced woman, the prostitute, the adulteress is nothing but a fool. He has fallen prey to the woman of folly, who offers deceitful pleasures that will lead to his death.

From beginning to end, Proverbs is a practical handbook for leading a life based on wisdom. In the end, there are only two choices for both men and women: to embrace wisdom or to love folly. The woman of Proverbs 31 may well be meant to inspire both men and women with a picture of what a virtuous life, male or female, is capable of producing: shelter for others, serenity, honor, prosperity, generosity, confidence about the future — true blessedness. Who wouldn’t want to be like such a woman? Who wouldn’t sing her praises?



## SPINNING AND WEAVING

*T*he woman of Proverbs 31 was a real pro at working with fabrics. She started by selecting the wool and flax (verse 13), then spinning it into threads (verse 19). She wove the woolen threads into rich scarlet clothing to keep her family warm in snowy weather (verse 21). She wove the flax threads into linen for bed coverings, for fine clothing for herself, and for clothing and sashes to sell (verses 22, 24).

Traditionally women's work, the spinning and weaving of cloth for clothing, bedding, rugs, and other needs occupied a tremendous amount of the time and talents of Hebrew women. Fibers from plants like cotton and flax or wool from sheep were spun and twisted in order to produce a long thread. That thread could then be used to sew fabrics together with needles made of bone or it could be used to weave new fabric. Weaving, an art that the Hebrews probably perfected while they were in Egypt, was done on a rudimentary loom.

Old Testament families used fabrics for a variety of purposes. The oldest and most common fabric in biblical times was wool. Woolen fabrics were woven from the hair of lambs and sheep and were made into the everyday clothing worn by the common person, even in hot weather. Linen, which was woven from the flax plant, formed the fabrics from which inner clothing was made. Some linen was so finely woven that it formed a silky, translucent cloth from which the rich made their garments. Heavy cloth woven from goat or camel hair formed waterproof tents and outer clothing.

Sound like a lot of work? It was. The women of a household spent virtually every spare moment on one part or another of the task of making fabrics. The "wife of noble character" in Proverbs 31 works "with eager hands" (verse 13), and it seems as if the spindle and distaff never leave her fingers (verse 19). That's why "she has no fear for her household" (verse 21). Spinning and weaving have kept her busy all the time, but she and her family are ready for the cold weather.

Does just reading about the Proverbs 31 woman make you tired? Do you wish she would just sit down and rest a moment? Whatever your response to this larger-than-life woman, you can't help but notice that she never wasted the time given her. In our convenient culture of store-bought clothing and fast-food restaurants, you may not need to weave your own cloth or cook your own meals—but that's not the issue. The issue is what you are doing with the time that's been given to you.

---

HER LEGACY IN SCRIPTURE

**Read Proverbs 31:10–31.**

1. Does this passage seem out of touch with reality to you? Why? What would make it seem more of a reality for today's woman?
2. How does this woman's husband view and treat her? Why?
3. List some of the different tasks that keep this woman busy. Now list *how* she goes about her work.
4. Look at Proverbs 31:25. Imagine someone saying these words about you. What thoughts and feelings leap to your mind?
5. What does it mean to fear the Lord (Proverbs 31:30)? Why is that more important than being beautiful or good at home decorating or crafts or business?
6. What would it take for you to become more of a woman who fears the Lord, one who can laugh at the days to come?

*M*any women find Proverbs 31 discouraging. Don't let that happen to you. Remember, this very capable woman is ultimately praised not so much for all she accomplishes as for one thing: She fears the Lord. The woman who is worthy of praise is not necessarily the one who does all her own sewing or is a great cook or is a natural beauty—the woman who gets the praise is the woman who fears the Lord. That's the target to aim for. Not outward beauty. Not a perfectly decorated home. Not even more intellectual knowledge or business acumen. Instead, aim for a bold, all-consuming love for God. Then you too will be worthy of praise.

### Promises in Scripture

*The fear of the LORD—that is wisdom,  
and to shun evil is understanding.*

—JOB 28:28

*Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;  
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*

—PROVERBS 31:30

*“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul  
and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, “Love your  
neighbor as yourself.”*

—LUKE 10:27



---

HER LEGACY OF PRAYER

*For wisdom is more precious than rubies,  
and nothing you desire can compare with her.*

—PROVERBS 8:11

- REFLECT ON:** Proverbs 8:11–36.
- PRAISE GOD:** For the gift of wisdom, which preserves, blesses, and even prolongs our life.
- OFFER THANKS:** For the benefits of wisdom you have already tasted in your daily life.
- CONFESS:** Any tendency to choose the wisdom of the world over the wisdom of God.
- ASK GOD:** Every day to make you a woman who longs for wisdom, who prefers it to silver and gold.

### Lift Your Heart

*P*roverbs is full of pithy statements that contain profound wisdom for daily life. Look through this book of Scripture and select a few favorites, then commit them to memory. Here's a few to get you started:

A cheerful heart is good medicine,  
but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.  
—Proverbs 17:22

Fools find no pleasure in understanding  
but delight in airing their own opinions.  
—Proverbs 18:2

Those who get wisdom love their own lives;  
those who cherish understanding will soon prosper.  
—Proverbs 19:8

---

*Lord, you know better than I the kind of heart in which wisdom grows best—one in which patience, faith, and humility are there to nourish it. Help me cultivate a heart in which wisdom can quickly take root and flourish. Let wisdom be so much a part of my life that it produces a shelter for others.*

---