

## Sayings of King Lemuel – Wisdom in Virtue

### Proverbs 31:10-31

**Proverbs 31:10-31** - *“Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.*

*The heart of her husband safely trusts her, so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.*

*She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands.*

*She is like the merchant ships, she brings her food from afar.*

*She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants.*

*She considers a field and buys it. From her profits she plants a vineyard.*

*She girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms.*

*She perceives that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out by night.*

*She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hand holds the spindle.*

*She extends her hand to the poor. Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy.*

*She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet.*

*She makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.*

*Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land.*

*She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants.*

*Strength and honor are her clothing. She shall rejoice in time to come.*

*She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness.*

*She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.*

*Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:*

*‘Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all.’*

*Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.”*

### Background Notes

This beautiful description of the noble wife is an acrostic poem: each verse begins with a different letter in the order of the Hebrew alphabet. Thus verse 10 starts with a Hebrew word beginning with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *alef*. Then verse 11 starts with a Hebrew word beginning with *bet*, the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And this pattern continues through the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Who wrote this description of the noble wife? Did King Lemuel write it? Did his mother give him this counsel about identifying a good wife? Or was Solomon the author – or perhaps an unknown inspired writer? We'll have to wait till we get to Heaven to find out, because we just don't know now.

## Doctrinal Point

### The noble wife of Proverbs 31 is a biblical role model.

When you read this lengthy description of the noble wife, you might be thinking, “No woman could measure up a hundred percent to all these standards!” And you’re probably right! We should think of this noble wife as an excellent model to follow. So if you’re looking for a biblical model of a godly wife, Proverbs 31 is a good place to find it. Let’s look at her qualities in this acrostic poem.

**Verse 10:** *“Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.”* The Hebrew phrase here could be translated “excellent,” “virtuous,” “noble,” or “fine.” The point of the verse is that a wife like this is not easy to find - and if you do find such a woman, she’s far more valuable than precious gemstones! Wouldn’t you agree?

**Verse 11:** *“The heart of her husband safely trusts her, so he will have no lack of gain.”* The idea here is not that the wife does all the work so the husband can be a couch potato! No. The idea is that this wife manages the family’s budget well. Her husband can be confident that she won’t overspend, or run up credit card debt.

**Verse 12:** *“She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.”* Her husband can trust her completely in every area. He doesn’t have to worry that she’ll talk about him behind his back, or tell family secrets. That’s a very important quality in a wife. And notice - this is a lifelong character trait.

**Verse 13:** *“She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands.”* The second line of this verse in Hebrew is literally “she works with the delight of her hand.” It’s not drudgery! This model wife enjoys useful crafts. She knows how to spin and weave and sew – important skills for women in ancient times. And just in case you’re wondering – flax is a plant; the linen is a fabric made from flax.

**Verse 14:** *“She is like the merchant ships; she brings her food from afar.”* This verse is talking about her shopping ability, and creativity in the bargains she’s able to find in the marketplace. She looks for good value at a good price, even if it means she has to order items from a distant location.

**Verse 15:** *“She also rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants.”* She gets up early to get the home fires going and meals started, and she sacrificially puts the needs of her family before her own needs - including the needs of her servants.

**Verse 16:** *“She considers a field and buys it. From her profits she plants a vineyard.”* From this verse and other verses that follow, we see that this wife is not ‘stuck in the kitchen’ all day! She’s involved in business interests outside the home. This excellent wife has a talent for business. She wisely invests by buying property and planting a vineyard. Throughout this Scripture passage, notice that her husband trusts his wife with the family’s financial matters.

**Verse 16:** *“She girds herself with strength and strengthens her arms.”* Does this mean that she goes to the gym to work out everyday? I suppose you could make the application that she stays fit and takes good care of her health, but that’s certainly not the interpretation in the context. The point of this verse is that this noble wife has a healthy attitude towards work. She’s not afraid of strenuous work.

**Verse 18:** *“She perceives that her merchandise is good. Her lamp does not go out by night.”* This worthy woman puts in a long day’s work, and as a result she’s on top of things. Her merchandise is top quality, so there’s prosperity for the entire household.

**Verse 19:** *“She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hand holds the spindle.”* She knows how to use the spinning wheel and loom. She is adept at housework, and she doesn’t mind doing necessary jobs - even though she has maidservants (v15).

**Verse 20:** *“She extends her hand to the poor. Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy.”* With all her busy activity, she doesn’t forget to share with those who are less advantaged. But a woman of her business acumen would be wise. I doubt she would foolishly give money to freeloaders. She’d tell a person who’s looking for a handout to get a job!

**Verse 21:** *“She is not afraid of snow, for all her household is clothed with scarlet.”* Yes, it does get cold in Israel, and sometimes it even snows! But if you have prepared proper winter clothing, you don’t have to worry. “Scarlet” was a good quality material.

**Verse 22:** *“She makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.”* The word “coverings” or “tapestry” here could include bedcovers, window coverings, blinds, and upholstery. This verse also tells us that this noble wife dressed well. Linen and fine purple were expensive fabrics. She knew how to dress appropriately for her position as the wife of a well-known public official, as we see in the next verse.

**Verse 23:** *“Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land.”* “Sitting in the gate” doesn’t mean that her husband sat around all day in a cafe, drinking coffee with the other men. No. The city court was “in the gate,” and business and public affairs were carried out there. How did this man have the time to be involved in local government? The answer is: he had a wise, dedicated and hardworking wife!

**Verse 24:** *“She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants.”* This woman is a good seamstress. She not only sews clothing and other items for her own home (v21-22), but she uses her expertise to run a home business!

**Verse 25:** *“Strength and honor are her clothing. She shall rejoice in time to come.”* This noble woman dresses well (v22), but her inward value is more important than her outward appearance. She is characterized by moral and spiritual strength and dignity. As a strong, godly and efficient woman, she can face the future with confidence.

**Verse 26:** *“She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness.”* This worthy woman speaks with wisdom. She gives instructions with kindness. She’s wise, but she’s not arrogant. She’s willing to share her wisdom. Her husband would respect her thoughtful counsel about important city affairs.

**Verse 27-29:** *“She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also praises her: ‘Many daughters have done well, but you exceed them all.’”* This woman is a “Supermom”! No wonder her children and husband praise her!

**Verse 31:** *“Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.”* This remarkable woman is worthy to be honored in the city gates in her own right, as well as being the respected and valued wife of her husband.

The noble wife of Proverbs 31 is a biblical role model.

## Practical Application

### Look for more than looks!

**Verse 30:** *“Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.”*

This practical application is especially addressed to single young men. However, those of you who are parents or grandparents can certainly pass on this excellent counsel to your sons and grandsons.

Don’t fall in love with just a pretty face! Don’t marry a woman just because she’s nice looking. It’s often been said: “Beauty is only skin deep.” That’s not a Bible verse, but it’s a biblical truth. It’s **inward** beauty that counts. Outward beauty will fade, but **inward** beauty lasts. Look for **more** than looks!

Beauty is like the icing on a cake. Icing is great - but only if you have a great slice of cake as well! It would be disappointing and unsatisfying if you got only a thin layer of icing on your plate - because that icing would be a very fleeting pleasure.

Make sure your sons or grandsons read this Proverbs 31 passage before they start to think seriously of marriage. Better yet, teach them the truths of this passage in Proverbs 31 while they’re young. Emphasize the importance of looking for the wonderful qualities of a godly woman who will be a committed wife and mother.

So - look for **more** than looks!