



FINDING HONOR

God recognizes those who faithfully demonstrate His wisdom in their lives.

PROVERBS 31:10-16,23-31

Most of us go through our days and carry out our tasks without thinking somebody may be watching us. We would be surprised if we found out somebody had been watching us while we go through the day. We would be even more shocked if our observer addressed how we managed our time and the specific challenges we faced.

Share about a time when you became aware that someone was watching you. How did you respond when you realized they were doing so?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

PROVERBS 30:1–31:31

Chapters 30 and 31 of Proverbs appear to be in contrast but related to each other. The sayings of Proverbs 30 are identified as the sayings of Agur, son of Jakeh (Prov. 30:1). Some Jewish scholars have suggested Agur was a nickname for King Solomon. Others have suggested Agur was a close confidante of Solomon, a type of ancient secretary who recorded the sayings of Solomon. Still others have argued that Agur was a man of the Massa tribe located in the northwestern section of Arabia, again a wise sage associated with Solomon's administration. Agur seems to have been an associate of Solomon and influenced by Solomon's wisdom.

Proverbs 31 records the wisdom of King Lemuel (and his mother; 31:1) in clear terms. It is not clear who Lemuel was or where he ruled as a king. Again, what matters is that Lemuel's wisdom is associated with Solomon.

Proverbs 30 and 31 give evidence of Solomon's wisdom in surrounding himself with men of wisdom. What can also be seen in both chapters is the kind of wisdom that leads to nobility, dignity, integrity, and honor. The wisdom of Agur and Lemuel, associates of Solomon, is laid out in clear terms—men and women of God not only understand the wisdom of God, they apply the wisdom of God to daily living.

Read Proverbs 31:10-16,23-31, underlining the actions taken by the worthy woman. How do these actions demonstrate godly wisdom?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

COMMITMENT TO HER HUSBAND (PROV. 31:10-12)

¹⁰ Who can find a wife of noble character? She is far more precious than jewels. ¹¹ The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will not lack anything good. ¹² She rewards him with good, not evil, all the days of her life.



VERSE 10

Lemuel characterized an excellent wife as one who has gained the trust of her husband. This kind of familial and relational trust begins with recognizing the inestimable value of a godly woman.

Lemuel's question—*Who can find a wife of noble character?*—implied that finding a wife of noble character was a rarity. Further, Lemuel argued that finding a woman of noble character is *far more precious than jewels*. Recognizing the inestimable value of a godly woman is critical to the success of a marriage built on mutual love and respect. Just as a successful, God-glorifying marriage requires the humble, servant leadership of a godly husband, so too it requires the character and commitment of a godly woman.

BIBLE SKILL: *Read, reflect on, and respond emotionally to a Bible verse.*

As you read Proverbs 31:10, notice the descriptive details that distinguish a woman of noble character, and spend time reflecting on how those traits would be displayed by a Christian woman who lives in today's world. Make notes of your reflections. Take the time to "find" the woman in your life who has exhibited in the most complete way the character traits described in the Bible passage. Be sure to thank the Lord for her.

VERSES 11-12

The character of a noble wife enables her husband to trust her with the most intimate details of life. The kind of commitment that should exist between a husband and wife is a matter of *the heart*. Godly wisdom is a matter of both the mind and the heart, as we have seen previously in Proverbs (see 3:1).

The wisdom of God works on the heart to align it with God's great purposes for the benefit of others. Lemuel explained that a noble wife enriches her husband's life in more ways than he could ever imagine. Because of her commitment to her marriage and to him, he ***will not lack anything good***. The Hebrew word translated *anything good* brings to mind the plunder a victorious army would bring home after a battle. Imagine the riches that would be gathered from the defeated army and the wealth to be taken from a fallen kingdom. Then imagine the joyful surprise on the faces of everyone back home who beholds the plunder the victorious army has brought to them. The husband of a noble woman enjoys that kind of surprise when he sees what she's able to bring into his life.

The value of a godly woman is not measured in terms of worldly success but in terms of her godly character. The elevated role God has given to her is to partner with her husband in building a home where all who are associated with that home are blessed, supported, and encouraged.

A good and godly marriage serves as a strong testimony to the power of God. The wisdom of God teaches that (1) the most important person in a home ought to be Jesus Christ; (2) the most important earthly relationship in the home is that of the husband and wife; and (3) the most important responsibility in the home is the raising of godly children, if God blesses that home with children. A godly home is a reflection of the person and work of Jesus Christ among His people (Eph. 5:22-33).

How does the keeping of the marriage commitment bring honor to God? To the family?

WISE IN HER WORK (PROV. 31:13-16)

¹³ She selects wool and flax and works with willing hands. ¹⁴ She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from far away. ¹⁵ She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household and portions for her female servants. ¹⁶ She evaluates a field and buys it; she plants a vineyard with her earnings.



VERSES 13-16

We must not devalue the quality and quantity of work required to administer a successful home where everyone flourishes. Lemuel pointed to the savvy and prudence of the wife who wisely provides for the needs of her family. The business acumen, entrepreneurial spirit, and wise decision-making of the woman in Proverbs 31 is breathtaking. Lemuel does not picture a woman who dutifully remains quiet and disengaged. The productivity of a godly woman is remarkable:

- ***She selects wool and flax.*** The woman was engaged in the economy as she selected and purchased the commodities and items for her family. She knew what these commodities cost and how they benefited her family.
- She ***works with willing hands.*** She works willingly, not begrudgingly as if what she is doing for her family must be tolerated and endured so she can get to the really important stuff according to the world.
- ***She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from far away.*** Lemuel pictured a godly woman as one seeking out the resources necessary for her family.
- A godly woman is not idle or lazy. She ***rises while it is still night and provides food for her household and portions for her female servants.*** In other words, a Proverbs 31 woman rises early, works hard, and manages other people besides herself.
- Further, she bought and purchased land and commodities and invested in those things that produced food and provided for her family.
- She earned money, wisely investing what she made in things that benefited her family.
- Proverbs 31:17-22 adds the superlatives of strength, diligence, concern for the poor, and industriousness to what is already a resume filled with relational and spiritual credentials.

The remarkable and striking portrait of a godly woman Lemuel painted is stunning. It is this kind of woman that is to be honored in all that she does.

Proverbs 31 destroys the mistaken notion that a woman who works at or from home is unproductive. Too often women are applauded as valuable only for what they accomplish outside the family. God honors the woman who works in such a way that what

she does in the home and outside of the home benefits everyone in the home.

What characteristic identified by Lemuel most demonstrates godly wisdom? Explain. How does the portrait of a godly woman painted in this passage compare to how society defines a successful woman today?

Proverbs 31 destroys the mistaken notion that a woman who works at or from home is unproductive.

SURE IN HER REPUTATION (PROV. 31:23-27)

²³ Her husband is known at the city gates, where he sits among the elders of the land. ²⁴ She makes and sells linen garments; she delivers belts to the merchants. ²⁵ Strength and honor are her clothing, and she can laugh at the time to come. ²⁶ Her mouth speaks wisdom, and loving instruction is on her tongue. ²⁷ She watches over the activities of her household and is never idle.

VERSES 23-27

Verses 23-27 emphasize the character of a godly woman. **City gates** served as the location where men would gather to conduct business and attend to legal issues. The husband of a woman of noble character would have a superb reputation there. Because of his wife, he would be considered one of the wise elders of the city whom everyone respected. A godly woman is a benefit to her husband.

As a godly woman, she is known in the marketplace as ***she makes and sells linen garments***. She engages in commerce with integrity. The foundation of her behavior is identified in verse 25: ***Strength and honor are her clothing***. Rather than being defined by the beauty of her clothing (though she may dress in style) she is clothed with things that never go out of style—strength, honor, and dignity. A godly woman is ready for the future because she has planned for it, and so ***she can laugh at the time***



to come. Lemuel also recognized that a godly woman was a teacher, speaking *wisdom* and giving *instruction* to all within her sphere of influence. Finally, she carefully watched over *the activities of her household*; she was *never idle*.

Lemuel's description of a godly woman is grounded in the truth that right conduct comes out of right character.

It is this kind of woman who builds up her husband, blesses her children, benefits all with whom she is associated, even benefiting the whole of God's people. Conduct is one thing, but character is quite another. Lemuel's description of a godly woman is grounded in the truth that right conduct comes out of right character.

What happens when character is disconnected from conduct, even if the conduct is right?

HONORED THROUGH FEARING GOD (PROV. 31:28-31)

²⁸ Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also praises her: ²⁹ "Many women have done noble deeds, but you surpass them all!" ³⁰ Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the LORD will be praised. ³¹ Give her the reward of her labor, and let her works praise her at the city gates.

VERSES 28-31

How is such a woman to be honored? Lemuel noted that an excellent wife will be honored in a variety of ways.

First, she is honored by *her children*. Nothing satisfies a mother more than when her children love and appreciate her. A mother is blessed when her children bless her. Verse 28 reflects the sixth commandment: "Honor your father and mother" (Ex. 20:12).

Second, she is praised by *her husband*. To lead and love one's wife does not mean to be domineering or overbearing. This is not true spiritual leadership. Instead, a husband honors his wife as he loves, covers, protects, appreciates, and applauds her work.

Third, she is honored when others recognize her work as valuable. Sometimes a woman may look at her work as tedious and

unimportant. However, from the most important to what may be perceived as the least important of her activities, the work of a godly woman is to be praised.

Fourth, she is honored by the recognition of the nature of true *beauty*. Many people place too much emphasis on physical beauty as the only mark of a beautiful woman. Seeking and maintaining a person's physical presentation has limited benefits. Physical appearance and good health is valuable, but godliness is better and more lasting.

Fifth, she is honored when she is praised because she *fears the LORD*. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of true wisdom (Prov. 1:7), then a woman who fears the Lord will not only live wisely but will gain the approval of other wise and godly people.

We are to honor what God honors—a godly woman who fears the Lord.

Finally, she is honored by both private and public recognition of her wise behavior. Lemuel was wise enough to know that many people honor all the wrong things (worldly success, physical beauty, and financial achievements). God honors the godly, honorable, and dignified way of living that is exhibited in the life of a God-fearing woman. We are to honor what God honors—a godly woman who fears the Lord.

What are some appropriate ways of honoring women in society?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Man*

The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created humans in His own image, and in that Christ died for humans; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love (Gen. 1:26-30).



IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers are to honor their marriage commitments.
- Believers are to wisely provide for the needs of their families.
- Believers are to use their influence for the kingdom.
- Believers are to honor God with their lives.

As a group, discuss ways of encouraging all married couples to live out their marriage vows. What can the group do to help husbands and wives honor God in their marriages?

List the needs of your family, including spiritual needs. What actions can you take to help meet the needs you identified?

As you go through the week, note people you influence. How are you influencing the people you listed to honor God? What needs to change for you to have a greater influence on others for God's honor?

Prayer Needs
