

The scene of Proverbs 31 opens with a statement that reveals the description of the woman we've come to know as "the Virtuous woman" in fact:

A) Is not a real person. She is from an "inspired utterance". She's an ideal. Or more accurately, the woman portrayed is a composite of wonderful characteristics. Also of note - it is a poem. An acrostic. This is lost in the translation to English but was used then as a common teaching tool.

B) A piece of prose likely taught to King Lemuel by his mother as a small child - maybe 4 or 5 years old. We're not *certain* if this King was Solomon, but if it was, his mother was Bathsheba which means she was a woman who knew pain. Taken to bed by the king, her husband murdered, her child dead at a few days of age - certainly this woman knew pain. Many of us prayed for our children in the womb, but I suspect none more so than a woman who has already lost a previous infant. This also seems to fit the possibility/likelihood of this having been Bathsheba so perhaps personalising the speaker and the audience and the potential age of the son - may help us glean more of its intention than our cultural casting of obligation so often carried over from this passage.

C) This poem was not taught by a man to a woman. But by a mother to a young son. The first part of the preparation leaning toward his eventual kingship, and the second toward both looking for a wife and of being a husband. The idea of this woman having been Bathsheba means you can see in the opening verses a depth of love, grief, longing and hope that is easily missed without that backdrop. Hear her **heart** in verse two "*Listen, my son! Listen, son of my womb! Listen, my son, the answer to my prayers!*"

Or paraphrasing... "*Oh my son! Listen! This matters! Please listen! You who are the answer to my prayers! Listen!*"

D) And what about her **heart** in verse three?! "*Oh my son! I was that woman! I was the woman your father risked it all for... the one who he committed adultery and murder over... who reaped such a cost from his behaviour - yet also saw God's wonderful grace. Don't be a fool. Choose well. Choose wisely. Don't repeat our mistakes - oh my son - learn from them!*"

Then a few verses later the poem begins.

Each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet are represented here. Such a little boy - I can picture him folding over his fingers as he recites and learns how he might recognise a woman of great character when he is grown up.

No potential bride is going to *be* all those things at the outset but good character begins somewhere and the beginnings of wisdom and willingness can be evident from childhood.

And - a great deal is also revealed in these lines about **the Proverbs 31 man**.

He places his confidence in his wife. He sees, recognises and encourages her to use and develop her gifts. He recognises her value and does not treat her as a servant or a possession. He is confident, at peace, un-anxious about her conduct. He is at rest toward all that she is. He recognises the good she brings their whole household, how hard she works and how great she is at what she does. He trusts her in their finances. He does not seek to control her or her every move or decision. She is free to act and he knows she will do so with wisdom and integrity. He sees that she works

hard, that she thinks ahead and both appreciates it from his heart, but lets her and others know it. He encourages her, praises her, thanks her and is not jealous of the same she receives from others. He sees that she is smart and consistent and gives whatever in his power/influence to provide security. Their children see the example of their father - they see how he loves her and they too appreciate all she does and is. There is no space in his gaze for any other woman. Not for comparison or contrast in any regard. He recognises that as a couple they are growing older and knows this only increases her depth and value. And - he recognises this is all due to the reverence and fear she has of the Lord - *who is the place and person where wisdom begins*.

Perhaps that inferred man seems as distant as the described woman. But if as a woman you read this with the slightest hint of contempt - aren't you returning judgement, for the same judgement that has hurt you over this passage?

The value of this pair is not as a standard of measure and failure - but as ideals into which we can grow as we honour the Lord and each other day by day.

Some thoughts on Proverbs 31

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Wisdom for KIDS and KINGS

An English acrostic

A PR 31:10 A wife of noble character who can find?
She is worth far more than rubies.
A treasure

B PR 31:11 Her husband has full confidence in
her and lacks nothing of value.
Brings confidence

C PR 31:12 She brings him good, not harm, all
the days of her life.
Causes good

D PR 31:13 She selects wool and flax and works
with eager hands.
Does careful work

E PR 31:14 She is like the merchant ships, bring-
ing her food from afar.
Eager to provide

F PR 31:15 She gets up while it is still dark; she
provides food for her family and portions for
her servant girls.
Foresighted

G PR 31:16 She considers a field and buys it; out of
her earnings she plants a vineyard.
Great initiative

H PR 31:17 She sets about her work vigorously;
her arms are strong for her tasks.
Hearty

I PR 31:18 She sees that her trading is profitable,
and her lamp does not go out at night.
Industrious and thorough

PROVERBS 31:10-31

J PR 31:19 In her hand she holds the distaff and
grasps the spindle with her fingers.
Job skilled and trained

K PR 31:20 She opens her arms to the poor and
extends her hands to the needy.
Keeps giving to others

L PR 31:21 When it snows, she has no fear for her
household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet.
Looks ahead prepared and faithful

M PR 31:22 She makes coverings for her bed; she
is clothed in fine linen and purple.
Makes private preparations too

N PR 31:23 Her husband is respected at the
city gate, where he takes his seat among the
elders of the land.
Never harms a reputation

O PR 31:24 She makes linen garments and
sells them, and supplies the
merchants with sashes.
Organized and conscientious

P PR 31:25 She is clothed with strength and dig-
nity; she can laugh at the days to come.
Poise and perseverance

Q (**Queen to son has much advice...**)

R PR 31:26 She speaks with wisdom, and faithful
instruction is on her tongue.
Really wise and kindly spoken

S PR 31:27 She watches over the affairs of her
household and does not eat the bread of
idleness.
Servant-hearted

T PR 31:28 Her children arise and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:
Thanks deserved

U PR 31:29 "Many women do noble things, but
you surpass them all."
Unsurpassed excellence

V **Virtues here and in "2 Peter 1"**

W PR 31:30 Charm is deceptive, and beauty is
fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD
is to be praised.
Wisdom is the fear of God

X **XP for Christ- Gods precious son (XP = CH for Christ in Greek)**

Y **Yes now we are nearly done...**

Z PR 31:31 Give her the reward she has
earned, and let her works bring her praise
at the city gate.
Zesty Praise well earned!

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