

- **\*READ Luke 8:1-3\*** As time marches on, more and more women find themselves in positions of prominence throughout our society. Women have made tremendous strides into the political realm in recent decades, and just within this past decade a woman was in serious contention for the presidency. As a sports guy, I have seen a number of women finding themselves in positions of leadership in places that simply haven't been occupied by women in the past. Becky Hammond is a top assistant coach for the San Antonio Spurs of the NBA. The Windows Surface Pro has had a commercial recently that featured a woman (Katie Sowers) in a coaching position for the San Francisco 49ers. Sarah Thomas made history as the first woman to be an official in a major college football in 2015. This list of break-through accomplishments by women could go on and on.
- For far too long, women have been judged and valued simply based upon their looks. This, of course, is demeaning towards women because their value far supersedes their level of beauty. However, instead of seeking to judge women based upon their looks, women are now being judged simply on what they can accomplish and achieve within their own lives for themselves.
- While there is nothing wrong with women being successful in society, things do become problematic when women (or men for that matter) begin sacrificing virtue for accomplishments. I am sickened and saddened each and every time I see some quote or interview featuring a woman who brags about the number of abortions she has had carried out in order to achieve her goals in Hollywood or some other sort of position. These women are lauded as heroes for putting themselves first in order to achieve personal success, but as I look within the Bible, I don't see that type of woman being lauded and praised.
- Instead, I see women like we just read about in **Luke 8:1-3** who are highlighted for their support of Jesus from their own means. Yes, there are times when the beauty of women are highlighted in Scripture, we must admit that the whole of Scripture teaches us that women are worthy of praise for reasons that matter much more than simply their level of beauty. On this Mother's Day, I would love to take some time to examine how all women, mother's certainly included, can find themselves worthy of praise firstly from those around them, but more importantly from our God. **Proverbs 31:10-31** will be our text of study for this morning because it teaches us exactly what God says makes a woman truly worthy of praise and valuable above all others. **(v.10)**

### **Proverbs 31:10-31 Teaches A Woman is Worthy Of Praise Because Of Her Character & Behavior**

- As I mentioned, many women in our society are lauded and praised for their looks or their accomplishments. Far too often, nothing is considered in regards to their character or their way they have achieved such great accomplishments. It does not matter if they are beautiful on the outside while being ugly, hateful, and wicked as a person. It often does not matter how many people they have hurt or run over in order to achieve to a certain position. All that matters is that they possess outer beauty and have found success in this life.
- Let us begin with the end of the text and then go back and add some depth to the conclusion. At the end of the day, the woman pictured in Proverbs 31 is a woman who is blessed by her children and praised by her husband. However, his picture of a successful woman is very much contradictory to the picture that is given to us in this text. Instead of the woman's outer beauty being lauded, the writer highlights the woman's inner character as being most important based upon the fact that beauty can hide character warts and will eventually fade away with age. While the woman of this text does accomplish great deeds, the writer highlights that these accomplishments are a result of godly behavior. This woman is praised because of the great effort she puts in to be godly in her character and behavior. This character and behavior is what we will highlight in this lesson. Godly character and behavior that all women can strive to live up to.

## I. Her Character

### A. Noble Behavior (v.10)

1. While we might think of this woman right off the bat being godly and morally upright, this idea of being noble in character actually carries with it the idea of simply being practically competent. The same description is given of Boaz in **Ruth 2:1**. The idea being more aptly put that this woman who is worth far more than jewels is a woman who can simply get stuff done.
2. But it also brings with it the idea of someone who has physical strength and energy to get things done within her life. The final thought is that this is a woman who is capable of providing financial wealth for herself and her family. She is not lazy by any means, but she has the mind to work and provide. These ideas are supported by other options for translating this verse such as *"a woman of quality"* or *"a capable wife."* These verses are highlighting the value and praiseworthiness of women who contribute positively in this life.

### B. Strong & Honorable (v.25)

1. This woman is able to contribute in this positive way because she is strong and honorable in what she does. No matter the age, a woman worthy of praise displays the strength of a young woman while also possessing the wisdom of an older woman. Though women around her might spend all of their time searching for the most beautiful physical clothing to adorn, the worthy woman is more concerned with clothing herself with this strength and honor because they will never fail her in a difficult moment.
2. The strong and honorable woman has no fear for the future because she has always operated with the greatest amount of integrity. She has not hurt others or run over them in order to have success. Backstabbing has not been her mode of operation. Being clothed with honor allows her to be courageous knowing that she has properly prepared herself to face anything that the future might throw at her. This might bring to mind the text of **Ephesians 6:10-18** which speaks of the battle armor that is worn by Christians as we fight against the forces of evil in this life. This same type of idea is found in this text. She is prepared for whatever comes her way.

### C. Wise (v.26)

1. She does this because she is wise in her understanding of the world around her and how she can be successful in the ways that truly matter. Remember that wisdom throughout this writing is personified as a woman who is calling out to be heard. This wise woman is sometimes contrasted with the wicked and seductive woman who seeks to tear down and destroy.
2. The wise worthy woman understands how she can contribute positively to the world around her. She recognizes that life isn't all about being the most beautiful or achieving a certain level of success. She realizes that life is more about contributing to the good of others and serving through loving them as she ought to do so. If that means that she has to take a back seat at times to put others first, then she is willing to do so. She allows true wisdom to dictate how she will respond to any given situation. But where does this wisdom come from?

### D. God-Fearing (v.30)

1. She is willing to allow this wisdom, honor, strength, and nobility to be the building blocks of her life because she first and foremost has built a life that is set on the foundation of fearing God. I recently heard someone share a great way of understanding what it means to be God-fearing, and it really stuck with me. We often think of being God-fearing in the sense that we are terrified of God and His power to do as He pleases.
2. While it is true that God's power is endless, and he can do what He pleases...that doesn't have to leave us scared of Him. Instead, we can fear God in the sense that we simply take Him seriously. If He has given us a command or instruction, then those who fear Him are those who

take His commands seriously and act upon them as He has instructed. Therefore, the worthy woman of this text fears God in the sense that she has taken God's intention for her life seriously. She realizes the role she was created to live in and she wants to be capable of fulfilling that role with great strength, honor, and wisdom.

3. And yes, it is at this point that we can highlight the fact that her taking God seriously will result in her living a morally upright life. She will pursue holiness and righteousness. She will love others, and seek to serve them because in serving them she is serving her God.

All of these characteristics form the mindset of the woman who is described as being worthy of praise within this text, and they are the foundation for the type of behavior she will exhibit within her life. While this text is describing the activity of a wife, I do want to quickly pause and recognize that being a wife is not required of the woman who seeks to live up to the quality of the woman described within this text. Take away her behavior towards her husband and children, and every aspect of this text can be true of any Christian woman. If this were not true, then those who choose not to be married or even younger disciples of Jesus couldn't live up to the godly living that is described in this text. Therefore, please allow me to simply take these principles and apply them to all women, and I will take just moment to highlight any wife specific behaviors that are found within his text.

## **II. Her Behavior**

### **A. Works Well With Others (vv.11,12)**

1. The text speaks of this woman being a woman that her husband can trust, but this ought to be true of all women as they seek to work hand in hand with people around them. Are the people you work with able to say that they trust you to be competent, capable, and trustworthy to accomplish whatever the task at hand is?
2. The Proverb writer speaks of her husband not lacking good and being rewarded with good and not evil all of the days of her life. Are the people you work with able to say the same? Are people excited to work alongside you? Or do they dread knowing that you'll be working with them?
3. This will be determined by what type of mentality and approach you bring into the work environment. People who are constantly critical, self-serving, and self-centered are not the type of people that are a joy to work with. This means that it is her honorable mindset that leads her to consider the needs of others as she works with them. She seeks to do what is best for the group instead of just for herself. She seeks to work hard and keep up her responsibilities. She strives to be the type of person that is a blessing and not a hindrance no matter the type of situation she finds herself in.

### **B. If Married, Brings Honor To Her Husband (v.23)**

1. This is especially true if she is married and has a husband to live and work with. We have already noted **vv.11,12** that speak of the worthy woman being trustworthy in the eyes of her husband and a blessing to him, but we can also see in **v.23** that she is able to bring honor to her husband in the eyes of others in the community.
2. While many want to harp on the idea of the husband being the head of the marriage (which is a solid truth established in **Genesis 3 & Ephesians 5:22,23**), they do so while forgetting that husbands and wives are sustainers of one another. Any great success that one will experience will only be experienced through the joint efforts of their spouse. I am convinced that the husband is able to be known by good reputation in the city gates because his wife supports him and whatever good and influential work he is striving to accomplish. The old saying that behind every good and successful man is a good woman is a true statement that I can personally attest to. My successes in my ministry can be directly traced to the incredible support given by my wife. I could not do it without her and she and all similar wives are worthy to be praised for it!

### C. Works Hard (vv.13-19, 22, 24)

1. Sadly, discussions of women and their roles sometimes get watered down to arguing over whether or not a woman should be working outside of the home or whether she must stay home and simply raise kids and keep house. While **Titus 2:3-5** does speak of the responsibility of older women to teach the younger women to be workers at home, I do not believe this means that a woman can never work outside of the home. One of my strongest pieces of evidence for such would be this very text where we can clearly see a woman who is going outside of the home to conduct business.
2. However, I do want to highlight what seems to be the intent for her doing such. Notice **v.15**, *"She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household and portions for her female servants."* This verse is nestled in these other verses of all of the work she is engaged in work outside of the home. She is working with her hands, bringing in food, evaluating and buying fields, planting vineyards, and spinning on the staff to provide for her household. Her gaze isn't fixed on a career to the neglect of her family, no she works hard because she knows the responsibility of caring for the family God has blessed her with! She works hard not for herself, but she does so for others! She is living out **Philippians 2:3,4**, *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others."*

### D. Cares For Others (vv.20,21,27)

1. This attitude of servitude is clearly seen as a characteristic and behavior of this worthy woman of **Proverbs 31**. She is said to be one who reaches out to the poor and needy. She makes sure that her household is cared for in every possible way, and she does so to the point that she never finds herself idle. This type of hard-working attitude and behavior is so greatly lauded because it is not inwardly focused but outwardly focused.
2. It cannot be overstated just how crucial it is to recognize that the woman worthy of praise is a woman who cares for the needs of other people and doesn't solely focus on herself. One of the most heart warming stories in all of the Bible is that which is found in **Acts 9:36-42** concerning Tabitha and her being raised from the dead by Peter. The text tells us that she had become sick and eventually died. Those who loved her washed her body and placed her in an upper room. The disciples heard of Peter being in nearby Joppa, so they call and plead for him to come to them so that he might possibly do something. The text tells us that those who loved her were showing Peter all of the robes and clothes that Tabitha had made for other people. Peter is obviously moved by what he is shown and raises her from the dead.
3. I can't say with certainty...but it definitely seems like it was Tabitha's selfless serving of others that moved the mourning friends of hers to so strongly plead for Peter's help with her raising. I have full confidence that her actions were not done so that something like this might happen, but it does show the impact that selfless service can have on others. Those who serve as worthy of praise.

### E. Instructs & Teaches (v.26)

1. Finally, the woman worthy of praise is the woman who is willing to do what she can to help others through the sharing of the wisdom that she has accumulated over her lifetime. While wisdom does not always come with age, it does accumulate over time for the woman who is God-fearing and seeking to with a strong and honorable life. The woman who is worthy of praise is a woman who desires for others to be as successful as they can be in their similar roles in life as godly women.

2. Again referring to **Titus 2:3-5**, Paul instructs, *“In the same way, older women are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not slaves to excessive drinking. They are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands and to love their children, to be self-controlled, pure, workers at home, kind, and in submission to their husbands, so that God’s word will not be slandered.”* The worthy woman loves her fellow woman to the extent that she wants to see nothing but success for her and those she cares for. This selflessness to give time and effort to teach continues to cause this woman to be worthy of praise from those around her.

If there is anything that we have picked up from these considerations, I do hope it is the call for selflessness and love for those around us. As we mentioned in our monthly focus lesson last week, we live in a selfish, prideful, and self-seeking world. It can be so easy for any of us to get sucked into that type of mindset and lifestyle, but we must remember that we are to follow the example of our Lord Jesus and put others first. For His efforts to do so, He was given a name above all names and positioned in a place of ultimate praise and adoration, and when women who confess His name live in the same manner, they are shown to be worthy of praise from all of those around them.

Therefore, on this day especially and even all through the year, I would love and encourage all of my fellow disciples, friends, and family to consider the ladies in your lives. Whether they be younger, older, or somewhere in between...if they match the characteristics and behavior of the woman we have identified in this text, then take time to give them praise. If you’re like me and have been spending much more time at home than usual during this time of quarantine and social distancing, then you surely have seen all of these characteristics and behavior at work in the women, wives, and mothers in our lives. Let us make them well aware that we see their sacrificial loving service!

There is no better place to end than where we began. May we all take time to praise the women in our lives who are seeking to follow the will of our God by living lives worthy of praise. *“Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also praises her: “Many women have done noble deeds, but you surpass them all!” Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord will be praised. Give her the reward of her labor,<sup>[q]</sup> and let her works praise her at the city gates.”* (Proverbs 31:28-31)