

“An Excellent Woman from A to Z” (Proverbs 31:10-31)

A man accompanied his friend home for dinner and was impressed by the way he entered his house, asked his wife how her day went, and told her she looked pretty. Then, after they embraced, she served dinner. After they ate, the husband complimented his wife on the meal and thanked her for it. When the two fellows were alone, the visitor asked, “Why do you treat your wife so well?” “Because she deserves it, and it makes our marriage happier,” replied the host. Impressed, the visitor decided to adopt the idea. Arriving home, he embraced his wife and said, “You look wonderful!” For good measure he added, “Sweetheart, I’m the luckiest guy in the world.” His wife burst into tears. Bewildered, he asked her, “What in the world’s the matter?” She wept, “What a day! Billy fought at school. The refrigerator quit and spoiled the groceries. And now you’ve come home drunk!”¹

I suppose the reason we laugh so hard at this story is because there is so much truth in it. Now I am not suggesting that many of you men come home drunk, but I am implying that in many of our homes encouragement is a rarity. Husbands, are you guilty of taking your wife for granted? Do you expect your wife to cook, clean, and care for you and your children? Do you expect her to always love and forgive you? Do your expectations result in a lack of encouragement? Young people, are you guilty of taking your mom for granted? Do you expect her to always understand you and be patient with you? Do you expect her to listen to you and support you in all of your interests? Do you expect her to serve as your counselor and personal taxi? Do your expectations result in a lack of encouragement?

Today, we will be studying Proverbs 31—the classic passage describing the ideal woman, who is a cross between Betty Crocker, Martha Stewart, and Mother Theresa. But, ladies, please don’t feel overwhelmed and depressed. I am not going to ask you to compare yourself to this “wonder woman” and call out all your weaknesses. Instead, I want you to note the similarities between you and the woman of Proverbs 31. Since it is Mother’s Day, I want you to be encouraged, not discouraged. For King Lemuel,² the writer of Proverbs 31 says, “*Give an excellent woman her due praise.*” In Prov 31:10-31 we will find three reasons to affirm *all* godly women, including those who are unmarried and childless. While this passage celebrates a woman who is a wife and mother, it is pertinent to all women (and men). Two Scriptures bear this out. In Rom 16:13 Paul commends Rufus’s mother who was an adopted mother to him. In Isa 66:13 the Lord desires to be a mother to us.³ God expects every one of His people to have motherly instincts.⁴

1. Godly women are valuable (31:10-12). Solomon begins by esteeming godly wives. In 31:10 he writes, “**An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels.**” The poem begins with a rhetorical question that is intended to establish the point that an excellent wife is rare. The Hebrew word translated “excellent” (*chayil*) can also be rendered “noble,”⁵ “virtuous,”⁶ or “capable”⁷ (cf. 31:29).⁸ Apart from the book of Proverbs,⁹ the Hebrew term translated “excellent wife” is used only in the book of Ruth, where Boaz calls Ruth “a woman¹⁰ of excellence” (3:11). Interestingly, in the Hebrew Bible, the book of Ruth directly follows Proverbs. Ruth is treated as a historical example of the virtuous woman mentioned here. So ladies, if you want to be an excellent wife or a virtuous woman, study the book of Ruth.

After declaring an excellent wife’s general worth, the king explains her worth to her husband. In 31:11-12 he writes, “**The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.**” An excellent wife is trustworthy, so her husband has complete confidence in her (31:11a). She will not bring her husband to ruin by overspending (31:11b). Rather, he experiences great gain. Furthermore, she is not contentious (31:12; cf. 27:15). The excellent wife does “good” to her husband “all the days of her life.” This last phrase is particularly significant. Many wives start well, but when their husbands no longer meet their expectations, they falter. The excellent wife, however, perseveres in her commitment to love and honor her husband till death do them part. If this isn’t praiseworthy, I don’t know what is. *Give an excellent woman her due praise.*

Someone has said, “Behind every successful man, is a surprised mother-in-law!” A few years ago, a man who was the president of a large insurance company was taking a trip with his wife. When they stopped to get gas, he visited the men’s room and when he returned to his car, his wife was in a friendly conversation with the guy pumping the gas. When they got back in the car, his wife mentioned that the man pumping gas had been a teenage friend of hers and that they had even dated years ago. The husband smiled and said, “Just think, if you had married him, you’d be married to a gas station worker instead of the president of an insurance company.” His wife smiled and said, “No, dear, if I’d married him, he’d be the president of an insurance company and you’d be pumping gas!”

Husbands, sons, and daughters, if we’re honest, we would have to agree with this assessment. Apart from the woman we call our wife or mother we would not have achieved what we have. God has used my wife and my mom in my life in remarkable ways. If these two ladies did not prioritize me and make sacrifices for me, I would be half the man that I am today...and that’s one small dude!

[Why are godly women valuable? They are valuable because they are rare and priceless jewels. Godly women are not only valuable, but...]

2. Godly women are responsible (31:13-27). This section lists numerous activities of godly women. At first glance, most women will feel paralyzed by the workload of the Proverbs 31 woman. However, we must recognize that there is more going on than meets the eye. So ladies, take a deep breath and sit back and relax. Proverbs 31 is not a narrative, it is a poem.¹¹ This means God does not expect godly women to carry out every single responsibility listed in this passage.¹²

It is important to know that each of the twenty-two verses in this passage begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in sequence.¹³ So 31:10 begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Verse 11 begins with the next letter. This structure continues until 31:31, which begins with the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The author, therefore, knows he is not describing a real person but is describing the types of activities that are appropriate for a God-fearing woman. Once the ABC system was chosen, something had to be written down for each letter of the alphabet, and that puts an artificial structure on the content of the poem. This is the writer’s way of saying, “This describes the ideal woman, ‘everything from A to Z.’”¹⁴ This is helpful to know because it tips us off that the author is not building an argument like Paul does in Romans. Instead, he is stringing pearls. He has set himself the task, as he says in 31:30, to praise the woman who fears the Lord.¹⁵ To do this he tries to think of twenty-two praiseworthy things to say about her.¹⁶

We will now work through the following fifteen verses one by one and make a few brief comments. King Lemuel begins in 31:13 with these words: **“She looks for wool and flax and works with her hands in delight.”** She “looks” for wool and flax. If she doesn’t find any right away, she continues to diligently search for them. She “works with her hands.” She doesn’t have a bad attitude. She isn’t outwardly miserable. She doesn’t say, “Woe is me. No one knows the troubles I have.” The godly woman serves her family “in delight” because she is pleased to be a blessing to her family. **“She is like merchant ships; she brings her food from afar”** (3:14). Rather than using whatever is handy, she wisely shops for the best that she can afford. She doesn’t always shop at Albertsons or Safeway; she travels to Win Co. in Federal Way or Vancouver because they provide the best selection and prices. She goes the extra mile. In 31:15, **“she rises also while it is still night and gives food to her household and portions to her maidens.”** She gets up early and puts the needs of others in her household ahead of her own comfort and convenience. She is self-sacrificing. Husbands, sons, and daughters, your wife and mom works hard and serves you in ways that you may not be fully cognizant of. If you were to calculate the time, energy, and attention she spends on you, I am sure you would be awed. Room for improvement is the biggest room in the world for all of us, but I am confident that your wife and mom have blessed you in meaningful ways over the years. So give it up for her—*give an excellent woman her due praise.*

In 31:16 we learn that the excellent wife **“considers a field and buys it; from her earnings she plants a vineyard.”** She “considers” real estate and augments her husband’s income.¹⁷ Does your wife or mom work outside the home? If so, how frequently do you praise her for this? Are you interested in what she does for a living? Do you ask her about her day before you begin talking about your own? Do you support and encourage her? Do you pray for her daily to experience God’s favor at work?

The excellent wife **“girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong.”** Verse 17 literally says that she “girds her loins with strength.” In other words, she is a vigorous and tireless worker.¹⁸ She even “makes her arms strong.” This woman is no girlie girl. She is tough as nails. My wife, Lori, grew up working on a thirty-seven acre ranch with her sister. As a result, she has “guns.” Honestly, one of the first things that attracted me to Lori was her tanned strong forearms and upper arms. I’m being serious! Whenever I see Lori’s arms I am reminded of her incredible work ethic. Husbands and young people, do you affirm strength in your wife and mom? Do you look for ways to encourage the ladies in your life? *Give an excellent woman her due praise.*

In 31:18 we read that the excellent wife **“senses that her gain is good; her lamp does not go out at night.”** Not only does she get up early but she stays up late providing for the needs of her family. In many cases, the wife and mom get fewer hours of sleep than the husband and children. Do you express thanks for this? Are you able to say, “Thank you for working while I was sleeping. I can’t tell you how much I appreciate your kindness and self-sacrifice.” *Give an excellent woman her due praise.*

In 31:19 we learn a bit more about the Proverbs 31 woman’s domestic activity. **“She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hands grasp the spindle.”** The “distaff” was the rod that held the raw wool while spinning and the “spindle” was the stick the spinner twirled between her fingers that took up the spun wool on this ancient sewing machine. We will see that she works at spinning clothes for herself, her family, those in need, and her town economy. Verse 20 states, **“She extends her hand to the poor, and she stretches out her hands to the needy.”**¹⁹ This is important. As busy as this woman is, she reaches out to the poor and needy. I would guess your wife and mom have done this as well. My mom has visited rest homes ever since I was a little child. She loves to care for needy elderly ladies. My dad and mom are both investing their retirement years in finding clothes to send to an orphanage in Africa. They are extending their hand to the poor. In what ways has your wife or mom cared for the less fortunate? Give her praise!

In 31:21-24 we read that the excellent wife is **“not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She makes coverings 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 belts to the tradesmen.”** An excellent wife is not worried or stressed because she works hard to clothe herself, her family, and her community. Please notice that this woman looks good! She makes her own clothes of fine linen and purple. Her husband is “known in the gates” because she looks good and works hard. Husbands, sons, and daughters, when the women in your life work hard at looking good, are you the first to say so? Or do they walk into church with a new haircut or dress and someone else says something before you get around to it? If a woman strives to look good, she needs to hear it from those who love her most. *Give an excellent woman her due praise.*

Verse 25 is potent. King Lemuel writes, **“Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she smiles at the future.”** This woman can smile at the future because she is full of strength and dignity. She knows in her heart of hearts that she has worked hard. Consequently, she can trust the Lord and relax. Many women can be busy bodies and worry warts. (Sorry ladies.) But could it be that one of the reasons for this is that family members have not affirmed a woman who trusts in the Lord? When we see evidence of our wife and mom trusting the Lord and expressing confidence in Him, we need to give it up for her. We need to tell her how impressed we are with her confidence in Christ.

In 31:26 an excellent wife **“opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.”** The Proverbs 31 woman is not all brawn, she is brains as well. She is a wise woman. Mothers are an integral part of the education process of children, both in the home and in the church. Many mothers homeschool their children, yet many of them are not consistently praised for their efforts. Many ladies help out in their children’s public school, but they are not appreciated for their efforts. Many ladies who serve in these capacities also serve in Awana, Sunday school, and kids’ choir, yet they are not appreciated as they should be. Husbands and young people, we must affirm this.

Verse 27 summarizes this section quite well: **“She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.”** This means she makes good use of her time. She is a good time manager. The old proverb says, “Idle hands are the devil’s workshop.” A Proverbs 31 woman stays busy doing the *right* things at the *right time*.

Researchers at the University of Michigan have determined that married women with three kids did an average of twenty-eight hours of housework a week, while married men with three kids averaged about ten hours a week. Many of these women undoubtedly work outside the home as well!²⁰ This year’s Salary.com, “Mom Salary Wizard,” estimates that an average at-home mom’s salary equates to about \$117,000 and that a working mom’s motherly duties are worth over \$68,000 per year.²¹

According to a survey by *Suave* of 1,000 moms, ages 25 to 39, 75 percent said they have skipped a shower to take care of their kids’ needs, with a quarter of them confessing to going three or more days without showering. Half say their appearance has taken a hit since having children and two-thirds say they now wear sweatpants and ponytails more. Almost half said they’ve gone without a haircut for seven or more months. On the plus side: 75 percent said their self confidence grew after having kids.²²

This research is convicting. It overwhelms me with a sense of gratitude and appreciation. Today is the day that we say, “Thank you, Mom” for being overworked, underpaid, and most of the year underappreciated. But let’s strive to not make this merely a once-a-year celebration. Let’s give praise to excellent ladies throughout the year.

[In what ways are godly women responsible? Let me count the ways. Oops, there are too many to count. Not only are excellent women responsible, but...]

3. Godly women are commendable (31:28-31). In these last four verses, Solomon explains that a godly woman should be praised by her family (31:28-29) and by all (31:30-31) who know her. In this final section, we will make a fascinating discovery: This magnificent piece of poetry was not written primarily to women, but to men. This is not a poem written by a husband to his wife, but rather a poem about a godly woman written to men. We know from 31:1 that this chapter records “The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him.”²³ While this passage does provide young men with guidance in the choice of a godly wife, its main purpose is to exhort married men to appreciate the worth of their wives and to give them the freedom to function in accordance with their gifts and talents, in keeping with their God-given role as a wife. What this means, then, is that this passage was written more to instruct men to become better husbands than it was to help women become better wives. Certainly we find an example for wives to follow here, but much more than this we find instruction for the man who would be a godlier husband.²⁴ So men, if you listen carefully to this final section you can give your wife, mom, or women in general a wonderful gift this Mother’s Day.

In 31:28-29 King Lemuel writes, **“Her children rise up and bless her; her husband also, and he praises her, saying: ‘Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all.’”** These words express the heart of a husband speaking about his wife and the mother of his children.²⁵ Both the children and the husband respect this woman and praise her accordingly.

Children, young people, think seriously for a minute. Suppose your mom was killed in a car wreck tomorrow and you had to go to her funeral on Thursday. What would you wish on Thursday you had told her today? Tell her. “Her children rise up and call her blessed.” Tell her, and you will strengthen her hand in God. And what about you husbands? You know what I would say if I lost my wife this week? “Why did I get upset at her over such stupid little things? Why did I make an issue of such non-essentials? Why did I let criticism and nit-picking dry up my expressions of gratitude and praise?” Oh, how we need to live in the light of our dying. Praise her, praise her, praise her while you have her; and you will strengthen her heart in God, honor the Lord, and add great joy to your own life.

Our passage closes with two powerful and memorable verses: **“Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her the product of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.”**²⁶ The shift from “you” back to “she” signals that the poet takes over for the husband. “Charm” and “beauty” stand together in contrast to “deceitful” and “fleeting.” Charm deceives because it promises a lifetime of happiness that it cannot deliver.²⁷ The Hebrew word for “charm” (*chen*) literally means “bodily form.” You can be deceived by the appearance of a man or a woman. Beauty may be there for a few years, but it soon flees like a vapor. Physical appearance will not last. The writer is not saying these are worthless; he is saying there is something infinitely more valuable.²⁸ He writes that a woman who “fears the Lord” has an advantage over all others. She occupies a position of honor and blessing that age and appearance can’t take away. Proverbs then begins and ends with an emphasis on the fear of the Lord.

Americans spend billions of dollars every year on cosmetics, however the best beauty treatment isn’t found in a bottle, but in a book—the Bible. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov 1:7).²⁹ If a woman fears the Lord, we are to “give her her due.”³⁰ This would either mean give her credit for what she has done or reward her for what she has done.³¹

The husband gives his wife public honor. A man decided to make Mother’s Day special for his wife. He bought her presents. He took her out to eat. He made life easy for her around the house. But when she later told him what made her weekend really special, she thanked him for something he did during church on Mother’s Day. When the men in the church were told they could have the microphone to say something about a special woman in their life, he listened for a while as others spoke. Then, when the last call was given, he rose and spoke ever so briefly about his wife—telling how thankful he was for her godly example. She was moved as he honored her before others. Those eighteen seconds were the highlight of her weekend. She even requested a tape of the service so she could savor his thoughtful words. It is admirable when a man does kind things for his wife, but if he compliments her publicly he demonstrates wisdom. When a man says of his wife in the presence of others, “You are special to me, and I appreciate you,” their relationship is enhanced.³²

In keeping with the overarching theme of this passage, I would like to ask all the ladies in our congregation to remain seated and I would like to have the men stand at this time and honor you with praise.

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Scripture References

Proverbs 31:10-31

Proverbs 18:22

Proverbs 19:14

Proverbs 12:4

Ephesians 5:22-24

Titus 2:3-5

1 Peter 3:3-4

Study Questions

1. Why is an “excellent wife” such a rarity (31:10)? What are the most valuable characteristics and behaviors of a godly woman? What women do I know personally that epitomize what it means to be an excellent wife, a godly single woman, and a godly widow?
2. As a wife/mother, in what godly behaviors do I exhibit strengths? In what family, work, and social responsibilities do I excel (31:13-27)? Where do I need to grow?
3. As a husband/father, how do I express appreciation for my wife and the mother of my children (31:28-29)? As a man, how do I show respect for other godly women? How can I teach my children to have a high view of women?
4. Why is charm deceitful (31:30)? How have I been guilty of pursuing the fleeting aspects of charm over and above eternal godly character? What does it mean to “fear the Lord?” How can I teach my daughter(s) to fear the Lord?
5. Do I have a high view of women? How do I specifically praise women (31:31)? What can I do to elevate my appreciation for women? In what ways can I build women up in my family, church, and workplace?

Notes

¹ Preaching Today citation: Robert Leslie Holmes, *God's Man* (Kregel, 1998).

² Jewish legend identifies King Lemuel as Solomon, making this advice from his mother Bathsheba; but there is no evidence for that. See NET Study Notes.

³ David Jeremiah, *Today's Turning Point*, 5/10-11/08.

⁴ In 1 Thess 2:8-9, Paul uses motherly language to describe his ministry: "But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us."

⁵ See NET and NIV.

⁶ See NKJV and NLT.

⁷ See HSB, NRSV, and NJB.

⁸ When used of men, the word is often translated "men of valor."

⁹ Prov 12:4: "An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames him is like rotteness in his bones."

¹⁰ Hebrew and Greek both have only one word for wife or woman (*isha* and *gune*). Context, then, determines which term the author has in mind.

¹¹ Ross observes that Proverbs 31 has striking similarities to a hymn. "A comparison with Psalm 111, a hymn to God, illustrates some of the similarities. The psalm begins with *halelu yah* ('Hallelu Yah' [NIV mg.] or 'Praise the LORD'); this is reflected in Proverbs 31:31, which says, 'Her works bring her praise [*wihaleluha*].' Psalm 111:2 speaks of God's works; Proverbs 31:13 speaks of her works. Psalm 111:2 says that the works of the Lord are searched or 'pondered' (*derushim*); Proverbs 31:13 says that she 'selects' (*dareshah*) wool and flax. Psalm 111:3 says that the Lord's work is honorable (*hadar*; NIV, 'majestic'); Proverbs 31:25 ascribes strength and 'dignity' (*hadar*) to the woman. Psalm 111:4 says that the Lord is gracious and full of compassion; Proverbs 31:26 ascribes the law of compassion to the woman. Psalm 111:5 says that the Lord gives 'food' (*terep*); Proverbs 31:15 says that the woman provides 'food' (*terep*) for her house. Psalm 111:10 says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom—the motto of Proverbs; Proverbs 31:30 describes the woman as fearing the Lord. Psalm 111:10 says that the Lord's praise will endure; Proverbs 31:31 says that the woman will be praised for her works. It is clear that Proverbs 31 is patterned after the hymn to extol the works of wisdom." Allen P. Ross, "Proverbs," in *Psalms-Song of Songs*. Vol. 5 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991 [2001]), Electronic ed.

¹² Verbrugge notes, "When you start looking elsewhere in Proverbs, you discover that a significant number of the attributes ascribed to the woman of noble character are ascribed elsewhere in Proverbs to Wisdom, personified as a woman (and in contrast to Dame Folly, also a woman). Compare, for example: 3:15 and 31:10; 3:14 and 31:18; 4:6, 8-9 and 31:12, 23; 8:30 and 31:13, 17—and especially 1:7 and 31:30. A key feature of Dame Folly is that she is deceptive and entraps a person into a wasted life; Lady Wisdom shows us how to live a rich and fulfilled life in service of others and in the fear of the Lord. Proverbs begins and ends with the theme: Let your life be guided by Wisdom and follow the choices that she endorses. Finally, if the poem is ultimately about Wisdom, then this points us to someone who has taught us wisdom greater than Solomon, namely, Jesus Christ. Several passages of the NT call Jesus 'the Wisdom of God.' So the greatest decision we can ever make in our life is to decide to follow Jesus and develop a relationship with him. He will lead us in a fulfilling lifestyle that glorifies God and serves others." Verlyn D. Verbrugge, e-mail correspondence, 2008.

¹³ The same thing is found in some of the Psalms and may have been used as an aid in memorizing Scripture. The most well-known alphabetical Psalm is Psalm 119, where there are 22 alphabetical sections of eight verses each.

¹⁴ Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs* (NICOT: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 514.

¹⁵ Constable rightly states, "Some scholars believe this chapter does not describe women at all but deals with wisdom personified as a woman. I believe this is too extreme. Wherever a writer personified wisdom elsewhere in the book it is always clear to the reader that he was using personification as a literary device (cf. 8:1; 9:1, 13). That is not the case here. Lemuel's mother seems to have been describing the eminently wise woman, not just wisdom as a woman."

¹⁶ John Piper, "A Woman who Feels the Lord is to be Praised" (Prov 31:30):

<http://www.soundofgrace.com/piper81/051081m.htm>.

¹⁷ Clearly a woman can work outside the home. However, husband and wife should agree that this is best for the family. She should make sure her motives and priorities are in order before committing herself to such a job. Is the income essential to meet needs or wants? Is she doing the work to avoid her other higher priority responsibilities? Is

she hoping that her job or career rather than her relationship with God and her family members will satisfy her needs?

¹⁸ Waltke writes, “Sarah (Gen 18:6-8), Rebekah (Gen 24:18-20), and Rachel (Gen 29:9-10) show that women of high social rank and wealth were not above manual, even menial labor (cf. Exod 2:16; 2 Sam 13:5-9).” Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 525.

¹⁹ The text literally says that she “opens her palm” to the poor (i.e, she gives to the poor with liberality, Ps 112:9).

²⁰ SermonNews, “How Much Housework Does a Husband Create?”

<http://www.sermonnews.com/MembersOnlyStory.asp?ID=1454>.

²¹ www.Salary.com “Mom Salary Wizard” (accessed 5/8/08). This tool counts the number of hours a week the average mom spends in her week doing activities like cleaning, cooking, childcare, finances, shopping, etc. and places a dollar value on them if they had to be hired out.

²² SermonNews, “Motherhood Is A Dirty Job - And Stinky”:

<http://www.sermonnews.com/MembersOnlyStory.asp?ID=261>.

²³ While much of Proverbs was written by Solomon, we don’t have a clue from Bible history who Lemuel is.

²⁴ Bob Deffinbaugh, “A Model for Marriage”: http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=643.

²⁵ A wise woman will enjoy many benefits. Her husband, assuming he is of normal intelligence, will value, bless, and praise her (Prov 31:10, 28b, 31). She will be secure (31:25). Moreover, her husband will also cherish and honor her (Eph 5:28-29; 1 Pet 3:7b), unless he is a fool.

²⁶ See the acclaim given to Ruth by Boaz: “for all the gate of my people knows that you are a noble woman” (Ruth 3:11).

²⁷ Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 535.

²⁸ Little is said of the physical qualities of the woman in Proverbs 31, though we assume she had a pleasant appearance. It is her character that’s emphasized - her trustworthiness (31:11), her hard work (31:13), her business instincts (31:16), her generosity (31:20), her creativity (31:22), her initiative (31:24), and her strength (31:25).

Deffinbaugh, “A Model for Marriage.”

²⁹ Ps 111:10 also repeats that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.

³⁰ See NET Study Notes.

³¹ In the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew canon (in contrast to the Septuagint, the Greek OT which is reflected in our English versions), Prov 31 is followed by the books of Ruth and Song of Solomon. House writes, “There is a conscious canonical effort to present Ruth and the woman in Song of Solomon in light of the definition of God-Fearing wife in Proverbs 31. This strategy allows for reflection on how women know and serve the Lord in a variety of situations and sets the stage for the problems Esther encounters later in the canon.” Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 453.

³² Dave Branon, “Our Daily Bread,”