

What If I Don't Fit the Proverbs 31 Woman?

One of my favorite passages in all of Scripture is Luke 24 where two of Jesus' followers are walking along the road to Emmaus after Jesus' death. They are sad and disillusioned. Whatever they thought the Messiah was supposed to do, being put to death on the cross by Roman soldiers seemed to unravel everything. Jesus draws near to them, but they don't recognize Him. He asks them what they are talking about, and they explain,

"21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. 22 Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

Jesus responds to them,

"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

I would LOVE to hear the totality of that conversation. Later He instructs them,

44 "...These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer

and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Note the culmination of whatever specific things Jesus told them about Himself through the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms—Christ would suffer and rise again, and repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name everywhere. THIS is the culmination of the message of the Old Testament according to Jesus.

So how should women who know Jesus read Proverbs 31?

Well, not the way I usually hear it taught, that's for sure. Proverbs is wisdom literature. Solomon was the wisest man to live. Yet even Solomon, who wrote much wisdom on raising children and finding a virtuous wife, did not excel at either. The author of the wisdom literature couldn't keep his own advice. But Christ did.

1 Corinthians 1:30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

Christ is the personification of the wisdom of God. He is the righteousness of God. He redeems us, and He sanctifies us. In Christ there is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Just as we bear no condemnation as we wear His robe of righteousness, we bear no condemnation because we are IN HIM and HE is our wisdom.

When you read through the wisdom literature of Proverbs 31, think of Jesus becoming for you this wisdom of God. Make no mistake—Proverbs 31 contains great wisdom. It is wonderful counsel. And it is fulfilled in the Wonderful Counselor! Don't be indicted by the ways you don't fit Proverbs 31. Maybe it's an impossible passage for you because of your life circumstances – your children can't rise up and call you blessed if God has not given you children, right?

The heart of your husband can't safely trust in you if God hasn't brought a husband into your life. Or maybe you have a husband or children, but the gulf between the virtuous wife and your reality threatens to swallow you up in hopelessness.

In Christ, this isn't just possible, it's already your status in heaven. This is wisdom from God, and it's not here to taunt you. Inspire you? Yes! Give you insight as the Holy Spirit brings these passages to mind in specific situations in your life? Yes! But not to frustrate you or condemn you. Christ has become to us, for YOU, the fulfillment of this wisdom from God.

Furthermore, wisdom is not law. Please check out this link if you haven't already read it, because this post makes no sense without it. Wisdom is not law. And wisdom is only wise when applied correctly in the right situations. You can't read Proverbs 31 the same as the Ten Commandments, yet in our fight against ignoring Scripture, conservative Christians fear situational wisdom. The result is silly, one-dimensional conclusions.

The answer to our fears of ignoring Scripture is to apply wisdom in ways that are actually wise through the indwelling Spirit. Paul exhorts us in Galatians 5:16 to "walk by the Spirit," which literally means to "keep in step with the Spirit." It is this pressing into God via the Spirit that equips us to apply wisdom in wise ways without fear of moral relativism.

It equips us to distinguish principle from application and to know what application God has for us as opposed to what He has for some other woman in a different situation.

In that context—first the difference in wisdom and law, and 2nd the gospel context of Christ as the personification of God's wisdom fulfilled in us and for us, let's look at Proverbs 31.

The virtuous wife of Proverbs 31 reflects back on the first woman created in the image of God in Genesis 2:18 to be a helper to her husband. God is called the helper of his people throughout Scripture (Ex. 18:4, Ps. 10:14), and the first woman was gifted at creation to reflect particular aspects of his strong advocacy and care for his children. But the helper created in Genesis 2 was marred deeply by the fall of man. The battle of the sexes began.

Supportive relationships between spouses became the rare exception rather than the norm, evidenced clearly throughout the rest of Genesis—Sarah, Rachel, Leah, Tamar, and so forth. The Proverbs 31 wife reflects back to the first woman created in perfection, and also reflects forward to the wife of Ephesians 5 who, redeemed by Christ, is equipped to reclaim the image of God in her relationship with her husband.

In Paul's beautiful discourse on the gospel in Ephesians, he tells first of God's plan before time began to redeem back all that was lost in the fall of man (Eph. 1 and 2). We see that, in Christ, we are now equipped to be "imitators of God" (Eph. 5:1), once again living as the image bearers of God that he created us to be. In that context, Paul paints a picture at the end of Ephesians 5 of what marriage looks like between husbands and wives who are IN Christ and IMAGE BEARERS of God. Both are tasked with gospel love for the other.

Though the husband is called on to give a special example and manifestation of this love, make no mistake that both the husband and the wife are commanded to love. Similarly with submission. Ephesians 5 tasks everyone in the Body of Christ with submission—submit therefore to one another out of reverence for Christ. Just as the husband is called to give a specific example of love, the wife is called to give a specific example of submission. This is all in the context of what it looks like to be IN CHRIST and IMITATORS OF GOD in marriage.

Proverbs 31 gives us a similar picture of the kind of love and support that a woman who is in Christ and an image bearer of God can provide in her home. She is a precious gift to her husband, valued far above earthly riches.

Some translations refer to this woman as the virtuous or capable woman rather than the virtuous or capable wife. The Hebrew word can mean either, but wife seems the better translation in context. Otherwise, the chapter makes it seem that the pathway to virtue for a woman is singularly through a husband and children. But Scripture is the best commentary on itself. And it gives us the story of Ruth among others to clarify this false notion.

Ruth's virtue and capable nature are most clearly evident as a single widow with no children. Well before Boaz came into the picture, Ruth is everything in character that God has called her to be. Rather than serving as a taunting, unattainable goal to single women who love and serve Christ, receive the virtuous wife of Proverbs 31 as a model to those who are in marriages tainted by the fall who long for a practical vision of what is possible in their marriage and home through Christ.

The author of this proverb paints a picture of a woman who is FOR her husband. She does him good, not evil, all his days. She is also FOR her family. She is aware of their needs and is diligent to support, protect, and encourage them. The great summary statement of the entire section is found in verse 30, "a woman who fears the Lord will be praised." Her horizontal relationship with her husband and family is based on her vertical relationship with God. She remains in close relationship with her God, for without him, she can do nothing (John 15:5). That is what equips her to be virtuous.

*Adapted from **Wendy Alsup's** blog, . Wendy has authored three books including By His Wounds You are Healed: How the Message of Ephesians Transforms a Woman's Identity. She is also a wife, mom and college math teacher who loves ministering to*

women.