04 – THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN REVISITED

- ✓ Through the years, I've noticed that Proverbs 31 is one of the most disliked chapters in the Bible, among Christian women. (Not because there's something *wrong* with it, but because it *feels* unattainable. Can anybody relate?)

- ✓ That's why I'm calling this: "The Virtuous Woman Revisited". I want to take a fresh look at this chapter to see if we can identify what God is *actually* praising here. Let me give my opinion. I don't think God is praising her for being a workaholic! I think He's praising two things – her character and her wisdom.

- ✓ Understand this! God is not praising her specific actions. See, where women get into trouble is: They look at what she does, and they see it as a "to-do list". (She sews, so I've got to sew. She buys land, so I have to buy land.) But Here's the Problem: You may not have the same gifts as her.

- ✓ This woman *clearly* has a business gift. (Evidently, God wired her that way.) So, when *she* applies wisdom to *her* life, it comes out as business sense. But you don't have that gift. So, when *you* apply wisdom in *your* life, it looks totally different! That's okay!

- ✓ God's not asking you to duplicate this woman's actions. He's asking you to apply wisdom in your life, like she did in hers. That's why we need to focus on the principles in this chapter, and not her actions.

The Chapter Layout

- ✓ Proverbs 31 is an acrostic. Each verse begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. (If we wrote an acrostic in English, it might look like this. A good wife is: Awesome, Beautiful, Caring, Dedicated, Energetic, Faithful … & so on, through the alphabet.).

- ✓ The thing that makes a *Hebrew* acrostic special is this: In Hebrew, each letter of the alphabet is also a picture, and each picture has a meaning. (In every case, the *verse* is going to portray the truth that's found in the *picture*.)

- ✓ Aleph () – is a picture of two oxen yoked together. This is the symbol for prosperity. (If you owned oxen in the ancient world, you were extremely rich.) That ties in with the content of the verse, "Who can find a virtuous woman? Her price is far above rubies." (Meaning, if you have a virtuous wife, you're very rich!)

- ✓ Beth () – is a picture of a house with only one door. It represents total trust. So, what does the verse say? "The heart of her husband safely trusts in her."

- ✓ Gimel () – is a picture of a camel's head. A camel's head never moves when it runs. (So, to them, it's the picture of steadiness or dependability.) He's saying a virtuous wife is dependable. "She does him good and not evil all the days of her life."

The Virtuous Woman

- ✓ As I said before, a lot of Christian women secretly hate this chapter, because it presents (what *they* think is) an unattainable standard. Look at her resume: She buys a field and plants a crop; she spins wool and weaves it into cloth; she sews clothes and sells them; she stays up late, then gets up while it's still dark to feed the servants and give them tasks. She runs all over town looking for the best deals; she does charity work … and that's just the beginning. How can any woman hope to keep up? You don't have to! God isn't asking you to *do* what she does. He wants you to *be* what she is.

a.) She Loves and Honors God

Prov. 31:30 – "Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised."

✓ This woman isn't praised because she's productive. She's not praised because she's pretty. She isn't praised because she's exhausted from serving everyone. She's praised, first and foremost, because she loves and honors God. (Can you do that? Absolutely, you can!)

b.) She Can Be Trusted

Prov. 31:11 – *"The heart of her husband safely trusts in her."*

✓ It's one thing to trust in someone. It's another thing to *safely* trust in them. She's worthy of her husband's trust. Because of that, it says, "He has no need of spoil." (He's not tempted to look for other women. Why would he? He's got a great one at home!)

c.) She's a Blessing to Her Husband

Prov. 31:12 – *"She does him good and not evil all the days of her life."*

d.) She's a Diligent Worker

✓ This chapter repeatedly describes the virtuous woman at work. (Not because God wants women to be workaholics. That's not the point.) Whether she's raising children, working at home, or running a business, she's faithful to her responsibilities. Busyness isn't the point. God values faithfulness more than busyness, & she's faithful.

✓ Side Thought: This chapter may not even be describing a real woman. According to verse one, this is a mother's instruction to her son on what to look for in a wife. (This may just be a description of what to look for!) If it *does* describe a real woman, this *could* be a list of her actions over the course of a lifetime.

e.) She's Compassionate and Generous

Prov. 31:20 – *"She stretches out her hand to the poor; yea, she reaches forth her hands to the needy."*

✓ Her compassion and effort extend beyond her immediate family.

f.) She's Wise

Prov. 31:26 – *"She opens her mouth with wisdom."*

✓ Wisdom comes from two things: Time in the Word, and time with God. Because she's made her relationship with God a priority, she has wisdom to share with others.

g.) She's Kind

Prov. 31:26 – *"… in her tongue is the law of kindness."*

✓ A "law" is consistent. She's consistently kind. (Of course, she has her "moments", like everyone else. She's human. But the overall bent of her life is kindness.)

✓ This is important for men too, by the way. *Prov. 19:22* – *"That which is desired in a man is loyalty and kindness [and his glory and delight are his giving]."*

h.) She's a Partner with Her Husband

✓ She does more (in the family) than just cooking and cleaning. In verse 16, she considers a field and buys it. She's got the freedom to think and act on her own, as a *partner* with her husband.

1 Tim. 5:14 – *"I will, therefore, that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house …"*

✓ I can almost hear some men now: "See there? She's barefoot, pregnant & in the kitchen!" She bears children and cleans the house.

✓ Not quite! The phrase "guide the house" is one word in the Greek – *oikodespoteo*. It comes from two smaller words: Oikos (meaning "family" or "home") and despotes (which means "ruler" or "manager").

✓ This doesn't describe someone with little or no "say" in the home.

She's part of the "management team".

- ✓ Vau () – is a picture of a hook (like you'd hang your coat on). It's the picture of a "support". This describes the woman's position in the home. The whole family "hangs" (rests) on her.

What Proverbs 31 *Doesn't* Say

- ✓ Sometimes it helps to notice what's missing. Notice, it doesn't say: She never gets tired, she never cries, she never feels overwhelmed, she never burns the dinner, she has a spotless house, she's never anxious, she never makes mistakes, and she does everything herself. It's not *about* being perfect. Virtue is a matter of the heart.

How to Read Proverbs 31

- ✓ Again, God isn't expecting you to do everything this woman does! He's asking you to cultivate wisdom in your life, like she did. So, the question isn't, "How can I become *her*?". The question is: "What will wisdom look like in *me*?". Or ask yourself this: "Which one of these qualities is God inviting me to grow in today?"

- ✓ Looking at it that way, the Proverbs 31 woman is no longer "Super Christian". She's an ordinary woman whose ordinary life has been shaped by her *love* for God, and her relationship *with* God.

- ✓ The final verse tells us the biggest reason why she's to be commended.

Prov. 31:30 (CEV) – "Charm can be deceiving, and beauty fades away, but a woman who honors the Lord deserves to be praised."

- ✓ Everything else in the chapter flows from that one defining characteristic. If a woman is growing in the fear of the Lord, she's already walking the same path as the virtuous woman.