

Embrace Wisdom:

God's Woman of Noble Character

Prov 31:10-31 and Selected Proverbs

Central Truth: Embrace wisdom to be equipped for the demands of life (31:21), as well as the uncertainties of the future (31:25).

Topic: What are the benefits of choosing wisdom?

Assertion: Choosing wisdom equips you for the demands of life (31:21), as well as the uncertainties of the future.

Notes: Along with concert by teens, teens also serve as ushers.

SCRIPTURE READING by Teens Introduced with this statement:

The Book of Proverbs comes to a close with a poem about the noble wife. This poem captures all the themes of wisdom presented in the book of Proverbs and arranges them in a portrait of the ideal woman. **This “ideal woman” symbolizes all that wisdom represents.**

Before several of the teens read this poem to you this morning there are **two characteristics of this poem you should be aware of.** **First**, this poem makes use of an alphabetic arrangement of the virtues of wisdom (an acrostic poem). In other words each line of the Hebrew text begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Such an acrostic was a way of organizing the thoughts and making them more memorable.

Second, the passage has similarities with **heroic literature**. The vocabulary and the expressions often sound more like an ancient song of praise to a champion than to a family scene. Putting these features together, one concludes that **this final poem in the book of Proverbs is a hymn to Lady Wisdom**, written in the heroic mode. Using this arrangement allows the wise writer of Proverbs to make all the lessons of wisdom in the book concrete and practical. This poem provides a strong, passionate argument against a culture that sees women as merely decorative. This poem portrays the greater heroism as moral and domestic rather than only exploits on the battlefield. **So this poem certainly presents A PATTERN FOR WOMEN TO FOLLOW. But IT ALSO PRESENTS A PATTERN FOR MEN TO FOLLOW AS WELL, for this is the message of the book of Proverbs in summary.**

Listen as our teens read for you **Prov 31:10-31**, a poem that describes **a woman of noble character.**

Engage: Many years ago a man wanted to make an impression upon his peers. He noticed that those who performed a certain sacrificial act were held in high esteem by the community. Desirous of this same glory, he took steps so it appeared outwardly as if he was performing the same sacrificial act.

Now there was hope that this man would not go through with his deceptive plans. One person, very close to this man knew all about his plans. **This one had influenced his decisions many times in the past. If this one would raise her voice of conscience, perhaps this man would have reconsidered his crime, repented, and things would have turned out differently.** Unfortunately, this person fully agreed with the deception. This couple did make quite an

impression, but not the type of impact they hoped. The first century, church historian, Luke records their story in Acts 5.

SLIDE: Now a man named Ananias, **together with Sapphira his wife**, sold a piece of property. ^{5:2} He kept back for himself part of the proceeds **with his wife's knowledge**; he brought only part of it and placed it at the apostles' feet. ^{5:3} But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back for yourself part of the proceeds from the sale of the land? ^{5:4} Before it was sold, did it not belong to you? And when it was sold, was the money not at your disposal? How have you thought up this deed in your heart? You have not lied to people but to God!" ^{5:5} When Ananias heard these words he collapsed and died, and great fear gripped all who heard about it. ^{5:6} So the young men came, wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. ^{5:7} **After an interval of about three hours, his wife came in**, but she did not know what had happened. ^{5:8} Peter said to her, "Tell me, were the two of you paid this amount for the land?" **Sapphira said, "Yes, that much."** ^{5:9} Peter then told her, **"Why have you agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out!"** ^{5:10} At once she collapsed at his feet and died. So when the young men came in, they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ^{5:11} Great fear gripped the whole church and all who heard about these things" (Acts 5:1-11 NET). [BLANK SLIDE]

Now you may ask, what difference does it make if I follow God's ideal or not? **The testimony of Sapphira is that failure to heed God's will for our lives can bring severe consequences, not only for you, but also, if married, for your spouse.**

Preview: This morning we are going to consider first, **why embrace wisdom**. Why is it best to choose to follow God's pathway for life? Then secondly, we will look at **three pictures of what embracing wisdom looks like for a wife**. So first, why should each of us embrace wisdom? And then secondly, what does embracing wisdom look like for a wife? First, why embrace wisdom?

EMBRACE WISDOM BECAUSE OF ITS SUPREME WORTH (31:10).

Choose wisdom because there's no other way to experience the lasting joy and peace of God's blessing. Choose wisdom because if you refuse to embrace wisdom you invite all kinds of disaster into your life.

As was mentioned as the Scripture reading was introduced, the Book of Proverbs comes to a close with a poem about the noble wife. This poem captures all the themes of wisdom presented in the book of Proverbs and arranges them in a portrait of the ideal woman. This "ideal woman" symbolizes all that wisdom represents.

This poem certainly presents a pattern for women to follow. But it also presents a pattern for all of us, men, women, teens, and children to follow as well. This poem in Prov 31:10-31 is the message of the book of Proverbs in summary.

Why embrace wisdom? Embrace God's wisdom in your life because there's nothing more valuable. Notice in your Bibles (or if you prefer on the screen) the supreme worth of a wife of noble character in Prov 31:10.

Slide: "Who can find a wife of noble character? For her value is far more than rubies" (Prov 31:10 NET). [Blank Slide]

APPL: A woman of noble character, like wisdom, is of supreme worth. If you have such a virtuous wife or mother, value her. She is extremely rare.

ILL: So much of our own development goes back to the influence our own mother had upon us. When he was a young boy the great painter **Benjamin West** decided to paint a picture of his sister while his mother was not at home. He got out the bottles of ink and started, but soon had an awful mess. His mother eventually returned and of course **saw the mess**. Instead of scolding him, she picked up the portrait and declared, **“What a beautiful picture of your sister.”** Then she kissed him. Later in life he said, **“With that kiss I became a painter.”**

ILL: One of the joys of these past couple of days for me was getting to spend time with my mother. I know my love for reading, and much of my study habits I learned from her. As a young child of five or six she would read to me books such as *Black Beauty* or *Robinson Crusoe*. Let’s make sure we praise our mothers, while we have that opportunity, as well as our wife, if married.

The rhetorical question Solomon’s poem opens with here in Prov 31:10 indicates that **a woman of noble character is rare**. Like wisdom she must be found.

Now **when you find such a wife Solomon tells us you find what is pleasing to God, beneficial for life, and abundantly enjoyable**. SLIDE: “The one who finds a wife finds what is enjoyable, and receives a pleasurable gift from the Lord” (Prov 18:22 NET). [BLANK SLIDE]

APPL: If God has blessed you with a marriage that has worked out well, give God the credit, thanking Him for His gift. You parents may have helped provide you with an education that allows you to have the job you have, but to find a wife who skillfully uses knowledge and discretion that proves to be successful is a gift from God. **Solomon contrasts a prudent wife with a nagging wife in Prov 19:13-14:** SLIDE: “A foolish child is the ruin of his father, and a contentious wife is like a constant dripping. A house and wealth are inherited from parents, but **a prudent wife is from the LORD**” (Prov 19:13-14 NET). [BLANK SLIDE]

APPL: For you men that are single (and single ladies as well) choose your spouse carefully! A woman (or man) of noble character, just like wisdom (cf. 3:15; 8:11), is priceless. “Her value is far more than rubies” (31:10 NET).

Trans: Now just as a woman of noble character is priceless and to be greatly valued, so embrace wisdom because of its supreme worth. Earlier Solomon expresses the supreme value of Lady Wisdom this way in **Prov 3:14-18:** SLIDES “**Blessed** is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who obtains understanding. ^{3:14} For her benefit is **more profitable than silver**, and her gain is **better than gold**. ^{3:15} She is **more precious than rubies**, and **none of the things you desire can compare with her**. ^{3:16} **Long life** is in her right hand; in her left hand are **riches and honor**. ^{3:17} **Her ways are very pleasant**, and **all her paths are peaceful**. ^{3:18} She is like a **tree of life** to those who obtain her, and **EVERYONE who grasps hold of her will be blessed**” (Prov 3:13-18 NET; cf. Prov 8:10-11). [Blank Slide] The sense of v. 18 is that each and every person who grasps hold of wisdom experiences God’s blessing.

Transition: A woman of noble character, just like wisdom (cf. 3:15; 8:11), is priceless. “Her value is far more than rubies” (31:10 NET). In contrast, when you or I try to live without wisdom we invite all kinds of disaster into our lives. Slide: “Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching at my doors day by day, waiting beside my doorway. ^{8:35} For the one who finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord. ^{8:36} **But the one who does not find me brings**

harm to himself; all who hate me love death” (Prov 8:34-36 NET). [Blank Slide] Embrace wisdom because if you to live without wisdom you invite all kinds of disaster you’re your life.

ILL: When Dr. R.A. Torrey was a young man, he had no faith in God or the Bible. His mother, however, was a devout Christian who constantly prayed for his conversion and often witnessed to him. One day he said to her, **“I don’t want to hear about my sins and your prayers; I’m going to leave and not bother you any more.”** With tear-filled eyes his mother followed him to the gate and pleaded with him to change his mind. But he would not be detained. Frantically she cried, “Son, you are going the wrong way, but when you come to the end of your rope and everything seems hopeless, call upon your mother’s God with all your heart and He will surely help you!”

After Torrey left home, he went deeper into the ways of sin. One night in a hotel room he was unable to sleep. **Weary from the problems pressing in on every hand, he decided to take his life.**

Just then **he remembered his mother’s last words.** Convicted by the Holy Spirit, he fell on his knees and cried out, **“O God of my mother, if there is such a Being, I need Your help. If You will give it to me, I’ll follow You!”** In a moment God opened his heart to put his faith in Christ and peace filled his soul. Later R.A. Torrey became an outstanding evangelist who led thousands to Christ!

Torrey’s life illustrates the disaster that comes into our lives when we turn our backs on godly wisdom. But also Torrey’s life illustrates the power a godly parent can have on his or her child.

Are you discouraged because your children are not interested in the things of the Lord? **Keep praying for them, loving them, and living a consistent life before them.** Never underestimate the power of parental witness!

Trans: Now what benefits does Lady Wisdom bring to us? How does the woman of noble character provide a model for women (and men) to strive for in our lives?

Embrace wisdom to be equipped for the demands of life (31:21), as well as the uncertainties of the future (31:21, 25).

Why embrace wisdom? Embrace wisdom to **be equipped for the demands of life (31:21), as well as the uncertainties of the future (31:25).**

Notice how the writer of Proverbs 31 tells us the woman of noble character is equipped for the demands of life in v. 21 of Prov 31: SLIDE: “She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all of her household are clothed with scarlet” (Prov 31:21 NET). [Blank slide]

Snow in this verse represents the cold weather that brings snow. Times of adversity do not overwhelm the wise woman because the family is well prepared. Why embrace wisdom? **Seeing and responding to life from God’s point of view equips us for the demands of life,** just as a wise mother does for her family.

ILL: Dwight D. Eisenhower was asked when he was President. “Mr. President, you have known every great man of our time. Who is the greatest man you ever met?”

Without an instant’s hesitation he said, “The greatest person I ever met wasn’t a man. It was a woman. It was my mother. **She never had much schooling but she was wise in God’s wisdom.**

She went to school to the greatest of all books, the Bible. And she acquired real wisdom.” He said, “Once when I was a boy, my brothers and I were playing a game with my mother. The game was with cards—not regular playing cards because she was too straight-laced for that—but **a hand of cards was dealt and I remember this night Mother dealt me an utterly impossible hand. And I began to complain about it.**

“She said, ‘Boys, put your cards down. I want to tell you something, especially you, Dwight. You are playing a game in your home with your mother under loving circumstances. We all love each other here and I have dealt you a bad hand. Now,’ she said, **‘when you get out in life where they don’t love you so much, you are going to be dealt many a bad hand. What are you to do? You are to pray to God. You are to trust God and like a man you are to play out the hand that is dealt you.’** “And,” said Dwight Eisenhower, “that is one of the wisest things I learned in my youth.”

Reit/Trans: Embracing wisdom equips you and me for the demands of life. Embracing wisdom also equips us for the uncertainties of the future.

The woman of noble character is confident of the future because of her hard work and planning. SLIDE: “She is clothed with strength and honor, **and she can laugh at the time to come**” (Prov 31:25 NET). [Blank slide]

APPL: As you embrace God’s wisdom you can confidently face the future, no matter what may come! Wisdom equips you for the uncertainties of life. For some of you today, your future may seem bleak. Life has not been going as you planned. Perhaps you are out of work. Your future may look bleak. Daily challenges press down upon you.

God urges you this morning, “Listen to my instructions. Daily listen to what I say to you through my Word.” You can trust me to take care of you. I will see you through.” Listen to God’s voice through His Word. Trust Him. Be obedient to His Word. Part of God’s love for you and me is that He disciplines those He loves. **Sometimes God chastises us to teach us wisdom. One of the fruits of embracing God’s wisdom is that we can confidently face the future, no matter what may come!**

APPL/ILL: For us as husbands or children let’s remember to honor and support our mothers. This reminds me of reading about **a woman who telephoned a friend and asked how she was feeling**, “Terrible,” came the reply over the phone. My head’s splitting and my back and legs are killing me. The house is a mess, and the kids are simply driving me crazy.” **Very sympathetically the caller said**, “Listen, go and lie down, I’ll come over right away and cook lunch for you, clean up the house, and take care of the children while you get some rest. **By the way, how is Sam?**”

“Sam?” the complaining housewife exclaimed. “I don’t have a husband named Sam.” “My heavens,” exclaimed the first woman, **“I must have dialed the wrong number.”** **There was a long pause.** **“ARE YOU STILL COMING OVER?”** the over stressed mother asked hopefully. [Bobby Moore, Any Old Port in a Storm (First Baptist Informer, First Baptist Church, Mineral Wells, TX, May 13, 1981), p. 1]

Reit/Trans: Why embrace wisdom? Embrace wisdom to be equipped for the demands of life (31:21), as well as the uncertainties of the future. None of us know what tomorrow will bring, but by embracing wisdom you will be equipped for the demands of life as well as the uncertainties of the future. Now let me give you briefly **three pictures of what embracing**

wisdom looks like for a wife and/or mother. How does a wife who embraces wisdom respond to her family? Let's consider your relationship with your husband.

A woman who embraces wisdom desires to be of value to her husband and bring him honor (Prov 12:4).

Wives, desire to be of value to your husband and bring him honor. How can you bring honor and glory to your husband? (And for all of us, how can we bring honor and glory to the Lord?) Be a person of noble character. Solomon contrasts the effect that a noble wife has on her husband with a wife who acts shamefully in Prov 12:4.

SLIDE: *"A noble wife is the crown of her husband, but the wife who acts shamefully is like rotteness in his bones"* (Prov 12:4 NET). [BLANK SLIDE]

Be a person of valor. Be a person of noble, godly character. "An excellent wife" [NKJV] [or "noble wife" (NET)] translates a Hebrew phrase [שֵׁט־חַיִל (shet-khayil)] that means a "a wife of virtue." It can be translated "noble" wife" (NET) or "a worthy wife" (NLT). This noble woman is the subject of Prov 31. She is a "virtuous woman" (cf. KJV), **a capable woman of noble character.** She is contrasted with the woman who is disgraceful [מְבִישָׁה (mévishah; "one who causes shame"); the woman who lowers her husband's standing in the community (cf. NET notes).

APPL: Wives, one of your primary objectives should be the building up of your husband; doing what you can to enhance his reputation before others. God created you as a wife to complete your husband. The apostle Paul instructs us in 1 Cor 11:7 that the woman is the glory of the man. SLIDE: "The woman is the glory of the man" (1 Cor 11:7b NET). [BLANK SLIDE]

Now the question is what does it mean that the woman is the glory of the man? Paul goes on to explain. "Woman is the glory of man, **first, because she came from him in creation.** As Adam glorified God by being the product of His creation, so Eve glorified Adam because she came from him.... The first woman came from the first man. God formed Eve out of a part of Adam whom He created first (Gen. 2:18, 20)" [Constable's Expository Notes on 1 Cor 11:8].

"Furthermore woman is the glory of man because **God created Eve to complete Adam.** God did not create the man as a companion for the woman but the woman for man's sake (Gen. 2:21–22). When Adam saw Eve for the first time, he "gloried" in her (Gen. 2:23)" [Constable's Expository Notes on 1 Cor 11:9]. SLIDE: "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man. ^{11:9} Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for man" (1 Cor 11:8-9 NET). [BLANK SLIDE]

So when Solomon tells us that a noble wife is the crown of her husband, Wives: **Desire to be of value to your husband and bring him honor.**

ILL: In 1849, when **Nathaniel Hawthorne** was dismissed from his government job in the customs house, he went home in despair. His wife listened to his tale of woe, set pen and ink on the table, lit the fire, put her arms around his shoulders and said, **"Now you will be able to write your novel."** Hawthorne did—and literature was enriched with *The Scarlet Letter*.

The focus in Prov 12:4 of being a noble wife is that you bring the highest honor to your husband. **In contrast, the wife who acts shamefully is like rotteness in her husband's bones.** A wife

who acts shamefully causes her husband to find no tranquility. Such a wife is like an infected tooth that progressively grows more rotten causing her husband increasing pain and discomfort.

****APPL: How can a wife bring shame upon her husband?** When as a wife you publicly criticize or run down your husband wife you are guilty of bringing shame upon your husband. When, rather than holding your husband up in honor, you belittle or ridicule your husband you are guilty of bringing shame on your husband. When you are not looking out for the welfare of your husband you are guilty of humiliating your husband. All of these ways and more can bring great frustration to your husband. A wife can also cause shame to her husband by thoughtless and/or immoral actions. Such shameful acts will eat away your husband's strength and influence and destroy his happiness. [Cf. NET notes on Prov 12:4.]

Now as a wife you are equal in essence to your husband, but you are to be a helper [Hebrew: *esrah*]. This does not imply you are inferior since the word is usually applied to God as our helper! [The word that describes a husband's trust or confidence in his wife in Prov 31:11 is a rare word that in most uses is used to warn against trusting in anyone other than God.]

Trans: So wives, one way you can pursue being a godly woman is by desiring to be of value to your husband and bring him honor. Seek to enhance your husband's reputation by your actions. Second:

A woman who embraces wisdom finds fulfillment in her family (Prov 31:10-31).

Find fulfillment in your family. As we mentioned in our introduction Prov 31 is a poem that praises the ideal woman. Wisdom is pictured as a godly woman. Prov 31 emphasizes the ideal wife's **industry, her devotion to her family, and her concern for others.**

So what does it mean to seek wisdom, God's noble woman? What does it mean to be a woman of noble character? **Be known for your strong work ethic.** Have a readiness to pitch in and help meet the needs of your household. **Be devoted to your family** (if married to your husband and household first of all), but for all, single or married, to helping to provide for your parents as they get older and have more needs. Also to seek wisdom, God's noble woman means you **have a concern for others.** You are sensitive to the needs of those around you. Here in Prov 31 God encourages us to live life according to His moral standards—not the current going philosophy of the day. **If you have such a virtuous wife or mother, value her. She is extremely rare.**

Trans: Finally, a third result of embracing wisdom is this:

A woman who embraces wisdom is not ill-tempered (Prov 21:9; 27:15, 16; 13:10 (Pride breeds quarrelsomeness.))

Don't be ill-tempered. Solomon warns: SLIDE: "It is better to live on a corner of the housetop than in a house in company with a quarrelsome wife" (Prov 21:9 NET). Blank SLIDE The reference is probably to a small room that would be built on the flat housetop primarily for guests (e.g., 1 Kgs 17:19; 2 Kgs 4:10). It would be **cramped and lonely – but peaceful** in avoiding strife [cf. NET notes].

"Quarrelsome wife" literally in the Hebrew is "wife of contentions;" a wife who continually causes strife and contention in the home. A contentious wife is one who rather than covering

over a transgression, continually points out the faults of her husband. Rather than demonstrating the forbearance and longsuffering that comes with love, the quarrelsome wife looks for and exaggerates the faults of her husband. All of us need to remember that Christian love is patient and forgiving toward the offenses of a fellow Christian (Matt 18:21–22; 1 Cor 13:4–7).

A contentious wife is uncontrollable. SLIDE: “A continual dripping on a rainy day and a contentious wife are alike. ^{27:16} Whoever hides her hides the wind or grasps oil with his right hand” (Prov 27:15-16 NET). Blank SLIDE

A nagging woman is uncontrollable. The wind can gust at any moment; so too the contentious woman can nag or complain without warning. If anyone can hide the wind he can hide her. [Cf. NET notes.] [Just as we can’t pick up a handful of oil (it slides through our hands) so this woman is uncontrollable. She’s a reoccurring source of irritation like a continual dripping on a rainy day.

APPL: What’s the answer for any of us that tend to lack forbearance and love at times to those we love? Solomon instructs us in Prov 13:10 that we need to learn to listen to the advice of others rather than going our own way.

SLIDE: “With pride comes only contention, but wisdom is with the well-advised” (Prov 13:10 NET). Blank SLIDE

The parallelism suggests *pride* here means contempt for the opinions of others. **The wise listen to advice rather than argue out of stubborn pride.** [Cf. NET notes] For the person who refuses to listen to advice, only contention is going to come out of them. Those who take advice are wise.

CONCLUSION: Let’s embrace wisdom. Embrace wisdom to be equipped for the demands of life (31:21), as well as the uncertainties of the future (31:25). By embracing wisdom you will **be of value to your husband and bring him honor.** As you embrace wisdom God can help you **find fulfillment in your family.** If we embrace wisdom we will **not be ill-tempered;** we will demonstrate forbearance with one another.

As Theodore Roosevelt said: “When all is said, it is the mother, and the mother only, who is a better citizen than the soldier who fights for his country. The successful mother, the mother who does her part in rearing and training aright the boys and girls who are to be the men and women of the next generation, is of greater use to the community, and occupies, if she would only realize it, a more honorable as well as a more important position than any man in it. The mother is the one supreme asset of the national life. She is more important, by far, than the successful statesman, or businessman, or artist, or scientist. “

Invite Janel to platform to lead in prayer for the mothers/ladies in the congregation.