Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Studies

Proverbs 31

“The Heart of the Matter”

Bible Studies from Southside Bible Church
Discussion Questions and Comments by Sarah Spangler
Proverbs 31

“The Heart of the Matter”

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The Heart of the Matter – A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study of Proverbs 31

Yeah – Where is she?

Proverbs 31:10 “Who Can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.”

After reading through Proverbs 31:10-31, a few things happen in our minds as women. First, we applaud the image of the Proverbs 31 woman. Second, we decide that if we want to be like her, then we better start making a long list of what to change about ourselves and what to add to our lives. Third, we wonder, “who was she and was she even real?” Fourth, we decide she isn’t real, we give up, and we decide it’s best to study Jesus’ life instead. He’s single. He’s perfect. He’s God. He isn’t comparable to us – like “she” is.

What have been your thoughts and feelings when reading Proverbs 31?

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Do you believe Proverbs 31 was written to be another list for us to measure up to?

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God certainly has standards that He expects us to live up to and guidelines He desires for us to follow. However, what we see in Proverbs 31 is an image of a woman who is showing the outward results of a heart that has been transformed into Christ-likeness. We are observing a woman who is “after” God’s own heart. We have to make a mental note that God creates us each completely unique. When we chase after God’s own heart – it may manifest itself in an entirely different way than the Proverbs 31 woman we see.

Is there a woman you know who has set an example to you of being a godly woman?

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This woman you have thought of is not perfect, and would never claim to be. As a matter of fact, the reason you probably view her as “Godly” is partly due to her sense of humility. In Phillipians 3:12-14 Paul speaks of “pressing on toward the goal.” This is what the Lord desires of us – to press on toward perfection but with the intent of becoming closer with Christ and to become the woman He intends for us to be – not the woman He intended Proverbs 31 to be.

What kind of woman do you want to be 5 years from now?
How can you live today in a way that will get you to that point?

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If your answer to the second question above is a list of things to add to your life, you are missing the center of this passage. However, if what you are adding is a nourishing, sustaining, life-giving relationship with Christ, then you are on your way to becoming your very own version of Proverbs 31. Remember the story of Mary and Martha? How tempting is it right now, while studying this passage, to react as Martha did? VERY tempting. But scripture teaches us over and over again that Mary’s response would be the appropriate one. The Lord does not desire us to “do” more or better things. He desires us to spend quality time with Him. The rest falls into place naturally. Have you ever thought of Mary as being a tad bit lazy? Maybe in the Bible story you haven’t. However, can you think of a time that you felt like you were being lazy or someone else was – and maybe what was really going on was you were soaking in the mindset, priorities, and love of Christ.

Now we can absorb that the main goal is to constantly allow the Lord to work in your life in order to transform you into His image and the only way to do that is to have an intimate and nourishing relationship with Christ. So, what is the heart of the Proverbs 31 woman? What are the characteristics that the Lord looks upon fondly? What other female examples in our life and in scripture has God given us to learn from? We will look at all these questions and hopefully answer a few of them through this study.
What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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Proverbs 31:11 “the heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain.”

Would you describe yourself as “Dependable, Steadfast, Trustworthy, Wise”?

Why do we fail to exhibit these characteristics?

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Many reasons come to mind. Selfishness seems possible. It takes a lot of energy to make ourselves happy and then after we’re done we have little left to give to others. It could also be overcommitment. Maybe we don’t realize that what we do or don’t do actually affects those around us? We somehow lose focus.

Think of the last time you were “undependable.” What was the root cause?

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God desires for us to be dependable. We know this because He is dependable. In order to come closer to this characteristic, we may have to simplify our life by cutting things out. We may need to spend more time focusing on the Lord and less time on ourselves. It may mean taking care of yourself so you are less frazzled and tired so you can respond when needed. When we become overwhelmed and we are “just barely holding on” – we tend to be someone that people do not trust, do not depend on, and do not consider wise.

How do you feel when you encounter someone who is “barely holding on”?
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We have several examples in the Bible of people who are very dependable. Have you ever thought much about Noah’s wife? Does scripture speak of her complaining or becoming a hindrance to Noah’s work? Does scripture talk of her opinions of Noah’s ark or her helping him figure out all the confusing logistics of getting all those animals aboard? Does it tell us her name? No, scripture actually tells us very little about Noah’s wife – but we know he had a wife. We can assume that she was helpful and supportive of his work and we can assume she held a quiet humility. When those around Noah thought he was insane, his wife did not leave him. The silence in scripture of Noah’s wife implies that she was doing exactly what she was suppose to do and exactly where she was suppose to be. Did you realize that being dependable and trustworthy tends to be a more silent characteristic?

Which relationship in your life would be the best to begin to develop dependability, trustworthiness, and faithfulness?
As we spend time with the Lord learning these traits, we can better learn how to display these to others in our lives. The Lord can show us instances in which we can have an impact on someone else’s life by demonstrating genuine trustworthiness.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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The Days of our Lives

Proverbs 31:12 “She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.”

What do you think the above verse means?

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Doing someone good and not evil can mean many things like being faithful to them or praying for them. One thing that many women don’t think about that can be hurtful to men is having a wife who makes them look foolish in front of others. We call it teasing, and maybe your husband accepts it well, but over time this can cause harm to your husband. In Proverbs 31: 23 is states that her husband is known in the gates and sits among the elders. This means he has a good reputation that has not been shattered or even dimmed by his wife’s “teasing.” She certainly would be the one to know all his weaknesses and faults. However, it is clear that she never uses this against him. Speaking positively about someone to them and about them all the days of your life is a measure of true faithfulness and respect.
Have you ever seen public teasing affect someone's husband? What did you observe?

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What kind of impression do you give others of your husband?

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What kind of impression do you give others of the Lord?

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Let's look at a few examples of women in the bible who faithfully do good and not evil to their husbands and the Lord.

1. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was involved in a scandal by becoming pregnant before marrying Joseph. Although she had many options of how to speak of the Lord and of Joseph throughout this time, she chose to stay faithful in action and word.

2. Anna was only married for 7 years before she became a widow. From that point on until she was 84 years old at least, Luke 2 states that she “never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.”

3. Noah’s wife – oh, the one without a name – that we studied earlier is also a great example of faithfulness and respect. She truly did her husband good and not harm throughout her days.

This entire concept is one that stems from the heart towards the Lord, our husbands, friends, coworkers, family, and even enemies. When it comes down to it, anytime we are doing someone else harm with our words or actions, it is simply out of selfishness. We are thinking of ourselves only.
Have you ever knowingly done someone else harm by talking negatively about them to others or to them?
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Have you ever knowingly done someone else good? If you are too humble to admit it, what is something good that you would like to strive to do for someone else in the future?
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Christ is our example of someone always desiring good and not evil for our lives. We know that no matter what we have done, what we have said, what foolish mistake we have made, Christ has only good things to say about us and only good things to do for us. As we study the Proverbs 31 woman, we must be careful to note that all the things she does is out of a faithful heart that loves the Lord. The things she does is not as important as why she does them. Again, we are reminded that all of our “to do” lists are uniquely different. We may not sow, or cook, or trade real estate, or have servants that we love. However, we must always strive to attain the heart attitude of Christ – pictured in Proverbs 31. Jeremiah 29:11 states “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

One last thought about the phrase, “all the days of her life” : Scripture does not state “all the days of their marriage.” This means she has been faithful and respectful of her husband before she met him and maybe after his passing. This verse speaks to women before they are married.
How can someone be faithful to their husband before they have even met?

For someone who always remains single and never marries. Remaining faithful to a husband who does not exist translates into being faithful to the eternal groom, Christ Jesus. Revelation 19:7-8 states “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”
You’re going to do your chores and you’re going to like it!

Proverbs 31:13 “She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands.”

What does a typical day look like for you?

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Most likely, there isn’t much free time in your day if any at all. Most of us live at a fast paced life and we live off of the dreaded “to do list.” There are many days that we sit down and look at our list and realize that we need to transfer half of it to the list for the next day. Others of us may not feel frenzied at all but rather the opposite. Sometimes the situations in our life force us into stillness where we almost have too much free time and we feel lonely, isolated, and limited. Either way, Proverbs 31 teaches us about our attitude toward the work the Lord has given us. She “willingly” works with her hands. Her list includes sowing, purchasing, rising early, cooking, providing for servants, real estate, farming, working into the night, charity, preparing for tragedy, selling and trading.
Yet, she “willingly” works. Her list seems daunting and intimidating to me. The fact that she is doing it willingly shows that this is her unique workload from the Lord. Part of giving our best to the tasks which God has set before us is not taking on more than God has given us. Sometimes, we invent things to be our responsibility and it simply isn’t. Let’s look at the example of Christ’s life. He certainly didn’t “have it all.” He was simply focused on what God had tasked Him with.

Do you believe that you do not have time to do everything you are suppose to do?

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This doesn’t even make sense when you consider that everything you are “suppose” to do is from God and He would not ask you to do something you would not have time for. If you are in this situation, then you are inventing a responsibility that is not yours or is not a priority right now. Isaiah 40:29-31 says, “He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tiered, they will walk and not become weary.” We can only gain strength from the Lord if the most important and non negotiable item on our list is spending time with Him.

Has there ever been a time when pride drove you beyond what you could handle?

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The main point from the Proverbs 31 woman is that everything on her list seems overwhelming to us – because it is not our list. It is hers. She did it all with joy. You cannot do your friend’s list or your sister’s or your mom’s. You can only do your own
unique list with joy and willing hands. Again, it is the attitude of the heart that stems from a relationship with the Lord and surrounding ourselves with encouraging friends and examples we can learn from. Most importantly, we can find the secret to the Proverbs 31 woman in verse 30: “Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.” She FEARS the Lord. If we find ourselves working hard to impress our families, friends, and coworkers instead of the Lord – then we are working hard on the wrong list.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?
**We have not been given the spirit of Fear**

Proverbs 31:21 “She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet.”

Proverbs 31:25 “Strength and honor are her clothing; She shall rejoice in time to come.”

It seems there are an endless amount of things to be fearful of. They range from small temporary fears to long lasting, lifetime fears. The temptation to fear will never go away, so it is inevitable that we each have to choose – in advance – how we will respond to fear.

What is something that you fear?

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Describe the typical way you respond when this fear creeps up on you?

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Fear can easily control our lives if we allow it to. The Lord makes it clear, however, that this is not his design or desire for us. He uses the example of the Proverbs 31 woman to show how we can respond to fear without sin. In verse 21 it states that she in not afraid of snow. So, this statement shows us that she anticipates snow and knows it could be something to be feared. Instead of being anxious and fretting over the possibility of what snow could do to her household, she simply prepares within her control. Notice she does not build a shelter, sow 500 blankets, develop a snow defense system, etc.. She simply provides the correct clothing for her family. She cannot control everything nor does she feel like she has to. This is because she is displaying trust that the Lord will take care of everything she cannot do. In the end, verse 25 states that she can rejoice in time to come. She smiles at the future knowing who is in control and she is probably without anxiety knowing it is the Lord and not her. She is focused on God’s love and power.

Have you ever lost focus of the Lord and allowed fear to take over?

There are a few things we need to do in order to stay focused:

1. Live a life of growing faith by handing your troubles to the Lord one at a time. Practice makes perfect.
2. Stop wasting your time. Worrying and fears is wasteful. Choose to spend your time differently by reminding yourself that the Lord desires good and not evil for us (Jer. 29:11).
3. OBEY. Scripture commands us not to fear. Romans 8:15 states the Lord has not given us the spirit of fear. Phillipians 4 tells us to be anxious for nothing and
then gives us instructions on what to do instead: think about things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent, worthy of praise.

4. Prepare. The Proverbs 31 woman, in verse 17, states she “girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong.” The originally language actually means to be strong physically and mentally alert. She has actually prepared herself so that when difficult times arise, she is ready.

What can you fill your mind with to combat your biggest fear?

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Just a side note – we must always consider how our response to fear affects those around us. How to our kids suffer from our anxiety? Do you talk about your worries to the point that your friends and coworkers are joining in your lack of faith in the Lord? The feeling of fear isn’t a sin – it is what you do with it that can be sinful.

Let us look at a few women who were facing a fearful situation and responded in a Godly manner.

Esther knew her entire nation and family were facing certain death. What is more scary than that? She did not become depressed or anxious, she did not hide away in her room. She chose to trust in the Lord and obeyed Him by risking her own life to save the nation of Israel.

Shiprah and Puah were two women we find in Exodus 1. This is when the king of Egypt commanded them to put to death any male babies born to Hebrew women. These two women chose not to fear the King but to obey the Lord instead. None of these women knew ahead of time the results of their bravery. They simply did what was
in their power and trusted the results to the Lord – good or bad – the peace we find in obedience surpasses the stronghold of fear.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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What do I want to be when I grow up?

Proverbs 31:16 “She considers a field and buys it; From her profits she plants a vineyard.”

What are your thoughts on whether women should stay at home or get a job outside the home?

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Does it matter if she has children or not?

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The Proberbs 31 woman obviously worked in the home and outside the home. We do not know how much time was spent both places. But what we do know is that no matter where she was working, she was savvy. The same skills needed in the business world, are also needed in managing a home. Some of the ways we know she was savvy is the way she is described – seek, consider, sense (perceive), watches over the affairs. In addition, we know her husband is well known and respected, she is a skilled craftswoman, and is capable of business dealings, and she is effective at managing her
home. She shows wisdom with managing her time, her money, and her interactions with other people.

My guess is that she does not allow each day’s crisis to control her. She is not waiting for things to happen. She is proactive about thinking through and planning ahead of time for various situations.

Describe a woman you know who you would consider “savvy”:
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In what areas of your life (money, parenting, words, time) do you tend to make unwise or hasty choices?
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Are you willing to accept your weakness as inevitable or would you rather gather wisdom to handle the above situations better?_________________________________

Scripture gives us examples of savvy women who use their intuition for good and also for evil. Simply being savvy isn’t enough – we must make wise choices with our insight. Savvy can also seem like the opposite of submission. Blind submission is the opposite of savvy though. We are to use our wisdom and insight in conjunction with our submission to the Lord and our husbands – which means again, doing them good and not evil all the days of our lives. This requires a subtle balance and a constant check of
our motive and intentions. Read Matthew 10:16 and Proverbs 2:6. We can always look to Christ as the ultimate example of balancing ultimate wisdom with ultimate submission. The Proverbs 31 woman, similarly, uses her business savvy to aid her household – not to bring herself power or recognition.

Do you feel you have an ability or a talent that you have buried because you don’t know how to balance it with your mother and wife positions?

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Be reminded that our talents come from the Lord. As long as the Lord is guiding you on when and how to use your talents, you can be assured that we need not always choose family OR talents. There are times the Lord allows the two to coexist.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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As we overview Proverbs 31, there are two concepts that need to be looked at briefly. First, as women, we are known to speak an average of 20,000 words a day (men are thought to speak an average of 7,000). So, we have 20,000 chances a day to either use our words positively or negatively. We see the Proverbs 31 woman using her words for good, 31:26 states “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness.” How does she open her mouth with wisdom and what is the “law of kindness”? We know that true wisdom comes from the Lord so she must spend the majority of her time seeking the Lord’s guidance through prayer, knowing His word, and thinking on His goodness. The law of kindness could refer to scripture and more specifically the fruits of the spirit. In order to follow her example, we must consider how much impact we allow the Lord to have in all 20,000 words we speak each day, we must commit scripture to memory so that it can guide our thoughts and words, and we must place people in our lives who will keep us accountable with how we use our tongues.
The second concept that should not be foreign to any of us is the “Fear of the Lord.” Proverbs 31:30 states “Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.” Although it is a common statement in the “churched” environment, “fearing the Lord” can be misunderstood. We need to be reminded that it is less of an emotion like “excitement” or “angry” or “anxious” – as it is a way of life. To fear the Lord is to live your life with the full understanding of God’s power, love, grace, peace, and sovereignty. It is a deep respect, an awe, and a recognition of who God is.

We’ve spent the past few weeks sneaking peaks at what the Proverbs 31 passage is telling us. This last study will be an exercise in matching scripture with a Christ-like attribute and reinforcing the concept with additional scripture. Below, the passage is broken into pieces. In the first blank following the verse(s), write in the characteristic involved. In the second blank, we will be attaching a separate scripture passage that reinforces the same concept.

**Characteristics:**

Dependable, Steadfast, Trustworthy, Faithfulness, Joyfulness, Generosity, Focus, Lack of Fear, Encouragement, Fear of the Lord, Others…..

**Proverbs 31**

“Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain.” (10, 11)

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“She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.” (12)

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“She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands. She is like the merchant ships, she brings her food from afar.” (13, 14)

“She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants.” (15)

“She considers a field and buys it; From her profits she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms. She perceives that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out by night.” (16, 17, 18)

“She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hand holds the spindle.” (19)

“She extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy.” (20)

“She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet.” (21)
“She makes tapestry 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 sashes for the merchants.” (22, 23, 24)

“Strength and honor are her clothing; She shall rejoice in time to come.” (25)

“She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness. She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.” (26, 27)

“Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her: ‘Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all.” (28, 29)

“Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.”

Now, let the Lord speak to your heart. Choose one of the verses in Proverbs 31 that is tugging on your heart for whatever reason. Mark it in your bible and note the characteristic of Christ Likeness and the additional verse. Decide to commit this one
verse to memory. It is a beginning. The passage of Proverbs 31 can be intimidating and overwhelming and also discouraging as you evaluate all the areas of your life that you do not size up to her or others around you. Just choose one thing today that the Lord is working on in your heart. The best way to let Him work it out is to fill your mind with His Word and to pray consistently and constantly.