

# Sermon Note: In Praise of Women Who Lead

## Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

### Introduction

As we continue our “Uncommon Wisdom” series, this week we turn to a passage that often gets a lot of attention, especially around Mother’s Day—Proverbs 31. But this Sunday, we’re looking at it through a different lens. Proverbs 31 isn’t just a checklist for the perfect wife; it’s a celebration of strength, wisdom, and leadership, particularly from women.

This passage describes a woman who is not only a capable and hardworking homemaker but also a shrewd businessperson, a compassionate neighbor, and a wise leader. She embodies wisdom in her actions, making her a model for all of us—men and women alike. As we prepare for worship, let’s think about the diverse ways wisdom can be lived out in our lives, particularly through leadership and service.

### Illustration Videos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAEnv1PvBvw>

A scene from the movie “Hidden Figures” (2016), where Katherine Johnson confidently stands up to make critical calculations that are pivotal to the success of NASA reentry plans. Despite the challenges she faces, her intelligence and leadership shine through, ultimately earning her the respect of her colleagues.

### Why This Video?

This scene illustrates the theme of leadership and wisdom in action, especially in the face of adversity. Katherine Johnson’s determination, skill, and courage reflect the qualities described in Proverbs 31. Her story challenges us to recognize and celebrate the leadership of women in all walks of life, much like the “capable wife” in Proverbs who leads with wisdom and strength in her community and family.

### Video Discussion Questions

1. In the video, Katherine Johnson demonstrates wisdom and courage in a challenging environment. How does her leadership inspire you, and how does it reflect the qualities described in Proverbs 31?
2. Think of a woman in your life who has shown strong leadership or wisdom. How has she impacted you, your family, and your community?
3. How can we better support and recognize the leadership of women in our own families, communities, and churches?

### Proverbs 31:10-31 (NRSVue)

<sup>10</sup>A woman of strength who can find?

She is far more precious than jewels.

<sup>11</sup>The heart of her husband trusts in her,

and he will have no lack of gain.  
<sup>12</sup>She does him good and not harm  
all the days of her life.  
<sup>13</sup>She seeks wool and flax  
and works with willing hands.  
<sup>14</sup>She is like the ships of the merchant;  
she brings her food from far away.  
<sup>15</sup>She rises while it is still night  
and provides food for her household  
and tasks for her female servants.  
<sup>16</sup>She considers a field and buys it;  
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.  
<sup>17</sup>She girds herself with strength  
and makes her arms strong.  
<sup>18</sup>She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.  
Her lamp does not go out at night.  
<sup>19</sup>She puts her hands to the distaff,  
and her hands hold the spindle.  
<sup>20</sup>She opens her hand to the poor  
and reaches out her hands to the needy.  
<sup>21</sup>She is not afraid for her household when it snows,  
for all her household are clothed in crimson.  
<sup>22</sup>She makes herself coverings;  
her clothing is fine linen and purple.  
<sup>23</sup>Her husband is known in the city gates,  
taking his seat among the elders of the land.  
<sup>24</sup>She makes linen garments and sells them;  
she supplies the merchant with sashes.  
<sup>25</sup>Strength and dignity are her clothing,  
and she laughs at the time to come.  
<sup>26</sup>She opens her mouth with wisdom,  
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.  
<sup>27</sup>She looks well to the ways of her household  
and does not eat the bread of idleness.  
<sup>28</sup>Her children rise up and call her happy;  
her husband, too, and he praises her:  
<sup>29</sup>“Many women have done excellently,  
but you surpass them all.”  
<sup>30</sup>Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,  
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.  
<sup>31</sup>Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,  
and let her works praise her in the city gates.

## Scripture Discussion Questions

1. The description in Proverbs 31 begins with the question, “A capable wife, who can find?” which suggests an idealized portrayal. What tasks and attributes are associated with this woman? How might we update this description for the twenty-first century?
2. Proverbs 31 describes a woman who is a successful businessperson, a wise leader, and a loving family member. How does wisdom serve her in her various roles? How does this model leadership today in these areas?
3. [James 3:13-18](#) speaks of two kinds of wisdom: “earthly” and “from above.” How are these differentiated, and what consequences do they lead to? How can “wisdom from above” be realistic and valuable in our daily lives?
4. [James 4:7](#) states, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” How do you interpret “the devil” in this context, and how does this proverb apply to your life?
5. Combining the wisdom from these passages and your understanding of “street smarts,” what is the most practical word of advice for you? How does this advice lead you away from foolishness to wisdom?

## Additional (Optional) Questions

1. Which characteristics listed in Proverbs 31 do you consider praiseworthy?
2. Which of these characteristics do you think you possess, and which do you wish you had more of?
3. Proverbs 31 is an acrostic poem in the original Hebrew, with each verse starting with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. How does knowing this acrostic structure affect your understanding of the passage?
4. How do the characteristics of the Proverbs 31 woman reflect wisdom?
5. Who are some other women in scripture who display courage and wisdom?
6. How can we use our ability to influence for the good of those around us?
7. When have you seen someone have a positive influence on another person?

## Weekly Action

This week, take a moment to recognize a woman in your life who exemplifies the qualities of wisdom, leadership, and strength. Consider writing her a note or telling her how much her example means to you. Reflect on how you can embody these qualities in your own life, regardless of your gender, and look for ways to support and uplift the leadership of women in your community and the world.

## Prayer

Gracious God of our Foremothers, we give you thanks for the nurture, guidance, compassion, and care they have provided. As we work for a peaceable world, we pray that their example of devotion and persistence will inspire us to service and faithfulness in the world. Amen.