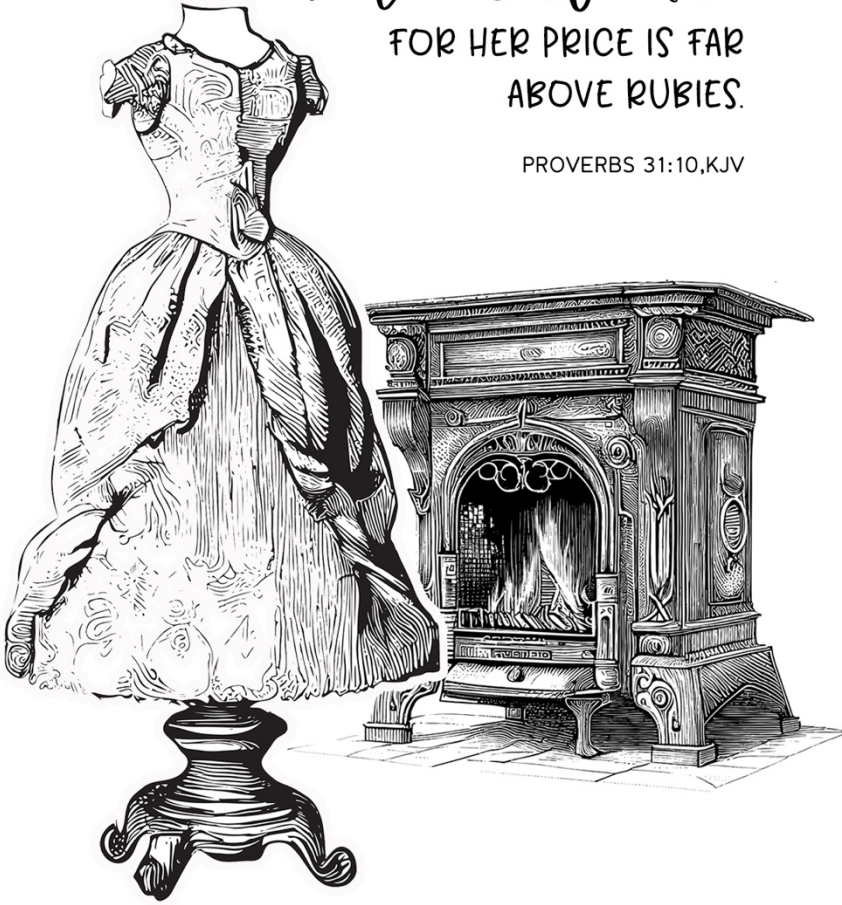


WHO CAN FIND A
virtuous woman
FOR HER PRICE IS FAR
ABOVE RUBIES.

PROVERBS 31:10, KJV



CHAPTER 1

She is Beautiful



SCRIPTURE FOCUS: RUTH 1-3, ESTHER 2

We've all fallen into the comparison trap at one time or another. Whether we're comparing our weight, our style, our height, or our hair, we're caught up in the idea that we don't measure up to other women around us.

Satan takes advantage of our insecurities by trying to convince us that we're not good enough or that we'll never measure up. His objective is to knock us down and keep us from being the person God created us to be. By keeping us in bondage to comparison and insecurity, he undermines our confidence and stunts our growth. These lies go against the truth of who we are in Christ, not to mention the fact that they take our eyes off things that are more important to God. The Bible says,

"Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight." (1 Peter 3:3-4)

SHE'S BEAUTIFUL FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Peter is not telling us here to abandon all sense of fashion or to toss out the bracelets we have, he's simply reminding us to cultivate an inner beauty that's pleasing to God. He's pointing out the fact that a meek and quiet spirit outshines the way we look. He's encouraging us to keep our focus in the right place.

Can you think of a woman whom you have met who is beautiful from the inside out? What characteristics do you admire most about her?

Beauty isn't found in the reflection of a mirror. It's found inside the heart. The inner character of a woman that reaches out to compassionately share the love of Christ. Virtue shines out from within, illuminating the world around us with its radiant grace.

While Peter points out that a meek and quiet spirit is of great value, the world tends to view meekness as weakness. What they fail to see is that meekness is strength under control. Talking about His impending crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus said,

*"No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."
(John 10:18)*

Virtue in the Biblical sense is conforming our lives to the image of Christ, which is a difficult battle at times as the flesh is at war with the spirit. Instead of letting sin take the lead, we follow the way of our Savior who was meek and humble in heart. The Blue Letter Bible defines meekness by saying:

The meek are those wholly relying on God rather than their own strength to defend against injustice. Thus, meekness toward evil people means knowing God is permitting the injuries they inflict, that He is using them to purify His elect, and that He will deliver His elect in His time. Gentleness or meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God's goodness and control over the situation. The gentle person is not occupied with self at all. This is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of the human will. - blueletterbible.org



In 2 Peter 1:5-8, Peter lists several virtues we should add to our faith. Which ones does he list?

Write them here:

Likewise, Paul shares a similar list in Romans 12:9-21. Which ones does he list there?

SHE REFLECTS THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

A virtuous woman reflects the meekness of Christ in that she's compassionate, patient, and kind. Her spirit is not easily ruffled or provoked, even in the face of adversity. She's slow to anger and quick to forgive, striving to do what's right in the eyes of the Lord.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus demonstrated a compassionate and forgiving spirit. He taught His disciples to turn the other cheek and to love their enemies. He set an example of how to live a life that is guided by patience and love.

The Bible teaches us to imitate the humility of Christ who took on the nature of a servant and humbled Himself before God. Remember when Jesus washed His disciples' feet? He washed all 12 of them. The fact that He was willing to kneel and wash the feet of the one who would betray Him, shows us just how strong a meek and gentle spirit can be.

"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:5-8)

SHE STANDS OUT FROM THE CROWD

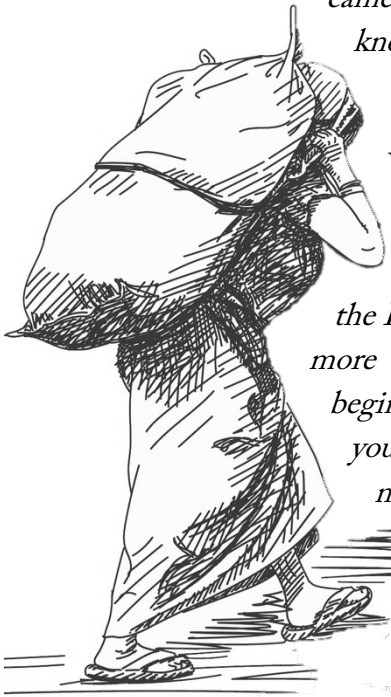
When it comes to those who are gentle and meek, Ruth stands out from the crowd. She was peaceful and content, not easily ruffled or anxious, and when things got rough, Ruth got tough. She was a P31 Woman through and through.

As you read the book of Ruth, you find that her story is one of faith, courage, and selflessness. She experienced more than her fair share of loss. But instead of giving up, she chose to follow her mother-in-law Naomi to a new land, where she worked to provide for them.

While many of the women in the Bible, such as Sarah, Rachel, and Esther, are described as being beautiful, we don't see Ruth being defined this way. In fact, we don't really know all that much about her physical appearance. What we do know, however, is that her

quiet and humble spirit caught the eye of Boaz, who was won over by her character.

"Boaz replied, 'I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before.'" (Ruth 2:11)



It wasn't Ruth's beauty that caught his eye, it was her virtue. Notice how Boaz praises her for her kindness, nobility, and selflessness,

"And he said, 'Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.'" (Ruth 3:10-11, KJV)

Ruth's beautiful spirit did not go unnoticed by God either. She found favor in the eyes of Boaz, who later became her husband. And through her obedience and faithfulness, Ruth became an ancestor of King David and ultimately of Jesus Christ himself.

In contrast to Ruth, women today are inundated with the idea that physical beauty is critical to success and acceptance in society. Social media as well as the fashion and beauty industries have

created an unrealistic and unattainable standard for beauty. The majority of what we see today is far removed from reality.

SHE'S ONE OF A KIND

As part of their "Campaign for Real Beauty," the Dove company released a short film in 2006, known as "Dove Evolution." The video showed viewers what it took to transform an average woman into a beautiful model. The process involved a team of several beauty experts who styled the woman's hair and applied makeup to contour and reshape her face. The video then showed the use of imaging software to enhance the model's appearance, by slimming her face, elongating her neck, and reducing the size of her nose and chin. The final result was a highly retouched image that bore little resemblance to the woman's natural appearance.

These unrealistic beauty standards are damaging to young women today, as they perpetuate the belief that everyone must look a certain way. It doesn't address the importance of one's character



and individuality. You're one-of-a-kind, uniquely made by God, with your own talents, strengths, and purpose.

In *Reshaping It All*, a book I co-authored with Candace Cameron Bure, we write,

There will never be another woman who owns the look, the personality, and the experiences that you do. Those ingredients make up the recipe that defines who you are, and it's your gift from the Lord—own it. Originality is something to be desired and you've got it girl, whether you know it or not.

SHE'S A CROWN TO HER HUSBAND

Character is more important than any clothing or makeup we'll ever put on. Why? Because inner beauty, has the power to touch the lives of those around us in profound and meaningful ways.

The essence of who we are is reflected in our character, a fundamental aspect of our being that doesn't fade away with time. Character stays with us, it grows within us, and if we nurture it well, it gets more beautiful with age.

The Bible says,

"A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones." (Proverbs 12:4)

What are some of the characteristics we find in a virtuous woman, and why is she so precious to her husband?

- She is honest. Her husband can trust her to take care of their household, and also his heart.
- She is pure. She's set aside for her husband and only him.

- She is humble. Standing humbly before God, she takes up her cross daily.
- She is strong. She's ready and willing to fight for her marriage.
- She is considerate and kind. She treats her husband with love, respect, and understanding.

If you don't have a husband, remember, you can still be a crown to others around you, in the way that Ruth was to Naomi.

"He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth." (Ruth 4:15)

Can you think of any other virtues that would add value to our relationships?

SHE'S A WORK IN PROGRESS

A friend of mine once told me that she was quite the party girl back in the day. She didn't know there was anything wrong with her lifestyle when she came to Christ, and so for a while, she continued to live in much the same way. It wasn't until she was exposed to the knowledge of truth that she started to change and eventually became a pastor's wife.

Transformation is a life-long process of spiritual growth wrought by the Holy Spirit within us. People experience spiritual growth in different ways, but it starts with a desire to seek God, and a willingness to surrender to His will. Although the details may vary, the steps to growth are similar:

1. We surrender to God's will and acknowledge our need for His help as we grow in Christlikeness.
2. We cultivate a growing knowledge of God's character and His desires for our lives, through reading and meditating on His Word.
3. We actively seek to remove sin from our lives and replace it with righteousness through the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, as the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, we turn from that sin.
4. We seek to serve others and share the love of Christ with those around us, thereby growing in virtue and holiness.

As I look over that list, I'm reminded of a sign we had on the wall of our house back in the day. "Please be patient," it said, "God isn't finished with me yet." That's the heart of sanctification, we're forgiven, and we are being transformed day by day into the likeness of Christ.

The word "sanctification" isn't a word we use all that often outside of the church. Even inside the church the word might be a

little difficult for some people to grasp. So, what is sanctification? Simply put, it is the process by which we become more Christ-like. I guess you could say that it's a beautification of the soul.

SHE'S PREPARING FOR THE KING

In the story of Esther, we see that she went through a 12-month beautification process (also known as a purification process) before she was sent in to see the king. As you read Esther Chapter 2, notice that during the first 6 months she was treated with the oil of myrrh, and for the remaining 6 months she was treated with perfume and cosmetics.

According to Healthline.com, myrrh was used in Biblical times for the purpose of purification as it is able to kill bacteria and stop the spread of disease¹. Furthermore, the perfume that was used is otherwise known as "sweet odors."

As I'm digging deeper into this chapter, I can't help but notice that there are unmistakable parallels between the beautification process that Esther went through and the Christian life. Instead of spelling them out to you, I'd like to ask you to read the chapter and see what you find for yourself.





The P31 Challenge

Describe a time when you struggled with feelings of insecurity or self-doubt. What can we glean from this chapter to challenge those thoughts?

What would you say to encourage a young girl who is struggling with the pressure to conform to the beauty standards surrounding our culture?
