

DEVOTIONAL

STARTING OVER
when it's time to let go, and let God

WEEK THREE

Starting over as a Woman of Valour

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THE BRAVERY OF THE PROVERBS 31 WOMAN

In May 2019, the world lost a brave woman and a beautiful writer, Rachel Held Evans. I'll never forget what she wrote about busting some of the myths around the Proverbs 31 woman:

"The woman described in Proverbs 31 is not some ideal that exists out there. She is present in each one of us when we do even the smallest things with valour."

The Proverbs 31 woman shares the same descriptor as Ruth—*eshet chayil*.

A woman of valour who can find? —Proverbs 31:1035

She girds herself with strength [spiritual, mental and physical fitness for her God-given task] and makes her arms strong and firm. —Proverbs 31:17, AMPC

Strength and dignity are her clothing and her position is strong and secure. —Proverbs 31:25a, AMPC

We might want to hate this woman, but instead, we should be looking to her as a model of a woman who's made some hard choices about who she's going to be, despite what culture is telling her. She is a woman who literally had to surrender everything she had known and start over in a new country, with little tying her to her culture and her past.

Have you been hanging on to misconceptions about the Proverbs 31 woman?

PROVERBS 31 IS A POEM

Because it's a poem, Proverbs 31 should not be interpreted prescriptively as a job description for all women. Its purpose is to celebrate wisdom-in-action, not to instruct women everywhere to get married, have children, and take up the loom.

Ruth was called a woman of valour as a widow without children. Being a woman of valour means you can be single and be found in any season of life.

PROVERBS 31 IS WRITTEN FOR MEN AS ITS TARGET AUDIENCE

It's a Jewish tradition to read or sing Proverbs 31 at the beginning of Erev Shabbat on Friday nights in the Jewish household. Husbands sing it to their wives to honour them for making the house a home. Proverbs 31 is not written to shame women into achieving every facet of this supposed to-do list. It is not written for women to try to "measure up." No one can be all the things! Rather, it's a tribute to every woman who is honouring God with her strong character, evident by the choices she makes day in and day out. Proverbs is for the men to study as a lesson in how to give tribute to the women in their lives.

PROVERBS 31 CELEBRATES VALOUR

The passage uses the same term, *eshet chayil*, to describe the virtuous woman as it uses to describe Ruth.



The late Rachel Held Evans reminds us of the following: Ruth was a destitute foreigner whose daily work involved gathering, threshing, and winnowing wheat. For most of her story, she is neither a wife nor a mother. Circumstantially, her life looked nothing like the life of the woman depicted in Proverbs 31.

Ruth didn't spend her days making clothes for her husband. She had no husband; she was widowed. Ruth's children didn't rise up and call her blessed. She was childless.

Ruth didn't spend her days exchanging fine linens with the merchants and keeping an immaculate home. She worked all day in the sun, gleaning leftovers from other people's fields, which was a provision made for the poorest of the poor in Israel.

And yet guess what Boaz says of Ruth before she gets married, before she has a child, before she becomes a wealthy and influential woman: "All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character" (Ruth 3:11). The Hebrew that's used there is *eshet chayil*—woman of valour.

Ruth is identified as a woman of valour not because she checked off some Proverbs 31 to-do list by getting married, keeping a clean house, and producing children, but because she lived her life with incredible bravery, wisdom, and strength. She lived her life with valour.

So how would you measure up to the Proverbs 31 woman on a scale of one to ten, now that you know her character was so much more than any "to-do" list? I hope it inspires you to look at your life right now and make some choices to step out in courage.

THE BRAVE TRUTH

Even when Ruth was "out," God had already provided a Kinsmen Redeemer for her to be brought "in." God is your Kinsmen Redeemer for your future, but you might have to wait to see it be fulfilled.

Ruth was part of the lineage of Christ. "Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David..." (Matthew 1:5–6, NIV). Remember to surrender yourself at Jesus' feet as an act of valour. He'll respond with an invitation to belonging and will act valiantly on your behalf for the rest of your life.

Despite Ruth's external reality of leaving behind everything she knew, moving to a foreign land as a woman who didn't fit in, what was Ruth's internal reality as a woman who became the very center of the gospel story?

Ruth's "I Am..." statements might have been as follows:

- I Am... Complete
- I Am... Confident
- I Am... Resourceful
- I Am... Whole

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If you were to complete "I Am..." statements, what would they be?

Valour isn't about what you do. It's about who you are. And we need to be reminded God has a particular place in His story for us to step into, just as He did with Ruth in Matthew 1:5 and onwards... all the way down the royal line that leads to Jesus.

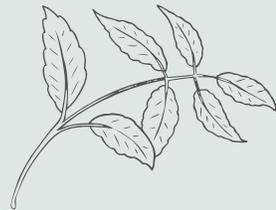
I shared that it was a difficult transition for me to move from my family of origin in Alberta to Ontario. About six months into my marriage, I was unhappy. I called home and talked to my mother about it. In true Ukrainian style, she asked if I had ever missed a meal. I replied I hadn't, so she declared, "You're staying!" She was right. She saw through my unhappiness and discerned that the choice to settle and begin to create a home where happiness could flourish was a better one than coming home.

How about you? Do you find yourself in a place you never imagined you'd be?
Have you ever felt like you've lost everything, even your identity?

Be encouraged by Ruth's story and see what might be possible by being open to new options. Give things time to unfold. Most importantly, watch for God to honour your sweet obedience by providing solutions in the middle of your situation that you might never have thought of on your own. Change is difficult. We like the status quo and try to hang on to what's comfortable. Sometimes we have the power to do that. But when change happens that's outside of our realm of control, we must remember we always have a choice in our response, even in a devastating loss. This is strength-building, character-forging grit.

Don't be scared of change. Don't be scared of living a strong life. Choose courage over culture, context, and the pressure to conform. The world is waiting for you to live as a woman of valour—not trying harder, but finding your place in God's story, knowing who you are in your core. I believe there's so much room at the table for women who truly display the eshet chayil qualities.

Would you step into your place in history and be that woman?



Do you need Prayer?
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This week's speaker
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