



# WOMAN *of* WORTH

**PRAYERS AND REFLECTIONS**  
FOR **WOMEN INSPIRED BY**  
THE **BOOK OF PROVERBS**

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TO **DUFFY KIKO** & **MARY ELLEN GILROY**,  
SISTERS IN CHRIST AND WOMEN OF WORTH

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# INTRODUCTION

## **Who can find a woman of worth? Far beyond jewels is her value.**

*Proverbs 31:10*

I have a confession. This book was born out of anger.

A good friend, an acquaintance, and I were talking about Proverbs 31's poem on the woman of worth. Acquaintance said it set an impossible standard for wives and mothers. It was not the first time she had expressed her view that childless single women have it easy. Good Friend and I allowed as how we'd been to an eightieth birthday party the week before and while the birthday girl wasn't perfect, she exemplified the women of worth's traits. Acquaintance said the birthday girl must not have children. I noted that she has eight of them and numerous grandchildren, and anyway, I thought the passage was not only about women with children, but also about Christ and his church and our individual relationships with the Lord.

"Oh," Acquaintance all but oozed, "you're thinking of it *metaphorically*."

"Ain't nothing metaphoric about my relationship with Jesus," I shot back.

Crickets.

I felt bad the whole way home for having lost my temper. Then I started thinking: maybe it was progress that I thought my relationship with Jesus *did* make me a woman of worth. For most of my life, I downplayed any accomplishments or compliments. Nothing I did was really that important; anything I could do, someone else could do better.

I delved a bit further into Proverbs 31 and learned that it was long believed that King Lemuel, whose mother gave him this instruction, was Solomon, which would make his mother Bathsheba. You know, Bathsheba, the woman with whom King David had sex and then sent her husband off to death in battle to hide that Bathsheba was pregnant. That child died shortly after birth, but the couple went on to have Solomon. We don't know for sure that Lemuel and Solomon are the same person, but I really like the idea of Bathsheba, someone familiar with sin and tragedy and forgiveness, holding forth on the attributes of a worthy woman.

So, here we are. Thanks, God.

Each chapter in this book includes a verse or two from Proverbs 31. In addition to a short narrative, you'll find reflections on two words from the verse's essence, a brief profile of a woman saint who exemplifies the verse, three questions for contemplation or discussion, and a prayer. Start at the beginning, or pick a verse that speaks to where you are today.

My prayer is that something in this book will speak to your heart and soul and further open them to the Lord. He loves you very much. Know that in his eyes, you indeed are a woman of worth.

# OF TRUST *and* JUDGMENT

**Her husband trusts her judgment; he does not lack income.**

*Proverbs 31:11*

As my twenty-year marriage neared its end, my husband and I had more than \$200,000 in credit card debt. Most of it was in my name since I was the primary income earner—or had been, until I’d been fired a few months earlier. We were sitting in our family room one day, arguing for the umpteenth time about the future, when he said, “You don’t believe in me anymore.”

He was right. And that, more than the debt or anything else, spelled the end of the marriage. I hadn’t believed in him or trusted his judgment for some time; to me, he’d become a drain, a burden. It was a far cry from the place we’d begun, both ambitious journalists, born and raised in the Midwest, our future together full of promise because we had the same political views and liked the same music. That God thing? Didn’t matter. Neither of us ever went to church, and we’d been married by a justice of the peace.

**TRUST**

I think about the marriages I admire among my friends today. It's not that the unions are perfect, and in some cases, to the outside world, they don't appear evenly yoked. There are big differences in age or background or education or political persuasion in many. Sometimes, they aren't from the same faiths. What they do have in common is that trust and respect for each other's judgment mentioned in Proverbs 31:11. Maybe he's not Catholic, but he respects her devotion to her faith. It makes her stronger and more loving (and perhaps, leads to unconscious evangelization opportunities). Maybe he at one point worked erratic or long hours that kept him away from important family functions. Her wisdom in selecting the times to discuss if or how that might change instead of erupting into tears or shouts every time he got home late resulted in small but important changes to his schedule even though the adjustments had a negative impact on his promotion possibilities.

That sort of trust gets people through the rough spots where some might regard them as lacking income—the dollars and cents kind—because they have the income that matters. That income is a sense of safety, confidence, and self-worth bolstered by a respectful partnership.

As women of worth, we attempt to be worthy of that trust in all our relationships: with spouses, with children and other relatives, with friends, with neighbors and coworkers, and with the Lord. When we have people we can trust and who can trust us, we all go about our daily work with less fear and uncertainty.

What about those times when trust is betrayed or disregarded—by us, by others, and, so it seems, by God? It's when our spouse is caught in a lie—or is caught setting traps or scrutinizing our habits in search of a lie—that distance begins to open up; we read Proverbs 31:11 and the rest of the woman of worth passage and shake our heads. No earthly woman has that kind of relationship with anyone. But we can. It's there for the asking with the Lord.

Throughout the Bible, we are told to trust in the Lord, not human-kind, over and over again. But in Numbers 12:7–8, God notes that while he speaks with prophets through visions and dreams, it's different with Moses, a human being:

Throughout my house he is worthy of trust:

face to face I speak to him,

plainly and not in riddles.

The likeness of the LORD he beholds.

What did Moses do to earn God's trust? He obeyed. He carried the Lord's messages to Pharaoh and the Israelites even when he knew he would be challenged, disbelieved, and scoffed at. He humbled himself. All laudable characteristics. All characteristics within our grasp, if we are willing to ask.

But instead of summoning up the courage and faith to ask, all too often we act as if we're in charge of the trust equation: Here's the deal, Lord. I'll go to Mass on Sundays and holidays, I'll give money to the parish, I'll get the kids or myself to religious ed or Bible study or prayer group, and you'll give me a life without worry in exchange. When the equation gets upset by infidelity, illness, poverty, or some other twist, we work to identify where our trust was misplaced. In our spouse? Make his life a living hell in retribution. In our children? Weep and wail to anyone who will listen. In ourselves? Find some refuge in alcohol, food, shopping, or other overindulgence as a means of self-punishment. In God? That's easy. Just turn our backs on him.

If we truly desire to be women of worth—of worth to the Lord, to the world, and to ourselves—we have to at some point begin to trust again, and again, and again. When Peter asked if he had to forgive a sinning brother seven times, Jesus's response was not seven times, but seventy times seven. We don't need to stay in situations that are dangerous to us or to those we love. Forgiveness can come from a distance as we prepare our-



selves to discern when—if ever—the time comes to open up our hearts and souls to again trusting those who have wronged us, intentionally or unintentionally.

We find these beautiful words in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* about reestablishing relationships within a marriage: “To heal the wounds of sin, man and woman need the help of the grace that God in his infinite mercy never refuses them” (CCC, 1608). That same infinite mercy is available to us in healing any rupture.

## **JUDGMENT**

The woman of worth’s husband trusted her judgment. That’s a weighty responsibility, sisters. As women of worth, we are influential, whether we realize it or not. Our children, friends, coworkers, and people in the parish whose names we don’t even know are watching us. They hope to learn from us. And so, we must judge carefully. Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:2, “For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you.”

The woman of worth’s judgment likely involved much observation: Who among her husband’s business partners conducted themselves ethically. Who provided financially for their families, including aging relatives, and who was miserly with their wealth. Who was kind to the children, and whose children seemed uneasy at the community’s gatherings. What the business partners’ own wives said about the men when the women gathered for activities.

That sort of judgment isn’t about liking or disliking someone for the tone of her voice or the color of her skin. It isn’t about whether she’s driving a ten-year-old car or wearing fashions from five years ago. It’s about taking the measure of the person to prepare yourself to go into battle with or against her. Consider Jesus’s observations of the authorities. He was slow to publicly condemn them, even when they were attempting to trap him in word games. He’d tell a story and listen and watch. Remember the

story of the woman found in adultery? Jesus didn't dish a lot of dirt on the scribes and the Pharisees. Instead, when they asked him about whether she should be stoned, he wrote something on the ground and said the person without sin should cast the first stone. Quietly, the others left, having judged themselves.

The woman of worth was careful in her judging—of others and of herself. She wasn't constantly going to her husband and others talking about what a total loser she was. She believed in her own worth—and we are called to do the same, even when we stumble and fall. We all sin. But as Christians, we know it needn't end there. As Pope Francis said in his beautiful encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* in May 2015:

Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning. We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom.<sup>1</sup>

The woman of worth's honest, compassionate actions and words made her a trustworthy, reliable companion of great value for her spouse, her friends, her children, and the Lord.

<sup>1</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_encyclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si.html)

## A WOMAN OF WORTH

**Blessed Chiara Badano***1971–1990 • Feast day – October 29*

Chiara Badano never married and never had children before she died in October 1990. Her life was indistinguishable from that of many other Italian teenagers: She loved her parents, went to school, had friends, was active in a Christian movement called Focolare, and played sports. All that changed one day on the tennis court when the pretty seventeen-year-old suffered a pain so intense that she dropped her racquet. Tests showed that Chiara was suffering from bone cancer, and that a cure was unlikely.


Bitterness over the injustice of this diagnosis would have been understandable given Chiara's youth. But she chose to trust and love instead. She served as a source of comfort to the caregivers and friends who came to see her. One Valentine's Day, Chiara surprised her parents with news they would be spending the evening not in the hospital with her, but at a restaurant dinner she had arranged. When the pain of her treatments would seem almost unbearable, she would say, "For you, Jesus...if you want it, I want it too."<sup>2</sup>

Chiara was buried in the plain white dress she had selected; she regarded it as her wedding dress, as she would be united with Christ in heaven, confident in his judgment of her.

2 <http://www.focolare.org/en/news/2012/10/29/beata-chiara-luce-badano/>

## FINDING YOUR WORTH

1. We all encounter difficult circumstances that can cause us to lose trust in the Lord, temporarily or for a more extended period. Those circumstances might include the sudden loss of loved ones, the end of a dream, or health issues. Where have you become bitter and vowed that when you get to heaven, the Lord is going to have some explaining to do? Make a pact with yourself and God that you will limit your thinking about this perceived injustice to thirty minutes a day, followed by fifteen minutes of offering thanks for the ways in which the Lord has blessed you.
2. Do you sometimes feel like God trusts you a little *too much*? Where are you feeling overwhelmed and overburdened in family roles, at work, and in ministry or friendships? Ask the Lord for some direction, and listen rather than coming up with reasons why the current path doesn't work for you. Consider talking with a priest or spiritual adviser if the Lord's way for you still seems a bit murky and challenging.
3. Is there someone who has lost your trust, perhaps for very legitimate reasons? Rather than nursing the hurt, in what ways might that trust begin to be rebuilt, without putting yourself in danger? Options might include sincerely praying for the person, or looking for small opportunities in which you can open yourself up.



**Lord, help me to believe in your trust in me;  
to trust in you; and to build loving,  
trusting relationships with others.**

