

“Okay, that was a little contorted,” Cait wrinkled her nose. “So try this, if you have a passage you’re struggling with, how do you figure out what it’s supposed to mean?”

“The first thing is to put it in context,” Brian smiled slightly. This was a topic he enjoyed talking about. “Verses were not meant to be read alone. When we read a verse in the paragraph it was originally placed in, it often means something much deeper than what we see when we try to use it alone. But sometimes the paragraph is just as confusing. Then you need to read the entire idea which might be more than a paragraph. You’d be surprised how much reading the sections before and after a passage can shed light on the original intent of the passage. Do you have a specific passage you’re struggling with?”

“Yeah. Proverbs 31, the virtuous woman passage. There’s no way she can literally do all that stuff. There has to be something I’m missing, but I can’t figure out what it is.”

“I’ve got to confess that I haven’t studied that chapter,” Brian grinned, “but I do know that Proverbs is supposed to be read differently than the rest of the bible since it’s wisdom literature.”

“So how do you know how to read it?”

“I’ve got all kinds of books that help, from how-to-read-the-bible books to commentaries. I also have half a dozen different versions of the bible.”

“I have three. That’s one thing I figured out on my own. In bible studies, lots of times someone had a bible that said something different from mine. It helps to read them side by side sometimes, doesn’t it?”

“Yes it does, but probably not so much with Proverbs 31. The context won’t help much either. You probably want some commentaries for that passage. To make sense of some of the proverbs you really need to understand the culture in which they were written.”

“That makes sense,” Cait giggled. “If you respond to ‘Hey, you like beef?’ without knowing if it’s a malihini or a kamaaina saying it, you could end up in real trouble.”