
Proverbs 31 Bible Study

Proverbs 31:10-31. 4 sessions of about 45 minutes, or one longer session. For small groups and personal study.

Proverbs 31 closes the book of Proverbs. Verses 1 to 9 are a mother's advice to her son, King Lemuel: avoid what ruins kings, and speak up for the poor. Verses 10 to 31 are a poem in praise of "a wife of noble character." In Hebrew each verse begins with the next letter of the alphabet. She works hard, trades, provides, gives to the poor and speaks with wisdom, and the poem ends: "a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised." Most readers take it as a picture of wisdom lived out in an ordinary household. It praises. It is not a checklist.

READ TOGETHER: PROVERBS 31:10-31

¹⁰ A wife of noble character, who can find? She is far more precious than rubies. ¹¹ The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he lacks nothing of value. ¹² She brings him good and not harm all the days of her life. ¹³ She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. ¹⁴ She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. ¹⁵ She rises while it is still night to provide food for her household and portions for her maidservants. ¹⁶ She appraises a field and buys it; from her earnings she plants a vineyard. ¹⁷ She girds herself with strength and shows that her arms are strong. ¹⁸ She sees that her gain is good, and her lamp is not extinguished at night. ¹⁹ She stretches out her hands to the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers. ²⁰ She opens her arms to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. ²¹ When it snows, she has no fear for her household, for they are all clothed in scarlet. ²² She makes coverings for her bed; her clothing is fine linen and purple. ²³ Her husband is known at the city gate, where he sits among the elders of the land. ²⁴ She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchants. ²⁵ Strength and honor are her clothing, and she can laugh at the days to come. ²⁶ She opens her mouth with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. ²⁷ She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. ²⁸ Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband praises her as well: ²⁹ "Many daughters have done noble things, but you surpass them all!" ³⁰ Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. ³¹ Give her the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her at the gates.

Scripture from the Berean Standard Bible (BSB), public domain.

BACKGROUND

A mother's words to a king

The chapter opens with "the words of King Lemuel," which his mother taught him. Tyndale's study notes say that "apart from this passage, Lemuel is unknown." Her teaching "encourages him to control his lusts (particularly for women and alcohol) so that he might reign justly." Then comes the line many readers remember: "Open your mouth for those with no voice."

Readers differ on whether the poem in verses 10 to 31 is still the mother speaking. Either way, the chapter puts a wise woman's voice at the end of a book that began with a father teaching his son.

These are the words of King Lemuel—the burden that his mother taught him: What shall I say, O my son? What, O son of my womb? What, O son of my vows? Do not spend your strength on women or your vigor on those who ruin kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to crave strong drink, lest they drink and forget what is decreed, depriving all the oppressed

of justice. Give strong drink to one who is perishing, and wine to the bitter in soul. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more. Open your mouth for those with no voice, for the cause of all the dispossessed. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the cause of the poor and needy. (Proverbs 31:1-9)

An alphabet poem

Verses 10 to 31 are twenty-two verses, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in order.

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown note that "in Hebrew the verses begin with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order." Tyndale's notes say the arrangement "gives an impression of completeness and provides the student with an aid for learning."

That matters for how to read it. A poem built from A to Z is painting a full picture, and nobody reads it as a schedule for one day. It is praise, and it was written to be learned by heart.

Wisdom in a household

Proverbs often pictures wisdom as a woman who calls out in the streets and sets her table (8:1-11; 9:1-6). Wisdom is "more precious than rubies" (3:15), and so is the woman in 31:10. Tyndale's notes draw the line between them: "Such a woman, like wisdom, is more precious than rubies," and "the noble wife's character exemplifies wisdom."

The book also ends where it began. Proverbs 1:7 says "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge," and 31:30 praises "a woman who fears the LORD." Tyndale's notes: "The book concludes where it began, by affirming the ultimate importance of the fear of the Lord."

She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire compares with her. (Proverbs 3:15)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. (Proverbs 1:7)

A woman of strength

The Berean Standard Bible translates verse 10 as "a wife of noble character." Jamieson, Fausset and Brown note that the word behind "noble" or "virtuous" is "literally, 'of strength,' that is, moral courage," and point to Ruth 3:11. There the Berean Standard Bible uses the same words of Ruth: "a woman of noble character."

And now do not be afraid, my daughter. I will do for you whatever you request, since all my fellow townspeople know that you are a woman of noble character. (Ruth 3:11)

THE POEM, STANZA BY STANZA

Twenty-two verses in eight short movements, then the mother's words that open the chapter.

Who can find her? (31:10-12)

The poem opens with a question and a price: "far more precious than rubies." Hastings' Bible Dictionary notes that the exact stone is uncertain, perhaps red coral or pearl, but the point is plain. Her husband trusts her, and she does him good all her life. Tyndale's notes add that no one can find such a wife "without God's help (18:22)."

Wool, flax and food from afar (31:13-15)

She chooses raw materials and works them with eager hands. Like a merchant ship she brings food from far away, and she is up before dawn to feed her household and her servants. Tyndale's notes: "This wife works to provide food and clothing for her family."

A field and a vineyard (31:16-18)

She looks over a field, buys it, and plants a vineyard from what she has earned. Tyndale's notes: "An excellent wife is engaged in commercial enterprises outside her home." She knows her trade is good, and her lamp burns late.

The spindle and the poor (31:19-20)

The same hands that hold the spindle open wide to the poor. Tyndale's notes say she "is generous to the poor, another characteristic of wise people," and list other proverbs that say the same. Her work is not only for her own house.

Scarlet, linen and purple (31:21-24)

Snow does not frighten her, because her household is dressed warmly. She makes fine cloth to wear and to sell. Her husband is respected at the city gate, where the elders sat. Tyndale's notes say her industriousness "enables her husband to distinguish himself among community leaders."

Strength and honor (31:25-27)

Now the poem turns from what she does to who she is. Strength and honor are her clothing, and "she can laugh at the days to come." Tyndale's notes: "The noble wife's character exemplifies wisdom. She is coolheaded as she faces future uncertainties. She gives advice in a winsome way."

Her children call her blessed (31:28-29)

The people who know her best speak up. Her children call her blessed, and her husband praises her: many women have done noble things, "but you surpass them all!" Tyndale's notes say "those most important to the woman testify to her character, abilities, and achievements."

A woman who fears the LORD (31:30-31)

Charm deceives and beauty fades. The poem's last word of praise is for something deeper: "a woman who fears the LORD." Tyndale's notes: "A woman's character is more important than her physical beauty." The poem ends where it began, with her work praised in public, at the gates.

A mother's advice to a king (31:1-9)

Before the poem, a mother warns her son not to waste his strength on women or wine, because a king who drinks forgets the law and fails the oppressed. Tyndale's notes on verses 8 and 9: "Rather than opening his mouth to drink wine (31:4-7), the king should speak up on behalf of the defenseless." The chapter opens with justice for the poor and the poem returns to it in verse 20.

SESSION 1 OF 4

A mother's advice to a king

Read Proverbs 31:1-9. See what a wise mother wanted her son to value, and why.
Also read: Proverbs 1:8-9; Proverbs 20:1; Psalm 72:12-14.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. Who is speaking in verses 1 to 9, and who is listening?
2. What two things does she warn him against (verses 3 to 7)? What does she tell him to do instead (verses 8 and 9)?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. Why might drinking be especially dangerous for someone with power over others (verse 5)?
4. Tyndale's notes say the king should open his mouth to speak up for the defenseless rather than to drink wine. How do verses 4 and 8 play on that?
5. Why might Proverbs end with a mother's teaching, when chapters 1 to 9 are mostly a father's?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

6. Who around you has "no voice"? What would it mean to open your mouth for them?
7. Whose wise advice shaped you? Thank God for them, and tell them if you can.

SESSION 2 OF 4

Who can find her?

Read Proverbs 31:10-18. See the poem's opening picture, and how it echoes wisdom.
Also read: Proverbs 3:13-18; Proverbs 8:10-11; Ruth 3:11.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. Count the verses from 10 to 31. Why might an alphabet poem have exactly that many?
2. List what she does in verses 13 to 18. Which happen at home and which beyond it?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. Read Proverbs 3:13-15 and 8:10-11. What else in Proverbs is "more precious than rubies"? What does that tell you about the woman in this poem?
4. Boaz calls Ruth "a woman of noble character" (Ruth 3:11). What do we know about Ruth that helps fill in what "noble character" means?
5. Why is it important that this is a poem, written from A to Z, and not a daily schedule?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

6. Where in your own work do you see the kind of faithfulness this poem praises?
7. Who do you know, man or woman, whose character fits these verses? How could you honor them this week?

SESSION 3 OF 4

Strength and honor

Read Proverbs 31:19-27. See how her generosity, care and wisdom fit together.
Also read: Proverbs 11:24-25; Proverbs 14:1; Proverbs 22:9.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. What do her hands do in verse 19, and what do they do in verse 20?
2. What is she clothed with in verse 25? What does she do with her mouth in verse 26?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. Why might the poem put the spindle and the poor side by side?
4. She "can laugh at the days to come." Is that because nothing will go wrong, or because of who she is? Look at verse 30.
5. Verse 26 says she speaks with wisdom and "faithful instruction." How does that connect her to the mother in verses 1 to 9?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

6. What would it look like for your household to open its hands to the poor this month?
7. What future worry would you like to be able to laugh at? What would you need to trust about God to do so?

A woman who fears the LORD

Read Proverbs 31:28-31. See how the poem, and the whole book, ends with the fear of the LORD. Also read: Proverbs 1:7; Proverbs 9:1-6; Proverbs 9:10.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. Who praises her in verses 28 and 29? Where is she praised in verse 31?
2. What does verse 30 set against charm and beauty?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. Read Proverbs 1:7. How does 31:30 bring the whole book back to its start?
4. Read Proverbs 9:1-6, where wisdom is a woman who builds her house and sets her table. How does that help you read Proverbs 31?
5. Some people hear this poem as a standard they can never meet. How does reading it as praise of wisdom change that?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

6. Our culture praises charm and beauty. What would it look like to praise character instead, out loud, this week?
7. Close by praying for each other to grow in the fear of the LORD, and give thanks for the people in your lives who show it.

ONE-SESSION PATH

Proverbs 31 in one evening

Read all of Proverbs 31:10-31. About 45 to 60 minutes.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. What does Lemuel's mother warn him against, and what does she tell him to do (31:1-9)?
2. Read verses 10 to 31. List what the woman does, and what the poem says she is.
3. What does verse 30 set against charm and beauty?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

4. The poem is an alphabet acrostic. Why does that matter for how we read it?
5. Read Proverbs 3:15 and 1:7. How does Proverbs 31 tie back to wisdom and the fear of the LORD?
6. Why is this poem better read as praise of wisdom than as a checklist?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

7. Who do you know whose character fits these verses? How could you honor them this week?
8. Close by praying for each other to grow in the fear of the LORD.

FOR THE LEADER

- Read the passage aloud at the start of every session. It is a poem, so let it be heard as one.
- Some women in your group may have heard Proverbs 31 used to measure them, and felt they came up short. Some may be single, widowed, divorced or without children. Say early on that the poem praises wisdom in a life, and that it is not a list every woman must tick off. The fear of the LORD in verse 30 is open to everyone.
- The book of Proverbs is mostly addressed to young men, and this chapter was taught by a mother to her son. Invite the men in the group to read it as wisdom for them too, not only as a description of a good wife.
- Christians hold different views on roles for men and women in marriage and in work. This passage can be studied well without settling that. If the discussion turns there, keep coming back to what the text says and praises.
- If someone shares something that needs more than a group discussion, follow up with them privately and involve your pastor.

WHERE CHRISTIANS READ IT DIFFERENTLY

A real woman, an ideal wife, or wisdom herself?

Some readers take the poem as a portrait of an ideal wife, held up as worth seeking (31:10; 18:22). Many see it as wisdom lived out in an ordinary household, since it echoes the way Proverbs pictures wisdom as a woman (3:15; 9:1-6). A few read the woman as Lady Wisdom herself. Tyndale's notes hold the first two together: she is a wife, and "like wisdom, is more precious than rubies." Most readers keep more than one in view.

Is Proverbs 31 a standard for every woman?

Some teachers use it as a model for wives and mothers to aim at. Many others caution against reading a poem of praise as a to-do list, pointing to its alphabet form and to verse 30, which puts the fear of the LORD above everything else. The qualities it praises, such as hard work, generosity, wise speech and trust in God, are commended to every reader of Proverbs, men included.

What does it say about women and work?

The poem shows her running a household, trading cloth, buying land and planting a vineyard. Tyndale's notes say she "is engaged in commercial enterprises outside her home." Some readers stress her care for her household (31:15, 27), others her work in trade and the city (31:16, 24). The poem praises both and does not set them against each other. Christians draw different conclusions from this about roles today, and the text itself does not settle those debates.

Who is speaking in verses 10 to 31?

Verse 1 introduces the words Lemuel's mother taught him. Some read the poem as more of her teaching, a mother describing the kind of wife her son should value. Others, including Tyndale's notes, treat verses 1 to 9 and 10 to 31 as separate sections, with the poem closing the whole book. Either reading fits the chapter.

SOURCES

Berean Standard Bible. Berean Bible. Public domain. Scripture text of Proverbs 31, 3:15 and 1:7, and Ruth 3:11.

Tyndale Open Study Notes, Proverbs. Tyndale House Publishers. CC BY-SA 4.0. Notes on Proverbs 31, quoted with attribution.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary (1871), Proverbs 31. Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown. Public domain. The acrostic form and the meaning "of strength" in 31:10, with the link to Ruth 3:11.

Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible (1898): Rubies. James Hastings. Public domain. The uncertain identity of the stone translated "rubies".

Protos study editorial. Protos. CC BY-SA 4.0. Study structure, questions, leader notes and summaries.

Edition 2026.1. This study is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0. You may copy, print, adapt and share it with attribution under the same license.



Protos

The full study, with links to the commentary and dictionary, is free at protos-app.com/study-guides/proverbs-31. Protos is a Bible app for iPhone and Android that puts the history and context beside the passage you are reading.