

## Study Guide for the Week of May 13, 2012



### “Mama”

**John 19:37 & Proverbs 31:10-31 NLT**

Dr. Joshua Beckley, Senior Pastor

Listen to audio sermon at <http://ecclesiachurch.com/audio%20sermons.html>

**TAKE IT TO PRAYER:** Continue to pray for group requests throughout the week.

⇒ Pray for your group members and your family.

⇒ Pray for these Ecclesia prayer needs:

Lynda Beckley (complete healing)

Flo Fellows (bereavement; mother)

Rita Hammond (recovery & healing)

Godfrey Julien (bereavement; brother)

Jessica Miller (healing)

Shannon Edmund (healing)

Jessie Francis (employment)

Liz Hemingway (bereavement)

Lisa LittleWolf (provision)

Carolyn Murray (bereavement)

### TAKE IT BACK

The Book of Proverbs focuses on human character and conduct. The observations and admonitions about life are addressed to individuals, not to the nation Israel as such. The Book of Proverbs stresses wise living which is synonymous with godly living for one who is godly, righteous and wise in God’s eyes. By contrast a wicked or unrighteous person is foolish. The characteristics and consequences of these two paths of living are referred to repeatedly in Proverbs. The conclusion for these two paths is summarized in Psalm 1:6: “For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

Chapter 31 - A mother gives a weighty message to her son about the dangers of wayward women and wine. She reminds him of the blessings of a virtuous woman. This final section of Proverbs is an acrostic poem exalting a noble wife. Each of the 22 verses begins with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each verse highlights the character traits of a woman who blesses and benefits all aspects of her family and family life.

Someone once said:

*“The most important occupation on earth for a woman is to be a real mother to her children. It does not have much glory to it; there is a lot of grit and grime. But there is no greater place of ministry, position and or power than that of a mother!”*

Jesus said to John, “*Here is your Mother!*” (See John 19:37)

Mother’s Day is a day to give honor where honor is due.

Mother’s Day is a day to honor Mother, Mommy, Mom, or “MAMA!”

The song “MAMA” by Boyz II Men is a tribute!

Whether your mother is here today or has gone home to be with the Lord, take a few minutes, listen to the lyrics written by Kenneth Edmonds and give honor to your Mama!

**TAKE IT HOME:** PERSONALLY prepare answers before meeting with your group.

There are character traits in Proverbs 31 regarding the virtuous woman. Women need to recognize that these traits are attractive men. They have seen these traits in their Mama and they want a woman like this.

**TRAITS WOMEN SHOULD STRIVE TO POSSESS:**

1. **She is a trustworthy and beneficial woman.**

Proverbs 31:10-12

*"Who can find a virtuous and capable wife? Her husband can trust her, and she will greatly enrich his life. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life."*

2. **She is an industrious and intelligent woman.**

Proverbs 31:13-14

*"She finds wool and flax and busily spins it. She is like a merchant's ship, bringing her food from afar." She works with her hands, and is not afraid to learn. (Proverbs 31:19, 22, 24)*

3. **She understands the priority of home and family.**

Proverbs 31:15

*"She gets up before dawn to prepare breakfast for her household and plan the day's work for her servant girls."*

She cares and sacrifices for her family. (Proverbs 31:27)

4. **She is a sharp business woman.**

Proverbs 31:16-18

*"She goes to inspect a field and buys it; with her earnings she plants a vineyard. She is energetic and strong, a hard worker. She makes sure her dealings are profitable; her lamp burns late into the night." She's an educated woman!*

5. **She is a self-disciplined and orderly woman.**

Proverbs 31:19

*"Her hands are busy spinning thread, her fingers twisting fiber."*

She does what needs to be done; she is not lazy.

6. **She manifests the grace of hospitality.**

Proverbs 31:20a

*"She extends a helping hand to the poor...."*

She doesn't mind sharing what she has!

7. **She is charitable in time of need.**

Proverbs 31:20b

*"...and opens her arms to the needy."*

8. **She is not selfish or cheap in care for her own.**

Proverbs 31:21-22

*"She has no fear of winter for her household, for everyone has warm clothes. She makes her own bedspreads. She dresses in fine linen and purple gowns."*

She provides the best that her family can afford.

9. **She has character, dignity and wisdom.**

Proverbs 31:25-26

*"She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future. When she speaks, her words are wise, and she gives instructions with kindness."*

10. **She is virtuous because she is spiritually-minded.** (Proverbs 31:28-31)

**TAKE IT DEEPER:** Personal study if you desire to dig deeper into the Scripture.

**The Wife of Noble Character** (Excerpted from Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 5)

The Book of Proverbs comes to a close with the addition of this poem about the woman of valor. A careful reading of the passage will show that her value is derived from her character of godly wisdom that is beneficial to her family and to the community as a whole. Traditionally this poem was recited by husbands and children at the Sabbath table on Friday night. Christians too have seen it as a paradigm for godly women.

Indeed, many commentators rightly invite a contrast to the earlier portrayals of Dame Folly lurking dangerously in the streets – she was to be avoided – and Lady Wisdom, who is to be embraced. The Lady Wisdom in this chapter stands in the strongest contrast to the adulterous woman in the earlier chapters.

Several characteristics of this poem should be noted in order to appreciate its impact on the teaching of wisdom. First, the entire poem is arranged alphabetically (a pattern known as an acrostic). This means the first word of each line begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in sequence. The arrangement made memorization easier and perhaps also served to organize the thoughts. We may say, then, that the poem is an organized arrangement of the virtues of the wise wife—the ABC's of wisdom.

Second, the passage has striking similarities with hymns. Usually a hymn is written to God, but here apparently it was written to the wife of noble character. A comparison with Psalm 111, a hymn to God, illustrates some of the similarities. It is clear that Proverbs 31 is patterned after the hymn to extol the works of wisdom.

Third, the passage has similarities with heroic literature. The vocabulary and the expressions in general have the ring of an ode to a champion. For example, “woman of valor” (NIV, “woman of noble character”) is the same expression one would find in Judges for the “mighty man of valor” (NIV, “mighty warrior”)—the warrior aristocrat. “Surpass them all” (v.29) is an expression that signifies victory.

Putting these observations together, one would conclude that Proverbs 31:10-31 is a hymn to Lady Wisdom, written in the heroic mode. Wisdom is personified as a woman because the word “wisdom” is a feminine noun and naturally suggests it, and because the woman is an excellent example of wisdom by virtue of the variety of applications it receives—at home, in the market, with charity, in business. There are several reasons why the writer would use these literary features to present his description of wisdom: a personification of wisdom allows the writer to make all the lessons concrete and not abstract (we can see them in action in everyday life); it provides a polemic against the literature of the ancient world that saw women as decorative—charm and beauty without substance – and it depicts the greater heroism as moral and domestic rather than only exploits in battle.

The poem certainly presents a pattern for women who want to develop a life of wisdom; but since it is essentially about wisdom, its lessons are for both men and women to develop. The passage teaches that the fear of the Lord will inspire people to be faithful stewards of the time and talents that God has given; that wisdom is productive and beneficial for others, requiring great industry in life's endeavors; that wisdom is best taught and lived in the home—indeed, the success of the home demands wisdom—and that wisdom is balanced living, giving attention to domestic responsibilities as well as business enterprises and charitable service.

**TAKE IT TO THE GROUP:** Share discoveries and answers in your group discussion.

**Let's Talk About Mama!** Each person in the group can answer one question to start the discussion.

1. Read Proverbs 31:10-12 aloud. How was your mom (or mother figure) trustworthy and beneficial?

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2. Read 31:13-14 aloud. How was your mom (or mother figure) industrious and intelligent?

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3. Read 31:15 aloud. How did your mom (or mother figure) demonstrate that she understood the priority of home and family?

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4. Read 31:16-18 aloud. Was your mom (or mother figure) a sharp business woman?

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5. Read 31:19 aloud. How was your mom (or mother figure) self-disciplined and orderly?

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6. Read 31:20a aloud. Describe how your mom (or mother figure) manifested the grace of hospitality.

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7. Read 31:20b aloud. Describe how your mom (or mother figure) was charitable.

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8. Read 31:21-22 aloud. Describe how your mom (or mother figure) was unselfish or spared no expense in care for her own.

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9. Read 31:25-26 aloud. How did your mom (or mother figure) demonstrate character, dignity and wisdom?

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10. Read 31:28-31 aloud. How did your mom (or mother figure) show that she was virtuous because she is spiritually-minded?

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**HUGG HOSTS:** Please remember to report attendance immediately following your group's meeting!