

## Proverbs 31:10-31

### Leader Session Guide

#### Focus Statement

From A to Z (*alpeh* to *taw*), Woman Wisdom is seen as a quilt of wise practices, portraying what it means to joyfully and productively live according to the God standard.

#### Key Verse

Strength and dignity are her clothing,  
and she laughs at the time to come.  
She opens her mouth with wisdom,  
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

Proverbs 31:25-26

#### Focus Image



A tapestry of wisdom.

# Are We Raising God's Standard?

## Session Preparation

### Before You Begin . . .

Proverbs 31:10-31 has many sewing and fabric metaphors that bring to mind quilts of wisdom, experiences, and people. This is not just feminine wisdom, per se, but the personification of the divine call to wisdom in Proverbs 1:20 and following. Each of the couplets in Proverbs 31 could be assigned a “word of wisdom,” such as integrity or charity. But what raises the biblical proverbs over Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s painting of Flemish proverbs is that, for the biblical proverbs, the bottom line is more about justice and mercy than merely being smarter or more successful. This is at the heart of the distinction between the gold standard and the God standard.

### Session Instructions

1. View the Session Prep Video.
2. Read this Session Guide completely and highlight or underline any portions you wish to emphasize with the group. Note also any Bonus Activities you wish to do.
3. Check to see what materials you’ll need—such as quilts, quilting fabrics, and notions!
4. Co-author and singer-songwriter, Peter Mayer, has composed three theme songs that relate to each session of this Book of Faith unit on Proverbs. Downloadable lyrics and mp3s for use as focus or bonus material can be found at [www.petermayer.com/bookoffaith](http://www.petermayer.com/bookoffaith)

### Session Overview

In Session 3 there is an all-inclusive celebration for the personification of Woman Wisdom. In this passage we are told of a woman who literally raises the standard by her deeds. While she appears to be the ideal and a rarity, she is the embodiment of the God standard for the inspiration and encouragement of both women and men. She represents the way God’s Word lives in all creation.



### Acrostic:

A literary device in which the initial letter of a word or phrase combine with other initial letters in the set so as to make reference to something else. Example: GRACE—God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.



### Incarnate:

From the Latin for “in the flesh.” Jesus is God incarnate, and his followers should continue to embody his teachings so that the Word of God might “live” in our world today (Colossians 3:16).



### Torah:

A Hebrew word for “teaching” or “law” that is used as the title for the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

## LITERARY CONTEXT

The literary aspects of this session’s texts offer some fascinating insights. Stylistically, these verses are an **acrostic**, which is comprised of 22 couplets each beginning, in order, with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. While some have called this the “ABCs” of being the perfect wife, this is a rather simplistic understanding of how these acrostics work. The A-to-Z treatment is intentionally well-ordered and comprehensive. While this structure also aids in teaching and memorization, the fact that a passage is given this kind of treatment speaks to its importance.

Other passages that share this acrostic structure include Psalms 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; and 145. In the rather small but very significant book of Lamentations, which describes the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, acrostics are used four different times in chapters 1; 2; and 4, where each letter begins a whole verse, and in Lamentations 3, where each letter begins three verses. Psalm 119, however, is the Old Testament’s *uber*-acrostic, which, like Proverbs 31:10-31, provides accentuated and comprehensive coverage of its topic over its 176 verses, making it the longest chapter in the Bible. In the case of Psalm 119 we find an acrostic celebration of God’s excellent Word, which is not far from Proverbs 31, which is a celebration of God’s wisdom.

The combined effect of this acrostic is not merely to provide a “job description” for already overburdened women and men, but to provide a model for what happens when the call of Woman Wisdom is heeded. By embodying this wisdom, we become God’s standard in the world, standard in the sense of a rallying banner or emblem. This metaphor is expanded in passages such as Matthew 5:13-16, which talks about the Christian’s role as a light of the world, a city on a hill, and in 2 Corinthians 3:2-3 as a living “letter” that **incarnates** God’s Word.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Historically speaking, one could question whether or not this passage was intended to counterbalance the kind of sexual irresponsibility noted in Proverbs 4-7. The sexual prohibitions of the Mosaic law are wide ranging, as illustrated in Leviticus 18 and 20. Despite condemnations of things like adultery, incest, and rape in the **Torah**, we can discover in passages such as Exodus 21:10 and Deuteronomy 21:15 that polygamy was