

Women *and* Wine



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Proverbs 31, Job 29:15, Proverbs 8, 1 Cor. 1:21, Rev. 14:13.*

Memory Text: “Do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink” (*Proverbs 31:3, 4, NKJV*).

The book of Proverbs began with the teachings of a father (*Prov. 1:1, 8; 4:1*) and ends with the teachings of a mother (*Prov. 31:1*). The name *Lemuel* may allude to Solomon; if so, then Lemuel's mother is Solomon's mother, and she warns her son against the two most serious threats to the king: wine and women.

The association of wine and women is deliberate. To be efficient as a ruler, the king has to be careful of the influences he faces, and these two factors can be very powerful. Though the right woman could be beneficial, alcohol is only trouble.

The father's introduction was concerned with the spiritual acquisition of wisdom. Now, the mother's conclusion is concerned with applying wisdom in real life. For the spiritual principles taught by the father would mean nothing if the practical advice offered by the mother were not followed.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 28.*

A Toast “To Life”?

In many cultures, drinking alcohol is associated with living a good life. People raise a glass and wish one another a long life, though the irony is that each glass works toward destroying life. Nicely designed bottles, poetic and funny drinking songs, clever commercials, and even some “scientific” findings all comfort drinkers in their idea that alcohol is good for them. Proverbs has already warned us against this deadly deception (*Prov. 23:30–35*). Now the theme reappears, showing us even more damage that drinking can bring.

Read Proverbs 31:4, 5, 8, 9. Together, what do they say, and how does their message apply to every follower of the Lord, not just the king?

In similar language, Job describes himself as being “eyes to the blind, and . . . feet to the lame” (*Job 29:15, NKJV*). Likewise, the king or those with means should help support the poor and the needy—those who are “speechless” in that they don’t have a voice because no one listens to them.

The destructive effect of wine can also be seen in how it can so easily distort one’s judgment. While alcohol is bad enough for common folk, for a king or someone with power, alcohol can create terrible situations. The drinking king not only “forgets the law” and does not know what is right, but he subsequently issues distorted judgments: the guilty are declared innocent, and the innocent guilty.

What is at stake here is the capacity to discern between right and wrong, good and evil. The prohibition of wine drinking has to do with basic wisdom and, as such, should apply to every human being. It is noteworthy that this concern is precisely the reason implied in the special prohibition of drinking for the priest: “that you may distinguish between holy and unholy” (*Lev. 10:9, 10, NKJV*).

Who hasn’t seen the devastating effects of alcohol in so many lives? How can you help others, especially the young, stay clear of what can bring only harm to them and to others?

A Toast “To Death”

Read Proverbs 31:6, 7. How are we to understand these texts?

A quick reading of these verses gives the impression that Lemuel’s mother allows the consumption of wine or any other alcohol for the person who is about to die (*vs. 6*) or for the person who suffers from depression (*vs. 7*). This reading, however, would contradict not only the immediate context—Lemuel’s mother has just warned the king against wine drinking—but also the general context of the book of Proverbs, which systematically and emphatically prohibits wine drinking.

In addition, it hardly makes sense to offer something to the perishing that would only make their health and well-being worse. And giving alcohol to a depressed person is like giving salt to someone who is already dehydrated. If, as we know, God cares about our bodies and our health, it doesn’t make sense to see these texts, especially in context, encouraging the use of alcohol.

More important, an analysis of the use of the expression “who is perishing” in the book of Proverbs reveals that it is speaking about the wicked (*Prov. 10:28; 11:7, 10; 19:9; 21:28; 28:28*). Through the expression “who is perishing,” Lemuel’s mother points in fact, by association, to the wicked. As for the expression “bitter of heart,” it refers to the depressed person (*Prov. 31:6, NKJV*), who, like the wicked, becomes insensitive and “forgets” poverty (*vs. 7*).

“Satan gathered the fallen angels together to devise some way of doing the most possible evil to the human family. One proposition after another was made, till finally Satan himself thought of a plan. He would take the fruit of the vine, also wheat, and other things given by God as food, and would convert them into poisons, which would ruin man’s physical, mental, and moral powers, and so overcome the senses that Satan should have full control. Under the influence of liquor, men would be led to commit crimes of all kinds. Through perverted appetite the world would be made corrupt. By leading men to drink alcohol, Satan would cause them to descend lower and lower in the scale.”—Ellen G. White, *Temperance*, p. 12.

A Virtuous Woman

“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies” (*Prov. 31:10*).

Who is the “virtuous woman” of Proverbs 31:10? A number of indications suggest that the author has more in mind than a godly woman or the ideal wife. Following the lead of many passages of the book (*Prov. 1:20–33, 3:13–20, 4:5–9, Proverbs 8*), we have good reason to think that “the virtuous woman” represents wisdom. This personification of wisdom as a woman is justified, not only because the Hebrew word for “wisdom,” *chokmah*, is a feminine noun but also because it allows the Hebrew writer to draw all kinds of concrete lessons for our daily life. Wisdom is not pictured as some lofty and unreachable ideal but as a very practical and approachable woman who could become our life companion.

This last teaching about wisdom is given through a beautiful acrostic poem: each verse begins with a Hebrew letter following the alphabetic order, as in the book of Lamentations and in many psalms.

Compare the text on wisdom in Proverbs 8 with our text on the “virtuous woman.” What features of the “virtuous woman” remind us of wisdom in the book of Proverbs?

1. She is precious and worth finding (*Prov. 31:10, 8:35*).
2. Her worth is more than rubies (*Prov. 31:10; 8:10, 11, 18, 19*).
3. She provides food (*Prov. 31:14, 8:19*).
4. She is strong (*Prov. 31:17, 25; 8:14*).
5. She is wise (*Prov. 31:26, 8:1*).
6. She is praised (*Prov. 31:28, 8:34*).

Though we live in the so-called information age, and though we have acquired so much more knowledge than had previous generations, there’s little to indicate that our generation is any wiser than previous generations. Indeed, as Martin Luther King Jr. said, “We have guided missiles and misguided men.”

Read 1 Corinthians 1:21. What does it say to you, and how can this idea help you live by faith?

She Works

The virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 is not lazy; she works hard and is very active. The poem insists on this quality (*Prov. 31:27*), which characterizes the wise versus the fool (*Prov. 6:6; 24:33, 34*). The field of her activities is comprehensive and concrete. To be spiritual does not mean that we should be idle, all under the pretext that we are concerned with highly important religious issues, and thus do not have time to take care of “trivial” matters. (See *Luke 16:10*.) The woman “willingly works with her hands” (*Prov. 31:13, NKJV*). It is interesting that this very spiritual person is never depicted praying or meditating. She is shown only as an efficient and productive woman, like Martha of the Gospels (*Luke 10:38–40*).

Read Proverbs 31:12, 15, 18. Why is the woman always working?

The woman works “all the days of her life” (*vs. 12*), even during the night (*vs. 15, 18*). Her active and watchful presence is effective all the time. The reason for her constant attention is her responsibility.

Read Proverbs 31:20, 25. What is the temporal scope of her projects?

Here we touch on an important point regarding our work and effort: it will be tested by time. Only the future will testify to the quality of our deeds. To work wisely is to work with the future in mind, not just for an immediate reward.

Though not quite dealing with the same thing, the principle in the following text from Revelation is so important: “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (*Rev. 14:13*).

If you have a special woman (a wife, mother, family member, teacher, boss, or friend) in your life, what can you do to show your appreciation for her and for all she has done for you?

She Cares

Read Proverbs 31:26–31. What other important characteristics are seen in this woman? Why are these important for all of us, regardless of who we are?

As we have seen all through this quarter, an emphasis is placed on words, on what we say. The woman is known for her wisdom and for her kindness. They are related. After all, couldn't one argue that kindness is another form of wisdom, especially when we understand that wisdom isn't just what we know but what we say and do?

Notice, too, the phrase the "law of kindness." That is, kindness isn't just some fleeting attribute that escapes from her mouth now and then. It is a law, a principle of her very existence. How powerful it would be if the "law of kindness" were to guide all that came out of our mouths.

Read Proverbs 31:30. What important point is revealed here that is so often forgotten?

All too often women are rated only in terms of outward appearance; that's such a shallow and superficial marker. The Bible points out just how "vain," how empty, that kind of attitude ultimately is. This woman's true beauty is found in her character and how that character is made manifest in her life and works. Beauty will always pass away; character can endure forever. "A great name among men is as letters traced in sand, but a spotless character will endure to all eternity."—Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 81.

In what areas of your life do you need to see your character improve? Praying about it is fine, but what concrete positive steps must you take in order to see growth?

Further Study: “When indulging their appetite for wine and while under its exciting stimulus, their reason was clouded, and they could not discern the difference between the sacred and the common. Contrary to God’s express direction, they dishonored Him by offering common instead of sacred fire. God visited them with His wrath; fire went forth from His presence and destroyed them.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 295.

“Let the children and youth learn from the Bible how God has honored the work of the everyday toiler. . . . Let them read . . . of the wise woman described in the Proverbs, who ‘seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands;’ who ‘giveth meat to her household, and their task to her maidens;’ who ‘planteth a vineyard,’ ‘and strengtheneth her arms;’ who ‘stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, . . . reacheth forth her hands to the needy;’ who ‘looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.’ Proverbs 31:13, 15, R.V.; 31:16, 17, 20, 27.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 217.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why is total abstinence from alcohol the only right option? After all, what possible good can arise from any kind of alcohol consumption? On the other hand, think about all the damage that it often causes.
- 2 Dwell more on the idea that although we have a lot of knowledge for our time, we don’t necessarily have more wisdom. In what ways can knowledge without wisdom be even more dangerous than a lack of knowledge without wisdom? What are some recent examples we can see of just how damaging knowledge without wisdom can be?
- 3 Review the characteristics of the “virtuous woman.” How can the principles behind what is revealed in this specific situation be applied to believers, whatever their gender, marital status, or age?
- 4 The book of Proverbs is filled with practical wisdom. This should tell us that our religion, even with all its lofty theology and spiritual dimensions, has a very practical side to it, as well. How can we make sure that we don’t neglect the practical aspects of faith as we seek to fulfill its theological and spiritual dimensions?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Proverbs 31:4, 5, 29–31*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize that lifestyle decisions are not trivial issues but have major effects, reaching far beyond the person who makes them.

Feel: Foster an appreciation for lifestyle choices that will enhance this present life and fitness for heaven.

Do: Determine, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to follow God’s lifestyle directives, which are promised to bring blessings now and to make his or her life a blessing.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Reality and Results of Lifestyle Choices Are Fundamental, According to Proverbs 31.

A Proverbs 31 aligns two significant issues that each person must decide on: the use of alcoholic beverages, plus relationships between men and women in and outside of marriage. How can one learn to make the best choices in these two areas?

B How does media (radio, television, Internet) impact a person’s thinking about these two important choices?

II. Feel: The Tension Between the Values of Society Regarding Alcohol and Relationships and Proverbs 31.

A Why is there often such a tension?

B How can a person best sort out the conflicting values between biblical counsel and societal pressures?

III. Do: Determine How to Make Optimum Lifestyle Choices.

A Imagine what a difference it would make if every person would choose to eliminate harmful drinks from his or her life and choose to honor biblical principles of family values and sexual purity. Describe situations you are aware of in which such choices would make a difference.

► **Summary:** The book of Proverbs concludes with reminders of the importance of the lifestyle choices we make. The final chapter also goes into great detail describing a godly woman. While dealing with many types of work and responsibilities throughout the book, the last chapter exalts a woman of great intelligence, wisdom, and kindness in her everyday tasks. We are instructed that there are no unimportant decisions and choices and that success comes from fearing the Lord (*31:30*), a frequent precept in Proverbs.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Proverbs 31:4–31*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The last chapter of Proverbs speaks to two important areas of life: what we choose to drink and how we live day to day, especially highlighting the daily tasks of a working mother. As the chapter closes, again the “fear of the Lord” is shown to be the fundamental choice undergirding a righteous life.

Just for Teachers: Throughout the book of Proverbs, advice and counsel for right living is given for family members (fathers, mothers, sons, daughters) and for various occupations in society. Some of the statements are commands, some practical suggestions; sometimes results of choices are spelled out. The underlying framework holding all the chapters together is belief in the Creator God—praised throughout the biblical canon.

This week’s lesson urges thoughtful consideration of the dangerous results of something often readily indulged in throughout many places and cultures: drinking alcoholic beverages. Also, the positive consequences of a well-ordered family are discussed, with the wife and mother’s role underscored.

Opening Activity: Bring to class, if possible, statistics on how drunkenness leads to many marital difficulties. In the same vein, it is significant that the consequences of the negative effects of alcohol on a king’s (leader’s) critical tasks are coupled, by contrast, in Proverbs 31 with a lengthy portrayal of a mother carefully managing her family, who duly honor her. Ellen G. White portrays the same precept:

“The influence of an ill-regulated family is widespread, and disastrous to all society. It accumulates in a tide of evil that affects families, communities, and governments.

“It is impossible for any of us to live in such a way that we shall not cast an influence in the world. No member of the family can enclose himself within himself, where other members of the family shall not feel his influence and spirit. The very expression of the countenance has an influence for good or evil. His spirit, his words, his actions, his attitude toward others, are unmistakable. If he is living in selfishness, he surrounds his soul with a malarious atmosphere; while if he is filled with the love of Christ, he will manifest courtesy, kindness, tender regard for the feelings of others and will communicate to his associates, by his acts of love, a

tender, grateful, happy feeling. It will be made manifest that he is living for Jesus and daily learning lessons at His feet, receiving His light and His peace. He will be able to say to the Lord, ‘Thy gentleness hath made me great.’ ”—*The Adventist Home*, pp. 33, 34.

Consider This: Ask your class to consider why the warnings against drinking alcohol should be stressed for everyone, even though Proverbs 31:4, 5 is addressed to the king. Also, reflect on and discuss how single men and women can benefit from the description of the married woman who is praised in detail in this chapter.

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The two topics presented in Proverbs 31—the harmful results of intoxicating beverages, and the depiction of the actions of a God-fearing wife and mother—though written thousands of years ago, are still very contemporary and necessary.

Bible Commentary

I. Alcoholic Beverages (*Review Proverbs 31:3–9 with your class.*)

Even the wonderful fruits of creation can be misused and lead to substance abuse. Alcoholic beverages cloud the areas of the brain in which moral thinking is done. When this happens, grave injustices can occur, such as not enforcing good laws or passing faulty, defective legislation that does not defend those who are oppressed (*Prov. 31:5, 8, 9*). What is warned against here is valid for every person in whatever sphere of influence he or she has.

Consider This: The opening “motherly counsel” to Lemuel in Proverbs 31 shifts to a warning against drunkenness, describing the tragic results that can occur. Why is it tempting to drown one’s problems in alcoholic beverages?

II. Godly Womanhood *(Review Proverbs 31:10–31 with your class.)*

The woman described in Proverbs 31:10–31 is the finale of the book of Proverbs, an exceptional climax. Throughout the entire book, readers have been warned of ungodly, “strange” women whose seductive powers cause ruin. This final portrait is in contrast to those women, describing a feminine role model of wisdom and godly values. The first verse, along with the final verses, skillfully envelope the passage in blessing: she is a blessing to her husband (*vss. 11, 12*), and he blesses her (*vss. 28, 29*). Her husband is known at the city gate (*vs. 23, the civil center of ancient Israelite communities*), and her own works are praised at the same place (*vs. 31*); and she becomes the praise of her community (*vss. 30, 31*).

She is no self-centered “superwoman” but, rather, a God-fearing person whom God reveals Himself through, for she “fears the LORD” (*vs. 30, NKJV*), deriving her wisdom from His Word. For in Proverbs, wisdom is not primarily an intellectual and academic achievement but a relationship with the Creator.

Consider This: How does the understanding of these two final vital principles of life in the book of Proverbs inspire your own motives and choices and broaden your perspective of God’s work in the human heart?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Recall biblical narratives in which drunkenness brought terrible, long-lasting results (for example, Noah and his sons [*Gen. 9:18–27*]; Lot and his daughters [*Gen. 19:30–38*]).

Find examples of biblical women who exemplify the character qualities of the Proverbs 31 passage. In light of this activity, contemplate the following thought: Jesus is the only human who was able to pick His mother. Of all the Israelite women living at the time when Jesus was conceived, He selected Mary. Though Seventh-day Adventists don’t worship her, we can appreciate her as the one with the qualities that Jesus knew would make her the best human mother for Him. This exalts the mother’s role in society. In the same vein, Ellen G. White exalts home virtues:

“The Lord is served as much, yea, more, by faithful home work than by the one who teaches the word. As verily as do the teachers in the school, fathers and mothers are to feel that they are the educators of their children.

“The Christian mother’s sphere of usefulness should not be narrowed by her domestic life. The salutary influence which she exerts in the home circle she may and will make felt in more widespread usefulness in her neighborhood and in the church of God. Home is not a prison to the devoted wife and mother.”—*The Adventist Home*, p. 236.

Thought Question: How can wives and mothers be encouraged and praised throughout the year and not just on Mother’s Day?

Application Question: In what ways can you help the wives and mothers, including single mothers, in your local church family feel the love and appreciation, honor and support they deserve for their demanding tasks?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: God bids us to call Him “Father,” but He also demonstrates qualities of a mother: He compares His protection of His people to that of a mother hen (*Matt. 23:37*). Also, He equates conversion to the birthing experience only females can know!

Activity: Have the class plan practical ways in which they could help any single moms in the church. Or surprise busy parents with unexpected assistance during the next week.