

STUDY GUIDE  
BY SHERRY HARNEY

TWELVE SESSIONS



*Women* TWELVE  
MORE  
OF THE BIBLE

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LIFE-CHANGING STORIES  
FOR WOMEN TODAY

Based on teachings from:

KAREN EHMAN

LISA HARPER

MARGARET FEINBERG

BIANCA JUÁREZ OLTHOFF

CHRYSTAL EVANS HURST

COURTNEY JOSEPH



STUDY GUIDE  
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*Twelve* **TWELVE  
MORE**  
*Women*  
**OF THE BIBLE**

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LIFE-CHANGING STORIES  
FOR WOMEN TODAY

12 SESSIONS

Based on teaching from:

KAREN EHMAN, BIANCA JUÁREZ OLTHOFF,  
LISA HARPER, CHRYSTAL EVANS HURST,  
MARGARET FEINBERG, COURTNEY JOSEPH



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## INTRODUCTION

### Transparent Portraits

Beautifully honest! That is what the Bible is.

From the creation of the first man and woman in the opening chapters of Genesis to the glorious consummation of all things in the closing pages of Revelation, the Bible paints pictures of people as they really were—with all their human struggles, doubts, and failings. This includes the portrayals of women who followed God and lived by faith.

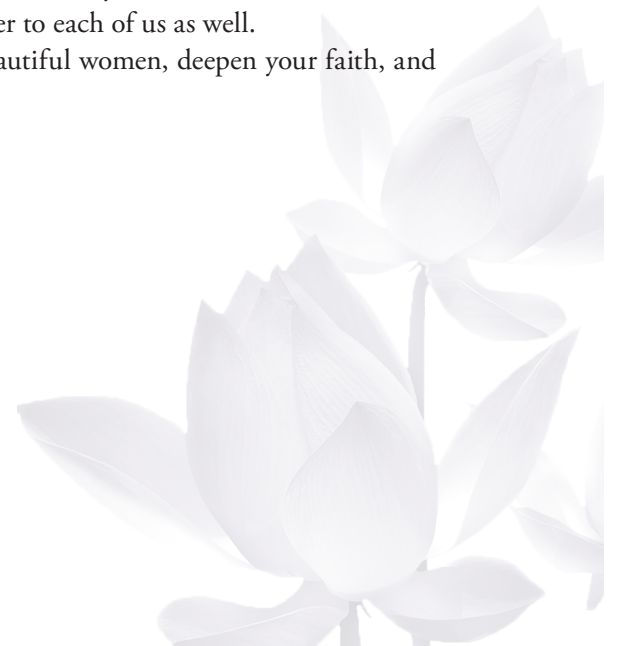
The women you meet in the Bible, including those you will learn about in this twelve-session study, will impress, surprise, and inspire you. The sessions in this study are intended to help you see these women as they lived and to see yourself as you can be through an ever-growing faith in Jesus. Their lives were not perfect—and your life will not be perfect either. But their lessons and journeys of faith are recorded in the pages of God’s Word to help you find your way forward as you follow God’s leading in every possible situation.

Some of these women show up in a single paragraph of the Bible and then disappear back into history. You have only a glimpse of their story, but it still speaks volumes. You can learn much from these often missed and passed over women of faith.

Other women have entire books of the Bible written about them. You get to follow them through years of their life. These women give you a fully orbéd vision of a real person, walking with God, seeking after their Maker. Their stories give you hope that every year of your life can offer time to grow in faith and walk more closely with God.

In every account, you meet women filled with the presence and power of the living God. Their appearance in the Bible, be it brief or expansive, is divinely ordained. Their lessons are eternal. Their lives matter to God, and they should matter to each of us as well.

May God anoint your study of these unique and beautiful women, deepen your faith, and grow your passion to follow Jesus.











SESSION 1

# PROVERBS 31 WOMAN

HOW NOT TO DO IT ALL

**Key Scripture:** Proverbs 31:10–31

Karen Ehman



## MEETING THE PROVERBS 31 WOMAN

*T*his woman is unreal! Literally. All of the other women you will meet in this twelve-session study are captured in a real place and time. Each of their stories comes from a particular context and setting in biblical history.

But not the woman portrayed in Proverbs 31. While she may be based on an actual person, the collection of her qualities and attributes are gathered from a lifetime of experiences and lessons learned. This chapter in Proverbs is not grounded on one moment in time. The portrait painted is a highlight reel, a “best of” collection, a top ten list.

The Proverbs 31 Woman is an ideal meant to inspire you to noble living, passionate leadership, humble service, compassionate care, and authentic faith. She is not meant to discourage you by setting the bar too high. Instead, she is a picture of beauty, grace, kindness, industry, and passion for life, meant to give you hope and inspiration.

As you read about this woman of noble character, listen for the whisper of the Holy Spirit. God inspired these words to give you something to strive toward—a vision of who you can be. God loves you as you are, but he also calls you to keep growing into the woman you long to be. Let the Proverbs 31 Woman be your example.



### Introduction

Picture perfect! It is an old saying that continues to cut at our heart and soul. When we view another person and see a snapshot frozen in time, we actually believe the image in front of us tells the whole story. It might be a Christmas picture of a family where everyone is smiling, well dressed, and apparently quite in love with each other. Everyone is delighted to be there, and peace is etched on every face. That is what the picture seems to convey.

Snap! There it is . . . a perfect family, couple, or life.

In recent years, this picture-perfect life has been expanded from one yearly snapshot to weekly or daily posts on social media. These images become a highlight reel of only the best experiences, the most exciting adventures, the most precious moments, and the happiest happenings. When we see these images, we might forget that any life can look glorious if we push the button at exactly the right moment, delete the pictures that did not turn out well, post only the highlights, and bury the mess and pain that surround these digital moments frozen in time.



At first glance, a couple named Carlos and Maria appeared to have such a picture-perfect life. They had a nice home, new cars, and smiles from ear to ear. A couple of times a year, they would host a party at their home and invite friends, neighbors, and church leaders over. It was a guaranteed afternoon of food, games, and laughter. No one knew that when the party was over, the house grew very silent. Maria and Carlos would both retreat to neutral ground and do their best to get along.

Suzette also seemed to have a picture-perfect existence. She loved life, people, and Jesus most of all. She had lots of friends and possessed a heart to serve those in need. Her voice was beautiful, and everyone at church felt drawn into the presence of Jesus when they heard her sing on the worship team. Her joy was real and deep, but so was her loneliness and depression. She let the joy shine for others to see, but she kept the dark days to herself.

Picture-perfect lives, marriages, and families exist only in fantasy. Real lives are a ruggedly beautiful mosaic made of laughter and tears, victory and defeat, confidence and worry, songs and laments, and a host of other highs and lows. This is true in our lives today and equally true of the people who lived in the days the Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit of God.

## Talk About It

*Briefly respond as a group to one of the following questions.*

Tell a fun story about a picture time with your family that was particularly challenging. How did the picture finally turn out (or not turn out)?

Tell about a character in the Bible you really appreciate. How is his or her story a combination of both wonderful strengths and honest human struggle?

*All of us could have a unique poem written about us.*

—Karen Ehman



## Video Teaching Notes

*As you watch the teaching segment for session one, use the following outline to record anything that stands out to you.*

Social media and the challenge of presenting a life in picture-perfect moments

Is the woman described in Proverbs 31 meant to be envied, emulated . . . or something else?

Our reactions to this woman: usually one of two things

Who is this woman . . . she is more than meets the eye

What can we learn from this woman?

1. It's about what you do and how you do it
2. Identify what is unique
3. Don't let comparison boss you around



4. Know your true audience

5. Have healthy fear

6. Remember the ruby

*It is always best to be an original version of yourself than a cheap, knockoff imitation of somebody else.*

—Karen Ehman

## Small Group Study and Video Discussion

*Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.*

1. What are some of the dangers of fixating on social media (or similar picture-perfect depictions) and believing these are real and honest presentations of other people's lives? Have you ever found yourself envious of such seemingly problem-free individuals?
2. **Read** Proverbs 31:10–31. What are some of the positive and praiseworthy characteristics you see in the woman portrayed in this passage? Why is it valuable and helpful to think about these traits and even aspire to grow them in our lives?

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3. The list of qualities and characteristics of this woman is most likely a composite of a lifetime of good moments and not the whole story of her experiences. (The times of struggle, sin, and hardship are not featured in this short list.) When we realize this is more of a highlight reel rather than an inclusive feature length film, we can open our hearts to learn from this woman's accomplishments. Imagine that someone wrote a list of your best moments and character traits that come from your faith in Jesus and love for God. What are at least three positive and God-pleasing things they would write about you?



Share one of these statements with your group members and humbly celebrate this good and beautiful work of God in your life. Be sure to share how this trait or characteristic has grown and developed over the years as you have walked with Jesus.

4. If the woman in Proverbs 31 is actually a picture of Bathsheba, the wife of David and mother of Solomon, how would this reality round out the fact that she was a real person with beautiful strengths and painful flaws? How does seeing the whole person—and not just the picture-perfect image—actually help us learn from a person's life?



5. Take time as a group to “translate” some of this woman’s activities and traits. What might this look like in our world today?

Verse	Then:	Now:
13	<i>She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands.</i>	
16	<i>She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.</i>	
20	<i>She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.</i>	
21	<i>When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet.</i>	
27	<i>She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.</i>	
28	<i>Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.</i>	

What is one of these traits you long to develop and deepen in your life? How can your group members pray for you and encourage you as you seek to grow this characteristic?

*Do what you can; don't do what you can't.*

—Karen Ehman

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6. This list of characteristics in Proverbs 31 is not a “to do” list of stuff we must accomplish immediately but a “ta da!” list of things God wants to grow in us over time for his glory. What is one “ta da!” moment you have seen in your own life in the past month? How did your awareness of spiritual growth bring joy and delight when you saw how God was working in and through your life?
  
7. God cares not just about *what* we do in life but also about *how* we do it. What do you notice in this regard about the attitude and disposition of the woman in Proverbs 31? What can we learn from her example?
  
8. Why is playing the comparison game dangerous and deadly when it comes to our health and joy? What are ways we can focus more on who God is making us and our family? How can we fight against the temptation to compare ourselves to other women and our family to other families?

*Stop comparing. Throw confetti instead, commending each woman and her uniqueness.*

—Karen Ehman

9. **Read** Colossians 3:23–24. What are some possible consequences and problems we might face if we expect our family members to praise us and vocally appreciate all we do? How can living with God as our primary and only true audience bring greater joy and confidence as we love and serve others?



How can a deep reverence and awe of God inspire us to live fully for Jesus?

10. Each one of us is God's ruby . . . unique, rare, and beautiful. What is one thing you can share about each person in your group that you see as rare, striking, and honoring to God?

*I need to remember I am loving and serving for an audience of One.*

—Karen Ehman

## Closing Prayer

*Spend time in your group praying in any of the following directions:*

- ① Thank God that you do not need to live a picture-perfect life because Jesus gave himself as the perfect Savior and lover of your soul.
- ① Thank God that the Bible is filled with portrayals of people with powerful strengths and honest brokenness.
- ① Pray for freedom from playing the comparison game. Ask God to help you focus on becoming the woman he wants you to be and not a replica of some other woman.
- ① Invite the Holy Spirit to shape your attitudes and motivations so that you will learn to do the right things in the right ways for God's glory.
- ① Ask God to grow in you a holy and powerful awe and reverence for his glory, power, and love.

*No one can do it all, all at once.*

—Karen Ehman

**BETWEEN-SESSIONS**  
*Personal Study*  
**SESSION 10**

**Reflect** on the material you have covered during this session by engaging in any or all of the following between-sessions activities. Remember this is not about following rules or doing your homework—these activities are designed to help you apply the concepts in a practical way during the week. Be sure to make a note of any questions or comments that arise from the activities that you would like to discuss at your next group meeting.

### An Aspirational Acrostic

In the video, Karen explained that the passage of the Bible covered in this session is actually an acrostic. This was a poetic structure used in the ancient world in which each line began with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order from first to last.

Today, take time to make your own acrostic of characteristics you see in yourself, or want to see grow in the years to come. Come up with one word or a short sentence for each letter of the alphabet. For instance, you might say: “A—*admiring* others; B—notice *beauty* around me; C—show *compassion* consistently” . . . you get the idea.

Have some fun with this, and remember it is not meant to be a “to do” list that causes pressure or guilt. It should be a “ta da!” list that inspires you and leads you to praise when you see yourself taking steps forward in any of the areas you list. Be sure to include some strengths you have already so you can “ta da!” as you write your list.

#### **Characteristics, Attitudes, and Aspirations:**

A — \_\_\_\_\_

B — \_\_\_\_\_

C — \_\_\_\_\_

D — \_\_\_\_\_

E — \_\_\_\_\_



- F — \_\_\_\_\_
- G — \_\_\_\_\_
- H — \_\_\_\_\_
- I — \_\_\_\_\_
- J — \_\_\_\_\_
- K — \_\_\_\_\_
- L — \_\_\_\_\_
- M — \_\_\_\_\_
- N — \_\_\_\_\_
- O — \_\_\_\_\_
- P — \_\_\_\_\_
- Q — \_\_\_\_\_
- R — \_\_\_\_\_
- S — \_\_\_\_\_
- T — \_\_\_\_\_
- U — \_\_\_\_\_
- V — \_\_\_\_\_
- W — \_\_\_\_\_
- X — \_\_\_\_\_
- Y — \_\_\_\_\_
- Z — \_\_\_\_\_



## “Ta Da!” to You

Take time in the coming week to send a few texts, emails, or handwritten notes to three women in your life who have been an example of godly character. Let each one know that God has used her to show you how a woman of God can love, serve, worship, lead, and impact the world. Thank her for seeking Jesus, and let her know that you are stronger in faith and striving to live more for God’s glory because of her life.

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Characteristics and God-honoring traits I see in this woman:

- 
- 
- 

2. Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Characteristics and God-honoring traits I see in this woman:

- 
- 
- 

3. Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Characteristics and God-honoring traits I see in this woman:

- 
- 
-



## Ruby Reflections

This might be a difficult and challenging exercise for some women, but it is one that we should all do on occasion. During the teaching session, Karen talked about the unique and beautiful nature of rubies. You are like a ruby because you are made by God (see Psalm 139), and no other woman on planet Earth is exactly like you.

All too often you may look at your uniqueness as a liability or something to be hidden. But God celebrates it! So take time to look at some of the facets of who you are and who you are becoming in Christ. Write down some of the things that make you unique in God's sight. Then thank him for how he has made you—fearfully and wonderfully unique.

Unique aspects of my *spiritual life* and love for Jesus:

- 
- 

Unique aspects of my *gifting and abilities* as I live for Jesus:

- 
- 

Unique aspects of my *physical makeup* and how God has made me:

- 
- 

Unique aspects of my *emotions and passion* and how I love Jesus and others:

- 
-

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Other unique aspects of who I am in Jesus:

- 
- 

Once you have made your list, read through it and praise God for the way he has shaped you, and how he is working in you to make you more like Jesus.

## Journal

*Use the space provided below to write some reflections on any of the following topics:*

- ① Write down aspects of the Proverbs 31 Woman that you see growing in you. How can you delight in these?
- ① Write about aspects of your character that you sense God wants to grow to make you more the woman he would have you become. What steps can you take to keep growing in this area?
- ① Write down what gets in the way of you seeing the good things God is doing through you and growing in you. How can you get past these obstacles so you can have more “ta da!” moments of rejoicing in the good things God is doing?
- ① Write about who needs to hear the lessons you have learned in this study. How can you share these encouraging truths with this person?

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## ABOUT THE PRESENTERS



**Karen Ehman** is a Proverbs 31 Ministries speaker, a *New York Times* bestselling author, and a writer for Encouragement For Today, an online devotional that reaches over one million women daily. She has written many books, including *Keep It Shut*, *Let.It.Go.*, and *Hoodwinked* (with Ruth Schwenk). Married to her college sweetheart, Todd, and the mother of three, she enjoys antique hunting, cheering for the Detroit Tigers, and feeding the many teens who gather around her kitchen island for a taste of Mama Karen's cooking.



**Bianca Juárez Olthoff** is the chief storyteller for the A21 Campaign and the creative director for Propel Women. She is the author of *Play with Fire: Discovering Fierce Faith, Unquenchable Passion, and a Life-Giving God*. Bianca is a stepmom to Parker and Ryen and has spent the last ten years mobilizing God's people to action alongside her husband, Matt, the executive director and pastor for Project Europe.



**Lisa Harper** is a gifted communicator whose writing and speaking overflows with colorful pop-cultural references that connect the dots between the Bible and modern life. For six years she was the national women's ministry director at Focus on the Family, followed by six years as the women's ministry director at a large church. She is the author of many books, has a masters of theological studies from Covenant Seminary, and has been a featured speaker with Women of Faith®.



**Chrystal Evans Hurst** is the coauthor of *Kingdom Woman*, a book that has sold over 100,000 copies. She writes regularly for her own blog, *Chrystal's Chronicles*, as well as blogging for Proverbs 31 Ministries, FortheFamily.org, and TheBetterMom.com. Chrystal is a dedicated wife and mother of five and serves as the chief operating officer of the Hurst household. Chrystal and her husband, Jessie, reside in a small town just outside Dallas, Texas.





**Margaret Feinberg** is a popular Bible teacher and speaker at churches and leading conferences such as Catalyst and Women of Joy. Her books and studies, including *Wonderstruck* and *Fight Back with Joy*, have sold more than one million copies and received critical acclaim. She lives a beautiful life with her husband, Leif.



**Courtney Joseph** is a graduate of the Moody Bible Institute with a degree in evangelism and discipleship. She has been a featured speaker at multiple women's conferences, is the founder of Women Living Well Ministries and cofounder of GoodMorningGirls.org, and is the special projects manager of Candace Cameron Bure's online magazine RooMag.com. Courtney has been married to her high school sweetheart for more than fifteen years and has a son and a daughter.

## ABOUT THE WRITER



**Sherry Harney** is an author and speaker for national and international groups. She serves as the leadership development director at Shoreline Community Church in Monterey, California. She is also the cofounder, along with her husband Kevin, of Organic Outreach International, a ministry that trains church and movement leaders to mobilize their members to go into their community and world and naturally share the good news of Jesus.

Over the past twenty-five years, Sherry has cowritten and collaborated on over seventy small group studies with such authors as Ann Voskamp, Christine Caine, Max Lucado, Nabeel Qureshi, Bill Hybels, John Ortberg, Mark Batterson, Gary Thomas, and Dallas Willard. Sherry and Kevin have three adult sons and two daughters-in-law. Sherry loves to hike, ski, read, cook, and hang out with family and friends. She is passionate about living her life with Jesus, like Jesus, and for Jesus.

# Twelve Women of the Bible Study Guide with DVD

Life-Changing Stories for Women Today

*Lysa TerKeurst, Elisa Morgan, Amena Brown, Jonalyn Fincher,  
Jeanne Stevens, Naomi Zacharias with Sherry Harney*



In this 12-session video Bible study, some of today's best loved Bible teachers look at the spiritual lessons learned from twelve biblical women and what they mean for your life today.

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- Live through your failures as well as successes
- Draw near to God in a world filled with trials
- Find lasting contentment
- Overcome rejection and insecurity and much more

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2. Rebekah: Breaking Free of Feminine Stereotypes (Jonalyn Fincher)
3. Leah: Overcoming Rejection and Insecurity (Naomi Zacharias)
4. Hannah: Surrendering in Waiting (Amena Brown)
5. Abigail: Dealing with Confrontation in Relationships (Elisa Morgan)
6. Gomer: Learning to Accept Unconditional Love (Jeanne Stevens)
7. Mary, Mother of Jesus: Moving from Comfort to Courage (Jeanne Stevens)
8. Mary Magdalene: Transforming from Outcast to Follower (Jonalyn Fincher)
9. Mary of Bethany: Putting Our Faith into Action (Elisa Morgan)
10. Martha: Finding Our Identity in Jesus (Amena Brown)
11. The Woman at the Well: Turning Our Messes into Messages (Lysa TerKuerst)
12. The Syrophoenician Woman: Approaching God with Persistency and Boldness (Naomi Zacharias)

*Available in stores and online!*

