

## 2CH Sunday at 7.30

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Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

### Happy Mothers' Day

Presented by Steve Cooper  
Proverbs 31:28-31

Good morning! And, if you're a mother, a special greeting to you on Mothers' Day!

Today all mothers should feel that they're valued and appreciated by their families. If you're a mum I hope that will be the case for you. I'm thinking too of all mother figures, like stepmothers, guardians, or foster mothers. Perhaps you will be given breakfast in bed, or special gifts, or family phoning or visiting with cards. Maybe your children are young, and today they will present you with a roughly drawn card made at school, but it will mean a lot to you!

For many of us, Mothers' Day can also be a sad day. My mother died eleven years ago, and every Mothers' Day I think of her and miss her. In some families there are broken relationships, and Mothers' Day is a painful reminder of the sadness when people won't forgive each other for old hurts.

This morning I want to say some things that I hope will bring encouragement and affirmation to all mothers and mother figures. It's a message for those who are not mothers, too. Let's look at some statements in the Bible about the value of mothers. Stay tuned.

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This morning on Mothers' Day we're thinking about mothers and mother figures, and how much they mean to us. I wonder if you've seen the movie *The King's Speech*? Colin Firth plays the role of Albert, the Prince of Wales, who unexpectedly became George VI, the King of England. Albert had a serious problem with stuttering, and his public speeches were a disaster. The movie is about the way his wife and a quirky Australian speech therapist helped Albert to deal with his stutter.

The wife of Albert, or Bertie as his family called him, was Elizabeth. In the movie she is superbly acted by Helena Bonham Carter. Elizabeth was supportive to her nervous husband, sympathetic, and wonderfully understanding. She was the mother, of course, of her two daughters – Princess Margaret and the future Queen Elizabeth II. Albert's wife Elizabeth would eventually become known, with great affection and respect, as the Queen Mother. She lived to the venerable age of 101, dying in 2002.

I remember watching her funeral service on TV, beamed direct from Westminster Abbey. The minister who gave the message quoted a very appropriate passage from the Book of Proverbs in the Bible. It was a passage that summed up much about this woman who had been so popular over her long life – her sweet smile, her witty comments, her disciplined commitment to public service, her strength of character during the dark days of World War II, her genuine faith in Jesus Christ.

The Bible passage, in Proverbs 31, describes a woman who is a godly wife and mother. It details her noble character, her support for her husband, her vigorous work to provide for her family, her generosity to the poor and needy, her business enterprises, her strength and dignity, her wise counsel and instruction. Quite a description! Let me read the final verses: 'Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all." Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate' (Proverbs 31:28-31).

These verses from Proverbs 31 were a fitting tribute to Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother. She embodied so many of the qualities portrayed in this passage. But let's be honest – most women listening to me this morning probably don't feel they measure up to that kind of description. My wife feels very nervous when she reads Proverbs 31, because it portrays an outstanding woman who seems too perfect to emulate! This morning, I want us to see two things about this Bible passage that should bring encouragement to us all, and particularly mothers.

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On Mothers' Day, I invite you to reflect with me on an apt Bible passage, Proverbs 31. Here is a description of a godly wife and mother. I hope this description will bring encouragement to us all, especially to mothers and mother figures.

There are two things emphasised in the final verses of the chapter. The first is that women, including mothers, need to be affirmed and appreciated. The writer says in verse 28 – 'Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.' The next verse quotes this praise of the husband: 'Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all' (v.29).

On Mothers' Day it's good to express our love and gratitude to our mother. But do we also express appreciation to our mother during the rest of the year? Our words, or our lack of words, can have powerful consequences. Often the only words we say to our mother are unkind or hurtful words. I've known mothers who soldier on, caring for their children and praying for them each day, only to receive words that wound. Perhaps even more often it's not just cruel words, but indifference and silence. Our mother goes on loving us and supporting us, but we treat her with coldness and hostility. I'm not pretending mothers are perfect, and never make mistakes. But most mothers deserve far more praise and thanks than they receive.

I remember my own struggle to say kind words to my mother. She was a very devoted mother, and loved me a great deal. But during the last decade of her life, when I lived interstate, she would phone me each week to tell me the family news and hear how I and my family were going. I didn't mind having a short conversation, but I became irritated by her detailed description of the doings of the wider family. I often felt I was too busy, and her long phone calls interrupted my plans. I felt guilty about my response to her, and I'm sure she often sensed my coolness.

When my mother died suddenly at the age of 69, one of the hardest things for me was dealing with my guilt that I had not affirmed her and thanked her enough during the past decade. It took me a while to work through my guilt, to find God's forgiveness and healing in Jesus Christ. But it taught me a deep lesson: express your gratitude and love to your mother while you have the opportunity. Stop saying unkind things to her. Stop being cold and remote. Let her know how much you love her and value all she has done and is still doing for you.

As the last verse of Proverbs 31 says, 'Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate' (v.31). In a moment, let's consider another way we can encourage mothers on Mothers' Day.

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This morning, on Mothers' Day, we're thinking about ways we can encourage mothers and mother figures. In Proverbs 31 in the Bible there is an inspiring portrayal of a wife and mother. At the end of the passage it says that her husband and children should rise up and express their praise and appreciation to her. I hope, if you're a mother, that this will be your experience today!

There's something else that is emphasised. In verse 30 we read this: 'Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.' This is a profound statement. A woman can put on the charm, and impress people with her outwardly good behaviour, while in reality she has an inner life that is unhealthy. Men can have the same problem, of course! Another difficulty for a woman, according to this verse, is that she can spend too much time and energy trying to look good - cultivating a lean figure, expensive hairdos, the latest fashion in clothes, and eye-catching jewellery. But as this verse says, 'beauty is fleeting.' In the end we all grow old, and we can't hide the wrinkles and aging.

This verse, then, encourages women not to focus on being charming, or physically beautiful, but to be a woman who ‘fears the Lord.’ That means she should be a person who honours God, who respects God, who is careful to please and obey God. The apostle Peter put this strikingly to women, in First Peter 3: ‘Wives ... your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight’ (1 Peter 3:1,3-4).

Today, on Mother’s Day, let’s encourage women and mothers to be godly people. Mums, what will help your children the most is not charm and beauty, but being a woman who loves God and honours him. That’s one reason, I believe, why Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother was so appreciated. She had an inner beauty, a strength of character, that came from her genuine relationship with God.

I want to say to mothers today that the best legacy you can leave your children is not money or property or education or musical accomplishment or a well-paying job. These may all be good things, but the best thing, mums, is to provide your children with a godly example. If you learn to love God, and trust the Lord Jesus Christ, and live by God’s standards, then your children will have a wonderful foundation. That’s certainly something my own mother did for me. She wasn’t perfect – in fact she was very aware of her failings. But she had a genuine relationship with Christ, and she encouraged her children to follow God’s ways and participate in a local church. It’s the greatest legacy she could have left me.

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I hope that today is a great celebration for you on Mothers’ Day. Take the opportunity to express your love and gratitude to your mum. Encourage her, and pray that she will give high priority to honouring God. And remember – the Lord loves each of us more than any mother. According to Isaiah 49, the Lord says: ‘Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!’ (Isaiah 49:15).

Let me pray: ‘Heavenly Father, we thank you for designing families. Thanks for the care and devotion of our mothers, despite their imperfections. We are grateful for the many ways your love and goodness has been shown to us through our mother and mother figures. Help each mum and those who have mothering roles today to feel appreciated and loved, and to grow in their relationship with you. We ask though Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.’