

*the*  
**PROVERBS 31**  
**MINISTRIES**  
*podcast*

**Biblical truth for any girl in any season.**

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- Meredith: Well, hello, friends. Welcome back to the Proverbs 31 Ministries podcast, where we share biblical Truth for any girl in any season. I'm your host, Meredith Brock, and I am here with my friend and cohost, Kaley Olsen.
- Kaley: Hey, Meredith, how are you today?
- Meredith: I'm doing pretty darn good. How about yourself?
- Kaley: I'm doing great. We're still recording from home, which is really fun, but also I miss your face and so I have a question for you.
- Meredith: Uh-oh. I hope it's not about my face. [inaudible].
- Kaley: I just know you love this. Okay.
- Meredith: Uh-huh (affirmative). I'm ready.
- Kaley: In spirit of all of us being at home with nowhere to go during this COVID thing, I think we're all craving a vacation, so if you could go anywhere right now, where would it be?
- Meredith: Oh, man. Just some beach, somewhere. I think that's a song, right? I think that's a country song. I just want to be in the sunshine with really-
- Kaley: [Inaudible].
- Meredith: I just want sunshine and beautiful blue water, and I, honestly, as much as I am an introvert, I want the sound of other people around me, the sound of kids playing and just normal life again. So if I could be on a beach somewhere with the sounds of people living their lives, I would be really happy. What about you, Kaley? Where would you go?
- Kaley: You know what? I've really been craving Charleston. I don't know why. [inaudible] there's the beach option, but also because it's so old and charming and there's always lots of people walking around, and yeah —

Meredith: And great shopping. Charleston has [inaudible]. Nothing like the shopping on King Street. If any of our listeners ever go to Charleston, you've got to hit up King Street because they have such great places to shop.

Meredith: I am so excited about our podcast today, and what our listeners probably don't know is that many times when we're looking for podcast content, we look at what is resonating with our devotions audience or maybe on social media, what people are really gravitating towards because we know if it's hitting home there, our podcast audience will likely enjoy it, too.

Meredith: So today's podcast teaching is by one of our ministry friends and an *Encouragement for Today* devotions writer. Her name is Kia Stephens. Kia wrote a devotion just a few months ago on God's love that was a huge hit with our audience. We knew we had to bring her on to talk more about it, so welcome to the show, Kia.

Kia: Hey, Meredith! Hey, Kaley! It's such an honor to be here.

Kaley: We are so excited to have you on the show today, Kia, but before we have you give your teaching, we do want to let our audience know a little bit more about you, and so like Meredith said, Kia does serve on the *Encouragement for Today* devotions writing team, but y'all, Kia is doing so much more over at [kiastephens.com](http://kiastephens.com).

Kaley: I was researching you, Kia, and I was like, "What in the world is this girl doing?" You've got a blog where you share a ton of encouragement, a conference... a conference... a legitimate conference at a hotel and things like that, for Christian communicators of color, and you minister through the Father Swap that provides a source of encouragement, healing and practical wisdom for women with physically or emotionally absent fathers. What in the world? And so I just want to pause right here and say that we'll talk about this after the show because I want to get our listeners links to all of this information. But [inaudible], Kia?

Kia: Not all at the same time. It's more running around like a chicken.

Meredith: Let's talk a little bit about that because you're a mom, too, right?

Kia: Oh, yeah.

Meredith: So I can totally relate. I am a mom and I feel most days like I'm running around like a chicken as well. So what does that look like for you on the daily, Kia? All this stuff you've got going on, how do you do all this?

Kia: Well, my kids are in an online public charter school, so they have teachers. Even though I say homeschool, I just say that because it's easier to explain, so that helps for them to have virtual teachers, which I guess everybody does now.

Kia: Then when it comes to writing, I basically function via deadlines, so when I have a deadline, I pretty much shut everything down. I get off the social media, I bury myself in

the Bible and just crank out the next writing, and I think what people see online is just an accumulation of years and years of hunkering down and writing. Just writing.

Meredith: Wow, that's amazing, Kia. That takes some real discipline to be able to do that in the midst of having kids around you. I know that feeling because I have —

Kia: Yeah, I was going to say it does, but I think your kids ... It's crazy. They watch what you're doing.

Meredith: That's right.

Kia: As much as I'm trying to disciple them, they're being disciplined by watching mommy dig into the Word of God and write or mentor women. They're watching. And I recently saw that my son was telling somebody, and I was like, "I didn't know he knew that."

Meredith: Yeah. One of my favorite sayings is kids, what they learn, it's more caught than it's taught.

Kia: Definitely.

Meredith: And it's true. They catch what we're doing. They watch what we're doing and absorb it way more than how we teach them. So good. Kia, I cannot wait to hear what you have to teach us today. So girl, take it away. Lay it on us. We are ready.

Kia: Sure. Well, the devotion that you all were referencing? It was inspired by this conversation I had with a friend of mine. We were at a coffee house, and she was sharing about a difficult experience she was going through in life, and then she makes this statement, and she says, "If this is how God loves, then I don't want any part of it," and immediately I didn't have condemnation for her. I could totally understand what she was saying and where she was coming from because we often equate the love of God with feeling good and everything going well, but a lot of times that's not the case. Sometimes that's not the case. And the difficult and hard-to-understand reality is sometimes God is loving us when he allows difficult circumstances in our lives. Even in those times, the love of God is still evident.

Kia: I thought about a time in my life that was really difficult. I was in year seven of my marriage. I had two kids in diapers. I was still breastfeeding one of them, and I was working inside the home and outside of the home. I was a teacher and it was a very stressful job. I also had a loved one that was dying. There was trouble in my marriage. We were arguing and it might've been scratching that seven-year itch, I don't know. And we've been married for 16 years, by the way. And then there was a tumultuous circumstance happening at my church. It literally fell apart.

Kia: So in that moment, it was like I didn't know who to turn to. I felt so broken and so alone. And this core belief surfaced in me that if God did not come and answer my prayer immediately — and I do mean immediately get me out of this situation — then I felt that

God was abandoning me. And certainly if you're abandoned by God ... God wouldn't abandon somebody that he loved, so I felt unloved by God.

Kia: I think this is the place that sometimes we find ourselves in life when the right circumstance or series of circumstances happen in our life, and then we have these questions that surface. Does God care? And if God cares, exactly where is He? And is He really who He says He is, who I believed Him to be, who the Bible says that He is? How can a loving God allow XYZ, fill in the blank, COVID-19, pain, homelessness, job loss, divorce, marital strife? Then we have these feelings of doubt and discouragement and frustration and abandonment. This is the place where some even walk away from their faith altogether, but the reality is God allows suffering in our lives for many reasons, a myriad of reasons. I can't even name them all.

Kia: It could be for spiritual growth like we see in James, where it says, "*Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*"

Kia: It could be for correction. I know we don't want to admit that where it says in Hebrews 12 and 6, "*Because the Lord disciplines the one he loves and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.*"

Kia: Or it could just be a part of the Christian walk. It could be us taking up our cross. As it says in Galatians 3 and 20, "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.*"

Kia: And guys, I grew up in a church, so I've heard these scriptures over and over again, and it's easy to understand this stuff with your head, but it's so tough to understand it with your heart. This is why I'm grateful that God put women and men in the Bible that I could relate to. Women and men that experience difficulty and suffering, and yet they also experienced the tangible love of God.

Kia: When I was preparing, I thought of so many women: Naomi in the book of Ruth, Hannah in First Samuel, Bathsheba in Second Samuel, the woman with the issue of blood. Oh, my goodness, I love her. I really do. But I got stuck on Hagar. I was planning to talk about all of them, but when I really started to dig into Hagar's story in Genesis Chapter 16, I just got stuck.

Kia: So let me tell you a little bit about her. Hagar is an Egyptian maid servant of Sarai and Sarai was Abram's wife. Sarai was barren and she decided, like many of us, to take matters into her own hands. And she says to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children, so go sleep with my maid servant." That was an ingenious idea. "Perhaps I can build a family through her." I'm not going to be too hard on Sarai because I know I can act just like her at times.

Kia: So Abram agreed to what Sarai said, and Hagar conceived, and when Hagar knew that she was pregnant, the Scripture says that she despised her mistress. I looked that word

up. In the Hebrew, it means to slight, to be swift or trifling. I was like, "Wow, trifling." I can't even judge.

Meredith: [Inaudible] what?

Kia: Yeah, trifling. This is ... Okay, this is biblical. It's not giving us an out to be trifling, but —

Meredith: Right [inaudible].

Kia: Right, right. But I was thinking, I can't even judge Hagar because I'm thinking that that came from a place of betrayal. She felt so betrayed, so isolated, so mistreated. She probably felt used. She trusted Sarai, and then this is what she received, and in return, she served Sarai.

Meredith: Wow.

Kia: She must have felt that her situation was so unfair. And then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible. It's your fault." I like it. You can't make this stuff up. She says he's responsible, but then she says, "I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant and she despises me." So as a result, Sarai mistreats Hagar, and as a result, Hagar flees.

Kia: In Genesis 16 and 7, it says, "*The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert.*" I love this. I love the word "found." He goes and he finds her. She didn't go looking for him. She wasn't looking for any anyone. She was trying to escape, but he pursued her out of His great love for her.

Kia: Many theologians believe that the angel of the Lord was the Lord in angelic form, so when you think of it as God Himself, God Himself stopped whatever He was doing and came and pursued Hagar. She was so valued by God that He came and spent time with her. And not that He didn't know where she was, because we know that God is omniscient, but I believe that He pursued Hagar for her benefit so that Hagar would know, "You're loved. Beloved, you are worth looking for. You are worth my time and my energy."

Kia: Then He says to Hagar, "*Servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?*" This interaction is so intimate. He pursued her and then He engaged with her. He finds out what is going with her and I'm so reminded of First Peter 5 and 7 that says, "*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*" He asked her, "What's going on with you?"

Kia: And then He listened. He listened. She said, "*I'm running away from my mistress Sarai.*" I envision her with tears in her eyes, just so broken. And then He gives her instruction and He says, "*I want you to go back to your mistress and submit to her.*"

Kia: This was fascinating to me because He didn't say, "Okay, I'm going to get you out of this situation. I'm going to get you a place of your own and you're going to raise your son

there and you're going to be well taken care of." No, that's not what He said. He said, "I will bless you in the midst of your place of pain." In verse 10, He says, "*I will increase your descendants so that they will be too numerous to count, in the midst of your place of brokenness, in the place where you feel isolated, you feel abandoned, you feel broken, you feel trapped, you feel mistreated, you feel unable to escape, this is the place that I'm going to bless you.*"

Meredith: Wow.

Kia: Wow.

Meredith: Come on, Kia.

Kia: Wow, wow. And then in verse 13 ... Well, I can't even go on because how many times do we want to escape? We're like, "God, do you see me? SOS. Get me out of this situation." But God is saying, "I have something for you in that difficult place." And then in verse 13, as a result, Hagar says, "*You are the God who sees me for,*" she said, "*I have now seen the one who sees me, El-roi.*"

Kia: Hagar reminds us all of God's tangible love. When we're suffering, when we feel alone, when we're broken, when we're abandoned, though we may feel this way, our feelings do not always represent truth. God is still El-roi, or the God that sees. wherever we find ourselves today, if we are a mother with two kids under two, if we got a baby at the breast, He sees us. If we're experiencing a divorce or marital strife, if we've lost our income today, and I know there are a lot of people who have, if we've experienced the death of a loved one, or if we ourselves are battling an illness, if we're hurting, broken, discouraged, frustrated or angry, God sees us.

Kia: And there are five truths that we can believe about the love of God in the midst of our difficult situation. Number one, we're noticed by God. Remember Genesis 16:7? God went and found Hagar for her benefit. He knew where she was and He finds us, too. He may be finding you through this very podcast, through a YouTube video, the radio, a Proverbs 31 devotional, a Bible study or His word. God is relentless in His pursuit of us.

Kia: Number two, we're heard by God. Remember Genesis 16:8, God listened to Hagar? He's listening to us, too. Our every cry, our concerns, our gripes, our prayers.

Kia: I love that we do not have to censor ourselves before we come before the throne. We can give God everything that's on the inside of us. God is ready and fully capable to handle our gut-honest thoughts and feelings.

Kia: Number three, we're blessed by God. Genesis 9 said, "God blessed Hagar in the midst of her difficulties." Sometimes God will swoop down and save the day and rescue us, but sometimes He will choose to sustain us right where we are, in the pain, in the brokenness, in the mess. Sometimes God will sustain us right there.

Kia: And then number four, we are restored by God. Genesis 16:10, "God restored Hagar." Of no fault of her own, Hagar had her dignity stripped from her. She was robbed of her virginity and used by her mistress, but God restored her dignity through the promise of many descendants that would be too numerous to count. Those painful circumstances that God allows in our lives, He can turn them around for our good.

Kia: And number five, my favorite. We are seen by God. Genesis 16 and 13, Hagar calls God El-roi. No matter where we find ourselves in life, we can be certain that the God who created the entire universe sees us. He will stop and let us know, "I am concerned about you." He loves us and is intimately concerned about every single detail of our life. Though suffering exists, God's love is evident in the midst of it.

Kia: So I just have a few questions for, really for all of us; we can evaluate this. Where do we see ourselves in the story? Are we feeling mistreated? Do we feel like we have an unfair circumstance happening in our lives as I speak? Maybe we're on the run, maybe we're running. Maybe we're sensing that God is pursuing us. We may even be realizing that God is requiring us to return to a difficult situation. Know that wherever you find yourself today, you are seen and loved by God. If nothing else, reflect back on Genesis Chapter 16 and the life of Hagar. You are loved by the God who sees.

Meredith: Wow, Kia, it's so good. So, so, so good. And earlier, it's amazing that this is... I think maybe the Lord brought you on the podcast today just for me, because no kidding, earlier this year, this is the exact... It was in January that the Lord really impressed this exact section of Scripture on my heart, and I've reread it and I think, Kaley, I may have even shared a little bit about this in our team meeting at Proverbs. One of the things that just grabbed me, and you hit it right on the head, is that out there in the wilderness-

Kia: Yeah.

Meredith: ... Hagar was there faced with the presence of God. God saying, "I see you, Hagar. I see you. I'm here with you and I'm asking you to do a hard thing." And she had a choice right there. She had the choice to either say, "Okay God, I'll do it and I will believe the promise that you're giving me and do the hard thing."

Meredith: Or she could have imagined... Just imagine had Hagar said, "No, I'm not going back there. It's too hard. I can't do it. I'm not strong enough. They're going to hurt me again." And instead she said, "Yes, Lord." She took her promise and tucked it in her heart and walked herself back to that place to let Him sustain her. And what a beautiful picture that is.

Meredith: I just want to say to our sisters who are listening right now: Whatever — just like you said — you are loved. You are seen. Listen to these truths that Kia has spoken today. Take those scriptures and tuck them in your heart for those moments when you say, "I just can't do it anymore. I can't keep going," and take that promise and hide it in your heart because God's going to show up on the other side of this — whatever. It's so good. So good. Kaley, what's on your mind? What are you thinking about right now?

Kaley: Meredith, honestly, what I'm thinking about is along the lines of what you're thinking about, about how God does see us. God does notice us. And I think it's so easy in times of plenty and times of really good seasons, to where we're like, "Oh, everything is good. I don't have to look for the good."

Kaley: But in hard times, you do have to look for the good and there might be ways that God is working in your life that you don't really see or notice. I think right now, I think, just truth be told, this current COVID season is not an easy season to walk through. Especially for someone like me who lives almost 11 hours away from her family, haven't seen them in months, don't know when I'm going to see them again, and sometimes it's just hard to walk in life just knowing I don't know when I'm going to see them again, and this is hard because they are important to me.

Kaley: God has been really faithful to me in the last couple of weeks where I've heard a lot of messages about the goodness of God and looking for him, and specifically, had a sweet friend from work one day randomly drop dark chocolate popcorn [inaudible]. Those are [inaudible], and a mug that says, not kidding you, "See the Good."

Kaley: And I'm like, "God, you know. You know that we're [inaudible], so I'm drinking out of that mug almost every day reminding myself, in this hard season, see the good, see how God is blessing you, and noticing you, and hearing you and restoring you even in this. This spoke to me and reminded me even more to just look for the ways that He is watching [inaudible]."

Meredith: That's so good. That's so good. Kia, I have a question for you. I'm going to put you on the spot a little, okay?

Kia: Sure.

Meredith: So forgive me if I throw you on your heels for a second. Let's go back to the beginning of this podcast, where you were in that season with two kids in diapers, you were working in the home, outside the home, you had someone that you really loved who was passing away, your marriage was facing some troubles. That's the wilderness, my friend.

Kia: It definitely felt like the wilderness.

Meredith: That Hagar moment of being out there, feeling so alone. How did you get, practically speaking, how did you get through that season and still have that soft heart towards the Lord?

Kia: I do want to encourage people and say my heart wasn't always soft. It was hard at times. I had a lot of moments of anger and frustration, and really dark, dark moments in my faith.

Kia: The one thing that I never lost was this awareness that God was real, and I don't know where this came from, but I had this resolve of just continuing to try and read my Bible, try and go to church. It was not always pretty. It did not look holy. It was just me saying,

"Okay, I'm going to try this because quite honestly, I don't know where else to go." Now, I did in that time period, I did reach out and get some counseling.

Meredith: That's good.

Kia: Again, I'm a firm believer in counseling. Anybody who knows me —

Meredith: Yes, girl. Yes, girl.

Kia: [Inaudible] probably. Even in saying that, your counselor is not God. They can counsel you and they can give you guidance and suggestions and ask you questions and probe deeper. They can do all these things. They can give you tools, but they are not God. So I say that to say there was still a place that I had to get to on my own and so I got counseling.

Kia: I also went through a program at my church, and I remember just this program, it's small group, but it's one-on-one, and you meet with a mentor once a week, and you go through things like how to process your traumatic life experiences and your hurts and your childhood hurts and things like that. You look at who you believe God is and what type of father you had, all these different things. I remember as we were getting to the end of that, I was just wrestling with whether or not God could be a father to me.

Kia: I had heard this concept of God as a father to the fatherless and I was like, "I feel abandoned and I don't think you're really here," and all this kind of stuff. I was just wrestling, wrestling, wrestling. And I had a prayer request that ... Because I was still praying to God through, like I said, I was still praying to Him even though I battled or I had doubts or I felt discouraged, I felt like He wasn't hearing me or wasn't listening, and God answered this prayer. It was for a very large sum of money that I needed and I was praying for this specific amount, was for some kids. I was a teacher and we were taking this trip out of state and we needed like \$5,000.

Meredith: Wow.

Kia: And so every day, even though I was frustrated with God and going through my stuff, I would say, "God, I need \$5,583 and 52 cents or something like that. It was something like that, some amount like that. I would just pray it every day. And when we came to a certain point in this lesson, in this small group, one-on-one, small group-type thing, right as we were coming to the end of meeting together, I got the check. I got the check. It was for the exact amount that I had been praying. And so clearly it reminded me of that passage of Scripture in Matthew that says, "*How much more will God do for His kid.*" If your son asks for bread, how much more will God do? And I was like, "Oh, my gosh. He answered me with specificity. He answered my prayer. He's real. He is God. He is a Father. He is a Father to the fatherless. I was like, "Oh, my gosh."

Kia: It was revolutionary for me to really begin to say, "You know what, God is real. He is near. He may not answer my prayers immediately, but through all of it, through the difficulties ... That would be my encouragement to any woman, that wherever you are

right now, it won't be like this always. Stay. Stay in your relationship with God. Wrestle with Him, talk to Him, be honest, search out the scriptures, read books. Do what you can and God will meet you. He will meet you and He will make all things clear.

Meredith: So good. My goodness, if that's not a place to land this podcast, I don't know where. You just got to stay. Stay. One foot in front of the other and God will show up in your wilderness wherever you're at. Just stay.

Kaley: Yes, so good.

Meredith: Stay in Scripture. Stay in prayer. Stay in church. He'll meet you there. So, so good, Kia. Thank you so much for being with us today.

Kia: My pleasure. My pleasure.

Kaley: So good. If you enjoyed today's teaching by Kia, then we know you'll love the Proverbs 31 Ministries *Encouragement for Today* devotions. And I just want to take just a second and talk about these devotions. I know a lot of times we write these devotions, what? Three or four months in advance. Kia, you're a writer, you can tell us how far in advance were written.

Kia: It feels that way. I think that at least [inaudible].

Kaley: [Inaudible] that these devotions that you can read in five to seven minutes, that are written so far in advance. We hear story after story of women who say, "I needed this today." Months in advance of a writer spending that time thinking through and praying through what devotion she wants to share, our months down the road meet so many women where they are and where they need it, and that's just another example of how God is showing up in your life and seeing exactly what you need and giving you that nugget of encouragement that you needed, and these devotions are absolutely free and delivered to your inbox every weekday. So I would encourage you, if you're on a journey right now, in a wilderness season, then these devotions are perfect for you.

Kaley: You can subscribe simply by going to [proverbs31.org](http://proverbs31.org) and entering your email address, and then you'll be on the list.

Meredith: That's awesome. And I don't know about y'all listening right now, but I want to hear more from Kia and you can hit her up at [kiastephens.com](http://kiastephens.com) and that's Stephens with a P-H, not a V.

Kia: With a P-H, not a V.

Meredith: That's right. That's right. Kia, I'm guessing you're on Instagram, social media. How can they find you there?

Kia: Sure. I recommend, just go to [kiastephens.com](http://kiastephens.com) and you can access all my socials from that website.

Meredith: Perfect. Perfect. I hope our listeners go and visit your website, because I know you have a lot more truth and wisdom that you want to instill into them.

Meredith: Thank you everyone so much for joining us today. We pray Kia's message was meaningful to you and helps you know the Truth of God's Word and live that Truth out because we know that when you do, it really will change everything for you. We'll see you next time.