

the
PROVERBS 31
MINISTRIES
podcast

Biblical truth for any girl in any season.

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- Kaley: Hello, everyone, and thanks for tuning in to the *Proverbs 31 Ministries Podcast*, where we share biblical Truth for any girl in any season. I'm your host, Kaley Olson, and today I'm here with a special guest co-host for today's episode, my dear friend, Kendra Schwarz.
- Kendra: Hey, Kaley. It's great to be with you.
- Kaley: I'm so excited that you're here, Kendra. And can I tell you about our brand-new *Proverbs 31 Podcast's* insider email list?
- Kendra: Okay. I'm excited. Let's do it.
- Kaley: I'm excited about it. So you can subscribe today for free, and at the end of every month, you'll receive an email with a bonus video interview with one of the teachers from that month, and a journal prompt to use in your quiet time to dig deep into an episode from that month, and the scoop on what's coming up on the podcast — like you'll find out when *Therapy & Theology* is coming back.
- Kendra: Oh, we love that. The 411. That's great.
- Kaley: I know, so do you want to subscribe?
- Kendra: Always, yeah.
- Kaley: Okay, okay. Well, if you want to subscribe, you can do so for free at proverbs31.org/listen. All you have to do is enter your email address, and we'll send you an email in your inbox at the end of every month.
- Kendra: So simple. Look at that.
- Kaley: I know. I'm super excited about it. Well, now, you guys might know that Kendra's voice is very familiar to us on the podcast, but I just want you guys to know she's truly one of my very favorite people. I feel like you're so easy to be friends with, Kendra. You're so laid back. You're funny. You don't take yourself too seriously.
- Kendra: Not at all, no.

Kaley: You've got great hair.

Kendra: Thank you.

Kaley: I could go on, but you're also the manager of Online Bible Studies at Proverbs 31, and we get to work together a lot, especially at video shoots. But Kendra, I want to let you give your very best elevator pitch to someone listening about why she should join an online Bible study today.

Kendra: Okay, Kaley, so here I go. So Online Bible Studies, what we do is we take a book on a particular topic — so anxiety, friendships, relationships — and we study it together, between three to six weeks, usually, is the study duration. And the coolest thing about Online Bible Studies is women from every age, stage and phase of life can sign up for these Online Bible Studies. And so, you get to learn from women who are older than you, you get to help people that are right alongside you, where they are in their walk, and then you get to teach some other people who may be new to the faith or new to exploring the topic we're talking about, and it's a really cool dynamic we get to do altogether.

Kaley: Yes, absolutely. And one of the best things about OBS is that it's free. Absolutely free to sign up. You just —

Kendra: Just like that, bonus —

Kaley: ... purchase the book.

Kendra: ... the subscription that you mentioned earlier.

Kaley: The insider?

Kendra: Yeah.

Kaley: Yes, yes. Well, we'll tell you guys how to get connected to Online Bible Studies later at the end of the show. But my friends, you guys are in for a treat today because we're joined by none other than Lara Casey. I just feel like her name goes together.

Kendra: Isn't it —

Kaley: You have to say —

Kendra: ... beautiful?

Kaley: ... it together. Yes.

Kendra: Lara Casey.

Kaley: Lara Casey. It's like a name brand or something like that. Anyway, there she is. There's Lara. Lara is the author of several books. She's the gal behind the *Cultivate Your Life* podcast and the creator of the ever popular PowerSheets Intentional Goal Planner. I like them. They also have great stickers in them, which I really enjoy.

Kendra: They do have great stickers, and they're gold, and they're fun.

Lara: It's got to be fun.

Kendra: Yes, yes. But Lara, you're also a longtime friend of the ministry, and so welcome, my friend. We're so glad you're here.

Lara: I am so grateful. I feel so welcome. I'm so glad to be here. Thank you.

Kendra: All right, Lara. Well, we're so excited that you are here. Our team has gotten to know you and your team pretty well over the last couple of weeks, because ... Drum roll, please! I don't know if we're actually allowed to drum roll on this table that±

Lara: [crosstalk] pretend.

Kendra: — we're recording on, so I won't do that, but we're doing our *Write the Word: Cultivate Worship Journal* as our next online Bible study. So how fun is that? We'll tell you guys more about it and how to sign up a little later in the show.

But for those on the other side, listening, Lara, we gave your fancy introduction about the PowerSheets and your podcast, but we want our listeners to get to know you a little bit better. So we have a few fun questions for you, okay?

Lara: Okay, let's do this. Love it.

Kendra: All right, so number one, what is your favorite hobby?

Lara: Oh, definitely gardening. I am an unlikely gardener, but gardening is my favorite hobby, for sure.

Kendra: Gardening is good. Kaley, are you a gardener?

Kaley: I grew some cherry tomatoes this summer.

Kendra: Okay.

Lara: Nice.

Kaley: Yeah. I grew about seven of them, and they never made it into the salad. I just ate them right off the plant as soon as they were red. They were great.

Kendra: That's good. Just eat them right off the vine. All right, Lara, what's your favorite color?

Lara: That's a tricky one because I'm a very color-loving person, but I'm going to have to say a teal blue is probably my favorite color.

Kaley: Oh, like Proverbs blue?

Kendra: Proverbs blue, yes.

Lara: Proverbs blue, yes.

Kendra: That's fine. We like that color too, Lara. That's a good color. And then, what activity has helped you get through this COVID-19 season?

Lara: Well, this may sound like I'm cheating, but it's true. I have been loving writing the Word. Always getting back into the Word, pouring my soul out. A lot of the time, my thoughts are really messy. It's just been that kind of year. But truly, every night, I get in bed and open up my Bible, get all my little markers out, make it fun, stickers, too, and I open my *Write the Word Journal*. And it's a ton of fun. I love it.

Kaley: That's awesome. Well, that's exactly why we have you on the show today, is to talk about your journey, and writing the Word, and how that's helped you worship. And so, Kendra and I are chomping at the bits, ready to hear your teaching. We've got our pens ready. And so Lara, you can take it away, my friend.

Lara: Mm-hmm! Thank you, thank you. It has been a really difficult year. That goes without saying. No one needs to hear that again, right? It has been a really difficult year. I like to say that this has been the year of the burned dinner in my house. It just happened again two nights ago.

Kendra: It's okay, Lara.

Lara: I just have so much on my mind, so much on my mind. We all have so much on our minds — truly more than any other year before, potentially. And things have not gone as planned, and so sometimes, dinner gets burned. Maybe not just in this year, but maybe in other years too. But the world has really been turned upside down, and so there have been endless opportunities for worry, right? So many little pockets of worry in our lives this year.

And then, I read scriptures. I open my Bible. I read scriptures like, let's say, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17, which says, "*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances.*" And I think to myself, "That's hard." How are we supposed to rejoice in all of the circumstances that we've experienced this year? So we've gone through some extraordinary things, and perhaps those of you that are listening, you're there right now. Now, this is a time in life when I really wish I had a magic wand.

Kaley: [inaudible] felt that way, else?

Lara: Yeah.

Kendra: Yeah.

Lara: Yeah, my house is a disaster. Where is the magic wand? I just want to give it a little wave, little pixie dust all over the place, and then poof, everything goes back in its place.

Well, if you guys find a magic wand, call your girl right here, tell me, because I can't find one. I'd really like one. But I have found something that has helped to put my heart and my mind and my soul back where they belong, which is at God's feet. Even just saying that, it just makes me take a big, deep breath. That's where we want to be, right? We want to be in that resting place, but it's been so hard to get there with so much on our minds, so many challenges, and just so much new — our brains have been on overdrive.

And so, I looked at this study. There was a study done at Princeton and UCLA where they compared what happened when students typed notes versus wrote them by hand. And it's funny, I think back to in college, I don't think I ever went back and referenced any of my handwritten notes, but somehow in the act of taking those notes, I retained the information. Well, this study really illuminated why that happened.

So it turned out that students who handwrote their notes, they were forced to capture the heart of the information being given, and they were forced to really internalize that information, as opposed to typing it, where you're kind of just trying to type verbatim, and it's just kind of going in one ear and out the other. So when you write things out in your own messy handwriting, you internalize what you wrote; you retain it.

And a light bulb went off for me. I thought, "Oh my goodness, no wonder writing out the words of Scripture has been so helpful for me!" Even if you just grab a scrap piece of paper right now, just right where you are, grab anything that you have right now and grab your Bible, open it up, and write out a Bible verse and just see how it forces you to slow down and really think about those words. Now, let me just say this. I don't like slowing down. I don't know if anybody else feels that way, but the idea of slowing down just feels like, "No, no, no, no. I have a to-do list. I have things that need to get done."

And then, God really sets me straight. When I do slow down enough to let the Word in, I actually have a better list of things that comes to mind. I think, "Oh, that thing on my list is actually not important. I need to focus on this thing," so I start to learn about what my priorities are and my to-do list takes a better shape even. But writing out the actual words of God, the words of Scripture, it does the same for us. When the Word gets in our hearts, our natural response is something very interesting. It's like when you really just let go for a minute, let the Word get in, your natural response is worship. You don't have to force it.

So here's an example. I read this set of verses earlier this year, and I thought, "How does he do it?" This is Habakkuk 3:17-18. And it says, "*Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food,*" and he goes further, "*and there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God, my savior.*" I don't know about you. That just blows my mind a little bit. How do you get to the place where your

circumstances are falling apart ... And this is just a hypothetical list he's making, but he's saying that, "If all these things were to fall apart, guess what I would do? I will rejoice in the Lord. I will choose to be joyful in God, my Savior."

I think we've all had a year like that. No matter where you are, what your circumstances, no matter what, we've all had a year of facing things that feel impossible. Actually, before we knew that the pandemic was going to hit, I started this year doing my *Write the Word: Worship Journal*, which I'm so excited to do alongside you all in the study. But I started January 1st. I thought, "This is the thing I need to focus on this year," and God knew. I remember writing those words from Habakkuk just as the pandemic began, right around the middle of March. And every word of Scripture I laid down on the page became written on my heart too. I wrestled with those words as I wrote them. And an interesting side note here is that, actually, Habakkuk's name means "the one who wrestles." Isn't that interesting?

Kendra: Interesting.

Lara: I know. He wrestled a lot. The one who, another word for it is "embraces or wrestles." But how could he do it? How could he worship the Lord when everything around him felt like it was falling apart? He complained a lot too. I can sympathize with that. I don't know about you, but many times this year, I have wanted to and I have definitely indulged in a lot of complaining to God.

But here's what intrigued me most about these verses, is that his wrestling eventually turned into worship. He didn't just say, "Nothing's wrong. I'm going to ignore all the hard things that could happen." He said, "No. If these things happen, I will rejoice." He actually laid a lot of complaints down, if you look at the beginning of that book. And I've learned over time that I like to just ignore my complaints and not do a whole lot with them. I think that God doesn't like my complaints, but it turns out that complaints are clues. God tells us in His Word that, "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks," right? Luke 6:45. A complaining mouth is a clue, and our hearts need intentional and tender nurturing.

Kaley: Wow.

Lara: I know. Doesn't that just give you a little bit of like, "Oh, okay. It's okay to be human. Oh, God knew that I ... complained?" It really puts me at ease because I try to ... Many times, part of my sinful nature is striving for perfection, and I feel like I've got to have it all together for God. But no, no. A complaining mouth is a clue that our hearts just need to rely on Him more, and they need a little bit of tender nurturing. So when I write those words from Habakkuk, or really any words from the Bible, I remember what he finally landed on, which is that God is in control. He had to wrestle with it. He had to make his big list. Okay, even if this happens, here's all the worst-case scenarios. Even if this, even if this, yes, I will trust the Lord.

When life feels undone and our plans, they seem unclear, we get to say, "God, I trust You." And when we're in the weight, we say, "God, Your will be done." When we feel

lost or alone, we say, "God, You are in this place." When the world presses in on us, we say, "Lord, You are mighty." Again, all of this year, when our minds are full and our souls feel empty, we say, "God, You have what I need. Lead me to Your feet." These verses and all that I have written throughout the Word, it reminds me that worship isn't something we just do on Sunday in song. It's actually a daily outpouring of a needy soul who rejoices in the gift of grace. Let's just sit with that for a minute. It's really about being someone who needs the gift of grace and someone who experiences that through the Word. God doesn't need you to be perfect. He doesn't need me to be perfect. Praise the Lord. He just needs your willing heart.

And it turns out, actually, that worship is that magic wand I was looking for. I want my house to be put back together, but it's kind of like when your house is looking put together on the surface, but there's actually a closet full packed of junk. There's things hiding under the beds or you just ... company came over, and you stuck it all in that other side room. Sometimes, that's what happens when we focus on these external things instead of: How is my heart doing? Because when my heart is good, when I'm really worshipping the Lord, I'm okay with a lot of mess. I'm okay with that. I'm like, "Actually, you know what all these toys on the floor are telling me? That my kids are having a blast together." My feet may hurt from stepping on Legos, but they're having a blast. That's all that matters.

But it's true. I used to think that worship meant praising God for what He has done for us or what He has given to us, which is ... That's part of it, right? Worship is about proclaiming that God has done great things for us. And I think this year, I've learned, and I wonder if you've learned that too, that ... I learned that those things are just the pathway to praise. I just look at my circumstances, and I start to say, "Okay, God, thank You so much for putting a roof over my head, and thank You so much for whatever it may be that I can see." Then I start to realize, "Oh, actually, God, thank You for who You are." I think that the circumstantial things that we get to praise the Lord for are just a pathway to praise.

So, for example, when I look at Scripture, I see David in the Psalms telling of God's miracles, and then ultimately, he proclaims who God is. So worship isn't just about thanking God. That's part of it, but it's not just about doing that and not just about proclaiming how awesome He is for what He's given us. It's about praising Him for who He is. And to me, the most exciting, beautiful, full-of-freedom part of that is that when we praise Him for who He is, when we really see His heart and His character, we get to see who we are.

Worship really reminds me who God is and then who I am, in His eyes. And it gives me a lot of reminders. I am reminded when I worship, when I say, "Lord, thank You so much for all You've done for me," and then, "God, thank You for who You are. Thank You that You are a God that doesn't just stop working on me, that You're always working on me." I remember too that I don't have to strive where I can't. God already has. I remember that I'm enough in God alone, not because of what I do for a living or what does or doesn't get crossed off my to-do list every day. It's just about who God is.

I'm reminded too that I don't have to do it all. This is my favorite reminder the Lord gives me. I don't have to do it all. Done is better than perfect and good enough is good. I don't have to fear what others think of me if I'm following God. And as we move into this holiday season, we can worship our way through the hard, and we can worship our way all the way up to the point where we realize, "Wow, God, just thank You for You."

There's three things we can do. We can, number one, look at the big picture when we feel stuck, when we feel like, "Lara, this all sounds great, but how do I do it? And how do I get there? I'm stuck in something right now. It all feels hard. It all feels impossible." Three things, really simple, practical.

Number one, think about the big picture. What's going to matter to you, say when you're 80 or 90 or 100 years old, Lord-willing? What is going to matter to you in the big picture? And then, how can you act like that today? Just kind of puts things into perspective. Does this really matter today, this thing that I'm worried so much about?

And number two is simplify your life a little bit. Maybe just choose one thing to cultivate in the season ahead. Maybe it's just one way that you'll focus on worshipping. And you could get very practical with this. Maybe it's, "I'm going to turn on some amazing worship music every time I'm cooking dinner at night. Every time I'm cooking dinner, we're going to have church and making spaghetti at the same time." You can always build on that, but what's the one thing that's going to be your anchor to worship the Lord every day, despite all the things that may have not gone well during the day?

And then, number three. I love this. When you think about the big picture, and you know what matters to you, and you also know what doesn't matter to you, and then you just choose one thing to cultivate, just one focus. Make it easy for yourself. There's some simple things I love to do, especially with my *Write the Word Journal*. For some reason, if I sit down in bed and I want to go do my *Write the Word Journal*, and it's across the house in the living room, I get lazy. You know what I mean?

Kaley: Yes.

Lara: Let's make it easy on ourselves. I literally keep the journal right by my bed with the Bible and a pen. Put these nudges in your life so that you make a better choice, so that you can make a choice toward worship. It's like people often say to me, "Lara, I know I need to watch less TV," or whatever it may be. You pick something. And yet, the remote still sits by their bedside. I'm like, "Well, take that nudge out of your life and maybe put something different there that you want."

We get to worship on the way, so do that. Worship on the way, write out the Word. I can't wait to have you join us. And just remember, too, that you don't have to know everything about the Bible to write out the Word, you don't. You don't have to be a scholar of the Bible, you don't have to have a degree in theology, but you do have to have a willing heart. That's it. That's all God wants of us. Just open up the Word, write the Word, and then you get to let God's living and active Word do what it was made to do, which is grow and change every heart it touches.

Kaley: Mm-hmm. Well, Lara, that was so good. I love how practical those three things were at the very end. But something that you said in the middle of your teaching ... I think that I'm going to get this right. But you said, "Worship is a daily outpouring of a needy soul," and that was kind of like a light bulb moment for me. But then I look over here, and I see that the title of this journal that we're working through is *Cultivate Worship*, and it almost seems like something that's kind of like an oxymoron. How do you cultivate worship when worship ... is it a response? And so Lara, I would love for you to dive into the word "cultivate" a little bit more, and unpack what it is, and why it's so important.

Lara: I love that question. The word "cultivate" is a really rich word. If you're ever out in the farmland ... I live in North Carolina, right near you guys, and to drive to my house, I have to drive past a bunch of cow pastures. Our mailman lives down the road, and he's also a cow farmer, and he's so wonderful. He grows okra and corn and tomatoes, the whole nine yards. Walter, he's my BFF. So when Walter's out there tilling up his soil and cultivating his soil, it's hard work. What he does is, he literally muscled into the earth, and then he prepares the soil by basically mixing it up. It's like taking a big old mixer to the soil, but you either do it by hand or with a machine.

And then, there's also the connotation of the word "cultivate," which is to foster the growth of something, to nourish something. But all of these definitions right here don't mean anything without the main point, which is that it's done little by little over time, little by little over time. I love the word "cultivate" because it just releases the pressure.

God gives us so many examples in nature. We see this if you grow things. If you're a gardener, even if you grow a little sunflower seed on your windowsill. It has to happen little by little over time. We have to trust when we plant a seed that it's going to do what God told it to do, that there's this special code inside of a seed that God gave it, and that when we plant the seed in the dark, it's going to release. It has to first release its outer shell. Isn't that just like our lives — has to release its outer shell first, and then it has to press toward the light and grow through the dirt?

And that is exactly what helps us too, with worship, is we do not have to come to God's feet in a place of perfection. It's such a, "Ugh, thank You, God. I'm worshipping right now. Thank You, God, so much that I don't have to be perfect to come to Your feet." Worship is done little by little, tiny step at a time. Sometimes, we get confused. We think, "Well, worship has to be this grand thing that I do. It has to be this enormous expression of me singing, or me painting something, or this beautiful thing that I write." And no, the Lord just wants your heart, so little by little, bring your heart to His feet and He will also do the cultivating too.

Kaley: Wow. Lara, that's so interesting. My dad has a garden too, and he has more than just a cherry tomato plant, but I've seen him out there late spring and summer, year after year after year, out there with the tiller, disking up the hard soil. And one thing that I just realized is that when he's out there, literally wrestling with the soil, he can't do anything else. His focus is on what he's wrestling with right then. And I think that that ties into what you said about cultivating because it's like, whenever we're cultivating worship, we're wrestling through that, but God wants our whole heart, and He wants our whole

attention. And it's like, that's the thing that we need to focus on in that moment. So cool, Lara.

Lara: That's such a good parallel to that because I think of so many times this year when I have not wanted to worship ... [my] husband, he'll say, "Lara, just think about the good things." If something hard happens, he'll be like, "Just try to be hopeful." I'm like, "Well, I don't want to be hopeful. I just want to complain." In my heart, I just want to say, "No, no, I don't like this reality. I don't like what's happening here." And like we talked about, I just want to complain like Habakkuk did.

But then, that is, to me, what cultivating is about too— is it's hard work. It's really hard work sometimes. I'm actually about to do this out in my own garden. In order to grow something new, I have to make this ... There's this moment out there where I have to let go of the past, and I have to commit to taking all my muscles and digging into that soil, and I have to actually exercise hope in that. I have to say, "You know what? I'm going to believe that good things are going to grow ahead," even though I don't want to. And it's in the act of exercising hope, which is a radical thing to do. That's where God meets us. And He says, "Okay, I'm here with you. I'm the one who's going to make things grow. You plant the seeds, but I'm the one that's going to make it grow."

Kaley: Mm-hmm. So good, so good. Kendra, I'd love to know what you took away.

Kendra: Yes, okay. So Lara, you said something, and then I made it into a sentence so I can remember it. But you said three words. You said, "Refocus, restructure and reinforce," and so I wrote, letting the Word in refocuses us, restructures our day, and reinforces His love for us. And so, I just like how all three of those things are what you mention in your teaching about what writing the Word, reading the Word, can do for us, which is a really sweet reminder.

Lara: I love that. That's like our magic wand. I just need my soul to be put back together, right? Lord, put me where I need to be. I'm not in control. Put me back where I need to be, so I can rest. Just put me back where I need to be in that place of trust, of faith, of believing in what I can't yet see. That's the magic wand I want in my life, and the magic wand is the Word. It's living, it's active, it's going to do that. I love that you said, "Restructure," too. I love that.

Kaley: Mm-hmm — mm-hmm. Me too. Well, Lara, I wish we had hours upon hours to keep talking about this, right? Because you have taught us so well and have been such a joy to have on the podcast, so thank you so much for coming on the show today.

And I know if our listeners got as much out of this teaching as Kendra and I did, that now is a perfect opportunity for us to let y'all know about this online Bible study that we've got coming up on *Write the Word: Cultivate Worship Journals*, and so we're super excited about it. The study starts November 30th. It's absolutely free to sign up for, so all you have to do is go to Proverbs31.org/study to sign up. Easy-peasy, right, Kendra?

Kendra: Super easy, yes.

Kaley: Yes. But Kendra, tell these friends about the journal that we've been talking about nonstop, that they're going to want to get their hands on.

Kendra: Yes, okay. So this journal is really special because Proverbs 31 worked alongside Lara's team, the Cultivate What Matters team, and they made this exclusive *Write the Word: Cultivate Worship Journal*. And so in it, there are scriptures that we handpicked and prayed through, so we picked every scripture you're going to read. There's a letter from Lara, a letter from Melissa Taylor, who is on staff with Online Bible Studies as well, and there's just some fun freebies all throughout. And so, it's a really special journal that we really think that you guys should get.

But there are only a limited number of them, so you definitely need to go to the bookstore, p31bookstore.com, and get one. And we've never done a study like this before, and so we are very expectant for how the Lord is going to move through us, studying and writing His Word together, so definitely go to p31bookstore.com and get your copies.

Kaley: Yes, I think this is the perfect study to end the year with.

Kendra: I agree with that.

Kaley: Yes, and set us up well for the next year. Well, Lara, how can our friends, listening, connect with you?

Lara: Come on over to cultivatewhatmatters.com. And more than that, I'm just so excited to spend this time with you during this study. I know it's blessed my soul the entire time we've been preparing it for you, and God has just ... He always speaks through His Word, but there's nothing better than opening the Word together, so I'm just excited for you guys to hop on over and join the study and get your journal.

Kaley: Awesome, yes. Well, all of these links that we just mentioned will be available in the show notes, but thanks so much for tuning in today, friends. Before we let you go, we also want to remind you about our brand-new Proverbs 31 podcast insider email list that you can subscribe to today for free at proverbs31.org/listen. And as always, we pray that today's episode helped you know the truth of God's Word so that you can live out that truth, because we believe when you know the Truth and live the Truth, it changes everything. Bye, friends.