



KO: Well, hey, guys, we are so excited and honored to have the one and only Jo Saxton on the show with us today. Welcome, Jo.

Jo Saxton: Hi, how's it going?

KO: So good. So good.

LA: Hi. I am so excited to have Jo with us today. For those of you who don't know who Jo is —and I can't imagine who that might be — we've got to do some quick introductions here.

KO: Mm hmm.

LA: She wears a lot of hats as she's an author; she's a speaker; a podcaster; a leadership coach — that's how I ran into you for the first time, Jo. And she's joining us from Minneapolis, but she's originally from across the pond, a little city known as London in the UK —

KO: Yeah.

LA: — and in heaven, I'm going to have her voice.

KO: I love that. I love what a gift that would be truly. That's honestly one of the reasons I was excited to record today is a lot of inner uninterrupted time listening to Jo talk, but that's amazing. Jo, we love you. We're so excited to have you here. And I personally love learning about British culture. And I like watching the British TV shows and all those things. And one of my favorite things is that, I know people who are British make time for tea in the afternoon. That's a habit I think we should adopt here in the United States because we work way too hard and way too fast all the time. So, before we get into your teaching, I want to know if you were to have Lisa and I over to your house for tea today what would you serve?

JS: Oh, well, first of all, first of all, I would tell you to leave all your fears of carbs out the door because we're going to go there.

KO: That's great.

LA: Okay, I'm in. I'm in.

JS: That's important because the irony is, with afternoon tea, if you do it properly, it's not even about the tea. The tea — I'm an herbal tea drinker. That's my favorite. Some of my friends think that's not real tea. They are wrong. It is.

KO: I like herbal tea.

LA: Agreed.

JS: I love drinking herbal tea. My favorite is one called snore in peace, and it is a really relaxing, chamomile and lavender and all that.

KO: I love it.

[Laughter]

JS: The cakes is what we're there for.

KO: Okay.

JS: And we'd have small sizes, but there'd be like about 30 of them on trays. And we wouldn't even look at the tray. We would just digest and talk, and it will be glorious.

KO: That sounds

LA: I'm in...I can... I'm available anytime.

KO: I mean, honestly, the great British Baking Show is a show that I binge quite often. And I kind of think I'm going to be ambitious and start making tea, cakes and biscuits which —

JS: Yes, thank you.

KO: — is their version of cookies and things like that. And it always really just makes me want to throw a tea party. So, I think we should do that after this recording. But, okay, come on. We don't want to take any more time from this amazing teaching, talking about biscuits, because I know we've got some meat here.

LA: Right.

KO: So, we're going to turn the mic over to you, Jo, and we cannot wait to hear what you have to share with us today.

JS: Thank you. Thank you. That's so gracious of you. You know, I was thinking of a time when I first moved to the States. I've lived in the States about 17 years now. And initially, I moved to Phoenix, Arizona. And when we moved there, I was part of a church and I remember leading one particular women's Bible study — a phenomenal group of women. And we were talking about the labels that we end up with, the names that we are. Like if, what if you were someone what one were you? What one were you? And I remember asking everybody and saying, “Hey, what one were you?” One woman put her hand up when she said, “When I was young, I was known as a skinny one.” And, then she paused and said, “and then I had children.” And nobody said anything. And then, but, and there was silence for about 10 minutes. Well, I am sorry, 10 seconds, then everybody burst out laughing because as she then said, “Nobody calls me that anymore.” A number of women said they were the strong one. And they were the silly one. They were the fun one. I think there was one woman who said “I was once described as the hot one. But now that hot one refers to the hot flashes I have, and not whether I was cute”.

[Laughter]

JS: There were different ones that we were called when we were younger. And then the conversation took a serious turn. Because as one, as one woman said, “I'm the strong one,” she said, “but I just wish, I just wish someone will be strong for me.” And then another woman, a grandmother, she was beautifully dressed, very sophisticated, she had all these rings on that actually probably should have weighed her fingers down because they were that many. And that's wrong. But she wore them for years. So, she had strong muscles in her fingers. “But” she said, “You know, I'm a grandmother of, maybe six, six grandchildren. I had three children of my own. My husband has had a business. I served in my community. But when I was a child, I was known as the silly and the stupid one. And I still feel nobody's taking me seriously.” And she desperately tried to contain the frustration in her voice because this label which once seemed cute and fun and charming, was now a yoke around her life. Because no one was listening to her. And she felt like no one ever had.

If you look back on your story, I wonder what “one” you've been. As you look back on your story, I wonder what label has defined you? What has named you? And it's an important question, particularly in this moment in our days to be honest. It's an important question because we never live beyond what we believe to be true about ourselves. So, if we believe and if we are labeled in our hearts and minds or by others as worthless, and we kind of disguise that and internalize that, we will live like we have no words. If we feel and believe that the label that defines us, the name over us is ugly, then don't be surprised if you don't treat yourself that well. If you don't treat your body that well, because these labels have power. These names name us in the same way we refer to an, in an address book, or when someone addresses us, we have a name. There's also the name that defines our minds, our souls, our spirits, all that makes us, us. And so, it's really important to know who we really are. And so, I love to ask the question. I should say this now, I'm the kind of person, who as a child, asked “why?” all the time. It was very irritating for the family members.

[Laughter]

JS: And I just never stopped, because it's just interesting. But the question I want to ask us, or one of the questions I want us to reflect upon as we come to the Word together, is “Who were you before anybody told you who you were supposed to be?”

LA: Wow.

KO: Hmm.

JS: And “who are you before life happened to you?” We might even ask “Who were you before 2020 and 2021 happened to you?”

KO: Yeah.

JS: “What were the things that defined your life, your hope and expectations,” because we don't live beyond what we believe about ourselves. And so, all of that throughout my life, that understanding, that these names, these labels, the ones we were, have shaped us. And often draw me back to say “Okay, God, who do You say we are? Who do You say we are? Should You... how do You define us? How do You label us? How do You name us?” Names in the Bible, actually not just in the Bible, in the cultures of around the world, are very important. Maybe, even in your family, names are really important. The way that someone is described. Maybe there's a name that carries on from generation to generation in your family, because it speaks of someone's greatness and impact in your family's story. Maybe in your culture, wherever you are, a name will say something about another person's past and future, something of their character. Well, that's what we see in the Bible again and again, with the names that God gave and the way He described people. It shaped their very identity and spoke of their purpose.

And so, as we learn to walk with God, as we learn to follow Jesus, one of the things that is going to be really important for us is to hear how He describes us. Because I don't know about you, these names that we get given, these labels — sometimes in jest; sometimes in someone, someone else's pain; sometimes out of our own pain — can be very definitive, can be very limiting. They shape how we relate; they shape how we love; they shape everything. And we come to Jesus hoping to be better or we react to those names. The good news is that we get a new name with it. The good news is that God already knew who we were before life happened to us. God already knew who we were before anybody told us who we were supposed to be. And as we come to His Word, we see a name, we see a label, we see a word describing us. That does not limit, but releases us, should we know what it actually means and should we choose to invite God to meet us, in His Word, with His Word, to our lives. One of the other questions I like to ask, and again, part in jest, is a question that I often ask of God and say, “God, when You looked down from heaven, on earth, and made a woman, what was, what were you thinking? You know, what did you have in mind? What, literally, what on earth were you thinking? What did you have in mind for us?” And when we look in the Scriptures, we see God's story of our womanhood, God's description of who we are, and what that means for who we are.

Okay, I've set the scene long enough. Let me take you back, back. And it's weird, that to know who we are and how to move forward, we actually go back. But actually, we find the truth about our identity and our God given foundations, we find those in the book of Genesis. The book of Genesis has two creation accounts in Chapter 1 and in Chapter 2. In Chapter 1, we read all men and women being made in God's image. I'll just refer to it just a little for you before I dive into the one specific word I want us to highlight today. In Genesis 1, He makes the sun, moon, stars — sorry, that's a very quick version — says everything's good. And then at verse 26, of Genesis 1, God says this, *“Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, over all the livestock and all the wild animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground. So, God created mankind in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.’ (NIV) “Then God blessed them....”* May I just pause for a moment and say how wonderful that our very wiring, our very creation, begins in blessing—

KO: Wow.

JS: — not expectation of achievement. That His first response is blessing. I wonder, each and every one of us I'd love us to consider, when we think of God's thoughts to us, do we think that He's starting with blessing? Or are we thinking of all the things we've done wrong? I remember, there was a time in my twenties, I'd wake up and say to God, “I'm really sorry because even if I haven't messed up yet, I'm sure I'm about to.”

KO: Yeah.

JS: And it was a reflection of me not realizing that God's love is far beyond my expectations and my limitations. *“God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful, and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’” (Genesis 1:28, NIV)* There is this beautiful beginning for humanity where they are given this commission from God, where they are given responsibility to represent Him in the world, but also to know Him. They're made in His image and likeness. And those words are not like mirror images, but they are like a representative figure that God's imprint is them. That's what, that's what the Hebrew language there evokes, the hand of God is on their lives, the impression of God is on their very beings. And it's given them gifts and abilities and strength, to engage with the world around them.

And it, and again, begins with blessing. It's a beautiful thing. And so, when we're thinking of who we were before anyone told us who we were supposed to be, we were made in the image of God. Now, does that make us God? No, it doesn't. God is God. We are ... We are His creation. We are not the Creator. But there are some good things there for us to just take in.

When you think of the gifts and the passions and the dreams in your hearts and minds: That way you have with hospitality; that way you have with numbers; that way you have with organization; that way you have with entrepreneurship; that way you have with friends and family and local community didn't

start with you. It didn't start with you but began in the very heart of God; began in God's goodness, and His delight to create us and in His image.

Well, let's keep moving on because that's just again, a foundation. Like I said, there's one account in Genesis of creation. In Genesis 1 of creation, then Genesis 2 as well. Genesis 2 again, sun, moon and stars, good; sky, good; everything's good until we reach verse 18 of Chapter 2. And it says this, "*And the LORD said, 'it's not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for you.'*" (NIV) It's not good for the man to be alone, I will make a helper suitable for him. I wonder how that phrase makes you feel. Everything's been going so beautifully. The creation is good, animals, all these glorious things. But there's something missing and something. There's something missing in His community. There's something missing. This aloneness is not great for human beings. We may have felt that particularly over this last year or so. We may have felt that in particular chapters of our life, that aloneness; this isolation is not great. And we'll come back to that in a little while. But what God says here is that I'll make a helper. He has a response for human loneliness. And He says, "*I'll make a helper suitable for him.*" Again, I wonder how that word makes you feel? When you think of the word helper, what comes to mind? Maybe it's someone assisting, someone in a backup role. In a serving role and for some of us that will feel like "No, that's great. That's exactly where I am, how I see my life flowing out and how God has wired me." And others may feel a slight "Well, that's great, but I'm not quite sure what that means for me, as I pursue what God is inviting me into, in ministry or in life or in work, or, or whatever." We often bring our understanding of the word help, and naturally, we bring up all the pictures that we've grown up with. But what I want to do in this, in the short time we have together, is to simply look at what this word means in the Hebrew; to simply look at it and ask ourselves, "Are we living in the light of how God names us and labels us? Or, have we put something else here?" Because when God made a woman, what He was thinking was of this word here, the word in the Hebrew is "eser כְּתוּב." Now, I might be pronouncing it wrong, but I must confess I wasn't there when ancient Hebrew was spoken.

[Laughter]

JS: So, I'm just going with what I've got friends, just going with what I've got. So, I'm pronouncing that "eser." But the word "eser" is a combination of two words: to res... a few words, actually, "to rescue, to save and to be strong." There are one hundred references, actually over one hundred references of the root of this word in the Old Testament. There are twenty-one references of this identical word, two of those times where we see this word "eser" pop up. And it's important we look at this because when a word is confusing in Scripture, you look at Scripture to tell you what it means.

KO: Yeah.

JS: The two times we see it describing the woman, three times we see it referring to military aid and sixteen times, sixteen times, we see it as God as the helper of His people, using powerful military language. Remember, Genesis 1 made in the image of God. (Gen. 1:27) We are our Father's daughters here. The word often appears in parallel with words denoting strength and power. It's actually a word

with military connotations. And the helper in the Old Testament worldview was one who had the power to help; one who had the resources to help. It was not about someone necessarily being in the background, although frankly, let's be honest, there's nothing wrong with serving. It's a wonderful thing to do. But it actually referred to one who had this... who would rise up to help another.

On another word pitch, for someone running ahead and pulling the obstacles out of the way. It's a verb as well as a noun. Meaning ... And I love to sit on this. I could talk about it all day and I won't, friends because I know you have lives. For a moment longer, as a verb as well as noun meaning: to defend, to protect, to surround and cherish. Let me repeat that for you, to defend, to protect, to surround and cherish. And the word "suitable" (Gen 2:18), "suitable" there in the Hebrew is connected meaning to fit; parallel to. Often, in later Hebrew canons, it means to stand boldly opposite. Sometimes when we look at this word "eser" we think up, we may not think that we have much to contribute. We may feel we may have been told, even told that we're too strong, that we're too much or we're not enough. And yet when we look at this word, when we look at this word, and how God designed us before anything went wrong with the world, you were an "eser." That's how God named you. That's how God labeled you; To rescue, to save and to be strong. To defend, to protect, surround and cherish. That beautiful mix of vulnerability and tenderness, but also God-given, God-infused strength.

Are you living as an "eser" today, as you face your circumstances? Do you know who you are? Because when you want to know who you are, it's not on your bank balance. It's not on your marital status. It's not on whether you have children or not, or your age or your size. If you want to know who you are, it's dependent on whose you are. And the one who created you knows you and knows how He designed you to be. Are you living into your design specifications? And may I just say one thing on this before I wrap up here. So often we have heard these words, and we have applied our marital status to them. And we've said, "you know the Bible says, *'be fruitful'*, and I haven't been fruitful in terms of having children because we've limited it to one meaning. Or it says, "It's not good for man to be alone." *And I'm alone, and I'm not married. So, this must mean I'm not.* And yet when we see the most magnificent person who walked on earth, our example in all things, the second Adam, the one who is renewing all things, the one who redeems our story, the one who restores humanity to what it's meant to be, we see one who was not married and didn't have kids.

And I say that, to just lift that burden off us as we come to these verses. And lift those expectations not to shame us if we do or shame us if we don't, but for us to simply receive the Word to us. Who were you before anybody told you who you were supposed to be?

Because this is who you actually are. God calls you "eser". As you walk through the challenges of your day; as you celebrate the wonderful things; as you lead your Bible studies; as you recover from the pain of divorce; as you go and face a diagnosis that no one ever wants; as you deal with difficulty; as you struggle to pay your bills; as you have good days, high days, low days, bad days, struggle days, tough days — you are an "eser" and the God who designed you has His hold on you, and has no intention of letting you go.

KO: Wow.

JS: Remember who you are.

LA: Hmm.

JS: Remember whose you are: “eser”, rescue to save them, to be strong, a warrior, that's your identity. Defend, protect, surround and cherish, that's your identity.

KO: Wow.

JS: And let's bring all the old labels to the cross. And let them stay there and pick up that resurrection identity, the one that began new. Before I hand it back to the ladies, I just love to pray for us, because I know that some labels have shaped some of our lives. And even now, yes even through a podcast, God would love to remind us of the new beginning.

Lord God, we bring to you the words that have shaped our identity for too long. The labels that we can't seem to escape; the past that we cannot get past; the stories that seem to be on repeat; the things that we just can't seem to push away; even the words that when we look in the mirror, we say to ourselves. And we ask You God, by the power of Your Spirit, because of Your Son, because of the work on the cross, which says that we are a new creation. Lord, would you break the power of those words and remind us of whose we are, and who we are, that You look at us with love and with blessing and You call us “eser”. Give us the strength. Give us the courage. Give us the boldness. Give us the power to live into our God given identity today and every day. In Your Name, we pray for Your glory and Yours alone. Amen.

KO: Amen. Amen.

LA: Whew.

KO: What, what an incredible teaching. Jo, thank you so much for that. I'm thinking about someone who's driving in their car, or maybe is listening to this. And they have heard you talk about labels. And so, I mean, I'll just go ahead and say mine. Mine are I'm the black and white one. It's very hard for me to live in gray. And I like to know the details of something, and I like to have a clear picture of things. And that serves me really well. But also, that can kind of be a hindrance. And so, it's very interesting to me to kind of look at that through the lens of how I might be looking at it as a hindrance or a burden and a way that it could hold me back and really see it as a gift that initiated with the Lord. And He is a God of structure, even from creation, and that's so helpful for me Jo.

I'm thinking about somebody who is like, *How do I even know what labels I'm telling myself?* Maybe they're in a spot where they're, I don't know, living every day, just, you know, almost looking for that affirmation of someone else to affirm them and where they are. And they don't even know how to identify what they're telling themselves they are. Or maybe, they're afraid to face it. And so, they just

kind of, don't look at it ever. Jo, how do you recommend, as kind of an expert— not kind of you are an expert in this area. But, if you were to have that conversation with somebody right now, what would you instruct them to do in terms of like, really identifying those labels that they're placing on themselves right now?

JS: Yeah, that's a wonderful question. I think there are a couple of things I would encourage. And I think it's why I do ask that question, “Who were you before anybody told you who you were supposed to be?” Because often we don't always know.

LA: Yes.

KO: Right.

JS: We don't always know. But what we do know is what people told us we were supposed to be. And so, I would ask that person, if they're not sure what their labels are, I would ask them a couple of things: What did, what were the expectations of you growing up? Or in your first job? What were the formative moments? Who were the most significant people? How? Because I think the reason why I ask lots of questions now is not just because it's a childhood habit, but because it draws out people; it draws out the parts of the conversation that aren't always at the front of our minds. And so, I would invite someone to think, and think of those moments where they say, *well, they won't do something because they feel inadequate*. And I say, *So, why do you feel like that? And why can't you do that? And why do you say, “who do I think I am?”* And allow them to draw those things out? And so, whilst you're in the car, you might feel weird asking yourself those questions.

[Laughter]

JS: You have your permission slip to say, *OK, who were some of the people who made you feel affirmed and encouraged, and others who may be not so, or experiencing not so*. What's the impact of that? What makes you question your ability to do something? Because you tend to find hints of the story. Sometimes it's obvious, and sometimes it is a bit like a jigsaw puzzle —

KO: Mm. Hmm.

JS: — discovering, discovering the full picture as you piece things together.

KO: So, I do, I want to add trauma to what you just said too, because earlier, you said “Who were you before 2020 and 2021 happened to you?” And I agree, we've kind of all been through, yeah, collective trauma this year. But I think all of us individually, like Lisa, you've got your own scar stories. I've got my own as well. And Jo, you have yours too. And I think it's really important to recognize, like, there was who we were before we went through something really, really hard. And then there's how that has shaped us and how we view life too. So don't leave trauma out of that. Lisa, I'd love to know what you have to say.

LA: You know, I love the fact... I, I it's very easy for me to think about labels, you know, and I wonder how many women are listening to this, that immediately, you know, they could write down all of their labels that they had that came to mind. And I think about the word Jo “exchange” that we get to “exchange” that label, that we get to “exchange”. I've been studying the word “confidence” in the Bible, specifically in Jeremiah 17. And I just did a Google search of books on confidence, and they're all about — contemporary books are all about, starting with you. And this flips the script and when you're a follower of Christ, Godly confidence, that flipping the label comes from starting with God and starting with...

KO: Hmm.

LA: This is where, where you see yourself, and as long as my eyes are on me, even on those labels, I'm never going to be able to see myself —

KO: Wow.

JS: Yeah.

LA: — the way God sees me.

KO: Yeah.

LA: I have to flip it. The other thing you said I just so resonated with, a couple times in this you've said the word “expectation”. And you talked about in Genesis 1 that God spoke blessing without any expectation of achievement. Now I know some woman is driving right now screaming “Hallelujah.” Because there we have so many expectations of us. And it's such a, it's freedom. That's where that yoke feels like it breaks because we can just be. We don't have to perform. We don't have to be perfect. We don't have to cook dinner. Right?

KO: Hmm.

LA: Or we can forget the kids and carpool, you know, whatever that means. And God is still speaking, blessing over us. What a gift that is.

KO: Yeah, yeah.

JS: I think it's just a rich, it's so rich and I love what you say about the exchange because that's what we see with covenant don't we? Both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, physically, it was an exchange. You exchange your old identity for your new identity. The old labels. Like even in Biblical times, they will be able to stand at one side to another. You have Abraham, the Lord, and there's this exchange that takes place in the blood.

LA: Yes.

JS: In the Old Testament, it's the blood of the animal; in the New Testament we know as the blood of our Savior. There's this exchange. We put down the old label, and we pick up this new label. And so, I was just so impacted when you said the exchange there, because that identity is given.

LA: Yes.

JS: And God wants to give us His one.

KO: Yeah, that's so good. Well, Jo, thank you so, so much for coming on the show today. This was impactful. And honestly, I can't wait to just like, dig into this more.

LA: Me too. I'm going to go read Genesis 1 and 2 again.

KO: I know. I know. I feel like well, that's kind of where we always end up going back here on at Proverbs 31. We always end up back in Genesis 1 and 2. But Jo, we are doing your book, "The Dream of You," as one of our Online Bible Studies this fall. And I just, I want to give you an opportunity, because this is your book, and no one can talk about your book better than your book. And so, somebody heard this teaching, and they're like, I've got to study this more. I want to learn more. How can Jo help me here? So, Jo, what's your book about? And why? Why should someone sign up for this Online Bible Study?

JS: Yeah, it is literally about identity and purpose. And I think in many ways, it is the journey of, of what that exchange looks like to put it. Because otherwise, it's like these things are life changing, now how do I do it? How do I live a life of blessing without these expectations? Because they bounce back just because I tell myself, it hasn't changed it. What does it mean to live in the power of this new covenant? And the reason why I called it "The Dream of Yours" is that kind of play on often society tells us who we should be, actually God has agreed with who we are, and God knows fully who we are. And so, it goes into a number of the labels, and the stories that have held women down. Places where we've lost our voice, lost our sense of identity. And it's a chance for us to journey together, really, to journey as a community, putting down the old labels and picking up what God says about us, knowing that some of those things are really agonizing. But that God, we have a God, who was tender with our story, that is strong to redeem every single fragment of it.

LA: I think this is the perfect timing for this too, like you said —

KO: Yeah.

LA: — you are you on the other side of 2020. And it's a perfect time, because sometimes even if you started you thought you knew what your purpose was —

KO: Yeah.

LA: — life can kind of knock it off kilter a little bit. And so, it's a good reset to say: *Where, what is the dream you have for me God?*

KO: Yeah, yeah absolutely. And I think like, as we're all re-entering society, we can't keep living like we were in 2019, and expect to go through life with the same mindset after having been through what we've been through. And so, I do agree, this is a perfect study, to do and really equip us to take that next step.

LA: Yeah.

KO: But Lisa, do you want to tell how to get signed up?

LA: Absolutely. So, if this message resonated with you, and I know it did, we want you to be part of this study. So, head on over to proverbs31.org/study to register for the study and be part of our Online Bible Studies community. It's really fun to be part of the community of our Bible study.

KO: Yeah. It really is.

LA: It's free to register; it doesn't cost you anything. We do recommend you purchase the book to have the best experience, and you can do that at p31bookstore.com. “The Dream of You” by Jo Saxon.

KO: Well lastly, I'm excited to let our listeners know about two incredible opportunities to study the Bible with Lysa TerKeurst in 2022. If you're a cruise person ready for an adventure now that we're getting back out into the world on the open waters, you can join Lysa for an Alaskan cruise from July 25 through August 1, 2022. Or — and we're really excited about this one — you can join Lysa TerKeurst and Joel Muddamalle in the Holy Land to experience over forty iconic and Biblical locations from October 25 through November 4, 2022. To find out more about these opportunities, click on the show notes for this episode of proverbs31.org/listen.

KO: Well, friends, that's about all we have time for today. Lisa and I are going to sign off and fly over to Minneapolis —

LA: We are ready.

KO: — to go see Jo for the biscuits —

LA: for the cakes and the carbs

KO: — Really, that sounds great. But anyways, thank you guys for joining us. Jo, it was a pleasure to have you on today. Thank you so much for the word that you shared with us.

LA: Mm Hmm.

JS: Thank you.

KO: We all say this every time, but at Proverbs 31, we believe when you know the truth and you live the truth it changes everything. We'll see you next time. Bye, guys.