

LIONESSES ARISING



Wake Up and Change Your World

LISA
BEVERE



Praise for
Lioness Arising

“*Lioness Arising* will cause you to see the awesome strength and beauty that God has given every woman. It will stir up the lioness heart in you and inspire you to rise above the daily grind of life and serve God with a renewed passion.”

—JOYCE MEYER, best-selling author and Bible teacher

“Lisa Bevere not only inspires us with roaring truths but also lives the life of a lioness. She is a committed Christian, a strong wife, a fearless mother, a bold speaker, and an extraordinary writer. *Lioness Arising* will inspire you to fulfill your God-purposed role in establishing God’s kingdom on earth. It is one of the most stirring books we have ever read.”

—JAMES and BETTY ROBISON, *Life Today* television

“*Lioness Arising* will help you to awaken the seeds of greatness God has placed inside you. Lisa’s passion to empower others will help you discover your value, purpose, and the amazing gifts you have to offer the world around you.”

—VICTORIA OSTEEN, co-pastor, Lakewood Church, Houston, TX

“Lisa Bevere sends out a clarion call to women everywhere to rise up and take hold of the power God has given them. Whatever stage of life you are in, *Lioness Arising* will empower you to realize the strength, courage, and direction God has set before you.”

—ED YOUNG, pastor, Fellowship Church, and author of *You!*

The Journey to the Center of Your Worth

“As a co-laborer for the cause of Christ, Lisa Bevere reminds us that the feminine form embodies love, hope, joy, and tenderness, without sacrificing courage, strength, and confidence. This book will remind you that God sees our dreams before we ever see them ourselves. It will inspire you to rise up in your calling and advance Christ’s kingdom across the earth.”

—BRIAN and BOBBIE HOUSTON, senior pastors, Hillsong Church,
Australia

“Compelling and thought-provoking, *Lioness Arising* will challenge you to be all God designed you to be.”

—MARGARET FEINBERG, author of *The Sacred Echo*
and *Scouting the Divine*

“Lisa Bevere’s prayer is that something fierce, beautiful, and wild will be awakened in you as you read this book. *Lioness Arising* will live up to its title because Lisa is someone who makes the world a better place.”

—DINO RIZZO, lead pastor, Healing Place Church

“Hope will arise as you catch a glimpse of what could happen if every woman was fully awake in her moment in history. Read this book and awaken the lioness in you!”

—CHARLOTTE GAMBILL, founder and director, Cherish Women’s Ministries, and senior associate pastor, Abundant Life Church, UK

“*Lioness Arising* shows Lisa Bevere’s God-given ability to shed light on spiritual principles as she shapes a world where women rise up as the fierce and beautiful lionesses they were created to be.”

—CHRISTINE CAINE, director, Equip & Empower Ministries,
and founder, The A21 Campaign

“In her own honest and compelling way, Lisa challenges us to rise courageously. I felt empowered, hopeful, and encouraged to take my place as a lioness among many others.”

—HOLLY WAGNER, author of *God Chicks*

“A timely message for women in the Body of Christ, Lisa gives a clear directive for the lioness to arise and take her place in defense of the faith.”

—JENTEZEN FRANKLIN, senior pastor, Free Chapel and *New York Times*
best-selling author of *Fasting*

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*To all my lioness sisters
who feel something wild, fierce,
and beautiful stirring within them.*



*You are stunning.
You were born for this moment.
Don't be afraid of your strength, questions, or insights.
Awaken, rise up, and dare to realize
all you were created to be.*


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Awaken a Lioness

Nature is made to conspire with spirit to
emancipate us.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON



The year was 1994, and it was a night like any other in that season of my life. I had tumbled into bed later than I should have after a desperate attempt at putting my house in order. As a pregnant mother of three sons, I slept deeply in those days. I would shut my eyes and fall right to sleep, only to be roused by the sound of an alarm, children, or late-morning sunlight streaming into my room. But this night I fell asleep and woke at dawn, shaken to my core.

In the predawn hours I'd experienced a vivid and unusual dream. Actually, to call it a dream makes it sound as though it came to me in the form of sleep or shadow; this imagery did not. I dream regularly, but not at this level of intensity. In my world of sleep, I found myself vibrantly awake. Before

me was a scene set in another place and time. I sensed I no longer walked the pathways of earth. I stood in some heavenly realm, a place of illumination, without glare.

Radiant light was everywhere and appeared to come from everything. There was no mist or shadow, only glorious color. These saturated hues of living color were comprised of shades so concentrated that I am without earthly reference to name them. The pigments were layered and multi-dimensional. For some reason I best remember the tones of purple (but not quite our purple) and blue (yet unlike ours). There were no edges, sides, or upper border, yet the backdrop of color enwrapped what it showcased—an elevated platform of flawless, cream-colored stone, and on this platform reclined a golden lioness.

She was feline perfection—majestic, powerful, and richly textured. She didn't move, but there was no doubt in my mind that she was alive—far more alive than any earthbound animal I'd seen in motion. Her head was erect but not tense, and her forelegs stretched out in front of her. Her fur and eyes gleamed golden. Beneath her flawless, tawny coat, I could see every curve of her perfectly formed muscles. This stunning, still lioness was far more substantial, vivid, and vibrant than any of the lionesses that now walk our earth. I couldn't help thinking I beheld a heavenly prototype.

Etched on the front of the flawless pillar platform were both a word and a roman numeral: Numbers XXIII.

In contrast with this lioness, my form felt transparent, insignificant, and strangely out of place. I felt detached from my body and unaware of being pregnant. I knew I was there *to behold and see*, to keenly observe—and in doing so, to learn something unrealized. I sensed an urgency to grasp the weight of the imagery. Even though I was alone with a lioness, I felt no alarm

or threat. I felt only wide-eyed wonder, as though by seeing, my spirit was being enlarged and connected. I absorbed all I could of what was around me. My focus shifted, and I looked into the eyes of the lioness. As I did, I heard a voice somewhere behind me announce: *With the birth of this son, you will awaken a lioness.*

In a blur of golden light, majesty, and wonder, it was over. The next thing I knew, it was morning, and I was fully awake. All my senses were in a state of high alert, not out of fear as much as out of shock. What had I just witnessed? As time has passed, I have come to believe our earth is the time-tethered, shadowed form or partial revelation of what is original, timeless, and whole in heaven.

RISE UP LIKE A LIONESS

As I lay in the gray of dawn, wide awake, heart racing, and body trembling, I sensed God had sent me this vision of a lioness to reveal something I would have easily missed in the day-to-day. He had my full attention. I was listening with every sense engaged. My room seemed faded and hollow, a stark contrast to the world of color I'd just left. The morning sounds of earth were muffled compared to the clarion voice in the otherworldly place. I paused, afraid to move and lose the last remnants of the vision. I closed my eyes. Yes, it was all there—the lioness, the platform, the inscription, the backdrop, and the voice.

Time passed, my heart slowed, my body calmed, and I opened my eyes. Curious about the inscription on the front of the platform, I reached out and drew my Bible into bed with me. I wondered, was there a connection with a literal chapter or verse? If so, what did Numbers 23 hold? As I flipped

through the pages, my heart sank when I noted the translator's heading and discovered the passage was an oracle of Balaam. I knew he was an accurate, but dishonorable, prophet. I read on, not sensing much of anything until I came to verse 19.

God is not a man, so he does not lie.

He is not human, so he does not change his mind.

Has he ever spoken and failed to act?

Has he ever promised and not carried it through?

Listen, I received a command to bless;

God has blessed, and I cannot reverse it!

No misfortune is in his plan for Jacob;

no trouble is in store for Israel.

For the LORD their God is with them;

he has been proclaimed their king.

God brought them out of Egypt;

for them he is as strong as a wild ox.

No curse can touch Jacob;

no magic has any power against Israel.

For now it will be said of Jacob,

“What wonders God has done for Israel!” (Numbers 23:19–23, NLT)

These words contain so much about the faithfulness of God. His promises are sure and certain, and his blessings are irreversible. Because of God's faithfulness, Israel had a future secure and free from the tainted and twisted effects of witchcraft or curses. All this was reassuring, but the next verse was riveting.

*These people rise up like a lioness,
like a majestic lion rousing itself.*

They refuse to rest
until they have feasted on prey,
drinking the blood of the slaughtered! (Numbers 23:24, NLT)

Trembling, I reread the fierce words printed on the fragile page: *rise up like a lioness, like a majestic lion rousing itself*. The raw imagery hit me. I could see it: a lion and his lioness, rising up out of the grass. As they rose, the dynamics of the plain changed from peaceful to electric. Every living creature sensed the lions' change of posture and watched attentively. The golden ones were awake, stretching, testing the air, surveying their domain, ready to make their move. Perhaps they were hungry. Maybe they were agitated by the presence of an enemy who had violated the marked boundaries of their territory, and it was time to make their presence known.

Once they were up, tensions would be high until their movements ceased. If the lions were restless, there'd be no rest for the other creatures until the lions had fought or feasted, then resettled.

With their rising, I sensed a stirring of their strength in my spirit as well. Who isn't awed and captivated when a lion or lioness rises and moves out from its resting place? It is a wonder to behold. But what was this to me? How could I possibly be connected to any of this wild, golden might?

While the imagery thrilled me, it also repelled me. I liked the idea of lionesses napping in the sun as their young frolicked, but images of the hunt and kill frightened and even disgusted me. When I watched *National Geographic* or *Wild Kingdom*, I averted my eyes as the big cats took down impalas and zebras.

As these thoughts flashed through my mind, I recalled the words of the night vision: “With the birth of this son, you will awaken a lioness.” What could this mean? I saw no connection between the powerful, fearless lioness and the large, pregnant woman who lay in my bed. To say I was a lioness was laughable. I was a tofu-eating, borderline vegan, not a bloodthirsty predator. I was terrified by almost everything outside my control and intimidated by the majority of the people I met. I found strong, dominant women especially frightening.

My pregnancy had been somewhat of a reprieve. In an impassioned moment of prayer a few months before my son’s conception, I’d laid aside all my protests and told God, “Okay, okay! I’m yours. Have your way in my life! I’ll do anything you want. I’ll even talk to women if you want me to.” Though at the time I had no idea what I might say.

When I became pregnant, I figured all bets were off. I imagined the commission and my compliance had been a test of sorts—like Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. Perhaps I’d get bonus points for being willing and I’d never have to follow through on my pledge.

But with this vision, it appeared my pre-pregnancy deal still stood.

And what was this about a son?

Throughout my pregnancy I’d assumed I was carrying a daughter. Everyone I came in contact with told me I was having a girl. No one had mentioned the possibility of a boy. I was the only one who harbored the secret hope for another son.

I shook my head in disbelief. *If* any of this was true and I was about to morph into a lioness of sorts, then surely someone else would see this impending transformation as well. This vision was going to require some serious secondary confirmation.

LOOKING FOR AFFIRMATION

A few weeks passed, and a woman evangelist I had immense respect for came into town. Here was my chance! She'd invited another pregnant friend and me to join her for lunch. My friend was an exceptional businesswoman who'd experienced a radical conversion and was shaking her region of Asia with the gospel. *Perhaps the lioness vision was for her...* I decided to casually bring up the idea over lunch and watch her reaction.

Our lunch date fell on a gorgeous, sunny day in Winter Park, Florida. After the three of us roamed the streets for a while, I finally plopped my pregnant self down for lunch and wondered how I could introduce the lioness into our girlfriend-shopping conversation. Later as we ate, my opening came.

My friend told us she was expecting a girl, and the evangelist said she was excited about the prospect of me having a daughter as well.

"But what if it's another boy?" I asked.

She was aghast that I would even raise such a possibility. After all, she reasoned, I had three sons, and John needed a girl to dote on. Right then I decided to relay the story of the lioness and the proclamation of a son.

I'm not certain what I said made sense. Actually, I know it didn't. After all, I was far from convinced myself. I knew the vision was real, but in my nervousness I still discounted my connection with the lioness imagery. I kept talking, trying to process my encounter, but how could I expect them to understand when I was confused? My ramblings reflected on their concerned faces. Realizing I had hit an impasse, I stopped abruptly.

There was a long pause in the awkward aftermath as the minister looked doubtfully at me and then asked, "When is your baby due?"

“October tenth,” I answered sheepishly, relieved to say something that made sense.

Leaning back, she shook her head and said with confidence, “No, no, you could not *possibly* be a lioness by then.”

I wanted to yell, “I agree!” but feeling slightly ridiculous, I merely nodded. On one level I felt relief and on the other slightly annoyed, definitely embarrassed, and possibly insulted.

What did she mean I couldn’t be a lioness by then? It was only springtime, and October was more than five months away! After all, how long could this lioness transformation take? Why had I shared my vision anyway? I should have waited until I found out if I was carrying a son.

She sensed my confusion and explained, “There is still too much stuff in you that God needs to work out... You will not be free by October.”

Well, there you go. Even though I didn’t like the woman’s bluntness, I agreed with her assessment. Slowly the conversation returned to its previously normal rhythm as I closed my mouth and allowed my thoughts to turn inward. She had only voiced what she saw obviously reflected in me. I was plagued by doubt and insecurity on many levels. Even my husband, John, was constantly saying to me, “It must be so hard to live in your mind, Lisa, with so many worries and fears crowding in on you.” He was right. And it was getting harder and harder all the time. I was tired of being a long-term restoration project.

NO MORE EXCUSES

For years I’d been making excuses for myself. I was a cancer survivor and a stay-at-home mom with a dysfunctional past, who just wanted to survive

her preschool children. Was it possible that God thought I was destined for more? Was something powerful and slightly fierce waiting to be awakened inside me? Maybe I'd wear courage well. After all, hadn't I been adventurous when I was young? There was a time when my dream job ideas ranged between assassin and astronaut.

Yes, I wanted to recover some of the strength I'd forfeited while trying to fit in as a pastor's wife and a nice Christian woman. I was ready to stretch a bit and rise up in strength and beauty. I was tired of being thought of as weak and whiny. I was tired of revisiting the pain of my past. I was up for a challenge. I loved that my husband was passionate and strong, but I was tired of hiding behind him. Tired of wearying my mind with so many things that didn't matter. Tired of pretending. Maybe the vision of a lioness was just what I needed! Rather than nice and safe, I was ready to be seen as slightly fierce and definitely focused.

I drove home after lunch that day, gripping the steering wheel more tightly than necessary. I was willing to try on this lioness vibe in the relative safety of my Honda Civic. I rolled down the windows and bounced to the latest in contemporary Christian music, and I let the wind rather than the air conditioning shake my "mane." It all seems a bit silly now (especially since lionesses don't have manes). Through my cat-shaped Ray-Ban lenses, I saw my frizzy, highlighted hair in the side-view mirror... *Wait, do I see wild lioness gold in those tresses?*

Not ready by October? Ha! I'll show you! I'm a lioness!

Somehow through the combination of my lunch faux pas, my friend's blunt assessment, and a series of other unrelated events, an interesting transformation began to take shape. It was as though a gauntlet had been thrown down and a challenge had been issued.

With the birth of my son Arden Christopher (his name means “fiery, determined, anointed one”), something within me shifted. Even though another child meant more of a mother load, I became a focused daughter. You see, like many other mothers, my God-connected self had been strained. I was almost at the point of drowning in my day-to-day life. I was so caught up with my ever-expanding and increasingly demanding to-do list, I’d forgotten who I was. I was full of self-doubt. My life was small, self-centered, isolated, petty, safe, and ineffective. I remembered my name, whom I was married to, and who my kids were, but what I did and who I was responsible for overshadowed my sense of being God’s daughter.

As I paused, God began to whisper strength to me and to call me by another name. To everyone else I had a name that was attached to a job description. I was mother to my children, wife to my husband, pastor’s wife to the congregation, but to God Most High I was simply *daughter*. As I focused on just being his and what all that meant, life and strength flowed into my days, and rest entered my soul. My heart enlarged.

After Arden’s birth, I began to step out of the shadow of my insecurities, fears, comfort zone, and failures and began to reach out to others. I wrote my first book, *Out of Control and Loving It!*, while nursing Arden. Writing this book opened up another world to me. Suddenly I was out speaking to women across our nation who were hungry for authenticity. In response to their hurt and hunger and the glaring need for healthy female connections, I wrote more books.

Time passed, we moved from our home in sunny, hot, and humid Florida to another home in sunny, cold, and dry Colorado. The move to Colorado drew our family indoors and around the table more. It also positioned us to weather many transitions. A few times over the next decade (almost too few to note), I was singled out or called a lioness. I would just smile, content that

I was no longer a frightened, timid, domestic cat. I imagined the lioness story was over and my personal transformation almost complete.

But I was wrong.

IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU, LISA

In the fall of 2007, the lioness visited me again. I was one of many women ministering at a women's conference in the stunning land of New Zealand. This event was so well attended that the host church had to do two back-to-back conferences to accommodate all the women.

The first conference was held at the church, and the second was held in an Auckland arena. We had finished conference number one and were at the arena for conference number two. The sessions had begun. The ministers were able, compassionate, faithful stewards of the Word. But for some unknown reason, I felt troubled during the afternoon break. It wasn't that I felt pressured to prepare—I would be duplicating what I had said in the first conference. Still, I felt an urgency to pray before my session. It was as though there was some sort of resistance. I knew it was not from the attendees, who had chosen to be there, nor from any of the speakers or the host church. We were all of one heart and had come ready to worship, preach, and encourage the women. But there was something else in the mix. Perhaps God was trying to get my attention. I had to get alone and sort my way through it, so I headed off to my hotel room, which overlooked the Auckland harbor.

I paced my room, stretching my arms out toward the harbor, praying for God's direction and insight and singing along with the music on my iPod, "Shout unto God with a voice of triumph." To position my heart, I began to thank God for various things he was doing in my life. I had just completed the final edits on my *Nurture* manuscript and began to thank God

that the writing and editing process was over. For me, writing a book is like going through labor, so my prayer went something like, *Thank you, God. It is finished!* I exalted, *I don't want to write again anytime soon!*

Suddenly I sensed God speak to my spirit. *I am sorry you feel that way...because I need you to write again.*

What? God *needed* me?

He went on. *I am releasing strategies from heaven. They will be found in my Word. You will not have all of these strategies by any means, but you will have a measure of them. You must write and record what I speak to you so that when my daughters gather, there will be a whole picture. If you do not bring your piece of the puzzle, the picture will not be complete.*

Suddenly the lioness was again before me.

As I beheld her in all her strength and fierce beauty, I heard the Voice say, *I said with the birth of your son, you would awaken a lioness. I did not say you were the lioness.*

Immediately I saw how limited, silly, and human my perspective had been. The Voice went on to say, *Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and it is time his bride awakens a lioness. Study the ways and aspects of the lioness.*

Then I heard the first strategy:

Lionesses hunt together.

I was taken aback. Was what I was hearing even scriptural? What could all this mean? Women were beginning to get used to the idea that there is power in femininity and value in their capacity to nurture. Now God was telling me to call them lionesses? How did this fit in?

I wondered, *Could it be God wants to awaken something fierce and wild within his women?*

Numbers 23 came before me once again, and I saw in it a charge for Christian women to rise up. Right then and there I set my heart to study the

lioness and to search out the parallels for God's daughters. I've spent the last two years researching, observing, and writing about lionesses. Initially I thought of making connections between women and lionesses only on a literary level—without sharing the vision God gave me—but as time passed, I realized this vision was not meant to remain mine alone. I was not shown the lioness because I am favored or special. Nor did I experience this imagery because I am highly visionary. I was shown this because God knew one day I'd be someone with a voice.

Time and time again as I have spoken the phrase “you will awaken a lioness,” I have literally seen it impact women. Sometimes they respond with quiet tears as something within them is watered. At other times they gasp as though they've breathed in the revelation and realized it is okay to be beautiful and fierce. I believe the response has been so overwhelmingly positive because, just as there is a lamb of sorts hidden within, there is also a lioness within every one of God's daughters. And it is time she awakens.

When I think of a lioness, a smile plays along my mouth. I throw back my shoulders and stand a bit straighter. More than any other creature, the lioness makes me proud to be a female. There is no doubting her strength. I also imagine there is no creature that makes a man prouder to be a male than the lion. The lion is the king of the jungle, and there is no question about who is the queen.

LOOK...AND LEARN

This isn't the first time God has pointed us back to the simplicity of creation to restore our perspective. Jesus admonishes us to consider the flowers and to learn from them that God will clothe and care for us (see Matthew 6:28;

Luke 12:27). Likewise, the heavenly realms declare God's glory and make an open show of his righteousness (see Psalm 19:1; Psalm 50:6).

The heavens declare His righteousness,
And all the peoples see His glory. (Psalm 97:6, NKJV)

The wild, fierce beauty of creation is but a window that offers a glimpse of the God who created us. We need to throw open this window and allow God's untamed, limitless beauty to awaken a heavenly awe within us. As we open our eyes to the wonder of creation, it arouses a God-yearning. Our spirit will respond to what it sees. Creation declares, "There is more! More than what you see. More than what you hear. More than mere human mortality. There is the Immortal God who is seated on high."

Jesus our Christ came as the Lamb slain before the foundations of the earth, but the book of Revelation also reveals him as a Lion:

But one of the twenty-four elders said to me, "Stop weeping! Look, *the Lion of the tribe of Judah*, the heir to David's throne, has won the victory. He is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals." (Revelation 5:5, NLT)

He is *both* our Lion and our Lamb. I wonder, could there be a combination of two more contrasting images? The Message version says this lion of Judah "can rip through the seven seals." John, the author of Revelation, wept because after a search of all of heaven, earth, and even the underworld, not one was found worthy to tear open the seven seals and begin the progressive reveal. Then the elder nearest John encouraged him to *look*, for there

was a revelation of a Lion in our Lamb. He alone is worthy and initiates this work of unsealing.

A rip or tear is a violent release. I am immediately reminded of the thick curtain of separation in the temple as it was ripped or rent in two (see Mark 15:38). The tear began at the highest place and ended at the lowest. I love this, for our God is always tearing asunder that which would hinder or separate any of us from all of him. In the divinely mysterious book of Revelation, this act of unsealing the scrolls of heaven sets things in motion on earth.

Nature is made to conspire
with spirit to emancipate us.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Even now I sense God longing to unseal and reveal a portion of himself to and in every one of us. If not, why would he have written this dramatic end of our earth story if it did not contain a revelation for each of us? I believe we are invited again not to despair or to weep but to lift up our eyes, look, and truly see.

Our earth echoes the revelations and wisdom of heaven.

How amazing that our heavenly Father designed his creation to open our hearts. Each plant, animal, element, and landscape says, “Arise and be all you were created to be.” According to Job, nature has the potential to teach us.

God sets out the entire creation as a science classroom,
using birds and beasts to teach wisdom. (Job 35:11)

The wonder of God’s love and the extent to which he will go to impart his wisdom to us is almost too vast to grasp. But we should not be surprised by this. He is, after all, the Creator, who declares:

Every creature in the forest is mine,
the wild animals on all the mountains.
I know every mountain bird by name;
the scampering field mice are my friends.
If I get hungry, do you think I'd tell you?
All creation and its bounty are mine. (Psalm 50:10–12)

We isolate ourselves from the creatures of the earth, but God knows them by name. Do we imagine that he cares nothing for his creation? He fashioned creation for himself. Nature has much to reveal about its Creator, if we will but listen to it. In Proverbs we are charged, “You lazy fool, look at an ant. Watch it closely; let it teach you a thing or two” (6:6).

I believe God is asking us to do something similar now. He is asking us to look at the lioness and to learn. He invites us: *Daughters, look at the lioness. Watch her closely. Let her awaken your untamed nature, your fierce beauty, and your unbridled strength so you can rise up and be the courageous women I have called you to be.*

How does a lioness reveal strength and courage in women? And how can women rise up like the lioness? Each of us will have our unique response, but this glimpse of lioness characteristics may give you insight. In the following chapters, we'll look at several reasons a lioness arises from her leisurely repose in the African sun:

She rises to gather strength.
She rises to greet and groom others.
She rises to hunt.
She rises alongside other lionesses.
She rises to move the young to safety.
She rises to confront enemies that threaten the pride.


She rises to walk with her king.

I have come to see the lioness as a picture of how every daughter of the Most High can embrace her strength, develop courage, and effect change in her world. Is there a lioness hidden within you? It is my prayer that by the time you finish this book, you'll have your answer, and with that answer something fierce, beautiful, and wild will be awakened in you.

A Force Unseen

If ever there comes a time when the women of the world come together purely and simply for the benefit of mankind, it will be a force such as the world has never known.

MATTHEW ARNOLD, NINETEENTH-CENTURY
BRITISH POET AND PHILOSOPHER



Could it be we've awakened in this moment? I've had the privilege of witnessing the foreshadowing of this gathered force. In the faraway land down under, in Europe, and even in my homeland of the United States, I have seen the first fruits of what will no doubt prove to be a full-fledged movement. From the quickening of a daughter, the gathering is quickly growing into a woman. Did the words of this poet and philosopher speak to something unrealized deep within you? When I first read this quote, I was arrested and literally felt my breath catch.

I can only imagine *my* physical response was a reaction to the enormity of *our* unrealized possibilities. You already know from the title of this book that I long to awaken something wild, wise, and wonderful in you. I challenge you to ponder this idea of women coming together for good. Reread the quote if necessary, because the hope within it is indeed worthy of more than a glance; this insight deserves your full attention.

Dare to ask yourself, could Matthew Arnold's words be more than theory, political rhetoric, or hopeful conjecture? Could his insight be providential, permissive, or even prophetic? Did he look ahead and see the daughters of our time and encourage us to gather now from his distant perspective of then? Did he know this gathering would not, could not, happen in his day yet hope this assembly would happen in ours? Did he realize how great the need of our time would become? Did he notice you and me in this moment?

I believe the truest answers to these questions lie deep within each woman and are best played out, not with words, but by how she chooses to live. Our potential to play a part in this answer of women will be known by how we respond to our space in time. Our choices will be further revealed in how we choose to position both our sons and daughters so they likewise will choose well.

Will the women of our time yet rise above the many conflicting and limiting worldwide cultural and religious images and the resulting prejudices against

The solution to adult problems tomorrow depends on large measure upon how our children grow up today.

—MARGARET MEAD

women? Will our brave sisters overseas move forward even with the absence of encouragement from many sectors? Will we in the Western world turn from frivolous distractions and focus our attention on worthy and noble causes?

Will we supersede the conflicting noise and arguments that say our contribution is not necessary, not God breathed? Will we apprehend the gravity and urgency of our time and lay aside our doctrinal differences and opinions in order to join ranks? Will the age gap close as we join hearts and hands? Will we come to the unity of faith? Will this unified faith merely express itself as a set of beliefs?

Will this unity be forced or vibrant? Could this shared faith be quickened through works and reveal us as stewards of something at once evident, irresistible, fierce, and substantial?

Will our coming together openly illustrate all we dare hope for and be a living declaration of all we truly believe? Could this faith extend itself by selflessly reaching out and giving rather than turning in and taking? I pray so, because only then will we find our world enlarged and the lives of others impacted by our stretch.

Yes, I understand that all I ask and hope for is a bit of a stretch right now, but we will reach no further without such a stretch. It is not enough to look solely at where we are. If we are to spread out, we must look back, around, and ahead.

By looking back to the eighteen hundreds, we see a time when women had little or no voice. By looking around, we realize the importance of our voice. By looking ahead, we know we must construct our words and lives in such a manner that we build wisely in the future.

It is time to enlarge the way we see and interact with so many areas of life. This dynamic of stretch happens when tension, flex, or strain is added to a muscle group. An ability to stretch can produce increased flexibility and prevent injury.

It is my hope to add some stretch to your life by introducing the lioness. I want her to expand how you view yourself, your femininity, your beauty,

your strength, your purpose, your marriage, your world, and your God. Allow the lioness to challenge your interactions and develop your relationships with men, friends, and family. Even the lioness knows she must stretch before she attempts a pounce.

Before us lies the tension of both our personal life and the needs of the world. To cover this vast realm, we will need a vision that encompasses both.

AT EASE WITH STRENGTH, AT REST WITH POWER

Before we go any further, I want to discuss a question that arose after the vision. I wondered, *Why a lioness at ease above a scripture depicting God's people engaged in such consuming violence?* As time has passed, I have pondered the vision and all the thoughts the revelation has awakened (and yet awakens) within me. Here are some things I have gleaned.

God did not show me a lioness and then expect me to respond to her with passivity or fear. Her imagery exposed and contradicted my limited, fearful vantage. This lioness was an instrument that opened my eyes to a wider vista and enlarged my range of motion.

As I have traveled, I have seen some magnificent statues. Denmark, Rome, London, and Paris have monuments that pay tribute to awesome feats of strength and celebrate past conquests and moments of historic liberation. I have photographed these works of art and marveled at how their elegance and timeless beauty yet speak.

But the lioness of my vision was not a statue—she was a revelation.

Revelations carry elements of exposure and surprise. The lioness certainly surprised and exposed me as I stood before her pregnant and trembling in my pajamas. Though she never moved, she was more alive than I. In the light of her beauty and strength, I realized what I had lost. Because of fear, I

had forfeited strength, life, and beauty. I had lost a sense of my true self, and with that loss so much of what God wanted for me was yet unrealized.

I am reminded of how the Israelites saw themselves as grasshoppers and the inhabitants of Canaan as giants, but we know from Numbers 23 that the inhabitants saw the Israelites as a lion and a lioness arising.

This contrast between perspective and reality comes into play when we compare our lioness sister with ourselves. Could we ever be like her? Will we ever be women who are at ease with our strength and at rest with our power? Will we wear our beauty comfortably?

The lioness imagery of might paired with respite is one we should embrace.

When the time came, the lioness roused herself. It is time you knew who you are. It is time you stirred, provoked, incited, and awakened yourself.

I have discovered this dynamic of *ease with strength and rest with power* is a very telling and beautiful image of a godly woman. Lovely ones, I give you permission to be at ease with your strength and at rest with your power.

Usually these pairings of *ease with strength and rest with power* come with the passage of time. They fuse as you begin to realize there is a power that abides within. Just as righteousness is a state we rest in, there is a realm where strength is a haven as well. We discover rest when we cease from striving.

Your salvation requires you to turn back to me
and stop your silly efforts to save yourselves.
*Your strength will come from settling down
in complete dependence on me—* (Isaiah 30:15)

There we have it! I can't imagine a better way to put it. Settle down, depend on him, and your strength will come. When we stop struggling in

our own ability, our true strength is revealed. God is not withholding strength from you; he's bestowing it.

In contrast to our friend the lioness, I've seen many women terrified by their own strength. They recoil in fear if ideas, questions, or passions arise unbidden within them. Strength is not to be feared; it is to be embraced. Do not make the mistake of imagining meekness to be weakness. It is tempered strength or might under control.

Moses was called both meek and humble, but he was nevertheless a mighty leader and a force to be reckoned with. I have to wonder if this was because he had met the very One who was backing his every word.

An isolated awareness of good and evil overwhelms our human nakedness and begs a divine answer. Walking the realm of good outside of God limits us. Our present world issues are so incredibly vast they need limitless answers.

Like Moses we need a revelation of God's goodness to calm our trembling earth.

So, lovely one, will you dare to believe that you might be a part of this revelation of good and therefore gather with others and strategize so God's goodness will be seen through us?

VIRTUOUS AND CAPABLE

I have intentionally not limited this "good" to the realm of "nice" or even "safe." It is a force, after all. I have likewise heard *virtue* described as a force.

Who can find a virtuous and capable wife?

She is more precious than rubies.

Her husband can trust her,

and she will greatly enrich his life. (Proverbs 31:10–11, NLT)

Single women, before you imagine this verse leaves you out, remember Jesus is your bridegroom. It is not a question of who is included; we all are.

The question that arises is, can we be trusted with this charge? Will we enrich the lives of those around us? Will we be at once both capable and virtuous? Or will he find us divided into segments: some who are virtuous and others who are capable? The expression of one but not the other is not enough. We need an honorable gathering of virtuous women who are well able. What will we need to be capable of? Quite simply, anything and everything. We will need to be daughters capable of whatever is necessary.

Over the last decade I've met many amazing women who encourage others to realize what they are capable of. Because of the increased awareness of need, women are intentionally focusing their educational pursuits and developing specific areas of talents so they will have a capable response.

They are bright enough to respectfully pose questions from an enlightened vantage of insight and relevancy. They've learned to add in necessary qualities so they can grow into all they truly are. These women are talented and gifted, fearless yet honoring, connected yet self-contained, present yet far reaching, compassionate yet fierce, pure but not naive, strong and gentle, simple yet highly strategic.

It is not enough to outline
gigantic programs on paper.
I must write my ideas on the
earth.

—EMILE PEREIRE

If our plans and programs do not translate and affect the earth and its inhabitants, then they are only theory. Programs need to come alive. They only work if we can lend voice, hands, and feet to them.

Our world has known the impact of many forces. Over the centuries our earth has been bludgeoned by forces of nature such as hurricanes, tsunamis, and monsoons. The earth's shell has been split and its foundations

shaken by earthquakes. Armed forces have gathered for motives and purposes both noble and foul. Coalitions of armed forces have met on battlefields and left destruction in their wake.

But what of a force that did not revel in its power to intimidate, threaten, or destroy? Members of this force would have strategic and unique roles—some seen, others unseen, but all valued. What if this force was at once selfless in motive and simplistic in its objective? What might it look and sound like?

Alexander the Great said,

I am not afraid of an army of lions led by a sheep; I am afraid of an army of sheep led by a lion.

What an amazing picture of us. We are an army of sheep led by a Lion. Since we follow a Lion, we should not war like timid sheep. We are meek in the way we follow and fierce in the way we fight. In this manner, gentle and fierce meet and are comfortable. If we study the natural course and history of human forces, we witness a pattern; there is a rise to power, a corruption of strength, a loss of power, and a collapse from within.

But what if there is another model? What if there is an unformed and yet unexpressed force?

I type this book in a much larger font than it will be printed in, because it is getting harder for me to see the small and up close. Yet my vision for the large and far away has increased immeasurably.

In the distance I see two conflicting images: great trouble and magnificent victory. On shores near and far, I see deep, dark oppression, but I also see a glorious uprising. I see gross wickedness and global injustice exposed and conquered on many fronts by an encounter with God's inescapable light

and his unassailable justice. I see his daughters stretching forth like lionesses preparing to pounce. I see all this in our future. No doubt nothing I've said surprises you. Like you, I do not see these things because I read the paper. I see them because I have eyes to see in the Spirit.

But I not only see...I hear. I have heard cries in the distance and cries up close. I have listened to the plight of hopeless ones trapped in prisons of darkness. Each day is a struggle against the stifling oppression, which threatens to silence their voices and then reach beyond to muffle the cries of their children. These desperate mothers' only hope is for something more for their children. One young mother begged us to take her eight-year-old daughter, because the young child hid under the bed as she serviced clients. Thankfully, Life Outreach, a ministry of James and Betty Robison, rescued this daughter, but the mother, who was afraid to leave, remains behind in the brothel—overwhelmed by despair.

WIND WORDS

There are times I am overwhelmed by what I hear as well.

Why?

It is easier *not* to have seen or heard. Because this is true, most turn from these disturbing sounds and images and quickly fill their ears and eyes with distractions. It is the very reason tourism thrives alongside sex trafficking. I watched as foreign visitors to Thailand pretended that what they saw was perhaps a perpetual party. One U.S. businessman I spoke with acted as though his lewdness was boosting the Thai economy.

Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand! (Matthew 11:15, NLT)

This charge did not stop when Jesus, the Son of Man, ascended and took his rightful place as the Son of God. In the book of Revelation, he again expounds on the urgency and desperate need for a people who are brave enough to listen.

Are your ears awake? Listen. Listen to the Wind Words, the Spirit blowing through the churches. (Revelation 2:7)

We must answer his question. Are our ears awake?

Better yet, do we want our ears awakened? Lovely ones, we are all in the process of not only hearing but truly listening. As I wake, I nudge you to ask, “Did you hear that sound?”

Sadly, I fear we are like a sleepy bride who tosses and turns on her luxurious bed, surrounded by pillows in an attempt to muffle the very sound that might awaken her. How loud must the alarm of our time become before we are aroused and fully awake?

In addition to the obvious screech of our hurting world, there is another sound calling to us. But it does not scream. With all the noise it is the sound you must strain to hear. It is the still, small voice of the Spirit. This sound rises in volume as we each choose to respond.

I love the terminology “Wind Words.” God has set his word upon the winds. The Holy Spirit is likened to a wind, or stream of air, carrying words that whisper life and power. We cannot see the wind, but we see its effect. Wind has the power to blow things into your world and to blow things away. Its energy propels ships or silently strands them. The power of the wind whips up seas and erodes mountains. There are headwinds that fight forward progress and tailwinds that hurry us on our way. The wind repeatedly encircles our world, sometimes traveling quickly, other times slowly.

The wind carries the whisper of God from one place to another.

Often the interference of the artificial noise that surrounds us dulls our ability to attentively listen to the Spirit's *Wind Words*.

There is another hindrance to our ability to hear. It is the familiarity of having already heard. When we have heard something time and time again, we may tune it out and quit really listening.

If we think we know what somebody is going to say, we listen differently. A few years ago I found myself in just such a place as I read the Scriptures. I was so familiar with certain versions of the Bible that, as I read, I knew what was coming next. Perhaps you've had this happen. This caused me to lose some of my childlike wonder with God's Word. To counter my apathy, I began to delve into The Message paraphrase.

Why? I wanted to be surprised. For this reason I have quoted many of the passages from The Message so you too could experience a vantage of wonder. I am not replacing the Bible with a paraphrase. I'm just bringing in relevant language and additional research. But feel free to study your preferred Bible version as well.

I've done this because, like you, I truly want to hear. Once our ears are opened, we cannot help but lend the sound of our voices.

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves;

ensure justice for those being crushed.

Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless,

and see that they get justice. (Proverbs 31:8–9, NLT)

In this passage Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, is charging her son, the king, to lend his majestic voice to those who are crushed by the weight of injustice. It is also the setup or context for the verses on the virtuous woman

(see Proverbs 31:10–31). Like Solomon’s mother, will we encourage the men in our world to speak up for those who’ve had their voices silenced? We have been made kings and priests before our God. So even if others remain silent, we are to speak out.

As a “grand” mother, I want to know that what the sons and daughters inherit will be truly grand. More and more the consensus of global studies points to gender equality as the missing link to stem the tide of world poverty and even terrorism. In 2001 the World Bank produced an influential study, *Engendering Development: Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice*, arguing that promoting gender equality is crucial to combat global poverty. “‘Investment in girls’ education may well be the highest-return investment available in the developing world,’ Lawrence Summers wrote when he was chief economist of the World Bank. ‘The question is not whether countries can afford this investment, but whether countries can afford not to educate more girls.’”¹ The United Nations Development Programme also conducted a study that concluded, “Women’s empowerment helps raise economic productivity.”²

The terrorism of our time inspired security experts to conduct a gender study of their own, and this is what they found:

The reason there are so many Muslim terrorists, they argued, has little to do with the Koran but a great deal to do with the lack of robust female participation in the economy and society of many Islamic countries.... Empowering girls, some in the military argued, would disempower terrorists.³

Great expense and effort went into these crucial, insightful, and extensive studies. I am always awed when our human wisdom points us back to

what God has said all along. Long before there ever was a world problem, there was a world answer: woman.

It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him. (Genesis 2:18, NLT)

The man alone was not good. Now, just as then, adding women to life equations multiplies and brings goodness to men, women, children, and the world we all share together. An isolated life invites what is “not good.” Humans were created for connections to one another. Even so, extensive alliances of only males appear to be a recipe for potential disaster. We can conclude from the insights of Genesis and current studies that dominant male-driven cultures are unhealthy on multiple levels.

You were not created to be subservient; you are a joint heir. Women are God-answers. The addition of women’s voices increases the educational opportunity for all children, stimulates the economy, and apparently decreases the risk of terrorism.

But what does this answer of woman look like?

When I discovered and celebrated *my* feminine creation, I realized I was not an afterthought. As a daughter, wife, and mother, I was an answer. If I was an answer, then it was only logical that the sisters who surrounded my life were answers as well. We are not secondary citizens in the eyes of God. You, lovely one, have the potential to be a living, breathing solution to human problems.

As I travel and declare this simple truth over the lives of women young and old, I can barely explain their response. Women not only hear what I say with trembling hearts; they speak it out loud and believe.

“I am an answer.”

In that moment there is a stretch, a revelation. Their eyes are reoriented and opened to see their feminine self the way God has always seen them...the one who completes.

Yet this realization is just our beginning.

Women are more than a collective economic stimulus. And with our ability to bring solutions, new questions will arise. We are writing a new bill of rights in which women are the friends of mankind. We gather to map out a world where women and children are welcomed, not exploited.

Here is some of what I know of heaven's daughter:

She is lovely, intelligent, and capable.

Her life is connected rather than isolated.

She is loved by God and hated by Satan.

She is oppressed worldwide by both subtle and obvious means.

The question remains: what might she be collectively if she was supported and strategic?

AWAKEN SOMETHING UNCONTAINABLE

I have had the privilege of traveling to Southeast Asia and India as a partner of Life Outreach in the hope of capturing stories compelling enough to release responses from others. I have witnessed the scourge of poverty and the outrage of sex trafficking as I traveled to Cambodia, Thailand, and Mumbai. I have also seen hope and the promise of restoration as people respond with generosity and as organizations begin to work together.

There is desperate need everywhere for cooperation and response. I was in the Ukraine, having breakfast with a friend, when a stunning young woman walked in. This is not unusual in a nation known for its beautiful women, but this one was in the company of a man who looked to be in his

sixties. Dressed in high heels and hot pants, she couldn't have been more than eighteen. They were seated at a table right by us. I watched as the older man devoured his food while she sipped black coffee and stared blankly out the window. The young men behind the buffet table whispered, snickered, and pointed her way. It wasn't long before another man twice her age joined their table. I wanted to cry. The girl looked so lonely, so lost. It was obvious she was a high-priced call girl, but all we saw was a love-starved daughter playing dress-up, seated between two lecherous businessmen who were devouring her life.

I've spoken directly to some of our sisters who were trafficked. Yes, that is what they are—our sisters. They are not prostitutes by choice; they are victims and courageous survivors.

One long, humid day in India, I listened to story after story of heartbreak from a group of young girls and older women whom Life Outreach had gathered in a small apartment. They each told their story a bit differently—some with many tears, others without any apparent emotion.

I am sure they wondered why I wanted to hear their stories. Was I sympathetic? Did I judge them? Could I even understand? Would I have any answers?

One of these brave women, whom I will call Sama, reflected back to when she was a young girl from an outlying village in Nepal, filled with dreams and frustrated by her mother. One day an uncle overheard them arguing and pulled Sama aside. He offered to take her with him to Mumbai. There she'd find opportunity, education, and a chance to realize her dreams.

The promise was irresistible.

Before dawn, Sama and her uncle stole away from their small village. She braved a long and dangerous journey to slip out of Nepal into India.

Upon arriving in Mumbai, her uncle left her to rest in a shabby motel room. While she slept, her uncle sold her.

Sama woke confused and surrounded by strangers. It was time for her to work off the money her uncle had been paid.

Sama was taken to a local brothel and locked in a dark room. She had no idea what was about to happen. She didn't even speak the language. The door opened, and a client came in, expecting to be serviced. When she fought back, four women held her down while she was raped.

Sama was thirteen.

Time passed. Sama learned the language and worked off her debt, and in the process she became a canny businesswoman. With no other prospects and nowhere else to go, she rose within the brothel system to become a madam. She was the one who bought and sold the young girls. At her word the trafficked youths were held down. Sama oversaw the initiation of rape and ordered them beaten into submission.

When I met Sama, it was hard to believe any of this could be true. She was no longer a madam; she was a composed, middle-aged woman. Someone had shared God's love with her, and she had become a Christian. She had also been given an opportunity to get out. Sama found the courage to walk away from the brothels. She now works tirelessly to rescue the very girls she had once oppressed.

As we spoke, I tried to make sense of how Sama had ever become a madam. Had she forgotten what it was like to be that terrified thirteen-year-old girl? I asked her.

"Sama, how could you watch as young girls were kidnapped, raped, and beaten?"

She sighed as her head shook side to side.

"We did what we had to...to survive."

For many, survival is all they have.

I have climbed a mountain of refuse. I have walked filthy streets lined by houses so frail and makeshift that it's no wonder those who take shelter within their frames feel hopeless. I have slipped into brothels, disguised. I have seen the depressive lethargy of purposeless women in the West. I have watched as resources were wasted because we forgot who we were. I have seen the problems firsthand, and it is my desperate hope I will also see the answers.

Here is a stirring charge from the close of the inspiring and challenging book *Half the Sky*:

The tide of history is turning women from beasts of burden and sexual playthings into full-fledged human beings. The economic advantages of empowering women are so vast as to persuade nations to move in that direction. Before long, we will consider sex slavery, honor killings, and acid attacks as unfathomable as foot-binding. The question is how long that transformation will take and how many girls will be kidnapped into brothels before it is complete—and whether each of us will be part of that historical movement, or a bystander.⁴

This is the question before each of us.

I scribe now to factor you into this revelation. It is my earnest prayer that my words will awaken something uncontainable hidden within you. I hope you will rise up with the strength of a lioness and bring God-wonder wherever you go. Then together we will be that force this world has never seen. Read on, my lioness sisters, and be awakened.

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