

## July 2 — A Lion in the Streets!

### READ

Proverbs 25:1-29:27

Proverbs 26:13, *“The lazy person claims, ‘There’s a lion on the road! Yes, I’m sure there’s a lion out there!’”*

### THINK

When we don't want to do something, it's easy to come up with reasons why we can't do it — a.k.a. make excuses. Some of us have made quite a profession of putting off today what can surely wait until tomorrow... or whenever.

Professional procrastinators are best at making ridiculous excuses to avoid work (such as “I’m sure there’s a lion out there!”). They’re also great at coming up with clever reasons not to act:

*“They didn’t text me back.”*

*“I’m waiting on the rest of the team before I start.”*

*“It’s too cold to go for a run.”*

*“No one else in my family will eat healthy foods with me.”*

What excuses are you making regarding your health, relationships, work, school, or parenting? Are they holding you back from working in the way God has wired you — with diligence, dignity, and discernment?

So how do we pack up and leave the procrastination station? Start with tackling the hardest tasks first! When we do what needs to be done first, we can then enjoy doing what we want to do. Since there’s likely no lion roaming the street where you live, there’s no better time than the present to accomplish some immediate goals. Get started and do the work!

### PRAY

Heavenly Father, Thank You for the gift of work. I know I have tried to avoid it at times. Please search my heart and reveal areas where I have been making excuses for so long that I don’t even realize it. Help me to be goal-oriented and on task so I can experience Your best life. Amen!

## July 3 — Highlight Reels Aren't Real!

### READ

Proverbs 30:1-31:31

Proverbs 30:31, *“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”*

### THINK

In a world where diva lighting and flattering filters are used to make the perfect Insta shot, who can really tell what is real and what's not? Our world constantly dares us to compare as we view the highlight reels of lives on social media. We soon find ourselves striving to obtain what we assume others have and do through pictures and videos — but who are we kidding? No life is perfect; we all have troubles, and we all have things we'd never dare post for the whole world to see.

Today's passage is from a poem written as a Hebrew acrostic commonly referred to as “The Proverbs 31 Woman.” She was described to King Lemuel by his mother as the woman he should strive to marry. In a sense, this could be considered a biblical “profile pic.” Who was this woman? Because, honestly, her characteristics seem quite daunting. Who can possibly be that together in every aspect? However, there's one virtue listed that we can all strive for and attain — a heart that fears the Lord.

The entire book of Proverbs offers countless practical teachings for men and women alike. We can choose to seek wisdom or stumble down the path of folly. Highlight reel living eventually fades, and such lack of substance and true authenticity only lead to heartache and pain because a life worth living has God in the center of every frame. So, seek to walk with the wise, to live within the understanding and discernment that comes from God alone. To Him be the glory as you maintain a healthy fear of His power in your heart. Praise Him and be blessed!

### PRAY

Heavenly Father, Thank You for the wisdom that only You can give, and I choose to seek it. Help me not compare myself to others knowing, You made me who I am for Your specific plan and purpose. Let my eyes focus on You and the beauty of Your ways. Amen.

## July 4 — Are You in the “Know?”

### READ

Psalm 42-46

Psalm 46:1-2,10, *“God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. ‘...Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world.’”*

### THINK

IQ tests are a general assessment of overall intelligence. But, one thing it can't measure is our emotional reactions in real-time. Even the smartest cookie might crumble in a crisis, and a high IQ doesn't preclude many from over-worrying.

So, let's take a WQ test! On a scale of 1-10, what is your worry quotient over things you can't control? If you scored 5 or more (or even if you didn't), today's reading provides invaluable insight on God's answer to worry.

In the first nine verses, we read a powerful description of the shelter and strength God provides in all circumstances. Then, in verse 10, God gives us two commands. He says, “Be still.” However, many translations say, “Stop fighting.” He's not telling us to sit passively. It means to stop flailing around trying to control what you can't.

Next, He tells us to “know He is God.” To know Him is to acknowledge that He is truly God over all things; that He has a plan to work through every situation for our good and His glory.

Life is the ultimate test. We can fret and fight or tap into the “GQ,” the God quotient, and find peace amid the chaos. So, whatever stressor you face, remember that He knows the outcome, is in control and wants you to shelter in His arms. Now, take a deep breath and relax... KNOW GOD!

### PRAY

Almighty God, You are my comfort and shelter amid the chaos, and I trust in Your strength to see me through. When I start to worry, remind me that You are in control; help me to be still and know. Amen.

## **July 5 — Your Safe Place**

### **READ**

Psalm 47-49, 84-85, 87

Psalm 84:1-2, *“How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of Heaven’s Armies. I long, yes, I faint with longing to enter the courts of the Lord. With my whole being, body and soul, I will shout joyfully to the living God.”*

### **THINK**

Do you have a safe place? Somewhere you feel loved, seen, valued? A place where you find strength in your darkest moments, encouragement amid pain, and a place where hope is found when all seems lost?

In today’s reading, we find such shelter — the local church. Psalm 84 describes God’s House as “lovely” and “your dwelling place.” Is that what the church is for you? Do you run to it to seek refuge and refreshment, or do you only seek it when it’s convenient to your schedule? There’s no better place to spend your time, to raise your family, or to grow and seek God’s plans for your life. And it’s the best place to find the right kind of people to surround yourself with.

The church should be your safe place where you feel loved by the One who created you and a community of people who have your best interest at heart. It should be the first place you seek to find strength in your darkest moments, encouragement, and the ultimate hope — Jesus. Are you actively plugged into what God’s doing within His house, or are you standing on the sidelines? Don’t let the church be a last resort; let it be your first priority in all seasons!

### **PRAY**

Dear God, Thank You for the local church, and the hope found there. I pray that I always run to it to discover more of You and the plans You have for my life. Amen.

## July 6 — The Secret Place

### READ

Psalm 91:1, *"Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty." (NLT)*

Psalm 91:1-2, *"He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust." (NKJ)*

### THINK

Okay, it's the middle of summer, but just imagine being lost in the woods during a winter storm. You're cold, wet, and afraid. After several hours of wandering, you smell smoke. You turn a corner and see a remote cabin with a chimney. As soon as you approach the shelter, the door opens, and you're welcomed inside. You're given a cup of hot cocoa, a blanket and told to warm yourself by the fire. A feeling of great relief overcomes you as you feel safe and protected from harm.

This is a small depiction of what's happening in Psalm 91. Such shelter is found in God alone. The remote cabin in the illustration above is unknown to many. Many translations refer to God's shelter as a "secret place." Why? Because the promise of God's protection in today's reading comes with a condition — it's only known to those who know God personally through Christ. In order to "abide under the shadow of the Almighty," we must first "live in the shelter of the Most High" by investing time with Him in a personal way. It's to rely on His strength in times of trouble and trust Him with the outcome. It's leaning on His understanding when life makes no sense. It's living by faith when we feel lost within the chaos of the world.

Have you found that "secret place?" Do you rely on God's protection amid life's storms? Do you spend time in fellowship with Him regularly to grow in your relationship with Jesus? It's never too late to find such amazing shelter. Seek Him, and know His peace. Trust that He alone is the answer to life's troubles. Abide in Him and find the hope that only He can provide.

### PRAY

Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your protection and strength. I will dwell in Your "secret place" as I "abide in the shadow" of Your loving arms. Draw near to me as I seek to grow in my relationship with You. Amen.

## July 7 — Know God, No Fear

### READ

Psalm 92-97

Psalm 94:19, "*When anxiety was great within me, Your consolation brought me joy.*"

Psalm 95:2, "*Let us come before Him with thanksgiving and extol Him with music and song.*"

### THINK

When you read a great book, do you enjoy the journey, taking in each page from beginning to end? Or, do you jump to the last page, so you know what to expect? Is there tragedy ahead, or will everyone live "happily ever after"? At times, the unknown builds our anticipation; other times, it can drive us crazy! Wouldn't it be nice if, in life, we had the option to jump to the last page to see how it all turns out? Yet, we're left to wonder. And, for many of us, within that gap exists worry and fear.

An old gospel hymn says, "*Many things about tomorrow I don't seem to understand. But I know Who holds tomorrow, and I know Who holds my hand.*" Uncertainty is a part of life, especially today. Negativity and worry can easily consume our thoughts. But as the song lyrics above so aptly remind us, if God wanted us to know the future, we would. Instead, we place our faith in the One who does know — the One who holds our hand through it all.

As Christ-followers, we can rest in His promises, knowing He is in control, even in the most seemingly out-of-control situations. God has a plan that brings the Light of Hope to the darkest places. Our job is to make sure we hold fast to Him. And, if we live for Christ, we *will* live happily ever after! In Him, we win!

### PRAY

Lord, Intercede in my life and remove the anxiety within me. Help me focus my eyes on You and be thankful. Put a new song in my heart as I praise Your name. Amen.

## July 8 — God Hears

### READ

Psalm 98-100, 102, 104

Psalm 102:17, 19-20, *“He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; He will not despise their plea ... from heaven He viewed the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners and release those condemned to death.”*

### THINK

“Is anybody listening?”

“Does anyone care?”

Have you ever reached out to God when you felt overwhelmed — by tragedy, stress, or attacks from the enemy — and felt like your words just ricocheted off the ceiling? If you have, you know what an awful, lonely experience that is; and if you haven't, chances are you will at some point in your life. However, when those thoughts try to drag us down, we must always hold fast to the truth revealed in the Bible — that God is listening and He does care. His Word is greater than any momentary feeling, and His promises are more enduring than the stars.

We often live on an emotional roller coaster, and when we take our eyes off of Jesus, we can get overwhelmed, disheartened, and distraught. But no matter the feelings of the moment, it does not change God's eternal love for us. This can be difficult to see on our own amid the turmoil. That's why it is so important to not only be honest with God and pour out our hearts to Him, but also to lean on others within the church and be transparent about what's happening in our lives.

Remember, you are not alone! God hears you. God sees you. God loves you. And even in the most tumultuous of times, He wants to guide you with His loving hand.

### PRAY

Heavenly Father, Though feelings are fickle, Your faithfulness endures forever. Remind me of this fact when I feel overwhelmed or alone. Even if I don't always feel it, I know You're always there for me. Thank You for Your abounding love. In Jesus 'name, Amen.