

LIONESSES ARISING



Wake Up and Change Your World

LISA
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P R E S S

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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 spring-time, 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.

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