

Courageous Women of the Bible

LEAVING BEHIND FEAR AND INSECURITY FOR A
LIFE OF CONFIDENCE AND FREEDOM

LATAN ROLAND MURPHY



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Always,
to my wonderful husband, Joe Murphy,
who has been my greatest source of encouragement.
Thank you for helping me courageously “go” toward
every dream of God’s heart for me.
I love you with all that I am.

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Introduction

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Deuteronomy 31:6 NIV

The first thing you need to know about me is that I am a self-proclaimed chicken, often fearful, and seldom courageous. Courage, I’ve discovered through the years, is something we all need, but all lack, from time to time. Courage whispers we are *enough* when fear of failure tells us otherwise. Courage gives us the desire to try. It urges us to get up when fear says sit down.

Few of us realize our need for courage until we face a daunting life situation. While fear paralyzes, courage mobilizes beyond our circumstances—like a best friend telling us we *can* keep going. We all know courage is tested most when life gets hard. Yet it comes as we *choose* to live standing strong, pressing into our faith, and it sees us through every difficult moment you and I face.

Because I needed courage, I decided to write a book that hopefully would encourage other women too—women who also need courage. That’s what started this journey to find courage in the tremendous stories of the Bible that show women displaying this essential quality. There are a few things I learned about courage that I want to pass along to you for the days you need more of it.

Courage advances us into opportunities we would otherwise shrink back from and avoid.

Courage *compels* us to use gifts otherwise left on the shelf: to write the book, sing the song, stick with the diet, run the race, start a new business. Courage helps us push through to the finish line.

Every woman needs courage because it transcends every circumstance of our busy, jam-packed lives. And it comes as we faithfully face our unknowns. Courage answers with grit when questions born of insecurity invade: Will I get the job? And if I do, will I be good at it? Am I capable of being a good wife, even though I had no strong role models to teach me how? Will I beat cancer? Will I, always the outcast, ever fit in? When our minds are overloaded with information and our hearts overwhelmed by fear, courage comes to the rescue, overcoming anxiety about our children’s futures, our own futures, fear of aging, financial hardships, and even death.

The women of the Bible teach us by example how to courageously live, love, and face life victoriously. We need God’s women to teach us how to keep going, particularly when the men in our lives fail to lead. It is women like the widow with two coins who encourage me to courageously give—beyond my resources—and prove God is able. And I need women like the woman with the issue of blood to teach me how to bravely come to Jesus when I feel most unclean or rejected.

As a young girl, I had no idea how much I would need Jesus and all He faithfully provides. In choosing Him, I literally chose *courage*. As He lovingly nudged my heart to come to Him, I experienced my first taste of the beautiful courage He offers those who trust His omnipotent power. Since that warm summer night, a few things have become very clear.

Courage comes as we point our feet toward the path leading to obedient living.

When life's circumstances have overwhelmed me—presenting me with unexpected or stressful changes beyond my control—my knees have buckled, many times over. In times like these, I'm grateful for courageous women who surrounded me, lifted me up, and pointed me in the right direction when I didn't know what to say, how to respond, or how to pray. Sometimes, I still feel like the little girl who fell to her knees weeping into the sawdust at a children's camp in Georgia—hot tears gushing from my eight-year-old green eyes. Although I could not see Jesus, I felt His love drawing me—magnetically giving me courage to keep walking—down the long aisle toward the altar to receive him.

My faith walk has not been perfect. But His courage goes with me down messy, sawdust pathways still today. Courage comes as I intentionally remember His faithfulness in times past—how He faithfully provided courage to make it through the teenage years, to leave home, go far away to college in Nashville, Tennessee, and step out on my own into adulthood.

His love grows sweeter and His strength more necessary as I remember how He provided courage to “fight” for a beautiful marriage of nearly thirty-four years now, courage to give birth to three miracles, courage to raise kind children in an unkind world, courage to help me grieve as cancer ravaged my

brother's body and Parkinson's disease paralyzed my father. I clung to this courage when my sweet nineteen-year-old niece was tragically killed in a car crash, when my twenty-eight-year-old nephew died unexpectedly from a heart attack, and another precious nephew died, just this year, in a motorcycle accident. In times like these, although there is nothing I can do physically to change the circumstances, I am comforted knowing I am never without help. Christ, my courage-giver, fills me with hope for brighter tomorrows.

Courage enables us to have a victorious spirit when we feel like crawling into a hole. Courage moves us emotionally beyond the circumstance, over the obstacle, and pulls us out of the pits we fall into. Courage helps us to look up when we want to look down and away. Courage says keep your eyes on the goal of better days ahead.

These days, Jesus is giving me courage to grow old—to look in the mirror, see my wrinkles, and choose to be alive with wonder. And yes, it is possible to be alive with wonder all the days of your life.

We need courage every day to stick to our “no” when our precious little ones flash puppy-dog eyes of cuteness—knowing our ultimate goal is to develop godly character in the lives of our children. We need courage to hold strong in discipline—knowing the fruits of our relationships must come later.

It takes courage to run a household and juggle a career simultaneously—courage to say no to the wrong things and yes to the right things. Some of us need courage to break an addictive habit, or break off an engagement to the wrong person before it's too late.

Perhaps we've lost our self-worth and need courage to stop following the crowd.

We desperately need courage to face our messy lives. If you could see the mess in my life, you'd understand my need

of courage. My life is wonderfully overwhelming, probably much like yours. I am a small-business owner, a speaker, writer, teacher, wife, mother of three, grandmother of two, sister to five, daughter-in-law, aunt to eighteen nieces and nephews, and daughter to my elderly mother. Because people matter, I put a lot of pressure on myself. A balanced life seems impossible because I simply cannot lay certain things aside. I don't have the courage I often need. But, friend, I have good news for us:

When we cannot do it all perfectly, we can do all that we do courageously.

Courage helps us to be the best we can be—in each given role God appoints us, knowing that we are doing all things for God—not to please people. Do you feel the pressure lifting from your shoulders, friend? I do! It takes courage to “let go” of our Wonder Woman mentality and rest in knowing that although we are imperfect people, we serve a perfect God who is pleased when we dedicate all that we do to Him alone. Oh, how we need sweet courage to let us know it's *okay* to fail. Courage helps us keep things in perspective when our perfectionism distorts God's reality. How we need courage to grab us by the nape of our neck, forcing us back to our feet when we want to sit down, give up, surrender in defeat to the voices telling us that if we can't do it *all* perfectly then we shouldn't try at all. This is a lie! Don't believe it!

As we draw wisdom from past mistakes, we can make courageous future choices.

God wants to use your story as He used many courageous women of the Bible to fulfill His higher purposes. When you are most tempted to throw your hands up in defeat, give up

completely, turn back to a smooth-surfaced path, you can choose to keep walking it out. Courage makes the right choice, acts the right way, says the best thing, chooses the best attitude, and takes the high road. Courage admits the wrong, making us transparent and authentic. Courage never gives up on us. Courage chooses integrity instead of compromise.

Perhaps you feel the least courageous of all as you read this. I know that feeling. So let me assure you that you are in good company. Friend, may we be wise enough to step out, finding courage along the way together.

Here we go!

In this book, we will look at eleven courageous women of the Bible who were flesh and blood, like you and me. Yet they were warriors, messengers, courageous leaders—wise enough to follow God’s best leading. Each woman left behind a sawdust trail of courage for us to follow. May we wisely learn from these courageous women of old, then practice being courageous women each day.

Because there are so many amazing women of the Bible, it was no easy task to pick my top eleven courageous women. But I think the ones I did choose are great role models for us. Their stories inspire and challenge us to find courage in the face of defeat and unchangeable circumstances.

Let me start by reiterating that what labels a woman as “courageous” hasn’t changed since the beginning of time. But the worldly definition of courage is far different than the biblical one. Worldly courage often masks a rebellious, sinful nature. Worldly courage screams, “You can’t make me do anything I don’t want to do!” or “It will be my way!” Or even, “You can’t stop me!”

Godly courage is mobilized by an obedient spirit—knowing the power of God is greater than the circumstances we face.

Courage by God's standards is the ability to act, regardless of human fear or frailty, and enables us to do supernatural things because we are not acting alone—God is with us. And sometimes, godly courage is manifested in the ability to not act outwardly, but to wait, pray, and be still in God's presence. To linger, listen, seek His best way to live. Real godly courage is laced with an attitude of obedient gratitude, knowing that He is able to lead, guide, and direct our lives. We can enter into a sweet place of rest knowing we can count on God to reveal how we are to live courageously in each and every moment of our lives.

Courageous behavior comes as we realize we are living for a higher cause, greater good, and better story that is being written across our beautifully imperfect lives.

In each chapter I have taken some creative license to position us emotionally inside each woman's unique life circumstances and look at how courage was manifested. But I have really tried to stay true to Scripture. Hopefully you will see a bit of yourself in each of these eleven women, or perhaps think of someone you know who has been a courageous woman in your life. I pray you will be inspired by how they each found courage.

We need to trust the reliability of Scripture when life gets messy and our hearts are facing the unknowns. I pray you will find relief in knowing there's no need to *pretend* to be tough or fearless to be counted among the courageous women of the ages. We are on a journey to leave behind fear and insecurity for a life of confidence and freedom. We will go courageously, hand in hand with the Courage-Giver.

Our lineup of courageous women includes:

- **Deborah**—Wife, judge, and ruler of Israel. Courage is needed to lead our families and others.
- **The Woman with an Issue of Blood**—Physically sick woman. Courage is needed when facing rejection.
- **The Widow with Two Coins**—Poor widow. Courage is needed to give generously in our financial hardships.
- **Jael**—Wife, warrior, divided household, decisive and courageous. Courage is needed to seize opportunities—using what’s in our hands in the midst of obstacles.
- **Abigail**—Faithful wife to a selfish, foolish man. Courage is needed to do the right thing, even when your spouse or others do not.
- **Bathsheba**—Exposed bathing beauty caught in a web of sin. Courage is needed when we’ve acted in sin, were abused, molested, or feel violated.
- **The Samaritan Woman**—Person with a troubled past of multiple marriages. Courage is needed to simply believe there is redemption and to tell others what Christ has done for us.
- **Mary, Mother of Jesus**—Young mother. Courage is needed to have a baby, especially in unpredictable times. Mary delivered the Son of God amidst great odds and pressure around her, and we are bearers of life in uncertain times.
- **The Shulammitte Woman**—Hopeless romantic. Courage is needed to express our physical love, knowing the marriage bed is undefiled.
- **Jochebed**—Mother of Moses. Courage is needed as we surrender our children and the people we care about to God.

- **The Shunammite Woman**—Hospitable wife. Courage is needed to show hospitality, taking an others-minded approach to life by welcoming others into our private lives, even when our prayers are unanswered.

I am so excited to offer you the opportunity to think about your own life and how each of these courageous women can help you to grow. At the end of each chapter you will find several questions for study and personal reflection that can be used on your own, in a small group, or in Bible study settings. As you answer each question in this *Courage Quest* segment, I hope you will linger, taking time to really think about how each woman's challenges and her responses to them help you in your own life experiences.

Another important feature of this book is a journal section, *Courage Coming—Journal Your Way to Courageous Living*. I can tell you firsthand, it's in times of quiet introspection I am able to hear God's voice most clearly. It's my sincere hope you will intentionally position yourself above the noise of life so that you can fully celebrate and evaluate how you've grown, and how you've found a bit of yourself in the lives of these incredible women of the Bible. Courage will come as you pen your fears and insecurities and how these affect your ability to live confidently and courageously free. It doesn't matter how you choose to use this journaling experience—whether you complete the corresponding journal page immediately after you finish each chapter or wait until you have read the entire book. Are you willing to join me?

**A willing spirit is what courage demands—nothing more,
and nothing less.**

Do you feel your journey demands more than you can give? Do you desperately need courage? As you read about the eleven

courageous women in this book, I pray you will invite the Almighty to join you in every part of your path, and that each relationship and situation you find yourself in will be faithfully transformed. I believe God wants to use women like you and me to do great things for *His* glory.

May we courageously leave behind fear and insecurity for a life of confidence and freedom. Let's begin by settling in underneath the palm of Deborah—the tree from which Deborah ruled and judged. I challenge you to view your life from God's higher perspective. You are, as Deborah was, the best person for your individual God-appointed job.

Nothing is allowed into our lives without God sifting it through His powerful fingers first. Will you allow Him room to prepare your heart and mind to be strong and courageous? I wish you courage for each and every day. The women in this courageous lineup have much to teach us about putting our faith into action. May we become modern-day women of courage—kingdom forces to be reckoned with!

Your courage-seeking friend,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Latan". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, looping initial "L" and a trailing flourish at the end.



Man Up and Lead!

Doubt that Deborah, a spunky woman from Ephraim, saw herself as more than Lappidoth's wife and a prophetess before being appointed as judge and ruler, with all of Israel under her wise jurisdiction. It's doubtful Deborah ever imagined herself in such a highly appointed position as deliverer and executive leader of Israel. And I doubt that any of us can imagine all *we* are capable of with God's perfect positioning in *our* lives. But in the same way Deborah courageously stepped up to lead as the fourth judge of Israel—the only woman to have held that important position—we also can bravely step forward into the God-filled, purposed positioning of our lives.

But sometimes we fail to recognize all that we are capable of, until we are in a position demanding “more” of us. And sometimes more is required of us because others fail to do their part in a given situation. For Deborah, this occurred when Barak, a military leader appointed by God to lead the Israelite nation into battle, fearfully pulled back from his leadership

role, refusing to go into battle unless Deborah accompanied him. Deborah was put in a position demanding that she add “warrior” to her already impressive résumé as judge and ruler. Too bad Barak missed his opportunity to lead strongly and faithfully, but Judge Deborah would not miss hers.

So, what’s a woman to do when her world falls apart? When those she thought she could count on to fight for her greater good shrink back in fear? Scripture offers us a glimpse of Judge Deborah’s world crumbling before her very eyes, and nothing could ready her for it except courage:

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud died. And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help, for he had 900 chariots of iron and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years. Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment.

Judges 4:1–5

Can you see her in your mind? Sitting under the palm tree, shoulders squared, jaw fixed, assessing the situations and circumstances all around with eyes of steel? Dedicating herself to the purposed positioning of God as the sun peeked through the clouds at the start of each new day? We’d be smart to do the same—seek God at the start of our day. How else could Deborah have found wisdom to lead and to fulfill each role of her life with such excellence? How can we?

As the cries of the Israelite nation traveled like the wind across the beautiful hill country of Ephraim reaching the obedient ears

of Deborah, she must have struggled with her own human nature warring against her godly best. Watching the suffering and cruel oppression of the people of God and desperately wanting to experience freedom. I think that as Deborah settled under the palm tree, her mind also settled on the realization of all she'd been entrusted with. Leadership is needed in every arena of life. A country without a leader suffers. The most powerful leader is one who understands that his or her ability to lead is no match for God's leadership.

There must have been times when Deborah felt like she was hanging on by her fingernails, as the weight of her burdened heart pressed in. Did she sigh a long, disillusioned sigh—wondering what happened to the godly warriors who once fought for their nation's freedom? Did she silently whisper a prayer, her heart crying out for answers, as we do, while watching Fox News or CNN? It's hard *not* to become disillusioned with so many negative news reports.

Sometimes, while watching the news, my heart is overwhelmed and I think to myself: If I see or hear *one more* sad or bad thing, I am going to fall into total despair: rapes, murders, burglaries, terrorist attacks, Amber Alerts, sex trafficking—to name a few. How about you, friend? Do you feel the same? If so, we can sympathize with Judge Deborah's need for courage as she watched the progressive evil in *her* world. Stunned, as we are, to see how far from God's truth her world had gone.

It Takes Courage for Real Women to Face Real Enemies

Deborah was a real woman, like you and me, with real-life struggles, insecurities, and fears; yet as she devoted both her strengths and her weaknesses to God, He equipped her to listen, speak, and act with power, purpose, and anointing—in an

ancient world where women rarely were leaders, and were not respected as such. Perhaps God positioned Deborah to prepare future generations of women and girls to find respect in life and leadership also. We can be inspired by Deborah, knowing that as the Israelite nation cried out to God for freedom once again, Deborah cried out to God for real-life answers to her very real-life situations.

How she must have wished the nation of Israel had remembered Joshua's words and passed them down to the next generation:

“Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Joshua 1:7–9

Thankfully, Deborah had remained strong and courageous. God's supernatural power was with Deborah; her success as a woman was nothing short of living proof of God's loving hand on her life and leadership. Moses, Joshua, and Ehud had “manned up” to lead God's people out of bondage in times past, and now Deborah faced forward to the battle ahead—keeping the courageous legacy of others close to her heart while *creating* a godly legacy of her own for the next generation. And as she did, she courageously chose to leave behind her fears and insecurities to pursue a life of confidence and freedom.

What about you, friend? Do you have a few fears and insecurities fighting against your daily freedom? Does your enemy have a name? Deborah's enemy had a name—Sisera. And his nine hundred iron chariots were intimidating and fierce, causing panic to ripple through the band of worn-out Israelites who were surely weary from the battles they'd already faced. But God had spoken, whispering in Deborah's ear a battle plan that included a man named Barak:

She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali and said to him, "Has not the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded you, 'Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun. And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand?'" Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go."

Judges 4:6-8

"You'll go . . . if I go with you?" Deborah must have been speechless. God had provided 10,000 people and Barak refused to go without *one woman*—Deborah. We might wonder: *Where's your courage, Barak?* Maybe we need to ask ourselves the same question: Where is our courage? Are we willing to lead courageously, or do we need someone to go with us because we lack confidence?

Barak's focus had turned away from God and toward his fears; he was looking to others for courage. I think God wants us to stop being disillusioned by the enemy, to set our prayer hearts into motion so we can live courageously, trusting that His power is *all* the power we will ever need—today, tomorrow, and forever—for every battle we will ever face.

Imagine the long line of compromisers—disgruntled, needy people waiting to hear a word of wisdom from *one* woman,

Deborah, the representative of God symbolizing peaceful living, if there was any to be found in their fallen culture. Like Barak, they also must have sensed the power residing inside of the judge and warrior Deborah. Both men and women coming with respect and expectation as Deborah sat judging and ruling over the nation of God's chosen people.¹ As her tired eyes shifted, left and then right, assessing every situation, do you think she ever grew faint because of her overwhelming responsibilities resolving issues such as land disputes or marital discord?

Our best attempt to relate to Deborah might fail. But let's think of our worst day of dealing with grumbling co-workers and aging parents, or try to relate to Deborah's exhaustion after listening to *your* family complaining about a single meal. Do you fall apart? Fall into bed feeling like a failure because your kids have been obstinate all day long and your husband is withdrawn? Now try to imagine ruling over an entire nation of grumbling adults. *That* would put most of us six feet under!

God can give us spiritual eyes to see our problems as spiritual battles that are being waged. And we can live confidently, knowing that whatever battles are yet ahead, God will equip us and provide people to support us when we need it.

“Certainly, I will go with you,” said Deborah. “But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.” So Deborah went with Barak to Kedes. There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.

Judges 4:9–10 NIV

We think our daily stress is bad? Imagine being told that Sisera's nine hundred iron chariots are coming to attack you—right in your neighborhood! It would be equivalent to nine

hundred army tanks coming your way. Intimidating, huh? Remember, the Israelite nation was weary from battles past, and after battling against so many enemies, no wonder they lacked courage. As you battle against deep insecurities, do you give up or remain faithful to God—doing what you can to ensure this season of life is your most powerful one yet, with or without a man to lead you? Will you be the woman God planned for you to be? With God by your side, who needs 10,000 warriors to fight for you?

It was God going with Deborah, equipping her with the ability to persevere and to discern what she needed to say to instruct even the most powerful men in her day. Impressive, huh? It'd be like presiding over a meeting in a boardroom and having the final say. Can you see the determination in her face, her eyes filled with grace but also strength when she said to Barak, "Has not the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded you—go?"²²

Imagine the courage it must have taken for Deborah to not only advise Barak but to go with him and the warriors into battle. I don't know about you, but I'm a princess who wants to be rescued and would rather stay in the safety of my home while my man led in battle to protect me. But I have also witnessed the strength of many military women, who would gladly have gone into battle, leading confidently because of their commitment to our country, even if they felt moments of weakness or fear.

Courage Helps Us Face Our Tomorrows

I believe that Deborah didn't always feel the strength that others thought came effortlessly for her. But obstacles are simply opportunities with God by our side—even when God's appointed man refuses to man up and lead. Deborah inspires us to "go" courageously into battle and shows us how not to squander a

moment of our God-given appointments. As she exercised her faith in God, I think she became more than a number, more than just a woman. Because heaven takes note of our willingness to serve the Lord. God saw Deborah's dedicated heart and gifted her with all she would need to accomplish all that *He* desired. Nothing can stop this kind of faith gone courage, not in Deborah's life, not in your life, and not in mine:

And Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the Lord go out before you?"

Judges 4:14

Victory demands that we get up. Lying around won't get us to our better tomorrows, friend. It takes wild courage to fight against oppression and depression. We are more than conquerors as mothers, wives, grandmothers, sisters, friends, co-workers.³ We can lead strong, knowing that "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31 NIV).

Come as you are, friend. Deborah's role as judge was symbolic and a "welcome" sign of sorts—inviting the people to come just as they were. She would stand in the gap for them, representing their individual case to God. Deborah lived before Christ's birth, when people counted on priests, judges, then kings to lead, represent, and help them through daily struggles—resolving conflicts of life and offering wisdom for living. Only the high priest could enter the sacred place where God's spirit dwelt, and that happened behind a veil.

Deborah's open-air courtroom, the palm of Deborah, provided a place where the voice of God could be heard through a judge, wife, and warrior to the people she so loved. The truth of her life-giving wisdom must have poured over the exhausted, sinful nation of Israel like pure spring water replenishing their

souls. Deborah's open-air courtroom was a foreshadowing of the freedom we can experience in coming into the presence of Jesus any time, day or night; Jesus gave His life on the cross and now stands between the Father and us these precious days representing our "case"—our every life circumstance—with forgiveness, love, and grace.

Years ago, my daughter went through a very hurtful time in her life when a man who had promised to love and cherish her broke his promise. I experienced so much anger and was unable to forgive and unable to pray. My child's life had been affected, and the war raging inside of me was overwhelming. If I'd been living in Deborah's day, I might have angrily huffed and puffed my way to the palm tree where she sat judging the nation. But I am privileged, as you are, my friend, to come openly to God when I've lost my way. And sitting in my fuzzy pink bathrobe, I cried out to God, confessing my sin of bitterness, saying, *Lord, I'm so angry! I have no grace!* As hot tears poured down my grief-stricken face, I poured out my rage onto the middle of the kitchen floor. And was amazed to find the Holy Spirit met me there as I came openly, holding nothing back. I experienced a sweet spiritual epiphany as Jesus whispered, *"I am grace when you cannot extend grace; I am forgiveness when you cannot forgive. I stand in the gap between you and a holy God—representing your case, I'll do the thing you cannot do. I will fight for you. Stay near me. . . ."*²⁴

Thankfully, as I chose to stay near to God, He went into battle against an enemy named anger that felt like nine hundred iron chariots wanting to turn me into a bitter woman. I am thankful for Jesus, the One who opened the way for me to come—the crazed mess that I was—into the presence of a holy God. He is the only weapon needed.

Hopefully, this puts into perspective the power of Deborah's open-air courtroom. Today, nothing can block our path leading

to the gift of God's grace, mercy, and love. Come freely, friend. Come angry, bitter, and grumbling—like the unfaithful remnant of the Israelite nation, and like me—a crazed, unforgiving, courage-seeking, weeping, angry woman in a pink fuzzy bathrobe. When we are most broken, God's light will shine through all the cracks, helping us see the things others would overlook, and lighting the way for others with less courage.

It was God's light shining through Deborah that made Barak look to her for courage to go into battle. But God doesn't play favorites, friend. He wants to use each of us, His children, to lead strongly and faithfully. By dedicating our fears and insecurities to God we can discern right and wrong, good and bad, knowing when to act, like Deborah did. In wisdom, Deborah acted courageously, knowing that if Barak didn't strike in a timely manner the entire nation would be at a disadvantage and lives would be lost.

And had chicken me not acted courageously and in a timely manner on the day a copperhead snake slithered its way up the sidewalk leading to my friend's home, her family would have been at a disadvantage. Standing in my high heels and dress, I (Barak) wanted someone else—anyone else—to take care of the enemy for me. But when my friend wimped out, courage stepped in, as it had for a woman named Deborah, helping *me* to realize all that was at risk, overshadowing the fear and anxiety.

With a shovel in hand, I pressed through the fear, killing the snake and possibly saving the lives of people and pets. As with Deborah, there was no time to waste, even though I wasn't dressed to kill a snake, had never dreamed I'd be called upon to kill a snake, and hadn't had time to practice or study *Snake-Killin' for Fraidycats*. Someone had to act. Otherwise the enemy (snake) could hide in the shrubs and ambush someone later. Like Deborah, I had no one to delegate my responsibilities

to, and so I dedicated my fears to God and called to Him for help—openly—without shrinking back.

I cannot express the courage God's son, Jesus, gives. Knowing that He represents us to the Father and that His Holy Spirit sets us apart helps us overcome fears and moves our hearts to engage by faith when we would normally run from difficult circumstances.

Has your enemy filled you with fear, causing you to perceive others as being set apart with power while you have been put on the shelf? No matter how unprepared or ill-equipped you feel, there's no one more capable than a woman who dedicates herself fully to God and then willingly acts when courage demands her to. The snakes on the sidewalk of your life might be temptations you are facing with fear. Are you willing to act in the moments of fear when life presents opportunities for courage to shine?

We can come seeking answers openly—as we drive down the road, our unseen power source, Jesus, right beside us. Or, we can openly seek His wise counsel while doing dishes or scrubbing the toilets. Will you allow His power to equip you for the moments demanding big courage, whether facing an enemy on the sidewalks of your life—wearing high heels, like me—or when facing the internal battles of your mind? Come to Him in prayer anywhere, any time of day, with hopes, dreams, and fears in hand—holding nothing back. Jesus' death on the cross opened the way for this kind of sweet personal intimacy with God.

Will you boldly step out to lead whatever your Israelite nation looks like? Whatever you are facing, friend, don't compromise your faith just because the other way seems easier. Courage comes when we are about to lose our footing but muster the fight to keep standing strong. God equips us with spiritual eyes to help us discern truth from lies.

Is God directing you to lead by example? Perhaps, like Deborah, you can help someone who lacks courage to do the right

thing. Perhaps your strong support is what's needed for them to rise to their purposed position. One woman's courageous actions moved the next generation to faithful living. And we can lead the next generation of girls to be strong and courageous too. What could change if we gave the world God has entrusted us with something to admire and aspire to be?

“Apart from me you can do nothing.”

John 15:5 NIV

We can't accomplish a lot *without* the Lord, but *with* His help we can accomplish things of lasting value. Deborah's dedication had lasting value for the nation of Israel.

Are you willing to dedicate yourself to God as Deborah did? Don't allow fear and insecurities to talk you out of acting courageously in everyday moments. Instead of filling our lives with good things, let's fill our lives with the things of lasting value. Instead of looking for our purpose in life, let's view God *as our purpose*. With God as our purpose, we can let go of the worry and live in true freedom, knowing He will help us bear fruit in our mothering, our job, and in the lives of others we influence.

Courage Sometimes Calls Us to the Lonely Path

Leading is sometimes a lonely path. The times we feel most alone are proof of God's loving desire to have us acknowledge that He is the *only* one who can fill our gaping, empty voids. Though others pulled away from their appointments, dedicated Deborah remained true to hers. Has God assigned you to a season of fighting a battle seemingly all alone? If so, don't give up. Rise, like Deborah—tenaciously, faithfully. Dedicate yourself to all that *He is* and lead others with all that *you are*. When your boss is difficult, the ministry you are leading feels

fruitless, when you aren't sure where God is calling you. Don't give up—until God says. All of heaven is fighting for you—a great cloud of witnesses are cheering you to keep going and not lose the courage it has taken to get this far.⁵

I wonder if Deborah felt relieved knowing God had chosen Barak to lead the battle against Sisera? Try to remember a time in your life when so many people needed you for so many things. Remember how difficult it was to get above the noise? When my children were little I felt exhausted by the end of the day. When friends or family gave me a break, I was thrilled. Do you think Deborah imagined such a rest? To have Barak fighting *for* her and for the nation God loved? But that is not how the story went. Barak refused to go into battle *without her*.

And perhaps that is how your story has gone? Sadly, it's how my friend Amber's story went too.

Amber loved her husband, David, and believed in his leadership ability; but she was weary of telling him and expecting him to be the spiritual leader of her home. Like Barak, David was too busy fighting internal battles of his own to man up and lead in his God-given appointment to fight the spiritual battles for his family, and Amber worried his lack of interest in the things of God might affect her children's faith. But Amber courageously dedicated herself to prayer—her wisest battle plan yet. Her voice might not influence or sway her husband toward God and away from the world, but she dedicated herself to staying near to God anyway.

And God faithfully stayed near to Amber—healing the anger, resentment, and confusion. Soon Amber felt stronger in her ability to fight the enemy on the sidewalk. And she found wisdom and rest knowing God would speak truth into David's heart. She *was not* responsible for his choices. David, like the Israelites who came to the palm tree of Deborah ready for change, had to own his unwise actions and seek God for change. To continue

in the same cycle of sin would be as destructive as the Israelite nation never learning from its past mistakes. Just like the Israelites found rest and peace at the feet of wise Deborah, we can find rest, peace, courage, and strength at the feet of Jesus. This is *our best battle plan* and the only plan with any hope of victory in our own lives.

When every single angle you have tried is met with a dead end, know that *you*, yourself, are an overcomer with God as the voice of wisdom. God wants you to experience life and freedom—to experience all that *He is*. Even when others are not receptive to God’s call for *them*, you—one dedicated woman, with a Deborah-like courageous spirit fueled by an Almighty power—will break bondages and find true freedom.

God was Deborah’s solution, and Amber’s solution. Will you allow Him to be *your* solution? He is the final answer to life’s big, fearful questions. And He can offer answers when confusion enslaves you.

It was under the outstretched branches of the tree of Deborah that the Israelite nation found courage to change. And it’s under the strong and capable outstretched arms of Jesus that we become confident and free. Go with God, stay near to Him. He will faithfully guide when men fail to man up and lead. And He will deliver the battle into one capable woman’s hands—yours!

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

2 Chronicles 7:14 NIV

Stay tuned for the rest of the story of this battle—and another courageous woman’s role in it—in chapter 4, “What’s in Your Hand?”

COURAGE QUEST

1. Read Judges 4.
2. Do you see Deborah's need for courage? Are you able to see a bit of yourself in Deborah? Have you ever experienced a time in your life when you were called to lead but felt ill equipped to do so?
3. Think about the many roles you play. Write them down and ask God to bless each appointed position He has entrusted to you. Ask Him to help you let go of any self-appointed position that is causing added stress to your life.
4. Have you ever been forced to lead because someone else failed to do so? Surrender your hurt to God so that the next season of your life can be your most powerful.
5. How does Deborah's life encourage you to live more courageously?