



# FEAR

# *Fighting*

awakening  
courage to  
OVERCOME  
your fears

KELLY BALARIE



**BakerBooks**

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To Emanuel: you are my coauthor. You are my coach. You are my fan. But most of all you are the one who pushed me not to fear my dream and not to run from it, but instead—to grab it. No words would be on this page without you, that I know. My gratefulness and admiration for all things *you* runneth over. You bless me, undeserv-  
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# Introduction

## *Fear Fighters Unite*

Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. The fearful are caught as often as the bold.

Helen Keller

*I* still fear. I do. If you were hoping for a perfect, brave, bold, amazing, and beautifully clad woman wearing the badged heart of courage, I am not your gal. I am gaining ground but I have miles to go. I have pushed through some swamplands but I still have a whole world to traverse. I have been touched deeply by the Spirit but I fight daily to stay above ground. My heart is unsettled because only sometimes I feel not anxious, only sometimes I feel okay, and only sometimes I wholeheartedly believe God—and sometimes is just not enough. It isn't. There's no such thing as partial faith. You know it and I know it. And saying this? Ouch! It hurts.

I am tired. I am tired of pretending I am good. I am tired of just existing. I am tired of returning to swampy places that make me sink into selfish desires. Instead, I am ready to tread somewhere different, somewhere brave, and somewhere new—or at least I think I am.

I dream of this verdant place. I daydream about it. I wish for it. And, when I finally get kind of serious about it, I pray for it. Are you at all like me? My hands are open and this book is my beacon of hope, my steadfast calling to go all the way—to let my heart fly, completely free, into the glorious sky where I risk it all to go the full distance, just God and me. Two who can do anything and go anywhere when they pull together. With this, I'm pretty confident (as confident as a fearful girl can get) I'll look back one day and say, "It was a dangerous, dark, and unsteady world, but the Spirit and me, we made it, we survived. Thank God I tried, because in this crazy adventure of amazingness, I couldn't have done it without Him."

I like this idea, because then, on my final day, I won't look back fretting that I forgot God and feeling like I lived a half-baked life. I won't. Instead, I'll know death isn't the end and life is just the beginning. In that moment, rather than agonizing over myself, I'll delight in His magnificent return because, in my life, I chose to know Him intimately, passionately, and reliantly. I'll look back and remember how I rested my rapid-beating heart right up against Him often. I'll remember His love that held me. It will be a victory day. I'll pump my arms and confidently walk right up into God's open embrace, and we will move on to something better. I look forward to that.

## **Joining Hands**

So I reach my hand out to you. To one who probably, like me, either feels removed from the good things of life or alive to the continually recycling factory of worry. Either way, will you do this thing with me? Because maybe, just maybe, if we join hands and take a small step—rather than look to judge each other's nail polish—we can actually make some progress. Maybe if we link arms rather than put our arms up in defense, we'll actually find ourselves united in

boldness rather than divided and living in unhappiness. Maybe if we pull together rather than pulling out our worries of what “they” think—or what is about to ruin us—we’ll make headway. Maybe we will arrive somewhere good.

Call me crazy, but I believe it’s possible and I really want to get somewhere, don’t you? Somewhere new, somewhere just a little bit risky, somewhere a little more free, somewhere lighter. Somewhere *more*. I see it on the horizon. Calling.

And staying where we are stinks worse than a giant landfill. Why stay here? Why stay in the place where we brace ourselves for the next thing about to nail us? Where we determine rejections are eternal verdicts on our worth. Where we swing on the pendulum of comparison—prideful one day and ruined the next. Where we are jealous of anyone who is better. Where our past stunts our growth. Where we shake horribly at the idea of the unknown. These kinds of things wear a good girl down to the treads.

They’ve worn me down and they keep wearing me down. They’ve kept me from friends and fun and fantastic opportunities. They’ve made me timid and shy, overly aggressive and nagging, mean and terse. They’ve been little dictators that have walked away with my dreams, my future, and my hope. I want to fight back now. I see how they rob. I see how much I could have had. I see how those around me have suffered because of my actions.

I want to start fighting today. Because I want devotion. I want rhythm with God. I want to do life with Him.

Friends, the Spirit’s work in me through this book—it is my only hope. I want to see what happens when one girl lays it all down as if everything depends on it and goes all-in to chase bravery with God.

Is it a risk? Yes. What if the Spirit doesn’t show up? My disbelief says that’s possible, but I’d rather discover truth than live a lie.

To dive into this little experiment, friends, I need you. I need accountability, support, and a hand to make it all the way. Just knowing that we are a united band of women means that we can

be authentic and transparent in this neck of these scary ol' woods. It is imperative we stand united so when fear tries to knock us over into failure (which tends to disguise itself as the pursuit of perfection), we rise as a red-rover band of women unbroken.

When you get silent and introspective, what patterns of fear do you identify in your life? I don't know about you, but I see how these patterns wreck me. They keep me hurt in false comfort. They keep me crying in fake safety. They keep me shivering in isolation. We live these patterns without thinking twice, don't we? On autopilot, we figure things will somehow work out and we will land at our predetermined destination—until one day we wake up and see that the distance between who we are and who we want to be is the width of the United States. Then we hate ourselves.

Truth is, normal doesn't deliver, status quo doesn't work, and pilots find themselves lost if they fall asleep. We won't sleep; we will rise up to allow the mystery of the Spirit to remove normal and bring in paranormal renewal. Not in some extraterrestrial way, but in a way that blows our mind because we never really believed it was possible.

### **Mobilizing Our Fear Fight**

It will be a battle. It won't be easy, that I know. But nothing's ever easy that is worth anything. There is no treasure without a seeker. There is hardly gold without a hunt. There is no diamond without pursuit. We will do all of these things. We will chase God and we will find Him. We will dig through our beliefs, wipe away the grime of lies, and discover our sparkle once again. We will adventure—and find the Spirit's affection and liberation for poor fearful souls like ours. It won't just be our fight; it will also be God's—on our behalf.

In high heels, we will fight. In skirts, we will fight. In pearls, we will fight. In the midst of the mayhem of work, womanhood,

kids, or husbands, we will fight. Not like some image of perfection, but like women who aren't afraid to let their mascara run in zebra stripes as they run in hot pursuit of real-life change. This means the tears will fall, my fellow fearers, but our arms won't, for we will also knock down any force that tries to block us. Arms crossed, breathing stable, we will learn to say, "Enough. If I can't be me, I can't be free."

We will not go alone. The Spirit will be our coach; His emboldened fighters never lose. They don't lose because they realize they are loved. They don't hear lies because they know how to discern the whisper of truth. They don't live injured and insecure because they see the indwelling power of what Christ has entrusted within them. They don't add lighter fluid to shame because the Spirit knits security in them. They don't live in agony because they live in awe of what God is doing in the present, in the here and the now.

We will dig out this treasure by the influence of the Spirit—in a profound way. In a way where we are confident it is ours for the hunting, finding, and owning. Then we will turn around to grab this bucking and unruly thing called the unknown (see Heb. 11:1), and we will put it to rest by faith instead of warring it down with fear. We will go one way instead of the other, more and more—not perfectly but purposely—and we will learn to discern the still, small voice of God (see 1 Kings 19:12). A voice that speaks calm.

Lean in. Breathe in. Relax.

Let go of pressures. The fight is nothing more than willingness and readiness. And I can't wait to do this with you; it is sure to be a journey of excitement, revelation, wisdom, and discovery. It will be a journey of growth, of veracity and new birth. Best of all, it will be an adventure we will trek together.

We will break the pressure that sits on our backs so we don't break under life's circumstances. *We will surface.*

We will shatter all antiGod images and fight the labels we bow down to so that we can light God's real truth in us. *We will shine.*

We will meditate on truth and uncover the deep knowledge found only in God's Word. *We will learn.*

We will meet other women who have struggled through their own fear fits. *We will join hands.*

*We will learn to live like beloved daughters who know their Daddy.*

And together *we will speak boldness*—new, despair-halting decrees, such as:



***Fear, you are a bad friend. But I serve a great God.***

***Fear, you are enemy number-one. But Christ has already won.***

***Fear, you are against me. But God is for me.***

My pledge to you? I will only be the truest form of myself. I realize if we want to get through this—through debilitating things like dealing with problem people, panic-packed predicaments, and painful pasts—it's the only way to go.

I want to see it work for me. I am going all-in with you.

Right into the nearly unreachable depths of this love, where the Spirit spins a woman called a fear fighter.

A fear fighter doesn't look around but rather inside for strength. She doesn't back down to naysayers but says God will help her. She doesn't see the waves as waters ready to sink her but floats to new heights.

She doesn't fear the truth but voices it, knowing it heals. She doesn't live a fake faith but finds a small seed within and nurtures it. She doesn't feel like a puppet, moving to the sway of the world, but dances.

She loses herself in vast Love to find herself loved. She will be you and she will be me, only by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let's go.

# *Part 1*

## Coming to God Jumpy, Jittery, and Just Needing Help

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one

# Discovering the Power of Now

I think that sometimes being fearless is having fears but jumping anyway.

Taylor Swift

*Get out of my way! I am on a mission.* I didn't say it aloud, but I might as well have. I was on a mission! A critical one that seemed almost impossible, as I could see a long line of people ahead of me inside the coffee shop. These people should know to never get between a woman and her morning caffeine fix. That's how I figured it. It would be just the thing to send all the dominos of my day falling.

I couldn't have that.

With all the details of my skinny, extra hot, double pump vanilla latte on my mind, I nearly missed him. My feet carried me faster than a cartoon roadrunner—and let's be honest, there's no time for anything when you have the anxiety of time chasing your heels. *Must. Get. Coffee. Have. No. Time.*

But there he sat. Scrunched in the corner by the door. Humble. Lowly. Dirty. One you would certainly miss if you weren't looking. But I didn't miss him; he was staring intently. His eyes met mine with both invitation and conviction. They practically asked me, *Are you just like them? Another one rushing past me to get that cup of golden idol to warm your hands for the day?*

Everything in me wanted to snap back, "Well, yes, I am. And don't talk to me anymore, because I am going to be stuck at the back of that line. And then you'll have to deal with one angry lady and no money in your cup, sir, and you certainly don't want that."

I almost said it. I really wanted to. I wanted to ignore him and rush in to suck down that brown nectar from the green goddess. But I didn't. I didn't because sometimes you know it is the voice of God pulling you in to something great, and if you don't slow down and listen for just a minute, you'll miss it.

I stopped. I stopped because I was deathly afraid of missing something greater, something powerful, or something that would release the feeling that an unbound schedule meant I would plummet straight into dark depths of despair. So I took the risk. I drew near, and the closer I got the more I couldn't help but inhale his stench and observe his deep, dirty lines of life-pain. I didn't want all this heaviness on my rush-in and rush-out stop-off. I knew this daily twenty-one-minute commute inside-out, and pausing now would throw my whole day off.

Yet what I have realized is that stopping and stepping into unsafe forces us to receive God's new safe. Will we risk it? Will we receive it?

It's the only place we get to see that God won't turn His back on us, disregard our emotions, or critique us. Rather He'll speak straight into our gaps of discomfort—if we let Him.

Will we?

I wish I could tell you, as that man and I talked, that I was given some glory story with words so powerful they made my insides

settle like peaceful, early morning fog, but I can't. Our shared words are mostly blurred in my memory now, but the underlying message of this encounter can't be erased: shushing up and slowing down is paramount to God working in us—and strengthening us. The truth is, God is ready to hit us with unfathomable new perspectives—ones that redefine our past, present, and problems if we will only stop, receive, and consider.

Will we? Will we walk unafraid into His presence? Into God's rhythms? Not cowering from mysteries?

You see—that man and I? We both had needs that day, though maybe we didn't even know what we needed. Maybe we didn't know why we reached out to each other. Maybe our lack of knowledge didn't matter. God knew. He positioned that man at the door and me heading to it. He set up a blind date founded on the principle of love—and waited for the celebration to unfold. God's deep affection was stored up in this chance connection of two unlikely souls. It often is, if only we stop, receive, and consider.

What if I had pretended like I couldn't see or hear him and just kept walking?

It pains me to think how I could have missed his eyes. Eyes that looked into mine the same way mine looked into his. Eyes that understood. Eyes that said, *I see you. I care for you. It is hard out there.* Even more, it pains me to think there was a chance I could have missed God's great collision that wanted to break up my don't-get-too-close-to-me mentality. Oh, I thank God I didn't miss out. I thank God I didn't miss His small prompting of, *I see what you are going through. I know you.*

I stopped. Received. Considered.

God knew both what he needed and what I needed.

This show called life—although we think it's about us, it hardly is at all. There is so much more to it. When we open our eyes to the greater possibilities, we enter an immersive experience where love comes alive, where the pin-drop nature of God's whispers are heard,

and where the form of who we were actually made to be emerges. We hardly need scripts, because the whole point of unconditional love is that it's entirely unscripted. We don't have to know everything but just have to be willing to accept His everything. To let it settle right into the deep gashes of fear. Then, things change.

### Don't Miss It!

Now I can't help but think that some of you might look at this story and say, "So what? You slowed down? You met a man who celebrated God with you, and that's nice. But what does this have to do with me?"

A whole lot. If you spend your whole life grasping for happy in the future, you'll end up missing God's transformation in the present. You'll run after something but you'll never catch it. I know this to be true because I have lived this way. And one thing I have come to terms with is that if we want the Spirit's power to crush our momentary fear, the only place that will happen is in the here and now.

Will we believe God can change us right here, or will we continue to pull on a wishbone and hope our best dreams come true?

I know, my collaborators in fear, that many of you are just like me. And in this moment, right here, your excitement is starting to wither. Why? Because you've hardly lived in the moment and you feel horrible about that. Let me tell you something: God does not point His finger at you. He doesn't give you demerits. He doesn't send you to your room without dinner. He speaks life. Let's allow it to soak into us and be with Him in this very moment:

*Child, I am with you. I will strengthen and help you; I will uphold you (Isa. 41:10). You can feel afraid, but know this: I will sustain you no matter what—I will not let you fall (Ps. 55:22). Still feel anxious? Pray. Petition. Offer thanksgiving. And let My peace waterfall on you (Phil. 4:6–7). I give you My peace; don't you believe?*

*It is peace I leave and peace I give, not like this mad world offers but as only I can—so don't even fuss with all that madness (John 14:27). Turn your shortness of breath into deep breaths, for you have not been given a spirit of fear but of power and love and a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7). You don't have to fear the intensity of love; you see, My perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). My consolation is what will bring joy (Ps. 94:19). Come, get to know Me. Come, get to see how much I care about your crossed arms, your shaking hands, your jitters, and your all-over-cold sweats. I see it all, and guess what, My child: there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). So pull up a chair and let Me do what I do best: minister to your heart murmurs.*

I don't want to let these words fly by unnoticed. I don't want to stay the same. Do you?

Part of beating what you always do is realizing what it is. I know that I am prone to stay in the status quo, like a teenager with her head stuck in her smartphone, both avoiding and dissi-  
ing instruction.

Just thinking of this also makes me think of my son. Sometimes I have to tell him to put on his listening ears. Normally this happens when I am on the verge of going berserk, and after I have repeated myself for the fourth, fifth, or sixth time—and my insides are about to spill rage all over the kitchen floor. It is my last-ditch effort that says, *This is the moment when you absolutely must listen.* It is the moment when everything is on the line if he doesn't hear me. It is both my way to ensure things don't fly over his head and to really reach deep into his heart.

With this in mind, I wonder: Will we put on our listening ears to hear God?

*Father God, we don't want to miss You anymore. Will You help us to hear the call to be brave? We believe, by faith, in Your power to teach us, to lead us, and to help us venture to the heights we are deathly afraid of. Illuminate these paths*

*by the current of Your Spirit. But most of all, give us eyes to see and ears to hear through the entirety of this book. Amen.*

## No One Said It's Easy

When I look at myself, I see a girl who wants to be brave but isn't so certain she actually can be. I love all those generic affirmation memes online—*Go, woman, go!* and *Nothing can stop you!* and *You are better than yourself*. Half of me gravitates to them, wishing they were true, but after reading a hundred and one of them, I have never seen them work a single thing in my life and I never really even feel that well just five minutes after reading one. I call them half-baked solutions to a crippling problem.

I am left discouraged; after all, I have tried it all. I have tried to will myself into better thinking: *Kelly, you can do it, stop fearing*. I have tried to chide myself into better thinking: *Kelly, you will never pull yourself together if you act like this*. I have even tried to shame myself into confidence: *Kelly, you are going to push everyone away with your bad anxiety*.

When all these efforts fail, I normally give up and give in to some sort of pleasure to get my mind off it: TV, food, drink, movie—you name it, I know it.

Even talking about this induces my other cure-all answer that is easy to offer: *Kelly, give 'em Jesus. He will make everything all right*.

But things didn't look "all right" for Jesus. Things weren't all peaches and sugar with a dollop of whipped cream on top. They were hard. They were painful. They were tough.

Jesus never said to expect easy. So why do we?

And maybe this is the exact kind of encouragement I really need. I need to know someone gets me. Someone understands. Someone declares it hard. Someone has been down a road with a debilitating cross on His back as He pushed into real life. Knowing

this, I won't feel so alone and scared. Then I can maybe see how He made it—and not just made it but made it safely *home*—and how He makes sense out of everything, even the little things, the pains and threats of today.

It is not so much that I don't have to be struggling as it is just that I have to get after Jesus and bring Him into my struggle with me. Doing this—it is called *chasing brave*.

### **Open Your Eyes to the Landscape of Now**

When I really stop to think about it, I can't help but notice yesterday is gone, done, finished, and complete. Tomorrow, also, encapsulates everything a fearer fears. But today holds a new horizon of opportunity. It is like a blank canvas, available to portray any image that God deems right for it. I can enter today ready to be changed. Willing to dance in the wind or care for a lost soul or be a child again or speak up for the marginalized. I can move.

The Spirit paints new life in us as we open ourselves up to His movement.

Are you His blank canvas?

*Now* is the only ground where transformation can be found. It is the only place where a new image of you and me can surface and breathe and live.

This untamed and unconstrained movement splashes vivid colors both left and right. It brings new growth from old seeds. It brings vibrancy to dullness. And it ends up sounding an awful lot like this:

*Now I am going to change you.*

*Now I am going to do something new.*

*Now My Spirit will lead you.*

*Now My Spirit will counsel you.*

*Now My eye will show you the way to go, and you will.*

*Now I will come to your rescue.*

*Now you will find My hand, and I will not let you fall.*

*Now I want you to trust Me.*

*Now I have somewhere to take you.*

*Now see yourself as Mine.*

*Now know you are My daughter.*

*Now journey with Me.*

*Now spin.*

*Now be free.*

*Now come undone.*

*Now let go.*

Our heart beats. Our breath resumes. Our hands relax. Our motions settle. Our will lays down. Our dreams surface. Our being is being in Him. Our eyes want to see His will. And what happens, what we unearth, is *her*. That little girl. The one who once just enjoyed the beach as the beach and wasn't distracted by all the hazards and car messiness and screamers that come along with it.

We pull her out, we remove her shell, and all is revealed—we see all we don't need and so much of what is, in us. We see all we hope to be and a willingness to grab much more. And so we relax and we let go. We are that little girl again.

We dance with the thrill of creativity. Arms wide open, we swirl with no agenda. We permit the peace of wind to lightly toss our hair. We find our motion and move to the beat of carelessness.

Free-spiritedness unhinges us with every salt-laced breath we take. Sand runs through our fingers. The sun closes the moment as it reaches the horizon and the sky offers us a colorful gift.

We find presence. The Spirit moves and then we do—according to truth. We move simply, in the here and now.

Don't miss it. *Here* is where God is.

Sure, we can plan tomorrow, sit in old grudges, pulse with anxiety over sunburns, or break down with the fear that our kids will get a cold and then we'll get a cold. We can do that—but then we may as well say, “Adios, joy; hello, turbulence!”

I am tired of that old cycle, aren't you? I no longer want to be so consumed with chasing wild notions that I miss the Spirit's motion.

The wind reminds us that He is always with us (and always will be). *Presence.*

The air proves He is around us. *Safety.*

The light reflects on us. *Power.*

The sand is vast around us. *Love.*

The water runs in rhythms that don't end. *Faithfulness.*

Peace fills our moment. *Life.*

A glimpse of heaven is close enough to grasp. *Vision.*

We speak new despair-halting decrees that help us chase brave.  
We say:



*If the Spirit is working here, then here is where I must be.  
God's working ground is the training ground of  
boldness.*

*Joy isn't recovered from the past; it is only celebrated  
in the present.*

We start thinking differently and then we start living differently, until some fine day we look down and see we are actually getting well. We see an image on a canvas of us chasing brave, and we feel good. We may even fly. All things are possible; we don't need to know. Either way, we love the feeling and we say, “It's a miracle. Thank You, God.”

## *Something to Chew On*

**The Art of Hearing God:** Wake in the morning and let the Word of God tend to your heart. Search out verses on fear, hope, courage, and life, and write them as a love letter from God to yourself. Then go deeper. Ask God to reveal an area in your life where you need to hold on to a specific verse or point. Listen.

### **Panic, Blood Pressure, and Stress-Reducing Prayer**

*Spirit God, pull me from my slumber. Shock the eyes of my heart. Light a spark within me. Pull me close to You. Call out to me when I cannot hear. Flood discouragement with Your presence. Indulge me in Your love. Shine the light of hope so I can find the shore beyond the wrecking and warring waters. For then I will walk on the safety that lets the past be past and the future materialize as bearable. Confirm my steps, grow me in boldness, armor me in strength, and recommission me in love. Amen.*