

(in)

BIBLE
STUDY

Courageous influence

EMBRACE THE WAY GOD
MADE YOU FOR IMPACT



Courageous
influence

More books by (in)courage

Take Heart: 100 Devotions to Seeing God When Life's Not Okay

LOOK FOR OTHER TITLES IN THIS SERIES:

Courageous Simplicity:

Abide in the Simple Abundance of Jesus

Courageous Joy:

Delight in God through Every Season

Courageous Influence:

Embrace the Way God Made You for Impact

Courageous Kindness:

Live the Simple Difference Right Where You Are

(October 2021)

For more resources, visit incourage.me.

AN
(in)courage
BIBLE STUDY

Courageous influence

EMBRACE THE WAY GOD
MADE YOU FOR IMPACT

Written by Grace P. Cho
and the (in)courage Community



a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

(In)courage, Courageous Influence
Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2021. Used by permission

© 2021 by DaySpring Cards, Inc.

Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Cho, Grace P., editor.

Title: Courageous influence : embrace the way God made you for impact : (in) courage / edited by Grace P. Cho.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2021]

Identifiers: LCCN 2020049232 (print) | LCCN 2020049233 (ebook) | ISBN 9780800738105 (paperback) | ISBN 9780800740726 (casebound) | ISBN 9781493430512 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Christian women—Religious life—Textbooks. | Influence (Psychology)—Religious aspects—Christianity—Textbooks.

Classification: LCC BV4527 .C6865 2021 (print) | LCC BV4527 (ebook) | DDC 248.8/43—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020049232>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020049233>

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Christian Standard Bible®, copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Scripture quotations labeled MSG are taken from THE MESSAGE, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Scripture quotations labeled NIV are from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL

VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations labeled NLT are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Use of italics in Scripture references indicates the author's emphasis.

(in)courage is represented by Alive Literary Agency, www.aliveliterary.com

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



contents

Introduction 7

WEEK 1

Me? A Woman of Influence? 11

WEEK 2

Not Position, but Place and a Willing Yes 43

WEEK 3

Be a Person of Integrity 75

WEEK 4

Be Generous with Your Influence 111

WEEK 5

Be Intentional with Your Influence 145

WEEK 6

Tell Your Story 177

Notes 209

About the Authors 211

introduction

In today's social media-saturated world, the word *influence* conjures up images of beautifully curated Instagram feeds or women who lead from the stage and have thousands of followers. It's measured by the number of likes and shares and how well we can get people to imitate us. Influence has almost become synonymous with fame and power, and if we're being honest, many of us long to have it.

But in its purest form, influence is simply the capacity to effect change in someone. It doesn't have the implications of celebrity culture or amassing power for self-promotion. It is the ability to impact others for a certain purpose. And from a biblical perspective, influence is the right and responsibility of everyone who follows Christ.

Like a stone thrown into the middle of a lake, our life in Christ should have ripple effects that reverberate from us to all those in our circles. Our faith is in a living God, and thus His movements should be evident in every part of our lives, throughout every season, and to everyone around us. It is a natural result of life in Him that people see how we've been impacted by Jesus, and it's our privilege to influence others to know Him too.

Influence isn't only for pastors and leaders in the church. It's not about having a position of power or years of experience. It has nothing to do with age or gender or how much clout we already have. All of us

have been given influence in Christ, and we are to use it to encourage and lead others toward Him.

Influence will take on different forms for every person. It can look like using our gifts, skills, time, and effort. It can be about where God has placed us—our location or our proximity to someone else or the role we play in our families, jobs, and communities. We can influence others in ordinary ways, like having someone over for dinner or walking with them through grief, or in particular ways, like writing a book or leading a ministry.

Wherever we are, however God has made us, in Christ we are women of influence.

As we push against our culture's definition of influence, we will need courage. We will run into doubt and insecurity. Some people may discount our capacity and abilities. The call to impact others for God's kingdom might feel overwhelming. But that's why we're going to do this together.

Over the next six weeks, we will study God's Word and answer reflection questions that will help us put into practice what we're learning. Our faith should always have both a solid orthodoxy (what we believe) and a solid orthopraxy (how we live it out), and this Bible study aims to achieve both. *Courageous Influence* will guide you in the journey of living the impact you were made to have.

Let's turn the world's idea of influence on its head and become the courageous women of influence God calls us to be.

How to Use This Study

Courageous Influence is a great study for personal or small group use. If you're doing it with a group, we recommend allowing at least forty-five minutes for discussion, or more for larger groups. (We think groups of four to ten people work great!) Enhance your community study experience with our *Courageous Influence* leader guide and videos. Go to www.incourage.me/leaderguides to download your small group resources.

As you begin each day of this study, take a moment to be still and pray. Ask God to meet you, teach you, and convict you. Since there will be a lot of material to digest, take your time and feel free to go at your own pace.

Some days you will be asked to look up Scripture passages in different translations. Use www.biblegateway.com or a Bible app to reference those.

When you read through Bible passages, pay attention to word choice and repetition. If it's a narrative, try to imagine yourself in that story and ask, *What do I notice (setting, character, tone of voice, sequence of events, historical context)? What is God showing me about Himself? What is God showing me about myself?*

Use every inch of white space in this study to process your thoughts and to write out prayers, questions, and reflections.

Each week focuses on a different aspect of influence:

- **Week 1** begins with a foundational statement: You are a woman of influence.
- **Week 2** reveals that influence is about where God has placed you and your willingness to say yes to Him.
- **Week 3** explores what it means to be a person of integrity in using our influence.
- **Week 4** teaches us to be generous with our influence.
- **Week 5** shows us how to be intentional with our influence.
- **Week 6** explores how storytelling can be a powerful way of influencing others.

Each week has a cadence that will help you get the most out of this study:

- **Day 1** looks at our call to courageously explore that week's topic.
- **Day 2** tackles what the world says about that week's topic.
- **Day 3** spotlights how Jesus or another key biblical figure lived it out and what we can learn from that person.

- **Day 4** shows God's heart for you in that topic.
- **Day 5** closes the week with motivation for becoming a courageous woman of influence.

We at (in)courage are excited to begin this *Courageous Influence* journey with you. You'll see that each day opens with a story from one of our writers sharing her experience of living out her influence. We hope these stories will help you feel less alone and more inspired as you look for God in your own story.

Are you ready? Join us as we redefine what influence means and learn to impact others the way God made us to!

WEEK 1

me? a woman of influence?

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:13-16

My cheeks held on to the heat as it spread across my face. I fanned myself with my fingers to no avail. I'd just run up two flights of stairs to make it on time for a meeting with my creative writing professor. I took a deep breath before stepping into his office for the first time.

He sat at a large desk with a recent draft of my short story set before him. The scents and songs of my childhood, which I often found impossible to share in other places, felt at home typed into paragraphs. I sat down and put my backpack on my lap, then moved it down to the floor beneath my feet, then back up again.

Pointing to a shelf behind me, he asked if I'd read two particular books there. He listed the titles. I read the Asian words on the spine of one book and silently corrected his mispronunciation.

me? a woman of influence?

Thoughts so loud I was sure he could hear them immediately came to mind: *Don't correct him. You probably have the word wrong, even though you've lived in the Asian country it comes from. You aren't smart enough to be a writer.*

I hunched over my backpack, telling myself that my voice was best kept quiet, my stories were safer untold, and I was better off keeping to the shadows and margins.

As we continued to talk, the title he'd mispronounced accidentally slipped out of my mouth. He paused, hearing my correct pronunciation. He held up my story in his hands and said, "You are doing something in all of your writing that I cannot teach. Your writing is powerful." Then he said, "And why in the world didn't you correct me on the pronunciation of that title earlier?" I shrugged, feeling the heat rush back to my cheeks.

That meeting took place over twenty years ago. It was the birth of a belief that perhaps my voice, stories, womanhood, experiences, and ethnicity matter, not just in silent spaces of prayer or as tiny afterthoughts of my identity but as main characters that were intentionally given to help tell the story of God's image and glory.

That day God spoke through my professor, saying, *Stop hiding the stories I have given you. Let Me use your voice to reveal My heart and light.*

—TASHA JUN

Can you remember a time when you tried to make yourself smaller in an effort to hide? What prompted you to do so?

Throughout life, our interactions with others shape the way we think about ourselves. Messages we hear from our culture, our parents, and our peers set the standard for what is considered worthy and beautiful. On the flip side, we also begin to understand what is considered shameful and ugly by the negative looks and words we receive.

Those categories create labels that we attach to certain areas of our lives. We dissect our bodies, thoughts, and desires, and we label them as good or bad, valuable or useless. In doing so, we learn to have an incongruent and unbalanced view of who we are. On the one hand, we strive to puff up the parts of ourselves that seem approved by others, but on the other hand, we try to cover up or silence the parts that seem unacceptable or uncool.

Instead of being whole, we become fractured.

Instead of being the light of the world, we become dim and unseen.

Instead of being the salt of the earth, we become bland and our voices go unheard.

Fractured. Unseen. Unheard. This is not who we were made to be.

We were made to shine, to have our good works bring glory to God. We were made to have influence, to have an effect on those around us and on this world *because* we have been made new in Christ.

We were made to have influence, to have an effect on those around us and on this world because we have been made new in Christ.

As women who have been changed by Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, we aren't meant to hide any part of who we are. As Matthew 5:15 says, "No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house." We are meant to be seen, to be fully who we were made to be, because God desires to show Himself to the world through our whole selves.

What are the labels you've put on yourself—your body, your mind, and even your spiritual life? What parts of your life have you deemed good

me? a woman of influence?

or bad, valuable or useless? Write down every word you can think of that has had a positive or negative impact on your identity.

Read Philippians 2:1–18. As you read, pay attention to the setup of the passage—how it first shows who Christ is and then who we should be in light of who He is. What words stand out to you? What’s the correlation between this passage and Matthew 5:13–16?

In Philippians 2:12–15, Paul says,

Therefore, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose. Do everything without grumbling and arguing, so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world.

Paul admonishes us to work out our salvation—not in order to be saved, since we are saved by grace alone (Eph. 2:8–9), but to live out what God started in us when we first believed. We may have been taught earlier in our faith that we believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior so we can live with Him forever. And though it is true that salvation leads to a future eternal life, that future eternal life should inform our present life. This means that we practice our faith here and now. Like exercising a muscle in order for it to become stronger, we work out our faith, engaging together with God in the redeeming work He has started in us and in the world until Jesus returns. Our faith should have an impact in this lifetime as “salt of the earth” and “stars in the world.”

Just as God created all living things and called them good (Gen. 1), He created us just as we are and called every part of us good. In fact, He calls us *very* good (v. 31). We don’t need to hide or exclude any part of ourselves from His purposes, because God desires to show Himself through our lives, our stories, and our beings.

Read Psalm 139:14 from the New International Version, and then write it here in your own words. List every part of you that has been “fearfully and wonderfully made.” If there are areas of your life, of yourself, that you’ve deemed less-than, relabel them now as fearfully and wonderfully made. For example, *My almond-shaped eyes have been fearfully and wonderfully made. My ability to see those on the fringes has been fearfully and wonderfully made.*

me? a woman of influence?

Learning to reclaim every part of ourselves as “very good” can be painful as we remember the hurtful words and actions that might have been said or done to us. As you practice this act of reclamation, how does it require you to be courageous?

Reflect on this prayer and make it your own today:

God, thank You for creating me as I am, for the stories I've lived so far, and for the path You have me on now. Thank You that You desire to impact others through my life and that I don't have to hide or dismiss parts of myself for You to do so. Amen.

Instead, God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God has chosen what is insignificant and despised in the world—what is viewed as nothing—to bring to nothing what is viewed as something, so that no one may boast in his presence. It is from him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom from God for us—our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption—in order that, as it is written: Let the one who boasts, boast in the LORD.

1 Corinthians 1:27-31

I started blogging in 2006 at a time when I especially missed my mother, who'd passed away the year before. I wanted a space to leave thoughts and images for my children to remember me and our lives together, the way I longed for those words from my mom.

I didn't realize that blogging would be a little like going back to high school at forty years old. In many ways it was amazing—the blogosphere was still a relatively small place with a lot of interaction in the comment boxes. There was a strong sense of community, although many of us didn't use our real or full names and worried about privacy.

Some embraced the label “mom blogger,” while others rejected it. Most of us were women in the trenches of motherhood, clicking our keyboards in stolen moments between changing diapers, cleaning messy hands and faces, applying Band-Aids, and (for some of us) homeschooling.

me? a woman of influence?

We craved a creative outlet and thrived on this new source of adult interaction.

On the flip side, the blogosphere also felt like a popularity contest, where those with the most shares, comments, and subscribers were the adult equivalent of being homecoming queen, head cheerleader, or student council president. For many, checking our statistics became an unhealthy obsession. (Ask me how I know.)

At some point in the hustle of creating a blogging presence, I realized I had sacrificed living real life for online interaction. Don't get me wrong, I believe online friendships can be real and life-giving. But God didn't create us to build platforms just so we could preen ourselves. He created us to have influence starting in our face-to-face communities.

The hustle for each of us might look different. Perhaps it's climbing the ladder of success at your job, being the sought-after mom who knows all the tricks for handling a toddler, or having more knowledge about current events than others. However we seek to build our reputation, at some point in time, we need to prioritize putting our energy into building a well-grounded life with meaningful friendships first over building a platform.

Once I realized this, I turned toward intentionally and vulnerably investing myself in my immediate circle and found that my words had impact right around me.

I thank God for the opportunity to encourage women I'll never meet through words in books or on screens. But seeking to impact the women around me has blessed me in ways I couldn't foresee: I'm not only a better friend, but I've also become a better writer. My friends are active participants in my life story. They're my audience, and they're my cheering section too.

—DAWN CAMP

How have you felt the pressure to hustle and make something of yourself? How does that kind of striving affect the way you view yourself, whether or not you're successful?

Building a platform and focusing on strategic growth, branding, and marketing are not bad things in and of themselves. Each of them is necessary to grow a business or an organization, and often all of them are required for success.

However, as people of faith, we should have a different standard for how we define success when it comes to our influence and the way we go about gaining it. What does it mean to God and His kingdom to have thousands of followers on social media, to have the ears of hungry women wanting to feed on our content, to have “made it” because we’ve been asked to speak at conferences or publish books? Does that sort of fame equal more meaningful impact or more glory for God?

It might seem like it, but when that kind of success becomes the driving force for the way we live, work, and share our lives, it too easily becomes more about ourselves and building our kingdoms instead of God’s.

First Corinthians 1:27–31 says that “God has chosen what is *foolish* in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is *weak* in the world to shame the strong. God has chosen what is *insignificant* and *despised* in the world—what is viewed as *nothing*—to bring to nothing what is viewed as something, so that no one may boast in his presence.”

We tend to reject what is foolish, weak, insignificant, and despised. And how often have we heard the word *nothing* spoken over us, our

me? a woman of influence?

gifts, our skills, our lives? Praise God that He sees with divine eyes and considers everything His hands have made as good, as redeemable! Nothing—no one—is useless to the God who chose humanity to be the vessels through whom He would proclaim His saving truth.

What have you considered foolish, weak, or insignificant in your life? Write down a time when God used those very things you considered “nothing” to show Himself to someone.

Read Joshua 2:1–13. How is Rahab an example of someone who might’ve been considered “insignificant and despised” but whom God used to make a way for His people?

Rahab was a prostitute who lived in Jericho, the first city the Israelites encountered after coming into the promised land. When Joshua sent spies to survey the land, they ended up at her house, where she hid them and then gave the king’s search party wrong directions when they came looking for them. She saved the spies from being discovered, and her act of faith is commended in Hebrews 11, where she’s listed among the so-called heroes of faith, including Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph.

God is not bound by human wisdom. He alone chooses who will accomplish His work here on earth.

We don't need to hustle for greatness or worth. When we're right where God wants us to be, He can change the course of history through our obedience to Him.

When we're right where God wants us to be, He can change the course of history through our obedience to Him.

In view of God's countercultural requirements for influence, in what areas of your life have you perhaps invested too much time and effort that don't ultimately carry weight in impacting others for God's kingdom?

When we recognize (and really believe) that having influence is not about how much clout we have with others or our status in society or whom we know, we will see that our responsibility is to influence others in a way that shows them who Jesus is. We don't need permission from someone up top (whoever that might be for you) telling us that we can impact others. We are in the communities and families with whom God has placed us, with the friends and neighbors we have, in the job and city we live in, to have influence right where we are.

Write out 1 Corinthians 1:27–31. Read over it three times, paying attention to the words that stick out to you. Write down those words here.

me? a woman of influence?

If you've hustled too long after what our world says we should do to influence others, what's one courageous step you can take to walk away from that kind of striving? Who is right in front of you or around you that you could share the truth and love of Jesus with?

Reflect on this prayer and make it your own today:

Lord, thank You for showing me through the stories in the Bible that You are not limited by my humanness. Instead, You choose to shine through my imperfections, unfazed that that's not how the world sees greatness. I want to stop striving after inconsequential goals, so help me to see where I need to pivot in order to be in line with where You want me to have influence. Amen.