



DISCOVER A LIFE FULL  
OF CONFIDENCE, HOPE,  
SECURITY!

**FREE  
SAMPLE**

*Introduction &  
Chapter 1*

COURAGE FOR LIFE 

# INTRODUCTION

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The pressure of reality was closing in from all sides. It was as if the air was being sucked out of the room. As I tilted my head back in anguish, I felt like I was drowning in a sea of confusion and despair, and the only part of my body left above the surface was the tip of my nose. Without supernatural intervention, I was going under fast.

With shaking hands, I scribbled the current reality of my situation onto a sheet of hotel letterhead. It took me a few drafts before I got it right. When I finished, I called to confirm the intended recipients were in their room before I opened my door and headed out.

The hotel hallway felt like a dark tunnel closing in around me, and my footsteps whispered on the carpet as I walked in an almost trancelike state. Fear coursed through me. I had no idea what would happen next, only that I could no longer stay where I was.

*How could this be happening to me? How would my truth be received?*

Increasing doubts about lifting the veil of secrecy raced through my mind with each step. For as long as I could remember, I had been afraid to let anyone see the real me. My secrets were like a dysfunctional security blanket I clung to for dear life. The night I mustered up the nerve to expose the truth, I finally said good-bye to that false sense of security—to the fearful isolation that had become my haven.

As strange as it seems, I didn't realize I lacked courage until I found it halfway around the world in a hotel room in Israel. On that night, I knew I had to take a major risk. Suddenly, I was like a hostage who finds herself with a window of opportunity to seek help—a sliver of time to reach out and let someone know she is in trouble.

As I walked and prayed, God gave me exactly what I needed in that moment: supernatural courage. I was terrified, but I was resolute. It was now or never. When my pastor's wife answered my knock, I all but shoved the note into her hands.

"I'm desperate and have to tell someone the truth. My marriage is on life support." The words quickly tumbled out as she stood there bewildered. Janet wasn't only my pastor's wife; she was a dear friend, the person who had planned a surprise birthday party for me just a few days before my adult son and I left for Israel. My husband and I had been friends with Johnny and Janet Hunt for over fifteen years, and they were about to learn that the marriage Mike and I portrayed was not what we lived.

"Come inside, Ann," she opened the door wider as I backed up.

"I can't . . . not now," I whispered, just as the elevator door opened a few feet from where we were standing and my pastor walked out. I wasn't ready to face him; I wasn't ready for a conversation with either of them. I was barely ready for what had just happened. But it had happened. And although I was shaking, I was still standing. I pushed through my fear long enough to invite someone else into my deepest struggle. I was no longer a hostage to the bitter truth. I awkwardly thanked Johnny and Janet, told them I had to go, and quickly rushed back down the hall to my room.

This was the moment I began my journey toward freedom—not freedom from any person, place, or thing, but from the bondage of my own fear-based choices, from the dark place of isolation where I felt so alone. This is where writing became the vehicle God used to give me courage and transport me to a place of amazing grace. And it all started on a sheet of hotel letterhead.

I didn't know what would happen once my husband (who had remained stateside) found out what I had done. But the truth that everything wasn't perfect in our life was at last coming out, and God was at work in miraculous ways. I took His Word to heart: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

Confessing the truth to Johnny and Janet started a chain reaction that led me toward honesty, openness, help, and healing. That night, I took two important steps toward courage. First, I committed to change. Second, I overcame the obstacle of secrecy and isolation. The Bible says,

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”<sup>2</sup>

It was then I understood a powerful truth: when our actions and behaviors are based on unhealthy, fear-based choices, the relationships we have with others will never be healthy—whether it’s with a spouse, family member, friend, employer, or even the person sitting next to us at church. I desperately wanted a healthy relationship with my husband, but that was never going to happen if the part I played wasn’t truthful.

## Exposed, Exhausted, and Exhilarated

For many of us, being in unhealthy relationships has become a way of life, whether it’s in relationships with others or the one we have with ourselves. Many of us have resigned ourselves to the distorted belief that we are destined to exist in a kind of half-life, in a world where tension is normal and joy eludes us. We’ve come to believe that it is what it is.

We’ve set the bar for happiness and joy extremely low. Some of us, like me, have gone so far as to deny problems even exist, living in a fantasyland of dysfunction and isolation. Some of us blame the people around us for making our lives miserable. But the truth is, it’s not about the choices those around us make—although their choices can (and often do) affect us. When all is said and done, it’s our own choices that really make all the difference, including how we choose to respond to the choices others are making.

What I’m saying isn’t rocket science. It isn’t advanced physics. But it is something that cripples countless men and women, no matter their level of intellect, success, or faith.

Finding the courage to foster healthy relationships is about the choices we make to change the story of our own lives. It’s about praying for godly wisdom and discernment to accept responsibility for those

choices, courage to face their consequences, and the strength to move on. And it's about the healthy boundaries we set—or don't set—for ourselves.

If you've spent any time pretending to be someone or something you aren't, you know how exhausting and isolating the dance can be. Contrary to what some may think, it takes a great deal of energy to hide behind masks to cover up our fear and self-condemnation. Many of us have constructed the walls of our personal prisons so high and so strong, we've lost sight of who or what we are protecting ourselves from. All we know is that to expose who we really are is an unthinkable act with inconceivable consequences.

When I found myself in a hotel room in Israel contemplating divorce, I had no idea I was about to discover seven courageous steps I would consistently follow, day after day, that would ultimately change my life. And now, these steps can also change your life—no matter what difficult, challenging, or fearful situation you may be experiencing.

# FIND COURAGE

COURAGE QUOTE

Courage is taking a risk—not knowing the outcome.

COURAGE VERSE

*Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you.*

—Deuteronomy 31:6

Our minds shape our belief systems about family, love, marriage, God, and life as we experience it. These beliefs, in turn, shape our choices and habits, both good and bad.

As a child, I learned to turn a blind eye and pretend everything in life was perfect, even when it was far from it. I grew up learning not to rock the boat, and I carried that dysfunctional coping mechanism into all of my adult relationships, particularly in my marriage. Finding courage to change these bad habits took me a long time.

Both of my parents were married to someone else when they met each other through work. My mother had two small boys, and my father had a young son and daughter. They met, divorced their spouses, and married. Within two years, they had me: his, hers, and ours. We were the new modern family. We were also monumentally dysfunctional, long before I knew what the word meant.

The father I knew was successful and a good provider, but he was also angry, self-absorbed, emotionally and verbally abusive, at times physically abusive, and consistently unfaithful. My mother worked hard to keep him calm and to accommodate his extreme behaviors. This shaped my distorted belief that a good wife accepts and accommodates the attitudes, behaviors, and choices of her husband—good, bad, or indifferent.

In fact, I believed a good wife did not have her own identity. But now I know, without a clearly defined sense of identity, we can allow ourselves to make poor choices and be overlooked and devalued.

God's desire is to enable us to make healthy choices that honor Him first, and, subsequently, the hope and wholeness He can give will flow through us and into all our relationships. He wants all of our relationships to be healthy, to come from places of truth. He wanted me to walk in power and purpose and wanted Mike and me to have a healthy, loving marriage. However, none of those things would happen unless some major changes occurred. And when push came to shove, the only thing I could really change was me.

If you begin now to apply practical steps toward courage, learning this natural progression of making healthy choices may not take you as long as it took me. My prayer is that God will use the courage He gave me to help you find yours.

## Crossroads

I have never been compelled to write down my feelings; not as a girl, when I was given a little gold-clasped diary with a teeny-tiny key that

never really worked, and certainly not as an adult—until a Christian counselor advised me to journal as a way to sort through my mixed-up emotions. Writing has never been a place I aspired to go. Yet writing was a catalyst God used to help me take a stand and recover my lost identity, to force my hand toward honesty and, ultimately, toward healing. And it was in God’s Holy Land where He began to exert that pressure.

I was on a ten-day tour of Israel with my oldest son, Blake. It was a dream vacation where we would experience the Scriptures come to life with our pastor, his wife, and about forty other church members. We planned to visit some of the most breathtaking sites in the world. This should have been one of the happiest times of my life. But as day one came to an end, the only thing on my mind was that my twenty-six-year marriage was all but over.

It was a long day of touring an ancient seaport, a Roman theatre in Caesarea, and historic spots in Mount Carmel, Megiddo, and the Valley of Armageddon. Throughout the day I tried desperately to keep my head up and hold on to my carefully crafted façade that everything was okay.

No one questioned why my husband had remained in the States. Mike is a successful and well-respected businessman, and folks were accustomed to our unconventional life. In fact, several of my fellow travelers commented on how special it was that a mother and son could experience such a memorable vacation together. I agreed with them. It was special, and I so wanted to pretend the only thing that mattered was making life-time memories with my twenty-four-year-old son. Yet, truthfully, the waves of reality were crashing in all around me, and I was drowning.

I hoped this trip would be a nice reprieve from the escalating tension at home between my husband and me. We both hoped the time apart would be a good thing for our relationship, that it would allow us to cool off and take stock of the bigger picture. I even decided to leave my phone turned off to limit our communication.

When Blake’s phone rang just as we returned to the hotel that first evening, I sat on the edge of the bed to untie my walking shoes, pretend-

ing not to listen as my son exchanged pleasantries with his dad and gave him highlights about our day. “I’m going to my room to take a shower,” I heard Blake say. “Do you want to talk to Mom? She’s right here.”

So much for leaving my phone turned off to avoid another confrontation. I wasn’t ready to talk to Mike, but I didn’t want to put Blake in an awkward position either. We never wanted our boys to be aware of any problems between us, and we always did our best to shelter them from any challenges we were having.

After Blake disappeared through the door that connected our rooms, it didn’t take Mike and me long to pick up where our last argument had ended, and even more hurtful words spilled out. For the next hour, we rehashed everything broken in our relationship and how far we had grown apart. After almost three decades of marriage, we just couldn’t seem to let go of our festering bitterness, mistrust, unforgiveness, and anger.

We were literally and figuratively thousands of miles apart that night as we tried to talk civilly about how we were going to end our marriage. But by the end of our conversation, we were simply in another fight—and hung up. Both of us were feeling completely defeated and hopeless.

Perhaps you know what hopelessness feels like. Maybe you are in the midst of a desperate battle to save a relationship or mourning over the loss of one. Maybe you are single and your need to find courage has nothing whatsoever to do with a significant other. Maybe you are at a crossroads in life, facing overwhelming odds, choices, or changes, and you find yourself drowning in fear.

No matter what you’re going through, fear not. Courage is possible! And with God’s help, I’m going to help you find it. *Courage For Life* will bring you closer to the power of God, a supernatural power promised in His Word: “Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.”<sup>1</sup>

## What Is Courage?

Courage is something most of us want. It's an attribute that encourages us to venture outside our comfort zone and embrace the possibilities. It gives us the ability to be brave, to conquer fear and despair so we can take on necessary challenges and make necessary changes.

When I was growing up, it was the boys who were taught to be strong, fearless, and courageous—not the girls. This was especially true in my house, where I learned destructive patterns of codependency, denial, and isolation from my mother's example.

I recently saw this message on a church marquee: "What you tolerate, children emulate." My mom tolerated a great deal, and as far back as I can remember, I viewed her way of coping as a valuable attribute, and I wanted to be just like her. I didn't understand how broken she was, and I brought that dysfunction into my own marriage. We bring much past history into our present relationships, and not all of it is good.

There are different types of courage, ranging from physical strength and endurance to mental stamina and innovation. Courage can be defined in many ways, but I like the following list of definitions.

Courage means:

- Taking a risk, not knowing the outcome
- Laying down our fears and embracing our faith
- Trying something new
- Rejecting temptation and pursuing good health
- Honestly evaluating our lives
- Saying yes to positive challenges
- Making wise choices in the face of fear
- Choosing to change in spite of an obstacle
- Being honest with others and ourselves
- Laying aside our disguises to celebrate our true self

- Being able to admit we've been wrong
- Putting away distorted beliefs and adopting God's Truth
- Accepting what we cannot change and changing what we can
- Accepting God's view over all other perspectives
- Giving grace to those who have hurt us
- Choosing to persevere, even when we're afraid
- Choosing joy in the midst of all circumstances

Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "Courage is about doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared. Have the courage to act instead of react."<sup>2</sup> When we act, we are making a rational choice. Conversely, when we react, we are making an emotional choice. There's something to be said for maintaining a healthy balance between these two actions.

Intentionally looking for courage and utilizing tools to make better choices is, in itself, a courageous act. It's an act I wish I had taken long before I reached the place where my lack of courage threatened virtually everything I held dear to my heart.

Kudos to you for reaching this place in your life now.

## A Seven-Step Journey

The seven steps to COURAGE I present in this book will provide the tools you need to learn how to act more than react, make intentional choices, experience the power of fearless choices, and find joy in the journey of healthy choices.

When we faithfully (and intentionally) implement these life-changing steps, the exercise will produce amazing results. It will strengthen our courage muscles and, ultimately, bring us into a closer relationship with our heavenly Father. And it's this relationship, above all others, that enables us to walk with courage, live in grace, and find true joy on the miraculous journey of life.

Get ready to unpack the seven steps I took to find the strength to make fearless choices. My prayer is that you, too, will feel convicted to follow these life-changing steps and find similar strength and freedom.

**The Seven Steps to COURAGE:**

**C = Commit** to Change

**O = Overcome** Obstacles

**U = Uncover** Your True Self

**R = Replace** Worldly Lies with Scriptural Truth

**A = Accept** the Things You Cannot Change

**G = Grasp** God's Love for You

**E = Embrace** a Life of Grace

## A Faithful Focus

There isn't a magical yellow-brick road that will lead us to a fearless place where we can instantly find courage. But God has provided us a way to hope and healing, a way to find saving grace and experience true joy. My prayer is that you will find God's hope, healing, and grace in these pages.

As we move forward, I feel it's important to make it clear that my perspective on this topic is that of a courageous Christian woman. Although I invite readers of all faiths to learn how to make courageous choices, I believe a critical part of any enduring solution will be found in a firm trust in God along the way.

God knows when our hearts are breaking. He knows the fear-based choices we make create open wounds that never seem to heal. But when we seek to please the Lord in all areas of our life, His desires will become the desires of our own heart. The Bible says, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart."<sup>3</sup>

As I've trekked through the mud and mire of poor-choice consequences, I've found the most direct route to courage and grace is to pray

for wisdom and discernment to make God-directed decisions. When we seek His kingdom above all else and live righteously, He will give us everything we need (Matthew 6:33). Having courage is, in essence, all about making good decisions—God decisions.

Now, just so we are on the same page, this isn't necessarily an easy thing to do on a consistent basis—especially when we've developed dysfunctional habits and coping mechanisms that have enabled us to operate for any length of time in a kind of spiritual or emotional amnesia or when people around us are making their own self-destructive choices.

It's difficult to manage life when the worldly lies we have come to believe have trapped us in a ditch of desperation, when we're feeling insignificant, insecure, and afraid. It's difficult, yes, but far from impossible.

**The Seven Steps to COURAGE Can Help If Any of These Describe You:**

- Have trouble saying yes and/or no with firmness and love
- Feel like no one understands what you are going through
- Have things in your past you are afraid to tell anyone about
- Have been betrayed by a close friend or someone you loved
- Struggle with unforgiveness
- Have developed unhealthy coping mechanisms (bad habits)
- Have experienced verbal, emotional, sexual, or physical abuse
- Are unhappy with your body image
- Struggle to accept that you are forgiven
- Feel confused about your identity or purpose in life
- Look for love in all the wrong places

At the end of every chapter, you'll find several powerful exercises you can use to grow stronger courage muscles. The Courage Call-to-Action Steps will help you apply what you're learning in an intentional way. Never underestimate the long-term effects these short-term exercises can bring.

In the closing chapters, “Move Forward in Freedom” and “Find Joy in the Journey,” we will transition from fearful brokenness to courageous wholeness. Join me in discovering a world of strong faith and amazing freedom, a place where you can be fully known, fully understood, and fully loved, right where you are; a place where you can uncover hurt, tackle healing, and embrace victory.

Together, we will find the courage our souls desperately long for. We will stand firm, not be hampered, and not be weighed down by the burdens the world seeks to place on us. As fellow warriors, we will learn how to lay aside our heavy loads to take up Christ’s yoke that is far lighter (Matthew 11:29-30). Together, we will learn how to make fearless choices, walk in grace, and change our lives.

## **COURAGE CALL-TO-ACTION STEPS**

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1. Purchase a spiral notebook or some type of blank journal. Put your name and the date on the first page. Keep this notebook nearby as you read to jot down thoughts, tips, and Scripture notes.
2. Take a few minutes to write down your thoughts after reading this chapter. List the areas in your life where you might need to make more courageous choices.

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