

**BLE**

*Finding Your Fierce*

**BOLD**

**RACHEL BILLUPS**

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**Mike Slaughter**

Pastor Emeritus, Ginghamburg Church,  
Founder and Chief Strategist, Passionate Churches, LLC

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“‘Crossover Credentials’ is a term I’ve used to describe leaders who use their seemingly disparate gifts toward incredible purposes. Rachel Billups is such a leader. Her “thin slice of life” roots, her Enneagram #8, and her passionate call to ministry render her the best possible person to write this book with authenticity and candor. Her stories will engage you and her truth will challenge you to reach down and find your own amazing fierce.”

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Author of *Redesigning Churches* and *Redesigning Worship*

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“*Be Bold* is a masterful weaving together of sacred scripture and personal story. Rachel humbly shows us the highlight reel of her life as well as vulnerably shows us the blooper reel too. She wonderfully helps Christ followers hear the whisper of the God who makes the mundane and mess of our lives into a masterpiece. This book will help you become fully alive in Christ living into the best you that you can become.”

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Dean of The Chapel and Director of The Pohly Center  
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“Rachel Billups lives life full out as a fierce, focused, no limits, on-fire pastor, leader, and Jesus follower—and yes, that’s also a pretty good description of *Be Bold*. Readers will enjoy the gift of fierce.”

**Karen Perry Smith**

Senior Executive Director of Leadership Development  
& Missional Strategy, Ginghamburg Church

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# BE BOLD

*Finding Your Fierce*

Rachel Billups

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BE BOLD  
FINDING YOUR FIERCE

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# INTRODUCTION

I'm a lemonade master. You might think my life's lemons are better than yours. They may seem brighter with fewer rotten spots, but yeah, they are lemons nonetheless. Just because there are sour moments in life, however, doesn't mean that God's going to throw out the whole batch of lemonade. My life has not always been easy, but I've learned, through the sour spots, to overcome obstacles, name fears, and use failure to fuel what I call my "fierce"—a holy boldness that has emerged from pain, frustration, silence, and breakthrough.

*Be Bold: Finding Your Fierce* is an invitation to journey with me. Together, we will peel back the layers of life. We will name the struggle and the suffering (self-inflicted and otherwise), and we'll recognize how it all—the good, the bad, and the in-between—can fuel our fierce.

*Be Bold: Finding Your Fierce* is part life story and part Bible narrative, capped off with a conversation with you about how I discovered fierce in a way that has changed not only my life but also the lives of people around me. It is the story of how fierce can change your life too! You do not have to live your whole life wishing that you could overcome the obstacles to being fully alive and living into your fierce. With the likes of David, Deborah, Moses, Esther, and Jesus, we will discover the ups and downs that lead people to stop playing life small and

## INTRODUCTION

recognize God's purpose and potential in their lives. I want you to finish this book empowered to embrace your past as fuel for your fierce but not to be bound by the limitation prophecies—the words of others or those inner thoughts that tell us we can't be who we are—that sometimes characterize your present.

This journey is your opportunity to tell yourself the truth about yourself. Be sure to be kind! Give yourself a little grace along the way. You have too many critics already and certainly do not need to become your own. My hope is that you will close this book having laughed, cried, and been inspired to live differently. I want you to strategize, to plan, to dream a dream of fierce possibilities for your future. Why do I have this dream for you? Because it is my dream for my life too!

Chapters 1 and 2 challenge us to wrestle with the limitation prophecies that people speak over us. Those negative words have the potential to cap our fierce, and you may discover that these limitation prophecies are your source of fear. Chapters 3 and 4 give us an opportunity to confess that we speak limiting words over one another as well, but we also recognize just how powerful our fierce can be when we fight for the right stuff. I wrote chapter 5 on my wedding anniversary because I wanted to give a picture of what fierce can do in a real-life marriage—the good and the bad. And then comes the hard stuff, chapters 6, 7, and 8—those moments in my life where I discovered fierce through silence, pressure, and pain. Chapter 9 is a reminder that we are bold because others have shaped our boldness. Finally, in chapter 10, I show how our fierce identity becomes the fuel to be fully alive.

I'm on the hunt for a life fully lived. I can't get there without looking back, being present, and propelling forward all at the same time. I have to keep going, even when I don't want to,

even when I would rather quit, even when everyone around me gives me permission to hang it up. Myself, my true child-of-God self, pushes me from within to say, “I cannot quit, not now! I cannot stop believing, dreaming, and moving forward! There is more to life! There is fierce! *Let’s be bold!*”

## THIN SLICE OF LIFE

*Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.*

*(Esther 4:16)*

**H**istorically women have not gotten the best press in Christianity. When you read through the Bible, you'll notice that the Scriptures were written at a time when the culture did not always treat women fairly. But God has always been God. And Genesis 1:27 tells us that "God created humanity in God's own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them" (CEB). All of us—men and women—are created in God's image. Throughout history, God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, superseded cultural limitations and man-made boundaries, defied the norms of the day, and raised fierce women to the forefront of the movement of God.

Now fellows, if you think this chapter has nothing to do with you—think again! In a world of #metoo, you also have the choice to promote the boys-will-be-boys club or join with

your partners in faith and promote a kingdom-of-God reality: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). We are alive at a time when men and women of faith need a supernatural dose of fierce, and we must absolutely recognize and own the power we already have to make a difference in the world. We need to be partnered together!

I can't tell you the number of times people have pointed to the Scriptures 1 Timothy 2:12 (“I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet”) or even 1 Corinthians 14:34 (“Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says”) to declare that I have no business preaching the good news of Jesus or pastoring a church. To this, I always say, “What do you do with Mary Magdalene who was the first person to preach the good news of Jesus's resurrection?”

Have you ever felt like you didn't have what it would take to move forward—face to face with being either the fool who believes the lies or the Jesus follower who risks choosing their fierce?

Let's think about that story. Jesus had just been resurrected and was standing at the tomb. Although, at first, Mary did not recognize Jesus, she finally realized that it was him and he was alive. Jesus said to Mary, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (John 20:17).

Mary Magdalene was the first person to share with a group (of mostly men) that Jesus was alive and ascending into heaven! But yeah, we are talking about pulling Scriptures out of context to fit our understanding of how women and men should function in the church. We should be careful about that.

In fact, one summer evening my husband and I decided to go to a tent revival at a Baptist church in the mountains of North Carolina. I love Baptists, but not all of my Baptist brothers and sisters are affirming of women in ministry. My husband and I thought we knew what we were getting ourselves into; we assumed that we could participate in the singing portion of the revival celebration and then leave during the preaching if we needed to. This revival was different. There were multiple preachers and multiple singing groups. A preacher would preach for the length of a TED Talk, and then a group would come up to sing.

For six-plus hours this pattern went on: preach a little, then sing a little. And to my surprise, we were engaged in both the singing and the preaching. But then the host pastor came to the front of the tent and asked for all of the pastors in the audience to stand to be recognized. I did not stand—frankly, I knew better. But a couple of women were standing and talking to one another, one of them the pastor's wife, to which he said, "Ladies, I don't think you are pastors. You might want to sit down." They realized their social mistake, laughed, and then sat down. But that wasn't enough for the host pastor. He went on to say, "Well, I am glad we got that taken care of! Women are not pastors. In fact, if there is a woman here who thinks she is called to preach, she can go over to the little green structure located on the side of the tent and preach there!"

I wasn't paying much attention to what the host preacher was saying, but my husband was. He looked at me, horrified.

"Rachel," he said. "Do you realize what that so-called pastor just asked you to do?" Confused by his clear anger, I said, "No, what?"

"He just asked you to go and preach in the crapper!" The green structures at the side of the tent were portable toilets. Jon was fuming and would not let it go. He went to the front of the tent, talked to the host pastor, and then declared when he returned to our seat, "We are leaving. I've heard enough. Let's go!" And we did.

I am so grateful for my husband, my forever champion—but once again, a limitation prophecy was spoken over my life: "If you want to preach, preach in the crapper!"

## Overcoming Fear

Heart-pounding, head-aching, gut-wrenching fear—that's what I was feeling. In January 2018, I found myself face to face with real-life fear and anxiety. I was stepping up and stepping out, doing something I had never done before. I had been invited to speak at the Resurrection Youth Conference in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. With a thirty-year history and nearly ten thousand students and leaders in attendance, this would be the largest speaking opportunity of my life. I am mostly comfortable speaking to adults, but there is just something about that teenage angst and judgment that scares me to death. I love young people; it's just that I don't want them to think that I am lame, quirky, or just plain out of touch.

As I began preparing for Resurrection, fears began to crowd my mind and heart. And I started to hear it—you know, the

lies that the enemy tries to tell us: “You can’t do this. This is above your pay grade, you’re going to make a fool of yourself. Who do you think you are, you’re not even a youth pastor! Why don’t you just play it safe and stay home?” Every day, for several weeks, the voices in my head would try to push me over the edge from fear into full-blown panic. And every day, I came face to face with the challenge: Will I be a fool and believe the lies or will I step out to find my fierce?

Ever felt that way before? Full of anxiety, riddled with gut-punching fear? The enemy filling your head and your heart with lies about who you think you are and what others might say about you? Have you ever felt like you didn’t have what it would take to move forward—face to face with being either the fool who believes the lies or the Jesus follower who risks choosing their fierce?

Yes, I have, and yes, you have; we have all come face to face with fear verses fierce. And we are in good company! Men and women throughout the Bible have come face to face with the same choice—foolish fear or fierce faith—and they chose fierce. Because they chose fierce, God moved mightily through these men and women, changing lives and entire destinies. One of the most compelling examples of overcoming foolish fear is the story of Esther.

## Recognize Your Power and Potential

The story of Esther begins with a young woman, orphaned as a girl, who hadn’t yet recognized her power and her potential. She and her people, the Jews, were in exile. Exile was a form of political powerlessness. They’d spent years serving a foreign ruler, being oppressed, and hearing the lie that “all you Jews are

a ‘no people.’” Stripped of her cultural identity, parentless, and raised in a world that did not value women, Esther felt anything but powerful. But that’s where life took a turn for Esther.

Xerxes was king of the Persian Empire, which stretched from Asia to the Mediterranean Sea. King Xerxes decided to hold a beauty contest because he was on the hunt for a new wife, a new queen. He had banished Queen Vashti because she wouldn’t do what he wanted. The king had thrown a party, and after he and his guests had gotten pretty well intoxicated, King Xerxes requested that Queen Vashti expose herself in front of his drunken friends. (We are not the first ones to live in a #metoo world.) Queen Vashti reckoned the danger of the situation but hurt the king’s ego with her refusal. When the king asked his powerful friends what he should do, they responded:

*“Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. For the queen’s conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, ‘King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.’ This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen’s conduct will respond to all the king’s nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord.”*

*Esther 1:16-18*

In the middle of this political and relational mess, Esther entered the story. Esther had a gift—she was kind and beautiful. Esther had been raised by her cousin Mordecai, who had a glimpse of how God might use this gift. He saw potential in Esther and signed her up for the contest. The contest included

twelve months of beauty treatments and a competition, and at the end of the year, Esther won the competition.

*Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality.*

*Esther 2:17-18*

I know that an ancient beauty pageant does not sound like women's empowerment, but stay with me here. Esther won and became queen of the Persian Empire. But until now, she had been a nobody, an orphan. Esther had no parents, no power, and no potential. But then God stepped into Esther's life.

Ever feel like a nobody? Ever feel like Esther: no family, no power, and no potential? I remember the first time I felt like a nobody, limited by my gender and social status. I was in middle school and nominated for a leadership immersion experience. I would be traveling to a place where a classmate of mine and I would be poured into as future leaders. Our school selected one boy and one girl for the trip. I was honored, excited, and ready for the opportunity. But then one day, the principal came to me and said I wouldn't be going after all. As it turned out, only one person could be nominated from each school, so only my classmate would be going. At first I didn't understand. I'm quite sure I shed a few tears.

While I was feeling sorry for myself, someone in the office noticed my distress. Attempting to be helpful, she said, "Oh,

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Rachel don't be upset. You can't go because we could only send one student. We are sending Adam. He has more leadership potential than you do because he is a boy." Because he is a boy? For the first time in my life, I was told that there was a ceiling to my potential. I didn't choose that ceiling, I didn't ask for it, but society created it for me. And in that moment, I felt like a nobody.

I'm sure I am not alone. We all have those moments in our lives where we think we don't have power. We can point back to times when we believed we didn't have potential. Maybe your defining moment came when you didn't make the basketball team. Maybe you were limited by someone who told you, "You're from the wrong side of the tracks." Perhaps you were bullied or told you weren't college material. But whatever happened, that experience limited your person, your potential, and your power! But then God stepped into your life.

When I read through the pages of the Bible, I see that God gravitates to the nobodies. God sees us, God hears us, and God promises to use us in power-filled ways. That's Esther's story! God recognized the power and potential in this young woman. God chose her. And, as we'll see, God used her to save God's people. And God wants to do the same in your life and in mine! Do you see your potential? Do you know your power? The power to step into the next dimension of your God journey? The power to take that new job, that new promotion, to go for that scholarship? The power to start that ministry that God has laid on your heart? Recognize your potential. Don't ever fall into the trap of thinking that you don't have any power.

## Surrender Your Fear

Even Esther, queen of Persia, struggled to embrace her power. But Mordecai wouldn't allow her to shrink down or bail out. The Jews—God's people and Esther's people—were in a world of trouble. Her own husband, King Xerxes, had been persuaded to sign an edict to annihilate every Jew in the Persian Empire, and Mordecai was sick over it. He was weeping, wailing, and sitting at the king's gate making a scene. And even though Esther wants Mordecai to stop the commotion, Mordecai refuses. "No, Esther! I will not stop, I will not stop while the very existence of our people is threatened." Mordecai wanted her to confront the king. But Esther was worried and anxious. She was filled with fear. She fully understood the strict, harsh rules of royalty. And she said to her cousin Mordecai,

*"All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."*

*Esther 4:11*

In others words, "I can't, Mordecai! I can't do that! If I go, there's a really good chance that the king could have me killed. He could get rid of me just like he got rid of Queen Vashti. And besides, it's been a month since my husband, the king, even wanted to see my face! I can't take the risk!" Esther was terrified. But Mordecai challenged her fear. He would not hold back.

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*“Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”*

*Esther 4:13-14*

“Esther, the time is now! Don’t wait! The very lives of the people around you depend on it.”

Hey, reader, the time is now! Don’t wait! The very lives of the people around you depend on you. You’ve got to surrender your fear. You’ve got to surrender your fear and apply for that new job. You’ve got to surrender your fear and end that unhealthy relationship. You’ve got to surrender and let your kid move out of state. You’ve got to surrender and take a risk on a healthier lifestyle. Stop living in fear, for who knows that you have come to your position for such a time as this!

Esther was living in a state of fear. It was fear that drove her to silence her cousin Mordecai. It was fear that kept her hiding her identity. It was fear that told her she couldn’t when the existence of her people was in jeopardy. It was fear! Fear can be such a debilitating force in our lives: it’s what keeps us from standing up and stepping out! It’s fear of failing, but at times it’s fear of succeeding! I find that there are times in my life that I realize if I do this thing, it may open doors that I am not ready to be opened. What if my life gets more hectic? What if my territory gets larger? What if I get that new promotion? What if my influence is expanded and I haven’t thought through my next steps?

Fear has this crazy ability to keep us from becoming the women and men God created us to be. Those limitation

prophecies have a way of playing over and over in our minds, and before we know it, we are paralyzed. We become stuck in our careers, paralyzed in our relationships, and unable to navigate the tough stuff of friendships, and we settle for a less-than-full version of life. We are afraid. And when face to face with fear, you and I, like Esther, have a decision to make: stay afraid for life or surrender our fear! Esther knew Mordecai was right. It was her moment to stand up and lead. “Who knows Esther, but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this!” Esther chose courage. She surrendered her fears, summoned her faith, and handed her future and the future of her people over to God. She chose fierce.

## Running Down Fear

We all can point to moments in our lives when fear got the best of us. I grew up with a strong desire to be a star athlete. I wasn't bad; I just wasn't a star. But I worked hard. And so senior year of high school, I found myself on the cusp of finishing in the top ten at the Mid-State League Cross-Country meet, and I was slated to make the all-league cross-country team. I remember being really aware of my placement; and as I neared the finish line, I was about to realize my accomplishment. But suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a runner coming up from behind me. If she outsprinted me, I wouldn't make the all-league team. I wasn't tired and could have beaten her, but in that moment I panicked. Riddled with the fear of losing this foot race, my legs began to feel like cement, and fear slowed me down. I watched as my hopes for being an all-league runner were dashed at the finish line.

It's a great metaphor for life, isn't it? We've done the work, we've come prepared to the presentation, the pulpit, the

platform, only to allow fear to get the best of us so that we come up short at the finish line.

But fierce can grow in our lives. If we didn't grab onto fierce the first time, there will be many more opportunities. Freshman year of college cross-country, I trained and prepared and, through meditation, I strengthened my mental fierce. Meditation is not only great for the soul; it's also an incredible way to strengthen the mind and, in the process, tell the body what it will do. "Mind over matter!" Once again, I found myself at the end of the season at the league meet, now in college-conference participation, and I was determined to finish strong. The same exact scenario began to take place—I could see the finish line and I was about to be awarded an all-conference position. Then out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a girl working to run past me in the final stretch. But I said to myself, "Not this time," and refused to go down without a fight. Fear wasn't going to beat me and neither would this young woman. I pumped my arms, relaxed my jaw, and kicked it into high gear. That day, fear didn't win—my fierce did.

## Fiercely Trust Forward

Esther also faced an opponent. But for her, it was a matter of life and death. The oppressive Haman was determined to annihilate the Jews. He tricked King Xerxes into signing an edict and, in the process, the king signed away the lives of his wife and her people. It was a death sentence. Esther had every right to be afraid.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation that warranted real-life fear? Fear is a natural emotion. There are moments in our lives when we are going to be afraid. Fear is not the absence

of fierce; rather, fierce puts our natural fear in its rightful place. So how does Esther overcome fear with so much at stake? Fierce trust! Esther trusted in her God.

*“Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”*

*Esther 4:16*

When Esther did not trust her own power, she placed her trust in God. She asked all of the Jewish people to join her in prayer and fasting for three days. If you’ve never heard of fasting, it means they chose not to eat in order to be focused on listening for the voice of God. They didn’t want to be distracted by food or by prepping for meals but wanted to be closely in touch with the very power of God. Esther wanted to fast because she wanted to be in alignment with the movement of the Holy Spirit in her life and the lives of God’s people. Once Esther surrendered her fear, she made room for fierce and faith-filled trust. Esther declared, “If I die, I die!” and in so doing, she proclaimed her faith in God. This was no suicide mission. This was not “I don’t care.” This was “I will be who God calls me to be even if it takes my life.” This is fiercely trusting forward.

## Fierce Trust

I remember it like it was yesterday. I was talking on the phone with a church leader about my call into ministry. I was a year and a half into the multi-year process of becoming an ordained pastor, and he wanted to make me start over.

The funny thing about fear is that it's not one and done. Fear has a regular return policy.

“Rachel,” he said, “you have skipped a few steps, and although you’ve worked really hard, the process is the process.” It all seemed like a lot of spiritual red tape to me. I’m not sure he meant to, but he spoke a limitation prophecy

over me. He had asked me if I was planning to go to seminary and I said, “Yes. I want to go to Duke Divinity School at Duke University.”

“Oh, Rachel,” he replied, “that’s a really hard school to get into and academically rigorous. I really think you need to consider going somewhere else. We can talk about it next month when you meet with the rest of the board.”

“Really? Okay,” I said. And I finished that phone conversation filled with the kind of determination that wells up inside me whenever people tell me, “Rachel, you can’t!” I was frustrated, and I channeled my frustrated to fierce. I knew I had heard God say that I was called to be a pastor, to be a preacher, and to be in full-time ministry. I had a fierce trust in the call of God on my life.

Fast forward two months. There I was at the table with the ordination board. These leaders knew the small church that I had grown up in, they knew the demographics of my hometown, and they thought they knew me. Determined to prove them wrong with an extra dose of attitude, I showed up in the most countrified farm-girl outfit I could muster the courage to wear and still be respectful: denim skirt, elbow-length hair pulled up on the top in a bun, and a nice fall sweater that I am sure my mom purchased at Tractor Supply. You see, I was from

the Hocking Hills, a rural community in Appalachian Ohio, born into a family with limited education. Although my family worked hard, very few even ventured to have dreams beyond the boundaries of Hocking County. To this group of church leaders, I looked like I came from a thin slice of life, so they put me into a category and labeled me accordingly.

We began with small talk around the table, and soon they were asking me about my Jesus journey. I began sharing about my love for Jesus and the church. How I had felt the hand of God leading me into pastoral and preaching ministry. “My husband, Jon, and I prayed for me to get a scholarship to go to seminary, so that we wouldn’t have more student loans to pay. We visited Duke, and after our visit believed stronger than ever that we were called to move to Durham, North Carolina. I am looking for a seminary for students who love the church and that is academically rigorous,” I said, waiting to get everyone’s undivided attention. “So, when Duke’s admissions director called and told me that I got in with a full ride, Jon and I were elated!” I declared.

There was an audible gasp in the room. The board chair’s eyes were as big as saucers. They were shocked. Later, when the meeting had turned into a debate about the theology of Soren Kierkegaard, the leader stopped everyone and turned to me. “We are sorry,” he said. “Clearly, we had no idea who you were. We thought we knew you, but we didn’t. We see the Jesus in you, we sense your call, and we want to help you in your journey. You don’t have to start over.”

That day, I walked into a room of adversaries and walked out with a new group of advocates. Often in our lives, we expect other people to change their perceptions of who we are. When we are labeled, judged, oppressed, or misunderstood,

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we expect the people around us to immediately change their attitudes with little or no work. I wish I could say that human beings are full of grace and generally assume the best in others, but usually that's not the case. Maybe it's because we are too busy with our own grab-bag of fear to notice the fierce in others. Or perhaps it's because life has made us a little hard or crusty around the edges. Whatever the case, usually it takes a cosmic knock upside the head to realize that, no, this man or woman is operating out of fierce. This is why we should not speak a limitation prophecy over others' lives but rather speak words of life-giving encouragement. Encouragement is free and may just be one of the most profound forms of fierce that we can share with one another. When we share fierce through encouragement, we are telling ourselves and the world that we are secure in who we are and in who God has created us to be. Fierce trust propels us all forward!

Brothers and sisters, the funny thing about fear is that it's not one and done. Fear has a regular return policy. Most of the time, we are operating out of some form of fear. And what I know is that while we will frequently be afraid, we must choose to trust forward. Trust that God is going to show up again and again and again. Trust the promise that God has spoken over your life: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b). God never promised a fearless life, but rather promised God's own powerful presence in those moments of fear. So, trust that God will provide you with the power you need to step into fierce.

God used Esther to save her people. Esther trusted God. And in the end, King Xerxes delivered God's people from the very hands of the enemy that had sought to destroy them.

*King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have impaled him on the pole he set up. Now write another decree in the king's name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king's signet ring—for no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked."*

*Esther 8:7-8*

Esther, the queen of Persia, had fierce trust in the face of life-threatening fear.

And that takes us back to the youth conference. Evil wanted to convince me that I wasn't capable of leading or being used mightily by God. "Rachel, who do you think you are? You can't possibly do this! You are going to fail!" But I trusted forward. In the weeks leading up to the conference, I prayed 2 Timothy 1:7, saying, "God you did not give me a spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of self-discipline." I didn't just pray it once—I prayed it over and over and over again. I was afraid, but fear didn't keep me from stepping into fierce and doing what I believed God was calling me to do. Jon, Adeline (my oldest daughter), and I drove down to Tennessee, and on multiple occasions, I said to them, "I can't believe I am doing this! I am not even a youth pastor. Who thought that this was a good idea?" And because he is and will always be my champion, Jon replied, "You were made for this. Do not be afraid!"

He was right. What happened that weekend exceeded all my expectations. Friday, when I stepped onto the platform, I said, "Okay, Jesus, I trust you." And we were on our way. On the Saturday night of the youth conference, hundreds of kids gave their lives to Jesus, and on Sunday morning following my

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last message, a youth leader approached me and said, “Before this trip two of my girls had been unsure of their faith in Jesus, but God, through you, has lit them on fire. They are different. They saw you on the platform, and for the first time they are dreaming of new possibilities for their lives. They have never heard a woman preach. And now they too are sensing the call of God to go into full-time ministry.” When given the opportunity to come forward on Sunday morning, 238 students signed up to explore a call into full-time ministry! It was one of those heaven-meets-earth moments in my life, and I was honored to be a part of what God was already doing in the room.

My being on that platform was a miracle of God, but being on that platform was not really about me. God wants to raise up a generation of young women and young men who will lead the church into its future, and I was excited to discover that this was part of my call: *to be used by God to spiritually pave the way for this next generation to become the Spirit-filled leaders that God desires.* That moment became a catalyst in my life to help me recognize that it was high time that I start giving my life and my ministry away. It was time to intentionally pour God’s best in me into God’s best for others. Although as a much younger pastor I dreamed of having the opportunity to be a resource to teens, I realize now is the time.

In the end, I was grateful for the chance to develop my own fear into fierce in order to pour my life into the lives of a new generation of fierce Jesus followers.

## So What?

For each one reading today, dare to recognize your own power. Dare to realize your unique potential. Fully surrender your fear

and fiercely trust forward. You and I have been created in the very image of God, and God wants to use our very best selves to transform the small thinking and brokenness of this world into resurrected life. Here's the deal, folks—we are all going to die. Not one of us will get out of this life alive! The question is not, Will you die? The question is, Will you actually live? Will you live a life of fierce trust?

And to the women reading this book . . . sisters! Don't shrink back, do not limit your potential, don't quiet your voice, and certainly don't think that just because you are a woman that you can't be used by God: in the name of Jesus Christ, find your fierce!

When you think back over your life, can you pinpoint moments of fear?

Who in your life spoke limitation prophecies over you? How did they shape your perception of yourself: in school, at home, in your career, or in your future choices?

When did you first realize that you needed to find your fierce? How did you respond to the situation?

Who in your life started as an adversary and turned into an advocate?

Name the adversaries in your life. Can they be transformed into advocates? If not, why do these folks have space in your life?