

An interview with Kelly Johnson, Author of *Being Brave: A 40-Day Journey to the Life God Dreams for You*



The world can be a scary place, and the fear it produces can spiral us into a sort of paralysis that keeps us from speaking truth, living boldly, and encouraging others. To spur us back into action, life coach Kelly Johnson has written a devotional, *Being Brave: A 40-Day Journey to the Life God Dreams for You* (Abingdon Press), to help fan the flame of bravery that lies in wait within everyone.

Q: How did your daughter first start you on the journey to study about being brave, and what role did she play in encouraging you to write this book?

When my youngest daughter was nine years old, she was having a particularly tough day. She had worn me out with her growing list of worries, complaints, aches, pains, and fears, and I told her I didn't know what else I could do for her. I had depleted my reservoir of mommy tricks in my efforts to help her get to the other side of her increasing angst and finally said to her, "Brooke, I don't know how to help you." She looked up at me with tears in her eyes and said, "Mommy, I just need you to tell me that I'm a brave soldier." Her response to me that day began our family's journey with the power of naming one another brave.

When Brooke left for college a few years ago, she wrote me a letter inviting me to step out and be brave in this new season of my life. Through my curiosity around the word brave, I started writing, reading, and wondering about what being brave meant for women like me who wanted to live lives of meaning and purpose but were sometimes scared to step out of their comfort zones. In October 2015, I offered my first Being Brave retreat where we explored God's vision for our life, the barriers to fully embracing that braver life, and the part our connection to one another played in hearing God's voice more clearly. This book was originally created as a resource and follow-up for my retreat attendees to go more deeply into the concepts we covered at the retreat.

Q: How is being brave tied into our faith and identity as Christians? Why is it powerful to be called brave?

The most often repeated command in scripture is "do not fear." God knew we would need encouragement to help us deal with our tendency to be sidetracked by our fears, so we find hundreds of scriptures about fear and courage in the Bible. Every exhortation to set aside our fear includes a reminder of God's presence. Because of God's presence, we can defeat the power of fear in our life and live in the fullness of who God made us to be. Because of God, we are brave. The theme verse for our journey is found in 2 Timothy 1:7:

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity,
but a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline.*

Remembering we are brave reminds us of our identity as children of God and sets us free to do the next right thing with confidence. Naming one another BRAVE, calling out the brave soldier in each other, is a powerful way of speaking out loud the following message of solidarity and inspiration: "I see your struggle. I see your brave, hard work. I believe in you, and I'm here if you need help." When we are reminded of our inherent, God-given courage, we can turn down the volume on the voice of our inner critic and turn up the volume on God's voice. Remembering we are brave helps us tap into the part of ourselves that is creative and resourceful.

Q: You describe part of being brave as being bold, confident, and resilient. What encouragement do you have for the woman who doesn't feel like she is any of those things?

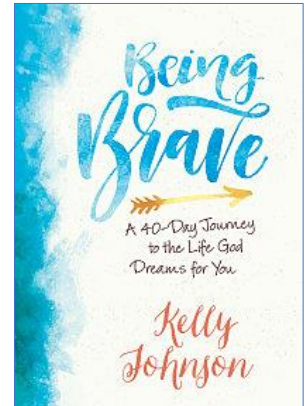
My experience both personally and in my interactions with friends and clients tells me many of us would have trouble describing ourselves with those words most of the time. While we might be willing to acknowledge confidence, boldness, or resilience in ourselves in some areas, many of us are much quicker to see those qualities in others. We tend to compare our insides with other people's outsides and reach the conclusion that others possess something we just don't have. I would encourage the woman who struggles to identify those qualities in herself to ask a trusted friend or family member for help in the discovery process. We are always

more connected to our courage in the context of community. Find the people who encourage you to step out and exercise your confidence muscles and offer them the gift of encouragement in return.

I would also encourage her to determine what she thinks being bold, confident, and resilient looks like and act that way until she begins to *feel* that way. One of my favorite quotes about being brave is from Aristotle. He says, "We become brave by doing brave acts." I believe scripture tells us that God created us to be brave, bold, confident, and resilient. Until we remember what that feels like, we need to encourage one another and practice doing brave things. Do one thing that scares you every day, no matter how small, and catch your friends being brave.

Q: Who was *Being Brave* written for?

The *Being Brave* journey is for women who feel stuck and want to get un-stuck. This book is for the woman who dreams of a life of deeper purpose and passion, even though she isn't sure she has anything significant to contribute. This book is for the woman who feels lonely, even though she has 750 friends on Facebook, and for the woman who loves Jesus, even though she doesn't always feel like she fits in at church. This book is for the woman longing for deeper connection to God and to other women like her. This book is for the woman who needs someone to tell her she is brave, her story matters, and the party won't be complete without her.



Q: How might being brave look different for different people?

Being brave or having courage means something different to all of us. We would all agree that a person on a battlefield requires a large degree of bravery. Facing a diagnosis of cancer or sitting with the pain of losing someone you love requires great courage as well. However, the need for bravery is not always black and white. What might be terrifying or hard for some might be easy for others.

For many of us, risking vulnerability and allowing ourselves to be seen as inadequate can be scary. For some of us, we are fearful of the unknown, of loss, of change, of that which we can't control, of appearing foolish, and of not being able to protect those we love. Is being brave in those circumstances even related to the kind of bravery required to lay down your life in a combat zone? What does this other kind of everyday courage look like?

Being brave might include any or all of the following:

- Being willing to move forward, even when I'm scared.
- Living creatively, chasing my dreams, and not settling for safe.
- Being driven more by my curiosity than by my fears.
- Being vulnerable and authentic in my relationships, even though I can't control the outcome.
- Trusting other people, even though I have been hurt.
- Being honest about who I am and what I want.
- Admitting when I am wrong and taking responsibility for my mistakes.
- Taking risks and being willing to fail.
- Asking for help.
- Believing my story is an important part of the larger story God is telling.
- Embracing progress, not perfection.

Q: Choosing to speak up in times of conflict is brave, but these days, it seems like every topic has the potential to turn into a heated discussion, especially online. How do you choose when to be brave and speak up for what you believe is right and when to take the path of least resistance and remain silent?

Choosing when to speak up and when to remain silent is often a difficult choice. I find I make wiser choices when I stay connected to the power of the Holy Spirit through prayer. Slowing down to seek direction from God in a moment of disagreement, instead of responding impulsively in the heat of strong emotion, I am much more likely to communicate with respect. Whether we speak the truth in love, or choose to remain silent, we can trust God's spirit of power, love, and self-discipline will be with us and guide us.

Q: How is being authentic and vulnerable a part of being brave?

Authenticity and vulnerability build connection. Jesus reminds us the most important commandment is to love God with all our heart and to love one another as we love ourselves. Although God has created us for community, we often hide from each other in our more tender places. Comparison, competition, and perfectionism block connection and keep us stuck believing we are irreparably separated. Authenticity and vulnerability break down those walls and build the connection we long for, the connection for which we were made. Listening to one another, authentically sharing our lives with one another, and naming one another brave is the path back to God and to the bigger, braver life we desire.

Q: Tell us a little bit about the format of *Being Brave*. How did you intend for the book to be used?

The book is formatted as a forty-day devotional journey. Using our theme scripture from 2 Timothy and an acronym of the word BRAVE, we explore six facets of being brave. On this journey, being brave includes being Bold, Resilient, Authentic, Vulnerable, Engaged, and Empowered by the Spirit. Each day explores one of the six facets of bravery with two scripture verses, an illustration, three thought-provoking questions, and a prayer. Along the way, we take inspiration from Jesus and His brave followers during the final weeks of His ministry, in addition to examples of courage from my own community.

My prayer is that readers will find an accessible guide to thinking about being brave in a new way and be willing to consider the idea that our Creator is willing and able to accompany us on the journey. I hope *Being Brave* is a book that both seasoned devotional enthusiasts and those who have never used a daily devotional before will find meaningful. In less than thirty minutes, most readers will be able to explore the daily offering and consider ways to incorporate the various facets of bravery into their day.

Q: Part of the proceeds of the book will be given to The Lamb Center, a ministry in your community. Can you share more about their work and what you have learned about being brave from your service at the center?

For the past ten years, I have had the privilege of serving at a local day shelter for homeless and poor individuals in our community called The Lamb Center. I have been deeply inspired by the staff, volunteers, and guests of The Lamb Center, and it has changed the way I think about what it means to be brave and live in community. It is my intention to donate part of my proceeds from sales of the book back to the ministry of The Lamb Center.

My friends at The Lamb Center have taught me that being brave means asking for help from God and from each other. We are always more courageous in community, but many of us equate self-reliance with strength. My friends at The Lamb Center are under no delusions and have no misconceptions that they have their lives under control. The pride and arrogance that plague many of us with comfortable homes and money in the bank have long since been left behind by my friends who sleep in the woods. Unlike many of us in more affluent circumstances, they know they need help because their circumstances leave them no alternative. Around our Bible study table each week, the masks of invincibility are left outside, and I am reminded how much we all need each other, regardless of our circumstances. God created us to lean on one another and to take care of one another.

Q: If you could tell readers one thing about being brave, what would it be?

God has named you brave. Being brave is your birthright as a child of God. You already have everything you need to live a life of passion, sacrifice, meaning, and purpose. You don't need anything else to be ready. Many of us have been playing it safe when God wants us to be bold and hiding from one another when God wants us to live in community. Courage is more often experienced in community, and naming one another brave is the path back to God and to the bigger, braver life we desire.

Learn more about *Being Brave* and Kelly Johnson at www.KellyIveyJohnson.com. She is also active on [Facebook \(KellyJohnsonGraceNotes\)](#), [Twitter \(KellyLJ1\)](#), and [Instagram \(kellylj1\)](#).