COURAGEOUS CHRISTIAN WOMEN

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“Therefore everyone who confesses me before men, I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.”
~ Matthew 10:33 NASB

“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to Speak. Not to act is to Act.”
~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

DEDICATION

For Danna Lou Skaggs Rende,
the sister who was tied to my heart,
and whose faith in me affects me every day.
Acknowledgments

This effort would not have been possible without the gracious help of many brothers and sisters in Christ. My parents, Dan and Lutrica Skaggs, taught me through years of studies and examples at home that I was capable of reading, understanding, and applying the teachings of the Bible in my life. Memories of Bible studies with my dad, and watching my mother reading her Bible as she sat under the hair dryer will stay with me always. These memories and the lessons I learned when I was young were a great source of courage in sharing the lessons in this book with you. My parents have also been an on-going encouragement to me in speaking and teaching endeavors for ladies’ classes over the years.

Numerous dear friends have encouraged me over the years to write a book. For more than thirty years, Jennifer Benshoof has told me I should do it; her belief in me quietly spurring me on. After I wrote a short article of fiction based loosely on a trial in her life many years ago, Theresa Love has also told me repeatedly to write a book. Other sisters over the years have, on occasion, said similar things.

Once I began entering words into my word processor, I began asking some special people for help. It was important to know if the thoughts I was trying to express were coherent to others. I turned first to a dear, wise brother in Christ, Larry Schales. Brother Schales desires first of all to be known as a humble,
faithful servant of God. The Bible is his source of strength and wisdom. He possesses a Master’s Degree in English from Texas Tech University. I knew if he felt my thoughts made sense and were in line with biblical teaching, I was on the right track.

I have also received practical help in grammar and content from Judy Lawrence and Elizabeth Blevins. Over the past years, I have forgotten some of the rules of English writing I learned in school; these two ladies not only provided sounding boards for ideas, they also critiqued my spelling and grammar. They have patiently labored through my chronic, run-on sentences, helping me remember to include periods. I do not believe I would have had the courage to submit my work to a publisher without Judy and Elizabeth. Judy’s daughters, Diane Cox and Carin Linker also reviewed parts of the book, offering helpful insights on my content from younger Christian women, as well as help with grammar.

I would be deceitful and ungrateful if I neglected to give credit for biblical understanding to the men of God who I have heard preach over the years. My father shaped my understanding of the Bible as a child; Ron White has helped reverence for God’s Word and understanding of God’s authority expand and grow in my life as an adult. It is accurate to say this because Ron and his wife, Mary Jo, have been serving God through their work with the congregation where my husband and I attend for more than thirty-three years, which spans my adult life. His preaching and their example as a couple have consistently pointed beyond their human service toward the perfect example of Christ and love of God. There are some chapters in the book in which I have specifically referenced sermons from Ron that I am aware added to the content. It is not an exaggeration to add that there are probably other places in the book where the content has been influenced by Ron’s preaching in ways I am not aware. Other speakers, such as those I have been blessed to hear at the annual Teton Family
Camp and the annual Utah Labor Day Camp have also affected my understanding of things shared in this book.

I cannot adequately give appreciation to my husband, Chuck, for his support. His example of leadership through service and his constant love are great blessings in my life. Our children, Elizabeth and Benjamin, have been great supporters in this project.

As God told Moses, it was He who made man’s mouth. I have not been inspired by God, but He deserves credit for everything good that comes from me. He has used me in spite of my humanity; His power sustains me; His Word teaches me. He is worthy of all praise and honor; if you receive anything good from this book, say a prayer of thanksgiving to God.
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If you are taking the time to investigate this book, thank you for your courage! I am not a big name author in the Christian book market; this is my first effort. You may be wondering who I am and what makes me think I have anything helpful to say to you.

I am an ordinary human being. I have made almost every mistake I point out in the pages of this book. I struggle with sin every day; like many people I seem to take three steps forward and two steps back in my struggles. I am of that class of Christians who believe Paul wrote Romans 7 about them. If you are looking for wisdom from a woman who has it all together, you might want to look elsewhere.

The good news for you as a reader is that this book is not a biography of me! It is not meant to highlight anything about me other than the power of God in the mind and heart of a flawed woman who depends on His grace daily. Each chapter has been an exercise in surrender as I have given my ideas about the topics over to God. I have asked Him to show me through the pages of His Word, rather than my own emotions, which direction to take. They have all turned out differently than I imagined them.

I became interested in the topic of courage after several years’ observation of changes in the culture of our country and in the church. One advantage of being over 50 is there are more changes to observe. God has taken my interest in politics and current
events and refined it into a message I hope will reach through my generation into the future. Married or single, old or young, Christian women of all cultures can find encouragement in these pages to hold up godly priorities in their lives. I believe Christian women can shine as lights to societies wandering in darkness.

The beginning of this book is written from an American historical perspective because that is the society in which I was raised. However, the problems and degradation of culture covered in the first five chapters can be found in every culture in the world. The solutions covered in the last seven chapters are applicable to everyone.

My prayer is that readers will be awakened to the subtle changes that have been going on around them for decades; educated about the insidious power of Satan in history; provoked to careful consideration regarding the truth of the Bible; and inspired to live more deliberately a life of obedience to God, no matter the consequences. I pray that your individual courage will inspire others, and that all of us collectively can highlight the only Source of Hope for the future of humanity, Jesus Christ. I believe in this way, joyfully highlighting the wonderful, awesome truth of the Bible we can radically change our country and the world!
Imagine you are 45 years old. You are happily married and have three children. You live together in a nice house; you both have jobs that allow you to keep up with your debt and still spend time with your kids. It’s a busy, sometimes crazy life, but you’re happy. One day the girls you go to lunch with ask you what diet you are on. You are surprised that they ask because you haven’t been on any diet! They point out that you haven’t finished your meal the last four weeks that they’ve been out with you. You laugh it off, but that evening you realize you just aren’t hungry very often anymore, and when you do eat, you seem to get full faster. You also notice that your pants are loose and lately you have been wearing the smaller clothes in your closet. You can’t figure out how this happened without your noticing it, because weight has always been such a problem for you. You get on the scale the next morning and are shocked to see that you’ve lost 30 pounds! You say a prayer of thanksgiving to God for this blessing and go about your busy day.

In the next week you begin to notice that you are more tired than usual. It seems like you fall into bed every night, sleep like a log, and then drag through your day. A little voice in your head mentions the word doctor, but you dismiss it; the kids are having more school events this week, and you are working on a big project at work, which has to be the reason for the fatigue.
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Your husband starts to express concern because he never sees you eat more than a couple of bites. Even your small clothes are getting loose, and the scale now says you have lost 50 pounds. You have been feeling dragged out and weak all the time for weeks, and in the last couple of days you are noticing that your upper abdomen seems larger than normal, and you are having pain. You know you need to go to the doctor, but you are too scared to go. Even though you are so tired and weak, you cannot sleep at night because the memories of your grandmother's and father's cancer experiences play over and over in your head. You pray and feel no relief from your concerns. Fear is your constant companion. Defensiveness is your reaction as more people express concern for you. You look in the mirror this morning and notice the whites of your eyes are actually yellow. You have had white, chalky bowel movements every day for the last week. You finally call the doctor with tears in your eyes.

After extensive testing you are diagnosed with liver cancer, stage III. You and your husband sit in the doctor's office dumb-founded as he lays out a treatment plan that includes surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. He is cautiously optimistic about your recovery.

Sadly, many people treat their physical health in this way. Fear of what might be wrong and ignorance of what can be done keep people in denial until their conditions are so bad that drastic measures have to be taken. They immerse themselves in the external matters of their lives as long as possible, and when they cannot go on, they finally seek help. I have heard it said, “People do what they do because it works for them, and they keep doing it until it no longer works.”

My sisters in Christ, I believe in the church we have done the same thing regarding the changes in our society. Those sisters old enough to remember the 1950s and ‘60s speak often about “the good old days” when, in spite of Woodstock and hippies, most
marriages remained intact and the population of Christianity was on the rise. Younger women nod indulgently at these observations and send their children to school with concerns about how soon they will come home with assignments designed to teach them to accept homosexuality and wondering if their school will be the site of the next school shooting. And yet, young and old, we go on every day with the external and urgent matters of our lives, ignoring the signs all around us. When our minds slow down and open up, however, we cannot escape a growing unease about our society. So we pray, but nothing seems to change, and that unease grows to quiet desperation with each new disaster and crisis when it touches our lives.

One of the most common sentiments expressed by Christians regarding current events and conflicts in our culture is, “I just don’t pay any attention to that stuff; I am not interested in politics, and besides, I don’t have time to watch the news.” Mass shootings and weather-related disasters garner prayers and attention from these tender-hearted souls, but they can spare no time or concern for the progress being made by those whose desire is to remove Christian principles from our laws, our economy, our communities, our schools, our homes, and the minds of our children. As I write these words, a large educational meeting is taking place in the state of Tennessee designed to persuade community members that they can be prosecuted under the Civil Rights Act of 1968 for speaking out against Islamic Terrorism and Shari’ah Law. Even though this is patently absurd, ignorant attendees to the meeting who don’t have time to pay attention to politics may believe this propaganda and give up their right to freedom of speech by refraining from speaking out against the violent teachings of Islam. Campaigns of this sort to cow our citizens into submission to ungodliness through fear are rampant throughout our country today.

As we begin our studies, please consider these two dictionary definitions:
Politics: 1. The art or science of government, of guiding or influencing governmental policy, or of winning and holding control over a government. 2. Political affairs or business; esp.: competition between groups or individuals for power and leadership 3. Political opinions

Nationalism: devotion to national interests, unity, and independence

A pervasive, dangerous misunderstanding has developed in our culture and in the brotherhood about the difference between the terms politics and nationalism. Most of us haven’t even heard the term nationalism since World War II. That was the last time our nation came together for the cause of freedom. Men went to war, but the people at home lived with food and gas rationing and participated in drives to collect resources for the war effort. Women went to work manufacturing equipment for the effort. Prayer services were held in churches throughout the nation. When the victory was won, there was an unprecedented sense of solidarity among the citizens of our country. In WWII, the National Socialist Party, known as the Nazi’s, took nationalism to an evil extreme as they sought to conquer the world. In the United States, nationalism helped stop that evil. Since WWII, every war has been an occasion for division and conflict locally as well as in the theaters of military operations. I am thankful to say that our veterans are given more respect now than the veterans of Vietnam, but there is still plenty of division in our country every time there is a war. My purpose in this discussion is not to support all wars, but to illustrate the high level of division among our populace about them.

I believe one reason the concept of nationalism has all but disappeared is the popular notion that anything to do with the nation is somehow political. People understand that politics is about power and government and the conflicts between political parties. But they do not remember that there is that concern
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for the well-being and unity and sovereignty of a nation called nationalism that transcends election cycles and political parties. Many Christians have gone about their lives in this country being convinced that they should enjoy the freedoms that come with being its citizens without taking responsibility for protecting those freedoms other than by engaging in military service. Average Christians insist they don’t have time to pay attention to the cultural, economic, and social struggles going on in our country. At the same time, they seem to have plenty of time to keep up with shows such as “American Idol,” “So You Think You Can Dance,” “America’s Got Talent,” the latest sitcom series, or whatever sports event is available.

I believe the repression of the concept of nationalism and popular sentiment against individual Christians being involved in civil affairs have in large part paved the way for the morass of corruption that pervades our political system today and has for generations. The complacency of this nation of prosperous, free Christians since the early twentieth century as we have become more integrated to our materialistic, godless culture has allowed the growth and spread of evil not just in our political system, but in our educational system, in our churches, and in our homes. Christians have behaved as though they truly believed that without their participation the high moral standards that existed in our nation 60 years ago would magically be maintained. They have been like the frog thrown into the cold water of the soup pot who swam around happily, blissfully unaware of the slowly rising temperature of the water until it was too late, and he became frog soup.

In contrast, the Bible provides us with examples of godly women who contributed to the history of the nation of Israel. They did so in unique ways. The first example is that of the Hebrew midwives in Egypt.

Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of
whom was named Shiphrah and the other was named Puah; and he said, “When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live.” But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the boys live. So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?” The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them.” So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them (Exodus 1:15-21).

These women recognized the evil of Pharaoh’s decree. They recognized they had the ability and the responsibility to thwart his plan for the Hebrews. They stepped out because of faith, and God rewarded them.

In Exodus 2 we read of the courage of Moses’ mother. First, she defied the law by keeping her son alive and hiding him for three months; second, she manipulated events so that she could have control of his teaching as a small child and then to secure him a home in Pharaoh’s house God used the foresight, imagination, and creativity of this woman to establish the Liberator of Israel right under Pharaoh’s nose.

When it came time for the people of God to conquer the cities of Canaan, in Joshua 2, we read of Rahab, another courageous woman who helped the nation of Israel.

And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.” But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went.
Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.” But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof...Now before they lay down, she came to them on the roof, and said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father’s household, and give me a pledge of truth, and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.” So the men said to her, “Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the LORD gives us the land that we will deal kindly and faithfully with you” (Joshua 2:3-6, 8-14).

I believe the example of Rahab should particularly touch our hearts. This account is a popular children’s Bible class story, but I wonder if we appreciate the immensity and power of what this woman did. She was not a member of God’s chosen people. From the perspective of an enemy, she discerned that these people would be victorious because of their God. She stepped out to help them against her king and the soldiers rifling through her house before she had spoken with the spies and before she had begged for safety for her family and herself. Perhaps this is why she is mentioned among the most faithful of the Old Testament in Hebrews 11:31.

In Judges 4 and 5 the account of two more Hebrew women who were significant in that nation’s history is given. After the Hebrews had divided up the land of Canaan, they were supposed
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to have driven out all the other nations. However, they did not obey this command of God completely, and God used the pagan nations to test Israel. Joshua had died, and there was no single leader of the people, but a series of Judges. The Israelites fell into a cycle of disobedience to God resulting in captivity, then repentance and salvation.

One of Israel’s Judges was a married woman and prophetess named Deborah. She guided the people during their captivity by Jabin, king of Canaan. After twenty years of his oppression, when the Israelites called to God, He spoke to Deborah. In Judges 4:6-9, she delivered God’s command to the warrior Barak:

Now she sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali, and said to him, “Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded, ‘Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun. I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his many troops to the river Kishon, and I will give him into your hand.’” Then Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” She said, “I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman” (Judges 4:6-9).

When the armies of the Lord arrive at the river Kishon, Deborah had to verbally push Barak out to the battle.

Deborah said to Barak, “Arise! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hands; behold, the LORD has gone out before you.” So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. The LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barack; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not even one was left. Now Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was
peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, “Turn aside, my master, turn aside to me! Do not be afraid.” And he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. He said to her, “Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.” So she opened a bottle of milk and gave him a drink; then she covered him. He said to her, “Stand in the doorway of the tent, and it shall be if anyone comes and inquires of you, and says, ‘Is there anyone here?’ that you shall say, ‘No.’” But Jael, Heber’s wife, took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand, and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died. And behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him and said to him, “Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.” And he entered with her, and behold Sisera was lying dead with the tent peg in his temple. So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the sons of Israel (Judges 4:14-23).

This victory, which freed the children of Israel from captivity, would not have been possible without the faith and courage of Deborah and Jael.

Considering Hebrew women of courage who contributed significantly to their history, Esther must be studied carefully. As a captive, this young girl found herself in the tenuous position of Queen to King Ahasuerus. Just as she was settling in to her new position as the most beloved of the King’s wives, the King’s servant, Haman, contrived to get the King to order the extermination of all the Jews. Esther had not revealed her heritage to the King, and though she mourned for the edict, she was also fearful that he would find out and destroy her. But Mordecai, her relative, insisted that she go and plead for the lives of her people to the King. Esther was terrified of this as entering the king’s presence without permission could easily result in her death. At first she refused to go. In verse 14 of chapter 4, Mordecai’s response to Esther, “...who knows whether you have not attained royalty for
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such a time as this?” was haunting enough to spur her to act. Her faith, humility, creativity, and charm literally saved her nation. We read the account of her dinners and speech to the king, of the destruction of Haman, and the elevation of Mordecai, but do we ever imagine ourselves taking a similarly weighted risk for even our family, much less our nation?

With the arrival of Jesus and the accounts of His teachings in the Gospels, we learn that God’s kingdom is a spiritual one, and that the citizenship we need to be most concerned about is in Heaven. However, even Jesus expressed sorrow over the loss of the nation of Israel as recorded by Matthew when He cried out,

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!’” (Matthew 23:37-39)

The apostle Paul in his letter to the Roman Christians dramatically expressed his love for his Hebrew brethren when he wrote the following,

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh (Romans 9:1-3).

Are there any of us who love our fellow Americans that much, that we would be lost ourselves if they could be saved? When Paul wrote these words his people were captives of the Roman Empire, and he knew they would be destroyed. He knew the reasons for this physical captivity and eventual destruction were spiritual ones. He remarked that their lost state gave him constant sorrow. His inspired words in this book indicate that he was aware of
not only the spiritual but the physical struggles his nation was experiencing in its final years. What was he doing about it? Did he tune out because the problem was beyond his ability to solve? Was he focused merely on saving himself and his friends? No! He obeyed the command of the Lord to preach the gospel. He used his talents for reasoning and speaking and even tent making to keep engaging whoever would listen to the truth. He eventually spoke before kings and went to Rome to appeal to Caesar.

Today we who live in America face a situation that seems to grow more desperate daily. We know it is because we as a people have turned away from God and His Word in our federal and state governments, our businesses, our communities, our schools, our churches, and our homes. Most of us do not understand how extensively Satan has been involved in the degradation of our country. This spiritual turning away has some serious physical consequences we see all around us: the bitter divisions among our people based upon race, economics, and morality; the general lack of respect and trust between people; the economic turmoil that affects every aspect of our lives and causes us to wonder what there will be for future generations; the corruption that appears to be the standard operating procedure at all levels of business and government; and, our vulnerability to those who would destroy us. What shall we as Christians do about these things? Shall we go into depression and anxiety worrying about them? Shall we allow anger over the injustices we learn about to grow into contempt for our countrymen so that we tune out everyone and everything? Once America had the undisputed title of the “Greatest Nation in the World.” As Christian Americans living since WWII, we have enjoyed perhaps the greatest wealth and the most extensive freedoms of any people on earth. Now our country needs the faith, courage, creativity, ingenuity, determination, and love of Christians who are willing to recognize the talents God has given them “for such a time as this.” Like
Jesus and Paul we need to love our countrymen according to the flesh enough to sacrifice for them. Like Shiphrah, Puah, Esther, Deborah, Jael, Rahab, and the mother of Moses, we need to work with our talents where God has placed us for the betterment of our people in this life as well as for eternity.

So this is not a book about “politics.” Although, if there are women who have the talent and the fortitude for entering public life and service who read this book, I pray you will take the steps necessary to get involved! This is a book about appropriate nationalism and the Culture War that Christians are currently losing due to denial and ignorance. It is about our responsibility to exemplify the truth of being faithful, knowledgeable, active, submissive, hopeful Christian women. It is about spreading the truth in our families and communities. As a Christian you have the answers to the ills that plague our nation. May the information in this book give you the courage to step out in your life and share those answers by your words and your example.

CHAPTER ONE  Questions for Discussion

1. If you have experienced a medical situation similar to the one described at the beginning of this chapter, was your relief at learning the diagnosis and beginning the treatment plan greater or less than the fear you had before you went to the doctor?

2. How is the culture in which you now live different from the one you knew as a child?

3. Discuss your thoughts on how hopeful you are for the future of the community where you live, the state, the country, and the world.

4. Given the irritations Christians experience daily from interacting with people who do not share our belief in following the Bible, and describe your reaction to the idea of loving our fellow citizens in the way Paul expressed loving his fellow Jews in Romans 9.
5. Based on this study, explain your thoughts on whether nationalism is a biblical concept.

6. If laws were passed in your country that went directly against the commands of God, can you imagine yourself disobeying them?

Reference

1. Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary AND Thesaurus, Copyright 2007, by Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, MADE IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.