



Introduction

I'm so excited about this book! Why? Because it's all about something that changed my life and can change yours too. I'm not talking about a little bit of improvement. I'm talking about a major transformation, a transformation that means fear, anxiety, worry, or dread will never again keep you from following your heart or doing what you want to do. This book is about a journey I'm on with God, a journey I hope you'll take too—a way out of fear and all the other negative things that keep faith from working in my life. It's my story about learning to live fearless, and I'm convinced it can be your story too.

As you go through this book, you'll have a chance to interact with it in a personal way. It'll be a way to chronicle your journey through and out of the fears that are holding you back in life—postponing God's purposes and plans for your life and maybe even derailing your destiny. As you dig deep into God's Word, answer questions, rise to challenges, receive encouragement, pray, and pay attention to what you believe God is teaching you in these pages, I truly believe something inside you will change. When God sees you moving toward freedom, He'll do everything He can to help you get there. Here's what you'll see:

WORK THE WORD

A pastor friend of mine says, "You've got to work the Word for the Word to work." What he means is that while God's Word is always able to change our lives, shift our perspectives, and empower us to live lives of

freedom and victory, it won't happen just because we have a Bible on a shelf or even go to church and open the Bible to read along with the preacher. When we “work the Word,” we read it, study it, think about it, choose to believe it is true, share it with others, and pray about it, asking God to use its truth to transform the way we think, speak, act, and live.

Obviously, one of my hopes for this book is that it will enable you to live a fearless life, but my greatest hope of all is that this book will cause God's Word to come alive in you and cause you to hunger for it so much that you feel you can't live without it. God's Word always works. If you haven't experienced that for yourself, there's no better time than now.

HERE'S A QUESTION

One of the best ways we can grow is to think about and respond to the questions people ask us. As I write about different things in this book and share my personal stories, I'll stop from time to time and ask a question to help you think about what you've just read, what you may be going through in your life while you're reading, or what God is teaching you. Later in the book, I'll share a story about a question my little sister, Bella, asked me—and it changed my whole life. I'm hoping some of the questions in this book will change your life too.

HERE'S A CHALLENGE

I grew up in a house where challenge was a way of life. That's because my dad always wanted my siblings and me to be confident in what we believe. He knows that the world can be a rough place and that people who believe the Bible is true and powerful aren't always popular. I don't

think it matters to him if we're popular or not; what matters is that we know what we believe, that those beliefs are rooted in the Bible, and that we can be confident in those beliefs and able to defend them, no matter how hard someone questions us. I'm grateful for the way my dad has challenged my brothers and sisters and me throughout our lives. He really did get in our faces about things. The fact that he challenged us has been extremely important in the development of my faith. That's why I'm going to challenge you in this book. The challenges may not be easy, but they'll be good for you. Trust me; I've learned this from experience!

HERE'S SOME ENCOURAGEMENT

For some people, meeting a challenge is its own reward. If they feel like they've owned it, they feel great. For others, meeting the challenge is not so enjoyable, and it's helpful to hear, “Way to go!” and a few words of encouragement. As I wrote this book, I was aware of the fact that the journey through fear can be a little scary. It just works that way sometimes. You're trying to get the fear out of your life, but you're afraid to get the fear out of your life. When that's going on, a little encouragement can be a big help. So I'll offer as much encouragement as I can.

HERE'S HOW YOU CAN PRAY

Years ago, you could drive through almost any place in America and see a bumper sticker or a church sign that said, “Prayer changes things.” Then, someone decided to adapt it a little bit and say, “Prayer doesn't change things; prayer changes us.” You know what? It's all true. It's not either/or. Prayer does change us, but prayer also changes our circumstances

because it gets God involved in them. Maybe you pray a lot and you feel confident when you pray. That's great. Whenever you see something in this book that you want to pray about, go for it! If you're new to prayer or not so confident about talking with God, you can pray the prayers I've written. As you become more comfortable, you may want to adjust those prayers or add to them, going into greater detail with God about whatever is on your heart. That'd be great. I'm a big believer in the power of prayer, so I want to offer as many opportunities as possible for you to pray throughout this book.

TAKE NOTE

As you journey through this book, I'll ask some brief questions in the section "Here's a question," but I also want to ask some deeper questions. These questions you may not be able to answer with a few words or a sentence, but may want to journal your response in several paragraphs. I may also want to share with you some Scripture passages that have meant a lot to me or ask you to find some that mean a lot to you. Any time I'm hoping you will take note or pay special attention to something that may mean putting down the book and picking up a Bible or a journal, that's what the "Take Note" section is for.

SO-O-O . . .

Here's a quick, behind-the-scenes story about my experience on *Dancing with the Stars*. The people in charge of the show were great, but they didn't hesitate to point out things I needed to change. One of the big ones was my use of the word *so*. I'm from the South, and when I say

the word *so*, I can spread it out over three or four syllables. I also say it a lot. The people at *Dancing with the Stars* said to me many times, "Sadie, you've got to stop saying so all the time. Just try not to say *so*, okay?"

In this book, no one is telling me not to say *so*, so I'm using that word (and dragging out the *o*'s) as a way to summarize the most important lessons and action points of every chapter. When you see the heading "So-o-o . . ." you'll know that it's my way of saying, "I've written a lot in this chapter and I really hope you'll remember and apply to your life a few key things, so-o-o here they are . . ."

After years of wrestling with being afraid of various things for various reasons, I can now say that I live a fearless life. That doesn't mean I don't still face situations that are scary; it means God has taught me how to stand strong and not let fear take over my life.

The first scripture I'm going to share in this book is Psalm 46. You'll see it when you turn the page. It's the Bible passage that literally changed everything for me as it led me out of fear into freedom. I hope and pray it will do the same for you.

This is not a book you just read and then say, "That was good." This is a book that can revolutionize your life. It can move you beyond the fear that is crippling you and set you free to soar. If you don't activate the words of the book as you read, I hate to say it, but you won't walk away fearless. If you do, then you will. You have a part to play in leaving fear behind. Just as you have to "work the Word for the Word to work," you'll also need to work this book for the book to work. Are you ready for an amazing journey, one that will lead you to live fearless? Let's go!



Pick Your Partner

We learn by practice. Whether it means learning to dance by practicing dancing or learning to live by practicing living, the principles are the same.

MARTHA GRAHAM

A few years ago, I found myself on a journey that I never would have dreamed of. They asked me to dance. Not just any “they,” but they who are in charge of *Dancing with the Stars*. That’s a major “they.”

I wrote in an earlier chapter about the experience of finding out they wanted me on the show. Maybe you remember: I wanted to do it. Then I didn’t want to do it. They didn’t call, and I was sad. Then they did call to say they wanted me, and I had a meltdown about that. I got off to a dramatic start, and in this chapter I want to share the rest of the story.

I remember the first night of the show. I’d been thrown into a dance where I had to hang on to just about everything—my faith, my confidence, the fact that I had rehearsed the moves over and over, and especially my partner—just to get through it. Right before Mark and I took the floor, my head started spinning, my heart started beating, and my anxiety went off like an alarm. As I said, I had to hang on to all kinds of things just to finish the dance. When it was over, I hung on to my family and friends, favorable remarks from the judges, the comments people

made about the performance, and the articles and reviews I read. Why wouldn’t I have done that? Everything was so positive! The reviews and comments were amazing. They lasted exactly one week.

When week two rolled around, I found myself in the middle of a different story. I still had a great partner and the never-ending support of my family and friends, but the judges and the general public weren’t nearly as impressed with the second dance as they were with the first. All of a sudden, I went from fabulous to mediocre. And that quick turn of events taught me one of the most valuable lessons of my life. I learned that reading applause and public affirmation could never sustain me. I could not let what other people thought or said about me affect what I thought and said about myself. I learned three words that stung at first, but then drove me to a place of faith in God I had never known before: People are fickle.

People change. Their comments and opinions change. One day they can think you are the most awesome person on earth, the next day they think you’re a worm—and someone else is the greatest on earth. My experience during the first two weeks of *Dancing with the Stars* was my introduction to that truth, but now that I’ve learned it, it’s been a fact of life for me for quite a while.

HERE’S A QUESTION

Have you ever depended too much on what other people think or say about you?

Here’s a challenge: It’s time to stop relying on other people for your sense of value and to stop letting their opinions determine what you think about yourself. I challenge you to do that.

HERE'S SOME ENCOURAGEMENT

Yep. People are fickle. There's only one person who has ever lived who does not change. Ever. I can't say it any better than this: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). If you want someone in your life you can always depend on, He's the one.

HERE'S HOW YOU CAN PRAY

Abba Father, today I want to focus on who You say I am. I go back to every word that the world has said I am and I cover it with who You say I am. Thank You for always being a father and supporting me as a daughter [or son] yesterday, today, and forever. I rejoice in knowing that You take delight in me.

(Scripture uses many names to describe God. "Abba Father" is one of the most significant because of how it relates to us. Translated from the Aramaic language, "Abba" means "daddy.")

TAKE NOTE

When people let you down, it's a terrible feeling. Maybe you've been there. Now would be a good time to journal about how you felt when you discovered that people are fickle and what you've learned since then.

If you read Luke 4 (and I suggest you take time to do that right now), you'll see that when Jesus told the people in the synagogue that He was the person the prophet Isaiah had prophesied, everyone went crazy with excitement—at first. Four verses later they all hated Him and

wanted Him dead. Four verses! That's how I know He totally understands when you and I feel like everyone loves us for a while and then suddenly they can't find anything good to say about us.

For me this turnaround took one week. During week one of the show, they loved me. I was second on the leader board. All the articles were awesome, but then the next week the articles were controversial and I was in jeopardy. It shook me. And the fact that it shook me, shook me. It was a challenge to my identity and to my faith, a challenge unlike any I had faced before. I had to decide how to handle it. I realized it was time for me to ask myself three very important questions:



1. Whose voice was the loudest in my life? Was it mine, or the judges', or the audience's, or my family's, or my partner's? Or was it God's? There were so many voices saying so many different things that I had to decide to mute some of them, turn down others, and put God's on full blast.

2. Whose lead was the strongest in my life? I had lots of options when it came to whose lead I wanted to follow—all the same people whose voices I heard. Was I going to follow one of them or follow God?

3. What's my idea of winning? Most people who watched the show thought winning meant coming in first place, having higher scores than everyone else, and being declared the winner. As I thought about it, I realized that I didn't need any of

those things to win. If I knew who I was in God and who He was in me, I won. I'm going to say more about my idea of winning in the next section of this chapter, but for now let me simply say that the Bible is clear about it: "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

TAKE NOTE

The three questions I asked myself were huge. They were so important in the development of my identity and my faith. So let me ask you the three questions I asked myself: Whose voice is loudest in your life? Whose lead is strongest in your life? And what is your idea of winning?

Everybody's on a Path

I hope you've taken time to really think about your idea of winning. It may not be what anyone else around you considers a victory, but if you can settle in your heart what winning means for you and God, then you've gained a big victory already.

I've always felt that when people watch *Dancing with the Stars*, they can tell which performers are on which paths. What I mean by that is, every season, there are people who will do whatever it takes to get the mirror ball trophy. That's their goal, and that's what winning means to them. Then there are other people who are simply happy to be on the show, and they love the journey.

One person who loved the journey is my good friend Michael Waltrip. I think the fact that he so thoroughly enjoyed being on the show is what endeared him to millions of people. He made it so far because he knew who he was, and he embraced it and shared it with the world. Was he the best dancer? Not so much. But he has one of the biggest hearts of anyone I've ever known, and that brought joy into homes across America and around the world. People loved him!

Enjoying the journey is what causes people like Michael to experience a measure of success on the show, while it causes others, who may be excellent dancers, to go home very early. Their skills and techniques may be nearly perfect, but when that trumps having fun and being grateful for the opportunity to be on the show, the audience can tell. Something's missing. When people are fiercely determined to get more points than everyone else and come in first, and that's their idea of winning, it's easy for them to lose sight of who they really are and to find joy in other aspects of the experience.

Now don't get me wrong. There are also some rare breeds like my "California dad," Alfonso Ribeiro. He wanted the mirror ball with a passion. He pursued it while also staying true to himself, and that's why he is a champion. A well-deserved champion, I might add.

I learned through my experience on *Dancing with the Stars* that people don't just want to see breathtaking, dramatic dance moves. They want to witness and relate to the journeys the performers are on as human beings. When hearts connect on that kind of level, it goes beyond a show on which people just do silly dances. This is true for any life situation, not only *Dancing with the Stars*. It's the heart, the journey, and the ability to

share them that matter. Anything else is just a competition, and competitions can be very sad and empty.

I'm sure you have noticed that in high school, in college, or in the workplace. Maybe you've even felt it for yourself. You see, when people lose their identity to get to the top, they begin to lose everything. I'll explain this using the example of the two-step.

To kids today, the two-step is a rap dance spun off a popular rap song. To other people, especially those beyond their teenage years, it's an old country dance. I once told 2-Mama that I knew how to do the two-step and she said, "We used to do that back in my day!" Of course, I was shocked because the two-step I was talking about seemed to be a weird dance for a grandma to do. I started doing today's version of the two-step for her and she quickly realized it was not the two-step she learned. The world had changed since she did the dance, and it became something it was never intended to be. It just had the same name.

Something similar often happens to us. Like the two-step, we can sometimes stray so far away from our original selves because times change and we do not realize we are changing with them (kind of like that time I lost my peace and didn't even know it). When we let times or circumstances change us, we do not realize the problem it causes. Our steps get a little ahead of us and we just follow where the world goes. We end up with a dance no one recognizes anymore; we ourselves don't even know what it is. We still call ourselves the same person, but we have truly moved far away from our original selves.

We live in a competitive world, and perhaps the only competition

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truly worth winning is the one we have with ourselves—the battle to be true to ourselves and maintain our identity when the world tries to get us to go after its trophies.



Here's a question: Have you realized that you don't know who you really are or that you've lost your identity as you've tried to win in life?

Here's a challenge: Your identity is one of the most foundational pieces of your life. I challenge you to discover, or rediscover, who you really are.

Here's some encouragement: It's never too late to figure out who you are or to change course as you try to win in life. God's always eager to use His eraser on your past and give you a fresh start.

Here's how you can pray: Father, I thank You that Jesus has already won the victory for us. I pray today that I will use the original gift You placed in my heart to populate Your kingdom. As I grow in confidence, I pray You silence the fear and enlighten my eyes to see Your side of victory.

TAKE NOTE

It's important to me to ask this question, and it's even more important for you to answer it: Who are you? I'm not talking about what you like to do in your free time or what you like to read about or listen to. I mean, who are you—really, at your core?

Do You Want to Dance?

When I started on *Dancing with the Stars*, not only did I not know how to dance, but I didn't understand my identity. I had no direction and I felt lost at first, but quickly I found myself learning to dance with Jesus—finding out who He made me to be and who I was in Him, not in myself. To do that, though, I had to get rid of all the unhealthy things I was holding on to. My friend ran my Twitter; I never read comments; Mark would translate what the judges said in a constructive, healthy way; and I decided that, to me, winning was not the mirror ball trophy. Winning would be conquering fear and learning how to find who I am through the words God says I am.

A lot of you watched me on this journey of learning to dance with Jesus while actually learning to dance. It was a crazy ride. I think sometimes we have to take a step back and identify what our ultimate goal is. Choosing not to go hard after the mirror ball helped me in my decision-making about a lot of things, because it really didn't matter if I "won" or not. It helped my perspective to be pure instead of smeared by the world. That's what made it easy to say no to "cool moves" that did not represent me well and to say no to super-cute outfits that just showed a little too much for my personal taste. This perspective taught me to not only make the right decisions because I had to, but to live those right decisions with a happy heart because I wanted to respect my partner, who was Jesus.

Dance is a respectful sport. That's why I chose never to say in an interview that I wanted to win, or "please vote for me" (which made Mark really mad. He didn't understand my theory, but once he saw the

joy in my heart after Alfonso won, he got it. Mark is like a brother to me, and brothers just want the best for their sisters). What the Lord needed me to do was fully fall in to Him and find victory in that.

God led me through every step, every interview, and every conversation, and I began to learn to follow. Dance is about confidence, going into every move with full confidence that the next move is going to be amazing. Whether it's the right move or the wrong move, confidence can sell it.

It's vital to fully embrace God's next move for you confidently, knowing He is pushing you into the step He has created for you.



To be confident in your dancing, you have to be confident in your partner, trusting that he will lead you where he is going. When I watched *Dancing with the Stars* growing up, I always thought it was so much easier for the guys, because it looked like a lot of times the girls could cover them by dancing around them. Being there, I realized it's actually easier for the girls to learn to make a beautiful dance together, as long as they have a good partner, because the male is the leader. Many times Mark gave my hand a little push or pull to make sure I was back to the original dance and on track for the next move, because the dance was his masterpiece that he created. More than anyone he knew it, and more than anyone he wanted it to be the best it

LIVE FEARLESS

could be. So, I learned how to follow that push or pull. I trusted that he knew how to lead me because, like I said, he created the dance.

It's just like your life. God is the one who created you. He wrote your story. He also extends His words and His love to lead you, and He will not lead you where He is not going. When you dance with Him down your path of life, He may tug you or pull you in one direction and it's vital to fully embrace that next move confidently, knowing He is pushing you into the step He has created for you. It's important to take note that you will also have judges in your life. You may have scores. You may be put in "competition," but it's up to you to find out who you really are and to decide whose voice is louder, whose lead is stronger, and what winning ultimately means to you.

SO-O-O . . .

- ★ People are fickle. They will love you some days, but not so much on other days. The only constant in this world is Jesus.
- ★ The race to be "the best" or to come away from a competition with a prize or the highest number of points isn't what's most important. What matters most is that you discover who you really are and live your life from your true identity.
- ★ God created you, and He knows exactly how to lead you in the dance of your life. All you have to do is pay attention to the nudges and follow Him.