

Choosing *to* Stand
for What Matters Most



FIERCE BEAUTY



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Hope Rising
Bridge Called Hope
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INTRODUCTION



STANDING FOR WHAT MATTERS MOST

Friend, what is sacred to you? What would you fiercely defend?

I've asked myself these questions many times. Though I love God and the life He's given me, including all He's calling me to do, I haven't always felt this way.

There've been many seasons when my focus shifted away from God and toward myself. During these times my faith grew casual, which was dangerous for me. My life mirrored a defiant creature I once encountered.

While my sister and I were walking down a dirt road, we came upon a gopher snake. It was stretched out across the road, gathering all the warmth it could. Unfortunately, what felt good to the snake was not good. If it stayed to bask in this location, the next passing vehicle would crush it.

Not wishing for this beautiful creation to meet such an end, I decided to guide it out of harm's way. With my boot I carefully pushed a small mound of sand against the snake, gently encouraging it to move off the road. The reptile complied for a short distance before changing its mind. Without warning, the snake attacked, striking my boot repeatedly. Despite its objections I did what was best for the annoyed critter and directed it away from certain destruction.

Suddenly I recognized myself in this picture. I turned to my sister and asked, "I wonder how many times I've reacted the same way to God when He's tried to move me away from my will and toward His." Like the snake, I've often unwittingly chosen a path into danger.

Thankfully, friends don't let friends lie in the road...and neither does the King who loves us.

A genuine friend uses her boot, either gently or firmly, to move us out of harm's way. A genuine friend doesn't tell us only what we want to hear; she tells us what we need to know. A genuine friend might even give you this book.

Because we live in a world that constantly batters women with the lie that how we look is far more important than who we are, we often need some help to move away from this dangerous falsehood and back toward what's true.

My prayer is that this collection of real stories from my life will provide some of that help. The first section is a challenge to evaluate what you're honestly living for. The second section is an invitation to discover the God who offers you His eternal love, hope, and purpose. The third is an opportunity to see how you can answer God's call and begin living the life you were uniquely created for.

Living to serve oneself is not pretty.

Only when we truly understand who our King is does our self-importance fade away. Once freed from our pride, we can see how our purpose in this life is simple: to know Him. Our God is not passive in His care for us. He is a consuming fire. His love for each of us is both fierce and beautiful.

Friend, God *is* calling you to be beautiful, but not in the way the world demands. It was never His desire for you to focus on looking beautiful—He wants you to become beautiful. Contrary to this world's declaration, you are far more than the sum of your exterior; you're a vessel for the living God. He's calling you to take action, to become beautiful by casting down your "princess crown" of entitlement, to pick up your King's sword of encouragement and fiercely defend those around you who are losing their battle for hope.

By doing so, you become—in the eyes of the King—a fierce beauty.

Just as I persisted in moving the snake toward a better path, our King

gently persists in moving you toward His will. Now you must choose what is most sacred, what you will defend.

You can strive for your own way—or yield to His and choose to stand for what matters most.



THE FRACTURE

One True Anchor

How had it come to this?

I was in no man's land—literally a place where no human being should be. Step by foolish step, my pride had brought me to this bitter, frozen end. Though the terrain was intensely beautiful, all that waited for me here was my own death.

At more than 14,000 feet, I dangled motionless above an infinite void. I clung with a white-knuckled grip to the only device that could save me, my ice ax. Hanging from a near-vertical sheet of ice only yards below a mountain summit, I was surrounded by a silent world of white.

The expanse around me no longer concealed the fact that this could be the exquisite location where my life would end. Frayed thoughts twisted around the clutter of all my what-ifs. Finally the noisy and confused voices within my mind stilled. All that remained of my broken ability to reason circled in my head like a lost boomerang, proclaiming with each weak pass the same whispered message:

How did it come to this?

One of the highlights of my life occurred when I was five years old. Seared like a brand on my soul, the memory of that moment feels me with heat even now. Earlier on that long-ago day, with all the determination and strength that a little heart could muster, I'd gripped the back

pockets of my dad's 501 jeans. Like a human mule, he'd patiently towed his youngest daughter up her first mountain. At 10,457 feet, requiring a round trip of less than five miles, Mount Lassen's small volcanic summit is not much of a challenge for those who frequent the high places. But for a young girl, reaching its peak was a triumph of love and wonder.

While my dad and I sat shielded by a rock wall, I snuggled close to him for warmth. The wind seemed to resent the vertical detour demanded by this small volcano and screamed all around us. My hair whipped around my face in a frenzied mass of black knots. With nothing above us but sky, I huddled in awe, captivated by the wonder that swept down and away like a living, undulating quilt of unthinkable beauty. Distinct from anything forged by the hands of men, this exquisite mantle continued beyond human sight in a decadent tapestry. Great forests appeared as deep folds of green and rushed down to embrace a myriad of sapphire lakes. Caught up in Creation's never-ending flow, green eventually gave way to amber as forests poured into vast plains of golden grass.

The rapid compression of air moving over the volcano's peak created cloud spindles. The white wisps appeared before our eyes, danced wildly across the summit, and disappeared just as swiftly. I was certain my dad and I were the only two people on earth who saw them. Like translucent sprites they tumbled and rolled in captivating shapes. Through exuberant eyes I watched them call me to join in their frolic. They seemed to play from the beginning of their brief lives right up to their last twisting moments. Spiraling down into threadlike strands of white, they waved one last good-bye before dissipating forever into a heavenly ocean of blue.

That moment with my dad on Lassen ignited in my heart a deep and passionate love for the mountains. There was an indescribable, fierce power in these high places—and also incredible wonder and beauty. I was hooked.

Later, more favor poured into my life when my dad was hired as a weekend downhill ski instructor on the lower flanks of northern California's Mount Shasta. At 14,162 feet, Shasta isn't the highest peak in the

lower forty-eight states. But most agree that by sheer mass, it's one of the biggest. Shasta's base-to-summit rise of nearly ten thousand feet is second only to Mount Rainier and Mount Whitney in the contiguous United States. As an active, stand-alone volcano, Shasta dominates the horizon for more than one hundred miles in every direction.

Often I joined my dad in this impressive setting. I vividly recall one day hanging between his lanky legs as he held me under my arms. I stood on tiny wooden skis fastened with cable bindings to huge boots. "Ready, Kimbo?" my dad asked with the enthusiasm of a parent gifting his child with something he loves.

Together, we perched on the crest of what my youthful perspective saw as a daring precipice. With the pure, unshakable faith of a child, I looked at my dad's slender thighs and saw the trunks of two strong oaks. His grasp was firm enough to convince me that as long as I was locked in his protective embrace, we could ski through any peril. Had I glanced up, I'm sure I would've seen his superhero cape wafting majestically behind him. I braced myself by pressing mittened hands on the inside of each of his thighs. Like a pint-size copilot, I bobbed my head and said, "Okay, Daddy." We pushed off into a serpentine world of white, the beginning of many glorious weekends filled with father-daughter adventures.

That string of shared activities ended, however, much too soon. I was nine years old when the inconceivable happened. Divorce was tearing our family apart. My dad sought help in many professional directions, but, tragically, the help he so desperately needed was not to be found.

One day a friend of my father's picked up my sisters and me from school and took us to our grandparents' house. No one spoke. During that drive I knew something catastrophic had happened. At my grandparents' house a distraught woman tried to comfort me in her arms. She kept repeating, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm so deeply sorry." Finally she blurted out, "Your father has just murdered your mother and killed himself."

My first thought was that she was a liar. She *had* to be a liar because what she said simply could not be true.

I tore away and burst out the house's back door. I ran and ran through a small orchard until I fell, facedown, in the powdery, dry earth. I heard screaming and realized it was coming from me.

"Jesus, help me!" I cried. "Help me!"

And then, He did.

I didn't really know who Jesus was. I'd been to church only a few times in my life. Yet in that moment of despair, I somehow knew He was the only safe direction I could turn and if I didn't, I would die.

What I understand now is how on that terrible day the Lord of all Creation came and knelt in the dirt beside a breaking child. He reached down and took the small hand that reached up to Him...and He has *never* let go.

Only through His grace did I begin picking up the pieces of my shattered life. My sisters and I moved in with my grandparents and started attending church. In the years that followed, I learned that Jesus was my Redeemer and my shelter. Despite the grief and despair I faced, I always found comfort in Him.

Another of my refuges was the mountains. Once I began driving, I set about climbing every horizon—no matter where that horizon was. In these wind-chiseled cathedrals of stone, my heart felt truly free.

The subtle, mighty voice of breezes murmuring through ancient, high-altitude forests perpetually called me to come and rest within their boughs of peace. Heavy sorrows and burdens felt too weighty to follow me to these wild places. The farther I hiked, the farther behind I left my pain. I sensed that all the tragedies that gripped my heart were not strong enough to chase me into thin air. I scaled many of the peaks surrounding California's Redding basin. Once my husband, Troy, and I moved to Central Oregon, I climbed most of that skyline as well. The one glaring omission from my ascensions was Mount Shasta. Believing it would be too painful, I purposed in my heart never to go back.

It was on the pearly white shoulders of Shasta that my father reveled and refreshed and taught his youngest daughter to ski. Perhaps to seal his

heart for the mountain he loved, my dad climbed this towering beauty the year before he died. Not long after, the mountain's original Ski Bowl lodge was destroyed. Adding to the Ski Bowl's woes was a constant siege of avalanches. More years than not, the upper chair towers were destroyed at random. In 1978 the destruction of the Green Butte chair towers was so devastating that the white flag was finally raised. Years later, a concrete lodge was erected on another side of the mountain.

There was no trace of the place where I fell in love with my dad. There was no reason for me to return.

Yet as the years streamed by and my love for the mountains grew, an old calling circled within my heart. This familiar resonance beckoned me to the slopes of my youth. In a way that's difficult to describe, the baton of my dad's passion for the high places and this mountain in particular had passed to me. I realized it was my turn to stand on the frozen spire, the majestic summit of Shasta.

I chose to face my past. As I stepped through this threshold of sorrow, I knew the climb would be an emotional reunion with childhood memories of my dad. What I didn't foresee was how much those memories would confuse and distort my judgment.

After extensive research and dialogue with those experienced with the steep slopes of Mount Shasta, I finally felt prepared for the challenge. A friend and I began our ascent at 2 a.m. on the south flank. While demanding, this route was regarded as the safest and least technical way up, a good choice for a novice at this level of mountaineering.

Though it was June, on this climb my boots knew only the familiar crunch of melted and refrozen snow. We traveled by a single dot of light cast from my headlamp. Soon the lush darkness of the forest gave way to beckoning expanses of uninterrupted white. A waning, sickle moon offered little help, but the shimmering glory of a zillion stars demanded that I stow my puny light and walk under the illumination of their combined brilliance.

With the triumph of heaven reflecting off the mirror of snow beneath

my feet, the world was transformed into a mighty, rising palace of silver splendor. Overhead, massive parapets of stone were draped in icy colors of royalty. Soaring in purple majesty, Sargents Ridge flanked my right, and the dark wall of Casaval Ridge rose to my left. Held between them, I was surrounded by their power. Beneath this starry robe every infinite detail of the mountain lay naked and unashamed for all eyes to behold its wonder.

Around 10,000 feet my friend and I climbed over a massive hump of snow mysteriously called Lake Helen. In my research I'd learned that only during excessive drought years does this phantom lake appear. Exhausted, my friend decided this reclusive landmark would be her summit.

The memory of my dad's voice, my enthusiasm, and my pride combined to drive me to the first major mistake of the day. I chose to climb alone on a big mountain I did not know. My friend and I mutually agreed to reunite in this exact place on my descent.

Setting out alone at a high altitude is never a good idea. I rationalized my dangerous decision by noting the handful of other climbers strewn about the pitch above me. My desire to reach the summit became all the validation I needed. I pressed on with crampons firmly strapped to my boots. My feet were armed with menacing rows of two-inch steel spikes. I'd need these weapons to defeat a new opponent: ice.

As I climbed, Sargents and Casaval ridges continued their rise as if to challenge each other in a collision of titans. Crushed between these towering foes was a steep snowfield, 2,500 feet in length and ominously named Avalanche Gulch. Walls of snow had already thundered down the ridges' flanks. Fresh avalanche tailings had cast alluvial fans of white destruction upon the same ravine I was trying to negotiate. The massive, rubble remains were beautiful, intriguing, and frightening in equal measure. Weaving through their frozen skirts, the graveyard of ice gave silent witness to the awesome, foreboding power of the high places.

After an hour of crunching up the twisting and perilous incline, I stopped for a moment to relieve the tension in my calves and regain my

breath. Instead, what I saw *caught* my breath. The sun was cresting the horizon on the opposite side of the mountain, sending the bulk of its hulking shadow nearly straight up into the heavens. Until that moment I'd never seen a shadow reach toward the sky. Lost in a view reserved for mountaineers, I stood transfixed as the shadow descended through the firmament to the slumbering earth below. The mountain's goliath silhouette, in perfect harmony with the rising sun, cast its swathed image over hundreds of square miles of Creation. Stretching like a visual prophecy, it joined the rising sun in heralding the imminent glory of this new day.

As the sun lifted in the sky, the mammoth shadow made a hasty retreat across the landscape below. It clung to the snowy slope for one last instant, then vanished completely as a laser beam of pure gold flooded down the steeps and consumed all darkness.

Washing in a baptism of new light, I felt the deep cold begin to loosen its grip. I continued to climb. Grateful for my ice ax, at 12,800 feet I safely passed through the vertical, crimson chimneys of compressed ash called the Red Banks. I knew this was the steepest part of the climb.

Immersed in irrevocable sunlight, I looked down the precipitous chasm to the east. I couldn't help but marvel at the gravity-defying tenacity of the Konwakiton glacier. So vertical was the rock to which it clung that the head of the glacier had peeled away from the cliff. Framed by melting teeth, the resulting moat of ice scowled up at me with a menacing grimace. Appreciative of the new and relatively mild grade, I continued up a section sardonically called Misery Ridge. My guess is that the exhausted soul who named this windswept spine believed that the crest above him was the summit. Though it looked like it, it wasn't (sad for weary legs). The true peak was still nearly a thousand feet above.

Finally I reached the summit rim. Like colossal pleats of a giant curtain heaving together, mighty ridges converged into a starlike pattern of immense, commanding beauty. The sheer physical power was overwhelming. Had someone been at my side, I doubt I would've been able to form words. This was as close to heaven as my feet had ever carried me.

Howling winds had carved strange and exquisite ice sculptures that adorned the frozen summit plateau. Among the nearly flat conjunction of arêtes, the true summit of this astounding mountain rose before me. Jutting fifty feet straight up into brilliant blue were the defiant remnants of an ancient lava tube. Fueled by exhilaration, I nearly ran across the lower summit col.

Though I knew of this extraordinary feature, I was still surprised to actually see it. To the left of the final buttress yawned an open, hissing cavern in the snow. From its boiling throat spewed a reeking, sulfuric stench. In a bizarre dichotomy, nature's opposing forces collided here. As unquenchable heat escaped the volcano's active core, the perpetual cold of this frigid altitude fought to extinguish it. The result was a sizzling cauldron of exposed basalt framed by a thick, glassy buildup of frozen steam. The continuous white plume rose in utter rebellion against the surrounding kingdom of ice. The combined effect was surreal.

Moving beyond what looked and smelled like an opening into the abyss, I glanced upward to evaluate the steep sides of the final buttress. Reaching high into a realm of cobalt, the jagged tower called to me. My ambition surged to a frenzied high. With a little more elevation, I would see "the box."

I knew from photographs that it was old and dented, fashioned of steel, and oxidized to a dull red patina. Held secure on the highest summit pinnacle, the box kept safe the book. The book kept safe the names—a record of those allowed to stand victorious in this honored place. It was the same place and the same type of book that, years earlier, my dad had signed.

The formidable frozen walls that soared above me were no match for the siren call of the book. Not seeing a clear route to the top, I looked for the other climbers, hoping to gain direction from them. None were visible. Driven by my fevered rush, I had passed them all earlier in the day.

At this point my lonely epiphany was clear: I didn't know which way to go.

Adding another link to my chain of foolish decisions, I chose *not* to wait for other climbers to guide me. I measured the wind-ravaged chimney with my eyes. It looked as if there was an uninterrupted section of steep but climbable snow that led to the summit.

I began my final ascent. With my ice ax firmly plunged into the frozen snow, I took two calculated strides, then checked the security of my crampons. Once assured, I removed my ax and plunged it into a higher position. I followed this purposeful progression until I had to relocate my ice ax with every increasingly perilous step. My anxiety climbed in mirrored unison.

I repeated this incremental method until I could step no more...until I could *move* no more! My novice aspirations had driven me into a no man's land. I was stuck. I was not on the pinnacle; I was hanging twenty feet below Shasta's icy summit on a glistening sheet of near-vertical ice. Now the only thing rising was my fear. I'd driven myself into a predicament beyond my ability to escape.

The slope was so steep that my left foot was placed nearly two feet above my right. I could clearly see that the slanted, two-inch ledge of ice that bore my left foot was fractured—it would *not* hold my full weight. I glanced over my right shoulder and saw nothing but blue. The ice was too steep to descend and too hard to ascend.

Standing with all my weight on my downhill foot, I fought my soaring sense of dread. Taking a few deep, steadying breaths, I evaluated my situation.

Blundering forward in selfish haste, I hadn't noticed that previous northwest winds had blown the steam up against the slope long enough to freeze the excess moisture into a sheet of nearly translucent boilerplate. If I tried to put weight on my uphill foot, the fractured ice beneath my boot would splinter away; I would lose purchase and fall. Because I was already thirty feet up the narrow chute and on a frozen surface with this high degree of angle, I understood that I wouldn't have enough time to self-arrest before I went into the sizzling cauldron of basalt. I would not

fall on snow but rock. A clear picture materialized—if I fell, I would not survive.

For long moments I hung suspended over the void. With both hands gripping the shaft of my ice ax, I wondered—*How did it come to this?*

I realized that, in my haste and arrogant stupidity, I'd simply seen what I wanted and driven myself to obtain it. Nearly obsessed with the prize, I'd pushed reason aside. In the process I exchanged wisdom for foolishness—the first of many steps that often lead to death in the wilderness. Because my focus was only on what I wanted, I ignored the hazards.

I *knew* what I was doing was wrong. I simply chose to keep doing it anyway.

My pride and my foolish desire had brought me to this place—my pride in my climbing skills and ability to handle myself without help from anyone, and my desire to reconnect to childhood innocence, my father, his passion for this mountain, and his love for me.

I'd staked so much on obtaining these things. I'd allowed them to become my life's purpose, my value, my god. My sense of self-worth had become intricately woven into the design of this new selfish masterpiece.

It was clear I had chosen the wrong path. Hanging just below the summit, I had plenty of time to contemplate how I'd arrived at this perilous place. With a grip that made my knuckles ache, I held fast with both hands to the aluminum shaft of my ice ax. Slowly I realized this wind-tortured peak was *completely* still. There was not a breath of wind. The only sound was my own heartbeat thundering against my eardrums.

As minutes crept by, the cold air seemed to target my fists. I could not only hear my heartbeat from within, but I could also feel it pound inside each knuckle. Yet as uncomfortable as I was, I knew I had no option. I could not let go. If I let go, I would fall. If I fell, I would die.

I held on and waited.

Then, in the stillness, the familiar voice of my Lord quietly rose within my heart. *Child, if you would only hold on to Me like this. I am not*

a mere metal shaft; I am your King. I am your true Anchor. If you would choose to hold on to Me, you would know I am the One who always has—and always will—keep you from falling.

I was ashamed. He was right. God designed me to cling only to *Him* with such lifesaving passion and determination. I needed to confess that it wasn't a metal stick that held me up. It was my Lord. Because I could move nothing else, I bowed my heart before Him and prayed. The prayer that streamed out of my heart was a simple confession of pride and a plea for help.

Jesus, help me... Please help me... Once again I'm reaching out to You. Although I've failed You miserably, You've never failed me. I'm sorry that I've chosen to serve the only other god there is—my desire, my will, my way. I've chosen to worship me instead of You. I'm so sorry for my awful pride and for how I've allowed it to block a close relationship with You. Will You forgive me, Lord? Will You wash my heart clean of my selfishness? Will You lead me again? I acknowledge that no matter how far I fall from Your presence, it's never beyond the depth of Your love for me. You've proven that You always have been and always will be with me. Again, Jesus, with this life, I choose to serve You.

In the moments that followed, something happened, something remarkable, something that changed my life. When I raised my eyes, I was still in *exactly* the same predicament as before. God didn't take my hardship away. God didn't fly me off to a safe place. He did something even better. He helped me realize that I was *in* a safe place—because He was with me.

He didn't take me out of my adversity; He took the adversity out of me. He revealed how He would go through the battle with me. I might fall; I might not. Either way, He was still my King, and I would trust Him with the outcome.

I knew what I had to do.

With my right hand I reached down and helped move my left foot down a few inches. From this new position I carefully sawed my crampons

across the surface of the ice beneath my left foot. After several minutes of this, I had worn a groove that would hold half of the spikes on my boot. In one of the greatest acts of will I've ever known, I began to cautiously remove my ice ax.

Acutely aware of the vast expanse around me, I drew a deep breath and held it. Slowly I pulled my ax free from the only physical anchor I had. Exhaling steadily, I breathed another prayer of thanks to my Lord. The two-inch rim under my left boot held nearly all my weight.

Balancing almost completely on one foot, I moved nothing more than my eyes and left arm. By repositioning my ice ax slightly higher up the translucent incline, I would be in a stance to take another step. My unstable posture did not afford any leverage to drive my ax into a secure position. With my ax firmly clutched in my right hand and its strap around my wrist, I began tapping the spike into the ice with my closed left fist, using it against the ax like a hammer. This tedious process took nearly twenty minutes.

Finally, when my ax was securely driven deep into the ice, I slowly shifted my weight off my left foot to the new, higher position of my right. As all my weight shifted slightly upward, I repeated the entire process of sawing deep grooves into the ice with my crampons and repositioning my ax higher and higher. By doing so, I climbed the remaining distance to the summit. Though it was only about twenty vertical feet, it took nearly two hours to complete.

Emotionally exhausted, I crawled on trembling hands and knees to a safe nook on the summit spire. After shucking my pack, I leaned back against the frozen gray rocks and closed my eyes. It was only by God's redeeming grace that I'd survived the consequences of my foolish pride. I slumped, curled into a ball, and wept.

Once my fear and sorrow were sluiced by my tears, I slowly rose to my feet. While drying my face on the backs of my gloves, I noticed the box only a few feet away. Kneeling beside it, I reverently raised its heavy lid and carefully pulled out the book of names. I gently leafed through its

tattered pages and found the last entry followed by nothing but white paper.

Out of His mercy, my heavenly Father had given me one last opportunity to repair the nearly severed bond between my earthly father and me. Though his life ended in horrific despair, he would forever be my daddy. I would always adore him and all he had imparted into my life.

Feeling again like a nine-year-old, I picked up a pencil and etched on the time-weathered sheet a long overdue letter of love to my dad. And beneath that entry, I scrawled a message of deep gratitude to my God.

THE CROSSROAD

We can fight for our way—or submit to His.

Friend, have you ever found yourself in a similar predicament—perhaps not literally clinging to a vertical sheet of ice, yet so committed to your personal path toward value and satisfaction that you suddenly realized you were on the precipice of death? Our need for self-worth and acceptance stalks each of us like an insatiable predator. And it can take so many forms...

Through desire or fatigue, some of us have bowed in submission to the distorted, self-serving *yuck* that constantly floods our souls through the media. By glamorous proclamations that we'll find personal satisfaction and romantic encounters and receive the attention and envy of others, we're lured into believing the messages we read in books and magazines. We're pressured to mirror the seductive imagery we see on television and movies. We're bombarded with catchy tunes and slogans calling us to conform to what we hear on the radio at our offices, schools, or homes. The message, though it varies in delivery, is simply this: if we will just succumb to this world's standard of beauty, we will have a purpose, we will have value, and we *will* be satisfied.

Meanwhile, some of us are seduced by the promise of comfort and

pleasure from *things*. We accept the world's view that a higher-paying job, a bigger house, a trendy college, a newer car, and a flashier wardrobe will provide fulfillment. We buy into the narcissistic concept that wealth and possessions are the handholds in our ascent toward happiness.

Please don't misunderstand; there's nothing wrong with wealth by itself. I know many who've done incredibly generous things with their financial blessings. Wealth only becomes dangerous when we value and seek it more than God. Unfortunately, this world twists our logic into the belief that we're somehow *owed* adornments—that money, possessions, beauty, and comfort are our birthright and anything less is simply unfair. We've adopted the mentality of a spoiled princess, of self-appointed royalty wearing a crown of entitlement that brings glory to no one but ourselves.

I can say from experience that choosing a life based on serving oneself simply does not fulfill. It places us outside the life we were meant for, looking in at all that could be. It leaves us feeling empty and alone. Useless. Worthless. Hopeless.

Stuck.

It's at this crossroad, when the life we've chosen seems to turn against us, that we are tempted to blame God. Instead, we must *seek* Him.

Each of us will know times when we'll ask, *How did it come to this? How did I get to this place of complete paralysis, hanging over what could very well be my ultimate ruin?* The trail of choices by which we come to such a dark place is as unique as every person who reads this book. Yet the answer for each of us is always the same.

Jesus Christ is the right choice at every crossroad and the answer to every question.

We worship a Lord who is both fierce and beautiful—fierce in the way He hates injustice and sin and fights on our behalf; beautiful in who He is and the way He shows us grace, mercy, and love. As believers, we're called to reflect Him and become fierce and beautiful as well. We were created to serve an eternal purpose—not to follow our mortal desires

while wearing a crown of our making, but to follow the One who wears a crown of thorns. We were not made to live on the outskirts of a kingdom but to worship in awe at the throne of our King. We were not designed to be princesses of entitlement but warriors of encouragement, fighting to bring love and hope to the world.

Our calling is to let go of our crown of gems (our puny personal ambitions, desires, and agendas) in order to pursue our true destiny: His crown of thorns (the will of our King). By doing so, we discover the value, joy, and fulfillment He always intended for those who call Him Lord.

Even now the King is beckoning. May He strengthen you in your endeavor to serve less of yourself...and more of Him.



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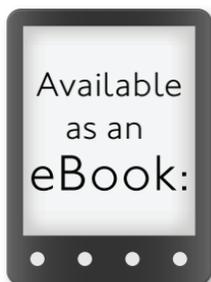
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