

# LIZ CURTIS HIGGS

Best-selling author of *The Girl's Still Got It*



## It's Good to Be Queen

Becoming *as Bold, Gracious, and Wise*  
*as the Queen of Sheba*

Praise for  
*It's Good to Be Queen*

“Liz Curtis Higgs does it again—a touching, beautiful look at one of the Bible’s most captivating women. This is a stunning blend of research, insight, and practical application that will challenge you and fill you with hope. You won’t see the queen of Sheba or yourself in the same way again. Highly recommended.”

—MARGARET FEINBERG, author of *Fight Back with Joy*

“Liz has the wonderful gift of making biblical history come to life. By the time I finished reading this fantastic book, I felt as if I knew the queen of Sheba. If you long to live, love, and finish well, you will treasure this book!”

—SHEILA WALSH, author of *Five Minutes with Jesus*

“Liz Curtis Higgs continues to knit our hearts with spectacular women in the Bible. In this treasure of a book, you will be captivated with the story of the queen of Sheba and how her all-out search for wisdom led her to the One of all wisdom. Thank you, Liz, for leading us into the riches of God’s Word.”

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“In this stunning account of a woman that most people know very little about, Liz has masterfully (and responsibly) brought fresh insights to the story of the mysterious queen of Sheba. Her writing unites imagery and research in a seamless, spectacular way, and I learned many facts that breathed life into a few short passages of Scripture. I walked away from this book inspired to be more like the courageous, bold, wise, humble, and generous woman I met on the page. This might be Liz’s best work yet.”

—ANGIE SMITH, best-selling author of *Chasing God* and *What Women Fear*

### Praise for *The Girl’s Still Got It*

“A perfect blend of humor, extensive research, descriptive language, and insightful commentary.”

—*Publishers Weekly* Starred Review

“Liz writes with the mind of a scholar, the heart of a novelist, and a beautiful wit.”

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—PRISCILLA SHIRER, author of *The Resolution for Women*

It's  
Good  
to Be  
Queen



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# It's Good to Be Queen



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*as the* Queen of Sheba

LIZ CURTIS HIGGS



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P R E S S

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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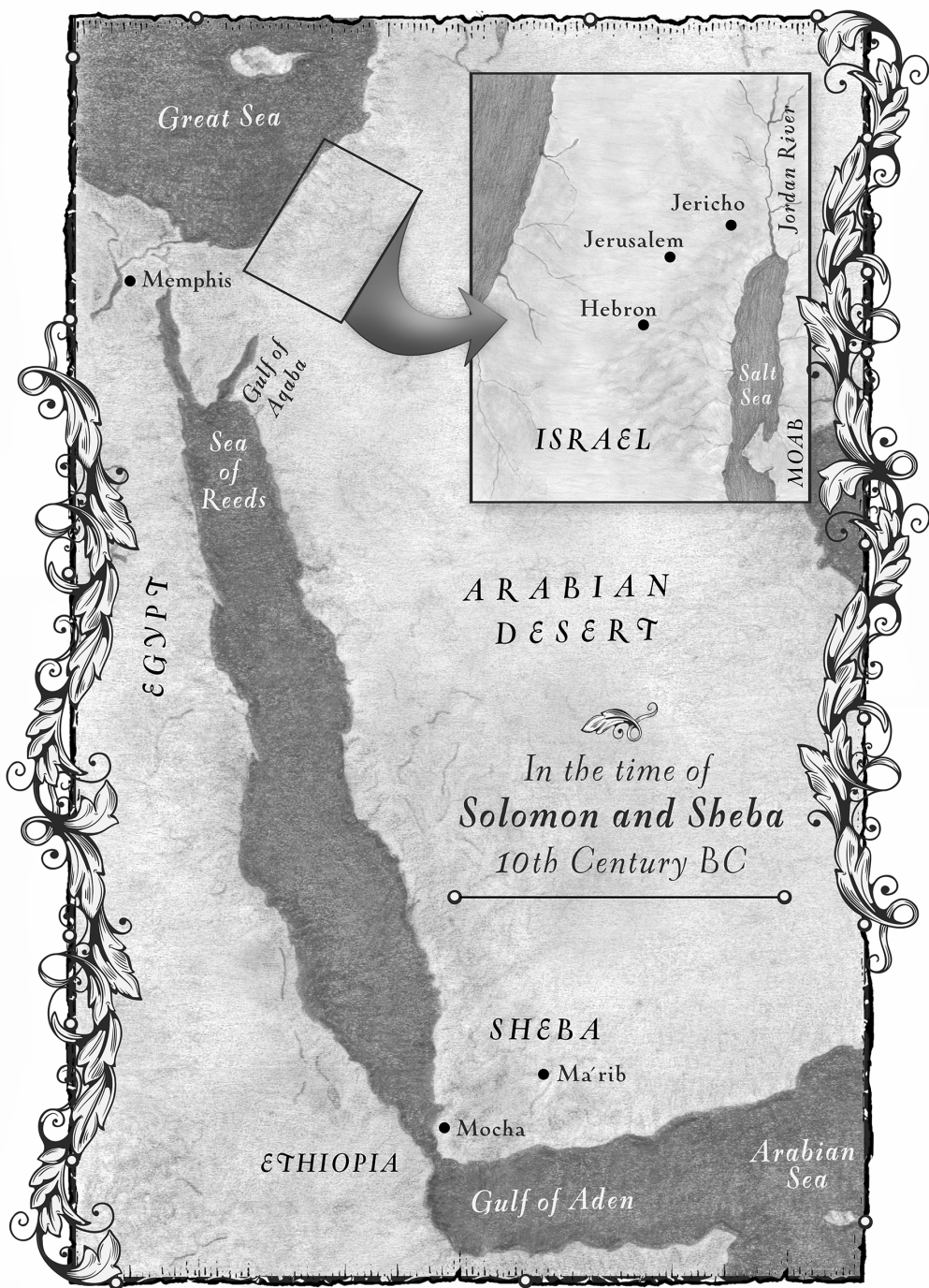


*To Rebecca Price*  
*with gratitude, respect, and love.*  
*From biblical Bad Girls to bonny heroines,*  
*from the mountains of the Springs*  
*to the glens of Scotland—*  
*RP, you continue to be*  
*a beautiful encourager and friend.*



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Great Sea

• Memphis

Gulf of  
Aqaba

Sea  
of  
Reeds

EGYPT



Jericho

Jerusalem

Hebron

ISRAEL

Jordan River

Salt  
Sea

MOAB

ARABIAN  
DESERT

*In the time of  
Solomon and Sheba  
10th Century BC*

SHĒBA

• Ma'rib

• Mocha

ETHIOPIA

Gulf of Aden

Arabian  
Sea



*T*antalizing reports blow across the Arabian Desert like the fragrance of cinnamon on the night wind. One man's name is on every man's lips: *Solomon*.

He is indeed a king, but what is that to me? I am a queen in my own right, sovereign over the land of Sheba. I have lived long enough to know a crown means nothing unless the head wearing it is filled with wisdom and good judgment.

My traders tell me King Solomon of Israel is worthy of his throne. He rules his people with words rather than weapons. He surrounds himself with royal daughters from many countries. And when he speaks, his words are carved on clay tablets, then fired in the hottest oven, ensuring Solomon's wisdom will outlive him.

Travelers bring me his sayings, written on their hearts. I confess, the man intrigues me. How has he learned these truths? Who is his teacher? His father, David, was not only a warrior and a king; he was also a poet, a writer of many words. But Solomon's chroniclers say he surpasses David in wisdom.

I should be intimidated by this sovereign from the north.

Instead, the breadth of his knowledge inspires me.

A crescent moon hangs above my palace in Ma'rib as I smooth out a papyrus scroll. It is time I examined my own store of wisdom, plumbing the depths of all I have learned as queen.

Will my thoughts travel beyond the Sea of Reeds, as Solomon's have? None can say.

But if *you* choose to read them, that will more than suffice. And if I may test you with questions, so much the better.

Whenever we seek answers, we grow.

*Sheba*

One

It's  
Good  
to Be  
Bold



When the queen of Sheba heard about  
the fame of Solomon and his relationship  
to the LORD, she came to test Solomon  
with hard questions.

1 KINGS 10:1



Queen Esther is easy to love. Queen Jezebel is easy to loathe. But the queen of Sheba? She wins my vote as one of the most fascinating rulers in biblical history—and one of the most infamous.

Anytime my mother wanted to put me in my place—let's say I was flouncing around the kitchen in some dime-store costume, wearing borrowed makeup, and putting on airs—she shot me a stern look, one eyebrow arched. “Who do you think you are? The queen of Sheba?”

If she meant to scold me, it didn't work. *Sorry, Mom.* Being the queen of Sheba sounded positively delicious. Having watched Gina Lollobrigida turn up the heat in MGM's *Solomon and Sheba*, I knew the score. Sheba was Delilah, Nefertiti, and Cleopatra all rolled into one—an exotic beauty from a foreign land with wealth, power, and sex appeal beyond anything this small-town girl could fathom.

Is that how you've imagined her too?

Then it's time to meet the *real* queen of Sheba.

A leader of uncommon boldness and vision, she traveled from the ends of the earth to seek wisdom. While many foreign princes visited Solomon, “no other ruler merits the same attention”<sup>1</sup> as Sheba does. Her search for truth is

one of many reasons this ancient queen serves as a modern role model. True, at the start of things, she was a pagan queen, yet “she prized wisdom above power.”<sup>2</sup> When a smart woman moves in the right direction, her steps inevitably lead to wisdom’s Source.

As for her name, I found nearly a dozen possibilities. Ethiopians call her Makeda, meaning “greatness”; her Arab name is Bilqis; the Romans called her Nikaule; and her Jewish folklore name is Malkath, the Hebrew word for “queen of.” Though *Sheba* is the name of her country rather than her given name, *Sheba* is how she’s best known in Western culture today, so that’s what we’ll run with here.

Her story in Scripture is brief yet rich—a handful of verses in 1 Kings 10, repeated almost verbatim in 2 Chronicles 9. We’ll stroll through her narrative phrase by phrase, marveling over the treasures to be found in God’s Word.

The Lord doesn’t speak in these passages, yet His name is rightly praised. Though no heavenly beings appear, we’ll sense God’s presence throughout. And while some may say there are no miracles in this story, I believe a changed heart is a wonder to behold.

Even King Solomon cleared his schedule to make room for the “very rich, very successful”<sup>3</sup> queen of Sheba. Suppose we welcome her into our busy lives as well and see what valuable lessons this Spice Girl of the Bible has to teach us.

## LEGEND HAS IT

Over the centuries Sheba’s story has been embellished by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. From chaste virgin to seductress, from goddess to she-devil, Sheba has become “whatever history wanted her to be.”<sup>4</sup> What we’re after is the Sheba of biblical history, the one who remained true to her royal calling.

By focusing on Scripture, we’ll avoid the shadowy corridors of specula-

tion and legend, lest we get distracted and lose our spiritual footing. “Her stories have been part of oral history for centuries. And in the telling, as with all folk legends, they sometimes become wildly embellished.”<sup>5</sup>

In the Bible there’s not a hint of sensationalism regarding Sheba, let alone any foundation for the scandals wrapped around her name.<sup>6</sup> Sexy Sheba lives only in Hollywood.

What can we know for certain about this queen of the desert? The things that truly matter: her words and actions, her motives and methods as recorded in Scripture. Together they reveal a woman almost as sage as Solomon himself. “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.”<sup>7</sup>

*Hmm.* I thought being wise would make a person proud. God’s Word says just the opposite. Genuine wisdom makes us genuinely humble. Sheba will show us how that works. Christina, queen of Sweden, once said, “Dignity is like a perfume; those who use it are scarcely conscious of it.”<sup>8</sup> Humility is much the same and releases an even more beautiful scent.

An independent woman, Sheba was “at ease with herself and with her world,”<sup>9</sup> willing to venture far from home to quench her thirst for knowledge, wisdom, and truth. Though she was “educated with royal care, in all the learning of her country,”<sup>10</sup> Sheba was ever eager to learn more.

I’m sold on Sheba; I think you will be too.

Our camels are standing by.

## TIME AND DATE STAMP

When the queen of Sheba . . . *1 Kings 10:1*

Hold it. *When* exactly was “when”?

The First Book of Kings was compiled around 535 BC, but the material was taken from much older records and temple archives—likely from the



time of King Solomon himself,<sup>11</sup> though even that timing is tricky to nail down.

Solomon isn't mentioned in any ancient Near Eastern resource other than Scripture, so we can't be sure how his reign lines up with other known historical events.<sup>12</sup> Most scholars peg his forty-year reign from 962 to 922 BC.<sup>13</sup> For Sheba's visit to Jerusalem, we'll circle 945 BC<sup>14</sup> on our calendars and call it done.

There's no mention of a king during her reign in the land of Sheba. An unmarried woman of royal blood, a virgin queen, Sheba was alone on the throne, although archaeologists have discovered evidence of several Sabeen queens during this era.<sup>15</sup>

Suppose we take a spin around the country these women ruled.

## LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus called Sheba "queen of Egypt and Ethiopia,"<sup>16</sup> but most scholars today place her firmly in the country we now call Yemen, tucked in the southwest elbow of the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>17</sup> The word *yemen* in Arabic means "south."<sup>18</sup> Since Sheba is also known in Scripture as "the Queen of the South,"<sup>19</sup> we can look toward Yemen with confidence.

Modern Yemenites claim Sheba as their own and nod with approval when the daughters of their country are named Bilqis (Sheba's Arabian name) in her honor. And in the ancient inland capital of Ma'rib, where as many as twenty thousand people resided in Sheba's day,<sup>20</sup> archaeologists continue to explore sites that bear her name—the Throne of Bilqis and the Sacred Place of Bilqis.<sup>21</sup>

I've been to the Middle East but not to Yemen. Photos reveal a countryside of dramatic contrasts—lush vegetation in one area, desert in another. The rugged beauty of the landscape and the sand-colored buildings—often built to dizzying heights—help us picture the place Sheba called home.

Neatly wedged between the Near East and the Far East,<sup>22</sup> the land of Sheba was a paradise for exporters, enabling them to conduct sea trade with both Africa and India.<sup>23</sup> Her country produced some of the finest oranges, lemons, and apricots in the ancient world and delicious mocha coffee, named for the port city of Mocha on the Red Sea.<sup>24</sup> And the spices! Myrrh, balsam, frankincense, and cassia were so fragrant “the intoxicating scent of the blooms could be detected by voyagers offshore.”<sup>25</sup>

Then one day reports began arriving from the north.

### THE FAME OF HIS NAME

. . . Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon . . . *1 Kings 10:1*

A celebrity culture in the tenth century BC? You bet. What made Solomon so renowned? Not his late father, King David, or his title or his wealth or his massive building projects. It was Solomon’s wisdom, “greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt.”<sup>26</sup>

King Solomon was a bona fide rock star, “whose praise was sung by every passing caravan.”<sup>27</sup> Without television or radio, newspapers or the Internet—with only traders on camels and sojourners on horseback—“his fame spread to all the surrounding nations.”<sup>28</sup>

But it wasn’t Solomon alone who commanded such respect. The world came to his doorstep because of Solomon’s bond with the One who was wisdom itself.

. . . and his relationship to the LORD, . . . *1 Kings 10:1*

When Sheba heard about Solomon, she heard about his God in the same breath. Solomon had clout because of “the reputation of the LORD” (EXB). Anything Solomon had going for him was “due to the LORD’s name” (CEB).

The same is true for us, beloved. Whatever good we accomplish, the Lord is ultimately responsible, and He alone deserves the praise. The whole purpose of our lives is to magnify His fame and “sing the glory of his name.”<sup>29</sup>

I know, I know—our culture teaches us just the opposite. We’re supposed to magnify our own names. Collect friends like trading cards. Earn vast amounts of cash. Surround ourselves with creature comforts. Our spirits may wish to glorify the Lord, but our flesh has other ideas.

That’s what makes Solomon a standout. From the moment of his birth, “the LORD loved him,”<sup>30</sup> and Solomon worshiped the Lord in return.

As for Sheba, in South Arabia of old, more than a hundred different deities were worshiped.<sup>31</sup> None of them was Solomon’s God.

Did she hope to meet Him as well? Historic commentator Matthew Henry thought so, seeing her as “religiously inclined” and wanting to know more about the God of Israel.<sup>32</sup> If an earthly king could be so wise, imagine meeting the One who taught him!

## ROAD TRIP

... she came ... *1 Kings 10:1*

Interesting that Sheba didn’t send ambassadors on her behalf. The queen herself traveled a long way to see Solomon. Many others did the same. “From all nations people came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom.”<sup>33</sup>

We still do that. Women travel hundreds of miles to attend conferences, to hear and meet speakers, to be educated, encouraged, challenged. *Being there* is the thing. Experiencing it firsthand. That’s what Sheba wanted too. “She was so interested, so disturbed, so curious, so hungry that she determined she would not depend upon the reports of others; she would investigate on her own.”<sup>34</sup>

What sort of journey are we talking about? A long and tedious one. If

you draw a straight line on a map, more than twelve hundred miles stretch north from Ma'rib to Jerusalem.<sup>35</sup> The actual route was probably closer to fifteen hundred miles, winding through the unforgiving Arabian Desert,<sup>36</sup> then across the land of Moab, past the Salt Sea, across the Jordan, through the fields and vineyards of Canaan, and finally climbing up to Jerusalem.<sup>37</sup>

Even the rocking motion of the camel—the “living ship of the desert”<sup>38</sup>—would’ve quickly grown old, not to mention the sheer boredom that inevitably sets in on a long trip. You know her servants must have whined, “Are we there yet?” In all, the journey would have taken more than two months,<sup>39</sup> since camels travel no faster than the walking speed of a man. *Groan.*

Sheba was clearly a bold adventuress—a “prototype and pioneer”<sup>40</sup>—who braved discomfort and thirst, bandits and thieves, sandstorms and scorching heat<sup>41</sup> as her caravan traversed the wide, trackless desert. Without warning a simoom—a dangerously hot, dust-laden wind known to sear across the Arabian Peninsula with violent speed—might have swept through their encampment. Fierce animals roamed the land as well—leopards, baboons, jackals, and hyenas—and deadly creatures like scorpions, cobras, and horned vipers.<sup>42</sup>

Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother once said, “Danger is often overcome by those who nobly dare.”<sup>43</sup> That’s our bold Sheba: noble and daring.

Sheba and her entourage probably traveled in the winter, crossing the desert at night by torchlight to avoid the oppressive heat of day.<sup>44</sup> Every oasis brought a welcome respite of shade, cool water, and fresh dates. But after two long months, our road-weary Sheba was undoubtedly ready for the courts of Solomon.

## TRADE SECRETS

She certainly wanted to ask questions and perhaps sharpen her leadership skills. But she also may have planned to negotiate a trade agreement with

Solomon before his fleet of ships put her old-school caravans out of business. In fact, some scholars are convinced the primary reason they met was to talk trade issues.<sup>45</sup> Solomon's new harbor in the Gulf of Aqaba, which allowed ships to cross from Arabia to Egypt, presented a serious threat to her spice trade.<sup>46</sup> As both a diplomat and a politician, Sheba knew a personal visit from a queen would accomplish far more than any ambassador could.

Whatever items topped her agenda, Sheba was bright, well educated, and socially adept. I'm telling you, the woman was impressive. Even so, "her greatest asset was a heart that desired wisdom."<sup>47</sup> Sheba had an insatiable hunger for knowledge, "a restless longing after the True, the Good, the Beautiful, the Eternal."<sup>48</sup>

Oh, to be described like that! Rather than longing for more power, more fame, more money, or more stuff, Sheba desired attributes that capture the essence of the Almighty: "The LORD is right and true,"<sup>49</sup> "the LORD is good,"<sup>50</sup> "He has made everything beautiful in its time,"<sup>51</sup> and "the eternal God is your refuge."<sup>52</sup>

**True. Good. Beautiful. Eternal.** That's what Sheba was searching for.

We want that too. In a world where lying is common, evil often triumphs, ugly deeds are celebrated, and people are satisfied with momentary pleasure, we need God's wisdom more than ever.

## TESTING, TESTING

Sheba's journey began with a clever plan.

... to test Solomon ... *1 Kings 10:1*

She wanted to see if this king lived up to all the hype. Her intent was to "challenge him" (NET), "try him" (DRA), "prove him" (ASV), and so "put his reputation to the test" (MSG).

It's been said, "Never engage in a battle of wits with an unarmed man." On that score Solomon was armed to the teeth. That's why Sheba's plan was so bold. She was "the first reigning queen on record who pitted her wits and wealth against those of a king."<sup>53</sup> Sheba was queen and she was confident. Plus, she knew what mattered most in life.

I once thought wealthy people chatted about their possessions: the mansions, the yachts, the furs, the jewelry, the fashions. Not necessarily. When I've had the chance to listen in on some of their conversations, here's what they've talked about: where they've traveled, what they've seen, whom they've met, and what they've learned.

That's real wealth, and they're sharp enough to know it. Being rich with material things isn't nearly as valuable as being rich with knowledge and experience.

Wisdom is "an ornament of grace to the soul,"<sup>54</sup> something money can't buy and skill can't earn. It does cost us something, though. Time. Effort. Focus. Sheba must have had those qualities in abundance. In her we see "a willingness to seek and sacrifice, to give whatever it takes to find answers to life's questions."<sup>55</sup>

So then, our bold Sheba prepared to test the king.

. . . with hard questions. *1 Kings 10:1*

Josephus called them "questions of very great difficulty."<sup>56</sup> These "riddles" (CEB) and cryptic "enigmas" (YLT) had definite answers—if you possessed the wisdom to sort them out.

## MIND GAMES

In Solomon's day such questions served as "a celebrated entertainment of the eastern princes,"<sup>57</sup> enjoyed at feasts and other special occasions.<sup>58</sup> To pick

apart the veiled meanings and allegorical language of enigmas required ingenuity and careful thinking.

I love word games—Scrabble, Boggle, Bananagrams—but I'm the worst at solving riddles, puzzles, or games of logic. Sheba excelled in them. Apparently Solomon did too.

The book of Proverbs introduces its earthly author—"Solomon son of David"<sup>59</sup>—who advised God's people to "listen and add to their learning,"<sup>60</sup> specifically by "understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise."<sup>61</sup>

Aha! *Riddles*. Solomon clearly loved and valued them.

Did Sheba know of his mastery in advance? Or did she discover his superior skills after she reached Jerusalem? Since Arabic literature is filled with riddles,<sup>62</sup> we can be certain Sheba was a talented opponent, coming up with questions that "cloaked a deeper philosophical, practical, or theological truth."<sup>63</sup>

Even though riddles often featured animals or plants,<sup>64</sup> they weren't child's play. Instead, they were an opportunity for Sheba to display "her cunning and statecraft."<sup>65</sup>

King Solomon claimed a single Source of wisdom: the God of Israel. Sheba, a pagan queen with many deities, seemed determined to stump Solomon and his God. A risky move but nonetheless bold and completely in character for this monarch.

## IS BOLDNESS A GOOD THING?

Boldness is definitely good. Especially for anyone who seeks to please the King of kings.

When the disciples prepared to share the gospel, they prayed, "Enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness."<sup>66</sup> That can be our prayer too—to share biblical truths with courage and confidence, unafraid

and unapologetic. God answered the disciples' prayer at once, "and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."<sup>67</sup>

Boldness is really about God, then, and not about us. Rather than a personality trait, it's an attribute of the Holy Spirit. If God resides in us and works through us, His love will pour from us like living water. He forgives our past, He empowers our present, and He holds our future in His mighty hands. "Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold."<sup>68</sup>

## BOLDNESS REDEFINED

Boldness doesn't mean having a big ego. Being arrogant, conceited, or self-centered. Acting in a forward, boastful, or pushy manner. As some of us have learned from experience, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace."<sup>69</sup> Let's not go there.

Boldness also doesn't mean being brash, careless, foolish, or reckless. As the proverb tells us, "He who hurries his footsteps errs."<sup>70</sup> Patience and practice are needed before we can speak with authority and act with assurance.

When I was in my early twenties, I desperately wanted to be a radio personality and so applied for a job at every station in a thirty-mile radius. I had an amateurish demo tape, a one-page résumé with lots of white space, and zero experience other than my ten-watt college radio station.

Yes, I was confident.

But I was also unprepared and woefully uninformed.

One job interview was particularly memorable. The station manager threw up his hands in exasperation. "You aren't even asking the right questions!"

Awkward? Oh baby.

I swallowed my pride, then said, "You've already invested a half hour of your busy day. Please take just five more minutes and tell me what I should be asking."



My honesty must have disarmed him. He spent another thirty minutes instructing me, coaching me, and helping me make the next interview more successful. You can be certain I did my homework before I knocked on another door (and got my first job in radio).

True boldness is God at work in us and often follows a long season of preparation. Doing research. Talking to people. Listening. Solomon rightly said, “The mind of the prudent acquires knowledge.”<sup>71</sup> That means you and I need to find solid resources and trustworthy teachers to fill our heads and hearts.

If we read with discernment, the wisdom of the ages is within our grasp.

If we listen to sound teaching, we won't be misled by those who've been misled.

If we test what we learn, comparing it to scriptural truth, our foundation will be secure.

Still, facts don't make us bold. *Faith* makes us bold. If we believe what we've learned, it's because we trust the One who taught us.

Luke described how the apostle Paul went about his ministry: “He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!”<sup>72</sup> That's the kind of chutzpa we're talking about.

## I AM WOMAN, HEAR ME ROAR

One of my favorite scenes in the movie *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* is when Éowyn, a brave female warrior safely hidden behind her armor, faces the evil Nazgûl in battle. Looming over her, the Nazgûl growls, “You fool! No man can kill me.”

Éowyn pulls off her helmet, releasing her mane of hair, then says through gritted teeth, “I am no man.” (Audience cheers wildly.)

Many women sense boldness living inside them like a caged lion, pacing left to right, waiting for the door to open. Queen Elizabeth I confessed, “I am

a lion's cub, and I have a lion's heart,"<sup>73</sup> and Solomon declared, "The righteous are as bold as a lion."<sup>74</sup>

What can we glean from the king of the beasts? When I asked our sisters online, they were quick to respond.

Louise said, "A lion is ever vigilant, ever watchful. Ears tuned in to every sound. Eyes that are all-encompassing. A nose that detects the slightest change in the air." In the same way, we need to use all our senses and check our surroundings before we speak and act. As Solomon wrote, "Ears that hear and eyes that see—the LORD has made them both."<sup>75</sup>

"Lions are regal in their bearing," Anne said. "They act like royalty and are treated as such." Sheba clearly understood this. A queen never forgets she's a queen. If we treat ourselves with respect, so will others. If we belittle ourselves, the world will do the same.

Cynthia said, "The lioness proudly and boldly stalks her prey." Could Solomon have pictured a female lion when he described the righteous as "bold as a lion"? Smaller, swifter, and more agile, the females do most of the hunting, joining with other females in their pride to stalk and bring home dinner.

The male lion protects and defends. The lioness provides. Both fearlessly do what God created them to do. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could say the same?

Knowing our limitations can be even more valuable than knowing our strengths. As Karen pointed out, "A lioness doesn't waste energy chasing prey she can't outrun."

The key to boldness isn't merely *believing* God is with us or *trusting* God is with us; it's *knowing* God is with us. Not self-confidence, but God-confidence. Not "I have this," but "God has this."

Queen Victoria said, "We are not interested in the possibilities of defeat."<sup>76</sup> Neither are we, beloved. "For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with victory."<sup>77</sup> God gives us a different sort of crown from Sheba's gold one, but it shines far brighter. And it shines forever.



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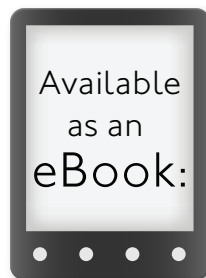
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