The background of the entire cover is a repeating pattern of stylized, overlapping waves. Each wave is composed of multiple concentric, curved lines in a teal color, set against a white background. The waves are arranged in a way that creates a sense of movement and depth, with some waves appearing to rise and others to fall.

FIND YOUR BRAVE

Courage to Stand Strong
When the Waves Crash In

HOLLY WAGNER

Praise for
Find Your Brave

"If you've lost the confidence and strength to endure the storms in your life, *Find Your Brave* is the empowering message your heart needs. With biblical wisdom and personal understanding, Holly will show you what it looks like to fight back against life's disappointments in the only way that works—with the Lord's help. I love this resource."

—LYSA TERKEURST, *New York Times* best-selling author
and president of Proverbs 31 Ministries

"Holly Wagner mixes raw honesty and real wisdom as she helps us navigate the storms that come our way. As you turn the pages of *Find Your Brave*, not only will you learn and be inspired, but at times you will seriously laugh out loud. This book has the potential to be a game changer in the way we respond to the challenges we all face. Why not pick up one for friend?"

—CHRISTINE CAINE, founder of A21 and Propel

"I have known and loved Holly for more than twenty years. Her grasp of the Word of God and her ability to bring it to life is magnificent. She personally has navigated uncharted waters on a number of occasions and always comes through with testimony to the goodness and grace of God. *Find Your Brave* will inspire courage in your own walk."

—BOBBIE HOUSTON, Hillsong Church, author of *The Sisterhood*

"I've always loved the insightful, practical, loving, and loyal way Holly approaches life. In this book, her honesty, mixed with wisdom coming from personal experiences and biblical teaching, encourages the reader to dig deeper and find your brave when walking through adversity. Holly not only reminds us who we are, but she walks alongside us with great encouragement and more often a sisterly push to keep moving forward!"

—DARLENE ZSCHECH, composer, worship leader, and author
of *Worship Changes Everything*

“Holly Wagner is one of the most dynamic and faith-filled people we know. Her new book, *Find Your Brave*, will equip, encourage, and inspire you to take bold steps of faith and stand strong when life gets tough.”

—CRAIG AND AMY GROESCHEL, authors of *From This Day Forward*

“*Find Your Brave* is more than a theory for Holly Wagner. She found her brave as she pioneered a church in Hollywood, journeyed through cancer, and battled with fear. This book positions *you* to forge through trials and come out radiant on the other side.”

—LISA BEVERE, Messenger International, best-selling author
of *Lioness Arising*

“My darling friend Holly doesn’t write about finding your brave from the sidelines; she writes from the heart of the battle. Because she lives out her message daily, she helps us understand that we too can find our brave. Not only that, the journey is exhilarating, and when we do it together, we are stronger.”

—SHEILA WALSH, author of *The Longing in Me*

“In a culture that sends women so many mixed messages about what bravery looks like, Holly has written a clear, concise, and defining message of biblical bravery to women for generations to come. We know challenges will come to us all; none are exempt. In *Find Your Brave*, Holly masterfully maps the way to finding and sourcing inner strength in those trying times. Her humor sets you at ease while her words stir, inspire, and spur you on to a life filled with courage and faith.”

—PASTORS JUDAH AND CHELSEA SMITH, lead pastors
of The City Church in Seattle, Washington

“In *Find Your Brave*, my good friend Holly Wagner empowers women to stand strong as an example to the world. She reminds us that it is in our strength that we find our purpose, and it is only through God that we find our strength. For any woman who has ever faced fear, this book is a must-read!”

—LISA YOUNG, Fellowship Church, coauthor
of *The Creative Marriage*

F I N D
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B R A V E

FIND YOUR BRAVE

Courage to Stand Strong
When the Waves Crash In

HOLLY WAGNER



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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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This book is dedicated to you, the reader, as you navigate the real storms of life. I know life can be messy, so thanks for not giving up and for your commitment to honor God as the waves of the storm crash against your life. You are not alone!

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Rising in the Darkness

Nothing splendid has ever been achieved
except by those who dared believe that
something inside of them was superior to
circumstance.

—Bruce Barton

And though she be but little, she is fierce.

—William Shakespeare

It felt like a bomb was exploding under my bed. Our house alarm system was screeching, and I could hear dishes hitting the kitchen's tile floor and shattering into a million pieces. The whole world seemed to be shaking. The electricity went out, and I could not see my hand in front of my face.

You may not remember where you were at 4:31 a.m. on January 17, 1994 (other than in bed), but I will never forget. We were experiencing a massive magnitude 6.7 earthquake in Los Angeles. I had felt small tremors before but nothing close to this. The shaking was terrible, and the noise was even worse. I have since learned that when an earthquake occurs, the first waves to hit are the primary, seismic waves, which cause

destruction as they hit various objects. The destruction caused is loud. That explained the bomb-like sound.

As the quaking continued, my husband, Philip, yelled that he would get Paris, our two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, and that I should grab our six-year-old son, Jordan. The house was pitch black. I glanced out our window and noticed that our whole neighborhood was dark, so I didn't even have ambient city light to guide me. The earthquake still rumbled as I stumbled across our bedroom to get to the hall. A dresser flew across the room and clipped me in the legs, forcing me to my knees. Now I was crawling to get to my son. Panicked, I barely noticed the shards slicing into my hands and legs from the shattered glass of fallen pictures. But I am a mom, and like most moms, I did whatever was necessary to get to my kids!

When I reached my son's door, I couldn't open it. Something had fallen on the other side and blocked it.

"Jordan?! Jordan, open this door!"

"Mom, I'm all right!" his scared little voice penetrated the door and pierced my heart. Eventually, we got the door open, and I clutched him close while we stood in the doorway, as those of us who live in earthquake zones have been instructed to do.

Philip was holding Paris in her bedroom doorway, and we all braced ourselves as the first aftershock hit. It was just a little less intense than the initial jolt, but still frightening. Philip realized that we needed to get out of the house, so we grabbed a blanket and made our way downstairs and out to the front lawn. (It was winter, which in Los Angeles can be tough—sixty degrees or so. Don't hate.) Somebody remembered to get the dog, and we all huddled under the blanket. The most important people—and animal—in the world to me were under that blanket on the lawn.

A few houses near us exploded when their gas lines burst. We were afraid and anxious as burning embers flew over our heads.

Finally the sun began to make its way over the horizon, and we could

see the devastation around us. Blood oozed down my leg where the dresser had hit me—I hadn't noticed the injury until that point. I carry the scars still.

I entered our house and was stunned to see the chaos. Every wall was cracked, the chandelier had swung so hard it had broken a wall, the television and computer had been thrown across the room, all the plates and glasses were crushed into thousands of tiny pieces, and the kitchen appliances were no longer in the kitchen. In the light of day, the scene was shocking. The damage came to around seventy thousand dollars. At that moment, I wasn't sure what to do next. I just knew that I wanted our nightmare experience to end. Right away.

You may never face an earthquake like the one I experienced. I certainly hope not! But I've found it isn't only the literal earthquakes that can tear us up. Figurative earthquakes can rock our lives with chaos and fear. And the aftershocks can feel just as devastating.

At some point, the unfortunate reality is that we all *will* face some kind of earthquake, our own dark, scary challenge. The decisions we make during those difficult times are crucial; they determine whether or not we'll make it through with our faith, relationships, and sanity intact. In the midst of our earthquake, Philip and I made some good decisions that led our family to safety, and we almost made some that I believe could have brought more damage (more about those later).

The Bible tells us not to think it strange when a "fiery ordeal" comes our way.¹ Just so ya know, I always think it is strange. But perhaps we need to make the decision not to take personally every challenge we face. Some trials might be of our making—our own bad choices, which we'll discuss later—but plenty occur simply because we live on earth. God is not mad at you or me, and He is not punishing us. Challenges come to the good and the bad, to the just and the unjust . . . they come to us all. They are not those elective courses we get to choose in college, but rather they are part of the core curriculum of life.

WE NEED THOSE CHALLENGES?

We face troubles of all kinds in our world, our country, our cities, our friendships, our families, and within our own hearts. Jesus promised us that in this world we would have trials, distress, and frustration—*but* that we should be at peace, because He has defeated the world for us and shown us how to overcome it as well.²

When my daughter, Paris, was in middle school, we had to participate in the school's science fair. The teacher's instructions stated that parents were not supposed to help. I was happy about those directions; I had already graduated from middle school and felt no desire to do another science project. Paris was interested in horses, so she chose to build a papier-mâché horse, or what vaguely resembled a horse, which leaned significantly to the left. I helped her carry her project to the fair and was interested in seeing all the other sixth-grade projects. After we set up Paris's horse display, I looked around the room. I saw some amazing projects, including a giant set of lungs that breathed and a map of the United States that lit up according to how much power each city used. I looked back at Paris's unique leaning horse and quickly realized that either some parents cheated or we had somehow ended up at a university science fair!

After I reassured Paris that her project was interesting, I began to walk around the room, mainly to give myself time to forgive all those cheater parents. As I perused the submissions, I encountered the most amazing project: a miniature re-creation of the Biosphere 2, which I am *so sure* was built by a sixth grader. But I'm not bitter.

In 1991, eight scientists lived for two years in an artificial environment in Oracle, Arizona, called Biosphere 2. (How they did that without a Starbucks is beyond me!) Inside the three-acre closed system was a small ocean, a rain forest, a desert, and a savannah grassland. The scientists produced every kind of weather pattern except wind. Eventually the lack of wind caused the tree trunks to grow weak and bend over. It is the pres-

sure of wind that strengthens tree trunks and allows them to hold up their own weight.

As I stared at that sixth-grader's project and thought about the lessons from the Biosphere 2, I realized something important about life. Like it or not, we have to admit that weathering storms builds our strength.

So as much as I hate challenges, I think we need them. Proverbs 31 tells us why. At first glance that chapter in the Bible sounds a bit annoying. It was written as a poem perhaps for men in Israel to memorize and recite as a tribute to women. While not necessarily a job description, many of the verses paint the picture of this seemingly perfect woman. Who could live up to her? Often she is called the "virtuous woman," which sounds like someone who is quiet and does a lot of knitting. (No offense, if you are a knitter.) I am not really good at either of those. I would have been happy for Proverbs to end with chapter 30. Really. However, about twenty years ago, I began the journey of discovering just who a daughter of the King is designed to be, and I had an inkling that understanding Proverbs 31 was going to be essential—not only to my faith but also to help me figure out how to handle challenges that come my way. As I studied, I learned that the word *virtuous* is the Hebrew word *chayil* and has to do with might, strength, and valor. It actually means a "force on the earth."³

Wow. We are designed to be a force on the earth. I like that.

WE MUST RISE!

At first I was rather put off by Proverbs 31:15, the verse that challenges us to rise "while it is yet night."⁴ What? I don't think so. I sleep while it is yet night. The truth is, however, that verse has less to do with the time of day we get up and everything to do with being women who *rise up* when earthquakes and chaos and heartbreak and calamity abound. In the darkest hour, she rises.

And on a more personal level, perhaps your world is shaking. Maybe

cancer has struck your family, or a loved one is addicted to drugs or alcohol, or perhaps divorce has torn apart your home. At times it seems, if for no other reason than the size of the global population, that there has never been more pain, more disease, more famine, and more heartbreak on the planet than now, and yet God has trusted you and me with this moment in history! We are to be a force for good on the earth. *Chayil*. When everything around us is in the midst of chaos, when our own world is quaking, we are to be the *she* who rises.

She does not wilt; she does not complain; she does not blame. She finds her brave and she rises. She actually grows stronger in the midst of dark times when it seems as if the whole world is trembling. God is looking for a company of women who will find their brave and rise in the midst of any and every challenge—and then be a force for good to help others find their brave.

Throughout the Bible we read about women who rose out of a dark situation to bring strength. In the dark days of disorder and confusion during the time of the Judges, when Israel vacillated in its worship of God, a woman named Deborah rose like a mother in Israel. God used her to lead the Israelites to freedom.⁵ She found her brave, and she rose to the challenge.

In a terrifying moment, when her people were threatened with genocide, Queen Esther risked her own life to rescue them, and a nation of people was saved.⁶ Esther found her brave in dark times and rose to the challenge.

We do not have to remain stuck in our trials! We grow through them, and as daughters of the King, we can rise in the midst of dark, shaking moments. But how?

PAUL KNEW ABOUT TROUBLE

How can we find our brave and rise to the challenges we face? Well, there's another person in the Bible who has some great advice to share.

The apostle Paul intimately understood dark times. In his case, he didn't suffer through an earthquake—it was a storm.

Paul had angered Jewish leaders by preaching the gospel, so they convinced the Roman soldiers that Paul was a troublemaker and had him thrown in jail in Caesarea. Although he was never officially convicted, Paul remained in prison. When he discovered he was going to be beaten, he appealed to Caesar to hear his case (because he was also a Roman citizen). So the soldiers loaded him on a ship headed for Rome. From the beginning of the sea voyage, the winds blew against the boat, and it made slow progress along the coast.

The ship was having difficulty because it left port during a dangerous time for sailing; the winds were already unpredictable. The sailing season was deemed dangerous from mid-September to mid-November, and the waterways closed for travel until February, a period of about three months. It appears that Paul's journey took place in roughly mid-October.⁷

Paul warned the crew that trouble lay ahead. But Julius, the Roman centurion in charge of the prisoners, chose to pay more attention to the ship's captain, who was determined to make his destination during this dangerous season. What started as gentle breezes quickly turned into hurricane-force winds, and the journey of navigating through a storm began. (I feel seasick just thinking about it.)

Acts 27 records his adventure, and it offers encouragement to those of us who are on the journey to find our brave in the midst of a storm. Just like Paul, you and I live in trying times. Every day we need to make decisions that produce the future we want. It is the same when we are in a storm. We must make choices, however hard they might be in the moment, that will get us through to the calm other side—or in Paul's case, to shore in one piece! We don't want to make choices that merely create another storm.

That's why I've written this book. You and I are going to face and struggle through storms. You may be in one right now. While it's never

fun, and often it's just really hard, it is possible to survive and grow stronger through it, and because of it, to come out as an overcomer. In the following pages, we will explore how to do that.

But as we will learn, we don't just find our brave and survive the storms for ourselves. God designed us to live in community so that our experiences can help others. People all around us are looking for help as they navigate challenges, and we can demonstrate a victorious way of living, even in challenging times. God gets the glory because it is at our weakest that His strength is revealed in us. After all, Jesus lived in and spoke to storms, and He never allowed them to interfere with His destiny. The same is true for Paul. The same can be true for you and me.

Throughout this book, we will look at some specific things Paul did to survive his storm, and these are the same things we must do to make it through our wind and waves. Not to spoil the ending of the storm story, but Paul and all the people on board survived. The ship carrying them was destroyed, but thanks in large part to Paul's wisdom and decisive actions, he and his shipmates reached their shore. So can you.

As believers, our ultimate shore is heaven, where we will hear Jesus say, "Well done." But throughout life, every storm, whether it involves a relationship, a job, or our health, offers the opportunity not only for survival but also for triumph.

I wrote this book because I want to see you fulfill your individual, God-designed purpose to be brave. That purpose, that bravery, that ability to rise as the Proverbs 31 woman did, will not be handed to us like a participation trophy at a Little League baseball game. We will have to work for it. Remember, we never camp out in the storm; rather, we forge through it and rise as virtuous women—stronger and more secure in our faith, relationships, *and* sanity.

Are you ready to find *your* brave? Then let's get started.



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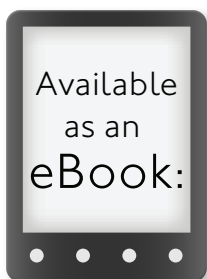
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