

CYNTHIA ULRICH TOBIAS

Author of *You Can't Make Me (But I Can Be Persuaded)*

A WOMAN OF  
**STRENGTH**  
AND  
*Purpose*

**Directing Your Strong Will to**

- Improve Relationships
- Expand Influence
- Honor God

Praise for  
*A Woman of Strength and Purpose*

“Wow! Cynthia Tobias has cracked the code for directing your passion and defining your purpose. Every strong-willed woman (not to mention the men who love them) needs to read this incredibly practical and insightful book.”

—DRS. LES AND LESLIE PARROTT, *New York Times*  
best-selling authors of *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*

“I thoroughly enjoyed *A Woman of Strength and Purpose*. I consider myself an SWW (strong-willed woman) and deeply appreciate Cynthia’s take on how we can use our ambition and strength for God! The book provides real-life and modern-day stories of other strong women of faith that encouraged me and inspired me! It is a book that will motivate women of any age!”

—MEGAN ALEXANDER, reporter for *Inside Edition*  
and author of *Faith in the Spotlight*

“Strong-willed women often struggle to know how their dynamic personalities fit with God’s call. In this wise and insightful work, Cynthia Tobias has demonstrated that those two realities can work together beautifully! Indeed, strong-willed women can have a lasting and powerful impact on the world around them.”

—JIM DALY, president of Focus on the Family

“Thank you, Cynthia Tobias, for helping godly women understand that it’s not only okay to be a confident woman with inner strength and purpose; it’s God’s design. This book is a great tool for women who desire to find the gentle balance between learning, leading, and loving others while following Christ.”

—BABBIE MASON, award-winning recording artist,  
author, and songwriter

“Finally! A book that speaks to the many strong-willed Christian women in the world today. Along with real-life stories, Cynthia Tobias shares her expert and practical advice on how to celebrate, embrace, and use your God-given gift to honor Him. You’ll be encouraged and uplifted as you learn how to be the best you can be in your relationships, work, and spiritual life.”

—MARTHA HADLEY, Christian radio personality for  
the nationally syndicated *Martha Hadley Show*

“Strong, determined men tend to be celebrated in our Western culture. But that same culture often marginalizes, criticizes, and stigmatizes these same characteristics when they happen to be in a woman. Cynthia Tobias knows all about being a strong and determined woman. She also knows how to help you rise above the cultural pushback and purposefully leverage your strength for the greater good of the people you love and for the glory of the God who gave it to you.”

—DR. TIM KIMMEL, best-selling author of *Grace-Based Parenting* and *Grace-Filled Marriage*

“I’m so glad Cynthia has written a book for us stronger-willed women. It took me a long time to accept the fact that God liked me. I knew He loved me because He says so, but like me? He also says He likes women of a quiet, gentle nature, and that just does not describe me. So this book touches a chord in me.”

—GIGI GRAHAM, author and conference speaker

“Cynthia Tobias is the quintessential strong-willed woman. In her latest book, *A Woman of Strength and Purpose*, she gives her extraordinarily valuable insights into the personal challenges of women who have strong wills and those who love and/or work with them. It’s rich information and great inspiration!”

—JAN SILVIOUS, author of *Fool-Proofing Your Life*  
and *Big Girls Don’t Whine*

“Have you ever been called a strong-willed woman? Maybe it was meant as a compliment—or maybe it wasn’t. I can relate! For all of us strong women, Cynthia’s message encourages us to embrace our strength—but to *always* direct that energy toward healthy goals and in a careful, godly way. Get ready: this book will excite, encourage, and challenge you.”

—SHAUNTI FELDHAHN, social researcher and  
best-selling author of *For Women Only*

“Cynthia Tobias’s keen insights and stories will free your strong-willed mind, heart, and life. You’ll discover how to live for Christ as you surrender your strong will to the One who rules

the world and secures your place in it. This book will strengthen you to be the change-maker He designed you to be.”

—PHYLLIS WALLACE, family counselor and former  
radio host of *Woman to Woman*

“If you’ve ever struggled with whether God can make kingdom use of your strong-willed personality, *A Woman of Strength and Purpose* is your next read! Cynthia Tobias makes it crystal clear: a surrendered and consecrated strong will is an arrow in God’s hand.”

—ALLISON ALLEN, speaker, author, and actor

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A WOMAN OF  
**STRENGTH**  
AND  
*Purpose*

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*You Can't Make Me (But I Can Be Persuaded)*

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- Expand Influence
- Honor God



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## A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND PURPOSE

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

Trade Paperback ISBN 978-1-60142-898-1

eBook ISBN 978-1-60142-897-4

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Cover design by Kelly L. Howard

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Published in the United States by WaterBrook, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Tobias, Cynthia Ulrich, 1953—author.

Title: A woman of strength and purpose : directing your strong will to improve relationships, expand influence, and honor God / Cynthia Ulrich Tobias.

Description: First Edition. | Colorado Springs, Colorado : WaterBrook Press, 2016. |

Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016008488 (print) | LCCN 2016016931 (ebook) | ISBN

9781601428981 (trade pbk.) | ISBN 9781601428974 (electronic)

Subjects: LCSH: Christian women—Religious life. | Will—Religious aspects—Christianity.

Classification: LCC BV4527 .T623 2016 (print) | LCC BV4527 (ebook) | DDC 248.8/43—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016008488>

Printed in the United States of America

2016—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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TO MY **STRONG-WILLED** DAD, **Robert Ulrich**,  
who taught me throughout my life how a strong will  
that's surrendered to God can change the world.

Dad's life has been living proof of that,  
and I'll forever be grateful for his example.

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WHO SAYS I'M A  
*Strong-Willed*  
WOMAN?

**S***trong-Willed Woman.* It's a galvanizing phrase. It evokes an immediate reaction—either positive or negative. There's no middle ground, no indifference. It's a term that is not neutral.

There are those who believe the term *strong willed* is automatically negative, describing a person who is stubborn, defiant, and difficult to deal with. But that's not the definition of strong will—that's what happens when strong will goes sideways. Strong will, in and of itself, is a positive trait; it describes a person who is energized, resourceful, and determined to succeed.

I am a strong-willed woman (SWW). I grew up the daughter of an evangelical pastor, and I never rebelled against my dad. I didn't talk back to a teacher or get loud, obnoxious, or rude. I tell people that you couldn't have traced even half the trouble I caused back to me! Outwardly I was compliant and cooperative. But if someone pointed a finger in my face, if someone told me something simply couldn't be done—that's when I dug in my heels and pushed back.

As I grew up, I had other strong-willed friends who were more independent, extroverted, and outspoken. Although some were unlike me in many ways, we all shared the same basic traits that make strong will such a positive force for good. We weren't afraid to tackle tough situations; we didn't back down just because circumstances were difficult. If we didn't know what to do, we figured out that someone in our network of friends and contacts would help us accomplish the goal. We excelled in finding creative alternatives.

During my first year of teaching high school, for instance, I was the girls' drill team faculty advisor. That meant getting forty high school girls to every football game. Unfortunately, I quickly found out that school bus drivers were scarce. Other people might just shrug, wring their hands, and say, "Well, that's just the way it is." But I thought, *How hard can it be to drive a bus?*

The next Sunday at church I pulled aside the Sunday school

director and pointed to the seventy-two-passenger school bus parked outside. "Pastor Bob, can someone teach me to drive that bus?"

He smiled. "I can make that happen."

In short order, I passed the driving test and got my special license—and my drill team girls had a reliably available school bus driver.

Because we quickly get a reputation as someone who can get the job done, SWWs tend to be called upon to figure out tough issues for other people too. All my life my family and friends have turned to me when they run into particularly hard situations: *There are no hotel rooms available. I can't find a rental car under sixty-five dollars a day. No one can figure out how to get there.* It's not that I have special skills; I just don't like taking no for an answer. I'm against giving up or admitting defeat when it's really important that something gets done.

Years ago, when I started traveling a lot for speaking engagements, the airlines had a rule that in order to get the best fares, you had to stay over a Saturday night. One weekend I was finished speaking at my event. Knowing that my young twins were both sick with colds, I decided I needed to head home even though it was still Saturday. I called the airline to see if I could get a flight out that night. The customer-service person informed me that the Saturday night stay could not be waived without great expense, and that I would have to wait until

Sunday morning. But I knew this airline had more than forty thousand employees, and every time I called the reservations number a different person answered the phone. I also knew there were several empty seats on that Saturday night flight, so I kept calling back until I found a reservation agent who would make the exception for me without penalty—and I got home to my sick kids on Saturday night.

SWWs are experts at finding loopholes, figuring out a way around a rule that doesn't make sense, or maneuvering around even the biggest obstacles. They are undaunted, undeterred, and sometimes succeed just through sheer perseverance.

But this book isn't talking about just *any* kind of strong-willed woman. Strong will has a dark side, and when it takes the wrong turn, things can get ugly. Resourcefulness can turn into manipulation; creative solutions can become dishonest tactics; determination can present itself as purely stubborn pride. Every strong-willed woman has experienced both the light and dark sides of her nature. We know we are capable of great good—or great destruction. The difference in how we use the power we have lies in whether or not we have dedicated it to the Creator and Designer of it.

When honoring God is our top priority, our greatest triumph is succeeding without cheating, being dishonest, or using any other tactic that would dishonor Him. As we're called upon to find unique solutions to problems or creative angles for at-

tempting the impossible, we are fully committed to staying within the boundaries of God's law and direction and using our strong will to change the world for good. One woman put it this way: "A strong will doesn't have to have negative consequences, especially if it keeps us following in the footsteps God wants us to follow. It might be a lifesaver."

So what do we mean by *strong-willed women*? If we were talking about an army, these women would qualify to be part of a special operations unit. Special ops members stand apart from the others, not necessarily because they are smarter or more gifted than those in the infantry, but because they are, quite simply, *bolder*. In God's army, we find strong-willed special ops women from all walks of life—teachers, stay-at-home moms, CEOs, cashiers, homeschooling moms, entrepreneurs, missionaries, neurosurgeons, mail carriers. Whatever they do, wherever they are, they meet the world head-on—unafraid, undaunted, undeterred by those who tell them something can't be done. Each one is a woman with convictions of steel, willing to take the lead when called upon to use her passion, courage, and drive to withstand extraordinary conditions—even when her commitment requires a seemingly impossible mission.

Today more than ever, we're in a battle between good and evil. There is an enemy who is determined to steal the hearts and minds of children, destroy marriages, crush ambitions, and redefine ethics and spiritual morality. This is no ordinary



warfare, and the stakes are higher than temporary victory. The outcome of this warfare determines the destiny of every soul for eternity.

God doesn't force us to serve, but when we voluntarily enlist in His service, we become part of something greater than any of us, and He uses our strong will to accomplish more than we could have ever dreamed. As Paul reminded us in 1 Thessalonians 1:4–5: "It is clear to us, friends, that God not only loves you very much but also has put his hand on you for something special. When the Message we preached came to you, it wasn't just words. Something happened in you. The Holy Spirit put steel in your convictions." God gave us a strong will for a reason—and He calls us to use it for Him.

The Enemy would have us think that it's wrong to possess strong will. He tries to make us feel guilty for using it or to discourage us from speaking up, especially in the church. That's because he knows that when strong will is voluntarily given to God and used for His purposes, it becomes a mighty force for God. Can you imagine how quickly the Enemy has to flee when faced with groups of godly, strong-willed women coming together to pray? Do you think these women will be reluctant to step up and fight injustice, crime, or any other evil? Will they be afraid to stand against what's wrong or be daunted by seemingly impossible tasks? I don't think so.

We won't all be called to fight in the same way—some will be on the front lines; others will prefer to work in the background—but every SWW serving God will play a critical role in carrying out His mission.

## **HOW STRONG WILLED ARE YOU?**

When it comes to identifying who is officially a strong-willed woman, you'll find a huge variety of strengths and character traits. While we have many things in common, none of us will ever fit into a typical profile and description. Every SWW is unique, with stories so diverse and life experiences so varied that sometimes the only thing we can count on is never being bored!

You may already be comfortable with your strong will, embracing it with enthusiasm, or you may be reluctant to admit you have it—and resist using the term at all. You may live using intuition and spontaneity, or you might rely more on analysis and predictability. Strong will comes in all sizes, shapes, and personalities. But regardless of your background or uniqueness, you can use your strength to bring honor and glory to God—and you're destined to change the world in ways you can't even imagine. After all, it's almost always the ones with the most determination who make the most difference.

Of course, there's no definitive test to determine who is and isn't strong willed, but the following checklist can give you a good idea of the degree of strong will you have. Since we often get a better perspective of ourselves through the eyes of those

### **How Strong Is Your Will?**

Put a check mark in front of each of the following statements that best describes you.

- \_\_\_ 1. I can be very creative and resourceful when I need to accomplish a difficult goal.
- \_\_\_ 2. I'm not easily discouraged by circumstances if the goal is important to me.
- \_\_\_ 3. I'm willing to step up and take on a project when no one else will.
- \_\_\_ 4. I am not easily intimidated.
- \_\_\_ 5. I don't automatically take no for an answer.
- \_\_\_ 6. When given the ultimatum, "Do it or else," my first reaction is, "Or else what?"
- \_\_\_ 7. I usually become the leader in a group.
- \_\_\_ 8. If the rule doesn't make sense to me, I look for ways around it.
- \_\_\_ 9. I may resist unconditional obedience in order to offer a few terms of negotiation before complying.

## Who Says I'm a Strong-Willed Women?

who love us, ask at least two other people who know you best to take this same checklist on your behalf and see if *their* score for you matches your own. (If you're married, be sure one of those people is your husband.)

- \_\_\_ 10. I don't shy away from adventure or steps of faith if I really believe God has told me to do something.
- \_\_\_ 11. I've been told I don't apologize as quickly or as often as I should.
- \_\_\_ 12. When backed into a corner, I'm more likely to keep fighting than to just give up.

Total \_\_\_\_\_

If you scored between eight and twelve, you definitely qualify as a strong-willed woman! If you scored less than eight, you probably think that you really don't have all that much strong will, and yet, as you read through this book, you might be surprised how many times you recognize yourself. Even if you don't come out high on the strong-willed scale, you'll find this book contains a wealth of knowledge for how to bring out the best in the strong-willed women you know and love.

## **IT TAKES ONE TO KNOW ONE**

You would expect the author of this book to be an SWW—and I am. But there's something I'd like to clear up right away. This book is not about me—not all about my story or my views or my accomplishments. The truth is, God called me to write this book. I know you may think that sounds a little over the top, but I've never been more sure about anything in my life.

I had to fight hard to put this book in your hands—and the battles were not with flesh and blood. They were, and continue to be, fought against the Enemy of our souls. I know what Paul wrote about when he warned, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12, NKJV).

During the course of finding a home for this manuscript, some people told me: “You're not reaching a broad enough range of women—the audience for this subject is too narrow.” My response? “I believe it's a lot bigger than you think.” Many people will be surprised by how many other godly SWWs are out there. In fact, I recruited several hundred of them to share, through a series of surveys and conversations, their thoughts, their struggles, and their advice. Oh, how I have enjoyed spending more than a year reading and thinking about what they

wrote! What a privilege it's been to pray for them by name and to trust God to provide the best way to weave their words into this book.

Throughout the following pages you'll read comments from some of the more than four hundred women who responded to my surveys—SWWs who have a heart for God. Their words are honest and unvarnished and offer intimate glimpses into the lives of those who struggle to keep their resolve firmly under the control of the God they love and trust.

If you've ever been accused of being too bossy, too controlling, too intense; if you've ever struggled with letting your husband lead or gone toe-to-toe with your stubborn child; if you've ever wondered why the skills that make you so good at your job don't work at all in personal relationships; if you often wonder why some people don't *just snap out of it*, you'll find encouraging and intriguing answers in the following chapters. It's important to know that many women think a lot like you do.

Welcome to a book that understands you, written by someone who gets who you are and how you're wired. No one who has contributed to this book will raise her eyebrows and say, "I can't believe you think like that!" You'll be *encouraged* as you recognize how positive your strong will is when it's pointed in the right direction. You'll feel *reaffirmed* as you discover how much you have in common with other women of such strength

and purpose, and how “normal” you are. Most of all, you’ll feel *challenged* as you identify the practical ways to use your gift of strong will to honor God and His purposes.

As you read these pages, you’ll find insights and strategies for every relationship—from leadership to friendships to marriage to parenting to, most importantly, your relationship with God. You’ll smile as you read the comments, confessions, and advice from others who have walked in your shoes. You’ll nod a lot and find yourself thinking, *That’s me!* You may feel like one woman who wrote: “My history with the phrase *strong willed* has the connotation of ‘head butting’ or disobedience or selfishness. Is there something wonderful about this word that I’ve been missing all these years?”

Yes—and you’re about to find out what it is. Are you ready to start this adventure?

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