

Faith, Farming, and Family

Cultivating Hope and Harvesting Joy
Wherever You Are

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Caitlin Henderson



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*For Jake:
You are God's greatest gift to me
and my very best friend.
I love you most.*

*For Grady, Porter, and Finley:
I am so thankful God chose me
to be your momma.
You are brave; you are strong;
you are loved.*

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Welcome to the Farm

I know that as you're reading this, you aren't actually at our farm. But if I had my way, we would be sitting on my farmhouse front porch, watching a beautiful Kansas sunset. We would skip the small talk, and we would get down to the good stuff. We would talk about life, motherhood, faith, and so much more.

As we sipped our coffee and watched the cattle graze in the pasture and the sun dip behind the trees, I would share my story with you. I would bare a vulnerable heart in the hope that you might relate and feel less alone and that you'd be encouraged to step into the person you were created to be. But since we aren't actually on the front porch, I'll share my heart with you here in these pages and pretend we are.

I'm Caitlin, but most people around here call me Mom or honey. I'll let you choose. I grew up in rural America

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but was still a town girl. I fell in love with a farm boy named Jake, so I took his last name, and we now have three little farm kids running around. Our two boys are Grady and Porter, and our little girl is Finley.

This way of life didn't come easily for me, and as I looked back on my years on the farm, I realized something beautiful. I could see clearly how God had taken many experiences from our farm and used them to mold me. I saw how He brought lessons out of each moment and used them to guide me. I believe He does that for you, too, even if your stories involve significantly less dirt and fewer tractors.

Often we live life in a daze. We go through the same motions and jam-pack our schedules, and something tragic happens. We are so busy getting through life, we forget to stop and savor the simple beauty right in front of us. The joy that comes from the simplest of life's moments is passed by as we keep pushing forward at full steam. It can be so easy to forge ahead and miss the lessons that were ingrained deep within these moments. We don't stop to look back and see the way God has woven all things together. We forget to pause and notice God's redemption in the chapters of our stories and the ways He has woven Himself into each page. But what if we dared to no longer settle for missing out on the simple beauty of life? What if we looked back in awe as we saw what God has done?

It took marrying a farm boy from Kansas and raising a family in rural America for me to realize all I was missing by trying to keep up with the unrealistic expectations society has set for us. God used simple yet valuable lessons from my life on the farm to show me there is more to life right here in this moment. Whether you are in the middle of a wheat field or in the heart of a city, together we can grab hold of these moments.

In these pages, I'm bringing you into my rural way of life. The big moments, the small moments, and everything in between. Each chapter creates a picture of how God can use the most ordinary things—even life on a farm—to show His character and goodness. The chapters reveal that no matter who we are or how we struggle, God wants us and He wants to use us.

I hope that as you read these pages, you'll realize the beauty of life right in front of you and find the hope, drive, and encouragement to take the next step—even if it's your first step—into bravely going where God is calling you.

I pray that as you begin to feel a desire to draw closer to God, you'll give up good in exchange for great and be able to savor the abundant joy that comes when we step into all God has for us.

I hope that this book is our conversation on the porch. That you picture yourself next to me on a porch swing as you tell me the dreams God has placed in the deepest

corners of your heart. That your eyes open to the lessons you've learned throughout life and the ways your story has been written. And as you bravely share your vulnerable heart, I pray that you'll hear me say, "Go for it, sister! You can do it! I believe in you."

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1

Shark Week Has Nothing on Cows

Learning to Face Your Fears

I just knew this was the day I was going to be killed. I stood paralyzed in fear, rationalizing my terror with a statistic—*There are more people killed by cows every year than by sharks*—and I knew I was going to be one of those people. As the moos grew louder, so did the pounding of my heart.

One day early in our marriage, my husband, Jake, ended up in bed with the flu. I don't mean the "man flu," where he really just had some sniffles but thought he was dying. No, this time he was extremely sick, the sickest I had ever seen him. I looked out our bedroom window at the frost on the branches and the clouds moving in with a winter storm. And I looked at my husband huddled under the covers and knew there was no chance he could get out of bed.

The words came out of my mouth—"Stay in bed. I'm

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going to go feed the cows for you”—and I instantly regretted them. I was really hoping he would put up more of a fight, but I think the fever had made him somewhat delirious. Sure, I had ridden with him dozens of times to feed the cows, and I knew what and how much to feed them, but I was not confident in my ability to do it alone. I had become accomplished at opening and closing gates, and that was about it. I was far more comfortable sitting happily in the warm truck, smitten with my handsome farmer as he was busy out in the cold, feeding his “girls.”

I hadn’t grown up around cattle as Jake had. I had gazed at them from a distance while driving down our country roads, but that all changed when Jake and I started dating. I needed to know what I was getting into if I was going to become a farm wife, and cows were included in that mix. I always tried to play it cool, but I could climb a fence in a hot second if a cow even looked at me the wrong way. I had seen how angry a momma cow could get, and I knew the damage a 1,300-pound animal could cause.

I pulled on my coveralls and boots that frosty morning and climbed up into his big diesel truck. As I drove to the pasture where we kept our round hay bales, I gave myself a pep talk: “I’ve done this plenty of times with Jake. There’s no difference. He’s going to be so proud of me.” I’m obviously great at pep talks.

I grabbed the remote that controlled the bale bed and

turned it on, double-checking to make sure I hadn't pushed the wrong button. I had used the bale bed before and knew I needed to back straight up to the hay bale, use the remote to lower the two metal arms on the pickup bed, squeeze the bale with the arms, and use them to lift the bale onto the pickup bed. I watched in the mirror as I held the button and the arms lifted the bale of hay onto the back of the truck with ease. Step one was accomplished without a hitch.

My confidence was rising as I drove the few miles to the pasture where the cows were. I hopped out of the truck, grabbed the icy metal of the gate, and swung it open so I could drive into the pasture. I turned to head back to the truck, and just when the thought crossed my mind that maybe I'd be okay after all, it happened.

I saw the cows heading for me and the opened gate, so I hurriedly jumped in the truck, pulled into the pasture, hopped out of the truck to shut the gate, and hopped back in the truck. The cows had heard the truck pull into the pasture, and they knew it meant dinnertime. Sixty momma cows came running and surrounded the truck, loudly sounding their dissatisfaction that I was taking so long to deliver their meal. I opened the door and sank in the mud as I hit the ground. I froze.

Cows kill more people than sharks. That fact rang in my mind, and I contemplated my options. Giving up wasn't an option. The cows had to be fed, and there was no way

Jake could do it. More than that, though, my pride was not about to admit defeat. So I got clever. I still wonder whether any neighbors or people driving by saw what happened next, but I doubt it or I would have become a viral sensation on the internet.

I unstuck my boots from the mud, stepped up on the running board, and contemplated my next move. When Jake fed the cows, he would walk through the herd to the back of the truck, lower the bale of hay to the ground using the bale bed, and cut the net wrap that holds the bale together. I didn't walk to the bed of the truck and do what Jake did. I stared at the large, demanding cows surrounding the truck, stretching their necks to try to sneak a nibble of hay, and I became paralyzed with fear. So I climbed *on top of* the truck. I crawled across the roof, trying not to slide off, as an entire herd of cows mooed and probably wondered why this crazy lady wouldn't just feed them already. I then climbed down onto the bed to cut the net wrap off and lower the bale to the ground. Only then did I realize I had left the remote that controls the bale bed in the center console of the truck. I had no way to lower the bale.

Maybe most people would have realized they were being a little dramatic. Maybe they would have just hopped down and walked to the cab to get the remote. They wouldn't have let their fear win. But not me. I climbed back onto the roof, scooted my way to the still-

open door, shimmied down and got the remote, and reversed the process to get back to the bed. My nervousness grew, along with the impatience of the cows. I was in no danger where I was, yet my hands shook and my heart-beat pounded in my ears as I tried to finish the task. The cows were done waiting for me and were reaching over to eat the hay straight off the truck.

I cut the net wrap off the bale, lowered the bale to the ground, and proudly climbed back onto the roof, over to the door, and into the driver's seat. Mission accomplished. Now, I have to be honest: I don't think anyone knew that full story since I've never told the details until now. I have admitted to climbing onto the bed, but I don't think even Jake knew I climbed onto the roof. Because on the other side of my fear, I could see the irrationality of my actions in that situation. I was embarrassed by the fear that had gripped me. I threw logic out the window and let fear lead the way.

We are constantly faced with fear in this life, and every instance will require a choice from us, whether that fear comes from chasing our dreams, doing what God called us to do, or feeding cows. Although I got the job done, I used ten times the amount of effort I needed to as I danced around the situation instead of just facing the fear head on. Fear does one thing: it prevents us from living the lives God has called us to. It stops us in our tracks and keeps us from continuing to move forward in what God

has planned for us.

Being scared of feeding the cows felt like a small inconvenience with few repercussions. But when I zoomed out and looked at the bigger picture, I realized that this fear of the cows could control a huge portion of my life as a farmer's wife. One seemingly silly fear could have stopped me in my tracks and done so much damage. It's the little lies we believe and the fears we have that Satan uses to distract and direct us. The impact those little things can have on us is wildly disproportionate. So many of our decisions are directed by fear: what we eat, how we parent, how we step out in faith, where we go. Our lives are constantly being led by fear. We let it slow us and stop us. Sometimes we become almost comfortable with it. We grow used to it and begin to no longer see the severity of it.

What is the fear that has power over your decision-making? The fear that feels like life or death? The fear you would rather exhaust your energy trying to dance around than face head on? We have a choice to either continue this dance or use the tools God has given us to fight for the life He is calling us to. Will we put our effort into avoiding our fears or facing them?

God says to us, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). We tend to think that

overcoming fear is a good suggestion, something we'll get to later. We forget that God doesn't suggest being strong and courageous; He commands it. It is that important. He knows that day after day we will be presented with our fears, but He is reminding us that He will be alongside us in the midst of them.

These days, after years as a farmer's wife, I can feed the cows without climbing onto the roof of the truck. But I had to keep facing my fear until it no longer owned me. I had to go through the actions even when my insides felt as if they were going to burst. I had no option but to work through it. Saying I would try again tomorrow rather than facing it today only gave the fear more time to tighten its grip on me. Letting fear win once begins a ripple effect. Its hooks in us sink deeper every time we choose fear over faith. I can still climb a pasture fence faster than anyone, but I have become much braver through the years because I refuse to let fear control the path of my life. Your fear is probably different from mine, but I can bet that whatever it is has stopped you from being all in on the life God has planned for you.

When You Need a Push

I sat at a conference with forty other women as we went around the tables, listing our biggest fears pertaining to our dreams. My heart ached as I listened to the fears that were slowing and stopping those women: fear of failure,

fear of success, fear of being vulnerable, fear of losing everything, fear of looking like an outcast. They all had one thing in common. Each woman's fear was stopping her from being all in on the dream God had placed in her heart. It was stopping her from living out God's will for her, and it was holding her prisoner to the lies she was believing. Fear places us exactly where the Enemy wants us. It leaves us powerless and cowering. It is our admission of defeat.

But conquering fear once doesn't mean it's gone forever. No, it's a constant war. It tries to sneak back in when we have our backs turned, and before we know it, we are shackled by its chains once again. John 14:27 says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

We have to constantly be on guard and armed with the Word of God to remind us who we are and to whom we belong. We have to recognize the fear for what it is—a tool used by the Enemy to stop us—and we have to take the first step anyway. We need to remember that when we have faith, we will also have the peace that comes from God.

As I sat at that conference, I shared how God had once again put on my heart to host a weekend conference for farm wives called Fellowship on the Farm. I had held one two years prior but hadn't again since having our third

baby. I struggled to host that first conference because I didn't feel worthy. The fear that no one would come—or, worse, that women would come and it would go horribly—constantly assaulted my mind. I didn't believe that God could use me to reach other women's hearts, and I wasn't sure I could be that vulnerable.

I shared how God so clearly laid before me every detail of Fellowship on the Farm and what a massive success it had been. Many of the women left in tears after hugging me and telling me that Fellowship on the Farm changed their lives. God moved in a huge way that weekend, and though my goal had been to bless those women, I had been immensely blessed in return. He had used my struggles and trials to help other women and bring Him glory.

So, I told the ladies at my table that I felt God was asking me to do it again. I told them that the month prior, for ten straight days, a different person each day brought up Fellowship on the Farm. Some were previous attendees, some were women who'd wanted to attend but couldn't, and some weren't even farm wives but were women who had heard about it. My husband told me that God was going to smack me upside the head if I didn't listen; clearly, He was trying to get my attention.

I knew without a shadow of a doubt that God was calling me again to host Fellowship on the Farm. Yet despite His clear call, still I doubted my worth. I let fear tell me I

wasn't good enough and smart enough to pull it off a second time. It took my friend Terryn, who was also at my table, to snap me out of it. She steered me back to the biblical principles of obedience and trust. I reminded myself that I alone am not enough, that on my own I can do nothing, but that God put those dreams in my heart and could bring them to fruition through my obedience.

We've Got to Face the Fear

When God calls us to anything, we are going to be faced with fear. I don't mean the righteous fear of the Lord that gives us wisdom and keeps us humble, reminding us that we are clay in the Potter's hands. No, I mean the nasty fear from the devil himself that thwarts our righteous desires and actions. I believe it's one of the Enemy's greatest tools against us. God wants to use every aspect of our lives—our motherhood, careers, hopes, and dreams—for His glory and honor. What better way can the Enemy steal that plan than to make us afraid?

God knew we would struggle with this, and He gave us all the encouragement and truth we would need to go to battle. More than eighty Bible verses include the command to not be afraid. Matthew 10:28 takes that command a step further, as we are told to fear not those who can kill the body but the One who can kill the soul. Anytime I am really struggling with fear and I feel anxiety start to take over, I remember that verse, and I also go to

the book of Esther. Esther is one of my favorite examples of choosing to face fear, even with the possibility of mortal consequences.

Esther was a Jewish orphan raised by her cousin Mordecai. When the king of Persia was looking for a new queen, Esther quickly won his favor. She became the queen while keeping her Jewish nationality a secret. So, when the king's right-hand man put into motion a plot to slaughter the entire Jewish populace throughout Persia, Esther had to make a choice—one that was fraught with danger. Fear stared her in the face, waiting for a decision.

She could take the safe road and keep her secret hidden. She could stay silent and remain unharmed while the Jewish people throughout the Persian Empire were slaughtered. She could continue as queen, never saying a word, and just suffer on the inside while her people perished.

Or she could face her fear and try to save her people in order to follow the path God had set before her. Approaching the king, however, involved risk to her position and her life. Explaining her plea for him to call off the massacre would mean admitting the truth of her own ethnicity, and King Xerxes was known for his hot temper.

But Esther had a person in her life to remind her that she was in her queenly position for a purpose. She had someone who, instead of just telling her what she wanted to hear, pointed her to the biblical truth that we are to be

obedient when God calls us. Her cousin Mordecai reminded her that God can make a way without us, but what a sad day it is when He has to go to someone else because we were too afraid to allow Him to work through us. Mordecai encouraged her to choose faith over fear, even in the face of unfathomable danger. Esther chose faith, and despite her dangerous actions, her life was spared, as were her people.

While you and I might be tempted to discount the ways God asks us to step outside our comfort zones when we hear stories like Esther's, it is important to remember that every act of following God's call is important, kingdom-building work. Giving in to fear, whatever we're being asked to do, causes us to miss opportunities to take part in God's redemption here on earth.

When God asks me to be vulnerable every day about my struggles and shortcomings in order to bring Him glory, I want to say no. Fear tries to tell me I'm opening myself up to criticism and hurt, my story can't be used, and God doesn't want me. And when I click the Publish button on a blog post and put my faults and struggles out into the world, I know I am inviting criticism.

But I also know it's worth it when the messages start pouring in from wives and moms who thought they were alone. Their hearts were touched, and they felt a little less alone because I refused to let fear win. I am reminded that pouring into women the truth that God loves them

and made them for a purpose is worth the vulnerability. I am encouraged to believe that God is using me to help restore their hearts and refill their cups with truth and love. But I have come very close to telling God no because of the fear of failing.

I wish I could tell you that I'm a warrior against fear and that you can be too. I wish I could give you the end of this story: how I always look fear in the face and march right on. But I can't. Sometimes I let fear win, and sometimes I try to take the long way around. I climb on top of trucks and do anything I can to avoid facing it.

I've also learned over the years that we never regret letting God use us. When God calls us, that doesn't mean our paths will be painless or easy; it just means they're worth it. It is always worth it to choose faith over fear. We won't get it right every time, but that's why we have grace. We can let Him pick us up off the ground and dust us off, and we can try again tomorrow.

So, what are you facing today? What fear tugs on your heart and won't let go? What is the dream God has tucked into the depths of your soul that sounds too big and scary to accomplish? What situation are you in that is requiring you to be courageous and to trust the One who wants to use you for His glory?

I'm going to be that friend who reminds you of the truth you already know: God wants to use you, but you have the free will to tell Him yes or no. He wants you to

face that fear so you can get to the other side and experience what a life of freedom in Christ really means. He wants to work in your life and be the light that shines through you. He wants you to be obedient because He knows best and He knows your path. But you have to choose. Isaiah 35:4 says,

Say to those with fearful hearts,
“Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come,
he will come with vengeance;
with divine retribution
he will come to save you.”

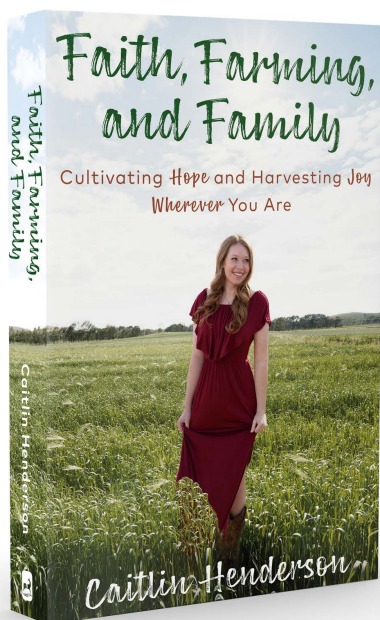
Today I encourage you to take the first step into whatever God is leading you to do. Is He asking you to start a business venture, take a mission trip, stay home with your babies, or tell the person in the grocery store about Jesus? Write down the scriptures from this chapter and hang them where you can see them often, or highlight or bookmark them in this book. And every time the Enemy tries to stop you from walking in your calling, go to those scriptures and arm yourself with truth.

You have to stand up and say you will no longer let fear rule your life and you'll face it head on until it no longer has power over you. You have to face it every day as a wife, mother, friend, daughter, and Christian. You have to take action, even when you're scared. You have to

walk where God has asked you to walk, even when you feel as if you could burst. You have to refuse to let fear leave its hooks in you any longer. You have to pull on your boots and feed the cows.

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