



LET'S ALL BE
BRAVE

Living Life with
Everything You Have

ANNIE F. DOWNS

New York Times Bestselling Author



PRAISE FOR

LET'S ALL BE BRAVE

I first met Annie Downs the summer she moved to Nashville, and I remember thinking she was the bravest person I knew. It's no easy thing to leave all that is familiar and comfortable to venture into the unknown. But I have watched God honor that decision and do more through Annie than I'm sure she could have ever imagined. Her willingness to follow where God leads is all over the pages of *Let's All Be Brave*. You will be inspired, challenged, and, hopefully, led to step out in faith to new places in your life as you read Annie's words and feel her cheering you on and reassuring you that God will meet you at every turn.

MELANIE SHANKLE, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Sparkly Green Earrings* and *Church of the Small Things*

For years I've said that part of our job is to be brave and go first so that we give other people the gift of going second. In this book Annie did exactly that. It's your turn now.

JON ACUFF, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Finish*

There are certain types of people who are capable of nudging us toward courage without making us feel small or insignificant, and Annie is at the front of the line. She is your favorite friend, the one who laughs at every dang thing, who tells stories you think must surely be invented (and yet they are not), and in the midst of it all, you discover you are dreaming new dreams. She has done that with *Let's All Be Brave*, and before you even mean to, you are putting your YES on the table.

JEN HATMAKER, *New York Times* bestselling author of *For the Love* and *Fierce, Free, and Full of Fire*

My friend Annie is a treasure, and her book is full of love, warmth, and courage. I can't wait to share it with so many friends so we can cheer each other on to the kind of bravery Annie is calling us to.

SHAUNA NIEQUIST, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Present Over Perfect*

Annie is everyone's best friend. Imagine sharing coffee, amidst outbursts of laughter, as she stirs your heart to be brave. You'll walk away with new vision, someone cheering you on, and a skip in your step.

REBEKAH LYONS, author of *You Are Free* and *Rhythms of Renewal*

I've never associated myself with the word *bravery*. But as I read Annie's poetic, riveting words, it occurred to me that I've misunderstood the concept. For me, it was always BIG and DRAMATIC and FILLED WITH EXCITEMENT. It was jumping from a cliff into the water, conquering the heights—and sometimes that's what it is. But it's also learning to say no, and recognizing the way Jesus has gifted you uniquely for the journey you walk today. It's listening for his voice and stepping out in obedience and faith, even before you know the details of what's to come. Only a few chapters in, Annie had convinced me of something radically comforting—that being brave looks different for everyone, and there is every reason to believe I can do it right here where God has planted me.

ANGIE SMITH, bestselling author of *What Women Fear* and *Chasing God*

Annie Downs is a comedic artist, a relational genius, and basically one of the bravest women I know. Her words sound like friendship and feel like courage, offering hope for those of us who want to live free instead of scared. *Let's All Be Brave* is fresh, relatable, and life-giving—her best book yet.

EMILY P. FREEMAN, author of *The Next Right Thing*

I am so grateful for Annie's voice and her courageous story in *Let's All Be Brave*. Authentic, moving, and completely relatable, Annie has done an amazing job of encouraging others to cast off fear and embrace an adventurous life of faith, bravery, and vulnerability.

NISH WEISETH, author of *Speak: How Your Story Can Change the World*

This is the book so many of us need to read. Finding courage right where we are is what will change the world. Annie Downs writes what she lives and believes, and we can feel it on every page. Anyone looking to grow in courage will be braver for reading this.

JEREMY COWART, celebrity photographer and founder
of the OKDOTHIS mobile app and Help-Portrait

Annie Downs tells the truth better than just about anybody I know. In *Let's All Be Brave*, she weaves God's truth in and through her own true stories to make us think about what real bravery looks like. And while the whole notion of bravery seems to conjure up images of fairy tales or superheroes, Annie shows that real-life bravery is really a matter of whispering yes to whatever prompting God puts on your heart. Annie's beautifully written words, which are filled with humor, tenderness, and godly wisdom, will remind you that while responding to God's call requires courage, living a brave life is worth the sacrifice. *He* is worth the sacrifice. Every single time.

SOPHIE HUDSON, author of *A Little Salty to Cut the Sweet* and blogger at Boomama.net

ALSO BY ANNIE F. DOWNS

*100 Days to Brave: Devotions for Unlocking
Your Most Courageous Self*

100 Days to Brave: Guided Journal

*A Life of Lovely: The Young Woman's Guide to
Collecting the Moments That Matter*

Looking for Lovely: Collecting the Moments That Matter

Looking for Lovely: Girls Bible Study

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Speak Love: Your Words Can Change the World

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of Falling in Love, and Why You Need a Hobby*

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Let's All Be Brave

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This is another day, O Lord.
I know not what it will bring forth,
but make me ready, Lord, for whatever it may be.
If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely.
If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly.
If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently.
And if I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly.
Make these words more than words,
and give me the Spirit of Jesus.

Amen.

BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I love writing in coffee shops. I love the hubbub of drinks being made and customers passing through, the conversations all around, and the smell of hot drinks and baked goods. So for each essay in this book, I've included the location where I wrote a portion, if not all, of that particular chapter. Think of me the next time you stop in at one of the coffee shops mentioned.

This book is full of stories—the ones I've lived, observed, and heard from others. I retell them to the best of my ability, as memory serves me. A few names and details have been changed in order to honor those I love, have loved, or could end up loving in the future. ☺

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Annie Dillard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.



NEW INTRODUCTION

I went back a few years ago to the very table at the very Starbucks in Holy Corner, my favorite part of Edinburgh. I couldn't believe the coffee shop looked and felt the same; the sidewalk held my feet in the same way as I walked through the door; the air smelled the same.

Gosh, there is just something about that place.

I care a lot about “place” in general. Where something happens matters almost as much to me as who it happens with and why it's happening at all. I trace my life up and down Mardale Crescent and around Bruntsfield Place, the streets I frequented the most when I lived in Edinburgh. Some of the shops have changed, but in general, it is still the town I lived in and, in some ways, grew up in. I see the bookstore and remember wishing one of my books would one day be on the shelf there. I see Montpeliers, the best restaurant along that stretch of road, and think of the early-morning breakfasts with friends, or that one date I went on that ended at Montys because he knew that restaurant held special meaning to me.

Even being back in this book feels like I'm going back to a

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place. That's the thing about memoir-type books like this—for me particularly, it feels like a yearbook. A moment in my life that is sealed and held and put in, well, a place. So I'm teary-eyed as I'm reading it again, as I'm passing by such moments and memories in my own life that I know have shaped me so profoundly that I cannot imagine life without them.

When people ask me about how I got “here”—wherever they have determined my HERE is that they are hoping to learn from or grow from or join me at—I always point them to this book. *Let's All Be Brave*, more than any other book I've written, is my manifesto of being who you always hoped you'd get to be.

It's not about jumping out of a plane (though you can). It's not about changing your life in one thousand ways. *Let's All Be Brave* has always been just about taking the brave step that is right in front of you and seeing if by chance it just may be the open door you have literally been praying for.

I'm returning to this book again today, reading to remind myself to be brave. It doesn't stop—these invitations we receive to get brave again. So I loop back again to live life with everything I have, even if it feels scary, even if the voices of fear are constantly whispering, even if it requires a yes or a no out of me that I wasn't prepared to say.

Nashville has changed a lot since I first moved here. It's changed far more than Edinburgh has, which feels right when I think of how I have changed in Nashville too. Nashville is growing up and growing out, and some of my favorite places are gone and some of my favorite places haven't opened up yet (I bet). I'm no longer the new girl looking for memories of this town; I'm the one who has them in droves, feasts on them, and

makes new ones as quickly as possible. Nashville has held me, cared for me, built me in many ways.

But it still asks me to be brave.

That's just the thing about it—the opportunities to be brave keep showing up. It's not like they are bigger or badder. I don't think the older we get, the harder it is. I actually just think little moments show up, like they always have, and invite us into a story we aren't sure we are able to handle (guess what though . . . you are). Life will ask you to be brave in your joys and brave in your sorrows. Life will ask you to be brave for yourself and brave for others. And what I know is that God is with you in those brave moments of invitation. The thing you didn't think you would survive? You've survived it. And the hope you thought would be deferred forever—well, it won't be. And the scariest thing you think God has ever asked you to do will pay off in a million little ways, like confetti tossed at a party.

I love the conversations that happen after you read this book. I love the things friends say to me in airports or restaurants about decisions they have made, changes they have embraced, pain they have confronted, joy they have grabbed hold of, because of what they read in *Let's All Be Brave*. It happened just last week—a friend walked up and hugged me, tears in her eyes, and told me a story of how God had met her right here in these pages and helped her to make the moves toward who she wanted to be and the life she wanted, the life God had for her.

I hope the same will be true for you. I hope that as moments are handed to you, the ones filled with laughter and the ones filled with tears, you will let yourself be as brave as you know you already are. I hope you won't tone down your courage one

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bit when given the chance to step into the right thing at the right time. I hope your courage spills over into the lives of the people around you, and I hope they get braver because you got braver. I hope that when you finish this book, you will know the thing you've been needing to know in order to make the change you've wanted to see. God is with you, God is for you, and his plans for you are wilder and kinder and bigger than you know. I'm cheering for you. I'm doing my best here too. You be brave. I'll be brave. Let's all be brave.

AN HONEST MOMENT

My dining room table, Nashville, Tennessee

I'm not brave. I lack courage. I'm thirty-three years old, and I sometimes cry when I leave my parents' home in Georgia to drive back to my little brick house in Nashville. I have never jumped out of a plane, and I only ride roller coasters when I'm trying to impress a boy.

Some people live for an adrenaline rush. I live for a sugar rush.

I don't think it is fun to risk, to gamble, to possibly lose. I like safety, smart choices, and learning the easy way. Tell me it's a bad idea and I'm going to believe you.

A few months ago, my friend Lyndsay's car ran out of gas. (Something that does not happen to me because I do *not* let my gas gauge go below a quarter of a tank. I never once saw the "low gas" light come on in my first car. I don't know if it even worked. Never risked it.) But Lyndsay is a natural-born risker, and she pushes that two-door coupe to its gassy limits.

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So her car coasted into Nichole's parking lot, and Lyndsay carefully directed it into a slot. It was out of gas, out of fumes, literally just rolling because the wheels are round. Before sitting down for dinner with Nichole, Lyndsay called her boyfriend, who brought over a can of gas. While she was still at the table, he filled up her tank with a few gallons of gas and then drove home. When she was ready to leave, her car worked fine.

Lyndsay told me the next day, "That did *not* hurt enough for me not to do that again."

She's the valedictorian at the School of Learning the Hard Way. And she wears it like a Ms. Tennessee sash and crown.

That's how risk takers roll. That is not how I roll.

But I want to be brave.

And I'm going to ask you to be brave too, even if you, like me, don't take to it naturally. I'm here to ask you to please do that thing in your heart that scares you to death. To make that move or leap or step or sound you wouldn't have made a week ago.

There is no formula and there are no rules. There is the Bible, our guidebook for all things, but other than that, being brave is organic and spiritual and a unique journey for each person.

I won't be making a list of brave things you should do. I won't be saying, "Here is exactly what courage looks like" or "If you want to really risk in a way that impacts the people around you, do these particular things." I don't think that works. I don't think you need me to tell you what to do. I think you know. I think you just need a little pregame warm-up. A little something to oomph you along. An understanding of the map you are holding.

An Honest Moment

I had lunch with my friends Chris and Jimmy this week, and we were talking about this very subject. And Chris said, “Courage implies action, like you are going somewhere or going to do something.” Courage. Maps. Movement. We talked about what it means to be on your map and off your map and whether there’s a map at all.

I left that barbecue lunch buzzing with hope and ideas. I love talking about what courage looks like (probably more than I like actually living it). I think an appreciation for brave people and brave moments has been in me forever. To this day, my favorite Steven Curtis Chapman song is “Burn the Ships” from way back in the mid-1990s. It’s a song about Spaniards sailing for Mexico in 1519, and upon arrival and in the midst of many hardships they wished they could go back. Instead they decided to burn their ships. Stay there forever. And figure out what that life would hold.

Brave.

That stuck with me when I first heard the song as an awkward middle schooler—sometimes you set sail without a view of the destination, trusting the tools you’ve got. And once you get there, you stay. You move forward, not backward. You burn your ships.

In my mind, when I think about you and me and where we are going, I see ships sailing and maps waving in the breeze and forks in the road. I see airplane arcs on tiny television screens and I see navigational tools strewn across a desk.

I see action. Movement. Travel.

X marks the spot, but it’s not about the X. (Also, it’s not about your ex.) It’s about getting there. It’s about the brave things you have to do between here and there to make you the

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person your X deserves. (Again, not what your ex deserves. You have got to get over him or her.)

But here's the problem: I'm known for getting lost. I cannot be trusted to lead if we need to get from here to there. So if you're on a journey or an expedition or an adventure, I'm going to get you lost.

If I had my pickings of what flaws to be known for, I'd go for something like "too pretty" or "too nice." Instead it's usually "too directionally challenged to be in charge at this moment." (Or any moment of travel, really.) Mama always said I'd marry a mapmaker—it would be the only way to balance out the deficit in my skill set. So any cartographers out there, give a girl a call.

I love maps. Before Siri would talk to me on my iPhone and tell me when to turn right and when to turn left and redirect me because somehow I had still missed the turn, I had a lot of maps in my car. I still have a few because, you know, I'm me and I get lost and I can't get too much directional assistance.

I need maps. And so do you. Maps of the mall because, seriously, I just need to pop into Gap for a breezy white cardigan. Maps of the airport because Atlanta's airport is practically its own city. Maps of your town and maps of your state. Maps of the places you've been that you never want to forget and maps of the places you want to go to.

Your life, start to finish, is a map. And we are HERE. That's all I know. I don't know where you've been and I don't know where your map will take you. I only know there will be moments when you feel like the map has turned or changed and moments when you realize you've read this map wrong all along. You will crumple it up and throw it down, only to return to it for direction once you finish your cryfest. I get it. I know.

An Honest Moment

But it's your map. Not my map. Or my cousin's map. Or your spouse's map. It's yours. And there is something so sweet about God doing life that way. Giving you your own rivers to cross and mountains to climb and forks in the roads of your life that I will never come to. You get to be brave right there, in each of those places. Bravery begets bravery. If you'll be brave, I'll be brave. And when I am brave, you feel like you can be too. We are holding hands and I promise I won't let go.

Let's all be brave.

JUST START

Mountain Brook Starbucks, Birmingham, Alabama

I think the hardest thing about writing is the blank page. Or computer screen. It's said to be a writer is to have homework every day for the rest of your life. You remember that feeling, don't you? When you have a paper to write or an assignment to turn in and you know you can do it if you can just. get. started. I find the same to be true if I'm creating a presentation for a conference I'm speaking at or if I'm trying to write a message on a Father's Day card. I know what I want to say. I just often don't know where to start.

My favorite hamburger in Nashville is the turkey burger with a gluten-free bun at Burger Up in 12South. It's always cooked perfectly, and they have this honey mustard aioli that will just bless you. The owner of Burger Up is Miranda. She's a bit of a legend in our neighborhood for taking a boring stretch of street and adding some substantial eateries. I wrote my first book almost solely at her coffee shop, Frothy Monkey. Next came Burger Up and then a sandwich shop, and now? Josephine.

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Josephine, the newest restaurant to situate itself on 12th Avenue South, hasn't even opened yet, but everyone in our neighborhood is buzzing about it. They're going to have a Sunday brunch that is pretty much all the permission I need to eat nowhere else after church except right there in one of her perfectly made booths.

Every time I run into Miranda on the street or in Burger Up, I ask how Josephine is coming along. She always tells me about another decision she has made—the style of patio furniture, the foods she has traveled across the country looking for, the right chef to bring to town, the kind of napkins and cutlery.

Every decision requires her to start somewhere. The menu was blank. The walls were blank. Even the title of the restaurant was blank. But one day she made that first decision toward offering us a new neighborhood favorite, and once things got started, they haven't stopped. Her courage shows up as community tables, delicious food, and warm hearts all up and down the neighborhood thoroughfare.

I'm flying to Minneapolis today. Travel is a major part of my life and job right now, which means fewer turkey burgers from Burger Up, but luckily, on an airplane seems to be where I get lots of writing done. Sitting in a window seat with my laptop open and *All Sons & Daughters* pouring truth into my ears—this is prime writing time for me.

As I'm buzzing over some farmland (I'm guessing somewhere in Iowa), I'm thinking about how hard it is to start, whether it's a new book, a new restaurant, or any other dream you may have. To start the journey toward that thing . . . I don't know what it is for you, but it's not a journey *to* courage. The moment you take that first step, the moment you start, little

seeds of courage, the ones I believe are already planted there right now, begin to sprout in your heart. You aren't headed out to find courage. It's in you, it is blooming, and it is with you as you travel and say yes to things that seem scary. Remember, it's not only the X that matters; it's getting there.

At my home church, the high school students host and run the middle school retreat. It's a really neat experience. As an adult leader a few years ago, I loved watching my sister Sally, an eighteen-year-old senior, be the retreat director. She nailed it. It was the only middle school retreat I ever attended, but I'm pretty sure she was the best retreat director *ever*. The coolest part about being an adult leader was I literally just had to supervise, not really plan or lead. It was awesome.

We were at one of those retreat centers that have cabins and bunk beds and two showers for every twenty people, and it was as rustic as you are picturing.

And I loved it. Yes, I absolutely love retreats. You know why? I love when all my friends are trapped in the same place for days at a time. Is that weird?

On the Saturday night of this middle school retreat, I crawled into my little twin bunk, shoved up next to another twin bunk, and closed my eyes. It wasn't thirty seconds later that I felt someone tap my shoulder.

Because we are a people who love to prank, I was sure I was about to (1) be sprayed in the face with some sort of liquid or (2) get to participate in pranking someone else. Instead, it was Mallory, another senior helping lead the retreat. Because it was March, Mallory was just a few months from graduating and heading off to Auburn University.

She asked me to scoot over, so I did. I was worried—Is

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something sad? Something wrong? To snuggle up next to your leader in a twin bed means that something isn't right. So I lay there on my side as Mallory stared up at the springs on the bunk above us. Light from the moon barely snuck in through the curtains, but it was enough for me to watch as she was obviously wrestling with something in her heart.

"I don't want to go to Auburn," she whispered, and I heard the tears dripping onto my pillow. I waited, thinking she had more to say. When she didn't, I responded.

"Okay, Mal. You don't have to."

"I think," she stammered slowly, "I want to be a missionary. I want to go to YWAM." Her voice was still shaky.

"Okay, Mal. You can do that." I said it quietly. I wanted it to fall softly into her heart. Of course, I wasn't her parent or the final decision maker in her life, but I knew all that would shake out. She didn't need me to help her figure out *how* it would work out; she needed me to tell her that it *could*. I know what it is to need to say the brave thing, whether it actually works or not. To just start the process.

Mallory didn't begin her journey toward courage right there. That little glow of courage was growing in her heart for days, maybe weeks. And then in the hours and minutes before she actually got up out of her bed, it grew feet, didn't it? Feet that brought her to me.

Somewhere, at some point, she started being brave—probably before she even realized it. It wasn't when she told me. It was long before, when something in her heart began to beat with a different rhythm.

You just have to start, my friend. That thing that is whispering on your insides? That conversation you need to have

or that place you need to go? That job you want to try or that ministry you want to attempt? That major you want to pick at college or that mission trip you want to go on?

You've got to start somewhere.

So do.

Tell somebody you want to be brave.



Today I volunteer as a leader for the college ministry at my church. It is one of the greatest joys of my life. I love that after four years of living in Nashville, virtually blind to the college scene (besides noting the massive decline in traffic during the summers), those students are now one of my favorite reasons for living in this town.

Each Sunday night after the service ends, we head together to the gym and eat cereal. Yep, cereal. College students totally dig it. It's hilarious. Our pastor, Pete Wilson, and I have a little game we like to play. We stand behind the cereal table and try to guess which cereal the students will pick. There are usually six or so options—the staples like Honey Nut Cheerios and Frosted Flakes and the classics like Cinnamon Toast Crunch and Lucky Charms, and then there are the wild cards that trade out, like Cap'n Crunch and Reese's Puffs, for example.

Here is how the game is played. A new young college guy will come over to the countertop lined with cereal and milk and supplies, pick up a bowl, and we'll introduce ourselves. "I'm Annie. This is Pastor Pete. What's your name?" And the startled student will say, "Uh, John."

I smile and continue. "John, we're so glad you're here. Now,

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Pastor Pete and I have a little competition going. We'd like for you to look at the six cereal options and pick the one you want. BUT. Don't say it out loud. Just think it. And then we'd like to guess what you are going to pick. You ready? Have the cereal in your mind?"

At this point, the student is usually quasi-entertained (because I'm obnoxious and Pete is really cool) and wants to play along, so he picks which one he would like—and we guess.

"Cinnamon Toast Crunch?" It's usually my go-to guess.

"Nope," John replies.

"Cap'n Crunch Berries?" Pastor Pete makes a left-field guess.

"Yep!" John says, and fills his bowl.

Now I'll tell you this, Pastor Pete has a pretty solid guessing percentage. But I'd like to have a formal investigation initiated because I am almost 100 percent sure that at least half the guesses Pastor Pete gets right are because the student changes his mind based on what the pastor thinks the kid wants.

And just so you know, I get about one out of every eight cereal guesses right. Terrible winning percentage, I know. But they don't lie for me like they do for Pastor Pete.

Also, on a personal note, this is my favorite time of the Sunday night events. I get to talk to every student and connect with him or her week after week. As silly as it sounds, this is a big part of my ministry, and I love it.

Last week, Pastor Pete was out of town, so a new volunteer, Paul, stood with me at the cereal table. I tell Paul how Pastor Pete and I have this little guessing thing we do, and I suggest he and I try it for a little while. So we start guessing some of the students' cereal choices. I'm totally off my game and go 0 for 7

right off the bat, which leads to a lot of students rolling their eyes and my confidence going down the drain. Ouch.

Paul and I decide to take a break from guessing. We just start chatting as the students keep getting cereal—when, out of the corner of my eye, I see one of my college buddies, Will, mix Cocoa Puffs and Cheerios, and I think that is just a crime against all things cereal. I turn my head, point my finger, and say, “No sir, Will, that is gross!” Because apparently I believe I’m allowed to guess *and* judge cereal choices.

A few minutes later, as Paul and I continue to chat, he looks at me and says, “I don’t know that I’ve ever told anyone this, but I think I want to write a book.”

And there is the moment, right there among college kids and sugary carbs and inappropriate cereal combos. The moment when courage stopped bubbling only on the inside. The moment when Paul believed enough in himself and in the God who made him that he took a step of courage. He started.



I didn’t plan to write books. Today’s call to courage? I need to finish writing this book and be willing to write about some things I don’t want to share but feel nudged by God to do so. But in 2006, when this whole journey began for me, it looked like eight pages.

I had to start somewhere.

The day I finished Beth Moore’s *Believing God* study, I sat down at my computer and pounded out an eight-page document of my life as a storyteller—from a childhood full of exaggeration to an adult life of wanting to be full of truth but telling

LET'S ALL BE BRAVE

the BEST stories. I wrote about how God was revealing to me, through Mrs. Beth's teaching, that this was the direction my life was about to go.

God's brave moment for me that day in February 2006 was to write out what I was feeling with regard to sharing stories. He knows me. He knows you. He knows we need dreams in pieces because we would be too scared of the whole puzzle. Had I known I'd be an author and a speaker back then, I probably would have crawled under my covers and stayed there for a year or five. I'm here today because of the little starts and the brave moments dotted throughout my writing career that have grown into this.

I think of King David, way back when he's a kid checking on his brothers in the battle against the Philistines. When he gets there, everyone is scared to death of Goliath, this beast of a man who is fighting for the other army.

Young David the shepherd tells King Saul he'll go against Goliath. Everyone is stunned because David is a kid and the rest of the Israelite army, full of adult dudes, is afraid of him. David's response shows us the importance of the daily steps of courage that lead to the bigger story.

But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the

lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Saul said to David, “Go, and the LORD be with you.”

—1 SAMUEL 17:34-37

And go he did! You can read what happened in this epic battle between David and Goliath in the rest of 1 Samuel 17. It’s worth a read, even if you’ve known the story your whole life.

David, as a shepherd boy, fought a lion. And a bear. And rescued his sheep. He never killed the lion in preparation for the bear. He didn’t kill the bear in preparation for Goliath. He just chose to be brave at every turn—to do his job and protect the sheep. And as the challenges grew in scope, so did David’s belief in the ways God had uniquely created him, and more importantly, David believed wholly in who God is and in the reality that David had a role to play on this planet that would require courage. Just like me. Just like you.



I’ve dreamed of this book for a long time. I want to tell two stories with my life.

1. God made you on purpose.
2. God made you to be brave.

In 2006, I wasn’t dreaming of writing books. I could barely imagine writing out the story of how I wanted to tell stories! Then I started a blog that took courage every day to write. Then I wrote a Bible study for a group of high school girls who came

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over to my house on Monday nights. Then those printed-out lessons became *Perfectly Unique*, a book read by thousands of girls around the world. And then came my next book, *Speak Love*. And now we are here. You and I. And we are fighting against the fear.

My lion.

My bear.

My Goliath.

Oh my.

David wasn't done after Goliath. I am not done being brave either. Neither are you, I hope.

My prayer for you today is that you will open the eyes of your heart to the map and the next brave thing and the step you need to start. Tell someone your dream. Maybe even at the bottom of this page, or in the margin, you can write that first step. Make that first move to research or learn or pray about the thing that is like a God-struck match lit on your insides.

Maybe for you, it's writing a note. Singing a song. Making a phone call. Having a conversation. Composing a story. Writing a check. Booking that trip. Sending an email. Going on a date. Reading a book. Signing up.

I'm trying to list as many options as possible, but you know the thing God is doing in your life better than I do. It's time to get quiet before the Lord and ask him what it looks like for you to live a life of courage *today*. To start.

Just start.



By the way, Mallory didn't go to Auburn. She went to Australia with YWAM. We would often skype and talk about that day at

the middle school retreat when God changed everything in her plans. After completing her course, Mallory came back home and married a great, godly guy, and now they have a daughter. They are missionaries in the Middle East. Every day they tell people about Jesus in a country that is closed to Christianity.

Just look at that. Look what her courage started.

And I can tell you firsthand that the moments of my greatest fears—those times when I was sure I was going to wimp out under the pressure of it all—have also been the open doors to the greatest changes in my life. So I step out, full of fear, but trusting that God is on the other side in new and wonderful ways. And so far? He always is.

BELIEVE

12South Frothy Monkey Coffee Shop, Nashville, Tennessee

I have a lot of respect for tennis players. Tennis players like themselves a lot. They have a strut. A swag. They may play for a tennis team, but when it is time to swing the racquet, it's just one. Alone. Don't hear me saying they are self-centered. That's not (always) true. What I am saying is that tennis players are confident enough in themselves that they are willing to walk out on a court alone and win. Alone.

I grew up playing soccer. I adore soccer. I'm one girl on a field of eleven. I can play and have an impact, but if we lose the game, I can look around the field like, "Sheesh, girls. What just happened there?" Because, you know, it couldn't be *my* fault. Ahem.

I'm about to get my brag on. Prepare yourself.

I'm a good soccer player. In my prime, I could kick a soccer ball with a decent amount of power. Once in high school I slammed one from center field that bounced off the crossbar of

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Living Life with Everything You Have

By Annie F. Downs

A call to embrace the God-given courage living inside you from host of the *That Sounds Fun* podcast and bestselling author Annie F. Downs.

How often does fear hold you back from the very things you most want to taste, touch, and experience? Annie admits she's not exactly the bravest woman in the world. But Annie knows that courage resides inside each one of us, and **she's on a mission to conquer her own fears while encouraging you to do the same.**

Annie uses honest and often humorous illustrations from her own life, contemporary real-life examples from the lives of others, and fascinating biblical stories to challenge you to discover God's surprising answers to overcoming fear, uncertainty, and anxiety, and more! Here is your call to step into those places that require courage, giving you the help you need to take the next step forward—even when it's scary.

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