

# YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

DARING TO BELIEVE THE  
GOD WHO CALLS YOU

*Jess Connolly*

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*You Are the Girl for the Job*

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*For Ruby, who reminds me that  
the hype about God is always true.*

yet I knew the  
moment I started  
worrying about  
whether or not  
I was good enough  
for the job, I  
wouldn't be able to  
do it.

- MADELEINE L'ENGLE

# SIX STEPS TOWARDS ABUNDANT OBEDIENCE

Foreword by Annie F. Downs . . . . .	13
Introduction: My Spin Class Revelation. . . . .	17

## I. CALL IT QUILTS

1. It's Quitting Time . . . . .	31
2. Let's Talk about Your Ideal Self. . . . .	40
3. He Is the Hero, You Are the Rescue Plan. . . . .	52

## II. FIND YOUR PEOPLE

4. Let's Redefine the Starting Line. . . . .	69
5. Who Are You Broken For? . . . . .	80
6. These Are My People . . . . .	96

## III. USE WHAT YOU'VE GOT

7. What Kind of Woman . . . . .	111
8. God Has the Last Word in Your Weakness . . . . .	125
9. The Best Gift Ever . . . . .	134

## IV. FACE YOUR FEAR

10. Come Out, Big Alice . . . . .	149
11. Fear, Failure, and Fighting Back. . . . .	160
12. Get Out Your Mouse Traps . . . . .	174

## **V. CATCH THE VISION**

- 13. The Stage We Crave (And Something Better) . . . . . 193
- 14. Catch the Vision. . . . . 201
- 15. Abundance Here and Now. . . . . 216

## **VI. MAKE YOUR MOVE**

- 16. The Most Important Step. . . . . 229
- 17. A Few More Things Before You Go . . . . . 239
- 18. You're Doing It Right. . . . . 247

*Acknowledgments* . . . . . 253

# FOREWORD BY ANNIE F. DOWNS

I don't know I need a reminder until I do.

Do you know what I mean?

My phone alarm just went off reminding me of a lunch meeting I have today. My assistant just sent me a message that I need to return a phone call this afternoon. My sister just texted me to make sure I had a date on my calendar to go to an Atlanta United soccer game with her next month.

I love all these reminders. I need to be reminded.

The actual purpose of a reminder is to RE-MIND us. To put back in our mind something we have forgotten, or maybe even never known.

Re-mind: 1. cause (someone) to remember someone or something. 2. cause someone to think of (something) because of a resemblance or likeness. 3. bring something, especially a commitment or necessary course of action, to the attention of (someone).

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

Jess helps me remember things. She and I sat at a dinner in 2013 until the entire restaurant was closed, all the chairs turned over on tables, all the floor swept, all the employees annoyed and ready to go home. It's a place in Germantown neighborhood in Nashville and it was warm outside. That's about all I remember except the way Jess told her story.

She looked me in the eyes the whole time. She teared up, so did I. She laughed, so did I. She laid out pieces of her heart and story that I did not know but were important for me to understand and for her to be understood. She needed to walk backwards a bit for us to walk forward. She was telling me things I didn't know, but it also felt like she was reminding me of something greater that I had always known.

I had always known I could do the thing that was right in front of me, but she reminded me that I had everything I needed.

I had always known that while the road would be tough and it wouldn't always be easy- the going backwards into my own story and going forward into my calling- but she reminded me how much it mattered, because she did it too.

I had always wanted a cheerleader to tell me I was the girl for the job, and Jess reminded me.

Jess also causes me to think of some people I really love because of the resemblance or likeness. She reminds me of my mom, a strong business woman who knows her professional strength. She reminds me of my friend Haley, a stay at home mom who finds joy and purpose and strength in raising her children. She reminds me of my pastor Kevin who teaches us to pray, who turns to God first, and loves the local church so deeply. She reminds me of my friend Nicolle who works out regularly because her entire self is better because she cares



## FOREWORD BY ANNIE F. DOWNS

about her health. And she reminds me of Jesus because of her resemblance to Him. She models strength and balance and joy and all these things I see in my relationship with Him.

Jess has done all that for me. But now I get to remind you. I get to focus on that third definition of “remind”. I want to bring something to your attention. It is a necessary course of action.

You are the girl for the job.

Jess is the girl to remind you.

To God be the glory.



## INTRODUCTION

# MY SPIN CLASS REVELATION

I sat on a bike in a dark and emo cycling studio. The room was shadowy, with lights that rose and fell, evoking emotion, matching the rise and fall of our intensity. The music was loud—so loud the words were almost indistinguishable, but the impact wasn't diminished. There was a thumping, a thriving undertone set by the sound, and it was perceived by everyone in the room. I'd come in that morning defeated, to say the least, jet-lagged and heartsick from an incredibly hard season, but I found myself swept up in the passion and energy in the absolute best way.

It was a 7 a.m. spin class in Los Angeles. I was on the West Coast for a work trip, and the whole week, I'd honestly felt like a character in a romantic comedy. You know, the one where the woman gets scorned by her lover and rushes off to see some new piece of the world, only to find herself and figure out that she was all she really needed in the first place? Okay—that wasn't *quite* the story I was living, but I was a broken gal, temporarily in a new place, praying for a fresh wind and hoping for some healing.

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

I'd come to LA fresh on the heels of an incredibly painful season in our church. I'm a pastor's wife—a church planter's wife, to be exact—and while some moments of leading the church are exhilarating and we feel like we're seeing in new colors, other seasons are heartbreaking, and it feels like signing up to run on mission is the same as signing up to have your heart poked by toothpicks incessantly for years. We'd recently sat through meeting after meeting after meeting, handling our own shortcomings and sorting through the pain of the people we love the most—pain we'd caused, pain they'd caused, all of it hard and all of it broken.

This work trip had been planned in the midst of it, so while leaving felt like the absolute last thing that I wanted to do, it was what I had to do, and I was trying to make the most of it. I packed my sunglasses and my most West Coast-y clothes (lots of black!) and hopped on the plane, eager to see what God had for me on the other side. As I made the almost-all-day trek from Charleston, SC, to LAX, I found a sliver of airplane internet and booked a bike at my favorite spin place, Soul Cycle, for a 7 a.m. class.

Have you ever been to Soul Cycle? It's a mix between a dance club, a fitness class, and a really incredible worship service. I basically can't get enough of it. Right now you can only find a true Soul Cycle class in pretty large cities, so anytime I'm in a bigger city, I figure out how to make my way toward one. Austin; LA; Washington, DC; New York—if I'm in one of those spots, I'm heading to Soul Cycle.

So far, I haven't made it through a class without crying—not because the physicality of the exercise is so tough, but because the experience is so moving for me. It's the perfect combination for my personality to feel alive. Mixing physical exertion with

## INTRODUCTION

loud music and excited crowds, a dark room, dance music, and someone pushing me to go further—I'm done. I'm toast. I'm so happy. I'm so moved. I'm in heaven. Soul Cycle is my happy place.

It's not everyone's cup of tea—if you're easily overstimulated or overwhelmed, or if being pushed emotionally and physically makes you feel threatened, you're going to want to stay far away from the dark room with the thumping music and the headset-ready instructor who wants to change your life.

I sat there in the room with my dark and bruised-up heart, desperate to move and desperate to be moved by God—searching for Him in a spin class for two significant reasons: (1) I think God can move anywhere and often does, and (2) my church suddenly didn't feel so safe for me. There were no leaders to blame other than myself, and there was nowhere to hide, so I was looking to be led and fed anywhere and everywhere God was willing to show up.

I was listening to sermons, spending hours on my knees, and poring over God's Word for encouragement—but I was also looking for Him on this trip to LA. *Come Father—breathe a fresh wind, bring a fresh fire, do more soul work in me in this short trip than I could ask or imagine. Put the romantic comedy storyline to shame with the renewed sense of purpose You're going to bring. Please.*

I went in needy. And God showed up.

## THE WORD OF GOD AGREED

The instructor's name was David, and I can't tell you that he's a Christian. But I can tell you I wouldn't be surprised if he was,

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

because it was 7 a.m. on a Friday, and David straight-up got to work ministering to everyone in the room, including me.

From the moment the doors closed, the lights dimmed, and the volume of the music increased, he started preaching. To be honest, he never got on his bike once—he had a stand-in gal to do the cycling for him so he could use every ounce of his energy to lead us. And as the music pulsed and our feet started pumping, David paced and yelled.

He started the class honoring one rider who just happened to be celebrating her birthday—he had us cheer for her—and then he got more intentional and personal in his affirmation as the class went on.

He started by telling her that joy was her birthright, hope was her birthright, and love was her birthright. He told her that this was a fresh year, a fresh chance to be who she was made to be, to step into her calling and step away from the fears of the past. I was just one bike behind her, and I watched her feet speed up, watched the tears carve paths down her cheeks, watched her nod in agreement with what he was saying. David was giving, she was receiving, and it was beautiful.

But then he turned to the rest of us, and in a loud and emphatic voice, he began assuring us of the same truths! It might not be our birthdays, it might not be a literal new year for us, but it could be the start of something new—we could leave behind the brokenness of our pasts and press into a new season. His words meant more to me than he could have guessed, because I didn't just hear them as general wisdom and empty truths.

The Word of God tucked into my heart agreed with the affirmations this stranger was saying over me. Second Cor-

## INTRODUCTION

inthians 5:17 was resounding in my brain: *The old has gone, the new has come!* It was the very first verse I memorized as a believer twenty years ago, and the Lord was bringing it to mind in that very moment, reminding me that the hurt I'd left behind in Charleston didn't have to dictate my future purpose. I was grateful, relieved, and refreshed—so I pedaled faster.

A song began that coincided with a steep climb on our bikes. As it progressed, we were supposed to choose to increase the incline ourselves. If you haven't been to a stationary cycling class, here's how this works: the difficulty of the pedaling is controlled by a small knob on your bike. As you turn it to the right, the resistance increases, simulating a hill. As you turn it to the left, pedaling gets easier. You can feel like you're flying downhill, riding on flat ground, or basically biking up a mountain—you choose by turning the knob and picking your own poison. It's worth it to know that theoretically, you could fake your way through a spin class pretty easily—keeping it turned to low resistance the entire class—but I'm sure you know the saying: you'd only be cheating yourself.

As David encouraged us to keep turning the wheel, to keep pushing against the defeated feeling within us that told us we couldn't, he dropped yet another truth bomb: “You will repeat what you don't repair.” He started explaining, again, the universal truth that the wounds for which we don't seek healing will just be replicated over and over in our lives. I thought about my romantic comedy running story, how I'd escaped Charleston just at the pinnacle of my pain, hoping to come back lighter and somehow not caring about all that had been done to me, somehow instinctively able to avoid making the same mistakes over and over again.

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

Hebrews 12:14–15 from *The Message* (MSG) version of the Bible came to mind:

Work at getting along with each other and with God. Otherwise you'll never get so much as a glimpse of God. Make sure no one gets left out of God's generosity. Keep a sharp eye out for weeds of bitter discontent. A thistle or two gone to seed can ruin a whole garden in no time.

You will repeat what you don't repair. A thistle or two can ruin the whole garden. God's truth, transcending church walls yet again.

*Lord, I thought as I spun faster, I'm listening. I receive this moment and all that You're bringing to the surface. I'll acknowledge my own pain and even examine it, if growth will come on the other side.*

## THE PROBLEM PRESENTED

Gals, I could write a hundred more pages about the wisdom David shared that morning. He just kept going and going and going—affirming, encouraging, gesturing wildly, and shouting eternal promises to my shattered heart. The Holy Spirit inside me was working just as hard as I was pedaling, it seemed, connecting the words of our instructor to the revelation of God's Word that was tucked in my memory. It was line after line of LIFE to my very heavy heart.

The second the class was over, I bolted to my locker, grabbed my phone, and tapped an iPhone screenful of notes.



## INTRODUCTION

I typed out all the little nuggets of wisdom and truth that my new friend David had poured into my heart through his words. And then, with my own words just about spilling out of me, I found my husband's name in my contacts and called him, burdened to my core with one idea that had risen to the surface above them all:

*Nick? Hey babe. It's me. I just got out of Soul Cycle and I need to tell you about it.*

*This forty-five-minute spin class I just took? It was more life-giving, more encouraging, and spoke more truth to me than any other Christian event I've ever sat through. I felt like I belonged more than I have in any community of believers, and it seemed like I was challenged more by truth, compelled and called to change more than I ever have been through a book or a sermon or a conversation with a friend.*

*I met with the Lord in Soul Cycle today, and I'm realizing that people everywhere are getting what they need from God from everyone else BUT believers. Because our church is NOT this encouraging, and our friends who love God do NOT speak life like this.*

*I'm worried we're missing out on doing what David is doing every single day. And we're in full-time ministry. If we're missing it—how many people are letting the opportunity slip by to change the lives of those around them?*

As I confessed my concerns to Nick, I realized they were bigger and deeper than just my concerns for our life, our family, our church.

I'm worried we're missing it.

We're missing our chance because we're too caught up in our own lives and in the fear that we'll do it wrong.

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

David isn't missing his chance—but maybe I'm missing mine.

And I know thousands of women who may be missing theirs.

## THE WORDS WE NEED MOST

Every week for the last few years, typically on Tuesdays, I have an hour-long call with a stranger. I started taking these coaching calls a while ago because it got too hard to answer all the emails I'd get from women who want to use their gifts or get into ministry in some capacity. So I take one call a week. Sometimes this turns into an all-day session with a brave soul who is willing to come be in my actual space here in Charleston. I meet with hopeful writers, women's ministry leaders and volunteers, gals who have a small business idea they'd love to see come to fruition. I meet with single moms who want to start a small group or college students on the brink of entering the working world, desperate to discern their place in the kingdom, I lend advice. I help these women make a game plan, but more than anything I state one message over and over and over again: *You're the girl for the job.*

If I'm meeting with a college student who wants to write to other women about Jesus, I tell her: *you're the girl for the job.*

A newly married gal finds herself unexpectedly pregnant and overwhelmed at the thought of being a mother: *you're the girl for the job.*

Two friends who want to start a local ministry encouraging the women around them: *you're the girls for the job.*

Is it negligent that I tell so many women the same thing?

## INTRODUCTION

Is it false hope to spur them on to some spiritual work when I know it may be harder than they think? Shouldn't I be warning them that it may not go the way they want it to?

Well, honestly, I don't think so. I find that most of us are pre-wired with fear, anticipate struggle, and carry a massive amount of doubt about our capacity. And honestly? We're not crazy. Life is HARD. Loving others is MESSY. Very few people are wildly successful, and no one is immune from getting beat up when they're on mission. We aren't crazy for having fears; we're realistic.

And what about our capacity? You know the old adage, "She believed she could, so she did"? I find that for me, just about *nothing* is further from the truth. I know my own natural capacity—it is very, very low. If left to my own devices, I'd watch Netflix and eat dairy-free yogurt all day long. I'd probably never enter into hard conversations or get out of my comfort zone. If I wanted to do things that made me feel capable, things that celebrated my strengths, I'd have a life that consisted of taking naps and making coffee. I'm naturally good at both of those things.

If I worked only based on what I can do well in my own strength, I'd never have children, get married, do ministry, drive a car, write books, love my neighbors, go on vacation, live on mission, serve the homeless, lead a church, start businesses, have friends, or encourage *anyone*. I would never live. I would never love. I would never taste abundance.

So how can I tell women every single week that they're the girl for the job? And what basis do I have for writing an entire book telling you the exact same thing? I'm certain the Holy Spirit was using David and his words that day in the spin

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

class, but what grounds do I have to believe the encouragement that came my way that day? And every time I open the Word of God?

*Here's the secret:*

We are the girls for the job because of the God of all capacity who not only calls us but equips us, and dwells within us, enabling us to carry out His plans. We are able to live, to love, to move, to repair, to receive, to heal, to hope because of Him. We are the girls for the job, for this season, for this life, for the joy and blessing of those around us at this exact appointed time because God has placed us here. He's called us to be His ambassadors, and He doesn't make mistakes.

## THIS IS YOUR INVITATION

This isn't a book about a spin class, and it's honestly not even a book about us. In the name of Jesus, my prayer is that you'll find that every single page of this book is about the God who made us good, set us free, called us holy, invited us on mission, and never wavers in His capability or His capacity. This is a book about the God who is right for the job, and it's an invitation to take your place as His coheir, servant, and friend.

This book won't puff you up and tell you that you have all you need, but it *will* point to the One who does. This book won't beckon you to be blind to your circumstances, but it *will* enlighten you to the truth that you're placed where you're at, with what you've got, on purpose.

We're going to go on a journey, one that I pray will take you to a place of being able to boldly, humbly proclaim that

## INTRODUCTION

YOU are the girl for the job—the girl for the task He’s given you and the girl for every task He is going to give you in the future. More than that, I hope these words commission you as an ambassador to speak life and authority to those around you, telling them *they* are the girls, boys, men, women, people, children of God for the jobs that He’s given them.

We’re going to dive into an others-focused mind-set, setting our sights on their good and His glory, and squashing the power of comparison and the feelings of inadequacy in one crushing blow. Partnering with the Holy Spirit, we’ll dive back into our pasts, taking stock of where we’ve been and what He’s given us. We’ll look at our strengths, our weaknesses, our stories, and the tools we’ve been handed by a good Father with new eyes—eyes that can see belief and hope.

Next, we’ll take God at His Word and ask Him for vision to see what it is He’s called us to, not just in the present but for the days and years to come. We won’t approach Him as though He’s a genie in a bottle or a Magic Eight Ball we can shake to find out the future, and we won’t expect Him to provide a detailed plan, but we will look to Scripture for truth and stand firm on the promises that say He’ll provide wisdom when we ask and that He’ll tell us to go to the right or to the left (see James 1:5 and Isaiah 30:21, respectively).

This is our invitation to strip off defeat, kick fear in the actual face, and get over ourselves so we can get on with living the wild and wonderful mission that He has for our lives. We’re going to bring the scariest parts of stepping into our calling into the light, to let Him shine on them, exposing the lies that keep us hiding in the dark. Friends, while reading this book we’re going to make a plan, and then, in the name of Jesus, we’re

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

going to begin making *moves* that align with His call on our lives. We're not just going to affirm that we're the girls for the job; we're going to agree with our actions.

This is your invitation. This is our invitation. It is for those of us who are burdened and broken, beat up by the sin of others and the inadequacies of our own lives. It is for those of us who took a break when it got too hard, and it is for those of us who never took the first step because it was too scary. This is an invitation for the women of God who have been stepping into the call of God on their lives for years to keep going, to keep fighting.

This is an invitation to not miss it, to not miss out on the thrilling and heart-wrenching life of love that God has for us. Because I don't believe David should get to have all the fun. And I don't believe we want to live in a world where a spin class speaks more truth than a sisterhood of women who have taken God at His Word to rise up and love with all we've got.

This book is for you. It's your invitation to leave behind defeat and disbelief and to permanently believe that God is who He says He is and that because of this, you are exactly who He's made you to be, on purpose.

You're the girl for the job. If you're ready to get to work, keep reading.

# CALL IT QUITS

It's time we quit arguing with God about our inadequacy and start relying on His capacity.





## IT'S QUITTING TIME

I'll never forget the day I decided I wasn't all that pretty.

It was early in my freshman year of college, a bright fall day, and I was walking from my class to the dorm. This first semester of college I'd taken all morning classes, as I was attempting to get school finished early in the day, work a part-time job in the afternoon, and study or hang with friends in the evening. Fall in South Carolina means it's still unthinkably warm, so I was walking and sweating and hadn't attempted to dress nicely or put on makeup. I felt great about that decision as the perspiration just dripped down my face and neck, pooling into a moist spot between my shoulders.

And then I saw her.

She had short, dark, straight hair that hit just at her shoulders in a beautifully natural way. Her outfit was similar to mine, just somehow better: a T-shirt and shorts, tennis shoes, and minimal jewelry. But her face was like something Michelangelo would choose for a muse—her bone structure was flawless, and I wondered how cheeks could be so pointy and pretty all at once. Her olive skin was tight, as though someone had pulled it back

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

and tied it with string beneath her hair. Even her eyes sparkled—*literally sparkled*—as I passed her, me on my way to the dorm, she on her way to wherever impossibly beautiful people go.

Sixteen years later, I can still describe the face of the girl who convinced me I wasn't all that pretty. I can still see her in my mind's eye. For all I can remember, I don't think I ever saw her again, but if she walked into a restaurant here in present-day Charleston, I'm almost positive I could ID her in a second.

That was the moment when I first thought to myself that some people just have beauty naturally. That thought has stayed with me for sixteen years.

My kind of beauty, on the other hand, is the *unnatural* kind. Some people look stellar in their husband's sweats with no makeup on. When I don't wear makeup (which is roughly four out of seven days of the week), everyone asks if I'm tired/depressed/sick/okay. I can't fit into my husband's sweats because he's super fit and trim, and while I get after it in the gym, too, my hips and booty are about twice the size of his, so we can just throw out that scenario altogether. My hair started going gray in my late twenties, but not in a distinguished way. We're talking squirrely, wiry, disobedient wildfires of gray that sprout up all along my part, so I dye those suckers regularly.

Don't misunderstand me—I feel *great* about how God made me, but I am *not* what you'd describe as a natural beauty. It takes about forty-five minutes on average for me to look my best, and that doesn't mean I actually spend forty-five minutes getting ready every day. I'm just down with not looking my best most days because it's my quiet rebellion against the confines and constructs of our society that say women can't be useful unless they're flawless.

## IT'S QUITTING TIME

But back to that day during my freshman year in college: my perspective shifted because I realized that, on the natural beauty scale, I would essentially never rank. But here's what I want you to catch: I wasn't devastated or dismayed. On the contrary, it was as if a fresh wave of freedom passed over me when I realized I was out of the running.

## OR THAT GREAT OF A MOTHER

I became a mom in a season where most of my friends were still in college, much less thinking about marriage or starting families. I was twenty-one when I got pregnant, had been married for eight months, and honestly, I didn't even slightly mind being the one in my group of friends to go first. My oldest child is now rounding the corner to twelve years old, and half my friends still don't have kids. But I *love* that we share our lives with people in diverse stages of life and always have. Our kiddos have grown up with the best spiritual aunts and uncles—single or newly married friends who have the margin and passion to invest in them—but what they don't have is a plethora of play-dates, since we don't spend time exclusively with other families who have kids our age.

My first child was born into a community where we were literally the only people our age having children, but we made a move (across the country) to Seattle just before our second was born. Then we had our third baby just a year after the second. So we were twenty-four and twenty-five with three children under three, living literally as far as we could be (while staying in America) from our families. God provided abundant

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

community quickly—friends who are still some of our closest to date, and to top it off, they were all our age and having kids quickly, like us.

You know what happens when you go from being the only mom in her young twenties to being one in a crowd? Or, moreover, when the crowd you're in is filled with women who've always dreamed of being mothers? They all made their own baby food, talked about homeschooling, and wore their babies in slings. These were essentially *professional moms*. They knew so much more about the whole enterprise than I ever could. And the kids?! The kids were like baby geniuses. How could they not be, with wildly intentional mothers speaking life and hope and learning into them all day?

My motherhood plan was essentially this: *wing it*. We did a lot of baby food in plastic containers and PBS up until that point. Not being around other mothers had allowed me to live in the dark, oblivious to the horrible phenomenon termed the “Mommy Wars,” but suddenly my eyes were opened. There *was* a competition, and I was incredibly behind.

Not sure what I mean? Think about this in your community: *Who is the cute mom?* You know, the one who always looks good and whose kids always look good. You've mentioned it to her, or maybe you only say it when she's not there. *Which one is the healthy mom?* Her kids have the most nutritious snacks, and you won't catch an ounce of plastic anywhere near them. *Who's the mom with the vibrant marriage?* Everyone is so impressed because they still make it on regular date nights or anniversary getaways. They're so in love! Motherhood hasn't fazed her!

For whatever reason, motherhood brings the race to be the

## IT'S QUITTING TIME

best to the surface like no other. And we unknowingly partner with it when we label and even laud one another. In all three books I've written, I've talked about my friend Karen in some way, shape, or form because she really is one of the wisest and most pure-hearted friends I have. And she is an *incredible* mom, mostly because she somehow constantly rises above what is expected of her and just does what God tells her to do.

But one day I was with a crew of women, most of whom don't have children, who were privately praising Karen and her motherhood in a way that made me uncomfortable. It wasn't jealousy; I took myself out of the running to be the best mom years ago. What messed with me was that I was hearing their acclaim with fresh ears—I was hearing how much pressure we put on one another to be perfect.

“She’s so calm!”

“She literally *never* yells.”

“She’s so creative!”

“She’s read so many books, and she’s always reading to her girls.”

I loved Karen enough to want these women to see the best in her, even if she *did* yell, even if she *lost her chill*, even if she ran out of things to do with her kids and stuck them in front of a Disney movie for an afternoon. I wanted them to see that Karen was an incredible mom, the absolute best mom for the job, because she was the one God had given to those girls *on purpose*. And what made her motherhood so life-giving to watch was this one thing: *she believed she was the girl for the job*. It wasn't because she was spinning her wheels trying to be her best; it was because she was resting on His strength and just shining where He placed her.

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

As I said, I had to take myself out of the running for the contest of best mom years ago. I don't remember exactly when it happened, I only know that I don't ever want to be back in the race. God showed me that when I am trying to be the best mom in the eyes of everyone else, the people who lose are the ones I'm trying to mother. There's a choice to pursue the prize for the best (through likes on social media, the approval of my peers, or meeting some arbitrary standard of perfection) or to be present, and I often choose incorrectly. When I love my kids—specifically, how they *need* to be loved, to the glory of God and for the praise of no one else—it might not look all that sparkly to the outside world. But that's okay, because I'm the girl for the *unique job of mothering my own children*, not the winner of the best mom race. I've taken myself out of the running. And I've never known so much freedom.

## LET'S QUIT NOW

You may not care a thing about beauty, and motherhood might not be on your radar. I realize these are easy examples for some of us to relate to and easy for others of us to dismiss. But it doesn't change the undeniable truth that somewhere in your life, there is temptation to measure up, to compete, to stand out, to rank. Where in your life do you feel a constant or frequent desire to look to the left or the right and compare yourself to others? Maybe you'd never admit you're trying to be the best, but quietly you're spinning your wheels. You might never dream of saying it out loud to another human, but you're silently exploring where you rank at \_\_\_\_\_.

## IT'S QUITTING TIME

Maybe you picked up this book out of that need, out of that desire to rise to the top or, at the very least, to find the confidence to begin running at all. Maybe you grabbed it because you're in need of the world's biggest spiritual pep talk or because no one has ever equated you with being able, special, fruitful, or appointed.

If so, I'm sorry to tell you that at the very beginning of this book, *the very first thing I'm going to ask you to do is quit. Give up. Surrender.*

In the race to be the best woman.  
The best servant.  
The most authentic.  
The most hospitable.  
The most encouraging.  
The most studious.  
The most creative.  
The best mom.  
The most energetic.  
The best listener.  
The most effortlessly put together.  
The most successful small business owner.  
The funniest.  
The best wife.  
The most empathetic.  
The most justice-minded.  
The fittest.  
The most capable.  
The cleanest.  
The cutest.

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

The most self-sufficient.  
The best leader.  
The most quiet.  
The healthiest.  
The most fun and spontaneous.  
The most positive.  
The best friend.  
The most productive.

Whatever it is for you, whatever goal or attribute or personality characteristic you've decided is important for you to master, even maybe to excel in, passing those around you, I'm going to ask you to quit it. And here are a couple of reasons why:

*We cannot seek God's glory and our own at the same time.* If any part of our hearts is divided, seeking to win rather than seeking to wonder at His goodness, let's just quit right now.

*We can't seek to be the girl for the job and the girl who wins at the same time.* You are the girl for the job, and I'm going to spend the rest of this book telling you why we can biblically stand on that truth, unpacking how we can actively obey the call He's given us. But we can't go forward trying to win the award for any of those things mentioned above while we seek to be obedient to what He's particularly called us to.

Our Father in heaven, He's the best, He's the ultimate, and He's here for His glory. Because He calls us, we do have a race to run. But it's not *our* race. It's not a race in which we win the prize and claim the glory for ourselves. It's *His* race, aimed at bringing as many people under the light and life of His love as possible.



## IT'S QUITTING TIME

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1–2 NKJV)

The first breaking, burdensome weight we're going to have to lay aside to love well is the desire to be the best. So let's give up now. Let's quit. *Let's take ourselves out of the running.* I'm going to spend the rest of the book making a case to convince you that you're the girl for the job. But truly: it's God's job, God's strength, God's power, and God's grace that actually get the work done. To step into this truth, to take our rightful place in this narrative, we've got to take ourselves out of the running for His job and take ourselves out of any race that pits us against other people or ourselves. To start, we've got to quit.

## CHAPTER 2

# LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR IDEAL SELF

*C*an you scoot to the side so I can open the fridge?"

A few years ago, I was standing with my husband in our tiny galley kitchen while he was cooking, catching up on the events of the day. Now, in our new home, I can climb on top of the countertops and sit while Nick cooks and we talk. But our last kitchen was so tiny, I just had to stand there, awkwardly ducking out of his way when he needed a pot or a pan or to get into the fridge. This kitchen scenario works for us because Nick is a phenomenal cook, and he loves to take the reins in the kitchen. His only request is that I hang out with him while he cooks and that we use that time to catch up on our days.

On that long-ago day in the old galley kitchen, though, my phone was plugged into an outlet on the tiny counter all the way at the back of the kitchen, next to the garage door, and I could see it buzzing and lighting up, but I couldn't get to it. Nconn (what I call him) is one of those phenomenal humans who is *really* good at being in the moment, and while he always knows

## LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR IDEAL SELF

where his phone is, he doesn't feel the need to be able to check it. He's content to leave text messages unread for hours, and he does the responsible thing and only opens emails when he knows he has the mental margin to answer them immediately.

I'm more like a rabid squirrel when it comes to technology, and I'm not proud of it! My phone generally lives in my back pocket or right hand, and when a text message buzzes, I will shuffle to see it and answer it with an eagerness that all but screams, "*A friend! A friend! I love my friends!*"

But when Nick is cooking and we're catching up on our day, I try to play it cool and follow his lead. I do my best to be totally in the moment, ignoring the flashing screen and keeping my gaze on his steely blue eyes. Which are not bad to be focused on, you know what I'm saying?

So I could see my phone buzzing, six feet away, beyond Nick and the amazing dinner he was making for our family, and my curiosity was piqued. *Stay in the moment*, my brain screamed to my heart, until finally Nick caught my gaze and said, "You've got a text, want to answer it?"

Thank you, God, for a man who loves me just as I am, not interested in cooking and happily connected to technology. In Jesus' name, amen.

I skittered across the kitchen as he continued working. When I got to my phone, I was thrilled to see a message from my friend Jessica. Jessica is a gem—everyone who knows her loves her, and it's easy to know why.

Jessica Honegger is an incredibly successful business-woman, an author, and a podcast host, and she loves Jesus vibrantly and wildly. I love talking business and gleaning wisdom from Jessica, but more than that, I love praying with

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

her—listening to her talk to God, agreeing with what she is saying, and thanking God that we’re sisters in Christ.

Anyway, the text was from Jessica. She was inviting me to her family’s ranch house for a few days that coming summer, to meet with her and other businesswomen, authors, and ministry leaders. She rattled off the names of the other women who would be attending, and I literally laughed out loud. *One of these things is not like the other*, I thought. I was just me, messy Jess in her galley kitchen, pretending like I knew what I was doing as I fumbled my way through my first few published books and online businesses. I would go on to tell a few friends who was invited to Jessica’s leadership retreat, and a few of them would bravely agree, saying, “You seem a little out of place in that bunch.”

But not Nick. I read the text to him and told him how insecure I felt about going on a leadership retreat with such accomplished and successful women—and he said, “No—you’re the girl for the job. God’s invited you to this. Go and give what you’ve got, and take what you can. We don’t ascribe to or live by the hierarchy of worldly success or labels anyhow, so who says you’re not qualified to be there? Go! Learn! Enjoy! Say ‘Thank you for inviting me, of course I’ll be there!’”

And that’s how I found myself on a ranch in June 2015 with some astoundingly fruitful women—baring my soul and working through the yuckiest and heaviest parts of my heart: the stuff that was holding me back from stepping into all God had asked me to do.

We spent the weekend working through one worksheet that broke our personalities down into different categories. My favorite category was the one called “Your Idealized Self.”

## LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR IDEAL SELF

We learned over the weekend that all of the parts are important (I glossed over this important detail) and that integrating all the facets of our selves would maximize our leadership potential.

Your Ideal Self is you thriving at the height of who God made you to be. It's you on your absolute best day, with no obstacles or barriers. It's a real part of how you were created, but it's obviously not the complete picture. But I got hung up on the Ideal Self because I already know her through and through, in and out, backwards and forwards. I'm well acquainted with her, and I really, really wish she showed up more frequently.

Here's a definition from a psychology glossary that unpacks a little more about the Ideal Self: *The Ideal Self is an idealized version of yourself created out of what you have learned from your life experiences, the demands of society, and what you admire in your role models.* I'd take it a step further and say that as women of God, we know that all knowledge and vision originate from God, and that He uses it as a helpful tool for us to partner with the Holy Spirit this way and see what can truly be.

I think, in a lot of ways, when we imagine our ideal selves, we're not just dreaming about who we *could* be, we're exploring part of who God *made us* to be. We're opening up the boundaries that used to hold us back and seeing our potential with His eyes.

What about you? Have you ever thought about your Ideal Self? Have you ever dreamed about her or imagined what she can accomplish? Also, isn't it interesting how our ideal for our own lives changes as we grow? One year, your Ideal Self

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

might be a powerful, independent businesswoman, and a few years later, you may picture her as a stay-at-home mom with a dozen kids.

Would you take a moment now and think about her? Ideal You? You at your absolute best? You without limits or weaknesses? You without a lack of belief, without fears or concerns? Picture her—maybe write a paragraph and describe her. I dare you! If Christ is in you, so is the power of the Holy Spirit, so don't go telling me you're not imaginative or creative. The God who created color, the cosmos, every majestic mountain and beautiful flower and powerful storm made you in His image, so I know you can do this. Meet your ideal gal before you meet mine, and then we'll come back together.

## MEET IDEAL JESS

I meet with my Ideal Self once a week. We basically have a standing date. I prepare for it, I look forward to it, and if I'm not careful, I spend the rest of the week craving to be back in her presence. My weekly date with Ideal Jess is every Monday at 8 a.m., so preparation starts the evening before. I eat a healthy meal for dinner on Sunday night because I'm trying not to be gassy or bloated when it's time to hang out with her. I'm careful to choose an outfit on Monday morning that makes me feel free and confident because I don't want to be distracted by insecurity over my clothing during this appointment.

As I drive the kids to school on Monday morning, I'm gentler than usual with them because I can't go into my meeting with Ideal Jess feeling busted for barking on the way.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR IDEAL SELF

After dropping them off, I pick up a venti black coffee from Starbucks—I always tip because Ideal Jess is so stinking generous, and I'm almost with her, so I might as well begin to act like her. I make my way from downtown Charleston, leaving behind the Monday morning hustle, and drive over the beautiful bridge that connects the city to the suburbs and then the next bridge, smaller and less regal, but still majestic for one incredible reason. This second, smaller bridge takes me to the beach—Sullivan's Island, to be exact. I turn left at the main intersection, which has only a stop sign, and make my way a few blocks down to Station 19.

I park, leaving my phone in the car, and as I step out I can feel the breeze and smell the salt air. It's time for my weekly prayer walk, which means it's Ideal Jess time.

My sneakers seek out the hard-packed sand, and I start stomping my way down the beach. I try to pause and just listen, then I start praising God and thanking Him for what I've seen of Him that week. I speak out loud because it helps me stay connected to my Father best. I tell Him what I need help with and where I could really use His encouragement. There is more listening and pausing. There is arm waving and arm pumping, there is gesturing, and sometimes there is a brief pause to stand firm and raise both hands in worship. Sometimes there are tears. As I round the corner of Sullivan's Island that points back toward downtown Charleston, I sit on the rocks and watch my city. I pray for her, ask God for her good. And then I walk back, doing much of the same.

See, it's really a meeting with God, but it's Ideal Jess who shows up for that encounter. She's Ideal Jess because she's not actively sinning, she's not getting frustrated with anyone, she's

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

not standing in the mirror wondering why her hips are uneven, and she isn't engaging with fear or doubt or shame. She's me, at my best, in the throne room of grace, doing what I was made to do. Or so I thought.

I came back from Jessica's retreat and felt so affirmed by the concept of Ideal Jess, motivated to spend more time with her, *as* her. Then, one day I was catching up my mom, sharing all that I'd learned, when she said something shocking, jarring, and incredibly wise that stopped me in my tracks.

As I told my mom about Ideal Jess, I watched her expression move from open to closed, her lips drawing together into a tight line as I talked. It was evident she still wanted to hear me out, but she was skeptical about what I was saying. Finally the words bubbled to the surface. "But that's not really who you are," she said. "I mean it *is*, but it's not the whole picture."

My loving and crazy-wise mom went on to bring back the main message of the leadership conference (which I had overlooked in my enthusiasm over Ideal Jess) as she explained that the way she saw me was much more comprehensive. It included Ideal Jess on the beach, but it also included Jess the mom in the middle of a messy house on a busy day. It included Jess ministering to people, often imperfectly, receiving grace from God and others. My mom's picture of me even included Jessi, the slightly chubby eleven-year-old version of me who liked to hide in the rec room, eating bagels away from the world. She saw the whole me: wounds, hopes, healed places, hurts, strengths, weaknesses, and victory all in one, and she wanted me to see all of it as good, all of it as usable by God.

She was right.



## LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR IDEAL SELF

### YOUR IDEAL SELF IS NOT WHO YOU THINK

My mom knew what the leadership retreat leaders knew because it's a universal truth found in the Word of God.

My Ideal Self, even though she's super spiritual and spends a lot of time praying, is innocuous because she's fragile—she's like a sandcastle that crumbles when other people are around. She is unreliable and unattainable because she's not *real* in the way that characters and personalities formed over time and through trouble are real. There's no trouble coming her way; there's nothing she must persevere against; it's just her and the ocean and her waving hands having the time of her life.

My Ideal Self isn't all that powerful because she isn't complete without the other people who push her to her limits—the kids who annoy her sometimes, but who also ignite her passion and fortitude. The husband who can hurt her, leaving her exposed and insecure like no one else, but who also has the capacity to commission her like no other because he sees her at her worst and encourages her to keep ministering anyhow. Ideal Jess on the beach on a Monday morning isn't completely able to stand because she's flimsy without the positioning of her past mistakes and failures holding her up and teaching her where *not* to go again.

I could go on and on. But let's get back to you. Remember that picture of your Ideal Self you described or contemplated? I know, she's *amazing*, right? She's got this. She's on top of things. She's intentional, purposeful, grounded, prepared.

But here's the kicker, here's the crazy news:

Ideal You, she's not nearly as strong as *Actual* You. See, she doesn't make mistakes, so she doesn't have to rise up after

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

falling down. She doesn't have self-imposed or world-inflicted limits, so she doesn't have to push past them in the name of Jesus. Fear isn't on her radar, so faith doesn't have to be either. Don't throw her in the trash or leave her behind, because she is a part of you. She is the beautiful, Spirit-filled part that listens to the Lord about what could be ahead. But she is not nearly as impactful or interesting or impressive—mostly because she's not actually *here*.

You, the broken you, the messy you, the you filled with past regrets and mistakes—you're the girl for the job. You, the one who sins and experiences grace, the one who feels fear and chooses faith, the one who hurts and can be hurt—you're the girl for the job. You, the interruptible. You, the unexchangeable. You, the complete-picture version of a woman created by the God who formed the universe with intention, talent, creativity, glory, and His perfect power—you are the girl for the job. You, placed right where you're at—in this season, around these people, with all the tools you need to love them and continually point them to Jesus—you are the girl for the job.

Your Ideal Self: she's got nothing on you.

## ACTUAL YOU IS A POTENTIAL POWERHOUSE

I love it when I find a Bible verse I've never read before that moves me. I read it over and over again, marveling at how creative and honest God is to put such helpful and resounding wisdom in the Bible. And I also love Bible verses that bring power in different seasons, and even when I expect that they might lose their weight over time, they never do.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR IDEAL SELF

Second Corinthians 12:9 is one of those verses for me. If we actually believe it's true, it gives us some knowledge about God that is so wild and counteractive to the ways of this world. It brings hope, comfort, peace, and wild worship to my heart—no matter the circumstances of my life.

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Science-y left turn coming your way. Hydrogen by itself is an incredibly dangerous material—it's highly flammable, it's explosive, and it causes asphyxiation in humans because it leaches the oxygen and the ability to breathe right from them. Hydrogen *plus* oxygen, on the other hand, forms the most refreshing and valuable liquid on earth: water. Hydrogen will kill us; hydrogen plus oxygen keeps us alive.

I understand that Actual You has weaknesses, that she has experienced unimaginable pain and heartache. Unfortunately, I also know that in her lifetime, she's probably also caused a lot of pain, and she's sinned against God and the people she loves. She can say hurtful things, do hurtful things, and she's had countless hurtful things done to her. There are lies she's been told by others and by the enemy of her soul; there are wounds she has received that run deep and cut to the quick. Actual You has the capacity to walk around the world wounded and wounding, doing more damage than hydrogen could ever dream of.

But Actual You *plus* grace . . . Actual You *combined* with

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

the mercy, kindness, restoration, and resurrection power of Jesus Christ our Savior? She is spiritual water. She is life embodied. She's the representative picture of the gospel that the angels *wish* they could experience, walking around on earth. The verse that tells me that, 1 Peter 1:12 (MSG), says this: "Do you realize how fortunate you are? Angels would have given anything to be in on this!" For everything I can gather about angels, here's what I surmise: their choice is to worship God for eternity or not; they don't get to live in the in-between of daily grace, the way we do. There is not an actualized and gospel-receiving version of life available for them. *That power and purpose is reserved just for us.*

Here's what I believe with absolutely all that I've got: You are the girl for the job. You're the one God has placed right where you're at with His perfect knowledge and foresight. It has taken one million—maybe one zillion (who knows?)—slight moves of His hand to place you in this exact moment. All of the small and ordinary miracles that had to occur at just the right time for you to be born, for you to stay alive and well, for you to be introduced to God or this book—whichever came first—are Him. For you to know the exact people you know, to have had the exact experiences you've had—all Him. You are the girl for the job: what you've got inside of you is what He has perfectly ordained for you to use for His glory.

But your Ideal Self? She doesn't have what it takes. She can't love like you; she doesn't have your failures or weaknesses to ground her in the grace of the gospel. She doesn't have the hope that springs up in the darkest times, and she doesn't know grace like you and I do. No one has to forgive her, so she doesn't know how to receive grace, and because she lives in

## LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR IDEAL SELF

some alternate reality where there is no tension, she can't press in and press through like you.

You're going to have to thank her for who she is and what God uses her to tell you. You're going to have to acknowledge that she's already a large part of who you are—all of her strengths and glory and power are found in the resurrection power of the cross, and you've got access to those, too. But then you've got to say goodbye to her. You've got to stop pretending to *be* her. You've got to stop wishing you could be her. Your Ideal Self is not your most influential self. Your Ideal Self is *not* the girl for the job. You are.

# HE IS THE HERO, YOU ARE THE RESCUE PLAN

July 23, 2005 was the hottest day on record in Charleston, South Carolina, for the whole year.

It was my wedding day, so the weather is emblazoned in my mind forever. And it was the heat that marked the handful of minutes leading up to me walking down the aisle. Those minutes are etched in my brain, and I often replay them, running my mind's eye along their bumps, curves, and jagged edges.

The backstory is this: I wasn't entirely sure I wanted anyone to walk me down the aisle. It wasn't a power play or a declaration of independence for me; it's just that I have *two* great dads (biological and stepdad). I didn't want either one to feel slighted since they'd both played such different and vital roles in my life. So the plan was a solo walk, until I toured the church we'd get married in a month or so before the wedding. I stood at the back of the church and I knew I'd need *someone* back there to hold my hand. The gravity of that moment was too intense, and I didn't want to be alone.

## HE IS THE HERO, YOU ARE THE RESCUE PLAN

So we planned a combination: my biological dad walking me down the aisle and my stepdad meeting us at the altar. Flash forward a few weeks, and it was all happening.

A few minutes earlier, in true wild wedding fashion, I'd had the first nosebleed of my entire life, when I was already wearing my dress, seemingly brought on by what? We didn't know. The heat? The stress? The dehydration because I was all hopped up on Diet Coke and coffee and hadn't seen a glass of water in days? (The early 2000s were a different time; don't judge me.) The nosebleed had come and gone quickly, my dress was fine, and my dad and I were standing behind the thick wooden doors. I could hear the music swelling inside the sanctuary and people rustling due to the excessive warmth permeating their tuxes, fussy dresses, and suit jackets.

Dad turned to me with tears in his eyes as he opened his palm and showed me a seashell hidden in his travel-worn tanned hands. He'd found it on the beach earlier that day, and there was something he wanted to tell me. I could see his mouth moving; I watched his lips quiver and the tears slowly drip from the corner of each eye, watched him brush them away with a slight flick of his finger. He was saying something wild, precious, and meaningful, but for the life of me, *I couldn't hear him*, and to this day I can't tell you what in the world he was talking about.

What I *could* hear was an incredibly loud and banal inner monologue that was screaming, *DID WE GET ALL THE BLOOD OFF MY FACE? IS ANY OF IT STUCK IN MY NOSE HAIRS?* I'm massively ashamed to admit that I interrupted him halfway through his emotive and beautiful monologue and asked him to check me one more time before the

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

doors opened. “Any more blood? Any makeup smeared? Thank you for the seashell. Let’s go!”

*I missed the moment.* I was twenty when I got married and hadn’t yet developed the emotional maturity it takes to savor a moment like that one. It would take me a few more years to acquire the ability to stay present even when it makes me uncomfortable. I didn’t yet know the value of keeping eye contact, leaving room for the awkward silence, or how to allow the tension of an occasion teach me something.

So to be completely transparent, I missed *a lot* of moments that month. It’s a funny story to tell about the ignorance of youth and the stress of wedding days, but now, thirteen years later, I’d give a million dollars to go back and just hear whatever it was my dad was about to say. On top of that, I’d give another million to have the capacity to go back into the moment, rip every last bobby pin from my head (who could think straight like that?), tousle my hair, take my shoes off, and repeat my walk down the aisle toward the man I was about to marry.

Because instead of doing that, just after I brushed off my dad’s incredibly sentimental gift, I did a kind of strange, strained rendition of a walk toward the front of the sanctuary. Due to the excessive hairpins and the particular way I was holding my bouquet so as not to create the dreaded “back fat” when I moved my arms, I looked less like a serene bride and more like a stilted mannequin who was determined to move the muscles in her feet and nothing else. Of course, hindsight tells me *now* that the twenty-year-old who was living on bran muffins and Diet Coke had nothing that even resembled fat on her posterior (and boy, have things changed), but alas, we can’t go back and recreate moments, can we?



## HE IS THE HERO, YOU ARE THE RESCUE PLAN

I missed the moment because my focus was on the wrong things. I'm still married, it was just one day, and there's obviously grace, but the regret I feel is a helpful tool that tells me the way I responded in that moment truly mattered, I missed it, and there was a consequence.

I love my dad, and I obviously love my husband, but it's not only that I regret missing moments with *them*. What I lost by making myself the focal point in those sweeping, grand, glorious snapshots of life was having my heart and spirit attuned to what *God* was doing. The ancient Celts came up with the phrase "thin places" to describe moments or physical spaces where heaven and earth collapse in on one another and become indistinguishable. One of my favorite authors, Shauna Niequist, describes them in her book *Bittersweet*:

Thin places: places where the boundary between the divine world and the human world becomes almost nonexistent, and the two, divine and human, can for a moment, dance together uninterrupted. Some are physical places, and some aren't places at all, but states of being or circumstances or seasons.\*

Weddings, the day a baby is born, holidays, first dates, funerals, even the day you're fired or your best friend betrays you: it seems these are the days when the Spirit of God is soaking into every breath, conversation, and blink in a much more palpable way. We can see His hand moving, we can see His heart beating as He meets us where we're at in the thin places.

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\* Shauna Niequist, *Bittersweet: Thoughts on Change, Grace, and Learning the Hard Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 92.

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

Did God want to heal some broken parts of my heart regarding my earthly father just before he attempted to give away what I felt he'd given away prematurely years before? Did He want to teach me about kingdom beauty through the seashell story just before I paraded myself as a beacon of attempted attractiveness through a crowd of my most loved friends and family? Was the Holy Spirit going to give me a word of promise or a vision for my marriage, for my future husband, as I walked down the aisle, my eyes locked to his?

Did my heavenly Father have something planned that was better than I could ask or imagine, that He'd accomplish by the power of the Holy Spirit, right there in that sanctuary by the sea? *I vote yes.* Did I miss it because I was worried about errant streaks of blood that were nowhere to be found and back fat that is now laughable? *Also yes.* Is there grace for me? Am I still married, and do I still have a relationship with my dad? *One hundred percent yes.*

But I missed the moment, an inevitable divine and holy intervention, because I made it all about myself. By God's grace, we get to learn from our pasts and learn from one another and plant flags in the front yards of our hearts that wave this banner in bright colors and bold words: *I refuse to miss out on what God is doing, what He might be saying, and how He may be miraculously intervening. I refuse to miss out because I'm focused on myself, my insecurities, or my perception of my own capacity.*

## THE RESCUE IS ON THE WAY

Let's walk through a small part of the story of the Israelites, God's chosen people of the Old Testament. Their story starts

## HE IS THE HERO, YOU ARE THE RESCUE PLAN

much earlier than we will—we're just deep diving into one snapshot. In Genesis 45, we learn that Joseph saved his brothers, who had sold him into slavery, when the country experienced an extreme famine. God warned Joseph about the famine through a dream, instructed him how to take care of everyone. Included in that "everyone" were his traitorous brothers, whom he forgave and to whom he offered refuge. Joseph lived in Egypt when he rescued his brothers, so they set up shop in Egypt as well.

You might say that Joseph, in this case, did *not* miss his moment to be used by God. He could have made it all about himself and denied his brothers safety and security, but he didn't, and his obedience led to them all staying alive and well. In fact, they didn't *just* stay alive and well, but their family grew and grew until it was no longer just one family that the Egyptians allowed to live in their land, but a burgeoning people group that was rapidly growing and making the leaders nervous. This, of course, was long after Joseph and his brothers were dead. The pharaoh, or king, of Egypt was so threatened by these Israelites (Joseph's dad, Jacob, was renamed "Israel" by God, by the way; that's where they got their moniker) that he enslaved them and forced them to work under horrifying conditions.

But the Israelites were incredibly resilient, and the oppression only made them multiply faster and grow stronger, which of course made the Egyptians even *more* fearful of them and in turn led to Pharaoh declaring that all the Israelite baby boys must be killed.

This is one of the parts of the Bible that really gets to me, because I read it not as allegory, but as the history of God moving amongst people—I read it with the belief that it actually happened. And as a mom and a lover of humanity, I feel sick

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

to my stomach when I read that one human was so obsessed with his own power that he ordered babies to be killed at birth by their midwives or literally thrown into the river. But that is exactly what Pharaoh commanded, and for the purpose of where we're headed, I think it's wildly important that we hold the weight of that for a moment.

Human tragedy and extreme social injustice are not new, and even when they have occurred in the past, I believe the devastating pain of others deserves our grief. But here's one snapshot of the Bible I appreciate seeing: the underweaving and working of God's rescue plan, like looking at the back of a tapestry. When we are forced to confront extreme inequality and oppression, we wonder, "Where is God?" The book of Exodus tells us that God was fully engaged, using *humans* as the catalysts, the agents of change, that resulted in rescue. God was broken, devastated over the sin that would lead people to annihilate one another, over the breaking of His chosen people. Where is God in the midst of oppression? I believe He's often working miracles on behalf of His people—miracles we couldn't dream of or see, and He is also stirring, calling, and equipping His people to meet the needs and fight for justice on behalf of their fellow humans. Our Father was not and is not inactive in times of injustice, but rather He is carefully and intentionally using His favorite tool to activate justice: His people. We may feel like we're the ones doing all the work, assuming He is quietly sitting by, when truly, He's the author of justice and we're made in His image—made able by Him to do His work and love His people. No, God's not idle—He is just working a plan that allows us to be a part of the rescue.

And this is the kind of story we find in the book of Exodus—the story of the Israelites, the story of Moses.

## HE IS THE HERO, YOU ARE THE RESCUE PLAN

Moses was born in the midst of extreme oppression and injustice, during the season when Pharaoh was forcing midwives to kill babies on the brink of birth or to throw them into the Nile River. Specifically, they were killing all the male babies, since, in their patriarchal culture, women carried no threat. As we walk a little further into Moses' story, there are two important observations we can make along the way—observations that only make this moment in Scripture more meaningful for us:

1. Patriarchy and sexism and the enemy of our souls may discount women, but God never did and never does. In fact, He invited many women to rise to the occasion and be His coworkers in the fight against injustice in this story. Pharaoh ordered that all the baby boys be killed, but he made the fatal error of discounting the power of God amongst the women who would rise up and fight against Him. The midwives fought by disobeying his law, Moses' mother fought by hiding her son, Moses' sister fought by strategizing his rescue, and God even used Pharaoh's daughter's gift of mercy to save the man who would come to represent God's power over Egypt. *Big mistake, Pharaoh. Big mistake, Satan.* Culture can discount women, but our God never will.
2. We see some beautiful foreshadowing to another man, born in the midst of injustice, protected by women (and men) so he could lead and love with all He had. Only this time, roughly 1,500 years later, those protecting the boy would be fleeing *to* Egypt instead of away from it.

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

Early on in the life of Jesus, an angel came to Joseph, warning him to flee with Mary and Jesus to Egypt and remain there until it was safe because Herod sought to kill the promised Christ child. Joseph did as the angel commanded, leaving town in the middle of the night, and they stayed in Egypt until Herod died. (This is recounted for us in Matthew 2.)

Where is God when His people are hurting? Where is God when abuse and persecution are leaning in on all sides? He is executing rescue operations, using ordinary people at every step. We call them the heroes, and we perceive them to be special when, in all actuality, they're just fallible and feeble individuals like us. Their willingness, however reluctant, makes them seem majestic in our eyes—it makes them seem otherworldly and untouchable. Presidents, world leaders, diplomats, authors, speakers, humanitarians, artists, heroes, stars, and explorers. If we're not careful, we can look at their work and misplace them as the target of our worship and reverence. But it has always been Him, always God, beckoning and calling and equipping normal people—even those of us who are reluctant to practice simple obedience—so that the rescue plan can have human hands on it.

Make no mistake: God can work through the supernatural. He can work through the wind and the waves, and He can make the rocks cry out or make the animals talk if we stay silent. But He chooses to use those who are made in His image, the flesh and blood and fallible kids that He loves to partner with as He fights injustice and oppression. Make no mistake that He wants to use you—*you*—to fight the darkness that lives both within and outside of your comfortable boundaries. Make no mistake that we're still in the midst of rescue, that He is still in the process of setting things right. Let's not make

## HE IS THE HERO, YOU ARE THE RESCUE PLAN

the mistake of missing it because our eyes are focused on ourselves, or because they're overwhelmed by the size of the fight, or because we're waiting for a hero to do the work for us.

Although he had wild moments of obedience and faith, Moses almost missed it. And his lack of focus and faith cost him dearly.

## MISSING FRUIT AND DELAYED DAYS

In our recounting, we're going to whiz quickly through the rest of Moses' story. His mother hides him, his sister, Miriam, works the plan to save him, the daughter of Pharaoh raises him, but God pricks Moses' heart for *his true people*, the Israelites. He sees an Israelite being beaten, murders the Egyptian who is beating the Israelite, and then flees to a place called Midian out of fear and shame. Moses stays in Midian, where he marries a woman named Zipporah and where he is seemingly happy pretending as though his people aren't still massively suffering under the oppression of Pharaoh. Who doesn't forget? God. And He comes to Moses with a proposition.

Exodus 3 may be one of my all-time favorite passages in the Bible, but possibly not for reasons you'd think. When most people think of God calling Moses into ministry, they think about him taking off his shoes because it's holy ground or they think about the burning bush. Maybe they picture God's booming voice saying, "I Am Who I Am." That's all incredible, especially when we read this as a historical document and not just as some allegory that tells us something about ourselves. When we blink and shake our heads and remember there was

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

an actual man named Moses who was literally hiding from his past and shirking his present, and God came to him through a bush that was straight-up on fire and an audible voice from heaven—that’s some crazy stuff.

Moses and God go on to have some more hard-to-picture-for-us moments, but there’s one thing about this initial interaction that I can never get over.

Here’s a crazy-quick recap of Exodus 3 and 4, the extreme CliffsNotes version. Moses has run from his problems in the biggest way—he’s tending flocks in the wilderness, seemingly trying to squash the memory of his people’s burdens. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord calls to Him, and God speaks to him through flames of fire inside a bush. Moses’ interest is piqued, and he moves closer to see what’s up.

*Here’s what I catch:* God is constantly telling Moses WHAT *He* is going to do and WHO *He* is, and Moses is constantly questioning how *Moses* will do it and who God has made *Moses* to be.

If the questions we’re left with after hearing that we’re the girls for the job, that we’re the rescue plan, have anything to do with *why us* or *how we’ll do it*, the story of Moses tells us right off the bat that we’re asking the wrong questions.

The answer to “Why me?” is this: *God is who He says He is.*

The answer to “How could you use me?” is this: *He’ll be the one doing the heavy lifting.*

I can unequivocally declare that you’re the girl for the job, without knowing you or your circumstances, because I know God. Because I know He’s all-powerful, all-knowing, always loving. I know He wouldn’t leave you behind or fail to give you what you need. Because He’s the author and finisher of



## HE IS THE HERO, YOU ARE THE RESCUE PLAN

our faith, and the writer of every human story, I know He's working it all out for us to experience as much of Him as we can—for us to see His glory. Because He's good and because He's a restorer, I know that no harm that has come your way and no bad decision you've made has the power to define you. I know that you're the girl for the job because He's God, and He placed you where you're at, on purpose, to bring Him glory and change the world.

The thing is, *I don't want you to miss it. I don't want us to miss it.*

God is not going to stop showing up or walk away from us. He's not going to give up on His master plan to use human beings to bring Him glory, no matter how messed up we are. I know He is not surprised by your unique set of challenges: the things that keep you from living the abundant life He crafted for you. *But I do believe we have the opportunity to stay behind.* In His graciousness, He's given us the capacity to choose how we respond to Him, and if we're not giving God our 100 percent yes, we may miss how He has ordained our particular role in the rescue.

Moses questioned God's decision to use him over and over, and God got tired of Moses telling Him he didn't have what it takes, but God still gave Moses a helper: his brother, Aaron. God provided miracle after miracle to prove His power, not just to Pharaoh, but also to bolster the faith of Moses—and still Moses doubted and questioned God. He questioned His provision, His protection, and His ability to show up. And throughout the tumultuous years of his leadership, while Moses was appointed pastor to these Israelites, God provided miraculously, and still they struggled with doubt.

## YOU ARE THE GIRL FOR THE JOB

God kept using Moses—his doubt didn't disqualify him, but there were consequences when Moses confused whose capacity would do the heavy lifting. Moses often struggled to understand that God was the hero of this whole plan, and it eventually cost him.

God still had Moses lead the people. He still had incredible and awe-inspiring encounters with Moses, letting him see parts of Himself no other human had seen. But when it came time to enter the land and take hold of what God had promised for them, God allowed another leader to take charge. What should have been an eleven-day journey from Egypt to the land appointed for the Israelites took forty years, thanks to their fear, grumbling, and lack of trust in the God who had physically and supernaturally rescued them. And Moses, the man God had handpicked to lead them, died just before they crossed the border. God warned him he wouldn't see the end of this road before dying, and Moses didn't fight Him. I wonder if Moses relented because, in hindsight, he could see the severity of his doubt in God's power and ability. Even though he knew he was wildly special to God, did Moses also feel regret over the moments when he could have trusted Him more? God Himself buried Moses, the Israelites mourned for thirty days, and then their new leader helped them take their promised-by-God land.

## WE ARE THE VARIABLE

We've got work to do, friends. Our world is hurting, our church is suffering, our generations are helpless and harassed and in need of a Savior. God, our Father and Friend, has placed you

## HE IS THE HERO, YOU ARE THE RESCUE PLAN

in this exact slice of time, arranging every relationship, circumstance, strength, weakness, and gift in your life to uniquely equip you to shine His light and build His kingdom. But we have to settle something here and now, before we start looking at the tools He's placed in our hands.

We have to take ourselves out of the running. We've got to give up on the pursuit of being the best or even doing it *right*, because it's His power and His purpose that were always meant to do the heavy lifting. We've got to leave behind this picture of our ideal selves that we hoped we'd eventually become; we've got to quit hiding who we are, so we don't get hurt or hurt anyone else. And in the name of Jesus, we've got to quit telling God He's got the wrong girl because (A) if we don't acknowledge that He knows better by this point in the game, we're being crazy, and (B) eventually He may listen to us and use someone else. And then we'll be the ones missing out.

*Let's settle this in our hearts before we move forward:*

God is God. God is the Hero. We are blessed to be a part of His rescue plan.

God is God, but we are the gals He's ordained to bring light and life to the corner of the world where He has intentionally placed us for mission.

If we believe He is on the throne, then we can trust what He says about us: *We are the girls for the job.*

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