

God's Girls

by Jen Gibbs

Day One - Be Bold

'And if I perish, I perish.'

~ Esther 4:16

Have you ever thought 'I can't do that' or 'I'm too scared' or 'I'm not influential enough or smart enough or strong enough...'? Same. In fact, it's actually really common.

Sometimes a little bit of fear can be good for us; it can propel us into doing things that we would otherwise shy away from. Then, once we're through it, we can look back in triumph. There's an old saying that goes something like this: 'Without fear there cannot be courage.' And it's true. I've had to employ and recite the phrase 'Feel the fear and do it anyway,' too many times in my life to count.

But sometimes the fear can be overwhelming... debilitating even. I remember when I published my first book feeling exposed and frightened with the words 'Who are you to be doing this? You're going to look ridiculous!' yelling with megaphone volume in my ear. I called my sister in tears the day the book was going to print and said, 'I can't go through with this... I'm going to pull the plug.' Thankfully my sister knew what it was and she prayed a simple prayer while driving around Sydney and suddenly the fear dissipated. Then I happened to read these words from TD Jakes as I hopped off the phone: 'If you listen to your fear you'll bury your talent. So bury your fear and expose your talent.' And with that, suddenly the ominous journey into the unknown became an adventure!

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One of the best examples of bravery in the Bible comes from a woman named Hadassah – or Esther. She has a book of the Bible named after her and it's a book that begins with elaborate parties and then a beauty contest, the likes of which the Kardashians couldn't emulate! Hadassah, we are shown, was a true beauty, inside and out. Of course, she ended up marrying the king (who liked himself very much indeed – lots of power but not a lot of brains!) and so Hadassah became Queen Esther in a country where some people didn't really like her extended family. You see, she was living in a foreign country, in exile, and was part of the family of God's chosen people - the Jews (fun fact: this is the first time in the Bible they are called 'Jews').

Now, the king's best buddy, Haman, hated the Jews so he tricked the king into saying they would all be killed on a certain day decided on by the throw of the dice, or 'pur'. Queen Esther was alarmed - she was Jewish, her family were Jewish, what could she do? Well, she fasted. And she got all her Jewish family to fast too. Then, once they were all done fasting, she risked her life and approached the king. This was a true act of bravery. It doesn't sound like much does it? She approached her husband... so what?! But she approached him without being summonsed. This single brave act was punishable by death because it was against the law. Esther knew he could order her death by approaching him and making her request, but she had already resolved 'If I perish, I perish!' (a euphemism for 'This is probably going to get me killed but I'll do it anyway.') But God helped her and (spoiler alert) because of her bravery and her cunning plan and action all the Jews were saved. Now that was a good reason for a party and it's still celebrated every year all around the world as Purim (from the 'pur' or dice!)

The really interesting thing though about the book of Esther is that God is never mentioned... not even once! We don't even know when she fasted and all her family fasted what they were fasting for or whether they were even praying while they starved. And because God's not even mentioned some people have wondered why the book of Esther is even included in the Bible! But it's there precisely because it shows us the hand of God working in the everyday lives of people as they trust him and step out in faith. The peripety moment in the story, or the hinge upon which this story swings, is when the king can't sleep and so he gets out the old annals to try to induce sleep. It's here he is reminded of a favour he is meant to bestow upon Esther's uncle for saving his life (yes, there's even more intrigue in this book than all

the Kardashian episodes put together!) The point is that God's sovereign hand is evident here and right through the book in coincidences, just like this one. And isn't that how we live our lives day to day? Suddenly we see the unseen hand of God in circumstance and co-incidence (which some theologians prefer to call God-incidence) and we know he is good and we know he is sovereign and we know we can trust him.

Day One - Response, Prayer, Notes...

A series of horizontal dashed lines for writing.

Day Two - Lead

'Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, now that Ehud was dead. So the Lord sold them into the hands of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. Sisera, the commander of his army, was based in Harosheth Haggoyim. Because he had nine hundred chariots fitted with iron and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the Lord for help. Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time...'

~ Judges 4:1-4

If you're called to lead wouldn't you love the same sort of commentary of your leadership as this: the scene is set with all the bad stuff that's happening, the seemingly impenetrable opposition that lies ahead and then a simple, understated 'Now Deborah...'

We read on and find out that this fearless leader in the Bible performed lots of different jobs: she was a judge; she was a prophet; she was a military leader! Yes, she was a legend. I'd quite underestimated her until I began to read around her story (there are two versions of her story in the Bible and they shed different lights onto her actions and character.) From these versions we see that she was really good at all her jobs and people trusted her.

One day, Deborah called on one of her commanders, Barak, to lead a battle (God had told her to do this). But he said, 'If you go with me, I'll go. But if you don't go with me, I won't go.' Deborah said she would go but she warned him that with an attitude like that there wouldn't be any glory for him when they won the big battle, all the glory would go to a woman. And sure enough, that's exactly what happened. Interestingly, there have been a lot of commentaries I've read or heard over the years where Barak is presented as the hero which leaves me wondering whether they're reading the same Bible as me! Barak, a military leader, wouldn't go to battle without Deborah by his side. His response is, in fact, one of the best and most telling insights into Deborah's position, character, presence and abilities.

Ten big companies of military fighters went out with Barak and Deborah to meet their biggest enemy. The enemy had oppressed the Israelites for twenty years! They had 900 special iron chariots and that was pretty intimidating technology back then!

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But they didn't intimidate Deborah. She called out 'Charge!' and declared that God had already handed them the win! And so he had, because the river flooded so that all their high-tech intimidating chariots got stuck in the mud! The enemy leader got scared and ran away and just as Deborah prophesied, the glory went to a woman, Jael, who captured the enemy leader that day, bringing him to a rather gruesome end.

So, what can we learn from the legendary Deborah? The best sort of leadership comes from listening to and trusting in God, just like Deborah did. Yes, it's that simple. I know there are tonnes of leadership manuals out there each with its own 12-step programme for leading well, but this is the foundation of Christian leadership. If you want to be a leader or you've been thrust into leadership and you're not sure how to do it... or even if you can do it, remember Deborah. Ask God to give you good ideas and then do what he says. If you're listening to him and trusting him, he'll help you... even if it means you might get a bit muddy!

We too can be just as brave and just as strong and just as wise, just as hopeful, just as successful in our fights because God walks with us and will provide us with everything we need right when we need it.

Day Three - At the feet of Jesus

'They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.'

~ Matthew 28:9

I really love reading about the women in the Bible who meet Jesus. They would have been completely surprised that Jesus would even talk to them, let alone help them given the culture at the time. The more I researched these women in the context of their culture and time, the more I realized that no one before (nor since) ever esteemed women in the way Jesus did. Jesus was revolutionary in this regard. And it's easy to see why when we look at the way he treats the women in these encounters. These women find themselves at the feet of Jesus and each one has their life transformed through the exchange:

- ~ One woman (a defiling foreigner, no less) falls at the feet of Jesus asking him to heal her child, Jesus helps her and holds up her faith as an example to the disciples. (Matthew 15:22-28)
- ~ Another woman, Mary of Bethany, sits at the feet of Jesus to be taught. Her sister wanted Jesus to tell her she shouldn't be doing that (and in fact she wasn't meant to), but Jesus said her decision to be taught was the best decision she could have made and he kept on teaching her! And his response was in a culture where the teaching of women was pretty much unheard of. (Luke 10:38-42).
- ~ Another woman - an unclean outcast - falls at the feet of Jesus hoping that by touching the hem of his cloak she would be healed from the bleeding that makes her not only sick but untouchable. Jesus, who should have been angry that she'd touched him, heals her and calls her daughter. (Luke 8:43-48)
- ~ Another woman (a prostitute) falls at the feet of Jesus and washes his feet with her tears and dries them with her hair because she's so grateful to him for all he has done. This is a woman whom the others think should be ignored or told off, and the host sits nearby thinking thoughts like, 'If Jesus was truly a prophet he'd know who this woman was and be outraged.' But Jesus tells the others in the room to look at her (in a culture where she should be ignored) and then commends her publicly for the expression of love and honour she had shown him. (Luke 7:36-50)

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~ And then there was Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene was one of Jesus' closest followers. She travelled with him and hung out with him and bankrolled his mission (well Mary and Joanna and a group of women led by Mary). She was close to Jesus, a leader amongst all the followers and she was awesome! She stuck by Jesus even when it looked like there was no hope, when he was dying on the cross Mary Magdalene was there. The Bible tells us she then got up early to go to his tomb to serve him – even in his death. Because she did that, she had the special privilege of being the first person to see Jesus as the risen saviour! Matthew's account tells us she grabbed his feet and worshipped him. Imagine, out of all the people in all the world whom Jesus could have appeared to first, it was this woman, Mary Magdalene. Then he gives her a special job: Go! Tell the others! Mary becomes the first person to tell the good news that Jesus was ALIVE! She was the world's first evangelist! (Matthew 28:1-10).

All these women found themselves at the feet of Jesus. They all came for different reasons but in every case, they had an encounter that changed them. Their needs were met, they found hope, they found belonging, they found forgiveness, they found meaning and purpose and significance. They found their Saviour.

Day Three - Response, Prayer, Notes...

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Jen Gibbs is the author of *SHE: A Journey of Faith, Hope and Love with Women of the Bible*.

You can find this book, and others, at www.jengibbs.com

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