



Perhaps the greatest barrier to greatness, transformation, and simply getting better is fear. In *Courage For Life*, Ann White provides a path and a process out of paralyzing fear and into the courage to do the next right thing and take the next best step to a better life—the life God has made for you and called you to. The results in her own life, and the lives of those who have followed her path, are the greatest endorsement of this book. If you have been searching for a way out of wherever you are or whatever you are going through, *Courage For Life* is the book I'd recommend.

**STEVE ARTERBURN**

Founder of New Life Ministries and host of the number one nationally syndicated Christian counseling program *New Life Live!*

Ann White's story is an inspiration to those who choose to do the hard things in marriage and life, rather than take the easy way out. This demonstration of one woman's courageous determination to trust God's truth, bathed in His grace, proves trust and obedience can overcome the deceiver who delights in crushing Christians.

**THE HONORABLE SONNY PERDUE AND MRS. MARY PERDUE**

Former governor of Georgia, former secretary of the US Department of Agriculture, and chancellor of the University System of Georgia

I love this book! Thank you for sharing your life, your story, and the truth behind overcoming the obstacles of fear. Your "YES" is a doorway for many to walk through and experience the ability to move forward and trust in the Lord. Everyone who reads this book will be encouraged to stand up and take COURAGE in the Lord.

**SHARI RIGBY**

Actress, director, writer, producer, author, and inspirational speaker

I've spent my career learning the principles of influence, and during that time, I've discovered that *change* is one of the most difficult and challenging actions anyone can take. That's why Ann White's book *Courage For Life* is so important. There are millions of people living in fear, unable to gather the courage to change their lives. Whether you're experiencing that fear, struggling with change, or simply stuck in your life or career, this is a must-read. Get this book and buy a copy for a friend. The world needs to hear Ann's story and embrace the power of courage.

**PHIL COOKE, PHD**

Filmmaker, media consultant, and author of *One Big Thing: Discovering What You Were Born to Do*

It takes miraculous courage to conquer paralyzing fear and failure. Ann's personal journey from hopelessness to abundance and joy in her book *Courage For Life* gives readers step-by-step instructions and true inspiration for anyone who is seeking a way out. Don't miss this one!

**KATHLEEN COOKE**

Cofounder of Cooke Media Group and the nonprofit The Influence Lab, and author of *Hope 4 Today: Stay Connected to God in a Distracted Culture*

Ann White truly exemplifies Christ in the way she cares for others. She didn't keep her struggles private but rather allowed them to be exposed so that others who battle like difficulties could find help. She is brave for she mustered the tenacity to not only tackle her trials but also succeed through the power of the Holy Spirit and then record the process for the benefit of all. Ann is my hero, my inspiration, and the perfect living example of what it means to have courage for life.

**SUZANNE NILES**

Director of relationship development, BroadStreet Publishing

Those of us who have lived awhile know one thing: A meaningful life takes courage. Ann White shows us how to unleash that lion inside us in her excellent book, *Courage For Life*. Her ideas are inviting and easy to follow, yet profound enough to impact a person's life. As I read her book, I felt a spirit of hope grow inside of me and realized I could live the rest of my life free from fear. Read this book, trust God, and have courage for life!

**JOHN MASON**

Author of numerous bestselling books, including *An Enemy Called Average*

Men and women in marriages worldwide suffer in silence. They wear a mask in public and in front of family and friends. Issues may be what some would call minor, yet the man and woman in that marriage are suffering. I applaud Ann White and her family for courageously sharing what could have remained a quiet suffering, yet became the hard work of change and the joy of healing. Ann's story is personal, painful, healing, and full of hope for anyone who suffers in silence. *Courage For Life* is a powerful resource for pastors and counselors who are in the trenches with individuals and couples who are fighting for their marriages, and it is a personal lifeline to individual readers who are ready for change.

**STACY ROBINSON**

Christian talent agent and film and television producer



**COURAGE FOR LIFE**

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# COULD BE BETTER LIFE FOR ANN WHITE

DISCOVER A LIFE FULL  
OF CONFIDENCE, HOPE,  
AND OPPORTUNITY!

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# INTRODUCTION

The pressure of reality was closing in from all sides. It was as if the air was being sucked out of the room. As I sat there on the edge of my hotel bed, I felt like I was drowning in a sea of confusion, and the only part of my body left above the surface was the tip of my nose. Without supernatural intervention, I was going under.

“God, I have done everything I know to do to fix myself, my family, and my marriage,” I remember saying. “And now I have no clue how to even take the next step.”

“Bring your struggles into the light where I can help you heal them,” I sensed God saying. So with shaking hands, I scribbled my current reality onto a sheet of hotel letterhead. It took me a few drafts before I got it right. When I finished, I called to confirm the intended recipients were in their room before I opened my door and headed out.

The hotel hallway felt like a dark tunnel closing in around me, and my footsteps whispered on the carpet as I forced myself to keep walking and not turn around. Fear coursed through me. I had no idea what would happen next, but there was one thing I knew for certain: I could no longer stay where I was.

*How could this be happening to me? How would my truth be received?*

Increasing doubts about lifting my veil of secrecy raced through my mind with each step. For as long as I could remember, I had been afraid to let

anyone see the real me. The familiar pretense was like a dysfunctional security blanket I clung to for dear life. The night I mustered up the nerve to expose the truth, I finally said goodbye to that false sense of security—to the fearful isolation that had become my haven.

While your life story may look very different from mine, one thing is for certain: Few of us escape this life without bumps, bruises, wounds, and scars. We all experience some level of pain, heartbreak, and disappointment. Yet when we ignore our need to address our emotional injuries, we allow them to fester and infect every aspect of our lives.

Jesus reminds us in Scripture, “I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

As strange as it seems, I didn’t realize I lacked courage until I found it halfway around the world in a hotel room in Israel. On that night, I knew I had to take a risk. Suddenly, I was like a hostage who finds herself with a window of opportunity—a sliver of time to reach out and tell someone, “I need help.”

As I walked and prayed, God gave me exactly what I needed in that moment: supernatural courage. I was terrified, but I was resolute. It was now or never. When my pastor’s wife answered my knock, I all but shoved my note into her hands. “I’m desperate and have to tell someone the truth. My marriage is on life support.” The words quickly tumbled out as she stood in the doorway. Janet isn’t only my pastor’s wife; she is a dear friend, the person who had planned a surprise birthday party for me just days before my adult son and I left for Israel. My husband and I had been friends with Johnny and Janet for over fifteen years, and they were about to learn that the put-together life I portrayed was not what I actually lived.

“Come inside, Ann.” She opened the door wider as I backed up.

“I can’t . . . not now,” I whispered, just as the elevator door opened a few feet from where we were standing and Pastor Johnny walked out. I wasn’t ready for a conversation with either of them. I was barely ready for what had just happened. But it had happened. And although I was shaking, I was still standing. As I looked between Johnny and Janet, I thought, *Now what?* So I told them I had to go, and quickly rushed back down the hall to my room.

Life here on earth is a journey filled with countless ups and downs. And although our experiences can be adventurous, exciting, and full of blessings, they can also be overshadowed by varying degrees of fears, challenges, and heartbreaks.

The day I pushed past my fears long enough to invite someone else into my struggles was the day I began my journey toward true freedom—not freedom from any person, place, or thing, but from the bondage of my own fear-based choices, from the dark place of isolation where I felt somewhat safe but was—in reality—so alone. This is where writing became the vehicle God used to give me courage and transport me to a place of amazing grace. And it all started on a sheet of hotel letterhead.

I didn't know how anyone would ultimately respond to my vulnerability, including my husband (who had remained stateside). But the truth that everything wasn't perfect in my life was at last coming out, and God was at work in miraculous ways. I took His Word to heart: "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

Confessing the truth to my pastor and his wife started a chain reaction that led me toward honesty, openness, help, and healing. That night I took two important steps toward courage. First, I made a commitment to change. Second, I overcame the obstacles of secrecy and isolation.

The Bible says, "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results" (James 5:16).

It was then that I understood a powerful truth: Actions and behaviors based on unhealthy, fear-based choices will never lead to a healthy relationship, whether it's with a spouse, family member, friend, employer, or even the person sitting next to us at church. I desperately wanted a healthy relationship with my husband and family, but that was never going to happen if I, for my part, wasn't open and honest.

## **EXPOSED, EXHAUSTED, AND EXHILARATED**

For many of us, being in unhealthy relationships—whether with others or ourselves—has become a way of life. We've resigned ourselves to the

distorted belief that we are destined to exist in a kind of half-life, in a world where tension is normal and joy eludes us. We've come to believe that it is what it is.

Some of us have gone so far as to ignore our problems. And some of us blame the people around us. But the truth is, it's not about the choices those around us make—although their choices can (and often do) affect us. When all is said and done, what really makes the difference is our own choices, including how we decide to respond to the choices others are making.

What I'm saying isn't rocket science. It isn't advanced physics. But it is something that is often overlooked, crippling countless men and women, no matter their level of intellect, success, or faith. Finding the courage to pursue an emotionally healthy life is ultimately about the choices we make. It's about praying for godly wisdom and discernment to accept responsibility for those choices, courage to face their consequences, and strength to move on. And it's about the healthy boundaries we set for ourselves.

If you've spent any time pretending to be someone or something you aren't, you know how exhausting and isolating the dance can be. Contrary to what some may think, it takes a great deal of energy to hide behind masks to cover up our fear and self-condemnation. Many of us have constructed the walls of our personal prisons so high and so strong, we've lost sight of who or what we are protecting ourselves from. All we know is that to expose who we really are is terrifying.

When I found myself in a hotel room in Israel contemplating divorce, I had no idea I was about to discover seven courageous steps I would consistently follow, day after day, that would ultimately change my life. And now, these steps can also change your life—no matter what difficult, challenging, or fearful situation you may be experiencing.

## Chapter 1

# FIND COURAGE

### COURAGE QUOTE

*Courage is taking a necessary risk and trusting God with the outcome.*

### COURAGE VERSE

*Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the LORD your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you.—Deuteronomy 31:6*

Our minds shape our belief systems about family, love, marriage, God, and life as we experience it. These beliefs, in turn, shape our choices and habits, both good and bad.

As a child, I learned to turn a blind eye to problems and pretend everything in life was perfect, even when it was far from it. I grew up always trying not to rock the boat, and I carried that dysfunctional coping mechanism into all of my adult relationships. Finding the courage to break this bad habit took me a long time.

Both of my parents were married to someone else when they met each other through work. My mother had two small boys, and my father had a young son and daughter. They met, divorced their spouses, and married. Within two years, they had me: his, hers, and ours. We were the new modern family. We were also monumentally dysfunctional, long before I knew what the word meant.

The father I knew was successful and a good provider, but he was also angry, self-absorbed, emotionally and verbally abusive, unfaithful, and at times physically abusive. My mother worked hard to keep him calm and to accommodate his extreme behaviors.

In fact, I grew up believing that a caring person sets their own needs aside to accommodate the attitudes, behaviors, and choices of others. But now I know that when we ignore our personal needs to attend to the desires of others, we often enable inappropriate behaviors and can allow ourselves to be overlooked and undervalued.

God's desire is to equip us to make healthy choices that honor Him first. Subsequently, the hope and wholeness He can give will flow through us and into all our relationships. He wants our lives and relationships to be healthy, to come from places of truth. He wanted me to walk in truth and purpose. However, none of those things would happen unless some major changes occurred. It was time to stop trying to change everyone else and instead focus on the one person I could change—me.

Can you relate?

If so, will you commit to taking practical steps toward courage beginning today? Making healthy choices may not take you as long as it took me. My prayer is that God will use the courage He gave me to help you find yours.

## CROSSROADS

I have never been compelled to write down my feelings—not even as a young girl, when I was given a little gold-clasped diary with a teeny-tiny key, and certainly not as an adult. That is, until a Christian counselor advised me to journal as a way to sort through my mixed-up emotions. Writing had never been a place I aspired to go. Yet writing was a catalyst God used to help me take a stand and recover my lost identity, to force my hand toward honesty and, ultimately, toward healing. And it was in God's Holy Land where He began to exert that pressure.

I was on a ten-day tour of Israel with my oldest son. It was a dream vacation where we would experience the Scriptures come to life with our

pastor, his wife, and about forty other church members. We planned to visit some of the most breathtaking sites in the world. This should have been one of the happiest times of my life. But as day one came to an end, the only thing on my mind was that I was ready to give up on my twenty-six-year marriage.

It had been a long day of touring an ancient seaport, a Roman theater in Caesarea, and historic spots in Mount Carmel, Megiddo, and the Valley of Armageddon. Throughout the day I tried desperately to keep my head up and hold on to my carefully crafted facade that everything was okay.

No one had a clue how distressed I was, not even my son. In fact, several of my fellow travelers commented on how special it was that a mother and son could experience such a memorable vacation together. I agreed with them. It was special, and I so wanted to pretend the only thing that mattered was making lifetime memories with my twenty-four-year-old son. Yet, truthfully, the waves of reality were crashing in all around me, and I was drowning emotionally.

I hoped this trip would be a nice reprieve from the escalating issues at home. I hoped my time away would be a good thing, that it would allow me to cool off and take stock of the bigger picture.

Have you ever felt the need to escape your current reality?

Well, that's exactly how I felt at that time. I had allowed disappointments, frustrations, and unrealistic expectations to build up until I could no longer see past them. What I longed for was peace. And even though I knew God's Word and its promise of peace, I was emotionally incapable of truly embracing it.

"Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9).

When my son's phone rang just as we returned to the hotel that first evening, I sat on the edge of the bed to untie my walking shoes, pretending not to listen as my son exchanged pleasantries with his dad and gave him highlights about our day. "I'm going to my room to take a shower," I heard him say. "Do you want to talk to Mom? She's right here."

I wasn't ready to talk to my husband, but I didn't want to put our son in

an awkward position either. We never wanted our boys to be aware of any problems, and we always did our best to shelter them from any challenges we were having.

We were literally and figuratively thousands of miles apart that night as we tried to talk civilly about how we were going to end our marriage. But by the end of our conversation, we were simply in another argument. As I hung up the phone, I felt completely defeated and hopeless.

Perhaps you know what hopelessness feels like. Maybe you are in the midst of a desperate battle to save a relationship or mourning the loss of one. Maybe you are single and your need to find courage has nothing whatsoever to do with a significant other. Maybe you are at a crossroads in life, overcoming past pain, facing physical or emotional challenges, or dealing with overwhelming choices or changes, and you find yourself feeling hopeless as well.

No matter what you're going through, fear not. Courage is possible! And with God's help, you can find it. Courage For Life will bring you closer to the power of God, a supernatural power promised in His Word: "Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20).

## WHAT IS COURAGE?

Courage is something most of us want. It's an attribute that inspires us to venture outside our comfort zones and embrace the possibilities. It gives us the ability to be brave, to conquer fear and despair so we can take on necessary challenges and make necessary changes.

When I was growing up, it was the boys who were taught to be strong, fearless, and courageous—not the girls. This was especially true in my house, where I learned from my mother destructive patterns of codependency, denial, and isolation.

I recently saw this message on a church marquee: "What you tolerate, children emulate." My mom tolerated a great deal, and as far back as I can remember, I viewed her way of coping as a valuable attribute, and I wanted to be just like her. I didn't understand how broken she was, and I brought

that dysfunction into my adulthood and marriage. We bring much of our past into our present relationships, and not all of it is good.

There are different types of courage, ranging from physical strength and endurance to mental stamina and innovation. Courage can be defined in many ways, but I like the following list of definitions.

Courage means

- taking a necessary risk and trusting God with the outcome
- laying down our fears and embracing our faith
- trying something new for the very first time
- rejecting temptation and pursuing healthy choices
- honestly evaluating our lives
- saying yes to positive challenges and changes
- making wise choices in the face of fear
- choosing to make positive changes in spite of obstacles
- being honest with others and ourselves
- laying aside our disguises to celebrate our true selves
- being able to admit we've been wrong
- putting away distorted beliefs and adopting God's Truth
- accepting the things we cannot change and changing the things we can
- accepting God's view over all other perspectives
- giving grace to those who have hurt us
- choosing to persevere, even when we're afraid
- choosing joy in the midst of all circumstances

As someone has said, "Courage is about doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared. Have the courage to act instead of react." When we act, we are making a rational choice. Conversely, when we react, we are making an emotional choice. There's something to be said for maintaining a healthy balance between these two actions.

Intentionally looking for courage and utilizing tools to make better choices is, in itself, a courageous act. It's an act I wish I had taken long before I reached the place where my lack of courage threatened virtually

everything I held dear to my heart. Kudos to you for reaching this place in your life now.

## A SEVEN-STEP JOURNEY

The Seven Steps to COURAGE I present in this book will provide the tools you need to learn how to act more than react, make intentional choices, experience the power of fearless choices, and find joy in healthy choices.

When we faithfully (and intentionally) implement these life-changing steps, the exercise will produce amazing results. It will strengthen our courage muscles and, ultimately, bring us into a closer relationship with our heavenly Father. And it's this relationship, above all others, that enables us to walk with courage, live in grace, and find true joy on the miraculous journey of life.

Get ready to unpack the seven steps I took to find the strength to make fearless choices. My prayer is that you, too, will feel convicted to follow these life-changing steps and find similar strength and freedom.

### **The Seven Steps to COURAGE**

**C** = Commit to Change

**O** = Overcome Obstacles

**U** = Uncover Your True Self

**R** = Replace Worldly Lies with Scriptural Truth

**A** = Accept the Things You Cannot Change

**G** = Grasp God's Love for You

**E** = Embrace a Life of Grace

## A FAITHFUL FOCUS

There isn't a magical yellow brick road that will lead us to a fearless place where we can instantly find courage. But God has provided us a way to hope and healing, a way to find saving grace and experience true joy. My prayer is that you will find God's hope, healing, and grace in these pages.

As we move forward, I feel it's important to make clear that my

perspective on this topic is that of a courageous Christian woman. Although I invite readers of all faiths to learn how to make courageous choices, I believe a critical part of any enduring solution will be found in a firm trust in God along the way.

God knows when our hearts are breaking. He knows that our fear-based choices create open wounds that never seem to heal. But when we seek to please the Lord in all areas of our lives, His desires will become the desires of our own hearts. The Bible says, “Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4, NASB).

As I’ve trekked through the mud and mire of poor-choice consequences, I’ve found the most direct route to courage and grace is to pray for wisdom and discernment. When we seek His Kingdom above all else and live righteously, He will give us everything we need (Matthew 6:33). Having courage is, in essence, all about making God-directed decisions.

This isn’t necessarily an easy thing to do on a consistent basis—especially when we’ve developed dysfunctional habits and coping mechanisms or when the people around us are making their own self-destructive choices.

It’s difficult to manage life when the worldly lies we have come to believe have trapped us in a ditch of desperation, when we’re feeling insignificant, insecure, or afraid. It’s difficult, yes, but far from impossible.

### **The Seven Steps to COURAGE Can Help If Any of These Describe You:**

- Have trouble saying yes and/or no with firmness and love
- Feel like no one understands what you are going through
- Have things in your past you are afraid to tell anyone about
- Have been betrayed by a close friend or someone you love
- Struggle with unforgiveness
- Have developed unhealthy coping mechanisms (bad habits)
- Have experienced verbal, emotional, sexual, or physical abuse
- Are unhappy with your body image
- Struggle to accept that you are forgiven
- Feel confused about your identity or purpose in life
- Look for love in all the wrong places

At the end of every chapter, you'll find several powerful exercises you can use to grow stronger courage muscles. The Courage Call-to-Action Steps will help you intentionally apply what you're learning. You will be surprised at the long-term results these short-term exercises can bring.

### **Courage Call-to-Action Steps**

Purchase a spiral notebook or some type of blank journal. Put your name and the date on the first page. Keep this notebook nearby as you read to jot down thoughts, tips, and Scripture notes.

Take a few minutes to write down your thoughts after reading this chapter. List the areas in your life where you might need to make more courageous choices.