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"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

– Esther 4:14



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IT'S NEVER WRONG TO DO THE RIGHT THING

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Nicole C. Mullen

IT'S NEVER WRONG TO DO THE RIGHT THING

Courageous Stories to Inspire Godly Decisions

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150 YEARS STRONG
DAVID C COOK

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Published by Esther Press,
an imprint of David C Cook
4050 Lee Vance Drive
Colorado Springs, CO 80918 U.S.A.

Integrity Music Limited, a Division of David C Cook
Brighton, East Sussex BN1 2RE, England

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Library of Congress Control Number 2025936986
ISBN 978-0-8307-8935-1
eISBN 978-0-8307-8936-8

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The Team: Susan McPherson, Suzanne Gosselin, James Hershberger,
Jack Campbell, Michael Fedison, Susan Murdock
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Printed in the United States of America
First Edition 2025

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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This book is dedicated to the loving memory of my grandmother Bessie L. Coleman. Her faith-filled courage to do the right thing became the catalyst for my existence, and I am forever grateful.

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Change Can Be Your Best Friend

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I must admit that after all these years, it still feels a little weird when people recognize me. I mean, I love the interactions and the meeting of new friends, but we live in a big world where most people don't know who I am. So, when someone stops me in public and shares gratitude for a song I've written or a word of encouragement I've given from a stage or on a broadcast, it's hard to describe the joy mingled with shyness I sometimes feel.

Over the years, I've been blessed to sing and speak at hundreds of events. I've performed at Billy and Franklin Graham Crusades, women's conferences, and Christian events. I've ministered at prisons, shelters, youth events, and churches. My songs have been played on radio stations, and I've appeared on TV shows and in movies. By God's grace I've received awards and been inducted into the Christian Music Hall of Fame. I've been invited to speak in environments and on platforms that still cause me to pinch myself! And still, I can't take any credit. Any success I've experienced is because of the Lord. The glory belongs to God alone.

I'm baffled to see and hear how God has used what I consider to be my small gift of "loaves and fish." He has multiplied the little and allowed it to encourage and feed many around the world. He has also redeemed my poor choices and brought glory to Himself—and goodness to me—through even the dark seasons of my story. In those moments, I am surprised by His goodness and grace all over again. I am humbled when I realize that what has turned into a victory for myself and millions of others did not feel heroic in the making. Instead, those seasons of preparation felt more like one right decision after another. And sometimes, one right decision after a not-so-right one.

It's kind of funny, but growing up in Cincinnati, Ohio, felt so happy and normal that my sisters and I used to label it as "boring."

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Life was pretty drama-free, until I got married at age twenty. We met shortly after I graduated from Bible school in Dallas, Texas. He was charming, and I ignored the red flags. Against my mom's better judgment, I proceeded in saying "I do." By the time our wedding day arrived, he had already struck me in the face and closed his fingers around my neck. But pride and stubbornness enticed me to remain silent. He had apologized, and I had forgiven him. Not that I was yet able to discern between true repentance and simple guilt. I ignored my mom's discernment and set out to prove I could make this decision alone. Rejecting wise counsel would cost me.

I am humbled when I realize that what has turned into a victory for myself and millions of others did not feel heroic in the making.

Two years later, I awoke one night to him grabbing me by my heels and dragging me out of the bed. He kicked me in the ribs and yelled at me for getting the mail. My life was rapidly sliding downhill. I had made some poor choices—and I was beginning to realize that this one could place me in an early grave. Eventually, I had to say goodbye to the normalcy of dysfunction and find the courage to make a change.

I recognize that our stories may not be the same. Everyone is given a unique set of joys and challenges. And yet many of us desire the same things: goodness, bravery, comfort, healing, acceptance, love, do-overs, and the ability to do what is right in every situation.

It seems that after every failure, fear tries to seep in. Whether it was a bad decision in a business venture that caused financial loss, the end of a relationship or marriage, the loss of a job, or a wayward

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child, we begin to question everything—including our ability to choose wisely. We are afraid that we will make another wrong decision or move. This line of thinking can often cause us to become paralyzed and unable to make *any* decision. Instead, we stay put. We do nothing because the fear of choosing the wrong thing again is too overwhelming.

Have you ever felt this way? I have. When this happens, we begin to entertain questions such as: "Isn't it more comfortable to just stay right where I am instead of taking a risk that might or might not lead to something better?" Or: "What if stepping out of my comfort zone leads to an even worse situation?"

I get it! I've been there and have the scars to show for it! During my marriage to an abusive husband, I went through a period where I was afraid to trust my own judgment. Courage seemed like a distant relative I desperately wanted to know but needed help to embrace. I was convinced that if freedom, peace, love, and wholeness were on the other side of my difficult and dangerous relationship, then it was a journey worth making. My life depended on it. But I still needed help to face my fears to make a change.

I lived in this familiar rhythm of abuse for three years. And at my lowest point, I prayed to die. When I awoke the following morning, I was disappointed that my request had been denied. I now recognize that a hearty "no" is sometimes the best and most loving answer God can give. I finally realized the negative patterns wouldn't change on their own. I would have to face my fear and make a change. *I* would have to change. The relationship ended with a

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late-night escape, which included sleeping in my car and hiding out in the home of loved ones. God was gracious to send me godly sister-girls—who not only reminded me of His goodness but demonstrated it in practical ways. They had their own stories. They, too, had suffered and seen God bring them through. Their hope was in Christ. They had found comfort and wisdom in the Scriptures. Someone else had encouraged and instructed them, and now they passed it on to me.

I would love to say that that was the end of my drama, but it wasn't. My cycle of physical abuse came to an end, and yet another type of hardship awaited me. The pain didn't leave with my abuser. There were internal wounds and invisible bleeding unseen by the naked eye. I felt unloved and yet desperately desired to be cherished. I was leaving a trail of blood in deep waters; which can eventually attract sharks. Unbeknownst to me, my pain was sending the wrong signals.

Before my inner healing was complete, I committed to love again. And I soon became familiar with heartbreak and betrayal. My timing was off, and yet, God was incredibly faithful. He blessed me with three beautiful children and gave me multiple "songs in the night." I didn't want another failed relationship, so I did all I could to make it work.

I stayed. I prayed. I fasted. I sought counsel. I cried. I pleaded with God for change. Change eventually arrived, but not in the way I had imagined. Neither did it resemble the miracle of healing I had desired. However, as I leaned into God's way and took steps of obedience, the results were superior.

For many years, I wanted a change without having to make a change. You may ask, "Was it scary?" Yes, it was. "Was it necessary?"

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Absolutely. The things we desire are not always easy to obtain. Sometimes a hard, painful decision precedes a season of health and peace. And yet, the right decision yields a good harvest, even if it goes unseen for a while. God knows what is good for us, and He makes the good things in our lives grow (1 Cor. 3:6). The blade of a knife cutting into flesh is always painful, but what makes the difference is who holds the knife—a surgeon or a foe. Both cuts will cause pain, but one is intended to harm and the other is intended to heal. If there is a malignancy in your body, cutting it out may be necessary to sustain your life. To do nothing is to partner with an inevitable, premature death.

In some cases, other measures can be taken to remove something that prevents health and wholeness. Not every tooth that aches needs to be pulled. There might be other remedies that will treat it. Just because betrayal afflicts a marriage doesn't mean the marriage has to end. Sometimes relationships can be fixed by both partners staying put and actively addressing problems; other times they can't. God's wisdom helps us choose the best context for positive change. And yet, where the heart is involved, separating what we feel is right from what we know is right can be challenging.

I don't know your story or what area of your life is in need of transformation. Maybe it's your marriage, finances, health, friendships, or parenting challenges. Perhaps you feel stuck in a job or a relationship that is stifling your gifts and the person God created you to be. No two people will have identical stories (though some details will mirror each other so closely they challenge that statement). After all, Scripture tells us there is nothing new under the sun (Eccl. 1:9). But our stories need not be the same for us to learn from one another or empathize with each other's hurts and victories.

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That's the difference between singing in harmony and singing in unison. One requires that we all sing the same note and the other permits different notes to be sung simultaneously within the same chord. Both can be beautiful, especially when performed at the right time. Through my years of ministry, I have noticed a common theme that each of us can wrap our individual story around. Regardless of age, ethnicity, or culture, we all know what it feels like to be afraid, ashamed, embarrassed, pressed down, unsure, and hurt to the core. The details of our stories may be different, but our struggles are the same. We share many similar desires: love, safety, acceptance, healing, and empowerment. Our similarities bind us together.

When we look in on someone else's situation, it's often easy to see the need for a change. For example, when a situation of domestic violence has been made known to us, we might say, "You're crazy for staying! Why don't you just move on? You'd be so much better off!" However, to the abused woman it may not feel so simple. Some stay out of fear because they believe they have nowhere else to go. Statistically, those who leave without a proper plan or support system risk greater injury and even death. Others don't leave because they are afraid to be alone, or the abuse feels more bearable than the risk of the unknown. Some, like me, remain because they have seen a glimpse of good in the other person and hope it will someday evaporate the abusive behavior. They hold out for a happy ending that may never come and want to believe their partner when he says, "This time was the last time."

Through my own journey with domestic violence and betrayal, I learned that words alone are not evidence of true change. Without the corresponding actions of taking responsibility, receiving counseling, accepting accountability, and developing new patterns of dealing

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with anger and temptation, a confession is just empty words—no matter how sincere the delivery or how authentic the tears. Oh, how I wish I could have convinced my younger self of this sooner. True repentance has both faith (belief and hope) and works (the corresponding actions that produce evidence of the change).

When I began to see that Christ does not condone the bruising of His bride or the abuse of anyone—that knowledge changed me. When I saw the consistency of God in keeping His Word and His vows, I noticed a sharp contrast to what I had experienced in my past relationships. The more unfaithfulness I experienced, the more I witnessed the faithfulness of God during what I call my "night season." The worse I was treated, the more attractive the gentleness of Christ. The enemy may have desired that the abuse would crush me and make me hard, but my trials had the opposite effect. I am becoming softer on the inside and tougher on the out. The betrayal I experienced made me cling to the kindness of Christ, my true Redeemer.

True repentance has both faith (belief and hope) and works (the corresponding actions that produce evidence of the change).

Your situation may have a different label. You might be struggling with depression, anger, illness, addiction, loneliness, low self-esteem, or general discouragement. In hearing your story, someone might be tempted to tell you what to do or make comments that begin with "If I were you ..." I will try not to do this, because I kind of hated it when it was done to me, especially when there was no real empathy,

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compassion, or biblical wisdom as its basis. So, I promise to do my best to point you toward hope and give you tools to step into true change and do the right thing.

I will tell you stories of people who have lived in messy situations, endured hardship and heartache, and even made some bad choices. But in the aftermath of wrong, they were able to make a change by doing the right thing. On many occasions, their small deeds became a big deal in the greatest of ways and the world was forever changed. Most of them had no clue of the magnitude and impact of their actions. The ripple effects have outlived them—and I can't wait to share their stories! Most of these courageous men and women are recorded in the Bible, but some are more contemporary.

I'll even introduce you to a few God-fearing men and women from my own family. In hard times, their examples have given me the strength to do the right thing. These heroes and "sheroes" have shown me how to apply the principles of their stories to my own. They have modeled lessons on being quick to make the right decision, avoiding fleshly, knee-jerk reactions, responding instead of reacting, and walking in wisdom. They have reminded me that life matters and should be celebrated and protected. They have taught me about taking a stand and loving fearlessly.

I'm not saying I've mastered all of these lessons; I haven't. Like every human since Adam and Eve, I am a work in progress—just ask my kids! I've made some horrible decisions in my lifetime, yet I can boldly say I have learned from them. I've also made some epically good decisions that have brought me success, happiness, and peace. These good choices were catalysts for changes that positively affected my mental, spiritual, and physical health. They initiated a shift in my walk with God, my finances, and my relationships. It may sound

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weird, but change really can be your best friend. It can lead you from a toxic situation to a place called "good." From there, it can lead to the destination, which is "great."

This journey requires us to take steps of faith and trust the process of how God is shaping and renewing us. Christ does not always change the situation, but if we yield to Him, He will always change *us* for the better. He is patient and may be waiting for you to make that first move in the right direction. That step may look like a cry for help, the placement of a new boundary, a risky step of obedience, or a courageous act. But in every circumstance, His desire is that we be changed for the better.

It may sound weird, but change really can be your best friend. It can lead you from a toxic situation to a place called "good." From there, it can lead to the destination, which is "great."

In my life, these changes were inspired first by God. He used some beautiful, ordinary, everyday world-changers to give me the courage to take the first step. These heroes and sheroes are mentors who live near and far, who have shaped my character over the past few decades. Their examples were only possible because of the One they imitated, Jesus the Christ, who is the source of all goodness, courage, compassion, wisdom, strength, and power—the One who gives us the ability to do the right thing. He is our standard and key example. Without knowing it at the time, these people were following patterns He had set and approved. My hope is that these stories will strengthen you and challenge you to do the right thing no matter what circumstances you may be facing.

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I am so glad that you have picked up this book and decided to take this journey with me. I can't wait to share the life-altering stories and lessons I have learned from some amazing heroes of the faith. We are in this together and joined by the One who promised He would be present if we gathered in His name. As you read, know that He is here, and my prayers and heart are also with you. Are you ready to be changed and to courageously change your world? Let's go!

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