

Kimberly Wagner has a life message that is both provocative and reassuring. As a longtime friend, I've seen her live her teaching and it's so refreshing to watch. Now other women will have the opportunity to learn from her and to be encouraged that strong women—grounded in the Word and trusting God—are beautiful to behold. This book is good for both the newly engaged and the long-time married woman. Buy it, read it, share it!

—**CAROLYN McCULLEY**, author of *Did I Kiss Marriage Goodbye?* and *Radical Womanhood*

Kimberly Wagner's life is a continual pursuit of all that is true, right, and holy. She not only strives for this in her own life but lives a life of sacrifice and investment into the lives of others, such as me, spurring us on in the faith, coming alongside, and speaking truth in love. This book portrays the beauty of strength under control . . . His control.

—**MELISSA HUDNELL**, wife, mom, and follower of Jesus Christ

If your marriage feels like a battlefield, you need this book! Kim presents the radical idea that fierceness is woven into God's design for womanhood, but softness is the application. She knows what it's like to wrestle with the urge to control, to crave power, and to rush toward battle. In a style that makes you feel like you're having coffee with a close friend, Kim shares her story while opening the Word to reveal God's truth. This book has the tools you need to equip you to move you and your husband from adversaries to allies.

—**ERIN DAVIS**, author of *Beyond Bath Time: Embracing Motherhood as a Sacred Role*

WOW! Pull out your highlighters, because this inspiring book is full of profound and quote-worthy truths. Dig deep into its pages and discover the power and potential of your own fierce beauty.

—**MARY A. KASSIAN**, author of *Girls Gone Wise in a World Gone Wild*

As a pastor's wife, this is the book I have needed for decades! I have longed for a tool to put in the hands of struggling, discontented, strong women . . . women who are wrestling with how and why they can restore their love for their husband and marriage. Kim does a masterful job of crafting her own life story into a message that is a handbook for restoration of any marriage. Kim is writing from the perspective of the trenches, about how to win the battle, and it is powerful!

—**HOLLY ELLIFF**, wife of Bill Elliff, Directional Pastor of The Summit Church

Can there be such a thing as sanctified ferocity? Kimberly Wagner has walked the path of sinful, self-focused boldness to find that there is a meek and humble kind of tenacity that ought to characterize every woman who loves Jesus. Fierce and humble can, and should, describe every woman of God.

—**BOB LEPINE**, cohost of FamilyLife Today

When I first met Kimberly Wagner, she was a miserable whif whose fierce spirit had intimidated her husband and stripped him of confidence and joy. I have watched as she has become a soft warrior who is a source of strength and encouragement to LeRoy and to others around her. I believe this account of Kim's journey and the truths God used to change her heart and restore her marriage will minister much grace and help to other "fierce women."

—**NANCY LEIGH DEMOSS**, author, host of Revive Our Hearts radio

Finally, a beautiful treatise on why God made women to be strong and how that can be expressed with a gentle spirit! Kimberly writes with conviction and tells her own story with transparency. Dare to pick this up and become gently fierce!

—**DANNAH GRESH**, bestselling author of *And the Bride Wore White*

THE POWER OF A SOFT WARRIOR

FierceWomen



KIMBERLY WAGNER

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

© 2012 by
KIMBERLY WAGNER

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*. Copyright © 2000, 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the King James Version.

Edited by Pam Pugh

Interior Design: Smartt Guys design

Cover Design: Connie Gabbert Design and Illustration LLC

Cover Image: iStockphoto.com / 17668588 and 13809210

Author Photo: Genevieve Townley, Viva Rose Photography

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wagner, Kimberly.

Fierce women : the power of a soft warrior / Kimberly Wagner.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8024-0620-0

1. Marriage—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Man-woman relationships —Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Women—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BV835.K63 2012

248.8'435—dc23

2012014084

We hope you enjoy this book from Moody Publishers. Our goal is to provide high-quality, thought-provoking books and products that connect truth to your real needs and challenges. For more information on other books and products written and produced from a biblical perspective, go to www.moodypublishers.com or write to:

Moody Publishers
820 N. LaSalle Boulevard
Chicago, IL 60610

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America

To my comrade in battle, my loyal friend, faithful lover.

*Your silly jokes make me laugh and your
deep understanding of Scripture makes me cry.*

*Thank you, LeRoy, for going the long haul with me
through the years of darkness when we'd lost all hope.*

Of all women, I am most blessed to be loved by you.

CONTENTS

Getting Started: Fierce and Soft	9
Chapter 1: The Beauty of Fierceness	13
Chapter 2: And Then There's the Scary Side	35
Chapter 3: Where Is the Man I Married?	55
Chapter 4: The Deadly Three	75
Chapter 5: The Life-Giving Trio	97
Chapter 6: Love from the Inside Out	119
Chapter 7: Letting Go and Grabbing On	139
Chapter 8: There's No One Else Like My Man!	161
Chapter 9: The Biggies	185
Chapter 10: What If He's Not Listening?	207
Chapter 11: What's the Big Deal about Marriage Anyway?	229
Chapter 12: Dream with Me	249
Notes	265
Appendix: Guidelines When Confrontation Is Necessary	271
Challenging Your Man to Robust Christianity	273
A Word to the Fierce Woman Who Is Single	276
Characteristics of a Beautifully Fierce Woman	277–278
Characteristics of a Destructive Fierce Woman	277–278
Recommended Resources	279
Appreciation	283

Getting Started: Fierce and Soft



When I was a little girl, I was captivated by stories of heroism—especially ones where the heroine was still young—like little Lucy in Narnia who bravely followed King Aslan into battle. I related to her willingness to valiantly serve her king. But her fierce courage was even more inspiring to me because she was a good and gentle warrior “with a very merry face.”¹ Perhaps every woman holds similar little girl dreams within her heart—of victorious battles for truth, love, and justice—dreams that are really but a dim reflection of the Great Story that lies ahead.

Most young women dream about the man who will one day win her love. She imagines the details of her wedding day with great anticipation. When the day arrives, no bride expects heartache or broken vows, but many soon realize the marriage doesn’t measure up to the dreams she had held. Two sinners attempting to meld into one glorious unit will undoubtedly experience conflict, stress, and

even spiritual attack. The wise bride recognizes that her vows are an entrance to a spiritual battlefield.

Often marriages are caught in a destructive relationship dynamic that I call the Fierce Woman/Fearful Man cycle. In this cycle, a wife's strengths can intimidate her husband. The Fierce Woman can be a living inspiration but her ferocity can also morph into her husband's worst nightmare.

He may respond to her fierceness by shutting down, running, responding in harsh anger, or passively retreating to his own silent world. Rather than experiencing joy and companionship, the couple caught in this miserable cycle relate to each other more like alienated roommates than passionate lovers and friends.

LeRoy and I have experienced both extremes in our marriage, and I want to share with you some things I've learned over the years. The good news is that this destructive cycle can be reversed. But a strong woman doesn't need to take on a wimpy persona or undergo a personality transplant in order to be the ideal wife. As a Fierce Woman, you can develop a fresh and intimate relationship with your husband. In fact, God desires for your fierceness to play an integral role in His plan for your marriage.

The bride on the cover of this book portrays this kind of woman. She expresses the passion and strength of the Fierce Woman as she enters marriage. Her raised arms communicate determination and praise for her God, while the bowed head conveys her softness and humble submission to His plan. She lingers in holy moments before entering the sanctuary—pausing to pray rather than rushing in. She's standing at the entrance of an old church, preparing her heart before closed doors that will soon open to a new adventure . . . a young woman returning to the ancient paths . . . a soft warrior preparing for what lies ahead.

Whether or not you realize it, you are in a battle, and God has

placed strengths within you to be used in powerful ways. When you enter the marriage relationship, you are entering the sacred metaphor God designed to explain Himself to a watching world. Marriage is the great mystery, the glorious platform God created to display His love relationship with His bride. This is why marriage is a flashpoint for Satan's attacks; he seeks to destroy the beauty and effectiveness of God's model. In light of this, we must strive for the Great Story to be lived out in our marriages.

I hope as you read, you will take moments to pause, ponder, and pray. May you encounter the Lord of Battles within these pages and receive insight and instruction for serving Him as a soft warrior—the Fierce Woman who is empowered by the Spirit and softened by His grace.

Let's get started.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Wagner". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Kimberly" and "Wagner" being capitalized and prominent.

CHAPTER

1

The Beauty of Fierceness



“These boots are made for walkin’
and that’s just what they’ll do!

And one of these days these boots are gonna walk all over you!”¹

—LEE HAZELWOOD

Maybe you’re too young to recognize these lyrics, but this was a popular song back in the day. The first grade girls were into knee-high, white, patent leather boots (yes, in first grade!). We’d sport our shiny boots as we strutted around the playground at recess, singing these words at the top of our lungs.

Recalling it now, I’m amused by the comical picture of a group of six-year-old girls and the strident aggression fueled by this silly little song. As we sang, we’d glare at the boys while digging our heels into the ground, giving the impression of grinding them into powder! I doubt we understood what we were singing. Our little game

may have been innocent, but we sure liked the feeling of power that surged every time we belted out the words, “Walk all over you!”

By the time I was in junior high, more refined lyrics fueled our intensity as we proudly joined Helen Reddy to “roar” our defiance in songs like “I Am Woman.” Each phrase increased our passion: “I am STRONG . . . I am INVINCIBLE . . . *I am woman!*” We were proud of our gender and ready to tell the world that “If I have to, I can do anything!”²

I think one reason these songs had such attraction is that they gave us a sense of power and strength. I never wanted to be a wimpy woman. I’ve always been drawn to strong women—aren’t you? A refined strength has an alluring appeal. I love to see a fierce woman in action. Nothing fazes her. She’s indomitable, determined, and she’s a passionate force beyond contention. When given a challenging assignment, she boldly goes for it and doesn’t let anything or anyone stand in her way.

She’s fierce.

But I’m not talking about an ugly fierceness that is really just raw aggression. There is a beauty to the right kind of fierceness. Not the brand of fierceness that recklessly walks over people or is rooted in self-centered goals. Not the fierceness that produces ice queens or conniving shrews but a fierceness that is humble strength and power under control. The fierceness I admire grabs on to the hem of God’s will and won’t let go. A fierceness that determinedly stands strong in a gale of opposition. This kind of fierceness looks fear in the eye without blinking and confidently forges ahead.

You may not agree. I mean, the word “fierce” carries some negative baggage, but today it’s a term many women in our culture embrace. While doing research for this book, I found various definitions for the word, ranging from: “savage; wild; of a violently cruel nature; harsh” to the more desirable: “intensely eager; intense;

ardent.” No matter what terminology we use, I think we might all recognize at least traces of fierceness within each of us.

I asked a group of women their thoughts on this topic and their responses varied:

“Fierceness is a good thing! I’m glad my mom fiercely stood for truth while I was growing up. In a world with so many confusing messages, it’s good to have women who know God’s Word and fiercely stand against the cultural tide.”

Another commented:

“When I hear the phrase ‘fierce woman,’ I think of a woman who’s loud, pushy, obnoxious, arrogant, and demanding.”

And this one was surprising to me:

“She’s a sharp dresser. A woman who’s strutting her stuff!”

THERE’S A FIERCE WOMAN IN EACH OF US

I believe a fierce heart resides within every woman, but it manifests itself in varying shades of beauty and ugliness. Oh, I’ve seen (um, even at times *been*) the fierce woman who is the self-centered shrew, ranting and shrieking to get her way. But in contrast to her, the fierce woman may also be the quiet but courageous martyr who is willing to die for her faith.

Whether you’re an extrovert or more introverted—women are a compelling force. You may not see yourself as beautifully fierce or even slightly strong, but what if God has placed a powerful fierceness within you, within every woman? And what if this fierce power was meant to be used in a way that is big . . . I mean really big, like *staggering the imagination big!*

What if woman was designed to be a living inspiration? Like a song that rallies men before battle or a vision that compels them to embark on the most dangerous of conquests. This power and drive enables a woman to persevere through daunting challenges. It

gives her the grit and determination to continue pressing onward in the face of tremendous opposition. I love this verse in Daniel that underscores this thought: “The people who know their God will display strength and take action” (Daniel 11:32 NASB).

When you’re told the hurdle is higher than you can jump, fierceness is what gets your blood going and takes you flying over the top. It’s the passion that motivates you to leave the cozy comfort of safety for the dangerous adventure of the unknown. It’s that element of determination that holds you in place when weak soldiers flee. It’s loyalty and doing what’s right; brilliant intensity and going the long haul. Fierceness is fervent faith and lonely stands; solitary boldness and trying one more time.

I love reading stories of women who have taken courageous stands for righteous causes at the risk of their own lives. And although their fierceness is seen on a much larger scale than what you or I may ever experience, don’t discount the power and potential of your own fierce beauty. Demonstrating your fierceness may look a lot different than it does in a courageous martyr or the leader of a movement, but it is no less important. Your fierce beauty may be seen as you stand beside your husband at his point of greatest failure, giving him the courage to get up and keep pressing on. It may be heard in your voice of truth, inspiring your husband’s faith, when the enemy tells him he’ll never be able to change.

MEN ARE DRAWN TO FIERCE WOMEN

Men seem to be drawn to fierce women. Generally men run from the clingy, whiny, weak-willed types. Perhaps it’s the fierce woman’s strength of character they admire, or her passion for life. It may be the unwavering loyalty and intense devotion they find appealing. The courageous heroism of a fierce woman has inspired many a great leader.

Rebecca Motte's name may not sound familiar to you, but she holds my respect. Her fierce loyalty to her country served to inspire the Patriot army during the Revolutionary War. She was a wealthy widow with a large estate on the Congaree River in South Carolina. In 1781 the British set up camp there; 175 soldiers took residence in her home and surrounded it with a trench and parapet. Rebecca escaped to the Patriots, who laid siege to the British compound.

After several days of fighting, the Patriots concluded the only way to force the British from their newly occupied "fort" was to set fire to Rebecca's house. When Lee, the leader of the Patriot force, broke the news to Mrs. Motte, she responded that she was "gratified with the opportunity of contributing to the good of her country." The widow produced a bow and set of arrows and told Lee to put them to use. The flaming arrows set fire to the roof and forced the British to surrender. The Patriots quickly climbed to the roof and managed to put out the flames and salvage her home. After the victory, true to the spirit of a beautifully fierce woman, Rebecca Motte served dinner to both the American and British officers in her dining room.

My husband says it was my fierceness that initially grabbed his attention and drew him to approach me. At the time, however, he had no idea how his world was about to be turned upside down by one really fierce woman. That fierceness he found so attractive? Well, he learned real fast it could work both ways, because the fierceness that drew his interest . . . also gave me the spunk to verbally *slam* him in our first conversation!

It was the first day of the fall semester. I wasn't prepared for the shock of entering a large classroom crammed full with young men. Way in the back corner I spied one lone female. She was dressed in military fatigues and sporting a camo cap, so at first she blended in with the all-male landscape. She and I were the only women in

Dr. Stagg's Greek 101. I guess I'd never considered whether this was a popular subject with female students; I just wanted to study the language.

I soon picked up on the fact that this class was filled with what I referred to as "young preacher-boys." And were they ever the cocky lot! Every Monday morning I watched them try to one-up each other by re-preaching their Sunday sermons. Lots of big stories, loud and long alliterations, exaggerated hand gestures. If they were trying to impress the two women in the room, they didn't.

One day at the end of class, most of us headed to the cafeteria for lunch. I was standing in line waiting my turn to pick up a tray and silverware, minding my own business, when one of the cocky preacher-boys just behind me in line startled me with, "Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?"

I'd never spoken to this guy before, didn't even know his name but had a vague notion he was in my class. I was thinking, *This is his impressive opening line? Smooth. We've never spoken and this is how you introduce yourself?*

Now, how is a girl supposed to respond to an opening question like that? I have nothing to hide. I've always been a transparent person and often too blunt for my own good, so I mumbled, "Um . . . no, I guess not." I could feel my eyebrow arching a bit. (It does that sometimes. I'm ashamed to admit, but if you ever meet me and see me do that . . . sorry, it could be indicating I'm a bit irritated.)

"Why are *you* in Greek class?" The question may seem innocent enough, but did you note his emphasis on the word *you*? With that one carefully turned word, he spoke volumes. The grip on my plastic lunch tray tightened as I realized—*This guy thinks Greek class is no place for girls . . . Who does he think he is, asking me why I'm studying Greek?* My eyebrow arched pointedly as I gave him a dead level glare while every ounce of my being flooded with Helen Reddy's theme

song, *I am woman, hear me roar!* My response was delivered in cold, even tones.

“I’m taking the class so that I can study the original language of the New Testament for myself in order to prepare to *pastor and shepherd my flock.*” Delivering the slam, I turned to pick up my salad plate. Stunned, he mumbled a subdued, “Oh.”

I left him to think as I picked up condiments. But the Holy Spirit wouldn’t let me do it. I couldn’t lie to this guy with my impromptu fabrication about being a “woman preacher”—even if he did seem to be a male chauvinist. With the last of my items placed on my tray, I took a deep breath and turned to tell him, “*No*, the real reason I’m studying Greek is because I’ve grown up hearing pastors claim what the original language says and I want to be able to read it myself, for my own personal growth.” His “Oh!” this time sounded much different, like he was extremely pleased with my answer. And with that, I concluded my first conversation with the man who would one day be my husband.

We both laugh about it now and he gets a kick out of telling people how my spirited response triggered his interest in me. I’ve heard many husbands say they experienced similar feelings of attraction when they met their feisty wives, like being drawn by the beauty and danger of climbing Mount Everest—the climb is filled with breathless anticipation and excitement, but woe to the man who attempts that climb unprepared!

Why is fierceness in women appealing to men? I think they like a challenge. They admire the strength, courage, loyalty, and determination of a fierce woman. They like spunk and passion. Fierce women don’t grovel for their attention and aren’t desperate for a

**WHY IS FIERCENESS IN
WOMEN APPEALING TO
MEN? I THINK THEY LIKE
A CHALLENGE.**



man to meet their deepest needs. Men admire a woman who doesn't depend solely on them for their identity or happiness.

The truly beautifully fierce woman has an otherworldly strength derived from a source beyond herself. She's plunged in fully to the forgiveness and love of Christ, and He holds her heart so completely that she's reached true contentment. Her identity is forged through abiding in Him, and her courage is displayed by her commitment to Him and His cause. He is her driving motivation and propels her by the wind of His Spirit. Her passion is stoked by His fire. She is no "halfhearted creature" but is drinking deeply of Him and experiencing infinite joy.

She is a warrior at heart—not violent or aggressive—but tempered by humility. She's a soft warrior; fleshing out the beauty of fierceness in her daily life. Loving God and others with sacrificial devotion. This is the kind of fierceness I'm talking about when I said I love to see a fierce woman in action. I strive for this ideal. Check her out in the characteristics below.

Characteristics of a Beautifully Fierce Woman:

- * Her identity and value are rooted in her relationship with Christ rather than a relationship with a man.
- * She's filled with gratitude for God's good gifts. Her heart is ruled by the peace of contentment.
- * She courageously faces her fears rather than running or hiding in shame.
- * She's passionate about things that matter rather than living for the trivial.
- * She loves God and others. She's more focused on giving love than getting love.
- * She's willing to battle for a worthy cause rather than shrinking in defeat.

- * She grabs the hem of God's will and doesn't let go.
- * She protects and defends the helpless rather than using her strength to bully others. She is known as a sincere encourager.
- * She's honest but kind.
- * Others feel comfortable in seeking her counsel.
- * She embraces God's Word as her ultimate authority rather than being swayed by the voices of the culture.
- * She faithfully confronts by speaking truth in love rather than enabling sin by keeping silent.
- * She walks in confidence and humility that flow from her recognition of Christ's work of grace in her life.
- * She has the power to influence and inspire because she lives under the Spirit's control.
- * Her life is lived all out for God's glory rather than the smallness of self.

God wants to use these characteristics to fulfill His calling on your life. I love seeing how the fierce women of Scripture did this. Esther courageously stood ready to perish as she fought for the lives of her people. Deborah led the armies of Israel to victory in spite of fearful Barak. Priscilla, along with her husband, Aquila, once literally "risked her neck" to save Paul's life (see Romans 16:4); she was bold, courageous, and a diligent student of the Word.

SEIZE THE KINGDOM!

The call to follow Christ requires fierceness. In fact, this kind of fierceness is commended by Jesus: "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12).

This intriguing verse contains some pretty descriptive words:

“suffered violence” and “the violent take it by force.” The Greek word that is translated “suffered violence” is only used twice in the New Testament and both times in a favorable light. It’s the idea of positive aggression; commendable fierceness. Think of the phrase “Seize the day!” in the sense of putting all your effort into making the most of the moment. Seize the kingdom life. Take it by force. Don’t allow anything to stand in your way or prevent you from living all out for God’s glory.

Jesus isn’t talking about physical aggression here; this isn’t a text that supports using violence to advance a cause. Though a kind of violent action is required, it isn’t aggression against others. It’s fiercely grabbing hold of my proud and lazy self and putting it to death!

**LIVING AN
EXTRAORDINARY
LIFE CAN WEAR
YOU OUT!**



This verse gives us a glimpse of the intensity required to flesh out our Christianity. This kind of living goes against our natural tendency. It’s the principle Jesus laid out to the disciples when He clued them in on the seriousness of the call to follow Him: “And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:38).

It’s the challenge of living an extraordinary life through the process of self-denial: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).

It’s easy to read a familiar verse like this and block out its real-life meaning. We like coasting in the comfortable and easy, but this verse flies in the face of that kind of nominal Christianity.

Living an extraordinary life can wear you out! Most people don’t want anything that’s too hard or asks too much. If it requires self-control or self-denial, the faint of heart heads home quickly. “I can put off studying for that test until later . . . I’ll start my diet tomorrow, this dessert is too good to pass up . . . Just let me sleep

a few minutes longer . . . I know I shouldn't be getting this angry, but I can't handle this kind of incompetency!" Anything here sound familiar?

The fierce woman picks up Jesus' challenge with the intensity required to follow hard after Him. Her passionate love for Him takes over when her flesh raises a fuss. Her longing to know Him more gives her the motive to press in further when things get hairy. Pushing aside fear of man, turning a deaf ear to self-conscious clambering, stepping out in faith, the fierce woman seizes the kingdom of God, grabs on to Jesus and hangs on for the ride of her life!

JESUS LOVES FIERCE WOMEN

This kind of determination and fiery faith reminds me of a woman who kept pressing on when life's tough challenges hit her in the face. Imagine having the courage to make an urgent request and then being referred to as a *dog*—not by your enemies—but *by Jesus!* This is one of those times in Scripture when Jesus really surprises me. I mean, He didn't respond like the normally tender, holding-a-child-in-His-lap-type of Jesus. No, this time He puts some huge roadblocks in this needy woman's path.

This woman had a real problem on her hands. Her daughter was demon possessed. There's no greater misery for a mother than watching her child suffer. Knowing she has no way to alleviate her daughter's pain, powerless before the torment and destruction, this mother looks beyond herself for help.

I love the fact that I can relate to this woman. She's in extreme need and she's not a member of the religious elite—she's a Gentile. For religious Jews, a Gentile woman was the lowest on the significance scale. But the one thing she has going for her is she recognizes Jesus for who He is and trusts His heart.

We find her story recorded in Matthew 15:22–28:

And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.”

He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Jesus seems to ignore her at first, and the disciples try to get rid of her. When He does speak, it isn't the tender words she's heard from His lips when other people came for His help. Instead, it seems as though He puts up a wall of rejection. But none of this stops her. She is desperate in her need and relentless in her pursuit:

But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”

A simple prayer lifted from a heart of worship. This is the cry of the true woman. This is the humble dependence of the woman who delights His heart. This is the faith and persistence of the beautifully fierce woman.

And he answered, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.”

No matter how rough His words may sound to you, He was not being unkind. Really. He was laying out a challenge for her to rise and meet. He doesn't use the word for dog that would refer to a common mongrel roaming the streets but a dog that is a house pet.³ Although His response may seem cold or offensive, He was letting her stretch her trust level and plunge in fully to demonstrate her faith by laying out some difficult obstacles:

She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.” Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great

is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.”

I love it! Jesus puts up walls of resistance but she passes the test and He loves her reaction. No argument from her. Yes, an undeserving dog. She doesn’t deny His humbling assessment, but she also doesn’t run away sobbing in self-pity or in a huff. She presses in and appeals to His merciful character. She looks beyond the slight, pushes past the rebuff, and goes for His heart.

This is the beauty of fierceness that I admire in women. This is a woman at her best. She’s not using her strengths to take advantage of others. She’s not using cruel manipulation tactics to get what she wants. She’s not arrogant in her approach and demeanor, nor is she groveling in self-condemnation or self-pity. She’s tackling the obstacles in her life with humility and determination. She’s resourceful and creative. She’s walking by faith, not by sight.

And Jesus honors her for it.

STRONG WOMEN ARE HIS IDEA

I hope you’re not under the mistaken impression that God created women as some kind of second-class citizens of the kingdom. He loves strong women. We’re His idea.

Before the fall, before the curse, God created a fierce woman. She was formed as a worthy complement to Adam—the first man. Eve was created to rule with him. God placed His divine imprint on her life. She had His likeness and bore His image. She was perfect in every way. Every woman since is inferior to this mother of all living. Before the depleting effects of the fall, her physical strength and energy were unsurpassed. Her intellect and creativity were keen and fresh, unmarred by the effects of sin, and her beauty timeless.

I wish we had more exposure to this pre-fall Eve. We barely meet

her before she runs into trouble, but we know she must have been a specimen beyond compare. God entrusted Adam and Eve with His new creation. He gave this first couple the divine mandate to take dominion over His young earth. Together they would fill the earth and subdue it. They held dominion over every living thing.

She was prepared to stand as his counterpart with courage and resolve. Placing her hand with his in a unity of purpose, held by an indissoluble bond, they ruled over creation together and functioned as one. Her fierce strength was like steel in his spine, she was iron sharpening iron, and her role in his life was powerful.

I distinctly remember overhearing a conversation as a young girl that had a lasting impression on me. A gentleman was explaining how women have an enormous power of influence and they can use it to either inspire men or destroy them. (I guess that was a dangerous thing to learn at such a young age, because I admit I enjoyed using that power the wrong way many times!) Not all women necessarily experience this, but most will admit they have an uncanny ability to influence men. And most men agree that women have this gift.

WOMAN'S FIERCE ROLE

In Genesis chapter 2, women are given the unique responsibility to use this power by serving as man's "helper." When I first learned that women were given the "helper" assignment, I thought, "Oh, great. We aren't good enough to actually be doing something really important—we just get to 'help out.'" Even that word—"helper"—on paper always looked lame to me. (It would be nice to inherit a working knowledge of Hebrew and Greek as a package deal with salvation, because knowing the meaning of certain words can change your whole perspective.)

I felt much better when I found out that the Hebrew word that is translated into our English word "helper" is not a wimpy word.

It is the word *ezer*, meaning to aid or provide needed help. In fact, it is the same word used in reference to God as a “helper” to His people in several passages (Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 29). That’s when I realized that being my husband’s “helper” was not an insignificant assignment but one of eternal consequence.

God didn’t create woman to fill a “no big deal” role. Men and women are created with equal worth and value, given equal access to God, and both live with the purpose of glorifying Him. Neither role is inferior or superior. Each comes with its own challenges, and in order to serve well in her role, a woman must be fierce. Not destructively fierce but *beautifully* fierce.

The same fierceness that the unnamed Gentile woman exemplified as she entreated Jesus to deliver her demon-possessed daughter is the fierceness required to fill this role. It takes a fierce woman to live out the helper role determinedly and not allow her own selfish pursuits to take her off course. It takes the creativity of a fierce woman to discover how to motivate the men around her to live out God’s calling on their lives. It takes the passion of a fierce woman to encourage a man who’s drowning in a pit of shame and despair. It takes the perseverance of a fierce woman to hang in there with her man when the going gets tough.

It takes a woman like my friend Jan, whose husband of two years dropped her off at work one day with the words, “I love you, but I don’t want to be married anymore. Marriage is just too hard.” Jan didn’t give up on marriage or toss her vows out the window. She didn’t run to find another relationship, or try various manipulation tactics or issue threats, but she clung to her relationship with Christ. She fiercely stood in faith for her marriage. She

**IT TAKES THE PASSION
OF A FIERCE WOMAN TO
ENCOURAGE A MAN WHO’S
DROWNING IN A PIT OF
SHAME AND DESPAIR.**



persevered in waiting, praying, and trusting God.

After four long years of separation, while receiving guidance and counsel from spiritually mature individuals and making some tough choices personally, Jan and Scott began corresponding. They began to rebuild their friendship and eventually remarried. They've enjoyed a healthy, loving relationship for the past thirty years. If Jan had not fiercely stood in faith for their marriage, if she'd given up or moved on to another man, their marriage would have ended as just another divorce statistic.

It's a woman like Hayley, whose fierceness was seen as she faced her greatest fear and courageously stood where many women give way. When she was barely in elementary school, her parents divorced and she was basically lost in the shuffle between Mom's new husband and Dad's new wife. By the time she was a young woman, her only real companionship was found in her relationship with Christ. Because of the pain and rejection from her parents, abandonment was a lifelong fear, but Christ was the One who never let her down, who promised to be her unshakable constant.

Hayley didn't follow the typical modern romance path. She waited. She entered the dating years with the same perspective she took in all areas of her life: seek God, walk in obedience, and trust Him to provide. And He did. Kevin, her best friend in the church youth group, became her husband. He was a man after God's heart. They entered their wedding night without the shame and guilt of past sexual encounters. They had saved themselves for each other and for that night.

Just four years into the marriage, Hayley's life was shattered again with the pain of betrayal and rejection. I'll never forget the look of sheer terror on her face as I sat with her during the aftermath of shock from discovering Kevin's affair. The one person she'd confidently relied on for constancy had broken the trust of marital

fidelity. Her childhood fears engulfed her like a flood.

I watched Hayley endure nightmarish episodes as the graphic details of her husband's infidelity surfaced. As the affair became public, she took on the shame and humiliation brought on by his sin. Broken and confused, she tried to make sense of it all. "I've been faithful and kept myself pure, but I'm having to deal not only with the rejection, the loss of our relationship, but also with the lifelong consequences of his immorality." The injustice was baffling, the betrayal brutal.

If you've walked this same path, you understand the temptation to run from public glare, to curl up in crumpled defeat, to close your heart and never open it to trust again. You understand the mental battle with rejection, the taunting words in your head that tell you of your worthlessness and encourage you to give in to despair. But Hayley stood for her marriage when every fiber in her being screamed, *Run!* She washed herself in God's Word. She used her knowledge of His truth to battle the lies running through her head. She faced the public stares. She followed godly counsel, rejecting the world's shortcuts.

Before Kevin came to the place of repentance and honesty about his sin, Hayley supported the elders' decision to proceed with church discipline for Kevin although it meant she would endure embarrassment and the humiliation of public scrutiny. And when her husband came to true repentance, Hayley worked her way through the rugged terrain of hurt and resentment to reach the place of forgiveness. She leaned hard into Christ and stepped into a position to start rebuilding her marriage with the man who'd broken trust and wounded her deeply. She went beyond just forgiving Kevin; she committed herself to helping him recover his walk with God. Hayley demonstrated the tough courage and faith of a fierce woman fulfilling the "helper" role as a soft warrior.

You see, Hayley’s fierceness could’ve driven her to bitterness and revenge. She could have chosen to manipulate the situation to her advantage or poured all her energies into making Kevin’s life as miserable as possible. Even now she could choose to dangle Kevin’s past infidelity over his head as a means of control. But instead, her fierce loyalty to Christ drove her to grant Kevin the same forgiveness she’d been given (Ephesians 4:32) and to display to others the reality of God’s grace. Rather than hammering him as a moral failure, she seeks to use her power of influence to inspire Kevin to live out his calling as a godly husband and father.

More than a decade later, Hayley and Kevin are taking the lessons learned from their season of brokenness and encouraging other couples who face some of the same marital challenges. What looked like the destruction of their marriage has become a platform of ministry to others. In our culture of divorce, their story is rare, but it doesn’t have to be. A fierce woman’s courage and determination to fight for her man and her marriage may make the difference.

IRON SHARPENING IRON

Your role as helper is to aid your husband in becoming all that God has created him to be—to be his iron sharpening iron (see Proverbs 27:17). Deep down every true man of God wants to do the right thing: he wants to be the spiritual leader; he wants to live all out for God’s glory; he doesn’t want to waste his life. When all is said and done, he wants to hear those words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” He wants you to be able to believe in him, to be able to say with all sincerity that you are confident in his leadership because you know he’s a man who walks with God.

You may be thinking, “Not my man—his biggest dream is Sunday afternoon football with no interruptions!” Maybe that’s all you can see from the outside, but don’t discount your power of influence, as

a Spirit-controlled woman, to stimulate his passion for Christ.

This is no job for weak-willed women. It takes intentional dependence on the Spirit, immense self-control, and wisdom from the Word to learn the difficult art of challenging your husband to godliness without demeaning him. To encourage him to continue pushing the envelope in spiritual growth without nagging, belittling, or preaching. (See: Challenging Your Man to Robust Christianity in the appendix.)

**FIERCENESS CAN
BECOME AN ASSET
OR A DETRIMENT IN
MARRIAGE.**



Every life we touch is affected by our fierceness, but the one who is most benefitted or harmed by it is our husband. Fierceness can become an asset or a detriment in marriage. I've had the privilege of listening to many women as they open their hearts to share some of their most private thoughts. They uncover hidden wounds, revealing deep fears and painful struggles within their marriage. And although admittedly we women are complicated creatures, and the details of our situations are varied, there seems to be a commonality in what is voiced. Women struggle with their fierceness and its effects. For some men, the fierceness that attracts them can also become a source of fear and intimidation.

Often when wives exert the strength God placed within them, the husband caves to passivity or rises in aggression. I've seen the pattern repeated far too frequently and watched it squeeze the life from many a vibrant relationship. I personally experienced the damage in my own marriage. Qualities my husband admired when he met me became painful wedges driving us apart after we were married. For several years we were trapped in a destructive cycle.

Looking back to that season from today's position of joy brings fresh gratitude, but also a burden for women suffering in isolation and hopelessness. That's why I've written this book.

As you and I spend time together in these pages, we'll check

out the destructive elements of fierceness but we'll also see how to cultivate characteristics of the beautifully fierce woman. We'll consider common barriers that develop in marriage relationships and see how to bring down those isolating walls to build unity. I'll share some practical ways you can show appreciation to your husband as well as give you components for building a platform of influence. I'll give you some guidelines for confrontation when your husband is trapped in a sinful addiction. Finally, I hope to give you a vision for what God could do that goes beyond what you may have ever imagined.

Please hear me as one who hurts with you and is praying for you as you enter this journey. I'm opening my heart to you in much the same way that I would if we were sitting at your kitchen table with mugs of hot coffee. I'll be transparent with you, but I'm ashamed of much of what I'm going to tell you. At the same time, I'm also excited for you to hear about the changes we've seen in our marriage, and my prayer is that it will bring hope and encouragement. But more than that, I'm asking God to meet with you as you grapple with the issues I share.

A fierce woman. That's what I was and still am. My fierceness drove my husband to a crisis of faith and a season of silence and depression. But there is a beautiful fierceness God provides in order for women to fulfill His calling on their lives, to be the soft warrior and "iron sharpening iron" in their husband's life . . . and that fierce woman can be you.

✂ **HEART ISSUES** ✂

.....

- 1.** Do you see yourself as a fierce woman? Which of these qualities might be descriptive of you?

Determined Faithful Disciplined Courageous
Aggressive Decisive Loyal Intense Impatient
Passionate Bossy Cold Intimidating Devoted
Controlling Manipulative Heroic Persevering

- 2.** Jesus commended this determined woman's faith (Matthew 15:21–28). What would be your typical reaction to this kind of rejection? Are you facing a similar struggle, and if so, how is your response demonstrating the beauty of fierceness?
- 3.** How are you fulfilling your role of influence in your husband's life? Is he being harmed or blessed by your fierceness?