

Find Your Brave: Courage to Stand Strong When the Waves Crash In

Holly Wagner | Reviewed by *Lori Buckle*

Find Your Brave is not an explicitly egalitarian book. It does not address issues such as women in church leadership or the relations between the sexes. Instead, Holly Wagner exhorts her readers to remain strong during times of adversity by drawing upon the strength of God. Her message is applicable, therefore, to every Christian, no matter what doctrinal position they hold concerning the role of women in the church.

There are signs that Ms. Wagner leans towards the egalitarian position, however. More than once in the book she refers to herself as a "pastor," and even says at one point, "As a pastor and teacher, I find it is easier to preach a message about getting through hard times than it is to actually do it." She also talks about working together with her husband to start their church.

Because her book is targeted towards women, Wagner addresses Proverbs 31, a text which has too often been used to set an impossibly high standard for Christian women. She engages in a skilled exegesis of the text by pointing out that *chayil*, the word often translated as "virtuous" in English Bibles (vs. 10), actually means "brave, strong, filled with valor" in the original Hebrew.

The author also offers an interesting perspective on vs. 15 of that chapter, "She rises also while it is still night and gives food to her household and portions to her maidens." Wagner interprets "night" in a broad sense, as a time of chaos and confusion in a person's life. From there, she builds on the phrase "rise up" to say that during these times:

She does not wilt; she does not complain; she does not blame. She finds her brave and she rises . . . God is looking for a company of women who find their brave and rise in the midst of any and every challenge—and who will be a force for good in the world to help others find their brave.

The author then mentions a few women from the Bible who arose and found courage in difficult times, such as Deborah and Esther. Later in the book, Wagner describes women outside of the Bible who persevered through difficult circumstances with the help of their faith. I was especially pleased that the author included the "disciple" of Paul named Thecla. Although she is only mentioned in an apocryphal gospel, archaeologists have discovered ancient artifacts bearing Thecla's image in many places. We also know from ancient sources that there was an early church shrine dedicated to her which was very popular with pilgrims. Her story may be fictional, but it gives a wonderful glimpse into the world of the early church and how women might have felt about their roles within it.

Although Wagner uses several women as examples, she focuses on the story of Paul and his shipwreck (Acts 27) as her foundational text. Besides the obvious lesson of not being afraid in the storm, there are other lessons we can learn from the story, she says. For instance, in vss. 21-6 Paul exhorts his shipmates that God still has plans for him; therefore, they should remain unafraid because God will not allow Paul or any of the others to die. Wagner then reminds her readers that it's not just about the immediate storm in your life. Keeping your sight trained above on him and the ultimate plan and purpose he has for your life will help you sail through the storm.

In a chapter on problems of your own making, Wagner points out that Paul had earlier warned the officials that they were now entering the stormy season and so should really put in to port. Once the storm hits he reminds them of how they disregarded his sound advice (vs 21). Therefore, it is important for Christians to remain in a community that can give godly advice when needed. And if they do offer such advice we should listen so that perhaps we don't sail into a storm!

Overall, I enjoyed this book. It just so happened that I was going through a difficult time in my life when I read it, so it was good to be reminded of some of the principles that Wagner enumerated in the book, such as finding my identity in God and not giving up on him just because times are difficult.

I do have some hesitations that do not allow me to give an unqualified endorsement, however. First and foremost, Wagner writes in a very informal manner. As part of this, she denigrates herself on more than one occasion. Of course Christians should remain humble, but it just felt undignified for a pastor and Bible teacher like Wagner to minimize herself and her talents. In a similar vein, she sometimes uses slang, such as “ya know?” I found this rather off-putting and wish that she had maintained a more formal level of discourse.

LORI BUCKLE was born in Texas. In 2004 she moved to Great Britain after marrying her British husband. They now live in back Texas where Lori is pursuing a career as a writer.