

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

DEBBIE FORD

COURAGE

OVERCOMING FEAR & IGNITING
SELF-CONFIDENCE

FOREWORD BY DR. WAYNE DYER

Courage

*Overcoming Fear and
Igniting Self-Confidence*

Debbie Ford



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Dedication

To all the courageous women in the world
and all those who are willing to take the risk
to step into their most courageous self

And to my remarkable sister,
Arielle Ford, whose courage and
confidence has always inspired me

Epigraph

unbound

*we may never know
how we hold
all we can
or how the light catches us
when we are out of breath*

*it's a sign of healing
to be feeling again*

*the real breakthrough
can only arise
from heartbreak*

*that which ails
cures
reminding us
that it's always about beginning
and then beginning again*

*as the waves crash me
i trust the sand
to polish my edges smooth
dissolving denial
revealing real while
courage and confidence
ignite my core
contraction and expansion
let the light stream in
and the stillness
after so much thrashing about
allows the body to wring
the sorrow out
as freedom floods*

*shadows may persist
know your undertow
as you alchemize the dark
and remember
that you always have
the strength to choose
how to engage*

*the clouds unveil the view
when you are ready to climb
now it's time to notice
the miraculous moments
in your life
as they are happening*

*this
is the making
of me
and we will walk
courageously
into daybreak
from the night
shining our light
together*

—Nancy Levin, *author of Writing for My Life*

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Foreword

In this insightful book, my friend and colleague Debbie Ford has detailed a very inspiring and pragmatic blueprint for living a courageous life. As you turn the pages, you will see her unabashed honesty displayed before you in chapter after chapter. Indeed she has covered all the bases. In between the covers of the book you hold in your hand is a thorough delineation of all that you would ever need to begin living in a confident, self-assured manner.

Debbie writes eloquently of her own personal transformation, from having a fear-based approach to handling the affairs of her own life into being an empowered woman of courage. She pulls no punches, holds nothing back, and I was so pleasantly surprised to note that those punches that she now launches are aimed directly at her own formerly panicky self as she is allowing you to be the beneficiary of her former faintheartedness. There is nothing I need add in this introduction to Debbie's book. She thoroughly spells out a plan for living a personally courageous life. As you read and absorb her profound offerings, I can assure you that you will find yourself becoming more and more equipped to deal with all of your life's challenges from a new and stronger position of self-confidence and, yes, courage as well.

I wish to say a few words about Debbie Ford's own application of this concept of courage. As I read this book, I was astonished at how willing Debbie was to throw all caution to the wind. Here in these pages, Debbie has literally let it all hang out. She has displayed a kind of courage that very few writers are willing to embrace, especially writers as well known as Debbie Ford. I have told audiences for decades that if they wish to move beyond ordinary in their lives, they must be willing to change their concepts of themselves. And in order to do so, they must understand fully that their concept of themselves is comprised of everything that they have come to believe is true. Thus, if they are living an ordinary life devoid of feeling that they are living out their own divine purpose, they must realize that their inner truths have landed them at this place called ordinary. In order to elevate your life, you are therefore challenged to change your concept of yourself, and this means changing what you have previously believed to be true.

This requires a kind of courage that few are willing or even able to muster. To say "What I once believed to be a fundamental truth I now see as a misperception on my part" is to literally let go of your own personal history. To change not only your current behaviors but to take on a new set of truths that requires you to admit that

those old truths were indeed lies—lies that perpetuated a way of life that almost always led to disaster in one form or another. This act of owning up to the false beliefs of your past and adopting new truths is a true act of courage, especially so for such an accomplished and public person as the author of the book you are about to read. In this profoundly courageous book, Debbie Ford has done just that. She has not only changed her concept of herself and taken on new truths for herself. She has also provided a brilliant blueprint for you to do the same. Her brutal honesty is her courage.

I watched this courage from a very personal vantage point a short while back at the Omega Institute in New York. Both Debbie and I have been handed opportunities to look deep within ourselves, connect to our divine higher selves—the God within us—and take our assigned roles as teachers of spiritual truths to those who read our books and listen to our spoken word. Debbie stayed in a cabin alongside the cabin that Mira, my spiritual partner, and I shared as we met with and received divine healing interventions from the mystical teacher John of God, who was visiting from Brazil. Each day we would stand next to Debbie as she lay in her bed recovering from her spiritual surgery. We both observed her phenomenal courage as her body, ravaged by years of a rare cancer, went through the withdrawals from John of God’s divine intercession.

Debbie never complained, always grateful for each moment of life, even though she was in obvious discomfort, willing to be honest and frank about her long battle with this cancer that she had previously kept in the background, afraid of being overcome by people’s opinions and projections—but not now. The fears were replaced by love, a new celestial kind of love brought about by the courage to just be herself and to treasure her own magnificence. We stood as one at her bedside and watched as this beautiful woman put into practice what she has written about so piercingly, so comprehensively, here in this book—all summed up in the ancient adage “Fear knocked at the door, love answered, and no one was there.”

Take Debbie’s sagacious advice. Let go of your old truths that were all illusions. Here is your truth. You have God within you. Live from that place and all will be well. This is courage. I love this book. I love the way it was written. And most of all, I love you, Debbie Ford. You inspire me.

—Wayne Dyer

A Letter to the Reader

On September 24, 2010, I didn't know I was beginning a journey into a hell I could never have imagined. I thought of myself as a strong, courageous woman who had the confidence to take on whatever came my way. I had fought through addiction in my twenties, a heartbreaking divorce in my thirties, and an earth-shattering betrayal in my forties. I believed my fifties and beyond were going to be a breeze. I not only had survived these traumatic experiences but was also privileged to use my own experience to help others thrive.

It began after waiting for days to get cleared by my doctor to fly to Istanbul, Turkey, for a week of vacation before a European speaking tour. But instead of getting the green light from the doc, I got a much different response. My doctor, Dr. Paul Speckart, who always told me I had more courage than sense, feared that I wouldn't make the sensible choice. He told me that if I got on an airplane to go anywhere, they would take me off the plane wherever I landed and send me right to the hospital. I had commitments to meet my friends Leinia and Stephen for a boat trip in the Aegean Sea and then to teach in Copenhagen and Holland. I was distraught that I wouldn't be able to meet my commitments.

Looking back, I should have been alarmed by all the concern in my doctor's eyes, but I wasn't. I believed that I was invincible, that I would be fine and that nobody else understood. I had been at what I thought was a routine doctor's appointment for a case of walking pneumonia, which I believed was no more than a nagging cold. When I was told I needed to be checked into the hospital, I couldn't quite grasp the gravity of the situation. Upset and angry at all the pressure I felt from the doctors and my family members, I begrudgingly let my mother drive me to the hospital. I was checked in for what they said would be a few days.

Within twenty-four hours, I was in an operating room, stunned that they needed to put tubes in me to get four quarts of fluid out of my chest. As I lay in bed after the surgery, I couldn't grasp how this could be happening, how something as simple as a cold was wreaking such havoc on my system. I couldn't explain why the myriad of doctors who came in and out of my room and reviewed my chart looked at me with such grave concern. Why when I was supposed to be getting better did I feel worse? Why was I getting weaker day by day? Was it because of the now unavoidable fact that despite my best efforts to deny, avoid, or repress it, I had cancer?

In 2001, doctors discovered a cantaloupe-size tumor in my abdomen and they removed it. They told me then that the tumor was malignant but that it was

“encapsulated,” which meant when they took out the tumor, they took out the cancer. So there was nothing to do except get scans every year to make sure the tumor didn’t return. I never entertained the notion that the tumor could return or that it could, in fact, be cancer even though they said it to me many times. When I would check boxes on medical forms, I never checked the “Cancer” box. Four and a half years had gone by and I went for another scan. After the scan, my doctor called me and said, “I want you to raise your left arm and feel right under your armpit.” He said, “You have a tumor growing there and three more, one in your spleen and two in your abdomen.” I couldn’t grasp that tumors had returned, and I minimized it to the few people who knew my secret. Even though I minimized that I had cancer, I pursued different healers. My friend Deepak Chopra sent me to a very holy oncologist, Dr. Daniel Vicario, who prayed with me and prescribed medicines that I didn’t take and treatment plans that I didn’t follow. In my spare time, I flew with Deepak and Dr. David Simon to the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute to talk to other experts about these very strange tumors that no one seemed to know about. When I didn’t like what the doctors there had to say or the drugs they recommended, I flew myself to MD Anderson, the other preeminent cancer center, and left there because I had a full head of hair and didn’t seem as sick as all the other people since traditional chemotherapies would not work for me.

I knew in my mind that I should be worried and concerned, and that my health should come first, but I could never feel it. I could never really get it. I was always sick as a young child with different ailments. I was known as the little skinny “malink,” the ninety-pound weakling, whereas my sister and brother were big, strong, and muscular. I had made a decision some time in my early teens that I wasn’t going to be sick again. So except for my family, some very close friends, and coworkers, nobody knew that I had this rare soft tissue sarcoma, Solitary Fibrous Tumor (hemangiopericytoma), because I didn’t even acknowledge it. Denial—known as Don’t Even kNow I Am Lying—was still in full effect. And as each year passed, I put the condition further and further from my mind.

The doctors told my assistant, Julie, with me now in the hospital, that the fluid in my chest cavity and the tumor on my chest wall that had already eaten through several of my ribs had forced one of my lungs to collapse, which contributed to causing the pneumonia in the first place. Although the fluid they drained from my chest could not be definitively explained, the prevailing theory was that the tumor was weeping fluid into my chest cavity. So although the pneumonia had brought me into the hospital, it was the cancer that was keeping me there. Because my oncologist was too far away to come see me, Dan Bressler, the father of my son, Beau, and a renowned internist, urged me to meet the newest, smartest oncologist on staff—Dr. Marin Xavier. When I met her, I thought Dr. Xavier was bright, positive, deeply concerned, and ready to fight this battle with me. She promised that she was

committed to making sure we had a plan of attack for this incurable and rare form of cancer.

Toward the end of my hospital stay, I was visited by a palliative care doctor, a doctor who focuses on relieving and preventing the suffering of patients. This doctor referred to me as a dying patient. He said he was just stopping by to set up hospice care. I looked at him like he was crazy. I had come into the hospital with pneumonia, which I still believed didn't have anything to do with cancer. I looked over at my assistant like "Is this man out of his mind?" He said he knew I was into all this positive thinking but that somebody needed to be straight with me. He wanted to know if I had talked to my son, my beautiful precious Beau, and if he was ready to let go of me. There was no doubt in his mind that I would be gone in a matter of weeks or a month at the longest. As he continued to talk, I suddenly put my hand up. "I am not going to be in this conversation with you. Who are you to tell me how long I have to live? Are you God?" His expression changed to one of consternation as he told me I was in denial. I repeated, "This is not a conversation that interests me." After he left, I asked Julie, who was sitting in the room with me, "Am I going to die?" I was thinking, "Nobody told me!" Then I called my ex-husband and asked him if he thought I was going to die. He said, "We're all dying, Debbie. It's just a matter of when." Then I asked him if he thought I was going to die soon, and he said, "No." When I hung up with him, I had Julie call Dr. Xavier, my new comrade, and I asked her, "Do you think I'm going to die? This guy just told me that I have to go into hospice care and get ready for my death." She said, "Absolutely not."

I am sharing this news because I finally realize that denial is no longer an option. The universe has been trying to get me to take the blinders off and focus on my health, my life.

Still in the hospital, I could barely walk. I was so weak and tired. I was back in the body of my ten-year-old self, except this time I was skinny and saggy. All I could do now was surrender, let go, and listen to Dr. Xavier. The flood of tears kept pouring out.

I couldn't grasp how just a month ago I had been in great shape, even knowing I had four tumors growing inside of me. How quickly things had changed. When I finally got home fifteen days later and twenty pounds lighter, I went into a severe depression. There were moments when I didn't care if I lived or died. I couldn't imagine my son, Beau, having to deal with me being gone. But aside from Beau, I could find no reason to live. It seemed like I had fulfilled my mission to give back to the world, and I had been fortunate, eight books and hundreds of seminars later, to help hundreds of thousands of people.

For months, I lay in bed trying to get my strength back, then trying to walk, trying to find some source of energy, trying to find a will to live. As I lay in bed, the person I knew myself to be was slowly stripped away from me. The things I had cared

about, the way I had spent my days, the way I lived my life fell away. I couldn't muster the energy to hold my iPhone. I didn't have the energy to simply talk on the phone. I didn't have the energy to send a text, let alone teach, write, or connect with my friends. What was once so simple, like climbing the stairs to my bedroom, became a challenge. Before, no matter how sick I was, I could muster the strength to lead a workshop. But here, months later, I couldn't work up the energy or care to have the capacity. Even my reflection in the mirror began to change, my body changed. I looked like a junkie off the street. The medicines I took made my skin bruise easily. The texture of my hair changed. My belly became bloated. My face swelled into a round shape called "moonface." That was the hardest part—losing my looks, an outside reflection of my internal collapse. I stopped recognizing myself in the mirror. Things that I once loved became abhorrent to me. I couldn't imagine what I was going to do with my life even if they found a cure for this cancer. I was living in a world of complete solitude and isolation, shutting myself off from most people and keeping my cancer hidden. My body, my mind, and my spirit were all weak. And my will didn't matter anymore.

In this vulnerable and debilitated state, instead of being filled with my usual enthusiasm and excitement for life, I was taken over by fear. The Voice of Fear sounded off in my mind, warning me in the night. It said, "Who needs this? There's nothing to live for. You can't make it through. These medicines are what is making you sick. You're not strong enough. Nothing's going to work for you." The experiences my fellow teachers had shared of tumors miraculously disappearing couldn't—or wouldn't—happen to me.

Finally, I asked my dear friend Cheryl Richardson for support. We decided that she would support me and start sending me affirmations, expecting nothing in return. Every day, she would text me a beautiful affirmation filled with emoticons, encouraging me to think positive thoughts, to list what was good about my life, to choose faith. Day by day, I would change like a chameleon—one day up, one day down, one day in the middle.

Looking back a year and a half later, I see that I believed I was so courageous. I believed I could stand up and fight off anything. But in reality, I was frozen in fear, unable to shake off my noisy internal chatter or my deep feelings of resignation.

The word slowly got out to my business peers. I soon felt their love and kindness, each one offering me much-needed words of wisdom. Despite the love coming my way, I was still dragged down by the voices in my head.

Once my strength returned, I was able to give a lecture at a Hay House I Can Do It! conference. I felt amazing. While there, I ran into Wayne Dyer, who at this point was more of an acquaintance than a friend. But a mutual friend told me to speak to Wayne. So I walked over to him and Wayne looked at me with the most loving, holy eyes. He gave me a warm, caring hug and said, "I want to share some things with you."

Wayne shared with me his experience of being with John of God, a powerful Brazilian medium and healer, and of opening his heart. We decided to go to the Omega Institute together and experience the presence of John of God. It was this powerful weekend where I was touched by Wayne Dyer and this holy healer that began to shift my attitude—looking for the cure, not the cause.

I also realized that my courage was missing. I was no longer fearless. Instead, I was fearful. I had been teaching about confidence, strength, and vision for years, writing about them and training people to make it through difficult times. And here I was stuck in the middle of my own battle without accessing my own truths—truths that I knew so well.

And so it was with the knowledge contained in this book, *Courage*, that I was able to take control, that I was able to see I was doing nothing more than choosing fear, and that there was work for me to do, both internal and external.

There are so many lessons to be learned. There is no doubt that I was running too hard and fast and that because I had so little respect for my health, I overrode all signs and clues that I needed time off. Even when I got those times, I would quickly fill them in with another project and push my own needs farther back and my health deeper into denial. One of the greatest lessons I learned lying in bed for almost a year was to receive love. Having people just love me and bless me and pray for me from all over the world has changed my life. I didn't think anybody could ever cry as much as I did, but the tears were ones of the deep joy of awakening. I could see how shut down I had been.

I learned that I was a people pleaser. I thought I was the opposite. I would stop and help somebody else before I would ever take care of me. I realized that all the things I had preached about all these years were things I needed to hear. As I preach in my first book, "Attend your own lecture." It has been a miraculous process of awakening.

Only my editor, Gideon Weil, would have asked me to write a book on courage before any of this happened. I thought this would be so easy—a subject I knew something about. Little did I know that I would have to find a new kind of confidence and courage to make it through. After turning the book in to him without a word about cancer, Gideon called me and asked if I would be open to talk about my battle with cancer. The book was months away from release and I figured that I would be ready to publicly share about this disease since my denial had finally lifted.

A year and a half later, I can see the holy design of my illness. I can see that having to stay at home and not having the energy to work gave me the opportunity to reflect on what's important to me, what I want to do in my future, who the people are I want to spend my time and my energy with, and what kinds of boundaries I need to draw. Although I've cut myself off from what might have been called my big inner circle, I am now nourished by the few that I keep close. I've learned that I

can't burn the candle at both ends. I've achieved one of my deeper goals, which was to be home with my son, Beau, the two years before he went off to college. I've realized every choice matters. Every choice—what I eat, what I say, what I think, whom I trust, and what projects I work on. Even where I live matters. I finally moved after seventeen years and nine houses in a city I didn't like. Accessing my courageous warrior inside has given me the freedom of “No,” “No, I can't,” “No, I won't.” And forgiveness is essential to everyone.

When I trust my intuition, when I tune into the Voice of my Courageous Self, I hear that the most important thing is to take care of myself first, my son second, my family and staff third, and then all else that follows. I will win this battle one day at a time because I choose to. We are all stronger than we can ever imagine being. Every choice matters starting with today. And today, I choose to live.

—*Debbie Ford*