

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

CANDACE
CAMERON
BURE

with
Erin Davis

Dancing
Through Life

Steps of Courage and Conviction

Dancing Through Life

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CANDACE CAMERON BURE



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Dedication

To my dear husband and sweet children:
Without your courage, patience, support,
and enthusiasm none of this would have been possible.
Thank you for your willingness to step out of your comfort
zone by allowing me to step out of mine. I dedicate this
book to you, for you are my everything. I love you.

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Jesus, sweet Jesus—All praise, glory, and honor is given to You.

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Chapter 1

Ready. Set. Stand!

*Let them praise His name with dancing and make
music to Him with tambourine and lyre.*

—PSALM 149:3

The cameras were ready. The audience was filled with my family and friends. I was in a costume tailor-made just for me, for this moment. It made me feel beautiful and special. When the music started, I begged my brain to remember the moves I'd been practicing. I begged my body to obey my brain. I forced a smile and started to dance. Once my feet started moving, it didn't take long for joy to bubble up from inside me. The seeds of a dream had been planted. I had no idea that God would plant my feet on a different stage years later and give me the opportunity to turn the spotlight toward Him.

The backdrop of this book is my experience as a contestant on *Dancing with the Stars (DWTS)*. Consider this your

all-access pass to the hit show that pairs a celebrity (that's me!) with a professional dancer (so not me!) for ten grueling weeks of dancing competition. Of course, it's much more than that. Even though I love to dance and dreamed of being on the show for nearly a decade, for me, *Dancing with the Stars* became so much more than a dancing competition. It wasn't about being on an Emmy-nominated hit reality competition show or seeing a dream come true while millions watched. I believe that my time on *DWTS* was the opportunity of a lifetime because it allowed me to showcase my faith in Jesus Christ. On a bigger stage than I had ever graced before, I had the chance to be a witness in front of a watching world. Along the journey I learned in many ways what it was like to stand with conviction while being stretched way beyond my comfort zone. I can't wait to share those lessons with you!

That scene of me on a stage in a fabulous dancing costume didn't come from the show. That was me at five years old, the first and only time I remember stepping foot on a stage to dance before I agreed to be on *DWTS*. That moment is a snapshot in my memory from when I took a handful of tap and ballet lessons one summer as a child. My sister Melissa and I took just enough classes to have a single recital at the end of the session.

I don't remember a lot about those lessons except for a vivid flash memory of learning to leap across the ballet floor. While some of the girls were just jumping over an imaginary line with one foot haphazardly in the air, I tried to split my legs and make the move look as graceful as I'd seen real dancers do. In my mind I can hear the teacher say to me, "Yes! Just like that, Candace. Good job!"

Fast-forward more than three decades and this is a picture of my experience on *DWTS*. I didn't just want to be on

a show. I didn't just want to learn to dance. I knew what my invisible lines were. I knew where I would not cross. Those lines were my convictions, drawn by my time in the Word, the guidance of the Holy Spirit in me, and the accountability offered by my Christian community.

Learning to leap is a great picture of what my experience was like. It was a leap of faith, for sure. But I knew up front that I didn't want to just vault across the *DWTS* stage without a plan. I wanted to move with purpose. I wanted to show what it looked like to live within the boundaries that God gives us for our good and I wanted to do it all while looking graceful to the watching world.

My childhood dancing lessons were short-lived and as much as I'm sure I enjoyed it, acting and commercial auditions were awaiting me. Melissa and I performed our recital at a local college auditorium in front of an audience filled with friends and family members of all the dance students. For my one and only dance performance, I was dressed in a black satin leotard with three white puffy balls down the center, white fluffy feathers around the top of my bust-line and a white feathery tail attached to my behind. I wore black satin arm-length, open-fingered gloves that attached around my middle finger along with a white feathery headband that held up my sparkly black cat ears. I don't remember what music we tapped to; I can't even recall the recital itself, but the pictures with my sister in her equally adorable lime green leotard with my mom and dad and grandparents show me that it really did happen.

I also took a few ballroom dance lessons when I was sixteen as a present to my dad for his birthday. My dad, although not a very confident dancer, always took my hand and led me to the dance floor if a slow song was playing when we were at

a party or wedding. I loved dancing with him, and even as a teenager it was one place I was never embarrassed to be seen with my parents. My dad loved watching his daughters have fun on the dance floor and his eyes were always beaming with pride and amusement, no matter how silly we looked doing the latest moves.

One year, wanting to give him an extra special birthday gift, I signed the two of us up for six ballroom dance classes at a professional studio. He was thrilled and I knew the end result would be moments and memories to cherish forever. For my wedding, my dad enlisted a choreographer who taught the two of us a special routine for our father/daughter dance, which included the waltz, disco, country, swing, and the YMCA. Our guests went crazy when we broke out of what everyone thought to be the start of a traditional dance to Nat King Cole's "What a Wonderful World" and into a mash-up of songs and moves that had everyone grooving on the dance floor by the end of it. I take full credit for starting what's now become the phenomenon of YouTube choreographed wedding dances!

But one recital, a few lessons with my dad, and a killer father/daughter wedding dance does not make me a professional dancer. Not by a long shot! I've been trained as an actress and spent much of my time in the laboratory of life learning how to be a wife and mom, but that didn't keep me from dreaming about standing on the *DWTS* stage.

Making a Scene

I was on an airplane flying to New York City when suddenly I had the urge to jump up and down and scream!

I was checking e-mail at 30,000 feet (thank you, Wi-Fi) when I got the offer. I had been officially invited to be a cast member on Season 18 of *Dancing with the Stars*.

I have turned down countless reality shows over the years. If you can name it, chances are, I've been asked to be on it. I've had no interest in being on shows that are all about cat fights, sex, drama, or resurrecting dead Hollywood careers. But after being glued to my TV watching the first season of *Dancing with the Stars*, I realized this one was different. It was a show I could imagine myself being on. It was a fun-spirited competition—in amazing sparkling, glittery costumes no less. And instead of creating a villain, stirring up rivalries, or seeking salacious plotlines, this show told stories about each contestant's journey. It seemed to focus on the best in people, even if that person wasn't the best at heart from the start, guiding them through something exciting yet scary and capturing all the moments in between. This was the one reality show I thought I would actually consider being a part of. Not to mention, my toes were still itching to learn how to really dance!

My husband, Val, knew how much I liked the show, considering I dedicated my Monday and Tuesday nights to watching as a fan in the early years of the show's run. I asked him what he thought if I were ever asked to be on the show, and without hesitation, he would say, "Do what makes you happy." Val's the kind of guy who has always supported my career decisions in entertainment, even though it's never been a personal area of interest for him. He believes in hard work and being passionate about what you do. So with that, he's always been my quiet champion cheering me on from the sidelines.

While I was on ABC Family's *Make It or Break It* from 2009 to 2012, my agents would receive regular calls from the

show's producers asking for my availability to be on *DWTS*, but it never seemed to work out. This only grew my desire to be on the show even more and planted a seed not only to check it off my bucket list, but also to fulfill my inner "little girl" dream. It wasn't until Season 18 that all the cards fell in the right place. That's why I wanted to scream when I got the official invitation to be on the show! Only, I was on an airplane, with no one to tell but the man next to me! Except, I contractually couldn't tell anyone. As soon as I finished cheering and waving my arms in the air from my seat, I messaged Val from my computer. I managed to contain my excitement enough to avoid jumping up and screaming, but just barely. The guy next to me thought I was crazy, but I didn't care, I was so happy to see my dream finally come true.

True to form, Val was a cheerleader from the start. He said, "I'm so excited for you. I know you've wanted this forever."

With a longtime dream realized, and the support of my man, I nestled back into my seat and spent the rest of the flight dreaming of what was ahead.

Standing with Conviction

It was part of my contract with *DWTS*, that I kept my participation under wraps until the big cast reveal on *Good Morning America*. My daughter, Natasha, overheard a conversation between her dad and me about the show and put two and two together that I was on the cast list (smart girl!) and she was beyond excited. We eventually told the boys a week before the announcement as well as my best friend, Dilini, and friend Stacy who would help us with the kids during the busy schedule. But other than those few, no one knew before

the cast was announced, not even my mom, sisters, or closest friends. I love surprises and couldn't wait to see them come unglued with excitement.

In that incubation period, when the realization of my dream was a close-kept secret, I felt nothing but happiness. I knew the show would stretch me mentally and physically, but I felt confident that I could face whatever was coming because I had the protection of Christ, the community of Christ, and the support of those closest to me.

But after the news broke, things got a little stickier.

My family was still super supportive. Natasha, Lev, Maks, and Val were just as jazzed as ever and many other family members and friends were excited and supportive too, but I started to hear expressions of concern.

“What if you're tempted to compromise?”

“Will you lose your conviction on the things you've taken a stand for?”

“What if the producers push you so hard and you feel pressured to give in to something that doesn't line up with God's Word?”

“Should a Christian be on a show about dancing?”

“What about the costumes? Aren't they a little too sexy?”

Well-meaning people, some from my inner circle, but many of whom I had never met, began expressing concern and frustration about my choice. It seemed like nearly everybody, aside from me, was worried that I had set myself up for failure. Certainly, I am human and capable of making mistakes and falling short of the marks God has for me. But conviction is the very reason I am still a woman of faith. It is the thing that grounds me in my faith. I can't live the Christian life and stay true to who I am in Christ and how He has called me to live without conviction. Another way to think of conviction

is boundaries. I knew what my boundaries were before I ever agreed to participate in the show.

Where does my strong sense of conviction come from? From the Bible! By studying God's Word, I learn where God stands on issues and I seek to stand with Him. But there are gray areas, where the Bible doesn't lay out a boundary in black and white. In those cases, my conviction comes from the Holy Spirit in me.

First Corinthians 6:19 says it this way, "Don't you know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own."

The Holy Spirit lives within me! He guides me and nudges me to be more like Christ. But that's not my only compass. God has given me a community of people who care about me and want to see me live like Christ has called me to live. I know that when I need to draw a boundary that is not specifically outlined in the Bible, I can bounce my decisions off the most important people in my life to make sure I'm not acting on emotions or strong desires. Those important people are my husband and my mentors in my Christian faith including some of the women in my small group Bible study, my mom, my sisters, and a handful of other women that I know will be honest and truthful with me and are also grounded in the Word of God.

So, while others worried I might be pushed to jump outside of the boundaries God has for me, I knew I could say "yes" to this opportunity without fear of failure because I had the protection of Christ. I had the community of Christ. I had the prayers of my community, my family and friends in my fellowship, and I knew I was covered and protected no matter what the outcome. That was why I could step out in

faith. It's also why you can step out in faith and do something out of your comfort zone.

In John 15:5 Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me."

Apart from Jesus I probably couldn't have stood up for what I believed without wavering. I might not have had the courage to boldly share my faith with millions of people. Maybe I wouldn't have had the clarity to know what decisions to make along the way. But I wasn't on my own. I had Jesus! I had His Word. I had the encouragement and discernment of my community around me. I knew that if I could cling to Him through this journey, I could tackle the challenge that was in front of me.

What about you?

What do you "cling" to when you are in a season of being stretched? How do you decide where your boundaries are? As you read my story, let me encourage you to look at your own heart and wrestle with the concept of conviction, because if you don't know where your boundaries are before you are thrown into a challenging situation, you are almost guaranteed to fall flat on your face.

The apostle Paul wrote about this reality in Ephesians 6:10–17 when he was describing the armor of God. I'd encourage you to check out the entire passage, but let me highlight three places where Paul wrote about standing with conviction.

Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength. Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the tactics of the Devil. (vv. 10–11)

We can be strong because of the Lord's strength. We can stand with conviction because of the protection and guidance He offers us.

This is why you must take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. (v. 13)

Standing firm is what conviction is all about. I knew that I could be confident that I would stand firm in my convictions through this journey, not because of my own strength, but because of the strength that God freely offers me.

In verse 14, Paul repeats his order to stand: "Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest."

I knew that because of God's Word, I was anchored in truth. I knew that because of my faith in Christ, I was protected from harm even as I entered this season of stretching. None of that meant the journey would be easy, but I knew I could stand with conviction, even with millions of eyes watching, because I would be clinging to the Vine the whole time.

I'm sure you've heard it said that if you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything. That's exactly what Paul is preaching in this passage. If we don't hold our lives together with God's truth, we will never be able to stand firm. If we don't know what our convictions are before the challenge comes, the world will decide them for us and we are destined to compromise. I knew that I could use the platform I had been given to stand for what I believed, because my convictions were firmly decided ahead of time.

Maybe my journey can help you think through your own boundaries. Where do your convictions come from? To whom

or what do you look to help you determine what you will stand for?

The Reality of Reality TV

Soon enough it was time to get down to business. The premise of the show is that each celebrity is matched with a professional dancer. I didn't know who my pro partner was until he showed up at my house while the cameras rolled.

I was secretly rooting for Mark Ballas or Val Chmerkovskiy to be my partner. I had a dream the week before the initial meeting that was simply a face . . . which was Val's face (the dancer, not my husband) so I thought I might be getting a glimpse of who I'd be paired up with. I was excited at this prospect because I knew he was an incredible dancer, I liked his personality from what I'd seen on the show, and size wise I thought we were a good fit. But when I imagined myself on the show over the years, I always thought I'd most likely be paired up with Mark. I liked Mark, he was fun and goofy and not too intense. And looking back through some of his other partners, I always felt like he'd be the one for me. So I was thrilled when I opened the door to find Mark standing on my doorstep.

Right away, as we filmed the very first segment for the show, I had an opportunity to stand with conviction. Mark asked me several questions like what my expectations were of the show, how much dance experience I had, and what I was most nervous about. Without really even thinking about it (that's what happens when your boundaries are set ahead of time), I said that I didn't want to be cast as "the sexy girl." I'm a mom of three kids. I knew that I didn't want to sell sex for the sake of getting me further on the show. I said up front

that I wanted to have the opportunity to look classy and feel beautiful. I even said that I wanted my costumes to be on the more modest side, a boundary that would certainly be put to the test in the weeks ahead.



Then it was time to get to work. Mark and I started practicing four hours a day, seven days a week in the practice studio. At this stage in the game, we were only allowed to practice for four hours in order to give our bodies time to adjust to the physical demands of the show. But it sure didn't feel like much of an adjustment period! We hit the ground running, and running hard!

Suddenly, I had to juggle being a wife and a mom of three kids while seizing a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. One of the first emotions to hit me during this process was a wave of mom guilt. I knew that the show was going to require me to be away from my kids a lot even though I was still in Los Angeles. It was tough knowing I'd be here, but I wouldn't be very available for them.

To help maintain my weight and to avoid stress about preparing meals, I used a food service throughout the duration of the show that delivered three meals and two snacks to my door daily. I ate an average of 1,500 calories a day.

I had the dream. Now I had the opportunity to do it, but there was a tiny tug-of-war happening in my heart. Because of my kids, there were times I wondered if it was okay to pursue my dream. I wondered if I was being selfish by doing something that would require my family to step out

of their comfort zones too, and I wrestled with how to know if this was something God really wanted me to do.

This certainly wasn't the first time I had experienced mom guilt. Even if you're not a mom, you likely know that as women, prioritizing can be tough. We often face choices where we have to weigh an opportunity on one side of the scale and the potential impact on the people we care about on the other. Will my kids be okay if I work these long hours? Will my parents be disappointed if I chase my own dream instead of the dream they have for me? Will my friends be hurt if I invest my time and energy into this project for a season, leaving less time to invest in our friendship?

I had to think through how to cope with mom guilt while pursuing a personal dream. Ultimately, I jumped over that hurdle by focusing on what I want my children to learn from me. I don't want to nurture my children into being unable or unwilling to be stretched out of their comfort zones. I don't want my kids to be afraid to take the opportunities God gives them and use them to point others toward Him. I don't just want my kids to hear what the Bible says; I want them to see it in action.

Philippians 4:13 promises: "I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me."

I knew that was true, and I wanted my kids to see it through my life!

I also knew that I had my husband's support every step of the way. Val has always been a hands-on dad. He's never been one of

Natasha came with me to rehearsal most Saturdays and gave me "face tips."

those guys who shies away from changing a diaper, driving carpool, coaching the kids in sports, making breakfast, lunch,

and dinner, having heart-to-heart conversations with them, or doing whatever needs to be done. He's always been a very involved parent, and while the show would require him to kick his role into hyper drive—something he's done many times before when I've filmed out of town—I knew that our kids would be well taken care of and supported. That's not to say the guilt didn't come and go. Sometimes, I think that's just part of being a woman, but ultimately, I could lay it down because I knew that my kids were watching me be stretched beyond my comfort zone.

Lights, Camera, Action

Once practices started, the cameras were rolling constantly. All of our practices were filmed by a crew of at least two people—one producer operating the camera and one person sitting at the computer operating the sound and making editing notes. Since I had been acting since I was five years old, I was pretty used to the cameras, but I wasn't used to the spotlight being quite so constant. The cameras were literally on all the time from the minute we walked in the doors!

Mark was a patient teacher and I needed his patience! As it turns out, those childhood dance lessons didn't carry me very far in a competition with professional dancers and gold-medalist athletes. Very early on, my mind and body were being stretched in new ways. I even got some major bruises during practice those first couple of weeks. I considered them battle scars and shared photos of them on my weekly blog on *People* magazine's website. I had a lot to learn if I was going to compete on this stage, but I felt ready for the challenge.

Our first live show was right around the corner. I didn't know it, but I had just strapped in for the ride of my life!