

QUIETING
— THE SHOUT OF —
SHOULD

Crystal Stine



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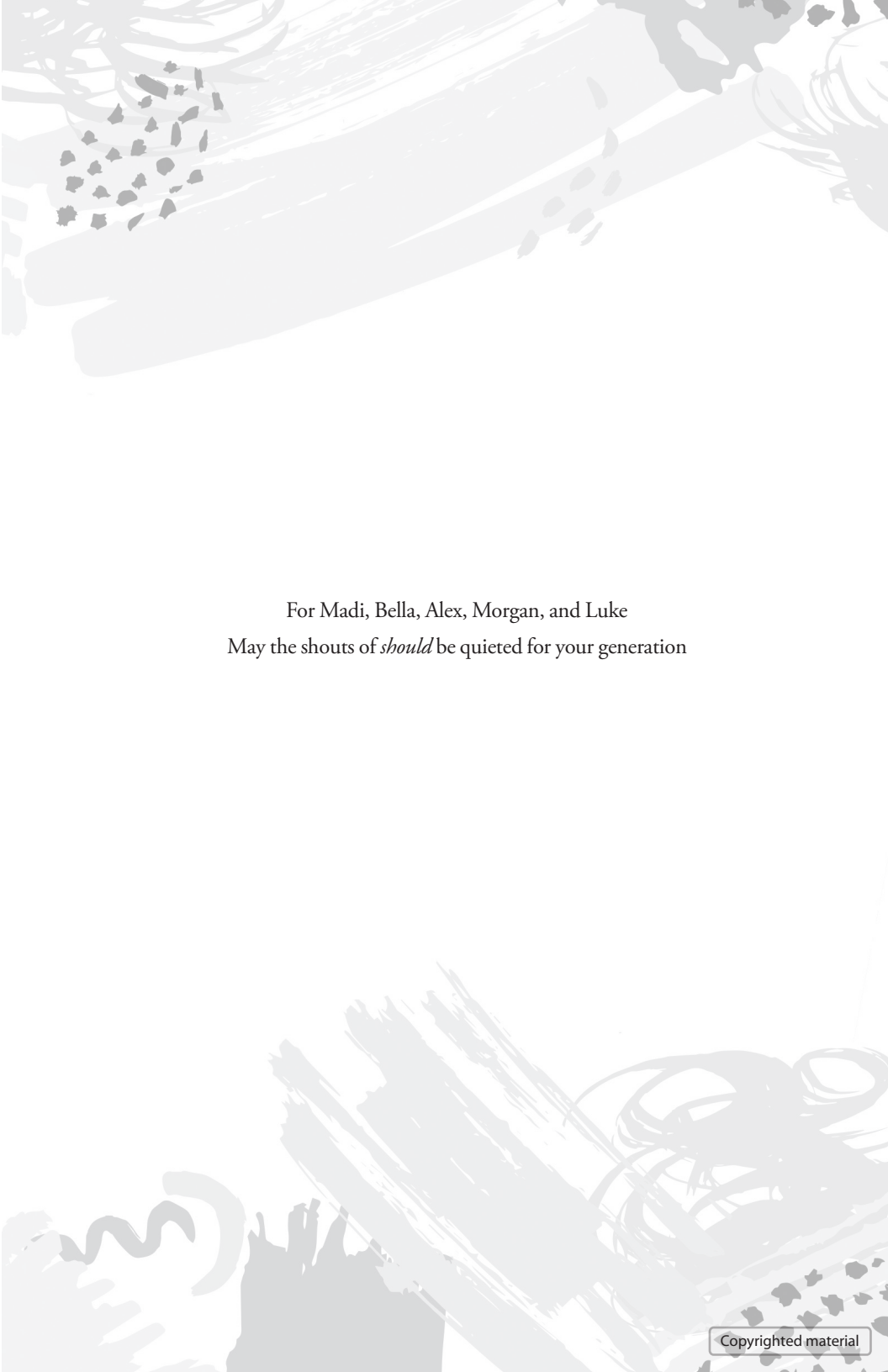
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The background features abstract grey brushstrokes and patterns. In the top left, there are circular scribbles and a cluster of small dark shapes. A large, diagonal brushstroke runs from the top left towards the center. In the bottom right, there are more circular scribbles and a cluster of small dark shapes, mirroring the top left. The overall style is artistic and textured.

For Madi, Bella, Alex, Morgan, and Luke
May the shouts of *should* be quieted for your generation

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Introduction

I have a constant soundtrack playing in my head. I wish I could tell you it was music (although “Carry On, Wayward Son” by Kansas is usually my earworm of choice), but unfortunately, my life is less spontaneous Disney musical and more to-do lists, doubts, expectations, demands, and dreams.

After speaking with women around the country, I know I’m not the only one who is looking for a way to quiet the shout of *should* from the world so we can fully embrace who God has created us to be. That’s what this book is—not permission to put on headphones and check out from our lives, but an invitation to go on a journey that navigates the noise of the world as we swap what weighs us down for the quiet, uplifting guidance from God our souls seek. It’s also not a simple self-help book where you’ll finish the final chapter and have your life sorted out in a few easy steps. What you *will* discover is the ability to identify what, in your current season, is keeping you from living fully as a daughter of God.

There are a couple of ways you can read this book:

1. Read on your own.

Each chapter will introduce you to a specific should women struggle with and will include parts of my story, a deep dive into relevant scripture, and time at the end of each section for you to pause and connect with God.

2. Read with a group.

This book has also been designed with your book clubs and Bible studies in mind and includes reflection/discussion questions at the end of each chapter and a series of devotions to help you create a more personal experience. Is there work God is going to want you to do on your own, just with Him? Absolutely. Are we designed for community, and do we need to have women in our lives who can take these next steps with us? Definitely. You'll also find reading plans and additional book club materials at shoutofshouldbook.com.

At the end of each section you'll find an invitation to slow down and spend time in God's Word. In addition to the "Digging Deeper" sections in each chapter, these devotions will point you back to Scripture and invite you to create space to hear what God has to say to you. At the end of each devotion you'll find a challenge—a quest to find quiet in the midst of the chaos.

I hope you choose to read this book slowly, giving yourself time to rest and reflect and space to hear from God over all the shoulds the world shouts at you. Running on empty will never take you where God needs you, and listening to the shouts of should from the world will only distract you from living fully in God's peace, provision, and power. Refill and refuel so you can be prepared to do the work God has set before you with passion and joy. Let's get ready to silence some shoulds.



Part 1

Relationships

I Should Be More Like Her

Nobody wants to be *should* on.

Whether it's the world shouting a list of expectations and demands at us, social media showing us what life is like for someone else, or even a desire to fit in, twisting our dreams and goals, when we slow down long enough to really pay attention to the thoughts in our heads, we find we've been should on.

I've had countless opportunities over the years to experience the burden of should on my life. From college to married life, from the workplace to social media, I've found myself so thick in the expectations of others (and myself) that joy, peace, and contentment had no room to thrive.

It's easy for the best intentions of *should* to paralyze us from moving toward God's plan for our lives. We begin every year thinking that we should get healthy, or we should finally start that project we've always dreamed of doing. Before we know it, we find ourselves frustrated at our lack of progress and wondering why we haven't achieved what

seemed simple for other women. What started as a good goal turns into a comparison trap that we struggle to escape.

As I've explored my struggles with should over the years, I've discovered that some deeper issues take me from living with an eternal perspective, holy anticipation, and healthy expectations to feeling like I've been should on: fear, insecurity, pride, comparison, doubt, and unrealistic expectations.

Fear tells me I should get moving because if I don't, I'll never achieve my dreams. Insecurity tells me I should change who I am and how I act because if I'm more like *her*, I'll feel confident, secure, and invited. Pride tells me I should do everything I can to keep up with the Joneses so I can be the best and shine the spotlight on myself—regardless of how hustling in that way burns out, wearies, and overwhelms me. Comparison tells me I should do more, be more—or else I've failed. Doubt tells me I should fake it until I make it because I'm not sure I belong or am good enough, but I can't let anyone else know it. And over it all is a layer of unrealistic expectations that my life, family, friends, work, and faith should look a certain way, and I should go to any length necessary to make every piece of my life practically perfect.

I'm exhausted just making that list.

That's what carrying the burden of should does to our lives. It keeps our eyes focused on everything—and everyone—around us instead of directing our gaze toward God. Should tries to yell so loudly in our ears that we can never hear God's voice inviting us to our next best step. Should is bossy and confusing and a liar. If should were a person, she would be someone your parents warned you to stay away from—the mean girl who makes you feel special for a little while but eventually turns on you.

Before we can break free from the chains of should, it would be

helpful to understand why it's so hard to change how we think—about our lives, our circumstances, and ourselves. There is a good reason it's difficult to break up with should.

Blame it on your brain.

Scripture tells us that our words are an overflow of our hearts (Luke 6:45). How we speak—to others and ourselves—is a reflection of what is in our hearts. Our thoughts follow our hearts, and our words follow our thoughts.

Maybe you've heard it like this: “garbage in, garbage out.” Hearts that are focused on the expectations and demands of the world will bear bad fruit. But hearts filled with God, grace, and the gospel bear good fruit in thought, word, and action. Through salvation and with God's help, we can be—as the apostle Paul says in Romans 12:2—transformed by the renewing of our minds.

And that transformation can make the difference between surviving and thriving. It's been said that Satan doesn't need to destroy us, only distract us, to keep us from fulfilling the plans God has for us. What better way than to distract us with the noise of the world, filling our hearts and minds with all the things we think we should be doing, ensuring we miss out on the fulfilling work God has for us?

Science tells us that our thoughts create patterns that change the landscape of our brains, cells, and genes. One writer explains the way our brain changes based on our thoughts:

What flows through your mind also sculpts your brain in permanent ways. Think of your mind as the movement of information through your nervous system. . . . As a thought travels through your brain, neurons fire together in distinctive ways based on the specific information being handled,

and those patterns of neural activity actually change your neural structure.

Busy regions of the brain start making new connections with each other, and existing synapses, the connections between neurons, that experience more activity get stronger, increasingly sensitive, and start building more receptors. New synapses are also formed.¹

Whether looking to Scripture or science, do you want to know the best part? With God, we can change the direction of our thoughts, create new patterns in our brains, and quiet the shout of should in our lives. It's possible, but we can't do it on our own. All the idols that should has built up in our lives need to be torn down to make room for abiding with Jesus, serving His kingdom with confidence and peace.

I sat on the carpeted floor of a small room in a building that was part college dorm, part nursing college. It was freshman orientation, and I felt a combination of excitement, nervousness, and confidence. My dreams were coming true, and I was so proud of what I had already accomplished. A small-town girl making it into a prestigious university.

I had no idea what I was getting myself into.

Several upperclassmen were seated at the front of the room, sharing their stories. They encouraged us to join campus organizations and let us know that it was okay to be nervous about starting something new. And then a girl talked about coming from a small town and struggling to fit in because she couldn't afford the name-brand, high-end clothing that everyone around her was wearing. She shared her journey of

discovering that her identity had nothing to do with the clothes she wore or all the things she thought she should do to fit in and make friends. Shopping at Kmart instead of Burberry no longer made her feel less-than because she'd learned that true friends wouldn't care what she wore or how much money she had.

I didn't get it, not really. I'd never been around that kind of privilege or prestige before, so why wouldn't someone feel comfortable wearing clothes from Kmart or Old Navy?

Moving into my dorm room in that same building quickly showed me how little I knew. The decorations I'd chosen for my room were looked down upon by my roommate and her mom. The clothes I thought were so great could never measure up to the preppy, labeled look of the girls in my hall. Without the experiences of spring break in Aspen, years of horseback riding lessons, and having a family with a beach house (or two), I struggled to find common ground.

I'd only been a Christian for a few years and didn't know what it meant to find my confidence in God. I wondered if going into debt purchasing clothes would help me feel like I belonged. Or maybe making the "right" friends who would include me in their vacations at beach houses and retreats in the mountains would make me feel less alone, or less...less-than.

When it came time for new leaders to be chosen for those retreats—the ones where we went to connect, unplug, and spend time with God—I applied. It was what I thought I should do. My expectations were high because I'd become friends with all the other leaders and those who planned the retreat. Of course I would be chosen! So I signed up to lead—over and over again. Each time an email was sent with the list of leaders and I wasn't on it, I became more discouraged.

My insecurity and fears made me desperate. I felt I should be chosen. I had experience and all the right friends, and I did all the right “faith things.” But they never chose me.

In my power, nothing I could ever do would make me more like *her*—someone who would be picked. I could go into as much debt as I wanted, wear all the right clothes, have all the right friends, and behave in the way I thought I should to fit in...and none of it would ever be enough.

In those months of focusing on trying to be good enough for one group, I missed out on trying new things and building relationships with other women.

Trying to be who the world tells us we should be will only tear us down. What friendships do we miss because we’re so caught up in the ones we think we should have? What experiences do we miss because we’re so focused on being chosen for just one position?

Don’t get me wrong, those five years I spent at college were full of amazing memories. But all my work trying to be someone else left me feeling left out, lonely, and depressed. I wasn’t a good friend because I didn’t know what kind of friend I was meant to be. I didn’t thrive or try all the activities that interested me because I thought I should be doing something else.

I’d always been interested in sororities and the strong bonds those women had with one another, but I never joined one out of fear. I did, however, join the campus gospel choir, even though I can’t actually sing, because other friends were joining and I didn’t want to feel excluded. I chose not to study abroad in Ireland, something I’d always dreamed about, because I didn’t want to disrupt my comfortable relationships or roommate plans. I did, however, start my freshman year in an international business relations course, because “business” seemed like a

degree that would land me a great job after graduation—and I spent the next several months dreading the class, the professor, and the first truly bad grade I’d ever receive.

Trying to be like *her* only made me less of the woman God intended for me to be.

When we quiet the shout of should that tells us we need to be like someone else, we can embrace the identity God has given us with joy and peace.

Trying to be like *her* only made me less of
the woman God intended for me to be.

Digging Deeper

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

ACTS 16:14-15 ESV

In Acts 16 we read about Paul, Timothy, Silas, and Luke visiting Philippi. Paul’s ministry had finally reached Europe, and this was their first stop to preach.² With no formal synagogue in the town (something that required ten Jewish men to start), the men found themselves at the riverside. They began to share with the women who had gathered there to pray, read from the Old Testament, and talk about what

they had learned. John MacArthur notes, “It is significant that the first people Paul preached to in Europe were women.”³ Among them was Lydia, one of the first converts to Christianity.

Matthew Henry’s commentary⁴ notes four significant points about this passage:

1. *She was named.* Women aren’t often named in the Bible, and when they are, it’s significant.
2. *Her calling was identified.* Lydia’s work is named and celebrated. The purple cloth that she sold would have been used by important figures in the Roman Empire—the wealthy and the royal. Though she was not wearing the garments herself, her work was honest and something to be proud of.
3. *She took advantage of where God placed her.* Although far from where she was born, her location was subservient to God’s providence. When the opportunity for salvation and life-change presented itself, Lydia leaned in and took advantage of the invitation.
4. *Her faith opened her heart.* Luke’s description of Lydia’s response in verse 14 beautifully captures the way we respond to God’s invitation. It’s not one-sided, but rather a willingness to listen when God opens our heart—and then act on what our faith has shown us.

Lydia didn’t simply sit by the waterside and listen to a nice story told by some travelers. She came to the Sabbath with a seeking heart and was ready to listen and act on what God was doing in her heart.

After hearing and believing, Lydia was baptized along with her household. They made a public profession of their faith, which Lydia followed with an invitation for the men to come and stay at her home. In the words of John MacArthur, “To make a home where travelers could be exposed to Christian love, family life, and fellowship was a high priority for Christian women (see 1 Timothy 5:9-10). Lydia’s hospitality gave proof that she was a truly liberated woman.”⁵ It was obedience, openness, and availability that changed the course of her household forever—not acting a certain way or trying to be perfect.

What if Lydia had held back? What if she had looked around her at the other women along the river and decided she would only respond if they did? That group mentality comes with a choice: conform and stay comfortable or be courageous and stand out, even if it means standing alone. Going along with what everyone else is doing is another should that keeps us from living in the freedom and joy God has for us. Lydia knew God and studied His Word, and she was not so distracted by what everyone else was doing or thinking that she missed an opportunity to say “yes” to God.

As Lydia invited Paul, Timothy, Silas, and Luke into her home, she was not only offering hospitality to the travelers, but giving herself and her household the opportunity to ask questions, listen, and learn. As Matthew Henry puts it, “Those that know something of Christ cannot but desire to know more.”⁶ Lydia loved God so much that she accepted Jesus as her Savior and opened her home and heart to learn as much as she could from the apostles. She didn’t have an example to look to for these actions, but she was confident enough in who she was as God’s daughter to say “yes” even when no one else was making a move.

Has God brought you to a place you’ve been praying for, and now

you feel stuck, trapped by comparison? What if He has you at the riverside to be refreshed in the presence of fellow believers? Could your time among women with similar passions, beliefs, and talents be an opportunity to learn, grow, and listen? Instead of being so distracted by what everyone else is doing, the opportunities they're sharing, and the ways you think you should be more like *her*, what if you entered into this particular season with a heart open to God's Word? What if you had ears ready to hear in holy anticipation what God has for you and a willingness to jump in with both feet when He extends the invitation?

What if you had ears ready to hear in holy anticipation what God has for you and a willingness to jump in with both feet when He extends the invitation?

Quieting the shout of should in your life isn't just beneficial for you. Imagine the impact it might have on your family and your future if you were able to walk in the freedom of making choices that honor God, instead of trying to live up to what everyone else is doing. There is freedom and abundant living in choosing to embrace who God made you to be.

We aren't enough on our own, and we'll certainly never be perfect. But with God working in us and through us, we can be women who keep our eyes only on Christ, listening to who He says we are and putting our faith into action in ways that honor God—and who He made us to be.

Does this should show up for you at work? At church? When you're trying to figure out how to express the unique way God created you to worship or serve or lead? This should manifests itself every time you make a small change to fit in, hide just a little more of yourself, go

along with what others are doing in hopes of an invitation to the table. It looks like choosing a group of *hers* over the call of God.

How do you fight it? One small choice at a time. One unapologetic yes to God when He calls your heart toward something new and unknown. One encouraging word to a woman who chooses to stand out instead of fitting in. One moment to affirm the unique, beautiful gift you see in someone else.

You, my friend, have been created by God. Not to fit in, but to be set apart. Choose every day to let your light shine and surround yourself with wise, trusted people who affirm who God made you to be. We can be women who quiet this should as we create groups and build friendships that welcome one another—just as God made us.

Flip the Script

Now that we've spent time together discussing this first should and digging into a biblical example, I want you to walk away feeling equipped to quiet the shout of should in your life. Below you'll find three real-life examples of how the should from this chapter might show up in your life, along with a "flip" suggestion—so you can turn over the should to God and refocus your heart.

- Flip "You should change how you look to fit in" to "God, thank You for designing me to be set apart so others see You."
- Flip "You should join that group if you ever want to be a leader" to "God, help me lead well right where I am."
- Flip "You should chase down that opportunity if you want to get ahead" to "God, I trust You to open the right doors at the right time."

Reflection / Book Club

I'm not going to pretend that any of this is easy. Retraining our brains? Identifying and silencing the noise that distracts us from joy? I wish I could tell you that this is a simple ten-step book that will give you all the tools you need to live a perfect, balanced, doubt-free life.

It's not.

“But with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26 esv). You can read as many books as you'd like, get advice from friends, pay for courses, and join all the groups, but unless you're willing to learn, listen, and obey like Lydia, the noise of the world will only become louder and more oppressive. There is no one-size-fits-all solution because God didn't create us to be one-size-fits-all women.

1. When you consider all the noise around you, what is keeping you from hearing God?
2. How might your relationships—with God, friends, family, and your community—be different if you all committed to dropping the lies of should?
3. Describe a time when believing you should be more like *her* held you back from an opportunity God had for you.

Lord, thank You for so carefully and beautifully creating each of us in Your image. You are infinitely more creative than we could ever imagine. We can't do any of this without You. Guide our hearts as we retrain our minds. Create in us a holy anticipation of what You're about to do in us and through us as we seek You and open our hearts to all You have for us. In Jesus' name, amen.