



The Brave Squire



Written By: Stephen M Robinson
Illustrated by: Elena Wood

This is an advanced copy of

The Brave Squire

Book One of the

Everfaith series

Provided for written review.

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About the Everfaith Series

The Everfaith series follows young Benjamin Aldwyn — squire, knight, and servant of the true King, Jesus Christ, as he grows in courage, faith, and character through the challenges of life in the kingdom of Everfaith.

Each book in the series is designed with purpose. At the heart of every story is a specific biblical character trait — the kind of quality God calls His people to pursue and that every generation needs to see lived out. Occasionally, a story may naturally draw on a second trait alongside the first, but each book has one clear theme at its center. In *The Brave Squire*, that theme is courage.

Together, these stories form a larger picture of what it looks like to follow the true King — not just in grand moments, but in the everyday choices that shape who we become. It is the author's hope that young readers will find in Benjamin not only an adventure worth following, but a life worth imitating.

The Brave Squire — Book One — Courage

The King's Command — Book Two — Coming Soon

A Note to Young Readers

Have you ever felt like you were not brave enough? Like the task in front of you was just too big, or the people around you were stronger, older, or more capable than you?

Benjamin felt that way, too.

He was not the biggest squire in the castle. He was not the strongest or the most experienced. But he had something that mattered far more than any of those things — a heart that wanted to do what was right, and a God who was with him all of the time.

As you read Benjamin's story, I want you to remember something important. Bravery does not mean you are never scared. It means you do the right thing even when you are. The master armorer said it well when he tapped Benjamin on the chest and told him, "*Courage starts in here.*"

That is true for you, too.

The apostle Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:13 that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. That strength is available to you — not because of how big or capable you are, but because of how great your God is.

Now, turn the page. Benjamin's adventure is waiting — and so is yours.

Your author and your friend,

Stephen M Robinson

PROLOGUE

The Boy Who Wouldn't Quit

Sir Rowan, a knight in the kingdom of Everfaith, was new to the village of Alderwyn. This little village is not known for producing knights, but rather for its farming and its loyal, and trustworthy citizens.

Since arriving a week ago, Sir Rowan had enjoyed sitting at a table outside a small cookhouse, sipping a cup of warm spiced milk and eating a small breakfast. The wood smoke from the stone oven inside and the gentle clatter of the workmen busily at their tasks was oddly soothing, as was the refreshing scent of cinnamon and nutmeg wafting up from his milk. Not many people were out in the streets this time of morning — markets were just starting to open, and the morning sun had barely topped the horizon, its light beginning to glisten on the river passing behind Aldwyn's Riverside Livery. The knight leaned back in his seat, enjoying the gentle breeze, and adjusted his surcoat — the rising sun catching the gold of the crest on his chest — a symbol of a special order in Everfaith.

It was on the second morning that Sir Rowan first noticed him, though by the third he was already watching. Between slow sips of spiced milk, the knight watched the boy work the livery across the street — a young lad, ten years at most, tackling each task as though leaving it undone was simply not a choice he was willing to make.

On this particular day, the boy struggled to carry heavy pails of water to fill the water trough. With each step, the water sloshed over the edge, the bucket heavy in his hands, but he refused to give up. The filled pail weighed almost as much as he did. Sir Rowan, a gentle and compassionate knight, sat straight but had to stop himself from jumping up to help. The sight tugged at his heart. Watching the boy work so hard, unnoticed by anyone but a passing knight, brought back a story his father used to tell him — a story Rowan had asked for so often growing up that he still knew it word for word. He could almost hear his father's voice now: "Come on lad, keep it up. Aye, you're made of sterner stuff than you look." He carried the pail a few feet, then set it down, rested for a minute, picked it up, and carried it a few more feet. Step by step, pail after pail, without giving up.

The owner of the nearby market stepped out to add to his product display, and Sir Rowan called to him. "Good sir! Do you know who that lad across the street belongs to?"

The market owner glanced at the stable and answered the knight with confidence. "Benjamin? Aye sir. Good lad. Works hard. His father keeps the livery there." When he turned

back to the knight, the crest on his chest gave him pause. Regaining his composure, the market owner continued. "Has the lad done something wrong, Sir Knight?"

"No fault lies with the lad. What is his father called?"

"Joseph, sir. Joseph Aldwyn. Owns Aldwyn's Riverside Livery, he does. Honest man. Keeps his horses and his word well enough. Raises the boy right too, if you ask me."

"I can see that." Sir Rowan stood, turned toward the market owner, and placed a hand briefly over his own chest as if in a salute. "You have my thanks, good sir." Then walked across the street to the stables.

Benjamin was making another trip with a heavy bucket of water. As he set it down to rest, the knight picked it up to offer a hand. "Allow me to help, lad. You've been working hard. You deserve a rest."

"Thank you..." Benjamin began—then he looked up.

The Ribbon Crest over the knight's heart caught his eye. A deep blue shield bearing a gold crown and two crossed swords, all set within a ring of pleated blue and gold ribbon. The Ribbon Crest, worn on routine duty, was enough to remind any man, or boy, exactly who he was dealing with. Benjamin's mouth dropped open.

"I... forgive me, Sir Knight. You are... you are with...The Order?"

The knight smiled. "Yes, lad. You may call me Sir Rowan."

"Thank you, Sir Rowan. I am Benjamin. Benjamin Aldwyn."

Sir Rowan bowed his head in respect. "I am pleased to meet you, Benjamin Aldwyn."

Benjamin's father noticed his son speaking with the knight and stepped over to see if he needed help. "Good day, Sir Knight. May I be of service?"

Benjamin jumped into the conversation, "Father, this is Sir Rowan. He is with the Order of the King's Shield, and he offered to help me with this bucket."

With a smile, Sir Rowan explained, "Yes, I was at the cookhouse across the street and noticed how hard working your son is. He works with a determination I have rarely witnessed in such a young man." Sir Rowan paused for a moment to think. "Master Aldwyn, I would ask a brief word with you and your wife in private, if it would please you."

Puzzled, the boy's father looked to his son and back to Sir Rowan. "Yes, of course, Sir Rowan." He looked again at Benjamin. "Benjamin, finish your task here, then rest yourself. But mind any who come to do business." Then Sir Rowan followed Mr. Aldwyn to the house.

The men returned with Mrs. Aldwyn, whose face was red and streaked with tears. She stood straight, her hands folded in front of her, and she gave him one slow nod.

Benjamin was concerned about his mother's tears. "Father, what troubles Mother so?"

Sir Rowan studied him for a moment. Benjamin had finished his work, sweat streaked with dust across his brow. Benjamin searched his father's face for an answer, but found only a steady look that told him to wait. The street noise carried on around them – a cart somewhere, voices from the market – but the small space between the four of them had gone quiet.

Rowan nodded once, as if confirming something already decided. "Benjamin Aldwyn," he said, "I have spoken with your father and mother. They are willing—if you are—to have you come and work with me. You will learn the ways of a knight. You will serve as my squire in King Aldric's court."

Benjamin quietly gasped. He looked to his father, whose hand rested firmly on his shoulder. "I would serve a knight in The Order of the King's Shield?" His father nodded in consent. "Yes...yes, sir. I would be honored, sir!" His voice was steady despite his pounding heart.

Sir Rowan's expression softened. "Young Benjamin. I am grateful for your willingness to serve. You will not regret this." Then he looked to Benjamin's parents. "Please, remember what I have promised you. I will take good care of your boy. He may continue to live at home. My other promises will take time to manifest, but I will send word as I am able. I will come for him in the morning."

Joseph nodded. "We will be ready."



Squire Benjamin and Starfire

Chapter One

The Squire Who Longed to Be Brave

In the weeks that followed Benjamin's coming to work as a squire for Sir Rowan, Benjamin both enjoyed his new life and found it challenging. His days were spent polishing the knight's armor, caring for the knight's horses, and running errands. Sir Rowan told him, "You would learn the ways of a knight," but learning and being are two different things. Knights are strong and brave. Benjamin never saw himself as brave. Only the bravest of men earned the honor of being a knight—or so he believed. As far as Benjamin was concerned, Sir Rowan was one of the bravest in the kingdom.

Boys like Benjamin rarely rose to such a calling. But his parents had told him of a boy long ago who earned it through an act of great courage. They told him that maybe one day he could do the same and help protect Everfaith. But could he really do it?

Lost in his thoughts, Benjamin didn't realize how heavy the bucket had grown — until it slipped from his grasp. THUMP! SPLASH! Water went everywhere soaking his feet and the ground around him. Frustrated, he pressed his lips together, picked it up and started to fill it again. One of the older teenage squires walked by, heard the pail fall and splash. He turned to see what happened then laughed and kept walking. *Of course. Of all the people to walk by, it had to be him.* Benjamin felt his face go hot and kept his eyes on the bucket. *Just fill it. Do not look up. Just pick it up and fill it.* Sir Rowan followed close behind. "Think nothing of it, Ben. You're doing well. We all drop things from time to time." Benjamin liked Sir Rowan. He especially liked it when he called him "Ben."

After filling the bucket...again, Benjamin went to the barn to water Starfire. As he entered the smell of hay reminded him of working in his father's livery. A brief wave of homesickness for the livery passed over him. But he knew he'd be home at the end of the day anyway.

Starfire was Sir Rowan's favorite horse. She was a tall and gentle, golden-red mare with a white star on her forehead and a white mane. Benjamin loved Starfire. Sir Rowan had five horses, but he loved Starfire the best. He enjoyed riding her on his patrols around town. Benjamin believed Starfire was the most beautiful horse in the stable. He poured the water into her water-trough, and she nuzzled him before she started to drink. Benjamin knew this was her way of thanking him. He smiled as he patted her flank, wishing he could reach higher to scratch her back.

Sir Rowan stepped into the stable with a lunch bucket. "Ben! Word reached me that you missed the midday meal — again. You give yourself so wholly to your work that you forget to come. I have brought you a meal. Rest a moment and eat. A squire, no less than a knight, must keep up his strength."

"I thank you, Sir Rowan. I lost track of the hour," then Benjamin's eyes fell to the ground and under his breath he muttered, "and no one came to fetch me." He kicked some of the straw. "None of the other squires ever think to look for me." Benjamin was the youngest squire at the castle grounds. Very few of the older squires treated him with respect. Benjamin was often overlooked.

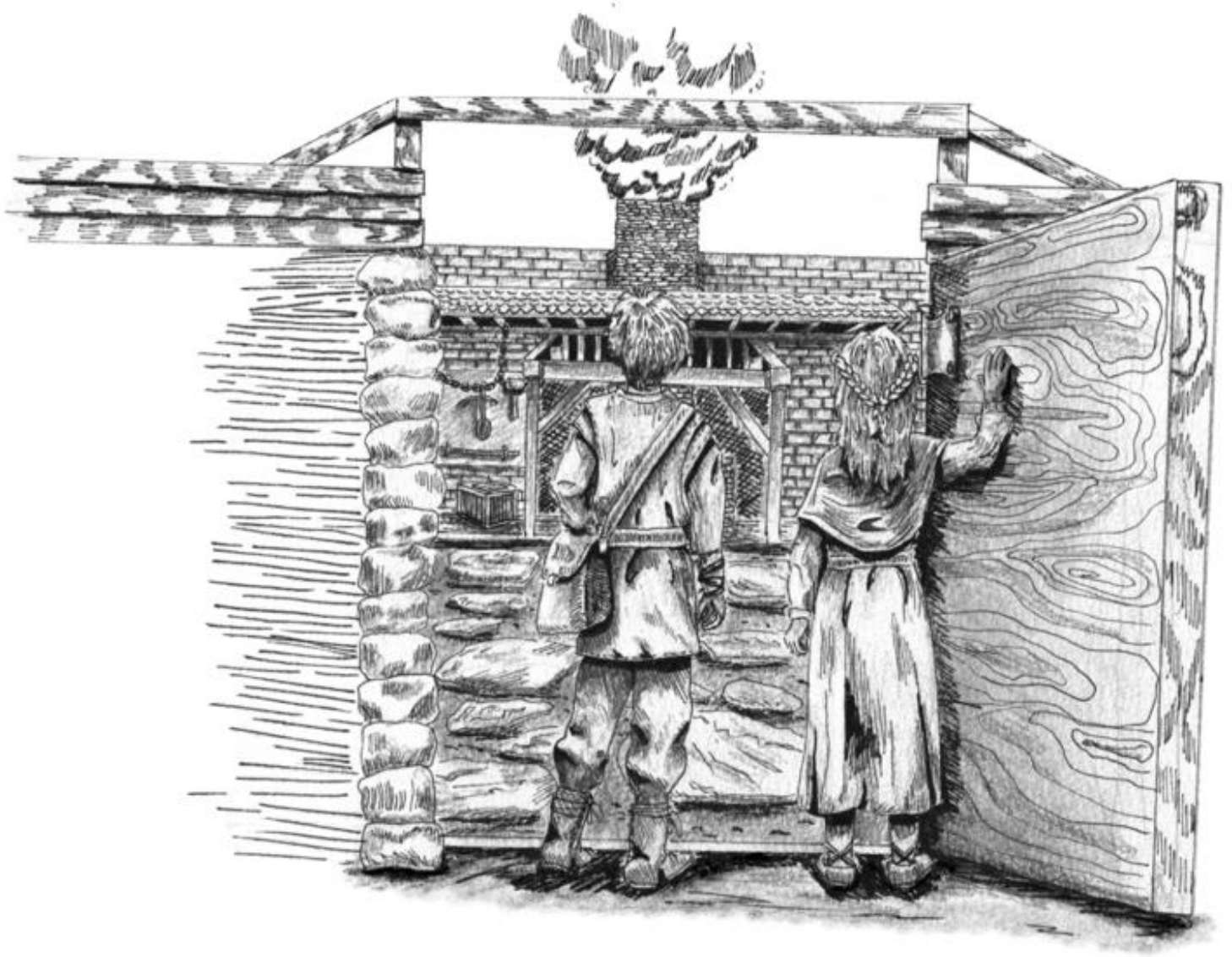
Sir Rowan looked into Benjamin's eyes. "You are a fine young man, Ben. It is my honor to have you among my squires!" He patted Ben's shoulder. "You work hard and with purpose, Ben — and will one day stand among Everfaith's greatest knights." He started to leave then turned back. "Ben, I have learned trust Starfire's instincts. I have seen how she is with you. She trusts you — and so do I." He gave Ben's shoulder a gentle squeeze then headed to the training ground.

Sir Rowan's words made Benjamin feel ten feet tall. Being respected by Sir Rowan made him feel...well, a little braver. Perhaps Sir Rowan saw something in him that he didn't yet see in himself. He held on to that thought the way a man grips a rope in a strong wind. He then sat down on a bale of hay to eat his lunch.

While he was eating, he thought more about what Sir Rowan said to him. He could see Sir Rowan standing before him. Then the Ribbon Crest came into view in his mind's eye. That crest demanded respect. It wasn't worn by accident. It was a sign of an oath — a promise given not for applause, but for obedience. And very few knights were ever chosen to wear it.

In the training ground, knights were training the bigger squires in sword fighting. If only he could truly be brave enough to be a real knight. He stepped up and leaned on the fence to watch. He imagined himself as one of them. He pictured himself standing tall in armor, sword at his side, the Ribbon Crest on his chest. Then the picture faded. Men like that were born to it, weren't they? Not boys who drop water buckets. He would do anything to be a knight. Benjamin told himself as he let out a deep sigh, the words a whisper to himself, "How can I ever become a knight when I do not even know how to be brave? Lord, please teach me how to be brave."

He didn't know it yet, but the Lord had already begun to answer.



Squire Benjamin and Beth
at the master armorers shop

Chapter Two

Benjamin's Task

The next day, Benjamin woke early because he wanted to get started on his chores before the older squires arrived at the barn. He felt uncomfortable around them: their presence was a constant reminder of how small he was. Though they hardly noticed him, their laughter always left him feeling like he did not belong. He ate a quick breakfast and ran to the barn to feed and brush Starfire. Of course, as small as he was, he had to use a ladder to brush her, but he loved that beautiful mare he would do anything for her. Sir Rowan never had any complaints about how his prize horse looked after Benjamin carefully groomed her.

When he had finished with Starfire, he grabbed a rake and headed out to the practice grounds. The area had to be cleaned and raked before the practice began. This was not an easy task for a boy as small as Benjamin, but he didn't mind. It was quiet, giving him time to think and enjoy the birds singing.

"Ben! Fetch your satchel and come here! I need you to run an errand for me." Sir Rowan stood outside the practice field with a leather money pouch in one hand and a folded parchment in the other. Benjamin propped up his rake against the fence, ducked back into the barn to grab his satchel, and hurried over. "Yes, Sir Rowan. How may I be of service?"

"Ben, I have a very important task for you. I would do it myself, but I must meet with the king. Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir. I am at your service." Benjamin answered excitedly.

"Good lad. You must take this money and note straight to the master armorer. I had him make a change to my helmet. Put the money bag and the note in your satchel. Do not stop to talk to anybody." Sir Rowan looked seriously into Benjamin's eyes. "Go straight there and come straight back. Do you understand?"

He did not want to let Sir Rowan down. Benjamin's stomach turned over, but he squared his shoulders and lifted his chin. He gripped his satchel with both hands so Sir Rowan would not see them trembling. He took the money bag and dropped it into the satchel. As he retrieved the note, he noticed it was unsealed. *Unsealed. He trusts me. I must not fail him.* "Yes, sir! I will take this to the master armorer straight away, sir. I will let you know as

soon as I return.” Benjamin set his face as seriously as he could muster, then turned to begin his journey. Sir Rowan had only recently come to Alderwyn from Willowmere, and Benjamin was glad to serve him in this — proud, even, to be of use to a knight so kind as to ask rather than simply command. As he walked, he prayed to the Lord for strength and confidence to fulfill this mission and make Sir Rowan proud.

As he entered Alderwyn, he could see the armorer's shop just up the street. He reached into his satchel and carefully pulled out the letter, ready to present it properly.

Without warning, a gust of wind snatched it from his hand. Benjamin gasped and lunged forward, but the letter tumbled and spun down the street ahead of him. His heart nearly stopped. *Sir Rowan entrusted this to me!*

A girl standing outside the market noticed the letter skipping along the ground toward her. As it fluttered down, she quickly planted her foot on it, pinning it flat. She bent and snatched it up before the wind could claim it again. She straightened and held it out toward the boy running toward her.

Benjamin skidded to a stop in front of her, breathless. "Thank you! I thank you most sincerely." He took the letter and immediately checked it over, turning it in his hands to make sure it was not damaged. He let out a long breath.

The girl smiled. "You looked as though you needed some help."

"I did," he admitted, still catching his breath. Then he remembered himself and stood a little straighter. "I am Benjamin. Benjamin Aldwyn. I am squire to Sir Rowan."

Something shifted in her expression — brief, quiet, almost nothing. She studied him for just a moment before her smile returned. "I am Beth," she said simply. "I am glad to meet you, Benjamin."

"Thank you, Beth. Truly." He carefully slipped the letter back into his satchel. "I must get to the master armorer just up the street. I must not be late."

"I know where it is," she offered. "I shall walk with you. I have nothing to do while mother shops."

Benjamin thought for a moment. Sir Rowan told him not to stop and talk to anybody. But they would be walking, not stopping. "Well, yes, I suppose that would be all right." "Oh! Look, we are here!" They opened the door and stepped in. Benjamin noticed the master armorer working hard on a shield at the far end of his shop. With his eyes fixed on the craftsman and his mind on his task, Benjamin misjudged his steps and bumped into a table. A metal tool clattered to the floor. Flustered, he picked it up and set it back on the table with an apologetic smile.

The master armorer chuckled and waved him over. "What may I do for such a stately young man and his lady fair?"

Confused, Benjamin looked at Beth and back to the armorer. "I beg your pardon, sir?"

Amused, the master armorer asked, "What may I do for you, lad?"

Beth excused herself and returned to her mother, who was waiting at the market. Benjamin answered the armorer, "Sir Rowan sent me to pay you for a job he had asked you to complete." Benjamin reached into his satchel and retrieved the money bag and the note.

"Well," said the master armorer with an impressed look on his face. "You must be quite a brave man to come all the way into town with such a sum of money." He continued with a smile, "Are you a knight, young sir?"

Benjamin bowed his head. "No, sir. I wish to be — but I am not brave enough."

The armorer knelt in front of Benjamin and lifted the young man's chin. "Even the smallest man can be brave, young lad." Then he tapped a finger gently against Benjamin's tunic, right over his heart. "Courage starts in here." Then he stood up and told him, "You go back to Sir Rowan and tell him his helmet is almost ready. He may collect in the morning."

Benjamin, encouraged by the master armorer, started back to report to Sir Rowan. As he approached the market, he saw Beth, but this time she wasn't smiling. She kept glancing over her shoulder, her expression tight with fear. His own sense of accomplishment vanished, replaced by a sudden worry for her.