

**A Conversation with Jessica Honegger,  
Founder and Co-CEO of Noonday Collection and Author of  
*Imperfect Courage***

***Q. First of all, congratulations on *Imperfect Courage*. It's powerful, and that's mainly because of the personal anecdotes you share. Have you always wanted to write a book?***

**A.** I can't say I've *always* wanted to write a book, but as this crazy journey toward entrepreneurship has unfolded I've realized that I have learned some important lessons I wanted to share with others who are still finding their path. I believe that the story of Noonday Collection is worth sharing, and I wanted to use my voice to empower others.

Books have really changed my life and influenced me. I wanted to be able to use my story to help someone else in the same way that people like Sheryl Sandberg and Brené Brown helped to shape me with their books.

***Q. The book is a distinct combination of memoir and clear call to action. How did you decide not to lean too far one way or the other, but to blend the two so well?***

**A.** I am a storyteller—I love storytelling. I run a storytelling brand. Noonday Collection was built on being able to capture people's hearts through story, not just product. Then also, I really want to help others see their potential and not listen to their fears more than they listen to what's possible. I don't think I could have written a book that was just a memoir. I want to use my story to lead people to stand up and make an impact in the world.

***Q. For those unfamiliar with Noonday Collection: Who are y'all?***

**A.** I began Noonday Collection in my guest room in 2010. Today, we are the largest fair-trade jewelry company in the world. We've employed more than 4,000 ambassadors in the U.S. and more than 4,500 artisan partners in 14 countries including Guatemala, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Ecuador, Peru, India, Vietnam, Nepal, Afghanistan, and more.

We believe in connecting and empowering people around the world.

***Q. How did you decide that fear and courage would be the heart of the book?***

**A.** I struggled—especially at the beginning of Noonday—with being held back by fear and insecurity. I thought that I needed to be the perfect mom and the perfect entrepreneur, and I wasted so much energy on those ideas.

I want others to learn from my story so that maybe they won't spin their wheels, wasting energy on fear, and instead, will use that fear to catalyze them into a life of purpose.

***Q. Let's talk a little bit about Noonday's beginning. Who are Jalia and Daniel?***

**A.** Jalia and Daniel are the first artisan couple that I partnered with. They're Ugandan—we were introduced via email about eight years ago. They're artists. When we connected, they were extremely poor but also extremely talented, and they just needed market access. They just needed an opportunity for their products to make it to a larger audience.

Now, they have a thriving Ugandan business. They're fully middle class Ugandans, and it's been amazing to see them reach their potential.

When I first met Jalia, her dream was to not die. Now, she dreams of opening a retreat center. They have a farm. It's just been so gratifying to be a part of that [her voice breaks]. Sorry. I'm crying!

***Q.*** *They sound like such interesting people, and the fact that you all found one another is so moving—and will give people hope. Can you tell us about your decision to sell their art? What prompted you to step up?*

**A.** I can't say that it was, "Oh, I have this really amazing business idea that I know is going to change the world!" [laughs] I was in a place of financial need and searching for a side hustle to bring our son Jack who we were adopting home from Rwanda.

I had this opportunity presented to me—these artisan-made goods, brought to my attention by some friends of mine living in Uganda who had connected with Jalia and Daniel and wanted to find opportunities for them. I happened to be there on a trip, and they said, "Hey, we'd love for you to sell these products."

I eventually said yes after a few months—again, because we were in financial need. Then, I first opened my home to women who came and shopped at my house. It was so successful. That's when I realized this could be something more than just a one-time offloading of products for Jalia and Daniel. This could actually be sustainable—something I could keep doing.

So I started ordering products from them. That's really when our stories became interdependent: I knew my success was Jalia's success, and Jalia's success was my success. That's what pushed me in those first few months, aside from bringing Jack home from Rwanda. This idea that these very small orders were making a very big impact already in these strangers' lives. I still hadn't met them.

I think that when you look across the globe and decide not to see strangers but see yourself, and you choose empathy and connection, that can really change the trajectory of your life. When you take on a global mindset—and not just in an, "Oh, I'm going to send money to the Red Cross every now and then," way—but in a way in which you really understand that you are connected to other human beings around the world, the stakes increase really quickly.

When you experience this, how could you not spend your days wanting to impact others?

***Q. Your adoption story is so moving. Your trip to DC to the Rwandan Embassy is incredible—and you include details like your fear at the time of riding in a taxi alone. What was writing this story down like?***

**A.** Writing it down now provided a really good moment to reflect on how far I've grown and how courage is just like muscles: it's just like working out. When you begin to practice courage, your courage muscles get stronger.

It is helpful for me to look back and remember I used to be afraid of travel and the unknown. Not long ago, I took 20 women to Guatemala. I realized, there are some moments happening that are scary for them, as they walked down unknown streets in a foreign country. There were some hearts racing, and people felt unsafe.

I'm proof you can overcome those fears, though—and life is so much better and bigger when you do.

***Q. Let's revisit the Rwandan judge's chambers, when you were trying to finalize Jack's adoption. You bring up such an important point in the book. You write, "A recent study found that when women are the minority in a group where everyone is being invited to share their thoughts about how to solve a problem, they speak 75 percent less than men do." But you spoke up. Can you talk about how you were feeling then and what happened because you used your voice?***

**A.** Even after getting the outcome I wanted that ultimately opened doors for all of those prospective parents in the room, I was still doubting myself. I thought, "Oh, everyone is thinking, 'That loudmouth Texan!'" A woman who'd been there too that day wrote to me and said, "That was a huge moment. I just want you to know that." That's when I realized, "Oh, okay! I was supposed to do that!"

We—especially women—experience self-doubt and we treat that doubt as a cancellation policy. We question ourselves and then those questions make us cancel ourselves: I'm canceled from being able to go for that promotion or speaking up or making a decision at home.

We let self-doubt disqualify us instead of just going scared and moving forward and leaning into all of that mess. That's the only way to get to the other side. I still deal with this. Writing this book has caused me to question myself! But we can't let this stuff sideline us, because then, we'll lead such small lives.

***Q. Noonday Collection's story is intertwined with your life as a mom. You have a quote in the book that will resonate with so many moms: "The problem with my needing a nanny is that being a nanny-needer did not at all fit with my script of what it meant to***

***be a Good Mom, especially a mom of three children under age five.” Can you talk about your journey as a mother?***

**A.** I used to be someone who would love down on people who’d put their kids in daycare. I was so judgmental. I think that’s because my mom was a stay-at-home mom, and that was the narrative I was raised in. When I was exposed to another narrative, I reacted first with fear. My judgement was just fear talking.

There is nothing that brings up fear more in women than becoming a mother. We want to believe that we are in perfect control—that we can put perfect parenting in, and perfect kids will come out on the other side. But when we live that way, we are miserable moms who parents out of shame and guilt. We can do that for a little bit, but eventually, that fuel is going to run out. You have to learn how to parent out of love and faith.

My journey of accepting that I could be a good mom involved my acceptance that there could be this other narrative, whether other people are involved in my children’s lives. Other people can pour into my children—it doesn’t just have to be me. And that doesn’t mean that they’ll turn into terrible, dysfunctional children.

I could be a stay-at-home mom and homeschool them forever, and they could still end up in jail. We just don’t have that much control. We influence them, but we cannot control the outcome of their lives. Once I was able to embrace the idea that God had provided other people for my children and then I was able to receive that help guilt-free, I could build a support network for my kids, which is a beautiful thing.

***Q. Work-life balance questions are annoying, but when it comes to an entrepreneur who is as successful as you are, they’re also necessary. What does making it all work look like for you?***

**A.** So much of balance has to do with your mindset—with what’s happening in your soul. I used to think of balance as a list: God first, husband second, kids third, work fourth. But then, I thought, “What does that even mean?” Because I’m clearly spending more time at work than I am with my kids. Does that mean I don’t value my kids?

It’s a weird math game that we play that doesn’t even make sense. Here’s the secret: what matters most is being fully present and intentional where you are. I’ve learned when I’m with my family, to be fully present with them. When I’m at work, I’m fully here.

Accepting help without letting any energy be zapped by guilt is key, too. Freedom comes from being able to receive help and knowing that you are stewarding the gifts you have to offer the world. Be confident in that.

***Q. The Noonday Collection story is inspiring, and your individual story as an entrepreneur is as well. You’ve combined local and global in such a unique way, all***

***without taking a traditional path to get here. What advice do you have for aspiring and new entrepreneurs?***

**A.** We have such insight into other people's lives today—in large part because of social media. It makes comparing your beginning to someone else's end an easy trap. Don't fall for it. Everyone starts somewhere. You have to take your first step because you can't finish what you've never started.

Don't despise the small things. There is scripture that says something like, "Do not despise the small days." I think that you've got to be able to run in your lane, knowing that eventually you'll be able to look behind you. When you're just starting, you think, the starting line is just right there at my heels. But when you keep stepping forward, soon, you'll be able to look behind you and see a starting line that's much more distant, and a finish line that's much closer. Instead of looking to your right and left, run your own race with gusto and confidence. You'll reach your goals with a lot more joy this way.

***Q. You all have accomplished so much at Noonday. What makes you the most proud?***

**A.** As an entire organization—with all of our stakeholders, artisans, ambassadors, and home office people—we have created a space for people to live into their purposes and reach their potential in spite of their fears. That's gratifying, whether it's a woman here in America who thought her voice was small but now she's running a Noonday organization of 30 women, or an artisan who thought he belonged on the streets but is now the manager of a workshop.

Creating opportunities for people to use their God-given power to create more power for others. Together, we are building a flourishing world, where people are able to walk freely in their God-given potential.

***Q. If readers walk away with just one big idea after reading Imperfect Courage, what do you hope it is?***

**A.** We're not made to live a small life. Don't let fear and insecurity keep you seated. Instead, with trembling knees and sweaty palms, walk out your front door and connect with the world around you, whether that's offering help to your neighbor, accepting help from a babysitter, or just getting on a plane. Don't stay isolated. Get up and go.

### **About Jessica Honegger**

Jessica Honegger is a pioneer. As founder and co-CEO of Noonday Collection—the world's largest fair-trade jewelry company—she has created a new breed of social entrepreneurship that empowers women, connects cultures, and celebrates handmade beauty. Her path to award-winning business leader was anything but traditional: from serving as a midwife in Bolivia, to earning her Master's degree in Education, to renovating and selling houses in Austin, Texas, Jessica has followed her heart down several paths, gaining once-in-a-lifetime experiences that all still guide her decisions today. A mom to three, she is also a passionate

adoption advocate who initially launched Noonday Collection to help raise the needed funds to bring her and her husband's third child home. Jessica shares her story, along with heartening encouragement, in her compelling new book, **IMPERFECT COURAGE: LIVE A LIFE OF PURPOSE BY LEAVING COMFORT AND GOING SCARED**, available everywhere August 21, 2018. Learn more at <https://jessicahonegger.com>.