

## *Chapter 2*

# Confidence

*Truth #9: You were born to fly.*

When I was a growing up, I often made simple-minded comments that made people laugh. I'd speak before thinking, demonstrating what I didn't know, and then get teased.

Fortunately, I was a good student. If I hadn't made good grades, I probably would have been labeled *dumb*. Instead I was called "book smart," "naïve," "green," and occasionally "a breath of fresh air." It was often my friends who said these things, and they never meant any harm. Their comments came with a grin or a follow-up like, "That's why I love you."

*I learned to laugh at myself and take it in fun. But deep down, I wished to be different. I didn't want to be book smart; I wanted to*

be street smart. I didn't want to be naïve; I wanted to be savvy and sophisticated. I didn't want to be gullible; I wanted to be shrewd.

Because I was young, I kept thinking I'd change. I thought I'd outgrow my innocent outlook on life and morph into a worldly, skeptical adult. I'd lose the rose-colored glasses, grow less optimistic, and stop thinking like a child.

But guess what? I didn't change much. Yes, I got wiser. I learned to filter my thoughts before blurting them out. I began to see harsh realities that never registered with me before. But overall, my outlook on life has remained child-like. I still find wonder in ordinary things. I still notice the positive before the negative. I still have an easy time seeing the best in people. I still love to laugh, be silly, and watch Disney movies.

When I was a child, I hated the child in me. I felt like she held me back and prevented me from growing up as fast as my peers. But as an adult, I love that child. I see her as a gift from God and the reason I can write messages of hope and encouragement. Now when someone calls me a "breath of fresh air," I take it as a compliment because I realize how important optimism is to a broken, complicated world.

The moral of the story is this: *every characteristic you possess serves a purpose.* They are all tools in the toolbox you'll carry through life. Each tool is necessary and important.

A tool that seems like a curse now, a heavy burden to lug

around, can become a huge blessing when it comes time to use it. Until then, you have to trust the tools God gave you. At some point in your journey, you'll need each one.

Will you ever be perfectly content with your toolbox? Will you ever stop wishing you could trade some of your tools for someone else's? No. You will, however, reach a point where you grow tired of fighting what you can't change about yourself. You'll make a choice to either (1) be miserable about it or (2) accept what you've been given and make the best of it.

I hope you choose the latter. Giving in isn't giving up because leaning into your true nature makes life easier and better. As doors begin to open, you will see how your surrender was actually a victory. *The fears holding you back were unjustified.*

God has great things in store, but to learn what awaits you, you must first be honest with yourself.

"**AND WE KNOW THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD WORKS FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM, WHO HAVE BEEN CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE."**

(ROMANS 8:28)

## WHAT MAKES YOU DIFFERENT IS WHAT MAKES YOU GREAT

I live near a junior high school, and I spend a lot of time at my children's elementary school. One thing I've come to notice over the years is how different the students are in these two venues.

At the elementary school, I see lots of personality. The kids are authentic, outgoing, and confident. They run up to hug me and ask random questions, whatever's on their mind. Fashion choices are all over the map. While some kids wear T-shirts and shorts every day (even in thirty-degree weather), others dress as fashionistas.

Anything goes at the elementary school because the overall atmosphere is acceptance. Being different isn't taboo because everyone is different. Nobody knows yet how to be anyone but themselves.

But at the junior high school, the scene is different. I drive by every day and see faces more serious and tentative than the joyful faces at the elementary school. The girls all dress the same—dark jeans, Frye boots, billowy tops, scarves—and to be honest, they look a little scared. I watch them and wonder what happened to the confidence they once had in spades. I ask myself questions like these:

- "Why do they walk shoulder to shoulder, huddled tight as if they fear a possible attack?"
- "Why is no one smiling?"
- "Why does no one want to be singled out?"

I know junior high is an awkward time. I understand that once self-consciousness and self-awareness kick in, anything that makes you different can add to your insecurity. Still, there's something about this transition that makes me sad. There's something that makes me want to pull the junior high girls aside and reassure them it's okay to be themselves. They don't have to blend in or retreat into their safe shell.

While some girls will rise to the challenge, coming back out of their shell eventually to show their true colors and take on this critical world, others won't. They may spend the rest their lives bottling up their best assets because they believe it's too risky to put themselves out there.

What you should know is this: *You were born to fly. You were made to be authentic, just like the children I see at the elementary school.* What makes you *different* is what makes you *great*. It is a huge part of God's plan for you.

You may be content flying under the radar. Blending in is safe and won't draw negative attention. *But when your goal is to fly under the radar, you're bound to conform.* You'll follow the crowd to avoid the attention that being different brings.

Believe it or not, feeling different is one of the most normal feelings in the world. And if your differences ever make you

- "What happened to the personalities I once spotted a mile away?"

feel lonely, that's normal too. We all feel different because we are different. Remember, never before has there been another human like you or me. That is why we have moments where we feel like misfits. That is why we question our design.

God entrusted you with gifts *only you can share*. To tap into your gifts, you must listen to the Holy Spirit, God's presence inside you. This inner voice is your instruction manual that helps you soar. Its purpose is to lift your feet off the ground. You face overwhelming pressure to conform. At your age, it is all about acting alike, talking alike, and falling in line like a row of ducks. But when you make yourself a carbon copy of your friends, you become replaceable. You make yourself interchangeable for thirty other girls.

Really now, what's the point of that? Think about your favorite people on the planet. Why do you love them? What attracts you to their company? Chances are, it's because they are unique. You've never met anyone like them—nor will you. What makes them remarkable is their willingness to shine as an original. You couldn't clone them if you tried.

This may sound strange, but feeling different is a *gift*. It reveals what is special about you. It reminds you that the world's way isn't God's way. It makes you pause before conforming. To pioneer your own path, you have to *tune into* your uncomfortable feelings and listen to what they tell you. Even pain serves a purpose. It is there to guide you, not hold you back.

You'll always be tempted to hide what makes you different. You'll always be tempted to settle for normal, which isn't striving for much. But when you bury your unique qualities, you bury your potential, because it's *through your uniqueness that your best opportunities emerge*.

Whatever you'd like to cover up, I guarantee it is the exact thing God has given you to help build His kingdom.

Aim *higher* than normal. Rise above the crowd without fear, shame, or apology. Birds fly in a flock, but an eagle soars alone. Do you want to be an eagle? Do you long to satisfy that urge that wishes to see more, be more, and do more (Isaiah 40:31)?

You have the gifts and capacity. You have wings to fly. And once you know your talents, you can take any vision God's placed on your heart and rise to achieve it.

**“FOR THIS REASON I REMIND YOU TO FAN INTO FLAME THE GIFT OF GOD, WHICH IS IN YOU THROUGH THE LAYING ON OF MY HANDS. FOR THE SPIRIT GOD GAVE US DOES NOT MAKE US TIMID, BUT GIVES US POWER, LOVE AND SELF-DISCIPLINE.”**

(2 TIMOTHY 1:6-7)



## Is There Hope for Quiet Girls?

When I was young, I was very shy. I liked to observe life instead of jumping into the action. While neighborhood kids played games in our front yard, I stayed in my bedroom reading. Even though I could hear everyone having fun, I was perfectly content in my private world.

Being an introvert, however, sometimes made it hard for me to connect with others. I longed to be like the outgoing kids who never seemed uncomfortable in social settings. When you're shy or quiet, it's easy to go unnoticed. It's easy to get overshadowed by big personalities who don't hide in their shell or hesitate to put themselves "out there."

What I learned over time is that there *is* hope for quiet girls. Yes, our world is made for extroverts, but with extra courage, an introvert can adapt. How? By learning to come out of your shell, push past your comfort zone, and pursue passions that bring you alive. *Because when you feel alive, you forget to be shy.* You get so caught up in the moment—and the

connections you make—you gain the sense of belonging you crave.

I used to believe my introverted nature was a handicap, but now I consider it an asset. It is introverts, after all, who tend to be deep thinkers, good listeners, and keen observers. We notice when people are hurting. We recognize life nuances that others miss. We are highly in tune with our thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and as a result, we often succeed at art and innovation.

So if you're quiet or shy, have faith in yourself. Don't discount your future or assume you can't chase your dreams as well as a social butterfly can. God gave you talents that can help you build bridges to others. As your talents touch the mind, heart, and soul of others, you learn to embrace yourself.

Think about what brings you alive. Is it the tingle in your fingers when you play piano? The rush in your body when you dance on stage and feel music pulsate under your feet? The intense curiosity sparked when you study biology? Whatever you love most, that

is probably your ticket to overcoming shyness. It can help you to live as boldly and bravely as an extrovert.

God created us for community. And when you share your gifts, you draw people in. You form connections based on the real you. You find encouragement to venture further from your shell and put yourself “out there” with confidence.

It's okay to need time alone to recharge. It's okay to enjoy life as an observer at times. The key for quiet girls is to strike a healthy balance. Use your shell when necessary, but don't get too cozy. The world needs your talents, and no matter how introverted you are, God will provide ways to pass on the gifts He gave you.

## STEP ONE: RECOGNIZING YOUR GIFTS

A lot of people believe they don't have talent. They see talent in others, but not themselves. I don't buy that for one second. If you're a child of God, which we all are, you have talent. You have gifts your Maker instilled in you to help you glorify Him.

While you and I may have different gifts, it's the same Spirit that distributes them. While we may serve in different ways, it's the same God at work inside us (1 Corinthians 12:4–6).

For some people, talent is readily apparent. We've all met or heard of prodigies whose abilities are off the charts. They're the Taylor Swifts of the world, the lightning in a bottle. From the moment they first strum a guitar, pick up a football, or sketch a drawing, the signs of greatness are there. It's clear to see how promising their future is because of where they start.

Then there are the rest of us, the non-prodigies who have hobbies and interests, but no readily apparent, supernatural gifts. We know what we like to do, but we're not sure what we're meant to do. Or maybe we know what we're meant to do, but we face obstacles like having more passion than talent or not having the resources to start.

Either way, we must work harder than the prodigies. They have a head start, and while we can catch up on some level, we'll probably never be in the same league if they match our efforts.

And frankly, that is okay. There's room in the sky for eagles to soar at every level. Some will fly at higher altitudes than you,

**“IN THE SAME WAY, FAITH BY ITSELF, IF IT IS NOT ACCOMPANIED BY ACTION, IS DEAD.”**  
*(JAMES 2:1)*

and some will fly lower. Some will have bigger fan clubs, fancier tricks, and better speed. You can spend your time being jealous of other eagles and keeping a constant eye on them, or you can pour your energy into making yourself a better eagle.

The choice is yours.

So let's start with the basics: Do you know your talents? Have you assessed your strengths and weaknesses? If not, consider these questions:

- What do I do better than my friends? What are my strong subjects in school? Does my family rely on me for certain jobs? What activities come naturally for me?
- What do I see better than most people? What's obvious to me that isn't obvious to others? Can I read emotions? Do I have a knack for design? Can I watch a dance routine and pick it up? Can I make art out of junk?
- What puts me in a "zone"? Would I rather craft with my hands or my mind? Do I have more imagination or logic?
- What do people compliment me on? Do I hear feedback on my photography? My articles in the school paper? The parties I plan? My teaching skills?
- What gets me so engrossed I lose track of time? What could I do all day long and never get bored?
- What would I do if failure or rejection didn't scare me? What's my dream job?
- What is my happy place? Where do I come alive? Am I happiest when I'm singing? Playing tennis? Performing

in community theater? Walking in the woods? Playing with my puppy?

- On a scale of one to ten, how do I rank in these categories?

- Emotional intelligence (ability to understand what I'm feeling)
- Social intelligence (ability to read others and pick up on social cues)
- Academic intelligence (school performance when I apply myself)
- Body intelligence (motor skills and abilities)
- Spiritual intelligence (understanding of God and eternity)

The word *smart* is a broad umbrella. There are many ways to be intelligent because talent takes on many forms. While school is very important and crucial to a healthy adult life, not all talents can be measured in a classroom. So if you're giving your best and struggling in certain subjects, don't sell yourself short. Don't assume you must be "dumb" because you can't cut it somewhere. You can and you will—just maybe not in calculus.

Depending on what you show a knack for, your intelligence could fall in one of these areas:

- People smart
- Numbers smart

- Heart smart
- Food smart
- Fashion smart
- Sports smart
- Body smart
- Music smart
- Animal smart
- Word smart
- Art smart

## STEP TWO: HONING YOUR GIFTS

Picasso didn't become Picasso in a week. Bill Gates didn't build Microsoft in a year. Even if you're a prodigy, you must still work hard. You have to stay committed when most people would give up.

Focus on what you can do *today*. Practice what you love for an hour—playing guitar, writing poetry, testing recipes—and repeat the process tomorrow. After a few weeks, your practice will form a habit. You'll see progress that encourages you to press on.

There are no shortcuts to becoming an eagle, although we all look for them. Developing your talents may mean giving up what you want now—i.e., watching TV or going to a party—for what you want later. But if you enjoy the process, it won't feel like a sacrifice. You can celebrate how far you've come instead of lamenting how far you have to go.

All too often, people give up too soon. They set their expectations too high and quit the second they fail. Show yourself grace by allowing room to make mistakes. You may fall before you fly, but if you see failure as *part of your story—not the end of your story*—it won't keep you down for long.

Consider this example of how practice pays off: Years ago, I had a line of poem prints I sold at arts and crafts shows. At one show, there was an artist generating buzz. Her stationary was amazing, very whimsical and eye-catching, and from morning until night her booth remained packed.

The list goes on.

When you use your talents, God gives you more. When you don't use them, you lose them. It's a waste to let your talents go unused. It also makes it hard for you to be happy when others apply their talents and succeed. When you aren't living up to your potential, you'll envy anyone who does.

Identifying your talents is the first step. The second step is developing them. To go from "good" to "great" takes dedication and persistence.

**"BUT AS FOR YOU, BE STRONG AND DO NOT GIVE UP, FOR YOUR WORK WILL BE REWARDED."**

(2 CHRONICLES 15:7)

By all accounts, this girl had "made it." She had a large staff, and they'd just been to an Atlanta Gift Mart to take her work national. This hometown hero was about to explode, and being in on the secret was pretty cool.

When I returned home, I raved about this artist to a customer who owned a stationary store. "You have to carry her work," I insisted. "They're the cutest cards ever!"

A funny look came over this store owner's face. After thinking a moment, she slipped into her storage room. A minute later she came back holding a pack of note cards. They were white and totally blah. The line art looked like a child's drawing—and not a talented child either.

"We carried that artist's cards a few years ago," the store owner said, "and they didn't sell."

I couldn't believe this was the same artist. To say she had improved was an understatement. Her cards at the craft show I'd just been to were authentic and bold, but these were, well, not. My guess was that it took trial and error to develop a signature style. She had to make mistakes to later accomplish a look that would hit.

The expert at anything was once a beginner. Like you, they doubted themselves and wondered what business they had pretending to have talent. What if that artist had quit? What if she never made it to craft shows and the Atlanta Gift Mart because her early products didn't sell?

Seeing how she reinvented herself was a powerful lesson for me. I hope it sticks with you too.

## CONFIDENCE

You'll never be as talented as you wish you were. You'll never be completely confident in your work. And while you don't want to share your work too soon, because it's better to wow people than overwhelm them, you also don't want to be so scared and self-critical you never take a chance, never step out, never show the world what you've got.

Remember, you were born to fly. And when you clamp your wings down, you miss out on God's plan for you.

*"YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. A TOWN BUILT ON A HILL CANNOT BE HIDDEN. NEITHER DO PEOPLE LIGHT A LAMP AND PUT IT UNDER A BOWL. INSTEAD THEY PUT IT ON A STAND, AND IT GIVES LIGHT TO EVERYONE IN THE HOUSE. IN THE SAME WAY, LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE OTHERS, THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD DEEDS AND GLORIFY YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN."*

(MATTHEW 5:14-16)

### STEP THREE: TAKING OFF

The point of flying like an eagle isn't to show off. It is to point others to God.

So if you're reluctant about being on display, take yourself out of the equation. Forget about *your fears, your worries, your doubts*. Stop thinking about possible judgment and criticism. Focus instead on God and find purpose in serving Him. Whatever talents you share, share them with all your heart.

What makes you *different* is what makes you *great*. So when you question your design, when you wish to change what can't be changed, remember God has a plan. He made you to serve your generation. Every detail about you is part of His amazing vision. You're an original, so act like one. Chart your own course and hold your head high, knowing that anything you do, you're doing for Him.

2. What is one trait you wish you could change about yourself? Can you think of how God might use that trait for good down the road?

3. Has anyone ever shot down your dreams? If so, did it motivate you more or make you want to quit?

4. Why does bottling up your personality create tension? Is it possible to discover God's unique plan for you when your life is a replica of someone else's life?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you ever miss the little, naïve girl you used to be, the one who didn't care so much about what other people thought? How can you reconnect with her?

5. If our God is a God of miracles, what miracles might He work through you?

## Reput



Truth #8  
reputation

hen you the pi Chances is again to make the right name match With some people's ton It is so inter time when a

