

What does a beautiful soul look like? Who in your life possesses an inner beauty that makes them radiant?

## Chapter 10

# Self-Talk

Truth #1: The source of all peace and happiness lives inside you. Learn to listen to the whispers of God over the megaphone of public opinion.

I couldn't find my cell phone anywhere.

I'd called it twenty times and searched every room of my parents' beach home. I knew it was nearby, yet no matter how hard I listened, I couldn't hear a hint of a ring.

Frustrated and fed up, I stopped in the kitchen and tried to think. *If I were a cell phone, where would I be? Did I accidentally throw it away like I've done before?* I checked the trash can, but it wasn't there. I'd exhausted all my options. I didn't know what to try next.

Then suddenly it hit me—maybe if I got the house really

quiet, I could hear better. Because the air conditioner was creating a low hum, I turned it off. Immediately the house grew still. I knew I was on the right track.

I called my phone again, and several seconds later I heard a tiny, faint ring. It was so light and barely perceptible I questioned whether I was imagining it. Oddly enough, the ring seemed to originate below the house, which was built over a carport and storage room. Since I knew my phone wasn't down there, I dismissed the thought.

But after attempting several more calls, I heard that faint ring again coming from below the house. It was an impossible thought because I hadn't been down there all morning. By this point, however, I was desperate enough to try anything.

So I walked out the front door of my parents' beach home, certain this was a waste of time, and called my phone again. This time I didn't have to listen hard because, much to my amazement . . . the ring got louder!

I wasn't crazy after all. My cell phone *was* below the house.

It turned out that I was right about accidentally throwing my phone away in the trash. Someone had then taken that trash bag outside for the collection. Laughing at myself, yet totally grossed out, I dug out my device from a large pile of garbage.

Not my finest moment, but at least I had my phone back.

In many ways, this story illustrates how God works in my life and yours. We want His call to be loud and obvious, but most often it's subtle. We have to turn off all the background noise

to catch it. We doubt ourselves and wonder if we're imagining things. We think crazy possibilities—then quickly dismiss them. We stay put instead of venturing out because venturing out requires us to leave our comfort zone.

But there comes a point when we're so desperate we'll try anything. We step outside the box to see if that faint call we hear from afar is real. We open our heart and mind, listen once again, and voilá . . . discover the answer is right under our nose.

Our mind wasn't playing tricks after all. At last it's all so clear.

Am I suggesting that God leads us to the trash? No, of course not. I'm saying that God leads us to unexpected places, venues we might never visit by our own volition. And when we keep our heart and mind open to that, trusting our instincts and testing out those far-fetched possibilities, we get a clearer picture of what direction God is nudging us toward.

"HE SAYS, 'BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM  
GOD; I WILL BE EXALTED AMONG THE NATIONS,  
I WILL BE EXALTED IN THE EARTH.'"

(PSALM 46:10)





## YOUR GOD-SHAPED HOLE

It started innocently enough, with a fantastic lavender dress I bought to wear on Easter.

I wanted my daughters to wear white dresses, and since my oldest had recently experienced a growth spurt, we ran around town searching for a white dress we agreed on. Reaching a compromise was painful. There were eye rolls, scowls, and tears inside many dressing rooms. I'm sure you can relate.

At last we found a dress—but then we needed shoes for her and her sister. I also needed makeup and a host of other things to help our family look nice and presentable on Easter morning.

What started as a simple effort became a scavenger hunt as I traveled from store . . . to store . . . to store to assemble my family's wardrobe.

It was the middle of Holy Week when I was able to step outside myself and watch this frantic woman struggle to pull it together. Only then did I realize how I'd *completely* strayed from the whole point of Easter. Here I was, preparing for the biggest spiritual day of the year, and the overriding emotion inside me was emptiness and a lack of purpose. It wasn't Jesus' fault by any means, because this was *all me*.

Instead of using the Easter season to fill up on Christ, staring at the cross and reflecting, I'd been staring at shopping racks. I'd let material pursuits distract me, and as a result I felt deeply dissatisfied.

What you should know is this: *inside all of us is a God-shaped*

*hole that only God can fill.* He created us for eternity, and that spiritual space represents our innate desire to connect with Him.

But when we try stuffing earthly pleasures into that space—clothes, money, relationships, success—we grow unhappy. We create a black hole of desire that can't be quenched because we're filling up on empty calories. The more we have, the more we need.

My Easter shopping mission was a misguided attempt to fill my God-shaped hole. I substituted my family's outward presentation at church for spiritual growth, and the fit was completely off, like forcing a square peg into a round hole.

Sometimes, however, what I stuff into my God-shaped hole works like putty. It fills the gap temporarily. I'll think I'm complete until suddenly, without warning, the void reopens, emptying me out again.

Think for a moment about your life. What earthly pleasures do you stuff in your God-shaped hole? What distractions get you off track and lead you down dead-end roads?

God calls you to live a simple life. He knows that less is more. Once your basic needs for food, shelter, and clothing are met, you shouldn't need much. Those things alone *should* sustain you. But do they? No. Why? Because the world we live in likes to complicate things.

According to the world, the basics are never enough. More is never enough. To be content is to settle . . . and to settle is to get left behind.



Why buy a twenty-dollar shirt when there are shirts for a hundred dollars? Why eat pasta when there is lobster? Why own one pair of designer jeans when you can own a *dozen* like the best-dressed girls in school?

Listening to what the world defines as important—fame, fortune, power, notoriety—creates unrest inside you. It sends you on wild goose chases for temporal things you think will satisfy your need for *more*.

But the craving that never leaves you isn't a craving for more stuff. It's a craving for more God. He designed you to seek Him. He gave you a heart for heaven to help draw you home. Even your best moments on earth can't compare to the joy that awaits you and me in our final resting place.

To tune out the world, tune into God's voice. Cut back the noise, chaos, and busyness of your life that buffers you from Him. Remember how I had to make my parents' beach home really quiet to hear the call? Your life works the same way. When you eliminate the distractions, you start to notice your faint call from God.

God will tell you where to walk next. He'll come to you wherever you are and show you the next right move. But He won't reveal His master plan at once. Your spiritual journey is step-by-step. It requires faith, trust, and complete reliance on the One who loves you most.

So if you don't have your whole life planned out, don't worry. God has it covered. He may call you into unfamiliar territory, but with Jesus by your side to help you, you can handle it.

What God wants from you is obedience. Once you turn down the volume of external chatter, you allow His voice to break through and speak words of hope, joy, and life.

"MANY ARE THE PLANS IN A PERSON'S HEART,  
BUT IT IS THE LORD'S PURPOSE THAT PREVAILS."

(PROVERBS 19:21)



## ARE YOU READY TO SURRENDER?

It took me forty years to truly understand what surrendering to God means.

I pray you'll be smarter than I was. I hope you'll understand early why surrendering to Him isn't a defeat. It's a **VICTORY**.

In the Lord's prayer we say, "Thy (God's) will be done." But do we embrace that in real life? Do we put God's will over our will? Not always. You see, we humans are selfish. We tend to be control freaks. We hate being told what to do. We're like those stubborn kids who run off from their parents at the mall because their parents won't let them eat cotton candy and Skittles for lunch.

And what happens after they're separated from their parents? They start to get lonely and scared, right? They look around and realize the world is bigger and more confusing than they



thought. Suddenly lost and unsure, they regret their rash decision. They wish they had someone who had their back again, a strong and capable adult.

Life is hard, and when you try going about it alone, it will soon become impossible.

I've tried running away from God. I've gotten mad because a prayer wasn't answered the way I wanted or because He allowed something bad to happen. But what I've discovered is that distancing myself from God only hurts me. It deepens the gulf of loneliness and fear.

My big surrender to God came late in life and by necessity, not choice. It happened during a very stressful period where I begged for help daily because I couldn't handle my life alone. I was tired of trying, tired of being tough, tired of trying to stay strong when what I *really* wanted to do was fall to my knees.

As I admitted my weaknesses—not in a single day, but over several months—a massive burden lifted off my shoulders. My heart began to change, and the old dreams I had, inspired by the world, transformed into new dreams inspired by God. I was happier and felt more like myself, even though my new focus was less about me and more about God.

Surrendering to God isn't a one-time event. It's a daily choice. Some days you'll get it right, and other days you won't. But even if you don't, even if you run away, God accepts you and welcomes you back. His love and grace are perpetual, available without conditions or limits.

Are you ready to be a vessel for God? Can you say, "Use me, Lord?" Can you chase big dreams with all your heart, yet accept any outcome in God's will? Do you understand your surrender as a triumph because it allows God to work through you in powerful ways?

If you've answered yes, you're ready to surrender. You're ready to show the world what you've got.

Now the question is, "Is the world ready for you?"

"IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST AND WILL FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND PURIFY US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS."

(1 JOHN 1:9)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does God work in your life? When His call is faint, do you pay attention to it or dismiss it?

2. What earthly pleasures get stuffed in your God-shaped hole? Why can't they satisfy you for long?

3. Have you ever run away from God? If so, what happened? Did your life get better when you wrote Him off, or did you wind up feeling too far away from home?

4. Think about the deepest peace you've ever felt. Can you recognize God's presence in the situation?

5. Do you consider surrender to God a victory or defeat? Are you ready for Him to use you in mighty ways?