



**Created to Flourish
by God's Design
Susan Tolles**

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Conquer Your Fears

What is holding you back from taking that leap of faith toward a more fulfilling life? Are you afraid of what MIGHT happen, or of whose feelings you MIGHT hurt? Does the fear of failure keep you from trying something new? Has fear kept your wheels spinning instead of moving ahead on your journey into reinvention? Fear is the one thing that can totally paralyze us and keep us stuck in neutral, afraid to release the emergency brake to begin our exhilarating ride.

Fear is defined as “a distressing emotion caused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc. whether the threat is real or imagined.” Is this the emotion you would choose to feel every day?

I’ve talked to many women who feel like they are stuck in a rut, wanting more out of life. When I ask them what is holding them back, the most common answer is fear. It is fear of the unknown; fear of failure; fear of what others will think; and fear of what might happen to family members, co-workers, and friends if they start following their own dreams. Sometimes, it is even fear of success! Failure won’t kill you. Nor will being wrong. The sky will not fall, and most likely no one will be seriously hurt. Trying something new will be a learning experience, no matter what the outcome. You will become stronger and your chances of succeeding increase with every attempt.

I used to be consumed by fear, also. One of the most vivid times was when my husband lost his job during the real estate collapse of 1986 in Austin. He came home one day and said, “My company is gone. They laid everyone off.” That sent me into a very dark place of worry and stress. I imagined that “impending doom,” with two toddler girls and no income. I cried in public, I wailed at home, and I felt we were headed for bankruptcy. My husband was just the opposite. He stayed strong in his faith and kept saying that God would take care of us. I would get so frustrated when he wouldn’t worry with me! My fear led to depression, stress, and wasted time that could have been used more productively. Of course, God prevailed, and eventually my husband started his own business, which has been a big blessing over the past 30 years. It was all part of God’s divine plan for our life’s journey. I had been too afraid to let Him have the steering wheel.

As I have grown in my faith and allowed God to lead me instead of me trying to lead Him, I have learned that “with God, all things are possible,” and I need not fear. If I am living in accordance with His purpose, following the plan He has for me, then everything will fall into place just as it should. That doesn’t release me from the challenges along the way, which will

strengthen me and remind me to rely on Him; instead it means I need to trust more and fear less.

Taking a step out of your comfort zone to pursue a flourishing life can be a little scary. Okay, it can be hugely scary! Yet staying in that comfortable place, where there are no new adventures and where everything is safe and cozy, means you will be forever stuck in that rut you are wanting to escape. It means not enjoying the vast horizons God has prepared for you on your new journey. It means reaching the end of your days with a list of things you wish you'd done, but you didn't because you allowed fear to hold you back.

One year from today, if you allow fear to stop you, will you wish you had trusted God more and started moving ahead toward a flourishing life? God did not create you with a spirit of fear. He wants you to take the gifts He has given you and use them to bless the world and glorify Him.

“For the Holy Spirit, God’s gift, does not want you to be afraid of people, but to be wise and strong, and to love them and enjoy being with them.” ~2 Timothy 1:7, TLB

One of my favorite translations of this verse is in *The Message*: “... God doesn't want us to be shy with his gifts, but bold and loving and sensible.” In other words, He created within you a purpose, and He intends for you to be living it boldly and with confidence, not fear.

Inspiration

Here are a few additional scriptures that address fear. Read these and meditate on them, knowing you are safe with God, and there is no reason to fear the unknown. He knows where you are going, so all you need to do is trust His plan. If you are following that plan, living in alignment with your God-given purpose, then your failures will simply be small pebbles instead of giant stumbling blocks. If you are living a life that is pleasing to God, who cares what others think?

“The steps of a man are established by the LORD, And He delights in his way. When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong, Because the LORD is the One who holds his hand.”

~Psalm 37:23–24

“Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

~Isaiah 41:10, NASB

“I’m proud to praise God, proud to praise GOD. Fearless now, I trust in God; what can mere mortals do to me?” ~Psalm 56:11, The Message

“I sought the LORD, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.” ~Psalm 34:4

“But now the Lord who created you, O Israel, says: Don’t be afraid, for I have ransomed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up—the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, your Savior, the Holy One of Israel...” ~Isaiah 43:1–3a, TLB

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” ~Joshua 1:9, NIV

Rhonda's Story

After working as an executive assistant in a small legal office for 25 years, Rhonda's company was purchased by a national firm and her position was terminated. She was devastated, and terrified about her next steps. She had a great experience and a stellar reputation, but believed she was too old to compete in the marketplace for a similar job.

Rhonda's nature was to be a worrier, but it was taking its toll on her health and she knew she had to somehow let go. Her first step was to pray, read encouraging scripture and release the tight grip of her anxiety to God, asking Him for clarity and peace about the future. She made a list of her strengths and past accomplishments, which boosted her confidence, and then she created a description of her ideal career, based on her passions and God-given gifts.

Rhonda could envision new possibilities in areas that aligned with the dreams she'd put on the back burner years earlier, and her excitement grew. Eventually, she viewed the unplanned shift in her life as a gift from God, not a crisis. She took a big step out of her comfort zone and started her own business as a virtual assistant, giving her the flexibility to spend time with her children every day, with no late evenings and weekend work. Eventually, she built a diverse team of her own, with greater control over her future.

If Rhonda had let her fears hold her back, she would have settled for something far less than what God had created her for. In her new role as a business owner, leader, and mentor, she honored Him as she used her gifts in ways she would never have imagined had it not been for that "crisis" that pushed her to do something new. Sure, she had a few small setbacks as she was starting over, but the result was well worth pushing through her fears.



“You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing which you think you cannot do.”

~Eleanor Roosevelt

HOMEWORK

These exercises will help you identify your fears and imagine the very best outcome instead of dwelling on the worst. The more you train your mind to think positively, the greater your confidence will be. When you envision yourself as victorious instead of a failure, you will feel empowered to keep moving forward. When you see what great things can happen, you are less likely to forfeit that best outcome by doing nothing to pursue it.

Complete the “Imagining My Fears” chart on the next page by doing the following:

- Make a list of the fears you have as you think about making changes in your life.
- Ask yourself “What’s the worst that can happen?” and enter that in the column next to the fear. Consider this when responding:
 - *If I fail, how long will it really take to recover?*
 - *Will it really matter a year from now?*
 - *Who will be affected if I fail?*
- Next, imagine the very best outcome if you trust God to help you conquer your fear and move forward, writing that in the third column.
- At the bottom of that page, answer the question, with renewed confidence that you will conquer your fears as you create your flourishing life!

Imagining My Fears

MY FEAR	WHAT IS THE <i>WORST</i> THAT CAN HAPPEN IF IT COMES TRUE?	WHAT IS THE <i>BEST</i> THAT WILL HAPPEN IF IT <i>DOESN'T</i> ?
Example: I am afraid I will fail if I go back to school.	I do not complete the course work to get my license to be a pharmacy technician, my lifelong dream. It will not affect anyone else's life.	I will receive my certificate as a pharmacy technician, and I will have a new fulfilling career, one I have always dreamed of!

Ask Yourself: Am I willing to forego the BEST outcome of taking action because I let my fears paralyze me?

Now complete the “Biggest Victories, Greatest Lessons Learned” chart. This exercise leads you to remember the confidence you gained and the sense of exhilaration you felt at times when you have overcome your fear.

You might go way back to your childhood—learning how to ride a bike, getting behind the wheel of a car for the first time on your own, leaving home to go to college, starting your first job—there are so many times you might have felt afraid to take the next step, but the result was well worth pushing ahead. More recently, you may have started a business, taken on a new leadership role, or embarked on a new fitness regimen to improve your health. Reliving those times will boost your self-confidence, especially now that you are wiser and have so many life experiences behind you to build on.

You might have failed the first time you tried, but you didn’t give up! Have you noticed that better things generally come into your life when you overcome one failure and keep pushing on? It’s true, from learning to ride a bike to changing careers. You must expect success to have it!

Use this chart to boost your confidence, knowing that if you have been successful many times before, you can do it again!

Biggest Victories, Greatest Lessons Learned

A TIME WHEN I OVERCAME MY FEAR	RESULTS OF MY VICTORY AND LESSONS LEARNED

Crush Perfectionism

One of the most common roadblocks to living a flourishing life is perfectionism. It can wreck your life as you strive for the impossible, and it can keep you stuck in your rut as you stress over making mistakes, disappointing others, and not achieving the world's definition of success. Measuring your value by what others think, what you accomplish, and how well you perform will set you up for failure and you never get all the way to "complete."

Dr. Brene' Brown is a world-renowned researcher and professor who has studied perfectionism, shame, and vulnerability for years. She calls perfectionism the 20-ton shield we carry around, thinking it will protect us from being hurt. What it really does is protect us from being authentically known. In her book *The Gifts of Imperfection*, Dr. Brown said:

"Understanding the difference between healthy striving and perfectionism is critical to laying down the shield and picking up your life. Research shows that perfectionism hampers success. In fact, it's often the path to depression, anxiety, addiction, and life paralysis."

Women spend so much time and energy comparing themselves to others; we wish we were smarter, younger, thinner, or more successful. We look at a friend's God-given gifts and wish they were ours. We measure our progress as beginners against that of experts. We shy away from having guests over because our homes are not as nice as theirs, or we have a little clutter around, or we simply do not have a house that looks like it came out of a magazine. Comparisons will drain the joy right out of your life; they will keep you isolated and playing small.

Our limiting beliefs keep us from pursuing a more fulfilling life, and the brilliance of our God-given light is snuffed out by our own negative thoughts. As Dr. Brown said, it can even paralyze us as we let that 20-ton shield keep us from being who God created us to be.

On the other hand, giving ourselves the grace to be imperfect, practicing self-love, and seeing ourselves as worthy gives us the freedom to live authentically, "letting go of who we think we are supposed to be, and embracing who we are." (Brene' Brown)

When my children were growing up, I was blessed to be a stay-at-home mom. I poured my life into being a super-mom, super-wife, and super-volunteer. I had dinner on the table at precisely 6:30 every night (probably feeling very stressed). I made elaborate painted t-shirts and sweatshirts

(thank goodness that era has passed), we had picture-perfect Christmas cards (which didn't show how agitated I had become trying to make my little ones sit still and smile), we made lavish Valentine cards for grandparents and relatives (most of whom my kids didn't even know), and I closely monitored their school projects to make sure they were flawless (of course the teachers knew). I had a color-coded calendar with all their activities, and I took pride in the fact that I was all put together (on the outside, anyway).

A few years ago, I asked my three amazing grown children, "What was it about your years growing up in our family that made you who you are today?" Not a one of them said it was because of our perfectly timed dinners, painted shirts, holiday cards, or A+ school projects. All that work I did to create a "perfect" home, and the memories faded.

Their answers were consistent and changed the way I look at perfection now:

- *We had a strong faith foundation in our home. Jesus was the center of our lives.*
- *We had unconditional love for one another. My son said "I used to be grossed out when Dad would give you a kiss and a hug first thing when he got home at night. But that made a huge impression on me, something I will do with my wife."*
- *We had respect for one another. There was always a "pecking order," and parents were always above kids. We had boundaries, which gave them direction and a sense of security.*
- *My husband and I were involved in their activities. Apparently, many parents dropped their children off at their sporting or extracurricular events. At least one of us was always present to support our kids in whatever they were doing.*

I had been an over-achiever, and no one noticed. I had wasted hours of precious time and energy on things that did not have lasting value. I had been exhausted at night, instead of allowing messes to stay put so I could get some much-needed rest. What did shine through to our children were our core beliefs, which are solid and traditional. That is our legacy, not perfection in unimportant things.

Christ is the only perfect being who has ever existed, and ever will. No matter how hard we try, we will always be human, with human flaws. The remarkable thing is that He loves us unconditionally, with all our imperfections! We don't have to be smarter, prettier, or thinner. We don't need a high-paying career; an expensive car; or a beautiful, sprawling house on a well-manicured lawn.

When you find yourself thinking you don't have what it takes, follow these steps and pull yourself out of the trap of perfectionism so you can step on the gas and speed ahead to your dream destination:

- **Acknowledge that “perfect is the enemy of great.”** If you are striving to have the perfect house, perfect yard, perfect body, perfect hair ... the list goes on and on ... commit to doing things well and move on. Say “Good is good enough!” It is much more valuable to be real and sincere than to compare yourself to those who have different gifts and skills. Quit waiting for perfect! Perfect does not exist.
- **Embrace do-overs.** If you make a mistake, or fail when attempting something new, admit it and try again. Consider it a chance to embrace new opportunities and expect the second (or third) time around will be even better.
- **Don't push yourself to extremes.** When you are feeling overwhelmed and pressured to meet a deadline, ask yourself, “Who else knows I am behind schedule? Who really cares?” Take a break! Don't let yourself get so exhausted from striving for perfection that you totally run out of enthusiasm or energy. Take it slowly and enjoy the ride.
- **Don't compare yourself to others.** You were born with a particular set of gifts and skills that make you unique. There is no one like you! Likewise, you are not like anyone else, so quit wishing you could be like them. That only leads to feeling inferior and small. There will always be a lot of people ahead of you in any area of life, but there will also be a lot of people behind you. Appreciate yourself and focus on what you have accomplished rather than what everyone else is doing.
- **Set your expectations on human standards.** You are human, and you are expected to perform at human levels, not super-human. Setting the bar at unrealistic levels will certainly set you up for failure, so set your sights on goals that motivate you, not frustrate you. Don't try to be Wonder Woman—she is not real!
- **Accept the risk of being authentic.** There is even greater risk in hiding your true self from the world. Being authentic attracts people to you, as they see you as imperfect and real, just like they are.

Inspiration

“Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” ~Philippians 1:6, NIV

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” ~Ephesians 2:8–10, NIV

“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.” ~1 Peter 3:3–4, NIV

“But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.’” ~2 Corinthians 12:9, NIV

“Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else.” ~Galatians 6:4, NIV

Melissa's Story

Melissa is a recovering people pleaser. She was raised as an only child by a narcissistic mother, and spent most of her childhood seeking affirmation and love by making straight A's and excelling in dance. As an adult, Melissa worked long hours doing her work and the work of others, hoping she would earn a better performance review. In what little spare time she had, she volunteered as a mentor for at-risk children and taught a women's Sunday Bible study. Melissa's home was always immaculate, decorated for each season. Yet, no matter how hard she tried, Melissa never felt quite good enough. In her eyes, she could never quite measure up to her friends and co-workers.

With so much self-inflicted stress, Melissa reached a tipping point, and she became sick from exhaustion. The perfect life she had tried to create was draining her. The things she felt she should be doing had become flat and unfulfilling, and she realized she had many superficial friendships and few she could count on. She came to me frustrated and desperate for help.

First, we looked at the root of her feelings of inadequacy. Melissa realized it came from a mother who felt inadequate herself. Then we talked about all her accomplishments over the years and how she had blessed so many people along the way. Finally, she looked at herself through God's eyes, as His beautiful daughter who was complete just as she was.

After realizing she didn't have to compete with her friends or co-workers for her self-worth, Melissa was able to relax and let go of many of the things she thought she should be doing, replacing them with things that brought joy and energy to her life. She learned how to say no to others and to herself and accepted that good is good enough. She focused on developing genuine friendships with authentic people, and tactfully declined when someone at work asked her to take on their responsibilities. When it came time to host a party, paper plates replaced stressing over table settings, and everyone had just as much fun.

The greatest commandment in the Bible is to love God, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Inherent in that command is loving ourselves. When we embrace who we are as perfect in God's eyes, then that is all we need. After all, He doesn't make junk! Loving ourselves honors our Creator; believing we are not good enough tells Him we think He made a mistake. You are a miracle! Believe it!



“What if you wake up someday, and you’re 65, or 75, and you never got your memoir or novel written; or you didn’t go swimming in warm pools and oceans all those years because your thighs were jiggly and you had a nice big comfortable tummy; or you were just so strung out on perfectionism and people-pleasing that you forgot to have a big juicy creative life, of imagination and radical silliness and staring off into space like when you were a kid? It’s going to break your heart. Don’t let this happen.”

~Anne Lamott, Author

HOMEWORK

On the following pages, there are two charts: **Quit “Shoulding” On Yourself** and **Self-Appreciation**. Read the instructions below and complete the charts.

Quit “Shoulding” On Yourself!

Make a list of some of the “shoulds” in your life: “I should be...” or “I should do....” Then honestly answer the questions below the box.

Self-Appreciation

Over the next week, fill in the self-appreciation chart with at least five things each day that you appreciate about yourself. What are the things you do well? What are your unique gifts? Did you accomplish something that day by practicing “good is good enough?”

Each daily list must be new—no repetitions! The more you list, the better. Whenever you are being harsh on yourself, read this list and replace your critical thoughts with praise and celebration for who you are and what you bring to the world.

Remember...perfect does not exist! Strive for “GOOD” and stress will melt away.

Quit “Shoulding” On Yourself!

I should be/do...

-
-
-
-
-

1. How much time and energy do you spend thinking about what “you should” be saying or doing in your life instead of what you want to say and do? How often do you compare yourself to others?
2. How do your “shoulds” and comparisons cause you to be a less effective worker or friend?
3. What are the biggest obstacles that get in your way of you being you?
4. If you looked at yourself through God’s eyes, as the beautiful child He lovingly created and loves unconditionally, how would that feel? What would freedom in knowing you are “enough” allow you to experience?

Self-Appreciation

Date	I Appreciate These Things About Myself...

Overcome Self-Doubt

Self-doubt, or a lack of confidence, is another heavy weight that holds many of us back from pursuing our dreams. Perfectionism and fear feed self-doubt, as we allow the world's view of success to become our own.

How can we possibly measure up to those who are so successful, beautiful, and perfectly pulled-together? The fact is, many of those seemingly perfect people are hiding behind masks, dealing with their own self-critics who are always saying, "You're not quite good enough yet." They just aren't willing to admit it.

When you look on bookstore shelves, you will find hundreds of books on improving self-esteem. In fact, on Amazon.com you will find more than 110,000! A Google® search for "confidence" yields 115 million results. Why is this such a major challenge, and why are so many people making a lot of money trying to help society become more confident?

From a very early age, girls feel the pressures of competition in academics, sports, and the arts. The teenage years bring immense pressures to conform to the "popular crowd" and do what they expect, not what is always best. Comparisons continue as young women vie for acceptance into colleges, with grades, extra-curricular activities, leadership roles, and volunteer work all playing roles in determining where they will attend. Once there, they must deal again with academic expectations, social life, relationships and feeling as if they just stepped out of *Vogue Magazine*. That role gives way to becoming career women, wives, and supermoms, with a perceived need to be "managers of the universe." It's no wonder our self-confidence gets beaten down!

At an even deeper level, in many countries and cultures, women have inferior status just because God created them female, a belief called misogyny. Sociologist Allan G. Johnson defines it this way:

"Misogyny ... is a central part of sexist prejudice and ideology and, as such, is an important basis for the oppression of females in male-dominated societies. Misogyny is manifested in many different ways, from jokes to pornography to violence to the self-contempt women may be taught to feel toward their own bodies."

The devaluing of women can be traced from early Greek culture to some of our greatest philosophers and today's religions. Family dynamics and cultural traditions have perpetuated these concepts throughout generations. Though great strides have been made in recent years, many women still battle these negative beliefs that cast doubt on their self-worth. Just being a woman is enough to make many feel inadequate.

Well-known author Dr. Norman Vincent Peale said, "Believe in yourself! Have faith in your abilities! Without a humble but reasonable confidence in your own powers you cannot be successful or happy." He went on to say, "Build your confidence by repeating the Bible verse: '*Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid ... for the Lord thy God is with you wherever you go*' (Joshua 1:9). Make a blueprint of what you aspire to be and hold it firmly in your mind. Then, commit your life into God's hands and let Him bring out of you the powerful person within—the you who is able to overcome."

The Bible says, "*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*" ~Romans 12:2, NASB

Did you get it? **The will of God is good and acceptable and perfect**, not what the world says! He created you with immense value, regardless of where you live or what your family history dictates.

Romans 12:2 is easier to understand in *The Message*: "...*Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out....*" God has a big plan for your life, apart from the opinions of anyone who wants to hold you down. What freedom we have in that promise!

Are you your own worst enemy? Is your inner critic filling your mind with nasty little thoughts like these?

- *You're too disorganized.*
- *You're not smart enough.*
- *You don't have what it takes.*
- *You can't leave the past behind.*
- *It's easier to stay here in this rut, so why bother?*
- *It's a good idea BUT...*

Consider these factors that may be contributing to your self-doubt:

- **Your Self-Critic** – This is the “chatter” in your head that is constantly giving you negative thoughts. When you spend your time focusing on the bad (what you can’t do) then you don’t have the energy for positive change. Your inner thoughts guide your life, so put that self-critic in a closet and throw away the key!
- **Low Self-Esteem** – Self-esteem is the unconditional acknowledgment of who you are. Think of it as being loved by others and loving yourself for who you are, just because you are you. SelfEsteemforWomen.com says, “There are many reasons why women suffer from low self-esteem. Perceived lack of self-worth, uncontrollable jealousy, relationship break-ups, high levels of anxiety or stress, inability to think positively, mild depression, and MANY other issues affect the self-esteem of millions of women every day.”
- **Self-Confidence** – This is not the same as self-esteem. It is conditional, based on what you have done and how successful you have been. The more success you have, the more self-confidence you have. Conversely, a string of failures can destroy your confidence level.
- **Influences From Your Past** – You have been programmed from an early age to believe there are things you can and cannot do. Perhaps you were overly criticized by a parent or teacher or suffered physical or emotional abuse. Like me, you may be an unmothered daughter who never received the nurturing love necessary to help you grow into a healthy, mature young woman. Even something as small as not being selected for a team sport leaves a lasting impression. As adults, we still crave acknowledgement for being special, and it is never too late!

A self-critic that rules your life sabotages your happiness and success, holding you back from becoming the strong, confident, vibrant woman you were created to be. Choosing to believe the negative self-talk keeps you from moving forward in several ways:

- **Throwing Your Dream Away** – Because you don’t believe you deserve it, you never try to achieve it.
- **Denial** – You don’t even recognize the opportunity as a possibility.
- **Settling** – You settle for less because you think you don’t deserve the best.

- **Resignation** – You give up before you even start because you perceive that the obstacles are too great.

Your self-critic can act as a positive influence on your life if you are aware that she is to be used not submitted to. When your limiting beliefs pop up, consider that those thoughts are simply obstacles that need to be managed. Let this be your “reality check,” asking for more evidence or a well-executed strategy.

Draw your confidence from God, never doubting for a moment that He has everything under control. He will bring out the best in you, if you have faith and trust Him! That also means locking away your self-critic, and not allowing her to sabotage your plans any longer. It means trying something new, even when you might fail. It brings exhilaration from living on purpose, just as God designed.

Inspiration

“Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised.”

~ Hebrews 10:35–36

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” ~Hebrews 4:16

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” ~Philippians 1:6, NASB

“Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.” ~Isaiah 40:31, NASB

“...we confidently say ‘The Lord is my Helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?’” ~Hebrews 13:6, NASB

Lisa's Story

Lisa had been working for a home builder for more than 15 years. She had worked her way up from an entry-level position but was feeling as if she was at a dead end. The job had been consistent, and it paid well, but she was feeling flat and unfulfilled. Lisa was afraid she had very few options for something new.

I asked Lisa what she would do if she could have her dream job. Immediately she said, “a nurse!” Since her high school years, she had thought about what it would be like to work in a hospital, caring for patients with her gifts of compassion, mercy, and encouragement. Lisa truly thought God had called her to be a nurse, and that she’d “missed the boat” because she’d settled for something less.

When I asked what had held her back from pursuing that dream, she had the usual excuses:

- *I don't have a college degree.*
- *It's too late.*
- *I don't have what it takes to do that job.*
- *People would think I was crazy if I went back to school at this stage of my life.*
- *What if I do go back to school and fail?*

Together, we worked through her limiting beliefs. She envisioned taking a big leap of faith to pursue certification as a Licensed Vocational Nurse, seeing the strong statement of courage and determination it would make to her children. She embraced the fact that she had at least 30 years left in her life to do what she always wanted to do, certainly long enough to invest the time and effort into getting a certification. When she asked her closest friends what they thought, they were excited for her and impressed that she would follow her dreams in mid-life.

Today, Lisa is working in her dream job as God's light in the medical field. If she'd let her doubts win the battle of her thoughts, she likely would have reached the end of her life regretting her decision to settle for mediocre instead of reaching for her highest potential. She is filled with excitement and gratitude every day as she goes to work, and the ripple effects are far-reaching with her family and friends.

Never let doubt crush your dreams. Pursue the calling God has given you, in work and in your personal life, and experience the joy of who He created you to be.



“Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy.”

~Dale Carnegie, Author and Leadership Development Expert

HOMEWORK

Fill in the “Overcome Self-Doubt” chart with the self-sabotaging beliefs you have, and how they are holding you back from living the life you desire. Then, “reframe” that belief with a new empowering statement.

Overcome Self-Doubt

Self-Sabotaging Belief	How This Affects My Life	New Empowering Belief
Example: It is too late for me to find a new career. I have to remain stuck in a job I hate.	I am miserable at my job. It is draining the joy and energy out of my life.	It is never too late to do the things I want to do in life! I have the courage and resources I need to pursue a new career that is more fulfilling.

Claim Victory Over Shame

Shame is an ugly word that keeps us in darkness. It robs us of joy and suffocates our passion. Most of us have felt shame at one time or another, but facing it can be painful. It's hard to look at our past mistakes, the way we treated others, or the way we were belittled growing up. Stepping into vulnerability to admit we are not perfect takes courage. Baring our souls and sharing our shame takes supernatural fortitude. It's just not something we want to deal with. But to truly flourish, we must.

The roots of the word *shame* mean “to cover, to veil, to hide,” derived from the first sin in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve covered themselves in shame as they tried to hide from God. Dr. Brene' Brown, who has studied shame for years, says, “Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging. Shame keeps worthiness away by convincing us that owning our stories will lead people to think less of us.”

Shame has many faces, like these from my clients and friends:

- Diane, who faced her alcoholism when she hit her “rock bottom place” on a family vacation and had to admit she was living a double life.
- Gina, whose husband had been addicted to pornography for more than 25 years, well before they married.
- Kasey, who was raped at 15, which led to depression, cutting, and an eating disorder. Her desperate need for love led to an extramarital affair as an adult.
- Karen, who was born with webbed toes and was told by her father that she would never amount to anything.
- Janet, who wanted the world to think she was a successful entrepreneur when she was facing bankruptcy.
- Jenny, who had an eating disorder, driven by perfectionism.
- Countless women who are enslaved by sex trafficking, most often because they are forced into it and feel trapped.

The causes of shame can range from being sexually abused as a child to having an abortion. They

can be brought on by seemingly small things like struggling with inadequacy due to the way you look or what others say about you on social media, poor choices you made as a teenager, or things someone said about you behind your back. You have shame when you allow a person or event from your past to define who you are today.

As we keep past trauma, mistakes, addictions, and imperfections buried deep in our hearts and minds, we can experience worry, stress, hopelessness, depression, isolation, eating disorders, and abusive behaviors. The longer we keep all those things in, the more they wreck our lives. Feeling unloved and unworthy prevents us from experiencing all that God created for us. It suffocates our brilliance and keeps us from creating a flourishing life.

To claim victory over shame, you must accept the past as part of your story, not your bondage for the future. Embrace God's tender mercy, and choose victory over darkness. You are already set free because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, so lay your shame at His feet and focus on what He did for you, not what others have done to you. See yourself as a precious daughter of the King, created for a beautiful purpose by His loving hands. You are God's masterpiece! Nothing can diminish His love for you, not even the worst mistake you have ever made.

Once you have faced your shame and committed to move forward, it is important to break the silence that has been feeding it all these years. In her book *The Gifts of Imperfection*, Brene' Brown says,

“Shame needs three things to grow out of control in our lives: secrecy, silence, and judgment. When something shaming happens and we keep it locked up, it festers and grows. It consumes us. We need to share our experience. Shame happens between people, and it heals between people. If we can find someone who has earned the right to hear our story, we need to tell it. Shame loses power when it is spoken.”

Accept your scars as part of your legacy. Allow them to be part of someone else's victory. Women who share their stories can bring hope and courage to others, just by being open and honest about who they are. We are all flawed. Revealing your shame can be the catalyst for another woman's redemption. Your story is really God's story! It will ultimately bring glory to Him.

How did the women in my earlier examples claim victory over shame?

- Diane joined a 12-step program and is celebrating continued sobriety today. She gathered a group of women who had also hit rock bottom, and they told their stories in a series of books called *Rock Bottom is a Beautiful Place*.
- Gina started a non-profit to support partners who have been betrayed by sexual addiction. Today she works for a recovery center that specializes in the treatment of trauma.
- Kasey confessed to her husband, who offered his unconditional love. Today, Kasey is a well-known author and speaker who uses her story to bring freedom to others.
- Karen bought her first pair of sandals at age 32, and has embraced her value in Christ, not in what she heard from her father for so many years.
- Janet hired a business coach who helped her turn her business around. She felt an enormous weight lifted off her just by admitting her challenges.
- Jenny went to therapy and now has a coaching business, working with women who have food addictions or other eating disorders.
- Survivors are finding new hope, like Amy, who, with help, made the courageous choice to be brave and leave prostitution. She is pursuing a degree in counseling, with a dream to provide trauma care for other women who have experienced what she has been through.

You can claim victory over shame, too, and use it to provide strength, courage, and hope for your future. Your best is yet to come!

If you have major trauma in your past, please seek the help of a trained Christian counselor. For additional reading, I highly recommend *Unashamed* by Christine Caine and *The Gifts of Imperfection* by Dr. Brene' Brown.

Inspiration

“Jesus went across to Mount Olives, but he was soon back in the Temple again. Swarms of people came to him. He sat down and taught them. The religion scholars and Pharisees led in a woman who had been caught in an act of adultery. They stood her in plain sight of everyone and said, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught red-handed in the act of adultery. Moses, in the Law, gives orders to stone such persons. What do you say?’ They were trying to trap him into saying something incriminating, so they could bring charges against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger in the dirt. They kept at him, badgering him. He straightened up and said, ‘The sinless one among you, go first: Throw the stone.’ Bending down again, he wrote some more in the dirt. Hearing that, they walked away, one after another, beginning with the oldest. The woman was left alone. Jesus stood up and spoke to her. ‘Woman, where are they? Does no one condemn you?’ ‘No one, Master.’ ‘Neither do I,’ said Jesus. ‘Go on your way. From now on, don’t sin.’”
~ John 8:1–11, MSG

“So those who are believers in Christ Jesus can no longer be condemned.” ~Romans 8:1, GW

“But he told me: ‘My kindness is all you need. My power is strongest when you are weak.’ So I will brag even more about my weaknesses in order that Christ’s power will live in me.”
~2 Corinthians 12:9, GW

“Once you lived in the dark, but now the Lord has filled you with light. Live as children who have light.” ~Ephesians 5:8, GW

“O my soul, bless GOD, don’t forget a single blessing! He forgives your sins—every one. He heals your diseases—every one. He redeems you from hell—saves your life! He crowns you with love and mercy—a paradise crown. He wraps you in goodness—beauty eternal. He renews your youth—you’re always young in his presence.” ~Psalm 103:2–5, MSG

“Christ has set us free to live a free life. So take your stand! Never again let anyone put a harness of slavery on you.” ~Galatians 5:1, MSG



***“I have learned that in order to get unhooked from the pain of my past,
I need to continuously choose to change my perspective.
I need to look at things through God’s eyes—through the resurrection power
of Jesus Christ living on the inside of me.”***

~Christine Caine, Unashamed

HOMEWORK

1. Write one piece of shame you are hiding in your life.
2. How is it affecting you? How does it affect your relationships? How is it holding you back from living a joy-filled life?
3. What will happen if you claim victory over this shame?
4. Read this statement, filling in the blank with your piece of shame. Then read the following verses aloud.

I am not _____. It does not define who I am. I will not let it have power over my life. I am beautiful and complete because I am uniquely and wonderfully made. Nothing I have done or nothing anyone has said or done to me can diminish my value in the eyes of God.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” ~2 Corinthians 5:17

“God is faithful and reliable. If we confess our sins, he forgives them and cleanses us from everything we’ve done wrong.” ~1 John 1:9, GW

*“You will again have compassion on us.
You will overcome our wrongdoing.
You will throw all our sins into the deep sea.” ~Micah 7:19, GW*

“I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me.” ~Philippians 4:13, GW

5. Pray, taking your feelings of shame to God and laying them at His feet. Physically open your hands, palms up, releasing the shame and letting go of your pain. Thank Him for bearing your shame, for setting you free to live a life that is made new through His redemptive love. Thank Him for making you a conqueror instead of a slave. Commit to living as a new creation through God’s strength and mercy.
6. Share your story with at least one person you trust, bringing your darkness to light. Shame loses its power over us when we share and gives others the permission to reveal their pain and begin their own healing process. Ask God for the courage you need to be vulnerable, and open when the Holy Spirit moves you. You don’t have to tell the entire world; start with one trusted friend, family member, therapist, or coach. Remember, shame grows in secrecy and silence.
7. Repeat these steps for any other shame that you need to cleanse from your life.