

A Confident Heart

How to Stop Doubting Yourself &
Live in the Security of God's Promises

Renee Swope



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JJ, Joshua, Andrew, and Aster

Thank you for believing in me and this message, and for giving me time to write it. When my confidence wavered and my heart grew weary, God provided His strength *for me* and His confidence *in me* through you.

But blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence. (Jer. 17:7 NLT)

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Foreword

As a little girl, I longed for a daddy to pick me up, swing me around, and tell me that I was special. That I was beautiful. That I was treasured. And most of all, that I was loved. But my daddy never swung me around with great delight, and he never said the words my heart desperately longed to hear. This rejection became an adult emptiness and brokenness that made me doubt I was lovable.

Insecurities cut deep. Shame ran rampant. Desperation for acceptance drove me to seek out all kinds of misguided remedies.

My primary remedy was to find someone or something that would make me feel secure and significant. It was as if I carried around a little heart-shaped cup and held it out to whatever or whomever I perceived might fill it.

I presented the cup to my education: “Will you fill me?”

I offered it to my husband: “Will you fill me?”

I held it out to my child: “Will you fill me?”

I extended it to my material possessions: “Will you fill me?”

I presented it to each of my jobs: “Will you fill me?”

Foreword

Within this question were many more entanglements: “Will you right all my wrongs?” “Will you fill up my insecurities?” The more I offered my emptiness, hoping something could fill it, the more inadequate I felt.

Why do we look to things of this world to give us security, self confidence, and fulfillment?

I think it’s because the message that worldly things can fulfill us is all around us. It’s on TV, it’s the focus of countless songs, and it dominates advertisements. We can’t even stand in the grocery store checkout lane without being bombarded by empty promises for a more fulfilling life. A better husband. A better body. A better career. A more beautifully decorated house. The magazines seem so slick, their promises so enticing. They sneak into our thought processes and make us think, *If only I had _____, I’d be so secure and fulfilled.*

But the reality is, every single thing the world offers is temporary. No person, possession, profession, or position can ever fill the cup of a wounded, insecure heart—not my heart, not your heart. It’s an emptiness only God can fill. Only God can give true confidence.

And how does God give us the gift of His security, fulfillment and confidence? He sends His words like love letters from Heaven to fall fresh on our parched and tired souls.

His truth waters us, sustains us, breathes new life into us and remakes us into the women He always intended us to be.

That’s why I’m so excited about Renee’s book. She is the friend you will find at the heart of this message. She’s walked this journey and gives us the gift of truths she’s discovered that will sweep away self-doubt and usher in the godly confidence we’ve been longing for our whole lives. Read this book and get ready to live with a confident heart.

Lysa TerKeurst, president, Proverbs 31 Ministries;
New York Times bestselling author, *Made to Crave*

Acknowledgments

I've never had the opportunity to thank the people who have helped shape my life and my confidence—people who believed in me long before I believed in myself. I am so grateful to get to do that here. Some I've known all my life, others for several years, and still some I haven't even met in person. I'll do my best to say a lot in a little space, so this doesn't become the longest chapter of the book. And if my forty-something-year-old foggy brain forgets someone, please know I love you and thank God for you!

First to my husband and hero, JJ, you are an amazing man, husband, father, and friend. I don't know how I got chosen to be yours, but I'm so glad I did! Without your words of affirmation, your confidence in God's calling on my life, and your servant's heart, I'm not sure I'd have had the courage and perseverance to do this. Thank you for sacrificing so much because you love me, but more so because you love Jesus and desire that He be made famous through the message He's entrusted to us. I respect and love you more than words can say.

Acknowledgments

Joshua, your passion for reading and your gift of writing inspire me. But your thoughtfulness, perseverance, and wisdom blow me away and make me proud to be your mom. Thank you for your constant sacrifice and support during our year of “impossible.” I pray your courage and strength will always be found in Christ, and that this message will become a legacy we live and leave together. I’ll never forget the times you told me you’d do whatever I needed so that I could finish my book. I did it! Now it’s your turn.

Andrew, God knew I needed more laughter and joy, so he gave me you! Your hugs, smile, encouragement, and the conversations you create to keep our family connected are such a gift! I love how you see God in everyday life and that you still let your mom in on the amazing journey of discovering who God created you to be. I value and respect who you are, and who you’re becoming as you dig into God’s Word and claim His promises for your life. May He alone be your confidence.

Aster, my Ethiopian princess. Never did I think I’d adopt a baby and write a book in the same year. Your momma is crazy, but not that crazy. Yet God’s crazy, amazing love brought us together for such a time as this. I treasure your sweet hugs, contagious joy, and oh-so-kissable cheeks. From the first day I held you in my arms, Jesus has changed my life with your love. I cannot imagine a day without you! Sweetheart, you are already a beautiful display of His splendor, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. May your security and worth always be found in Him!

Mom, when I was sixteen you told me God must have a plan for my life. It was the night He spared my life from being lost in that horrible car accident. Your words painted a picture on the canvas of my heart that sent me searching for His purpose. I think this book might be part of it! Thank you

Acknowledgments

for believing in me and loving me through it all. I'm grateful for the "kingdom" Jesus has given us to enjoy now in this new season of our lives.

Dad, Mark, Scott, Brad, Chris, Beth, Tamika, and Robin, thank you for your love, encouragement, and support!

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To each of my Proverbs 31 Ministries sisters, you are my treasured friends and forever family! When I need to see or feel God's love, I can come to the office or pick up the phone, and it is well with my soul. I am honored to serve Jesus with you, and I wouldn't want to do life or ministry without you!

Bev, thank you for your smile that affirms me, your tears that tell me God is speaking through something I said, and the joyful enthusiasm you show every time you hear me teach. Boy, did He fill in my gaps with your help. I love and treasure you!

Acknowledgments

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To my wonderful publishing team at Revell, Janelle, Twila, Lindsey, Deonne, Michele, Rod, Rob, and the rest of the Baker-Revell family for all you have done and will do to bring this message to the hearts of those who long to live with confidence. Thank you for seeking Christ and His glory in all you do!

To my *Confident Heart* prayer team, a very special thank you, as well as my faithful blog and Facebook friends, amazing women's event leaders, and their ministry teams who so faithfully prayed and encouraged me through this journey!

Most of all, my sweet Jesus, thank You for not letting me throw away my confidence anymore. You encouraged me to

Acknowledgments

persevere so that when I had done Your will, I would receive what You had promised! Because of Your life in me and my dependence on You, I found the confidence to believe and live in the assurance of Your love and the security of Your promises. You are my confidence!

Hebrews 10:35–36

1



Discovering the Shadow of My Doubts



So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Hebrews 10:35–36

I stood in front of my bathroom mirror, squinting from the bright lights above while also trying to open my eyelids so I could brush mascara on my lashes. My mouth opened too, almost instinctively. I couldn't help but wonder why opening my mouth also opened my eyes. It didn't make sense and neither did the way I was feeling.

My heart was wrestling with self-doubt regarding an event I would be speaking at the next day. I had felt honored, confident, and excited when the leader called months before to invite me to speak at their women's event. Now I questioned

whether I should have accepted the invitation in the first place. I couldn't help but wonder, *What's wrong with me?*

I needed to get ready, finish packing my suitcase, and drive to the airport. Instead, I wanted to stay home and do something predictable like fold laundry, order pizza, and watch a movie with my kids. Something less risky than standing in front of five hundred women to give a message that I hoped would challenge and encourage their hearts, bring them laughter, and leave them longing for more of God.

Questions replayed over and over in my head: *What if I completely forget what I am going to say? What if my points aren't that powerful? What if the women don't connect with my stories or laugh at my humor? What if . . . ?*

As I continued to put on my makeup, I asked God—once again—to please take away my uncertainty. I hated feeling this way. Canceling the event wasn't an option. Maybe I could call in sick? No, that wouldn't be good.

This was not the first time I'd struggled with self-doubt. In fact, doubt was something I had dealt with more times than I wanted to recount. As a child I doubted I was worth keeping. My insecurity even kept me from riding the carousel at an amusement park, because I doubted my dad would wait for me. I thought he might leave me forever once I was out of sight.

Doubt also robbed me of the joy of waterskiing as a young girl. I refused to try it because I wasn't sure my family would come back to get me once I let go of the rope. I questioned whether I was good enough in college, so I avoided some great opportunities because they brought the risk of rejection. Even as a young bride, I doubted my husband's faithfulness. Our newlywed memories include a lot of arguments about trust.

Now here I was years later, a grown woman in ministry, doubting myself again. It was getting old. I wondered if

perhaps my self-doubt was a sign I was in the wrong calling. I mean, if God calls you to do something, shouldn't you feel confident about it? Shouldn't you want to do it? Shouldn't self-assurance be part of God's equipping?

Maybe you know exactly what I'm talking about. Perhaps you have prayed since you were a little girl to be a mother, and here you are with kids, doubting you have what it takes to be a good mom. Or maybe you've sensed God calling you to serve Him in a way that requires steps of faith, but insecurity has convinced you that you're not smart enough or gifted enough. Perhaps you have wanted to change jobs for a while and now you have the opportunity to do just that, but you don't want to go. The unknown is too scary. Although you've been miserable, at least the misery is familiar where you are now.

I desperately wanted to move out of the shadow of my doubts, but all I could do was go through the motions and pray that God would zap me with confidence. I kept hoping it would happen right there in my bathroom, but it didn't. Doubt and questions continued to criticize me.

Once I finished brushing on my mascara, I turned around to put my makeup bag in my suitcase, which was on the floor behind me. That's when I noticed a huge nine-foot shadow on the wall. I was surprised by how much bigger my shadow was than my five-foot-two-inch frame.

It was distorting my image on the wall by making my body look bigger than it really was. All of a sudden, it dawned on me. My uncertainty had created a huge shadow of doubt. Just like my shadow on the wall was distorting my shape, my doubt was distorting my thoughts and overpowering my emotions with confusion and questions. The shadow of doubt had become bigger than what I doubted—myself.

I just stood there looking at the humongous shadow. Then I bent down to put my makeup bag in my suitcase and sensed

God whispering to my heart: *You can only see the shadow because you have turned away from the light. Turn back toward the light.*

As I stood up and turned back toward the light above the mirror, I realized I was no longer standing in the shadow. And that was the day I discovered the shadow of my doubts.

Listening to Doubt's Whispers

In the shadow of doubt, insecurity paralyzes us with statements like:

“I can't do this.”

“Things will never change.”

“My life isn't going to get better.”

“I'll never have the confidence I need.”

Those are some depressing thoughts, aren't they? But oh how quickly they weasel their way into our minds and disguise their voices to sound like ours. Sometimes we agree with them and they become our own.

These are the voices of insecurity that cast shadows of doubt over our perspective and keep us from becoming the women we want to be—the women God created us to be. Self-doubt blocks the promise of God's power and truth to change us from the inside out so that we can live with a confident heart.

Have you ever agreed with the whispers of doubt and found yourself living with a sense of discouragement and defeat? Have you felt paralyzed by insecurity, and let it stop you from living confidently? If so, you are not alone.

Maybe, like me, you have wondered why you struggle with self-doubt. Or maybe you've asked God to take away your insecurities and give you a more confident personality, yet you

are still waiting for that to happen. Perhaps you are good at hiding your doubts and no one but you knows the paralyzing power they have on your life.

As you read the title of this book, did any hint of doubt creep in to tell you it's not possible to have a confident heart? It wouldn't surprise me. Doubt keeps us from believing things can get better. Doubt convinces us that it's not worth the effort. Doubt shouts from the sidelines:

“It's too hard.”

“You might as well quit.”

“Go ahead and give up. Just close the book now and walk away.”

It's Not Supposed to Be This Way

Don't listen to those thoughts, my friend. God doesn't want us stuck in a cycle of defeat or living in the shadows of doubt. He reminds us in Isaiah 49:23, “Then you will know that I am the LORD. Those who hope in me will not be disappointed.” Yet, doubt and hope cannot live in our hearts at the same time. As God's girls, we need to know and believe that change is possible. We need to hope that life can be different. Otherwise, doubt will win every time and our hearts will be eroded by attitudes and emotions of defeat—but it is not supposed to be this way.

God declares with confidence that things can change—“See, I am doing a new thing!” “I am working all things together for good, because you love me and are called according to my purpose.” “All things are possible to [her] who believes” (Isa. 43:19; Rom. 8:28; Mark 9:23 NASB).

Over the past few years, I've found lasting confidence by living daily in the security of God's promises. He's led me

beyond believing *in Him* to really *believing Him* by relying on the power of His words and living like they are true no matter what my feelings tell me. Some days I do better than others, and you will too. But I've found that when I choose to dwell in the assurance of Whose I am and who I am in Him, I have a confident heart.

The God of all hope is calling you out of the shadow of your doubts so you can live with a confident heart! Are you ready to let His Word change the way you think, which will determine the way you feel and eventually transform the way you live (Rom. 12:2)? This will be a process that happens if you are willing to have honest, soul-searching conversations with God, yourself, and a few people you trust—conversations about where you are, how you got here, and where you really long to be.

If you are looking for a friend you can trust with the things of your heart, this book is a great place to start. I promise to create honest conversations about our doubts that will challenge us to live beyond them. We'll look back so we can move forward, and talk about how we got to this place of being so hard on ourselves.

We'll do the most important thing first: spend time digging deep into the heart and character of God so we can learn to depend on His heart toward us. The next three chapters will be foundational as we examine and grow in our understanding of who God is and who we are to Him. We will take the first steps out of the shadows of doubt as we choose to embrace the reality of His measureless grace, unconditional love, and redeeming hope.

Next, we'll identify the triggers of our self-doubt and the destructive effects they have on our lives and relationships. We'll learn how to live beyond the shadows of doubt by holding each of our insecurities up to the light of God's

Word. We'll talk about the struggles, uncertainties, and fears we all face and how we can learn to actively trust God's heart as we process our never-ending thoughts, our always-changing emotions, and our oh-so-busy and often confusing lives through the transforming truth of God's Word. We will find our heart's confidence in Christ as we learn how to rely on the power of His promises in our everyday lives.

Before we get started, there are a few things I want to make sure you don't miss. At the end of each chapter I have included something really important: a prayer that weaves together Scriptures we've talked about in the chapter and others I want us to engrave on our hearts. Praying God's Word has been one of the most life-changing ways I've learned to live in the security of His promises.

One way God tells us that confidence will come is when we ask Him for what is already part of His will. "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14 NASB). So there you go: we can be confident we are praying God's will when we pray God's Word!

But that's not all. Romans 10:17 tells us that "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (NASB), so let's pray these promises out loud again and again. That might seem weird but trust me, it works. When we pray God's words out loud, and hear them, the Holy Spirit engraves them on our hearts and writes them in our thoughts. We internalize God's truth as our faith grows and we are transformed from the inside out!

I also hope you will take time to answer the reflection and discussion questions after the prayer in each chapter. These will be an essential part of processing, internalizing, and applying God's promises to your life. Be sure to get a

journal or notebook to write out the promise prayers and your answers to the questions so you can look back and see what God has done.

Reading this with a small group of friends would be ideal, but if you are going through it on your own, that's great too. I've created a section of my interactive website where I would love for you to be part of the conversation with me and other women who are seeking to live with confident hearts. I'd love to hear your thoughts and your story at www.ReneeSwope.com as we take this journey together.

Are you ready to take God's hand and trust His heart? If so, let's get started together in prayer.

Praying God's Promises

Lord, I pray that You would give me a confident heart in Christ. Take me beyond believing in You to truly believing You. Help me rely on the power of Your promises and live like they are true. You say blessed is the one who trusts in You and whose hope and confidence are found in You. Those who hope in You will not be disappointed, because You work all things together for good for those who love You and are called according to Your purpose.

When self-doubt tells me I can't overcome my insecurities, I will believe Your promise that all things are possible to whoever believes. I will not throw away my confidence, because You say it will be richly rewarded. I will persevere so that when I have done the will of God, I will receive what You have promised. My confidence is in Christ and I am no longer one who shrinks back and is destroyed, but one who believes and is saved! In Jesus' name, Amen.

See Jeremiah 17:7; Isaiah 49:23; Romans 8:28; Mark 9:23; Hebrews 10:35–36, 39.

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. What is your earliest memory of doubting yourself or feeling insecure?
2. Has insecurity ever kept you from doing something?
3. Describe how it makes you feel when doubt whispers:
“I can’t do this.”
“Things will never change.”
“My life isn’t going to get better.”
“It’s too hard.”
“I might as well quit.”
4. Describe what happens in your heart when you read God’s words:
“Those who hope in me will not be disappointed” (Isa. 49:23).
“See, I am doing a new thing!” (Isa. 43:19).
“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” (Rom. 8:28).
“All things are possible to [her] who believes” (Mark 9:23 NASB).
5. What do you think hinders you most from living with God-confidence on a consistent basis? Is there a promise listed above that speaks to your greatest need right now?
6. How would you describe a woman with a confident heart?
7. Read Jeremiah 17:7. What does this verse promise and encourage you to do? Think of one situation where you could live in the power of this promise and describe what that would look like this week.