

*Seizing
the Confidence
God Offers*

You can do This

TRICIA LOTT
WILLIFORD

You Can Do This is so refreshing. With inspiring and funny stories, Tricia helps you exchange fear for faith. She leads you to a place where you can deal with the bullies who have tried to steal your confidence—the ones around you and the ones inside you. Read this book and live as the confident girl and mighty warrior who God intended you to be.

JENNIFER DUKES LEE

Author of *The Happiness Dare* and *Love Idol*

They say life doesn't come with an instruction manual, but I think "they"—the authors of such platitudes—have yet to read *You Can Do This*. The wise, quirky voice of Tricia Lott Williford is the one I want to hear. I want to hear it when I don't feel as though I'm good enough. I want to hear it when I feel afraid of what the future might hold. I want her voice in my ear when I meet someone who's unkind. As you read *You Can Do This*, listen for the gentle voice of God's life-giving Spirit breathing through the words on each page.

MARGOT STARBUCK

Author of *Small Things with Great Love*

With gentle humor and friendly warmth, Tricia Lott Williford assures women that they can be who God has created them to be. Williford comes alongside the reader as a fellow struggler, not an expert, winsomely and honestly reflecting on mistakes made and lessons learned. I love that Williford incorporates practical examples and advice—both

from her life and from other women's—about walking in courage and in God-confidence. Readers who feel alone and insecure (and who hasn't felt that way?) will find much to love in *You Can Do This*, including rest stops (questions and tasks related to biblical confidence) at the end of each chapter.

DENA DYER

Coauthor of *Love at First Fight*

Tricia's poignant, humorous writing has always captivated me, but she really hit a home run with *You Can Do This*. The wisdom she imparts on female confidence is fresh and bold and grounded in truth. You'll never look at yourself quite the same. Buy this book for your daughters, your best friends, and most of all, for yourself.

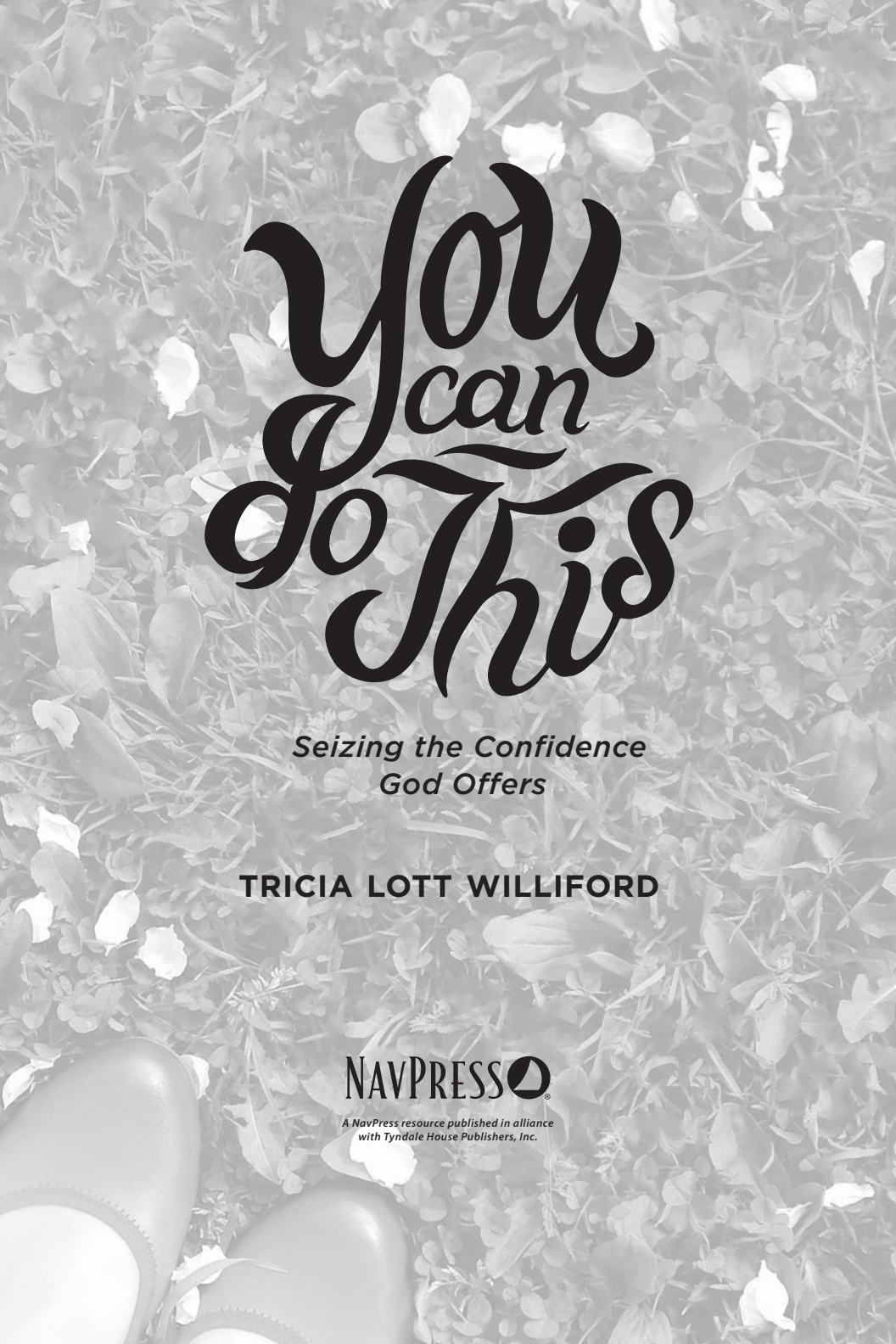
RACHEL RANDOLPH

Coauthor of *Nourished: A Search for Health, Happiness, and a Full Night's Sleep*

Even women who stand on platforms can struggle with confidence, and raising small people demands outright guts. Tricia Lott Williford shares hard-won insights and do-it-today ideas to grow stronger. Tricia helps women from all walks of life sit tall in their places at the table—with God and those they're called to love and lead. I loved this book!

NAOMI CRAMER OVERTON

Former president/CEO of MOPS International and national director for World Vision's National Leadership Council



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TRICIA LOTT WILLIFORD

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You Can Do This: Seizing the Confidence God Offers

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INTRODUCTION

You Can Do This

The Confident Girl Joins the Conversation

The clock is ticking, and the world is spinning, and we simply do not have time anymore to think so small.

ELIZABETH GILBERT, *BIG MAGIC*

You know what is really, powerfully sexy? A sense of humor. A taste for adventure. A healthy glow. Hips to grab on to. Openness. Confidence. Humility. Appetite. Intuition. . . . Presence. A quick wit. . . . A storyteller. A genius. A doctor. A new mother. A woman who realizes how beautiful she is.

COURTNEY E. MARTIN, *PERFECT GIRLS, STARVING DAUGHTERS*

*I have complete confidence, O God;
I will sing and praise you!*

PSALM 57:7, GNT

HERE. COME AND SIT WITH ME. I've got a nice spot reserved for us here at my table, with a vase of daisies and my favorite

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coffee mug—the red one with white polka dots. Pour whatever you choose into your cup; it's not actually about the coffee, anyway. It's mostly about the warmth, the comfort, something to sip as we talk and think. Personally, I love my little polka-dotted cup for how it feels in my hands. I always feel more sophisticated when I am holding a coffee cup, and I find it helpful for gesturing, if you want the honest truth. And I hope we can agree that polka dots are almost always a nice touch. Polka dots and daisies are the essence of happy. Most of life is a little happier with a splash of one or the other.

Here's a little plate of caramel toffee scones, but don't worry—I didn't bake them. I mean, it's not like you should fear for your life if I offer you my home-baked somethings. I only say, "Don't worry" because I don't want you to think this whole scene is something it isn't: meant to impress or make you feel like I have it all together. It's just a table of intentional invitation. Because we're friends now, you and I, and I have a couple of things to say to you.

Let's start with an invitation: I'd like to invite you to stop being unhappy with yourself. To stop wishing you looked like someone else, or that people liked you as much as they like someone else, or that you could get the attention of people who hurt you. I'd like to invite you to stop second-guessing all of your decisions and commitments, to stop wondering whether your life would be different had you only chosen the mystery prize behind door number two.

I'm writing to you working moms who think you're not

doing enough to be present at home, and to you stay-at-home moms—to those of you who are unapologetically content at home and worry about getting things right in your long days with the little people who hold your heart, and to the ones among us who miss working outside the home and feel like they lost their confidence somewhere among crumbs and dirty diapers. I'm thinking of you single women who feel incomplete or not enough because you're not married. I'm writing to you single moms who balance more than you were ever meant to carry alone, and to you women who live with a failure, a betrayal, or a loss that has stolen every bit of who you thought you were.

I am inviting all of you, all of us, to a new conversation. I'd love to invite you to stop hating your body, your face, your figure, your hair, your freckles (or lack of them), your personality, your quirks. You're worth more than these self-imposed opinions. It doesn't matter when you began torturing yourself with criticism, but it needs to stop today. And here's what I'd love to convince you of right here, right now:

You can do this.

Now, when I say, "You can do this," I'm afraid you'll call to mind clichés that I hate, the one at the top of the list being the lie that God won't give you more than you can handle. Not true. He will, and he often does. I could have titled this book *You Can't Actually Do This, but God Can If*

You Can Do This—

You'll Trust Him with the Journey and Believe All Confidence Is Miraculously from Him, So Get on Board Because He's Better at Everything Already and What You're Doing without Him Is a Waste of Time and Energy. But that's a little cumbersome.

So before we go any further—before we get to understanding how God has actually already offered us this confidence that we may not think we deserve—we need to face this one thing head-on: God will never give you a challenge or a limitation just because he believes you're strong enough to handle it. I've met so many women—and have often been one of them—who have been lectured into the lie that this challenge, this physical limitation, this disease or cancer, this crippling addiction, this loved one who's dying, this wondering-how-I'll-feed-my-children-next-week, and on and on, is a compliment from God. As if it's a job promotion. As if she has done so well with all of life's normal responsibilities that she's now been promoted to carry the heaviest things that come with life's hardest seasons, all because God thinks she can handle it. God doesn't work that way. He's not waiting to see how much we can carry before we are crushed under the weight. My goodness, I'm thankful this is not the God we serve.

While you may be facing a situation, a role, or a season right now that has caused you to believe you can't do it at all, you are not left alone in this journey. And the truth is, you *can* do this with the *real* truths in your pocket.

YOU WERE MADE FOR ALL THE THINGS

I read some time ago about a woman who begins each day with a simple prayer: *God, let me be the answer to someone's prayer today. Guide my path, that I will cross theirs. And whatever you put before me today, I promise to do my very best.*

I love that prayer. I love it so much that I began to claim it too—this idea that God is right with me in all my moments, that he is working with me to make the most of every opportunity. And sometimes it's easy to live from that place. I have awaited God's plan for my days, and sometimes I have been abundantly aware of his direction in moments that can only be divinely planned, inspired, and orchestrated. I have belonged to conversations, moments, and encounters that were wholly destined. In praying these words, I began to await divine adventure, bigger plans, moments I couldn't have created on my own. On some days, he has handed them to me.

But some days hold no such moments. Some days, what God places before me is a list of menial tasks: endlessly washing sippy cups, answering Mommy-Mommy-Mommys, folding laundry, cutting coupons, planning menus, monitoring time-outs, adjusting attitudes, forcing naps on exhausted children who insist they aren't tired, teaching how to share, and acting as referee to boys who wish to be neither divided nor conquered. Some days, God places before me a call to love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness, all on one harried trip to the grocery store. Some days,

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he calls me to be the backstage manager who minds the cues and the curtain with quiet faithfulness, loving others and watching their dreams unfold.

I don't know about you, but it's not so easy for me to feel a sense of purpose when there's nothing shiny, sparkly, or even appreciated about the task at all. The lie we can so easily believe is that our small days don't matter—that sure, God might be with us, but he's not really doing much with us. But girls, hear me on this: We need to stop thinking that if we're not living up to grand expectations in our families, our jobs, our churches, and even ourselves, then we're not good enough. On those days when we think we are doing something small and insignificant, God has something big in mind. Some days, this business of the backstage and the side-lines and the unexpected is exactly where he wants us to be. And we need to have the confidence to step forward and claim who God made us to be, regardless of what fills our days.

Dear sister of mine, you were never intended to be walked on, degraded, disrespected, bullied, or belittled. God created Eve because he knew the world needed women. And not just to prepare meals like Betty Crocker, keep houses like Martha Stewart, be celebrity sex kittens in the bedroom, or make babies like machines. We may be good at some of these, and some of us are good at all of these. But it's not *all* that we are, girls. You were made because you matter, and you were never intended to live a life that matters less than anyone else's.

Somewhere along the way, we have become anxious and afraid, convinced that other people—women and men

alike—matter more and are better equipped to face the messes of life. We are shying away from the paths in front of us because we are terrified we won't do it well, do it right, or do it enough. The most beautiful thing a woman can have is confidence, but as a culture, we're starved for a dose of it.

I'd like to tell you something you may have never heard, so lean in closely:

*You have the same goodness within
you as all the people who you think
are better than you.*

The only difference between you and a confident person is this one thing: confidence. We're all working with the same basic ingredients except for a handful of game changers, such as how you feel about yourself; what you tell yourself; and whether you believe God is in you, beside you, and equipping you to do this. God is the king of love, and with him we lack no good thing. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is alive in me—and in you. It's a tremendous shift of security to realize that any confidence I have in myself is ultimately confidence in the one who made me.

BEFORE WE BEGIN

Dear reader, with all due respect and affection, I need to tell you this before we begin: I didn't write this book to help you.

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I have definitely written it *to you* and certainly *for you* to read, but I did not write it *to help you*. I wrote this book because I wanted to think about my own confidence. How did I find Confidence? How did she come to be mine? I wrote this book so that I can read it again later when Confidence has left me behind. She seems to hang out only with the prettiest girl at the party, and I rarely feel like I'm that girl. I wrote this book so I can remember later how to win her back. I wrote this book to remind myself whom God made when he made me, so another woman might embrace who he made when he made her.

And because I've written this book *to you* and *for me*, I'd love for you to join me, right here at my kitchen table. That's why I put the daisies in the vase and got the scones out of the bag and created this whole situation in the sunshine today. It's because I'd like to invite you into the confidence conversation. These words here are a chat between you and me, a dialogue about our confidence. The black parts are what I think, and the white space is for you and your thoughts.

To give space for your side of the conversation, I've included some rest stops along the way, at the end of each chapter. These include questions, points for further reflection or discussion, ideas for prayer, suggested exercises, and even some spiritual disciplines. I hope you'll let yourself slow down, engage your confidence on a deeper level, and respond. Add to what I've written. Underline what resonates with you. Respond with your own thoughts and experiences. Write in the margins. Make it yours. Coauthor with me.

Then, one day, if I ever have the pleasure of meeting you in person, we can talk about what we've created together. After all, you'll be the one who added the other half of the dialogue, the one who finished what I started. Join me in what God is doing here. I've found that anything he's part of is never, ever wasted time.

When you've finished reading this book, I hope you'll think, *This book made me think and laugh, and now I feel like I can do this next thing in front of me.* I hope you'll feel hope, courage, strength, encouragement, presence, freedom, and confidence to move forward into your life with the awareness that you were born for this. I hope, girl to girl and eye to eye, we can remember that we are called to claim complete confidence.¹

Finding your confidence is a miracle. I know this because I found mine. And when I looked hard at the woman I've become, when I finally recognized the courageous warrior hidden in this frame, I was surprised by joy and astonished by awe. I want the same awareness for you.

Join me, girlfriend. Let's do this.

The First Bully of My Life

The Confident Girl Knows Her Story

I wish I'd known from the beginning that I was born a strong woman. What a difference it would have made! I wish I'd known that I was born a courageous woman; I've spent so much of my life cowering. How many conversations would I not only have started but finished if I had known I possessed a warrior's heart? I wish I'd known that I'd been born to take on the world; I wouldn't have run from it for so long, but run to it with open arms.

SARAH BAN BREATHNACH, SOMETHING MORE

THE FIRST BULLY OF MY LIFE was my fourth-grade teacher. My teacher, whom we will call Mrs. Wretched, seemed about eighty-nine years old; she wore polyester skirts and sensible shoes, and the flesh of her arms swayed when she wrote in cursive on the board. In what I can only assume was a grand gesture to avoid favoritism, she made sure none of her students felt liked or even acceptable at all. She yelled at children who looked out the window. Children who tattled on their

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classmates were sentenced to wear the Tattletale Name Tag. Children who leaned back on the rear legs of their chairs were banished to stand in humiliation for the rest of the day. There were rumors of dunce caps and noses held to the chalkboard. She probably had a box of stolen kittens in the bottom drawer of her desk. In my memory, she had warts on her face and a long pointy chin and a dog that she kept in a basket on the back of her bicycle. I'll agree to *perhaps* a very slim and remote possibility that she's become a caricature in my memory; but the truth is that Mrs. Wretched was legendary, and she was my introduction into the deep, dark waters of public education.

I had spent my first few school years in the sheltered, careful environment of a private school until my parents moved our family into the upper-class suburbia of their own hometown. To be clear, I wasn't transitioning to school in a foreign country, and the transition wasn't exactly culture shock. In fact, I would join the ranks at the same elementary school my parents had both attended in Greensburg, Ohio.

But I was an anxious little girl, and I felt like I had been thrown to the wolves. I was wildly nervous about the unknowns of a new building, a new lunchtime protocol, the location of the restrooms, this business of having a "locker," and what I should wear since red plaid uniforms were not the public school plan. My concerns numbered in the dozens, and it was all so new and so much for a nine-year-old girl who resisted change even on a predictable day.

On the first day of school, I stepped off the school bus

into a sea of kids just like me. I found Room 8 in the fourth-grade hallway, and I walked into my new classroom with the smile I had practiced. The other children were sitting impossibly silent at their desks, and Mrs. Wretched sat behind her desk at the far side of the room. With a flat tone and a firm brow, she barked at me: “Name. Bus number.”

I deflated. I felt my fragile assurance slipping right out the toes of my new shoes. “Tricia. Sixteen.”

“Find your seat and your locker.”

I walked the row of lockers and found my name—misspelled as *Trisha*. I navigated the metal handle and put my bag on the hook inside the locker, quietly ignoring that Mrs. Wretched had spelled my name wrong. See, the thing was, I had never met another Tricia (or Trisha), and it turned out there were two others in my new grade, and one in this very classroom. I had made a grievous error in my first four minutes of fourth grade, but I didn’t know it yet. A few minutes later, *Trisha* arrived to find someone’s stuff in her locker. She went to Mrs. Wretched like Baby Bear complaining that someone’s been eating his porridge.

Mrs. Wretched, who almost never came out from behind the fortress of her desk, walked over to Trisha’s locker to retrieve my contraband: a Rainbow Brite backpack hung in the wrong place. “Whose backpack is this?” she demanded.

I raised my hand so silently, so subtly, just wanting to disappear.

She said, “The first thing you will learn in fourth grade is to respect other people’s space. *That is not* your locker.”

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“But it said ‘Trisha.’”

“And is that how you spell your name?”

“No, it isn’t—”

“Well, do you *know* how to spell your name?”

“Yes, I—”

“You’re not the only person in this world with your name, young lady.”

She held my backpack hooked on her finger and waited for me to come and get it. I put it in my locker and returned to my seat, and I felt tears coming, coming, coming. I didn’t want to cry. I just wanted a do-over. But you so rarely get a do-over on anything in life, and this was my first hard lesson in that truth.

I checked the name tag on the locker every day of that school year, terrified to make the same mistake twice. The locker was mine all year long, but every day I made sure.

Mrs. Wretched and I had a rough start to our year together, and it was hard to recover from that. As the first days lined up to become the first month, I found a routine in my new environment, but sadly very little improved. I had always loved school, but now my favorite parts of the day were any chances I found to leave the classroom. Recess, music, gym, art—I craved any opportunity for a break from her watchful, witchlike gaze. She was mean, and her unkindness stood out as the blatant opposite of the teachers I had had to that point in my young life. I had fallen so in love with my second-grade teacher that I had outlined my own career path to become a teacher just like her, and my third-grade teacher had named

me her “little author” and wooed me into writing. I aimed to please, and my kind teachers rewarded my efforts with smiles and kindness. After love affairs with my earliest teachers, it never occurred to me that not every educator loves her job—that perhaps they wouldn’t all love me.

Early in the fall, our school celebrated Right to Read Week. It was a nerdy version of spirit week, with daily themes such as “Choose Your Favorite Punctuation!” or “Be an Adverb!” or “Dress Like Your Favorite Person from American History!” For the last one, I chose Betsy Ross, and my costume became a family project. On that day, I went to school in a long, blue colonial dress, my curly hair swept up in a bun, and I even carried a picnic basket with an American flag carefully peeking out from under its lid. I mean, really, it was indisputable: I was a very charming Betsy Ross. Whatever you’re picturing isn’t nearly cute enough.

I started the day with my confidence restored. I had even packed an extra outfit for gym class—such was my preparedness. I’m pretty sure I said to myself, *I’ve so got this*, or whatever was the equivalent circa 1988. I stopped by Mrs. Wretched’s desk, and I asked her, “Where should I put my clothes for gym class today?”

In retrospect, I knew the answer to that question. Of course any extra items of mine would go in my locker. But I think I wanted to give her the chance to be overjoyed by my costume. I probably pictured in my mind a scene similar to Ralphie’s dream in the classic movie *A Christmas Story*, when his teacher reads through so much drivel until she finds his

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paper: finally one worth reading, the work of a student who has restored her faith in education and her very self. In other words, I set myself up to inevitably see firsthand how very unimpressed she was.

“I don’t even know why you’re dressed like this,” she said. I took a step back, feeling shoved away by her disgust.

“Because it’s American History Day,” I said, my voice wavering.

“*That* is tomorrow. Now go change your clothes.”

I carried my American flag, my picnic basket, my extra clothes, and my nine-year-old dignity down the hall to the bathroom, trying to decide what to do with it all. I pulled the pins out of my bun and shook my hair free. I stuffed my colonial dress into the basket, I changed into a very plain T-shirt and pair of jeans, and I gave myself a few minutes to just cry.

I just wanted to move forward, to go on with the day, to somehow get out of the crosshairs. But when I came back to the classroom, even though I tried to will myself to be invisible, she noticed I had been crying.

“Crying again, I see,” she said, with an exasperated sigh. And then, loud enough for everyone to hear, “Tricia, I have never in my life met a child with less confidence than you. I certainly hope you grow up to have more confidence as an adult, because you are a child with none.”

Who does that? Who says that to a child? I was devastated. I didn’t know what the word *confidence* meant. I didn’t know what it was. But when I was nine years old, an adult

told me I didn't have any of it. And when an adult slaps a label on your chest, it sticks.

Have you ever had someone like that in your life? Someone who threatened to steal the spirit right out of your soul, the joy right out of your smile? It's sadly and likely true that you have a story similar to mine. Someone who stole your confidence right out of your pocket. Think about it. Let's do a little detective work to think about who did this to you.

These thieves are probably the voices you still hear in your head when you're right on the edge of doing something really creative, profound, brave, or simply joyful. If you're like me, maybe you hear objections in your head: "You think you're creative? Since when? When is the last time you had an idea that was actually yours, or worse, actually *good*?" Or "Who do you think you are, trying to do something so brave? Leave that to the people with real courage. You're just faking it." Or "Somebody sure thinks highly of herself, doesn't she? Stop bragging. Don't you realize how prideful that is? That's not humility." Or "You're an impostor. You might as well wave the white flag and give up, or else somebody's going to blow the whistle on this little charade you've got going on. And I think we can agree it will be far less painful if you surrender on your own before somebody makes you."

Were those words painful to read? They were painful to write. I get it, my friend. Where do those voices come from in your life? Parents? Teachers? Coaches? Siblings? Bullies your own age or, as in my life, significantly older? How about an old boyfriend? Or maybe even the person you're married to

You Can Do This

today? Maybe it's something even bigger, something without a face or a voice, something harder to identify—like the culture of your church or the religious beliefs of your family. Sometimes we get to a point in our lives when we realize that what the “grown-ups” have been telling us the Bible says isn't actually in there at all. Sometimes grace gets lost in criticism, and self-worth gets swept away with rules.

Look back on the stages of your life—childhood, adolescence, college, early jobs, careers, marriage, motherhood, successes, failures, and the transitions in between—and think of the people who influenced you. Think about who walked with you on these journeys, and think of their voices. What did they say to you? Did they build you up or tear you down—give you life or drain you like a helium balloon with a slow leak? If these voices come into your head when you think of the worst things you believe about yourself, then my friend, you've found the thieves of your confidence. Their passing comments plant the seeds in a fertile ground of negative thoughts, and before we know it, those seeds grow into oak trees of personal beliefs.

Negative thoughts and beliefs are just that: thoughts and beliefs. They are not facts, and they do not need to be true. Each one of these holds you in bondage, and each one must be shut down. You are not ridiculous, overly emotional, selfish, or grandiose just because somebody said you are. What you are is terrified.

That's the thing about negative thoughts and beliefs: They keep you scared. You're afraid of getting hurt, afraid of being

seen, afraid of being shamed or shut down for not measuring up to the rest of the world. And these thoughts are ruthless. They will search until they find your most vulnerable place: your beauty, your lovability, your intelligence, your sexuality, your courage. When criticism finds vulnerability, it grabs on tight. Before we know it, we are bound tightly in the tentacles of an octopus that's very much in charge. Girls, we very simply and truly and deeply *cannot let those thoughts be in charge of us*. We can get our confidence back from the thieves who stole it from us. We can choose a different way.

Stepping Forward

Think about the time when your confidence was stolen from you. Jot down the details that come back to you—who said it, how he or she looked at you, the room you were in, the way you felt, and how your parents responded if you talked about it. It's so important to acknowledge the ways we've been hurt and the things that have been taken from us, because here's the thing about wounds: They almost never go away on their own. They only create thick scar tissue that keeps us from being real, authentic, brave, or confident. Write down what you remember about the ways your confidence has been taken.

Set a timer for twenty minutes and journal about what you wrote down. Lean into the pain instead of avoiding the

You Can Do This

memory. The infection is there; see if it will come out when exposed to the light of day.

In the same way, think about a time when you have stolen confidence from someone under your influence. Is there something you may have said to your husband, your sibling, or your child in a harsh moment of stress or exhaustion? If a memory comes to mind, it may have stayed in that person's mind, too. A conversation and a request for forgiveness can restore the relationship as well as the very confidence that was stolen away.

Do something nice to reward yourself for all this emotional heavy lifting you've done today. You have been brave, you are valuable, and you deserve kindness—first of all, from yourself.