

THE  
WomAn  
CODE

20

Powerful Keys  
to Unlock Your Life

Sophia A. Nelson

  
Revell

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This book is dedicated  
to my beloved paternal grandmother,  
*“Nana” Dora Whitaker Nelson*  
(July 11, 1925—September 30, 2000).

I learned much of my “Woman Code” from watching you live out yours. I miss your presence more and more in my life each day. Thank you for having been such a living expression of family devotion, wisdom, kindness, friendship, thoughtfulness, resilience, and love in my life.

I am honored to be your granddaughter.

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*No Codes determine our ultimate joy, happiness, and fulfillment in life more than the Codes for how we relate to other people. At the end of the day it is our relationships that make our lives worth living.*

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I love you, Mom.

## Section I

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# The Personal Codes

Every woman lives by a Code that either propels her to greatness or keeps her stuck in the challenges and obstacles of her life. These Codes are the foundation of every woman's life. They are core to how we develop into the women we all want to be.



# Code 1

## Know Your Value



You can be the most beautiful person in the world and everybody sees light and rainbows when they look at you, but if you yourself don't know it, all of that doesn't even matter. Every second that you spend on doubting your worth, every moment that you use to criticize yourself; is a second of your life wasted, is a moment of your life thrown away. It's not like you have forever, so don't waste any of your seconds, don't throw even one of your moments away.

C. JoyBell C., from *Wolves of the Sapphire Sun: This One's for the Wild Ones*

**I**t is life changing to know your value. One of the most timeless and challenging issues for women of every generation is the struggle to know our value, to know our worth, and to claim what we deserve in the workplace and in our relationships.

Knowing your value means not only knowing who you are but who you are not. I know that some of you may not feel very valuable right now, or very loved. That is okay. That is why you picked up this book. Many women look good on the outside but are badly

wounded on the inside. They may seem successful, but they are hiding their hurts inside. Believe it or not, they feel valueless too. So I need you to stop thinking you are alone. You are not. Every single one of us at some point has doubted her value.

Women today are educated, talented, connected, financially secure, gifted, well traveled, and more, yet we still do not know our value. We shrink from saying what needs to be said for fear we will be called the “B” word or worse. We fear outshining men lest we make them feel less than. We worry that we are not pretty enough, smart enough, talented enough, or powerful enough. We envy other women who are thinner, more beautiful, smarter, or happier. We fail to see the amazing gifts we are to the world.

It is time for that to change.

All of our doubts, fears, and limitations come from within our own minds. Envy starts out as admiration. We want what other women have because we don’t see our own intrinsic value. We are so good at advocating for and empowering other people but not ourselves. We know how to negotiate a fierce deal for a client, and we will go to the mat for a family member or friend when we feel someone is not treating them as they deserve. Yet we will diminish our own value; we do not stand up for ourselves and honor our worth.

We can possess an Ivy League degree and an amazing work history, and yet when it comes time to negotiate for that salary at the new job we just landed, we let someone else decide our value. *Men never do this*. From the time they are boys, men are empowered by their families, their culture, their communities, and even the sports teams they play on to know their value. Men are taught almost from birth that they are to be hunters, protectors, providers, and winners. In other words, they have value.

This is not the case for us.

Women are taught almost from birth that we are to be nurturers, supporters, encouragers, peacekeepers, and ladies. While these are all great virtues, these traits play into what we call “soft skills.” Soft

skills, which most women possess in abundance, are important; however, they do not often get you what you want when it comes to the corporate boardroom, business, or life. How you value yourself has a direct impact on how well you live out your Code.

**In a nutshell:** your life “Code” is formed from the time you are a small girl. It is shaped by the influence of your parents and your nuclear family. And after the family, it is shaped by your community, by the friendships you form, and by the faith (or spiritual value system or lack thereof) your parents impart to you. Your Code either propels you to greatness or keeps you stuck in the challenges and obstacles of your life. If you grow up in a family of people who are nurturing, loving, and kind you are more likely as an adult to *be* nurturing, loving, and kind. On the other hand, if you grow up in a family where people are angry all the time, argumentative, and demeaning to one another, you are likely to handle conflict as an adult by arguing, demeaning, and yelling at people.

All women struggle with self-esteem, self-worth, and self-value issues. Women have been taught for centuries that we are second-class citizens. It is not easy to undo centuries of programming. But we are going to consider three keys to unlock how to know and honor your value as a woman.

1. Erase the negative tapes in your head—don’t let your history define your destiny.
2. Realize that what you think about you is what others will think about you.
3. Shift your thinking to put you at the top of your list.

## **Erase the Negative Tapes in Your Head—Don’t Let Your History Define Your Destiny**

Words have power. Words define, shape, and mold us beyond what we can ever imagine. You have value. You are born and created as

a person of value. How you perceive your worth and self-value is shaped by your experiences. And once certain words and images have been placed in our spirit, it becomes almost impossible to redefine ourselves so that we can truly embrace our value.

One of the most fundamental factors that determines your happiness, success, and joy in life is how well you value yourself. It sounds simple, but far too many women and girls do not know their value. You must be defined first and foremost by your Creator and yourself.

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Words have power.  
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**The bottom line is this:** if you let others define you and tell you your value, your journey in life will be hard, passionless, and unfulfilling. We are defined early on by our families, the first place we learn how to be, who to be, and what we can be. It does not matter

whether we were raised by two loving parents, a grandparent, a beloved aunt, or even in foster care. What matters is what these loved ones or caretakers spoke into our being. The power of words spoken over us, about us, and into us can last a lifetime. Words have the power to inspire, propel, or diminish us.

All women, regardless of our geographical region, nationality, religion, or socioeconomic status, grew up being defined by labels. How you value yourself was determined by how your nuclear family spoke to you, spoke about you, and how they saw you. My labels were as follows: *Sophia is my smart one. She is going to be an attorney. She is my talker. She is outgoing. Sophia is a real go-getter.*

Those words were ingrained in my Code early on. They were for the most part affirming words. I honored the high value bar that was set for me by my family. I grew up to be an attorney. I am still outgoing and a go-getter. But I had friends who did not get affirming labels. They were called fat, unruly, worthless, shy, average, boy crazed, too introverted, and worse. Many of the girls I grew up with became women who lived out the value that was

placed on them by their families. It is the rare woman (e.g., Oprah) who can overcome the negativity of her early life and rise above the labels that shattered her Code. But, *it can be done* when we are given the tools to go within and dare to love ourselves again.

### *Two Women, Two Different Stories*

Janet is forty-four, never married, and has no children. She is a successful civil engineer. Janet grew up poor in a small town in West Virginia. Like many in her community, she grew up with a strong religious faith, with a small nuclear family, and with a father who worked twelve hours a day in the coal mines. Her mother, Patricia, was a homemaker and took care of Janet and her three younger brothers. Everything in Janet's upbringing told her that her value was found in being a wife and a mother, and in being compassionate to other people before herself.

Janet's father was a decent man, but he drank a lot. And when he drank, he often verbally abused his children and at times physically abused his wife. Janet's father adored her. He would tell her that it wasn't her fault God made her a girl. He would tell her that she would grow up, meet a local boy, get married after high school, and start her own family. Janet knew from the time she was small that she did not want that type of life.

The mixed messages Janet got about the value of a woman, a wife, and a mother led her to decide early in her life that she never wanted to marry or have children. Janet is strikingly beautiful, yet if you talk to Janet privately, she will tell you that she feels unattractive and never quite good enough, and that she still has nightmares about her childhood.

**Here's the point:** Janet's instincts told her that life had more to offer her than what she saw growing up. But the negative tapes, the messages, and the words that defined Janet's value as a girl and ultimately as a woman have played in her head for years. *Don't miss this.* Janet on the outside is a beautiful, successful, smart engineer.

But on the inside, she still struggles with intimacy and relationships with men. She has pushed away some very good men because she fears that she will not be enough or that somehow they will not see her value. She closed off the doors to her heart long ago.

Donna, age thirty-four, on the other hand, heard very different messages about her value. The oldest of three children, Donna is an oncologist. Her parents were both physicians, and her sister and brother both became physicians. Donna's parents instilled in their children that they could do anything, be anything, and change anything in life they wanted to.

Donna's friends adore her. She is always the life of the party, the laughter that fills up the room, and she is an encourager to all who know and meet her. She's young, she's vibrant, and she never finishes a round with her patients without giving them a hug, a hand squeeze, or even a kiss on the forehead.

Donna's husband is a college professor. Not only do they value themselves, but they are both committed to instilling value in others. Donna exudes confidence, love, competence, connection, and empathy because she values herself. Both Donna and Janet are smart, accomplished, beautiful women who are at the top of their game professionally. Donna grew up understanding her value. Everyone around her affirmed that she was valuable. Janet grew up having to fight her way past the negative tapes and words that made her feel *valueless*. She made a success of her life but at a deep personal cost. She is afraid to love and afraid to connect.

These two women—one older, one younger—teach us something important. They teach us that how we see our value as girls has a lasting impact on how we value ourselves as women. And that once we leave the environments we grew up in, we have to reprogram any negative thoughts, words, or images that made us feel worthless, unlovable, and not valuable. What I'm saying is this: you have to fight for your value. You have to return to that core Code that you were born with that says you are worthy, you are loved, and you are valuable.



## Realize That What You Think about You Is What Others Will Think about You

What does it mean to “know” something?

To know something is to be sure of, certain of, firm and aware of it. It means you are not guessing; you are informed. It means you believe it with all your might.

What does it mean to “value” something?

To value is to hold dear. To place in high esteem. To love. To adore. To commit. To see someone’s or something’s worth. To treasure and to protect something of priceless value. So to “know” your “value” is to simply believe that you are priceless, made from the beginning to be special, rare, to have purpose, and to be loved.

**Here’s the thing:** when we can learn to operate in that space of self-love, self-worth, and self-value, we can soar to heights unimaginable. We can forge a universal sisterhood so great that we can truly ignite a spark that lights the way and changes the world. Feeling valuable allows us to do valuable things in life. If you don’t love you, no one else on this earth can love you. That is a hard truth, because we realize that most women who lack self-love and self-esteem feel that way because they were taught to feel that way about themselves. They kept playing those negative tapes over and over again, and ultimately they believed them. Women who rise above their beginnings and mis-definitions of value are whole, complete, and fulfilled because they tapped back into their worth.

A point will come when you need to ask yourself three important but hard questions. Remember, it is never too late to believe in your value.

**Question 1:** Who do I want to be? Not in terms of my achievements or position in life, but according to my core value system. What will my living say to others about who I am?

**Question 2:** What is my life’s purpose? What gifts do I possess that will make an impact that will last far beyond my life?

**Question 3:** What do I want for my happiness and fulfillment?  
What do I desire for me?

Only you can answer these questions. By answering them, you tap into your Code. And when you discover that Code, you will experience a freedom and a joy many women will never know. Your Code is the road map to your life's purpose and fulfillment.

## **Shift Your Thinking to Put You at the Top of Your List**

Everything we do or will not do in life starts with the first Code: Know Your Value. If your Code has been corrupted you have to reset and restore it to begin anew. Realizing who we are and what we have to offer this life is a precious thing. It is a gift every woman should give herself. Believing in our value is no small task. But the reward is nothing short of miraculous. In other words, you must shift your thinking to put you at the top of your list.

You are valuable. How do you shift your thinking and recognize your value? These five steps will help you do just that; that is, they will help you value yourself and make sure that others around you know your value too.

**Step 1:** Trust yourself and your instincts. They are rarely ever wrong. Women have always practiced being still and listening. We are the original purveyors of “instinct” or “intuition.” Listen to your inner voice. It will lead you to your purpose, to your value.

**Step 2:** Spend quality time getting to know you. Not your family's version of you, or your friend's opinion of you, or your boyfriend's or spouse's opinion of you. You must get intimately acquainted with you. Get to know what you like, what you do not like, and what you want versus what you need. You need to sit with yourself and pray for yourself.

**Step 3:** Face you to fix you. Face the wrong definitions you have been given about yourself. Families define us by our birth order, our siblings, and our traits: *she's the kind one, she's the tall one, she's the smart one, she's the bad one, she's the dumb one, she's the fat one.* The Code you have within never lies; let it help you find and face the authentic you.

**Step 4:** Believe in yourself. If you do not believe in you, no one else will. You teach people how to treat you (see Code 3). If people pick up that you don't like you or that you don't believe you are valuable, they will move on without you. People notice people who feel confident and good about themselves.

**Step 5:** Honor yourself. You know what lies in the deepest reaches of your heart and soul. You hear that small, still voice saying, "This is the way; walk in it." If you will honor what you know to be true for you, about you, and in spite of you at times, you will always honor your worth, your value, and your gifts. We lose this most important aspect of the Code when we let others define, mis-define, and tell us who we are. Stop. You were not designed by your Creator to do anything but to be you.



## Living the Code

Make these ten points of wisdom part of your life this week, this month, this year.

### Points of Wisdom

1. Your value comes from your Creator, not your parents, siblings, friends, or naysayers.
2. To know your value, you must practice good health. Your health impacts your emotions, spirit, and self-worth.

3. Words define value. Be intentional about those you allow to speak into your life.
4. Knowing your value directly impacts the quality of your life.
5. Knowing your value helps you to set important boundaries.
6. Knowing your value means you do not allow anyone to diminish you, your worth, or your hopes.
7. Surround yourself with people who affirm, adore, and love you deeply.
8. Have the courage to speak up for yourself. This communicates to others that you know your value.
9. When you know who you are, you are eager to spend time with you, alone, in the presence of your spirit and of your Creator.
10. Knowing your value means that you like yourself. You embrace you, even in all of your imperfection. You would choose you as a friend.

## **Key Words**

|         |             |           |
|---------|-------------|-----------|
| Know    | Rediscover  | YOU       |
| Value   | Tapes       | Embrace   |
| Code    | Affirmation | Priceless |
| Creator | Worth       | Woman     |