

SILENCING INSECURITY

BELIEVING GOD'S TRUTH
ABOUT YOU

DONNA GIBBS



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Dedicated to all who are seeking freedom.
May you find hope and healing here.

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Introduction

I felt a sense of vulnerability and a rage of anger unlike anything I had ever experienced. My wallet had been stolen and the offender was using my identity for his own good pleasures. I had been robbed. I felt defenseless and violated. If only I had known a thief had been lurking, I would have been more careful. I would have kept my guard up and been more alert. But now, it was too late. The damage was done. I'd been betrayed by an unknown enemy, and the destruction was to my credit, my pride, and my overall sense of security.

Millions of people fall victim to identity theft every year. The majority of those victims have no idea they have been targeted until months, or even years, after the crime. But I want to talk to you about an even more common, subtler, and more dangerous form of identity theft that is claiming unsuspecting victims. It is the theft of our purpose, our joy, our stability, and our very being. Webster defines *identity crisis* as “personal, psychosocial conflict especially in adolescence that involves confusion about one’s social role and often a sense of loss of continuity to one’s personality.”¹ Unfortunately, I know only a few individuals whose “psychosocial conflict” ended in adolescence. In fact,

many women at every stage and circumstance in life continue to be just as conflicted as they were in adolescence. What about you? Are you secure in who you are? Or do you still feel like a teenager who is tossed to and fro by each passing circumstance? If this describes you, then you will likely relate to some of the testimonies below.

“I don’t know what to do with myself now that my children are out of the home. Who am I if not a mother?”

“When my husband left me, he took part of me with him. He was my everything.”

“I just finished college and everyone says I have great potential. Yet I am still trying to find myself, and I truly have no idea who I really am.”

“I take care of my husband and constantly run around taking care of the kids. I think I have lost myself in the midst of caring for everyone else.”

“My husband struggles with an addiction to pornography. Clearly I am not good enough or attractive enough. This is my fault.”

“I was abused as a young child. I’ve spent my life believing I am dirty and deserving of what happened to me.”

“My physical condition has gotten worse, and I can’t do the things I once could. I feel so inadequate.”

“I work so hard to keep everyone happy, and I hate conflict. I lose sleep if I learn someone is disappointed in me.”

“If only I had a boyfriend, I would feel better about myself. I feel so anxious and dejected when I don’t have someone special in my life.”

“My past prevents me from having a future. I don’t expect to ever be able to experience happiness.”

“I seem to fail at most everything I do. Why should I even risk trying?”

“If only I were thinner . . .”

“If only I were smarter . . .”

“If only I were younger . . .”

“I feel inadequate.”

“I feel worthless.”

If you have ever struggled with thoughts or emotions like these, then you have been the target of identity theft. Unfortunately, you are not alone. So, join with your sisters, and let’s enter a journey that is mysterious but also freeing. Let’s get to know our “thieves,” those areas that trap us and leave us vulnerable to feelings of inadequacy. We’re living in a society surrounded by thieves, so we need to be prepared, don’t you think?

After we expose those thieves, we will uncover the problems they leave behind. Boy, can they make some messes. Next, we’re going to look at an individual in Scripture who got into some messes of her own because of her lurking thieves.

Thankfully, God always provides a way out. And we’re going to discover the path out of insecurity through the Formula for Wholeness. This formula will connect the destructive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that are keeping us stuck in a pit of insecurity. We’ll also be encouraged by some biblical characters who outsmarted their insecurities and exemplified a life of wholeness. We’re going to investigate how they succeeded and pray that God will give us the grace and courage to apply the same principles. That journey will be a breath of fresh air.

If you have picked up this book because you struggle with insecurities, I want to give you a word of hope. You don't have to live the rest of your life feeling that you don't measure up. You don't have to settle for living as if you aren't enough. You don't have to settle for living with the emotional instability that results from insecurities. You don't have to settle for the relational chaos, indecisiveness, and unnecessary suffering invited by an inaccurate belief system regarding yourself. *It's time to stop the theft of your identity and gain stability through rescuing the significance of the person you were created to be.* It's time to experience freedom from your insecurities.

When you finish this journey, I am confident you will be able to more accurately identify the thieves that plague your identity. More importantly, you will have all the tools you'll ever need to completely disarm those thieves and gain back the security that never should have been stolen. *Let's get this rescue mission started!*

Donna

PART 1



IDENTITY THIEVES

A thief will use any trick to deceive us. Take, for instance, the thieves who try to steal our personal information. If they can trick us out of the right details, they can steal our financial worth. But there are other, subtler threats to our personal identity.

We look to various people or things to affirm our value. These can be positive, such as our appearance or our success, our background or our life experiences, our relationships or our church involvement. Sometimes the things that influence our perceived

value are not good things and instead are painful experiences of rejection or even previous trauma. The first part of this book will cover the typical things that impact our sense of identity. When our sense of self, our perceived worth, is overly attached or perhaps dependent on these external things, they can become thieves that steal from us, robbing us of joy and contentment. The things that influence how we feel are in and of themselves not problematic. Being pretty or successful, for instance, are not problems unless our security depends too much on our appearance or performance. By the end of this section, you will know with certainty whether your security has secretly and destructively been stolen by one of these thieves.

We'll conclude this section with an investigation of the chief thief—Satan—and his desire to steal a stable, healthy, and secure identity from you and from me.

1

Appearance and Comparisons

You probably remember the popular TV series *American Idol*. I had the rare opportunity one season to join a young girl in her audition. You've never seen so many alterations to bodily appearances in one place in your life. The startling personalities, styles, accessories, and painted-on faces screamed, "Notice me! Please notice me!" You expect this kind of parade at auditions for a reality TV show, but down deep in our hearts, we're *all* screaming, "Notice me. *Please* notice me." Without a secure identity, we either go to drastic measures to gain attention so that we can feel a semblance of peace with ourselves or withdraw into feelings of inadequacy, convinced that we just don't really matter. The good news is that a secure identity is within reach of everyone, even you and me.

You are probably not flamboyantly presenting yourself to judges at a voice competition, but is it possible you are still vulnerable

to the thief of appearance and comparisons? Let's consider a few questions that might reveal the answer.

1. Have you ever changed your outfit repeatedly before you headed out the door?
2. Have you had thoughts that you weren't pretty enough?
3. Are you a chronic dieter, or have you ever been vulnerable to an eating disorder?
4. Are there some aspects of your appearance that you find disgusting?
5. Do a few pounds or clothing sizes have the power to significantly inflate or deflate your self-confidence?
6. Have you given up on taking care of yourself physically because ultimately you believe that you don't measure up?
7. Do you obsess over compliments or criticisms you receive regarding your appearance?
8. Do you often compare your appearance to others?
9. Have you ever behaved a little oddly with hopes of gaining attention?
10. Have you avoided situations or people altogether because you felt you didn't measure up?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then consider the cause. Tell the truth. It's just me and you—and I think I might already know the answer. Why did you do those things? What thoughts were going through your mind about yourself? What emotions were you experiencing? I have a feeling I know, because I have done a few of those frantic dances myself. We did these things because we were self-conscious. There it is. We admitted it. We didn't feel cute enough or pretty enough or young enough or sophisticated enough or thin enough or . . . enough already! Society gives us spoken and unspoken messages and expectations regarding how we are supposed to appear. We rate our appearance when we

look in the mirror or at other people. We say to ourselves, “They will (or won’t) think I’m enough.” In effect, we’ve let “them” become an audience for whom we’re performing. We hear applause or boos as we interpret what we think “they” think about us. Sometimes we measure up; other times we don’t. When we think we measure up, we become confident, maybe even arrogant. When we assess that we don’t measure up, we become anxious or depressed. Our confidence has been taken from us. Sounds like robbery to me.

Take our appearance, for example. When does our obsession with appearance begin? Unfortunately, that journey begins early in life, as we each develop in our own culture of comparisons. Barbie had a role in that. Did you know that if Barbie were a real, life-size woman, “She would be 5’9” tall, have a 39” bust, an 18” waist, 33” hips and a size 3 shoe. . . . She likely would not menstruate . . . she’d have to walk on all fours due to her proportions.”¹ Seriously? We’re giving our little girls these dolls, and we’re inadvertently celebrating such incomprehensible proportions. Barbie might be the first identity training tool, but she has had lots of company by the time young girls become teenagers. How do you know if you are pretty enough? You look around. How do you know if you are wearing the latest style? You look around. How do you know if your new hairstyle is going to work? You look around. How do you know if you are thin enough? You look around. You watch a movie. You see a commercial. You open a magazine. You take a trip to the mall and gaze at the models in the storefront windows. Journey to any high school, college, or even church campus, and you’ll quickly pinpoint the latest set of appearance expectations. What do you see? You likely see a glaring message from a materialistic society that you just aren’t enough. And let’s not be fooled into thinking that pretty people are exempt from this struggle. Ask any beauty queen, and she will tell you the same. Left and right, you and I are robbed of being content in our own skins. Sadly, many industries depend on our being discontent with our appearance. We’ve been robbed of the satisfaction of who God created us to be—in flesh.

Skinny jeans, Wonderbras, stiletto heels, Botox, hair products, laser treatments, tanning beds, and acne cream—all products marketed to entice us to make a purchase because of our desire to improve our appearance. While one could certainly argue the effectiveness of the “skinny” jean, these products produce millions of dollars because women have a thirst for more and better when it comes to appearance. We’ll pay pretty much anything to increase our self-appraised appearance.

The United States is rated number one for the amount of money spent on cosmetics. We’re talking billions of dollars each year, with most women spending more on cosmetics than education in their lifetime. In both good and bad economic times, the beauty industry thrives, because it portrays physical attraction as a scarce necessity, born of an unattainable, airbrushed standard that promises power and acceptance. This is an empty promise, resulting in competition, shame, and chronic insecurities. The enemy has found a great tool for crippling our joy. It is true that a healthy sense of self is created from the inside out and attacked from the outside in.

Imagine the young college girl who works out daily to keep her body rock solid and lean. If she misses a workout, she thinks she’s fat. What will happen to her self-concept, which has been dependent on her toned body, when she has a baby eight years later and struggles to shed her post-pregnancy weight? Unsurprisingly, she will feel self-conscious and inadequate as well as anxious to gain her trim body back. Those nasty emotions are the sign that this young mother has been robbed.

How about the young girl who backs out of going to the prom? She is experiencing a bad acne breakout and feels it has ruined what is supposed to be one of the best days of her life.

How about the wife who decides to get breast implants because she doesn’t feel she can keep her husband’s eye? She doesn’t want to endure a painful surgery or a permanent alteration to her body, but she will, because she hopes it will bring her more security in her marriage.

Please understand it is not the attention to appearance that creates a problem. Rather, *it is the attachment to appearance—the idolizing of appearance*—that brings destruction and is an open door for a thief. It is important for us to distinguish between taking responsible care of the health and presentation of our bodies and fixating on appearance. The two couldn't be more distinct. It is perfectly healthy to find joy in taking care of your body and presenting yourself confidently. There is nothing sinful or destructive about exercising or wearing nice-looking clothing or fashionable accessories. Consider the wife of noble character described in Proverbs 31. We first learn that she is “virtuous” and “capable,” “more precious than rubies” (v. 10 NLT), and trustworthy (see v. 11). She is an amazing woman—a mentor who is spiritually respected and emotionally strong. Interestingly, we also learn “she dresses in fine linen and purple gowns” (v. 22 NLT). This woman isn't wearing dull polyester every day, and it is perfectly okay that she doesn't. Her body is a sacred temple, just like yours and mine, and it is appropriate that she gives it warranted attention.

This noble woman has another piece of knowledge that we need to know. She recognizes that “beauty does not last” (v. 30 NLT). What a profound insight! Her security is not based on the appearance of her body or the beautiful clothing that she puts on her body. Her security is based on her fear of the Lord (see v. 30). It is *dangerous* to gain our confidence from anything that perishes, including our bodies and our appearance. Our bodies will one day decay and return to the earth (and they may already be beginning to sag their way there), so they are not worthy of our total confidence.

If at any time you experience anxiety related to your appearance, know that you have been distracted and conned by an unworthy thief. Consider Luke 12:23: “For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.” While the Scriptures were perhaps referring to the *provision* of clothing, the concept certainly applies to our discussion that the body is more than an hourglass figure.

Lest you get discouraged, let me inform you that we have stumbled on some truth that is very powerful. Remember, our eyes are the tools the thief uses in the robbery of our contentment. Wouldn't you know it—God has a word for us about this very subject. Let's gain some insight from the book of Matthew: "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (6:22–24). Our eyes are the tools of comparison, and I am praying that you and I have healthy eyes. With healthy eyes, we see and understand truth, and our entire bodies are full of light. We confront a thief who wants to blindfold our eyes; he seeks to darken our perception of ourselves. I am praying we will boldly remove the blindfold and refuse to be taken advantage of again.

VICTORY VERSE

"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"

MATTHEW 6:22–24



1. What thoughts do you have when you look in a mirror? What emotions do you experience when you look in a mirror?
2. What impact does your perceived appearance have on your self-esteem?

3. Regarding your appearance, to whom do you compare yourself?
4. How is the aging process impacting your sense of security?
5. In what ways do you take care of your body? Do you consider this care to be (a) healthy, (b) obsessive, or (c) negligent? Explain your answer.
6. What lessons about female appearance did you learn as a child? How did you learn these lessons?
7. Do you ever experience negative emotions regarding your appearance? If so, what negative thoughts are associated with these emotions?
8. How do you typically act on the negative thoughts and emotions you named above regarding your appearance?