

# You're **Already** Amazing

*Embracing Who You Are,  
Becoming All God Created You to Be*

*Holley Gerth*



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*For amazing you*

and the God who made you that way

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Introduction

## The Dare



*Pssst* . . . pull up a chair and I'll tell you a secret. You'd better lean in close for this one.

Ready?

You don't have to *do* more, *be* more, *have* more.

I'm sure there are security alarms going off somewhere. You should probably hide this book when your in-laws come over. And this could be the makings of a Sunday morning scandal.

But it's true.

It's the kind of true that will change your life, set you free, and make you wake up smiling for the first time in a long time. I know because that's what it did for me (and believe me, for this non-morning girl that's nothing short of miraculous). I've seen it happen to a lot of other women too. I've read it in their words through thousands of comments on my blog. I've seen it in their faces as they sit on the couch in my counseling office. I've heard it in a new kind of laughter over coffee with friends.

So watch out, sister. If you keep reading, you just might be next.

Even if we've never met, I know this about you: you're a daughter of God, a holy princess, a woman created with strengths you've yet to fully grasp and a story that's still being written by the divine

## The Dare

Author himself. And if you really take hold of who you are and what you're called to do, there will be no stopping you. That's because there's no stopping him *in you*—and he's got bigger plans for your life than you've even imagined.

Okay, you've been warned.

If you're feeling brave, I dare you to read on . . .



## A Heart-to-Heart Talk



My friend sits across the table at lunch. She's lovely, wonderful, a bringer of joy to my heart. Yet today there's little light in her eyes. She talks of endless juggling—kids, work, church, marriage, sex, groceries, and God.

She whispers, "Sometimes I don't even like my life. And I feel so guilty because I'm so blessed."

She speaks of reading books, doing studies, and listening to sermons that say she needs to give more, have more quiet time, find more friends.

"I try," she says. "I try so hard and I just fall further behind."

She describes her spirituality as a treadmill that keeps having the speed turned up. She runs faster and faster, only to become more exhausted.

As she shares, I think not of where she is going but of the One who is pursuing her heart. He stands just behind her, but she can hardly hear his voice above the whirl of the track.

"Dear daughter," he whispers. "Come to me. You are weary and burdened. I will give you rest. You're already pleasing to me."

I tell her this and she pauses, sighs, leans into that truth for a moment. I watch the treadmill slow and then stop as she rests instead in the arms of grace.



A woman settles onto the couch in my counseling office. I can tell she's got something hard to say this week. She shifts back and forth. I see the words rolling around in her mind and finally making their way to her lips. She tells of abuse from those who should have protected her. Rejection instead of love. Names called in the privacy of her home and the public of the playground. Sticks and stones could break her bones, but it's words that have broken her heart. She finally comes up for air, and as the tears run a river down her cheeks, it seems a single lie follows their tracks.

*"You could never be enough."*

If it were audible it would be said with a hiss—the same one that has haunted Eve's daughters since the Garden. And within me I feel the response rising from a more Tender Voice.

*"Tell her the truth."*

So I do, and the rivers of tears become torrents, buckets of loss and fear poured out in that office. Empty and full, she looks up and smiles.

It's the first time I've ever seen her do so.



She writes me an email from across the world. I've never seen her face or even visited her continent. But we are more alike than different.

She tells me of feeling meaningless and wondering if she has anything at all to offer. She types, "Everyone else matters but me. Everyone else has something to offer but me. God must be so disappointed."

As I read her words I feel a physical ache in my chest, a longing for her to see what I can see in just a few sentences—that she has kindness, creativity, gifts, and strengths. She is brave, compassionate, and valuable.



I think of God placing his hand over hers as she types those sentences, wanting with all of his heart to replace those wounding words with new ones that reflect his love for her.

I type back, “Yes, you matter. No one can take your place. God made just one *you*, and this world needs you just as you are.”

I hit “Send” and pray the truth will make its way straight to her heart.



Wherever I connect with women, it seems the same hurt is there. I recognize it well because I’ve felt it too.

I know what it’s like to stare at the ceiling in the middle of the night and ask hard questions with few answers. I know what it’s like to hide in the corner of the room, hoping no one will notice me, wondering if I’ll ever be wanted. I know what it’s like to wrestle with insecurity, guilt, and impossible standards of my own making.

*I know.*

Yet there also came a point when my heart began knowing something deeper as well. In my desperation, I started asking God what he really wanted for his daughters. I searched the Scriptures, talked to women, pondered and prayed. I’m still trying to understand all of it and, quite clumsily, to fully live it. But what I discovered just may be the best news you’ll ever hear.

So let’s talk.

## ..... *Would You Like to Have Coffee?* .....

Imagine I ask you to have coffee with me—which is exactly what I do with my dearest friends. There’s just something about sitting across a table from someone you truly care about that really gets a conversation going. (And if you’re not a coffee drinker, then tea or a yummy dessert are perfectly acceptable substitutes.)

I call, text, or email: “Can we get together? There’s something I’d really like to tell you.”

We pick your favorite spot. I meet you at the door. We settle into a quiet corner. Order our favorite drinks. Swap small talk over mochas or tea.

Sip by sip we go deeper, until we land at the level of the heart . . . that place where it's hard to go in the middle of the busy and the broken.

I clear my throat, lean back, look you in the eyes, and say:

~ "It's time you knew you're amazing." ~

You smile, laugh awkwardly, glance at the ceiling. "I know, I know," you reply. "So kind of you to say."

I respond, looking at you more intently.

"I mean it's time you *really* knew. And there's more:

- You're not only amazing.
- You're enough.
- You're beautiful.
- You're wanted.
- You're chosen.
- You're called.
- You've got what it takes . . . not just to survive but to change the world."

By this time your fingers are wrapped around your cup. You stare down at the bottom of it, focused on the emptiness, wondering why these words are so hard to hear.

Finally, you ask, "Who told you that?"

And I respond, "The only One who really knows—Someone who loves you."

## *You're God's "Is Girl"*

There's a pause in our conversation, and you point to a frame on the wall. It's a portrait of a woman taken by a professional photographer. The image makes it clear that she's the kind of girl who makes heads turn and smiles appear out of thin air. She looks

entirely serene and effortlessly chic. We speculate that even grande mochas don't go to her hips.

"Okay," you laugh, "I could understand if you told her she's amazing. But me? I've got a lot of work to do. I'm not exactly the 'it girl.'"

"Good thing you're not," I casually respond.

You're a bit surprised. "What did you just say?"

"I said it's a good thing you're not the 'it girl.'" And with a twinkle in my eye, I lean in to tell you why.

Our culture is obsessed with the "it girl." She's defined as a woman who has it all together—whatever "it" is at the moment. We want to be like her and do what she does. We can't imagine anyone feeling the same way about us. Life becomes a competition to see who can be the prettiest, trendiest, and most stylish. In the corporate world, it's who can climb highest, fastest, farthest. In the church (don't think we're exempt) it's who can be the sweetest, godliest, most servant-hearted. Depending on the day or year, who that woman is changes. It's an endless game of "tag—you're it" that exhausts us all and makes us competitors rather than sisters.

But when we look at the kingdom of God, it's a different story. There aren't "it girls" (or guys). There are only "is girls." God looks at you and says, "She *is* loved, accepted, and valued. She *is* created just the way I wanted her to be."

Our biblical buddy Paul wrote letters to some of the first churches. He told early Christians that we're a body. Someone is a hand. Another person is a foot. There's no competition—only complementing and completion. Part of the beauty of that is how different we are from each other. As my friend Jennifer Leep says, "God creates each of us to be uniquely who we are—just like each part of the body is unique. We don't need more than one of a given body part. Nor would we want more than one. Sure, we have two hands and two feet. But not two *right* hands or two *left* feet. Each part of the body has a purpose that only it can fulfill. The same is true for us. That's a truth that's easy to understand *and easy to forget.*"

## Most People Don't

.....

In my life, forgetting the truth we just talked about often starts with one phrase: “Most people don’t . . .”

Those three words *ping, ping* in my mind over and over like pebbles against a glass window. When they do, I pause and consider, “It’s true. Most people don’t spend so much time sitting in front of a laptop and writing.” And then it comes: “What’s the matter with you? Why can’t you relax and be more like most people?”

You’ve had these words thrown like stones at you too, haven’t you?

Most people don’t . . . wear themselves out in the kitchen because they believe a meal feeds hearts and fills bellies.

Most people don’t . . . throw off their entire schedule because they take time to listen to the stranger in the grocery store who’s having a hard day.

Most people don’t . . . pore over spreadsheets until their eyes are red because they see numbers as a sort of art and a way of bringing order to a chaotic world.

It’s true. Most people don’t do what you do, love what you love, feel the kind of passion you feel about that thing.

I started thinking about this recently, and I realized we’re in pretty good company if we feel like we’re not like most people. After all:

- Most people don’t . . . build an ark.
- Most people don’t . . . lead people through the desert to the Promised Land.
- Most people don’t . . . die on a cross to save the world.

*But aren’t we glad one person did each of these things?*

If most people don’t do what you do, and you’re passionately pursuing Jesus with your life, then it’s probably not just a human plan. The heartbeat of God is probably somewhere within it. We need you, just you, to fulfill that purpose, complete that project, bring that gift to the world in a way no one else can.

Most people don't . . . but you do.  
In your own wonderful way, you're God's "is girl."  
And that's amazing.

## Putting the Pieces Together

Back at our corner table, a waitress stops by and asks if we need anything else. She lifts an empty cup from the table, revealing more of the surface beneath. It's a mosaic, hundreds of broken pieces placed together again to make a vibrant pattern.

I run my hand over the roughness and reflect, "This has been the hardest part for me."

You tilt your head and pull your brows together, a look of concern crossing your face. "What do you mean?"

"The brokenness in my life has sometimes made it difficult for me to believe I could ever be amazing."

I can relate to those scattered pieces on the tabletop because my life is made of much the same. Bits of hurt tossed here and there, dreams shattered. This has especially been true in the last five years or so. My husband and I have struggled with infertility all that time (and we still do). That kind of brokenness isn't a loss you mourn once and move on from; it stays.

As I drove home from work one day, the pain I felt seemed especially pointless, and in turn, my life did too. "God," I whispered, "how can you use me when I'm so broken?"

A song came on the radio that repeated a verse from Isaiah over and over again:

*He was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed. (Isa. 53:5)*

I started singing along with the words. As I did it seemed God whispered to my soul, “You think you have to take what’s broken and make it perfect in order to be used by me. But I think in a completely different way. I took what was perfect, my Son, and made him broken so that you could be whole. And because you belong to him, your brokenness can bring healing to others too.”

I touch the mosaic again. “It’s a crazy, upside-down way of thinking. But it’s true. God has used my brokenness in ways I never expected. It’s become part of who I am, a surprisingly beautiful part.”

My friend and fellow writer Angie Smith can also relate to broken pieces. She shared a story on her blog *Bring the Rain* about smashing a pitcher and then piecing it back together again after the loss of her daughter:

I began to realize that this pitcher was my life, and every piece was part of a story that God had chosen to put together. I started crying, and remembering things I thought I had forgotten. It took a long time to finish, but it was time well spent. Every nook and cranny whispered to me, until at last it stood in all its imperfection.

*Here you are, Angie.*

*You are mended. You are filled with my Spirit, and I am asking you to pour yourself out.*

The image of my life as a broken pitcher was beautiful to me, but at the same time, it was hard to look at all of the cracks.

I ran my fingers along them and told him I wish it had been different. How I wished I had always loved him, always obeyed him, always sought him the way I should. I was mad at the imperfections, years wasted, gaping holes where it should be smooth.

But God, my ever-gracious God, was gentle and yet convicting as he explained.

*My dearest Angie. How do you think the world has seen me? If it wasn't for the cracks, I couldn't seep out the way I do. I chose the pitcher. I chose you, just as you are.<sup>1</sup>*

God has put my heart together again too. It's not the same as before—but it's good. He's filled those empty spaces with his grace and, surprisingly, joy. Oh, sure, there are still days when I try to tear the table apart again and make it into something else I think I'd like better. But those days are fewer and farther in between.

I touch the seams between the pieces in the table again and say, "It's a good thing God can put us back together again. I'm totally craft challenged. I'm not even allowed to use a hot glue gun!"

We both laugh and then sigh, lost in our thoughts, wondering at the way God works. He doesn't just restore; he transforms. Beauty from ashes—or brokenness.

## *The End (and the Beginning)*

.....

By this time the coffee shop is almost empty. We take one last sip and make plans to get together again soon.

"Remember," I say as we walk toward the door, "it's true—you're already amazing."

You laugh, "Okay, I'll try to believe it. But you might need to say it a few more times."

"I will. I promise."

We step into early evening. The lights outside are just starting to really shine.

And maybe, just maybe, the ones inside are too.







## 2

# Who Am I, *Really*?



Who am I?

It's a question we ask throughout our lives. Oh, maybe we don't use those exact words. But we're looking for the answer from the time we awkwardly enter the middle school cafeteria and hope for a table where we belong. It can drive us to fix our hair a certain way, date that boy, break that rule, join that club, or pursue that degree, and it can ultimately take us to the life we have now. Even as grown women, we still ask it. We just trade the junior high cafeteria for a women's retreat, corporate boardroom, or playgroup. No matter how many years go by, we still ask, "Who am I, *really*?"

And until we can answer that question, it's impossible to believe we're amazing.

I believe the desire to know who we really are has been placed within us by the heart of heaven itself. God wants us to understand who he created us to be so that we can fulfill the purpose he has for our lives. Sometimes we feel guilty

for wishing we knew more about ourselves. After all, we're not supposed to focus on ourselves, right? I often hear women say, "That's selfish." But it's not the question that matters—it's what we do with the answer.

If you want to understand yourself just so that you can do whatever you'd like for your personal gain, then it's self-centered. If your intent is to love God, others, and yourself more, then knowing who you are is one of the most unselfish things you can do. And I have a feeling that second option is why you're reading this book. Yes? So push that guilt aside and give yourself permission to explore who God made you to be.

Once we decide we want to know who we are, we still wonder, "But how can I know who I am?" This chapter is designed to give you tools to help answer that question. The following pages are broken into sections that will give you an overview of three different parts of who you are: your strengths, your skills, and your "who." Each section includes an interactive tool that will help you apply what you've read specifically to you.

A little disclaimer: All the chapters in this book have interactive tools and exercises, and you have full freedom to use them in whatever way works best for you—whether that's doing them as you go, waiting until the end, or even (gasp!) skipping them completely. For a printable version of the tools and exercises, go to [www.holleygerth.com/books](http://www.holleygerth.com/books). And if you're interested in going deeper, check out the guide in the back of the book. You can use it on your own, with a few friends, or in a group.

## *Your Strengths*

When new clients come to me for counseling, I ask them to fill out a form. In one place it asks, "What is one of your strengths?" There are far more personal questions on the page, but that's the one that's most often left blank. Women walk through the door and apologize,

“I couldn’t think of anything to put for that question.” Whatever else we may talk about in our sessions, we always work on finding strengths. It’s like mining for diamonds. I know those strengths are in there—we’ve just got to find them and bring them into the light.

It’s the same way with you. Like I said before, I wish we could have coffee together so that I could find those strengths with you in person. You’ve got them. I know it. God does too. After all, he’s the One who placed them within you.


So what exactly is a strength? *A strength is a personal characteristic that can be used on behalf of God in service to others.* Usually strengths are present throughout our lives but can be enhanced through experience or training. Strengths are part of *who we are* while skills are more about *what we do*.

..... **Find Your Strengths: 5 Minutes** .....

Circle three strengths that apply to you.

	◦ Adventurous	◦ Fair	◦ Organized
	◦ Athletic	◦ Flexible	◦ Positive
	◦ Brave	◦ Forgiving	◦ Protective
	◦ Calm	◦ Friendly	◦ Reflective
	◦ Capable	◦ Frugal	◦ Reliable
	◦ Caring	◦ Funny	◦ Resilient
	◦ Cheerful	◦ Gentle	◦ Resourceful
	◦ Considerate	◦ Gracious	◦ Responsible
	◦ Courageous	◦ Hardworking	◦ Sensitive
	◦ Creative	◦ Helpful	◦ Servant-hearted
	◦ Dedicated	◦ Honest	◦ Spontaneous
	◦ Determined	◦ Hospitable	◦ Supportive
	◦ Devoted	◦ Imaginative	◦ Talented
	◦ Easygoing	◦ Intelligent	◦ Thoughtful
	◦ Efficient	◦ Kind	◦ Trustworthy
	◦ Encouraging	◦ Loving	◦ Warm
	◦ Energetic	◦ Loyal	◦ Wise
		◦ Mature	◦ <i>Add your own...</i>

If you're still wondering if the words you circled are strengths, then you can put them through the STRENGTH test:

 <b>S</b> ervice	<i>Does it help me serve God and others?</i>
<b>T</b> ime	<i>Has it been present throughout much of my life?</i>
<b>R</b> elationships	<i>Do others see this?</i>
<b>E</b> nergy	<i>Do I feel energized when I'm living this way?</i>
<b>N</b> atural	<i>Does this come naturally to me most of the time? Or do I know God has intentionally developed this in me even though it doesn't?</i>
<b>G</b> lory	<i>Does God ultimately get the glory from it?</i>
<b>T</b> rials	<i>Even in hard times, does it usually come through somehow?</i>
<b>H</b> earth	<i>Does this really feel like a core part of who I am?</i>

## The Source of Your Strengths

How did you get your strengths? God created you with them. You are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14). Then he allows life experiences to develop your strengths even more.

For example, I love words. *Always have.* I don't like numbers. *Never have.* Are you nodding your head with me? Shaking it back and forth in disagreement? Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton, authors of *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, say there's a reason

for your particular response. They explain that our brains are actually wired to approach life in certain ways: “By the age of three each of your hundred billion neurons have formed fifteen thousand synaptic connections with other neurons. . . . Your pattern of threads, extensive, intricate and unique, is woven.”<sup>1</sup>

Pretty amazing, huh? Marcus and Donald go on to say that by age sixteen, half of these connections are lost. “Oh, no!” I thought when I first read that. But it’s actually a great big, “Oh, yes!” to who God created you to be. The connections dropped allow you to focus intensely on the remaining ones, your strengths. As Marcus and Donald say,

Your smartness and your effectiveness depend on how well you capitalize on your strongest connections. Nature forces you to shut down billions of connections precisely so that you can be freed up to exploit the ones remaining. Losing connections isn’t something to be concerned about. Losing connections is the point.<sup>2</sup>

In essence, the most vibrant connections become our strengths, and those that fade away become our weaknesses. I love this because there are parts of me I wish I could change. (I’m sure no one else feels that way.) I don’t have many decorating, details, or dinner-making connections in my brain. No, ma’am!

But it turns out that God has physically wired me with strengths that let me fulfill his purpose for my life. And he helps me do so by strategically creating certain weaknesses too. It gives “power made perfect in weakness” (see 2 Cor. 12:9) a whole new meaning. *Our divinely created strengths (fueled by God’s power) are actually supported by our weaknesses, because if we were good at everything, we wouldn’t focus on much of anything.*

Sigh of relief. Maybe no one else struggles with this, but it was some of the best news I’ve heard in a long time. For my husband’s sake, I’m still going to try to keep those weaknesses a little in check. (Who made coffee without a filter last week because she’s not so

good at details? *Ahem.*) But I'm also going to celebrate who I am and who you are—fearfully and wonderfully made, strengths and weaknesses woven together just right.

## ..... *Living in Your Strengths* .....

Once we know our strengths, we can begin to feel a lot of pressure to maintain a certain standard. We tell ourselves, “I have to *always* be friendly.” Or “I should *never* miss an opportunity to be kind.” Then when we miss the mark, we're quick to condemn ourselves. But even in our areas of strength, we'll mess up. We'll fall short. We'll make mistakes. That's why there's grace.

And we don't have to muster up the power to live in our strengths ourselves. Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (NKJV). Jesus is the source of our strengths, and he's also the One who enables us to live in them each day. We don't have to force ourselves to be “on” all the time. Instead our focus can be on remaining “in” Christ. Just ask him to use your strengths to glorify him and serve others. And if you mess up, ask forgiveness and keep on going.

Also, be gentle with yourself. When we're tired, hungry, lonely, or afraid, our strengths can quickly flip to the other extreme. Passion becomes irritability. Sensitivity turns into worry. If you find yourself having a reaction that's not helpful, just stop and take a deep breath. Think about what you're feeling and what you need.

Rather than wishing you were different, stop and say, “I'm getting away from my strengths right now.” Then ask yourself, “What do I need to do to change this reaction and respond out of one of my strengths instead?” Ask God for help, and then take action. *When you attack yourself, you side with the enemy.* God is always for you—that means you can be too. We'll all slip out of our strengths at times. The key is just getting back into them as quickly as possible. Receiving God's grace and giving it to ourselves speeds up that process.

The goal is not perfection. It's simply to be in an intimate relationship with Christ each day, fully embrace who he created us to be, and seek to fulfill the purpose he has for us. He is our greatest strength—and the One who enables us to live out all the other strengths he's placed within us.

*Hey, you . . .*

*The one wondering if you've got strengths.*

*You do.*

*The one questioning if God really even wants to use you.*

*He does.*

*You've got gifts to offer the world.*

*Things that are good and right and true.*

*No one else can make a difference like you can.*

*Like you already are.*

*Dare to believe it.*

*Dare to receive it.*

*Stand tall, be strong, just go out there and be *you*  
in your own wonderful way.*

*Today.*

## *Your Skills*

.....

Now that you know your strengths, what do you do with them? Chances are, you're already doing something. Strengths are made to be expressed. We call those expressions *skills*. *A skill is a strength expressed in a specific way that builds up others and benefits the kingdom.*

Skills can get overlooked. Besides being made fun of in the movie *Napoleon Dynamite* (okay, that was pretty hilarious), they can sometimes seem less than spiritual.

For example, you might wonder, "How does something like cooking help the kingdom?" (Besides potlucks, which are just about the best

kind of goodness this side of heaven.) In the DaySpring Cards creative area where I worked, this verse stayed on the wall for many years:

I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts. (Exod. 31:3 NIV 1984)

This verse reveals that God's hand is in our skills, in the ordinary things we do. *And they matter.* A lot. We don't all have the same skills. For example, the "all kinds of crafts" part doesn't quite fit me. If the word *craft* appears in my life, it starts with a "K" and ends with me making macaroni and cheese.

To help us figure out our skills, I've got another list. Take a look and find yours.

..... **Find Your Skills: 5 Minutes** .....

Circle three skills that apply to you.



- |                 |               |                          |
|-----------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| ◦ Acting        | ◦ Decorating  | ◦ Persevering            |
| ◦ Adapting      | ◦ Empathizing | ◦ Persuading             |
| ◦ Administering | ◦ Encouraging | ◦ Planning               |
| ◦ Advising      | ◦ Evaluating  | ◦ Prioritizing           |
| ◦ Analyzing     | ◦ Expressing  | ◦ Problem-solving        |
| ◦ Appreciating  | ◦ Growing     | ◦ Protecting             |
| ◦ Assembling    | ◦ Guiding     | ◦ Relating               |
| ◦ Believing     | ◦ Helping     | ◦ Responding             |
| ◦ Building      | ◦ Imagining   | ◦ Risk taking            |
| ◦ Challenging   | ◦ Influencing | ◦ Serving                |
| ◦ Cleaning      | ◦ Initiating  | ◦ Sharing                |
| ◦ Collaborating | ◦ Leading     | ◦ Speaking               |
| ◦ Cooking       | ◦ Listening   | ◦ Supporting             |
| ◦ Communicating | ◦ Maintaining | ◦ Teaching               |
| ◦ Connecting    | ◦ Managing    | ◦ Training               |
| ◦ Constructing  | ◦ Motivating  | ◦ Writing                |
| ◦ Coordinating  | ◦ Negotiating | ◦ <i>Add your own...</i> |
| ◦ Counseling    | ◦ Nurturing   |                          |
| ◦ Creating      | ◦ Organizing  |                          |



## Connecting Strengths and Skills

Skills Circles can be a fun way to connect strengths with skills. Draw a circle and write one of your strengths in the middle. Then draw small circles around the edge and write related skills in them. Here's a personal example:



The size of each circle is related to how much I express that strength through the skill. For example, I write a lot more than I speak.

Have fun with this! Doodle, put these in your journal, write them on napkins next time you're stuck on a plane. This isn't meant to be a big project—just a little tool.

We usually express the same core strength in many different ways. That reveals a lot about who we are and what God has called us to do in our lives.

Watch out, world! We've got skills and we're not afraid to use them. (Except for the hot glue gun. I'm still not going there. You fabulously talented crafty people handle that one for me, okay?)

## Skills for Different Seasons

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A few years ago I had the opportunity to help women go through a study called *The Significant Woman: Pursuing God and His Unique Design for Your Life*. During the study, many of the women confided things like, “I know one of my strengths is being creative. But right now I don’t even have time to take a shower because I have a new baby! I feel guilty for not doing what God wants me to do.”

While strengths stay consistent throughout our lives, the skills that display them vary depending on the season we’re in and the specific assignment God has given us. For example, when I asked those women questions, I found that they were still being creative! They told stories to their toddlers as they tucked them in, came up with new games to play, or just found interesting solutions to the everyday issues that come with having little ones. That strength was still coming through loud and clear—it just looked different than before, so it was harder for them to recognize. If you’re in a season of life where you’re not getting to use a particular skill, ask yourself, “What is the strength behind this skill?” Then see if there’s another way you’re already expressing this strength or one you’d like to try.

While what we do may change, the reason we do it stays the same. “Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). King David had the skill of shepherding. He did that first with sheep and then as a ruler of God’s people. Peter had the skill of fishing—first with actual fish and then with hearts. God will use you in a lot of different ways throughout your life.

Here’s a little confession: I can tend to focus too much on my skills, especially in the busy times of my life. I spin my wheels, wear myself out, and try to do everything at once. When I finally slow down enough to hear God’s voice, it seems what he often whispers to my heart is, “*Holley, I want your heart more than your hands.*”

Yes, our skills matter. Yes, they are important to God's purpose for our lives. But in the end, what he wants most is simply *us*. Our hearts. Our dreams. Our days. Then what we do with our skills is just a natural response—and ordinary activities such as cooking or cleaning become just as sacred as leading a church or going on a mission trip.

*I've been thinking of you right there in the middle of  
the ordinary . . .*

*changing diapers, writing reports,  
driving, cleaning, fixing, blessing.*

*Ordinary is hard for me.*

*Is it ever hard for you?*

*I like the new.*

*The exciting.*

*And yet it seems God has been whispering  
that I need to look at the ordinary with new eyes.*

*All that seems small can be really BIG.*

*And what we do every day  
matters more than we know,  
more than we see.*

*You are making a difference.*

*You deserve to be applauded—  
for just digging in, doing what you do,  
keeping at it no matter what.*

*So from the bottom of my heart . . .*

*THANK YOU*

*for all you do.*

*(I've got a feeling it brings joy to God too.)*



## Your "Who"

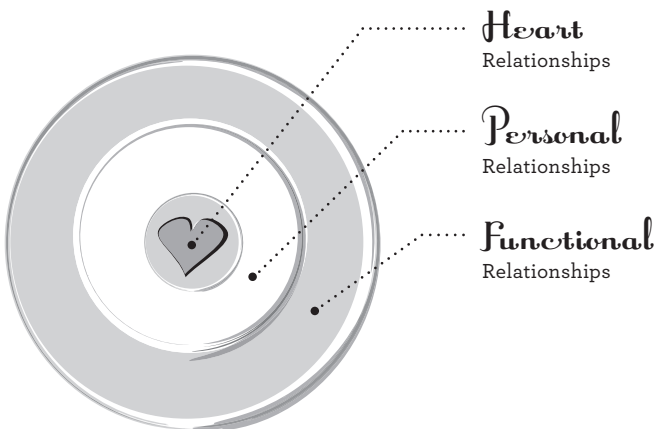
Our strengths and skills aren't meant just for us. So the next step is to take some time to consider who shares our lives and stories. Before we do so, I'd like to bust the myth among women that goes something like this: "Everyone else has lots of relationships, but not me."

Facebook, Twitter, and all the other social media sites out there can make it seem as if the whole world is one big party and we're not invited. The enemy can use that to lie to us and make us feel alone. But it's not true.

According to an article in *USA Today*, 25 percent of Americans do not have even one friend they can confide in. Including family, the average number of close relationships is still only two.<sup>3</sup> What I want to highlight here is this: *you are doing okay in your relationships.*

That being said, let's take a closer look at the relationships in your life. I've created a little diagram to help us out.

### ..... Your Social Circles: 5 Minutes .....



- **Heart Relationships**

This is your inner circle, those with whom you can truly share who you are, the ups and downs. Some family members and your close friends would be here.

- **Personal Relationships**

These people share your life in your neighborhood, church, work, family, and so on. You care about each other, but they are more casual relationships than the first group.

- **Functional Relationships**

These connections are very casual, and interactions have a practical purpose. You might call them acquaintances.

.....

Think about names that would be in each of the circles above and write them there if you'd like. You don't have to include everyone you know—just enough to give you a broad overview of who's in your life and how you're connecting to others.

When we look at the life of Jesus, we see he had different types of relationships just like those in the previous chart. He had three disciples who were closest to him, then the twelve, the forty, and the multitudes.

Like our skills, our relationships will vary with the seasons and stages of our lives. When my husband and I first got married, we moved to a new town. I'd had several close friends in college but now suddenly found myself alone. It took several years of trying to connect with people (and a lot of praying!) before I formed new bonds where I now lived. So if you find yourself in a season of fewer relationships, give yourself grace and know it's most likely not about you. If you find you're intentionally holding back or avoiding people, talk to a counselor or someone you trust so your heart can heal and you can reach out again.

Connections to others impact our lives now and our legacies forever. As DaySpring cofounder Dean Kerns once said, "All we take with us into eternity are our relationships with God and each other."

## Who You're Called to Serve

After you know your strengths (who you are) and skills (what you do) as well as understanding the relationships in your life, then you're ready to explore who you're specifically called to serve.

Yes, we're all called to love each other. And yet there's usually a group of people that has a special place in your heart. You might love working with kids, women, older adults, or inner-city youth. Knowing your *who* can help you make strategic choices about which opportunities to pursue and which to pass up.

Lisa-Jo Baker (who blogs at [www.thegypsymama.com](http://www.thegypsymama.com)) is an amazing woman who has found her *who*. Raised in South Africa, she's done humanitarian work all over the world. Right in the middle of that journey, she discovered that she felt deeply called to serve moms with young kids. She sent me this email:

I am at an incredible leadership conference in the Pacific Northwest. There are primarily men here, and they are discussing some groundbreaking work their organizations have done to bring justice to the poor and afflicted. For many years that is the kind of work I have been involved in also.

But I have consistently felt this call on my heart to speak into the lives of women. Young mothers and wives who feel that what they do isn't important. So I blog. I write my heart out to this beautiful audience who need to be encouraged as I wish someone had done for me. Because young mothers and struggling women have great needs too. And it is my delight to be used by God to be part of the plan for meeting them.<sup>4</sup>

A few months after writing this email, Lisa-Jo became the social media manager for [www.ingrainme.com](http://www.ingrainme.com), a website for the hearts of women. One of the other cofounders and I had been praying about who would be the right person to step into that role. In one of those rare moments, it seemed God almost audibly put Lisa-Jo's name on

my heart. Without knowing anything, Lisa-Jo sent me another email saying she was resigning from her current position and asking us to keep her in mind if anything ever became available with (in)courage. When we called Lisa-Jo and shared that we had already been thinking of her, the “yes!” she responded with came easily because she knew (in)courage reached the exact group of people she felt called to serve.

While it seemed to happen quickly, Lisa-Jo found her *who* through a journey that took years. The same is often true of us. And yet there are usually glimpses along the way. Our heart is drawn to a particular group. We get excited when we know we’ll be around a certain type of people. We feel at home with kids and out of place with teens. We love serving seniors but would rather skip out on nursery duty. We feel drawn to families rather than individual women. There are clues that lead us to who God wants us to serve.

..... **Find Your Who: 5 Minutes** .....

◦ I feel especially drawn to:

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◦ I’m at my best when I’m with:

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◦ God has given me a tender spot in my heart for:

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◦ My strengths and skills seem to help:

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What you wrote might be very general (for example, “my family” or “women”), or it might be very specific (“children with special needs under the age of five”). Either way is okay.

Also, your *who* may change throughout your life. Right now you might be focused on toddlers because you’ve got three of them! Later on, you might shift your focus to mentoring college students.

It’s also okay if you don’t find a specific *who* right now. As mentioned before, we’re all called to love each other. So if nothing comes to mind here, just serve whoever is in your life right now!

When an opportunity that seems to fit with your strengths, skills, and *who* comes along, you can use the tools in this chapter as filters to see if it’s really in the center of what you’re created to do. If it is, you can be fairly sure God is giving you the green light! If not, ask him if he specifically wants you to accept it as a special assignment that’s outside of what you’re called to do most of the time.

your strengths + your skills + who you’re called to serve  
= you making a difference in the world in your own  
amazing way

## ..... *God’s Heart for Who You Really Are* .....

Even when we know our strengths, skills, and how we best connect with others, it can still be intimidating to think about living all of that out. That’s especially true if we’re a bit on the insecure side (I am).

Here comes a confession: *I’m intimidated by you.* And by you, I mean women. Put me in a room of my peers, and it won’t be long before my hands are sweaty and I’m shaking in my boots (yes, the cute ones I bought from TJ Maxx in the hopes they’d somehow hypnotize everyone into liking me—you know what I’m talking about).

It got so bad I even took drastic measures a few summers ago. Disclaimer: There is some serious dorkiness coming in the next few sentences. If you’re offended by that, you should stop reading now.



I went to the library and checked out all the social skills books. The ones like *How to Have Friends and Influence People without Relying on Your TJ Maxx Boots*. And I read *all* of them. I know—don't say I didn't warn you.

Through my ambitious pursuit of coolness, I discovered that my insecurities came from a much deeper place than an inability to make coherent small talk at times. What I thought might be some sort of social ailment turned out to be a spiritual one.

Inside a voice whispered, "You're not enough." Depending on the day, an extra word might be thrown into that sentence:

- You're not *pretty* enough.
- You're not *outgoing* enough.
- You're not *likeable* enough.

So I kept spinning my wheels on an endless treadmill. I'd make progress in one area, only to realize I had miles to go in another. Exhausted, I finally began pondering and praying.

"Lord," I asked, "why do women feel as if we're not enough?"

It seemed I heard a whisper in response: "*Because they're not.*"

For a moment I thought I had some holy static happening.

"Excuse me, God, it sounded like you said we're not enough. Could you repeat that, pretty please?"

Again, gently and firmly, "You are not enough."

By then I started thinking perhaps my heart had dialed the wrong number and the devil was on the line. But in that pause it seemed God finished the sentence: "You are not enough . . . *in me you are so much more.*"

- We are *much more* than pretty . . . we are wonderfully made.
- We are *much more* than likeable . . . we are deeply loved.
- We are *much more* than okay . . . we are daughters of the King.

I think the enemy tricks us into believing we are not enough because he knows if we discover the truth, we'll be unstoppable.

If you've embraced that lie like I did, then together we can start trading it for the truth. We are chosen, cherished, created women who have all we need to fulfill God's plans for our lives. He has made us just as he wants us to be. We have something to offer that no one else can bring . . . and the world is waiting.

Girls, let's stop shaking in our boots and instead start standing tall for him together.

Let's use our strengths, skills, and relationships to make a difference.

Let's be who we are, *really*.

I can't do it alone—are you with me?