

Discovering the Shadow of My Doubts

Chapter 1 ~ From *A Confident Heart* by Renee Swope

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

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

My heart was wrestling with self-doubt regarding an event I would be speaking at the next day. I had felt honored, confident, and excited when the leader called months before to invite me to speak at their women's event. Now I questioned whether I should have accepted the invitation in the first place. I couldn't help but wonder, *What's wrong with me?*

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

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

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

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

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

Now here I was years later, a grown woman in ministry, doubting myself again. It was getting old. I wondered if perhaps my self-doubt was a sign I was in the wrong calling. I mean,

if God calls you to do something, shouldn't you feel confident about it? Shouldn't you want to do it? Shouldn't self-assurance be part of God's equipping?

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

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

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

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

I just stood there looking at the humongous shadow. Then I bent down to put my makeup bag in my suitcase and sensed God whispering to my heart: *You can only see the shadow because you have turned away from the light. Turn back toward the light.*

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

Listening to Doubt's Whispers

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

"I can't do this."

"Things will never change."

"My life isn't going to get better."

"I'll never have the confidence I need."

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

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

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

Maybe, like me, you have wondered why you struggle with self-doubt. Or maybe you’ve asked God to take away your insecurities and give you a more confident personality, yet you are still waiting for that to happen. Perhaps you are good at hiding your doubts and no one but you knows the paralyzing power they have on your life.

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

“It’s too hard.”

“You might as well quit.”

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

It’s Not Supposed to Be This Way

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

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

Over the past few years, I’ve found lasting confidence by living daily in the security of God’s promises. He’s led me beyond believing *in Him* to really *believing Him* by relying on the power of His Words and living like they are true no matter what my feelings tell me. Some days I do better than others, and you will too. But I’ve found that when I choose to dwell in the assurance of Whose I am and who I am in Him, I have a confident heart.

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

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

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

Next, we'll identify the triggers of our self-doubt and the destructive effects they have on our lives and relationships. We'll learn how to live beyond the shadows of doubt by holding each of our insecurities up to the light of God's Word. We'll talk about the struggles, uncertainty, and fears we all face and how we can learn to actively trust God's heart as we process our never-ending thoughts, our always-changing emotions, and our oh-so-busy and often confusing lives through the transforming truth of God's Word. We will find our heart's confidence in Christ as we learn how to rely on the power of His promises in our everyday lives.

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

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

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

I also want you to take time to answer the reflection questions after the prayer in each chapter. These will also be an essential part of processing, internalizing, and applying God's

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

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

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

Praying God's Promises

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

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

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

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. What is your earliest memory of doubting yourself or feeling insecure?
2. Has insecurity ever kept you from doing something?
3. Describe how it makes you feel when doubt whispers:
"I can't do this."
"Things will never change."
"My life isn't going to get better."

“It’s too hard.”

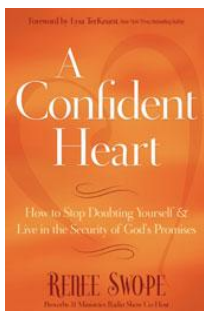
“I might as well quit.”

4. Describe what happens in your heart when you read God’s words:
 - “Those who hope in me will not be disappointed” (Isa. 49:23).
 - “See, I am doing a new thing!” (Isa. 43:19).
 - “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).
 - “All things are possible to [her] who believes” (Mark 9:23 NASB).

5. What do you think hinders you most from living with God-confidence on a consistent basis? Is there a promise listed above that speaks to your greatest need right now?

6. How would you describe a woman with a confident heart?

7. Read Jeremiah 17:7. What does this verse promise and encourage you to do? Think of one situation where you could live in the power of this promise and describe what that would look like this week.



This chapter is taken from Renee Swope’s new book *A Confident Heart*.

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Renee Swope’s passion is to lead women to live confidently in Christ by showing them how to *rely on* and *live in* the power of God’s promises in their everyday lives. For more information, about Renee and her ministry visit www.ReneeSwope.com.

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