

CHAPTER 1

IDENTITY

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THIS IS WHO I AM

“For You formed my innermost parts; You knit me [together] in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks and praise to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was being formed in secret, and intricately and skillfully formed [as if embroidered with many colors] in the depth of the earth. Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book, were all written the days that were appointed for me, when as yet there was not one of them [even taking shape]”

Psalms 139: 13-16

CHILDHOOD WONDER

If you were to ask my mother for two words to describe me, she would call me confident and brave. According to her, I was born with those two characteristics already being a part of me, but believe me, it wasn't always the case.

I grew up in the '80s, in a community where the colour of your skin and the texture of your hair was the standard of beauty by which you were measured. It dictated the way people responded to you and your level of importance in an unseen hierarchy.

As a little girl, I could never understand why was I the one to look different. My cousins, who I spent my childhood with, were extremely light skinned with straight, long, beautiful hair that you could run your fingers through. The picture of what it meant to not only be beautiful but to be accepted.

I also had a family member who incessantly teased me about having a big forehead and although in hindsight I see it as the teasing of a young boy, at the time, there was nothing funny about it. I didn't see it at first, but the more I heard it, the more I believed it.

I can remember getting home from school one day, after being teased by an older boy who decided that the name "Black Cat" was a fitting description of how he saw me. That day, as I stared at myself in the mirror, tears rolled down my face and I wondered how I could make myself look different. What I could do to change the way I looked so that I could be more acceptable to the people who had placed a label on me.

Something you need to know is that I grew up in a home with two loving parents who always affirmed me. My mom has always been my greatest support and she constantly reminded me how special I was and that God loved me. She spoke life into me.

But on this day, staring into the mirror I didn't believe it. I felt that somehow God had made a mistake. I cried and cried because there

was nothing I liked about the way I looked. I was disappointed in the picture that was looking back at me. On that day, through the negative experience brought about by that bullying boy, two things happened. Firstly, I decided that no one was ever going to make me feel less-than ever again, and also, that I would stand up for myself against anyone who dared to come at me.

So, while staring at a face I wished I could change, I discovered the powerful concept of self-talk. I'm not really sure why I said it out loud, maybe because it seemed to be an important moment, but I said:

"Reneë, there is no room for tears. You need to toughen up, and don't let anyone bring you down."

The second thing that happened was that I stopped enjoying looking at myself in the mirror and began to hate taking photos. I dreaded having my photo taken because I never wanted to see the image it portrayed. Whether it was for a family outing or for school photo day, I would literally freeze and want to climb out of my skin. Actually, it became one of the biggest reasons my mother and I got into arguments because she believed in capturing moments and I believed in not wanting to capture my face forever.

IMAGINING MYSELF CONFIDENT

My childhood was, what many people would call, idyllic. My parents showered me and my brothers with love, care and attention. They made sure that I knew how important I was to them. Unfortunately, my identity and self-worth were being narrated by external influences and it caused me to create an identity that worked for me. This identity wouldn't allow anyone to walk all over me, it did everything to not stand out too much, was not sentimental and believed I could quickly move on from any crisis. One who built relationships but was hesitant for people to get too close for fear of being reliant on them. I rarely asked for help and believed that if I was just tough, I could handle anything that came my way. What started out as confidence quickly became a crutch that I proudly carried like a badge and in the process, my heart became hardened, I lacked empathy and I believed

that no one could get to me. Sure, I was strong, but my confidence came from the wrong place.

You see, our identity is established long before we were even in our mother's wombs. Genesis 1: 27 says: "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

This means that what we would look like was already established long before we were in our mother's wombs.

God already knew. He knew how you would look and why you would look the way you did. He already knew who you were meant to be. Unfortunately, the world distorts that view. Along the journey of life, that image gets corrupted by the way people treat us and by the things they say to us. It shapes us into what it sees as acceptable, worthy or significant.

It paints for us a picture of how we could look better and be better so that our identity gets wrapped up in who they say we are, as opposed to who God created us to be. It begins to dictate how we see ourselves, the things we do, the relationships we pursue and the path we follow in life. It becomes the badge we wear as validation. We feel that this is who we are because of what "they" told us.

In an age of social media it seems that now, more than ever, at every turn we are getting messages constantly trying to tell us who we are. That we are not good enough as we are, that we should strive for bigger and better no matter the fallout.

So, how do we discover what our true identity is?

FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

I was 19 years old, happily going through my teens as only a teen girl can, but I felt like something was missing. A friend of my parents came to visit one day and before she was about to leave she asked to speak to me. I was very surprised because I didn't know her very well and couldn't imagine what it was she had to say. I can still remember her words as if it was just the other day. She said,

“The Lord wants me to ask you a question. He wants to know if you know who you are.”

Well, I burst into tears. Right there, in front of a relative stranger, I balled my eyes out. It was a question I had been asking myself for a long time and to hear someone else say it out loud shook me. She told me to read Psalms 139:13-16 because God wanted me to remember that I am His, that I am His image bearer and that He had made me fearfully and wonderfully. This was a turning point for me. I began to read scripture that spoke to who my Creator was and who He had created me to be.

Labels take away your value and limit your potential. They replace your true identity in Christ with false identities. When you allow the labels of others to define who you are, you function in the confines of that label. Your true image gets distorted by the opinions of others, and you begin to answer to their perceived image of you. You are only who or what you answer to and who you are is not what you have done or what was done to you. When you begin to understand and embrace who God has called you to be, you will not answer to anything less. You will remember that He calls you daughter, His beloved, His workmanship, made in His image.

It is time for you to rise up, to cast off the labels, to discover your identity and walk in the plan and purpose that God has for your life.

I have tried and tested a few things, but these are the things that helped me:

- As a teenager, I discovered a scripture that became my power declaration. I would quote it over and over again as a reminder of who I really was at my core. This is something I still do today.
- I learnt how to shut off the negative words that went against what I believed to be true.
- I began to journal consistently. I have always loved words and this is my outlet to get clarity and focus.
- I became very careful of who I spent my time with. I didn't always get it right but I became very aware of who I allowed to speak into my life and be an influence.

PINK PURPOSE

My own journey developed in me a resilient attitude, a sense of confidence and an ability to embrace who I am; flaws and all. The thing is that in order to fulfill your purpose, you must first know and celebrate who you are.

What do you want your journey to teach you?

LET'S PAUSE AND REFLECT HERE

PURPOSE QUESTIONS:

Before you imagine this big overhaul, I want you to think about some of the things people have said that caused you to question who you are.

Now ask yourself:

- Is it true?
- Who am I at my core?
- Who did God create me to be?
- How do I want to be remembered?

Because of a journey that started out as a little girl, today I can confidently answer these questions without hesitation. How about you? Take the time to pause, reflect and write down your responses.

This will be your first step in your own journey of discovery.

PURPOSE ACTION:

Write down 3 things you love about yourself.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____