

# You Do You

*Own your own story*



I'd attended a Christian school through eighth grade, so ninth grade was the first year I attended public school. And all I wanted to do was fit in. In each class I'd notice the girls who hurried in to get a front row seat and the ones who beelined for the last row. I'd observe which ones might be new like me and which ones exchanged glances and notes like they'd known each other forever. I was searching for my tribe.

Within about a week I'd started eating lunch with a group of girls who had grown up together. They all bought pizza and fries from the school cafeteria, and I brought apples, yogurt, and my mom's homemade chocolate chip cookies. They all had boyfriends, and I was completely inexperienced in that department. Their language was pretty salty, and the worst words to ever pass my lips were "shut up." Despite our differences, I wanted desperately to fit in.

One day I pulled out a chair at the end of the table, sat



down, and unzipped my red lunch box. The other girls were going off about some teacher they didn't like. Jumping in like I was as streetwise as they were, I wanted them to know I thought that teacher was as horrible as they did.

"I know, right?" I agreed. "She's a #%&\* -ing #@\*\$ \*!&#!"

The table fell silent as six pairs of eyes stared at me, shocked at the foul words that had just fallen out of my mouth. Honestly, I was as shocked as anyone.

Finally, one girl broke the silence.

"Girl, don't even. You're not doing it right. Just . . . don't."

I felt my face flush with warmth. I had been trying to be someone I wasn't, and I'd been called out.

So, yeah, it was pretty embarrassing.

That hard lesson has had a lasting impact. Though she acted a little more disgusted than I thought she needed to, that girl was essentially saying: *You do you*. And believe me, I did. I was willing to work on and improve lots of things, but cursing wasn't going to be one of them!

It was better to be *me*, than try to be someone else. And it is better to be *you* than to try to be someone else.

Not long after that, I started looking for a different group of friends to hang out with.

Part of the problem was that I felt self-conscious about being one of the "smart kids." Nothing about "Principal's Gold Star Honor Roll" says, "Here's a cool kid you might want to hang with." Because so many other students weren't interested in achieving academically, I didn't want to be labeled as the smart nerd.

Did I still want to achieve? Yeah, I did. But did I want to stand out among my peers? Nope. Not for being the geeky girl.



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But by playing down my gifts and abilities, by failing to honor what made me unique, by trying to blend in with the crowd, I was denying who God had made me to be. I was choosing to sit in the backseat when I should have been gripping the steering wheel of my own life.

You know what it's like to sit in the backseat of the driver's ed car while another kid drives for the first time? When you're not sure if you will live or die? The choices I was making to downplay who I really was should have scared me *that much*.

Being in control of your life really is like driving a car. Whether you're thinking about signing up for driver's ed right now, practicing driving around huge vacant parking lots with your mom, or if you're already pretty confident behind the wheel, I want you to hear that God meant you to be the operator in the driver's seat of your own life. Yes, ultimately, he's in charge, but he's given you this life—and it's yours to choose how it goes.

Until now your parents have been doing a lot of the steering. They decided where you would live, what you would eat, what you would wear, where you'd attend school, and whether you'd attend church. But right now is the season when you are starting to slide into the driver's seat of your own life. Increasingly, you're going to be making more of those choices for yourself. And what I want you to hear is that you are the person who is ultimately responsible for who you will become.

If that sounds like a heavy load, I get it. I've walked in your shoes. And that's exactly why I want to be in this with you. Think of me as that aunt who's teaching you to drive on weekends. I want you to hear that this is your thing, that you're the one behind the wheel, and I want to share with

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you some of the helpful tips and tools I've picked up along the way—and possibly point out the ditches, hairpin turns, drop-offs, and cliffs you'll want to avoid.

If learning to drive is still ahead of you, and the thought of it freaks you out, let me say it another way: *You are the author of your story and, with God's help, you are responsible for becoming all you can be.* And part of owning that story is not only writing what comes next, but it's accepting and integrating what God has given to you and what's already unfolded. If your parents weren't married when you were born, that's part of your story. If you were reading words off cereal boxes when you were three years old, that's part of your story. If you were diagnosed with childhood cancer when you were five, that's part of your story. If you started singing solos in the church choir at seven, that's part of your story. Some of the pieces of your story are ones you would choose again in a heartbeat. Other parts of your story might be ones you wish had been different. In both cases, God has made the plans and he's poised you to begin writing a beautiful story for the rest of your life once you own the chapters that have already been written.

When you take the time to pause and consider your story, you have the greatest ability to notice the pieces you're working with, what you've learned from, what healing work needs to be done, and what choices you want to make to move forward. Denial or half-truths prohibit you from moving forward.

Owning your story is an act of strength.

And if you're not where you want to be today, it doesn't matter so much how you got there as much as it matters that



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you acknowledge that where you are is not where you want to be. You are the author . . . so own it.

Part of owning *my* story is owning that I'm a girl who has been raised in the church. I'm a preacher's kid. I know the Bible, and I've had a personal relationship with God for most of my life. I have memorized a few Scriptures in my life, but to be honest, I'm super grateful for Google. Many times I know that certain words are *in* the Bible, but I don't know *exactly* where to find them. But as a young girl my mother made sure I knew this verse in particular: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jer. 29:11). I grew up memorizing passages of Scripture that taught me my life could be abundantly full and overflowing (John 10:10 AMP).

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I'll give you more of the details later, but there was a moment when I woke up to the realization that my life had veered from the plotline of my expectations. The vision God had given me for my life didn't match my actual life at all. And that's when I had to choose to own my story and re-craft it into one in which I was being all that God had made me to be.

The fact that that was such a difficult season for me is one of the reasons I'm excited to be taking this journey with you. My prayer is that, by exposing some of the ways I lost who I really was, I can spare you some of the struggles I've stumbled through along the way.

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As we take this trek together, I want to encourage you to be as honest as you can be. Moving forward begins with telling the truth, the truth that God already knows but wants us to be honest about for the benefit of our own healing. “For He knows the secrets of the heart” (Ps. 44:21).

It takes courage to admit that

- You’ve experienced hurts you wouldn’t have chosen.
- You want something different for your life than what you’ve seen around you.
- You really don’t know what’s in your future.
- You may not know how to achieve the dreams in your heart.

I know what I’m talking about when I say that it takes Someone outside of ourselves to reset what’s broken, put back together what’s been fractured, give us a vision for a beautiful future, and give us the courage, determination, and tools to go after it.



What about your story?

Maybe you haven’t seen examples of a strong healthy marriage, but that’s something you want for your life.

Maybe you’re afraid you’re not good enough or smart enough or pretty enough or talented enough.

Maybe you’ve got your eye on a demanding career, but you also want to get married and raise children.



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Maybe you're afraid you don't have what it takes to get where you want to be.

I get it. Believe me, I get it.

If I could sit down next to you when you are feeling these aches and pains and wonderings, I'd look at you and tell you the truth.

Your life does not have to be defined by the story you've lived thus far.

It is not limited by what you can and can't see today.

God has beautiful plans for your life that you can discover over time.

Most of all, I want you to hear that you've got this. You can do this.

When I was just starting high school, I was hiding my light. I didn't even know where the switch was to turn it on. You might be there too.

What's most important is that you know it's your responsibility to show up for your life. And as you learn more about who you are and about God's good intentions for your life, you're not only going to show up, but you're also going to kill it.

Beloved, dare to trust that God's desire is for you to live out a beautiful story He designed with you in mind.

Choose to own your story.

Be honest.

Tell the truth.

The good, the bad, and the ugly. Whatever happened, you survived. You are still here.

Own your story.

The girl you want to be is depending on you.

# Reflections for the Rescue

## REMEMBER

Owning your story is an act of strength.

## REFLECT

- Are you comfortable owning your story? Why or why not?
- Do you believe with all your heart that God has given you the power to create a beautiful story when you show up for your life?
- Are you willing to make the effort to discover and embrace the goodness God has for you?

## RESPOND

Own your story. Over the next seven days, spend a few minutes each day writing down defining moments in your life's story.

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2 CORINTHIANS 12:9; PSALM 15:1–2; JOHN 8:32;  
JEREMIAH 12:3; PSALM 139:1; PSALM 145:18



# No One Else Like You



I want to tell you about a teenage girl who might be a little like you or a lot like you. Her name is Kariss.

When Kariss was in sixth grade, she was struggling in school. Academics were difficult. Good grades didn't come easy. Kariss worked really hard to succeed. When she came home from school, she'd grab a snack and start studying at the kitchen table. She even stayed up late studying. And some mornings she'd get up early to prepare for tests. But achieving in academics continued to be a challenge.

Basically, schoolwork was not her jam, but since the law says kids must attend school, she hung in there and did her best.

A friend of Kariss' mom encouraged her to homeschool Kariss. If you're not familiar with homeschooling, it is literally *exactly* what it sounds like. Kariss began learning at home. While some people think that means getting to bake cookies, walk the dog, and play basketball in the driveway

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all day, kids who are homeschooled are responsible for learning the same content as students in traditional schools. Now you know.

When Kariss finished her core classes each day, she was given time to develop other interests. Kariss wanted to learn how to sew, and her mom pulled out the sewing machine, showed her how it worked, and set her free to create. Kariss was really creative, so her mom found someone who could give Kariss drawing lessons. When she was given the opportunity to explore and discover other parts of who she was, Kariss began to flourish. She was happier because she was being the girl God created her to be.

And I got to see it firsthand, because Kariss is my daughter. (You saw that coming, didn't you?)

Okay, yeah, so I'm a little biased. I think she's amazing.

Today Kariss is married and she's the mom to two young children. She owns her own business photographing celebrities, weddings, family portraits, and pet snakes. She is killing it, professionally. Her home is beautifully decorated in her signature style. Seriously, in any given moment it is Instagram-ready. In her free time—lol, she really doesn't have much free time—she sews amazing clothes for her children.

While there's no way I can take any credit for Kariss' current awesomeness, I do think that one of the reasons she's thriving today is because she had the opportunity to figure out and embrace who she really was. I didn't want her to be a carbon copy of me! The world has plenty of people-pleasing copycats. Everyone is so interested in being the same. More than anything, I wanted for Kariss to be Kariss.



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To be comfortable in her own beautiful, glorious, unique, custom-made skin.

Maybe you can relate. If schoolwork comes easily for you, another area might take more effort for you. Maybe you dread running the timed mile in gym class so much that you fake a heart attack at the bus stop in order to miss school. Or perhaps when your art teacher asks everyone in class to sketch an apple, yours looks like it's been run over by an eighteen-wheeler. Or maybe when you had to give a three-minute talk in front of your history class you were so nervous that sweat was dripping from your face and hitting the floor (and the guy in the front row). We've all got something, right? Something at which we don't excel. And don't enjoy. Some are mildly unpleasant, and others feel absolutely death-dealing.

What I wanted for Kariss was what I want for you as well. You might have the kind of wildly creative gifts that God gave to Kariss. Or, like me, you might be more inclined toward academic achievement. And, if we're keeping it real, you might have *no idea* yet what makes you *you*. That's cool. Because together we're going to start noticing both what's inside of you, what God has knit into the fiber of your being, and what's outside of you, all that you're experiencing and discovering. I'm not asking you to have it all figured out yet. I'm just asking you to *notice* what it is that lights your fire.

Maybe you feel a spark of satisfaction when you pick up the newspaper for an elderly neighbor from the curb each morning and deliver it to her doorstep.

Maybe you glow inside when you complete a really, really, really hard calculus problem.

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Maybe you feel a warm sense of accomplishment when you cook an amazing creative dinner for your family with flavors that pop and delight.

Maybe your joy is ignited when you pen a poem.

Maybe your happy place is kindled when you reorganize your family's chaotic, dusty, sticky pantry, straightening and ordering and labeling. (Ahhh, the thought of that is making me happy inside right now.)

You are uniquely designed, so the person God created you to be is necessarily different than your sister and your best friend and that girl at school who gets straight A's. And that's the way it should be. So I'm just asking you to begin to notice what it is that makes you *you*. And one of the ways to do that is to notice what lights you up inside.

Thankfully, you don't need to be homeschooled in order to discover the unique masterpiece that God lovingly designed you to be. Although I wasn't homeschooled, I feel like I had the opportunity to entertain a host of possibilities as I was growing up. My parents encouraged me to live with wonder, my teachers gave me the courage to explore, my friends allowed me the chance to play, and my world offered me the opportunity to learn and grow. Fall and spring days were filled with homework, school activities, and play with neighborhood friends. The summer months held visits to my grandparents, slumber parties with cousins, and long, boring days with an occasional trip to the library.

From the vantage point of my childhood, I *could* hope and dream. I had a picture of what I thought my grown-up life might look like. I imagined my future family, my future career, and the future places I'd live. I still have the paper



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with the names of my twelve kids written on it. I figured I would either be a teacher or a famous actress and that I'd live close to my family but have a second home near the beach.

I figured I would honor those desires when I was old enough. You know, when I was “grown and free.” (Who knew that escaping childhood meant giving up naps, free room and board, and summers off?)

Every book I read and every person I met introduced me to more of the world that I could experience. I thought of the people I might one day meet, the places I might one day travel, and things I might one day do. And while I have yet to meet Julia Roberts, explore Australia, or release my own album, I haven't forgotten the thoughts that went through my head before I shifted into adulthood.

My thoughts, dreams, and expectations had room to run.

I believed in the idea of a masterpiece.

I've believed that all parts of my life—the good, the bad, and the ugly—could come together in the hands of the person who gave me life. I believed through ups and downs that He knew what He was doing and that He could make something beautiful of my life in His time.

And what I believed for me, I also believe for you. I believe that you are a masterpiece. I believe that God designed you for a special purpose. I believe that all the parts of your life—the good, the bad, and the ugly—can come together in the hands of the person who gave you life. I believe that through the ups and downs God knows what He is doing and that *He is making something beautiful of your life* in His time.

Will you decide to believe it with me?

I know a bazillion reasons can make this beautiful

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possibility seem unlikely. When girls at school snub you, or ignore you, or outright harass you, it's hard to believe that you are special. When bad things happen in your home, between family members, it can be difficult to believe that you matter so very deeply to God. When all you want is to be noticed by that *one boy*, and he doesn't even know you're alive, it may be a stretch to imagine that God created you as a marvelous masterpiece. When you just want to fit in, you might not want to be a one-of-a-kind unique soul. And it might be hard to believe that God created everything about you—your brain, your body, your heart, your soul—for a particular purpose. So if you're struggling to believe that who you are is precious and purposeful and altogether lovely, I feel you.

That's why, for today, I'm asking you to trust me. In this moment, I'm asking you to give me the benefit of the doubt. I'm asking you to take my word that you are a unique masterpiece. You are. And we're going to notice different ways that you can figure out just what that means for your life today and for the beautiful, messy, unknowable future that God has planned for you.

When I'm with my women friends, I'll mention the "girl" who's still inside each one of us. And when I say that, I mean that girl who lived with wonder and enthusiasm and possibility—whether she was climbing a tree, or drawing with crayons, or flying a kite, or homeschooling her Barbie dolls. I believe that "that girl"—the carefree girl we were when we were less self-conscious!—can give each one of us clues to who we were designed to be, whether we're fourteen, nineteen, forty-two, or eighty-seven!



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I want to challenge you to explore what's possible. Be brave enough to believe that a uniquely beautiful life can be yours. As you notice all the ways that God has uniquely designed you to be who only you can be and to do what only you can do, you honor that girl inside you.



You, my friend, are a work of art. And your life can be beautiful.

As any artist will tell you, the key to creating a wonderful work of art is to be committed to the process. Beautiful creations take time. Sometimes they can be messy. And the artist often wrestles with how to produce a winning representation of what lives in the heart, mind, and soul.

The same is true for you. The key to a beautiful life is to keep going. You must decide not to get hung up or stuck. Don't get bogged down in the mess that comes with making a masterpiece. Choose to commit to the creative process.

Choose to  
commit  
to the  
creative  
process.



Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago” (NLT).

The girl you want to be—or the girl you aren't sure you

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can become—is already a divinely inspired masterpiece. Every day that you live, you have the opportunity to do the work of honoring the plan God has for you.

And I want you to know that you have a friend.

I count it as my mission and privilege to share lessons I learned from my journey in the hopes of saving you a few bumps and bruises along the way.

This is your life. You've got this.

And this is me, your new friend, leaning in close with a smile to tell you this:

You have everything you need to create a life you love.