

Breaking Free From the Spirit of Inferiority

I grew up in the South, where football is a religion. Every boy I knew dreamed of becoming a star quarterback. When my relatives gathered for meals, the conversation usually revolved around whether Auburn would beat Alabama this year.

I felt like sliding under my chair during those moments. I was not a football player—and there was no chance of me becoming one. I didn't have big enough biceps to throw a 50-yard pass, and I didn't have the frame to tackle a 200-pound guy. I felt like a total wimp. I assumed that when God handed out physical talents, I was stuck at the back of the line.

Thankfully my lack of athletic skills didn't cripple me entirely. I had other abilities, like writing—and I ended up being the editor of my high school yearbook. But a cloud of inferiority followed me everywhere. No matter how successful I was in other areas, I branded myself a failure because I didn't measure up as an athlete.

It was only through the power of the Holy Spirit that I eventually overcame this painful sense of disqualification. But now I meet people every day who are slaves of inferiority. Some feel intellectually challenged; some struggle with a physical disability; others are terrified of speaking publicly because they are insecure about their appearance or weight. Others were bullied or abused, and the cruel words they heard on a playground or at the dinner table were stamped into their brains with a hot iron.

What about you? Do you find it difficult to describe your positive qualities? Are you haunted by labels that were pinned on you by parents, siblings, teachers or classmates? Were you ever called "stupid," "fatso," "dunce," "dork," "lazy,"

“slut,” “queer” or the N-word? Words are like knives, and they can leave permanent scars. If inferiority is hindering you in your relationship with God and others, consider taking this journey toward healing:

1. Let God change your self-image. The Bible is full of stories of insecure people who ended up doing heroic things. God loves to use “powerless” people “to shame those who are powerful” (1 Cor. 1:27, NLT). Sarah was barren, yet God called her a mother of nations. Moses was a stutterer, yet God called him to confront Pharaoh. David was an embarrassment to his father before he became a king. If you feel inferior, you are in good company!

2. Bury the lies you’ve believed. False beliefs will not collapse without a fight. You must identify the lies you believe about yourself, and then renounce them. This is not something you can do alone; you must be willing to talk about your inferiority with a counselor, a pastor or trusted friends.

When I was in my 20s, I asked two friends to pray with me because I felt so inferior. This deep insecurity made me shy and fearful, but I wanted to be confident so that I could grow spiritually and discover my calling. That prayer meeting put me on a path toward full-time ministry that has taken me to 30 nations! I would have stayed in my prison of insecurity if those men had not helped me see that God had something important for me to do with my life.

3. Confess your new identity. Gideon felt like a weakling when the angel of the Lord came to him and announced: “The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior!” (Judges 6:12). At that point, Gideon was looking around and wondering, *Who is this guy talking to?* He did not believe he was a warrior! Yet God redefined Gideon’s identity and eventually changed his name to Jerubbaal, which means (my paraphrase) “The devil is in trouble.”

But it is not enough to simply believe in your heart that you are God's chosen instrument. You must boldly proclaim who you are now. Joel 3:10 declares: "Let the weak say, 'I am a mighty man.'" You must say it! If you were told you are a failure, say: "I am more than a conqueror." If you were told that you are fat and ugly, say: "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is for me" (Song 7:10). And keep saying it until you believe it!

4. Stop comparing yourself with others. At the core of sinful human nature is the desire to have what isn't ours. That's why one of the commandments God gave Moses was "Do not covet" (Ex. 20:17). We live in a culture that celebrates perfect beauty, athleticism, celebrity and wealth—and our media constantly reminds us of what we don't have by bombarding us with images (actually they are idols) of "perfect" people. Don't let those idols control you!

The media doesn't set the standard for us—God does. Instead of focusing on what you aren't, celebrate who God made you to be. If I had spent my life lamenting the fact that I couldn't make the football team, I would have never discovered the other talents God gave me.

5. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. You can never overcome mental strongholds of worthlessness and inferiority in your own strength. It is the Holy Spirit who changes us. Just as He convicts us of sin and purifies our motives, He also strips away the lies we have believed about ourselves and heals us from the words and experiences that crippled us. Ask Him to fill you so full that those lies can't hang around any longer.

If inferiority has gripped your soul, you can say this prayer now: *"Lord, You are more powerful than any label that has ever been put on me. I renounce the lies that I have believed about myself. I am not weak; I am strong in You. I am not stupid; I have Your wisdom. I am not worthless; You died on the cross to redeem me. Thank You that because I am in Christ, I am a new creation. I am not bound by my old identity—I have a new*

*identity in Jesus. Help me to see myself the way You see me—as
Your beloved child and as a powerful, anointed, gifted
disciple. Amen.*