

Scared to Speak? God Wants to Help You With This Stronghold

Scared to speak? Me? It didn't start out that way. As a child I loved to honor my grandma by reciting poems for her church's Christmas program. It made me happy to speak because it made her happy.

Then came the year I turned 12. Grandma decided since I did such a good job learning one poem a year, she would have me recite two poems! I wasn't scared at all until I got up to speak.

I'm not sure if it was because I'd never seen that many people there before or because I was suddenly self-conscious, but my mind went blank after five verses of the first six-verse poem. There were words in my head, but I knew they were from the other poem.

I stood frozen center stage in my black-and-red plaid dress with black patent leather shoes and white socks. Grandma was in the front row trying to tell me the next line, but I knew the words she was mouthing to me were not correct.

As a sea of faces stared back, I ran off the stage, down the center aisle, past all the people and out the back door to the safety of the huge oak tree. It's where I remember Grandma reading vacation Bible school stories to me and several other kids. This day, though, was not a summer day. It was beyond freezing.

Tears streamed down my cheeks. All I could remember was the shocked look on Grandma's face as I ran down the aisle past her. I stayed there for a long time. Grandma thought I was at the back of the church. She did not come to find me, and I was glad. I didn't want her to see the tears freezing on my face. It felt as if something special had been stolen from me.

Oath Sworn

There under the oak tree I swore I would never speak in front of an audience again. I never wanted to feel that level of embarrassment and shame. For years I kept the oath.

In 1994, I was part of a freedom seminar. One exercise we did was to memorize and lip-sync a song in front of the group. We were to be “judged” by those in the seminar. They would stand when they experienced us being real.

My fear of being in performance mode was heightened because I now weighed well over 350 pounds. Not only would I be in front of people but I was also going to be judged. The 12-year-old girl in my mind wanted to find that oak tree real quick.

My time came to perform. The minute the first strains of “You Light Up My Life” started, I could feel myself shaking. But I was committed to try. Still, it wasn’t until the chorus that the other trainees started standing, and by the second verse, the trainers were standing.

I sang the rest of the song through a veil of tears, not caring what was happening or who was standing or not standing. As I cried, I noticed I wasn’t alone. Their tears were joining with mine. Then I saw Russ, the director of the seminar, standing on top of a table joining me as tears streamed down his face. Somehow I knew being in front of people would never be a huge problem again.

Testing My Voice

In August 2013, I was talking to my book mentor about a release date and launch party for my first book, *Sweet Grace*. “You know this means you’ll need to speak at this event,” she said. “They are coming to hear your story. You can have a few others say some words, but you have to be the main speaker.”

This was the first time I had even considered that writing a

book might mean I'd have to speak. On the day of the book launch party, even though I had copious notes on my iPad, I spoke from my heart and loved every moment of it. The words flowed effortlessly.

I realized the stronghold that screamed "You can't speak in public!" had truly been broken. This could have only happened with God's help.

From birth, God knew me. He knew one day my voice would be heard at workshops and seminars, in my coaching group and courses I have developed. But God wouldn't stop there. My voice would be heard on national and international Christian television stations, radio, YouTube and my own podcast. He had a plan to make it all happen before I ever desired to utter a single word.

God Knows

Psalms 139:4-6 (NLT) says, "You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD. You go before me and follow me. You place Your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand!"

God knows what I'm going to say before I say it. He even helps me say it. He takes away the fear of staring into a camera, speaking into a microphone or looking out at the faces of those at a conference or workshop. These days I do all those things with ease only because I have the assurance that God does know me.

I still feel my voice is loudest when I write, but there is no doubt speaking, coaching and podcasting are also part of God's plan for the message He has given me to share.

Oaths sworn on oak trees don't last, after all. I think God set me up that day. He knew one day that scared little girl would be speaking in front of potential audiences of millions. Even now I can hear Him chuckle about this turn of events that

didn't take Him by surprise at all.

I know I have a voice because God broke the stronghold that kept it silent for many years. I believe you do as well. If you are afraid to use your voice, allow God to help you overcome this stronghold. {eo}

Teresa Shields Parker is the author of six books and two study guides, including her number one bestseller, *Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds and Stopped Trying to Earn God's Favor*. Her sixth book, *Sweet Surrender: Breaking Strongholds*, is live on Amazon. She blogs at [www.tereshieldsparker.com](#). She is also a Christian weight loss coach (check out her coaching group at [Overcomers Academy](#)) and speaker. Don't miss her podcast, *Sweet Grace for Your Journey*, available on the [Charisma Podcast Network](#). This article first appeared on [www.tereshieldsparker.com](#).

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