

REFLECTIONS
OF THE
Butterfly

*Affirmations
for Empowerment*



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CHAPTER EIGHT



[AUTHENTICITY]

Real genuine, not made to look false or not copied.

Perpetrating Authentic...

S remember saying I wanted to be like her. Staring at the television watching the latest episode of Charlie's Angels, I wanted to be like Farrah Fawcett. Who did not like that long, flowing, blonde, feathered hair, eyelashes and blue eyes? It was the ideal at that time. I walked around with a towel around my head, pranced around my mother's house and dreamed of saving the world. Who knew then that most television stars wore wigs, false eyelashes and colored contacts, not to mention a few decades later I could get the very same look with a little creativity and the right stylist, if I wanted. I can laugh at it now, but then it was serious business! When and where did the imitation game begin?

I do not remember everything at that age but what I do recall is that I felt like an outsider. It was cool being a loner because I got to spend a lot of time exploring the world around me trying to figure it all out. But there were moments that I craved the company of someone who liked to do the same things I did. The more I tried to find that person, the more isolated I felt. Is it so hard to find someone like you? Finding a person to spend time in your space should not be that hard. Even at that young age, I knew that I was a great person but wondered why no one could see that. I struggled with the idea that I was different.

I imagine wanting to be like someone else stemmed from me as a child being skinny, short, dark skinned and pigeon toed. I was not the pretty girl in school. Like most girls at that young age, I was awkward. I only have a couple of pictures of myself as a child, and I wasn't smiling in either. Was I snaggletooth or camera shy? I am not sure but I do know that all the other girls seemed to have "boyfriends". This continued on into my college years when I was the "friend" and not the "date" material. I began to buy into the notion that I was not pretty enough to be the "it" girl and I overcompensated by being smarter. Looking back, it was better to be "smart" because those are the kind of girls that blossom into authentically beautiful women.

In Search of the Authentic...

Our whole life is spent searching for an identity only for it to evade us. Countless hours are spent watching television to entertain and take us to an alternate reality. We want to be anywhere but present in our circumstances. Discerning between true and false becomes harder. We look for motivation and inspiration in others to help fuel our journey. But what we do not realize is that while we search for it in others, it is already inside of us. We are already enough.

The search for authenticity begins within, depending on how we define what that is. I came from a small town which did not offer a lot of social activities. The big thing to do on Friday nights was to watch high school football. Do not get me wrong, I am a HUGE college football fan and there is a strict no shopping rule on Saturdays in the fall. It is all about football from sunrise to sunset. However, when I moved to a bigger city, I saw people all around moving and shaking it to the top of the economic ladder. They were doing big things and I felt so far behind. Looking over my life, it seemed as if I had not accomplished much, certainly not to the standards of what I was

seeing. I felt the need to compare myself to what others had. But how many of you know that perception is not reality? So in my own journey into discovering what was and what was not real, I came to the following conclusions on how to begin the search for “true authenticity”.

First, I had to understand the problem, meaning it was not what other people had or were doing; it was with ME! I got so caught up in what I was seeing that I failed to recognize who I was. I desired more out of life but I was afraid to do more to make it happen. Secondly, genuine authenticity comes from peace, freedom and contentment with who you are. At that time, I was not satisfied with my station in life because I viewed my accomplishments as failures. You read that right. I viewed what I had done to that point as insignificant. Thirdly, I came to know that material items do not automatically mean success. They do not even begin to scratch the surface.

Many years ago, I participated in a study on Rick Warren’s “The Purpose Driven Life”. The focus of the book was finding out our purpose on earth. Every Wednesday evening, I sat in the study and listened to the teachings and testimonials of how enlightening it was for others. I walked away with absolutely nothing. I felt something was wrong with me. Did I just not get it? This may be surprising to some, but not so much to others. I say that because many of you have felt the exact same way when examining your own purpose. You do not get your life and there are more questions than answers.

I had a decision to make. I could stay where I was, feeling lost and confused or I could get busy and try something different. The choice was easy. I had to do a new thing! Reaching the point of being sick and tired of being sick and tired, I had to make a move. The road to authentic officially began with me deciding it was okay to be different.

Becoming Authentic...

One day, I sat down with my journal and decided that if I was going to be true myself, I had to make some hard choices. Wanting to be someone else was not an option! Embracing my uniqueness became the only thing that mattered. In writing, I found that on the way to becoming authentic we must do the following:

- Motivate Ourselves.
- Never Accept Complacency.
- Accept Imperfection.
- Do Not Circumvent the Process.
- Celebrate Milestones.
- Be Grateful for the Journey.

The next time something great happens to you, stop, wait, breathe, enjoy and then Tweet and Facebook it. Even then, be ready for some haters. Not everyone in your life wants to see you do well. In your success, they still see their struggles. Motivate yourself and others will follow. If that encouragement never comes, you have to be okay with that and move on.

Have you ever known a person that seems like they are in school forever or change jobs like they change clothes? We criticize that person for being perpetually unsettled. Looking at it another way, that person may be doing what they are designed to do. I know this first hand. My brother is a chameleon, who switches things up in his life every few months. I cannot keep up with his projects. One thing is for sure though, I admire his spirit. He has a go get it attitude that just will not quit! We can never truly know another's purpose by looking at them. A lesson may be learned from it all. Keep it moving, try something new and never become complacent!

I decided once I turned 40 that I would not live by anyone else's standards but God's. If God could accept who I was then why should I try to fit someone else's mold? Trust me, this decision has been liberating. It was pivotal moment that literally saved my life. I spent my 20s finding life and my 30s living life. I wanted to finally experience MY LIFE. So, I accepted the fact that I was going to make mistakes. Some of them were monumental but they were all my own. We spend our time trying to be the picture of perfection for others but we lose ourselves in the process. Accept that you are not always going to get it right, but thanks be to God that I get another chance.

Living in a fast-paced society, we are get used to taking short cuts. Social media allows us to instantly post our thoughts and we have plenty of options for fast food. The one thing we cannot avoid is living life. We were created to live an authentic life that is worthy of our Creator. Every day is not going to be kind to us. We cannot circumvent the process. Every step of this journey is a lesson. We must learn and apply it so we can teach others. Go through the storm. The view is so much better on the other side.

I know people who do not celebrate their birthday. It has nothing to do with religion, they just do not celebrate. It baffles me to no end. You naturally want to commemorate the occasion of a friend. But they resist any plans you suggest. One may say that they are humble and not into parties. I do not completely buy that. I would offer that many are not used to being celebrated. They have not learned how to celebrate themselves. It is not natural for them. They feel uncomfortable when others do it for them. Well, I can tell you this is not the case for me. Feel free to help me celebrate ANYTIME! Sometimes you need to have your own "praise" party for the milestones you reach. For each victory celebrate it!

One common trait that successful people have is gratitude. No one person is responsible for every good thing in their life. All of us have had someone help us along the way. I call these individuals "Butterflies". They have taken me under their wing and started me on the journey to being an authentic woman. I am grateful beyond words for what they have breathed into my life. Who are those individuals in your life? This journey is not easy. It causes bumps and bruises but is necessary for maturing. If change in life is inevitable, why not let it begin with you?

Authentically You...

Once we become authentic, what are we to do with all this newfound freedom? We certainly cannot sit on it. We must share it with someone. You have reached an important moment

in your life. What better way to honor it than to truly live it out?

Courage is a word that has many meanings. It is not just for the physically strong but it was designed just for you. You exemplify courage and it can only be shown through your beauty, a beauty all your own.

Make your authenticity a movement! Empower those around you to find the strength to seek out their own. Rise up against those who try to damper your spirit. They are only afraid of what is happening inside of you. They see the magnificence in you and doubt their influence over this new creation. Whenever doubt creeps in, I want you to embrace the following:

- If it does not work out, start over.
- Do not take yourself too seriously.
- Always be different.
- Reinvent yourself from time to time.

I practice these things in my life and they have worked out well so far. Still not convinced, let me encourage you.

Affirmations for Authenticity

- Dare to speak your mind. Never be a carbon copy of anyone else. Be original, strong, independent, and most importantly, comfortable in your own skin.
- Never be afraid to go down the road less traveled, be open to change. Be generous yet humble.
- The journey to becoming authentic is not easy. It cannot be circumvented. It must be embraced and cultivated for it to reach its desired resting place.
- I have always said that if everyone were like me the world would not be this colorful, wonderful, beautiful place.

God's Word

After defining who we are, the process of application begins. What good is this newfound knowledge if we do not apply it? I realized in my time studying "The Purpose Driven Life" that we are created for a divine purpose. That purpose is multifaceted and is made to benefit others. We are created:

- For God's Pleasure.
- For God's Family.
- To Become Like Christ.
- To Serve God.
- To Carry Out God's Mission.

What better way to do all those things than to become who God intended you to be, a beautiful

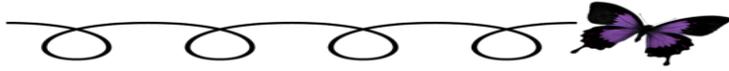
reflection of His love's design... AUTHENTIC!

When Jesus came into the world, there were those who did not believe that he was the Messiah, the one who would save the world. Many were satisfied to believe in the fables and the mysteries that they were told. This is demonstrated in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, where it says: *"for the time will come... when we will turn away our ears from the truth and turn aside to myths."* It is much easier to cling to an untruth than embrace the intangible. Is it so hard to hear the truth? I remember growing up and hearing "the truth will set you free", which usually is not given in full context. John 8:32 speaks about it when it says that those who follow and believe in Jesus as Savior and heard the words He was saying, they would know the truth and be set free. The question becomes "free" from what? We must strive to be free from the criticism of others.

So many times we hold onto what others say about us and internalize it. It becomes our mindset and we live it daily. What if we were to "believe" the good report of the love Jesus has for us? What would be the benefit? We would be free to experience what we were meant to be, AUTHENTIC! Living your best life comes from knowing who you are. How are we to know that if we do not inject positivity into our lives? In the words of my pastor, Dr. Craig L. Oliver, we must be willing to "drop some liabilities and pick up some assets" along this journey to authenticity.

Scriptures for Authenticity

- 1 John 2:27 - *As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him.*
- John 17:17 - *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*
- Proverbs 3:5-6 - *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.*



Dear Beautiful,

You are a living, breathing example of what is unique in this world. There have been some desert, valley and wilderness experiences along the way to being a great woman of purpose. But look around. You MADE IT! No longer will you dance to the tune of someone else's music. Now you will make your own song out of the melodies only you can create. Shine for all the world to see. You are a gem in a world full of stones! Run with it! Embrace, live and breathe it! Your journey to AUTHENTICITY has begun!

Go get it!

Necole