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The
Confident
Woman

*Knowing Who You Are
in Christ*

Anabel Gillham

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Confident
Woman

Anabel Gillham



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EUGENE, OREGON

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THE CONFIDENT WOMAN

Copyright © 1993 by Anabel Gillham
Published by Harvest House Publishers
Eugene, Oregon 97402
www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gillham, Anabel.

The confident woman / Anabel Gillham

p. cm.

Rev. ed. Of: a woman's strength

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-7369-1240-1

1. Women—Religious life. 2. Marriage—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Gillham, Anabel. I. Gillham, Anabel. Woman's strength. II. Title.

BV4527.G55 1993

248.8'43—cd20

93-19

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Printed in the United States of America.

03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11 / BP-MS / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To the men in my life,
in the order of their appearance
on the stage:*

*Marcus Hoyle, my dad
Jesus Christ, my Lord
Bill Gillham, my husband
and
my four sons:
Preston, Mason, Will, and Wade*

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge two people especially for the part they played in this production. My husband, Bill, who has been my principal mentor through our years together, and my son, Will, who read and reread the original manuscript and gave me his invaluable editing advice.

A dear friend, Susan Endsley, worked with me in compiling a comprehensive teacher's guide to assist you in teaching through this life-transforming book. This material features chapter-by-chapter teaching suggestions and includes two audio CDs and an enhanced CD with digital copies of all the materials you will need. For more information you may contact our office at 1-888-395-5433, go online at lifetime@lifetime.org, or drop in to visit at 3333 Winthrop Avenue, Fort Worth, Texas.

No man is an island, and I thank everyone for the unique roles they have played in my life.

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When All Else Fails...

I had finally come to the point of complete desperation. I turned to God with one thought in mind, one conviction: I can't go on this way. The bared, soft, searching heart—broken. He knew. He saw. Why try to hide? "God, show me. Teach me. I've got to know..."

For 20 years—long years—I tried to be everything my husband, Bill, wanted me to be. I corrected every fault he pointed out and tried to change my personality to suit him—but it wasn't working. I was hurting, hating myself and the circumstances that had finally proven to be too much for me.

That took a lot of "doing." I was strong. During those 20 years my ability to endure had been severely tested. Each of our children, from boy one to boy four, was born into physical adversity (the Gillham family was well-known in the pediatric wards of the local hospitals). Mason, our second son, had a physical impairment that could not be corrected—he was profoundly retarded. Financial problems? Big ones, but I can handle them. In-law problems? I can work them out. Heavy household decisions? I can manage. Through my bootstrap efforts, my sheer determination, I had survived.

And yet, my marriage—indeed, my whole life—was so far from what I had always hoped it would be. I had come to see myself as helpless, my efforts as futile. I knew that God had promised life, *abundant* life, to those who follow Him. I knew what He intended for marriage to be. But here I was, a dedicated Christian—desiring God’s will, God’s best—simply enduring much of my life. My husband and I were growing farther and farther apart, building our own worlds, struggling to meet our needs in our own ways, and all the while passing on to our children the futility and frustration of our marriage.

As I look back on it all now, I am amazed that I was still standing after those 20 years. But there again, my super strength came through. You might think that had I ripped off my blouse there would have been a Wonder Woman suit underneath. But there was no Wonder Woman. It was only Anabel doing life in her own strength, strength that had never failed—up until one point in time.



There are so many things I want to share with you—truths I have discovered through the years, truths I so wish you will come to know in your life. These truths are in this book only because the Holy Spirit patiently taught them to me and tutored me into their realization. Once I saw them, everything began falling into place—and that’s why I want them to become yours.

I know what God has done and is doing in my life—as a woman; as the wife of Bill Gillham; as the mother of Preston, Mason, Will, and Wade; as a counselor and lecturer. I am a disciple, seeking to know the will of God. I have realized my needs, and I have discovered the source of their fulfillment. I have acknowledged my problems, and, by the grace of God, I am embracing the solution. And God compels me to share what He has shown me, not only because of what it has done in *my* life, but because of the extraordinary restoration it has brought about in other lives as well.

Women today are seeking. Most of us want desperately to know what God had in mind when He created the female. What is our role? Who are we? How are we to be?

Yes, we've read books, sought counsel, heard sermons, attended seminars, and bought tapes. The problem is that we have come away inspired, enthusiastic, loaded with good intentions, ready, willing to change, and yet entirely unable to carry it all out: "How do I make it work? I've tried and I just can't do it!" What pure release it is for me now to utter those same words—"Lord, I can't"—because I have heard Him say, "Anabel, *I can.*"

I don't know you. I don't know what your life has been until now, what you have done or endured. Perhaps you're divorced or separated or widowed, and you are wondering what life holds for you now; maybe you're married, desiring fulfillment in your role as wife and mother; maybe you are alone and desperate, seeking direction and answers. Whatever your status, this book is for you. Read with an open heart and a willing mind.

Only the Holy Spirit can impart spiritual truths and enable you to incorporate them into your life. By His grace I will present them, but you alone can choose to take them up. Test what is written here. Go to the Bible. Ask God to give you wisdom to know and understand; ask Him to reveal the truth to you.

God has placed in every woman longings, certain needs, that are the same. We are kindred spirits, you and I, and my prayer is that you will come to know His indescribable love for you and His intricate plan for your life as we journey together.

Lovingly,
Anabel

The Woman
Confident
The Woman

PART I

*Who I Am
in Relation
to Christ*

Where Horses Belong

*If you're serious about going somewhere,
about making progress, then putting the cart before
the horse will bring you nothing but frustration,
futility, and possibly disaster.*

*First find out where the horse is supposed
to be, then (so you won't always be asking questions)
find out why the horse belongs there—
and while you're at it,
find out how to make him go....*

What does it take to put the cart before the horse? A lot of work! First of all, once you finally persuade the horse to push instead of pull, you need someone holding up the tongue of the cart to keep it from digging into the ground. Surely you can figure a way to make this work. You could rest the tongue on a round rock, I suppose. So you roll a few feet, stop, move the rock, and position the tongue again.

Of course, you have to entice the horse with something to make him go, like sugar cubes or carrots or hay. In a moment of brilliant insight, you decide not to try the hay because it would be hard to keep on a stick. You opt for the sugar cubes and carrots. It just makes so much more sense.

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So here you are, ready to go. But you're not *in* the cart! Nope, you're walking beside the cart, dangling your bait from a stick in front of the horse's mouth, feeding him a sugar cube every once in a while to keep him going.

But you still have a *big* problem: The horse starts pushing, takes three or four steps, and the wagon tongue noses into the ground again. You take some time to study this a bit longer. How about a wheel on the tongue? Then it will roll on its own, and you can forget this rock-and-roll business! Ah, what ingenuity. Congratulations. Now you can at least *walk* at a steady pace; that is, as long as your bait holds out.

Quick! Someone run to the store and get some more sugar cubes. Find a longer stick for this carrot, too. And clean the dirt out of that wheel on the tongue—it's getting all clogged up again!

And with a considerable amount of hustle and bustle and frenzied activity, you're (sigh) moving right along.

This makes quite a ridiculous picture, doesn't it? Why? Because we know where the horse belongs, what he's supposed to do, and how the cart is designed to work. That horse has to be in *front* of the cart before we can go anywhere. We've got to capitalize on his strength and stop trying to do things our way. Just think, we could be sitting in the cart, eating those carrots ourselves. We could let that horse do all the work for us. What a relief that would be.

How many of us—in our daily lives, in our Christian walks, in our marriages, as mothers, as employees—have the cart before the horse? Oh, there's a lot of effort and frenzied activity. We go from one meeting to another, from a Gothard seminar to a Dobson film, from a broken marriage to a therapist. We read every new book on the market, put forth every effort, and suddenly find ourselves so tired and beaten that we give up. We quit without ever realizing the magnificent, untapped power we have at our disposal.

I tried everything I know to pull my life together (even hauling the horse myself I suppose), and when I became so weary that I could not go on, when I was discouraged and entirely disillusioned, I finally allowed God to assume His position in my life. The cart and the horse changed places.

How desperate are you?

If this doesn't work, Anabel, I'm giving up. I can't—I won't—go on. Surely there is more to life than what I am living.

Are you tired of the masks?

To everyone else we are a delightful, talented, dedicated family. But when the door closes behind us, we are nothing more than four people living in a house.

Are you willing?

God, the Christian life is something You designed—it must be a good thing—but my life is so empty—so meaningless—hollow. Please God, show me what to do. Make something true and beautiful out of this mess. And use me...I'm willing.

Every woman who is searching for truth eventually comes to a personal Waterloo. What does that mean? That she will experience a “disastrous or decisive defeat.” She’ll come to the end of her own resources—the end of her ability to meet the circumstances that come into her life.

My Waterloo was my marriage—the overwhelming defeat that exhausted all my efforts and left me ravaged on the battlefield. That’s when I began to search diligently through the Bible in order to find out what God said about marriage. (I had previously undertaken several halfhearted searches.) I encountered an admonition that was virtually *impossible* for me to carry out:

Let the wife see that she respects and reverences her husband—that she notices him, regards him, honors him, prefers him, venerates, and esteems him; and that she defers to him, praises

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him, and loves and admires him exceedingly
(Ephesians 5:33 AMP).

And I didn't even *like* my husband, much less all of those other things! Our marriage was not a good one, and no matter how hard I tried, it seemed to get worse instead of better. Of course, not a single soul knew our marriage was anything short of perfect. I wasn't about to let anyone know—I couldn't endure the thought of someone knowing I was a failure at something that was my responsibility. But, oh, how I longed to be loved, to be cherished, to experience for myself the poetry of Robert Browning:

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made.

Was I expecting too much?

How about you? What is your frustration level? Where are your emotions? Are you trying to keep the facade of the “ideal” Christian couple in place, struggling like crazy to hold that “ideal” marriage together? Perhaps you're single...again. Your children live with you, and there are absolutely not enough hours in your day to be the provider and mom and dad and tutor and friend and housekeeper and cook and doctor and disciplinarian. You wonder where you'll get the strength to deal with the trauma of the circumstances that brought you into this unbelievable lifestyle. Or maybe you're a woman who's never been married. Day by day you find yourself growing more frustrated by what's *not* happening in your life.

Exploring our role as women—who we are and what we want—will be just as frustrating, futile, and disastrous as trying to “cart the horse,” unless we first realize our position in Christ Jesus. I'm not talking about a position like marriage, or about the relationship of woman to man, but as a disciple to Christ, seeking to understand and embrace as our own plan His plan, and then going on to discover how to make that plan work.

What is it we all long for? What do we, as women, want? My dream was that my prince would come, and we would meld into an inseparable oneness and maybe even “love happily ever after.” A lovely fairy tale. And I tried so hard to make that fairy tale come true.

But according to John 15:5, Jesus said, “Apart from Me, you can do *nothing*” (emphasis added). (*Nothing*: not anything; that which does not exist; a nonentity; a thing, event, or remark of no account; absence of all magnitude or quantity; a zero.) Nothing? That’s a sobering thought.

I want to argue with God. I want to say, “But, Lord, there *are* some things I can do quite well!” That’s not the point. This is the basic plan, the rudimentary principle of His original intent: If I am incapable of doing a thing—if I can, indeed, do nothing—how much help do I need to get my life straightened out? To recreate my marriage? To face each pressure-filled moment? To do *anything*? You’re right. I don’t need someone to help me; I need someone to do it *all* for me.

It would be 42 long years before I realized the incredible, liberating wonder of this truth.

Somebody Loves Me

*All I am or ever hope to be is in Him. Without Him,
I am nothing. With Him, I am everything.
And when I am not "everything," He loves me still.*

During the seven years Bill was a psychology professor at Southeastern Oklahoma State University, we lived in an old, two-story white house on Main Street. I loved to keep it up; it was almost like "playing house."

Early one fall I began to find little brown moths flying around, from the sunroom downstairs to the bath upstairs. I knew they were up to no good, so I killed them indiscriminately. It was a battle I could not win. They kept cropping up in the carpet, the closets, and the clothing. I finally came to the point where I had to admit that killing those moths one by one was not the answer. I had to get to the source, the *root* of the problem. I had to call in an expert and follow his advice.

And What Did He Say?

There are as many different heartaches in this world as there are women, but to broach each individual problem would not necessarily help us get to the root of the dilemma, the underlying cause, the crumbling foundation. We need to call in the expert and follow His advice.

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Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall (Matthew 7:24-27).

For some of you, the rains have come, the winds have blown, and they have nearly destroyed you and all you hold dear. You need an answer, a solution. You can't go on—you may not even have the will to try. For others, the rain has just started, and you are disillusioned: "I didn't know it was going to be like this, and I don't intend to put up with it!" Others of you, a minority, are thinking, *Well, I'm doing okay as it is. But maybe there is something I don't know, a secret that will make my life better.*

Wherever you are in your relationship with the Lord, with your husband, or with the people around you, your needs are unique. Believe me, there *is* a light at the tunnel's end. You say you're different? You say you've tried this "religious bit" before? Your case is too difficult? It's too late? No. "With God *all* things are possible" (Matthew 19:26, emphasis added). That *all* includes you and everything about you. You can't deny this—that would indict God as a liar, and He cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

"Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psalm 127:1). Have you been trying, like I was, to build the house by yourself, to do it in your own power? We must come to that point in time when we are willing to admit that *our way* has been wrong or that we are at least willing *to try* God's way. This is the first step, recognizing Him as your answer, your source. You go

to Him with your life—your bucket of ashes—and you ask, “God, can you make this into something beautiful?”

“Yes,” He promises, “but you will have to do it *My way*.”

God’s Way

If your concept of God’s way is anything like mine was, then what is in reality His way will probably seem foreign to you. I believed in His power, but I felt that it was primarily for the poor, the inept, the oppressed, the weak, and the sick—in other words, for those who were unable to *help themselves*.

I didn’t fit into any of those categories. I was strong, or at least I thought I was; and even more important, I wanted others to think I was strong. With clenched teeth, clenched fists, churning stomach, and tears in my eyes, I stubbornly declared time and again, “If I can’t do this myself, I’m certainly *not* going to ask God to do it for me!” At other times, in utter despair, I would ask myself, “How many times am I going to have to ask God for help? When am I going to learn to do this on my own?”

This “theology,” though I didn’t realize it at the time, has a major flaw: The more situations I can master, the more capable I become, the less I will need God. It’s the “Lone Ranger” philosophy. My ultimate goal was to advance to that lofty position where I would never need His help at all, to be entirely self-sufficient—or, at most, to call on Him only in times of desperate need: “I’m doing okay on my own, God. There are certain areas where I still need You, but I’m working on those! I’ll call if I come up against something I can’t handle.” In other words, “Don’t call me; I’ll call you.”

It sounds all noble and heroic, doesn’t it? It wasn’t. My world was in a mess because I insisted on doing things *my way*. In fact, it had, for the most part, shut down altogether. And then I discovered God’s way.

Every event in our lives, every stimulus and every response, takes place within the following three arenas. If we are to experience the fullness of God’s plan for our lives, if we are to know Him

and His resurrection power, these three arenas must be completely and utterly subjected to and pervaded by Him. This is the foundation of His way.

1. *My self-image*: what I have learned about myself in my world.
2. *My performance*: how I act; how I respond in my world.
3. *The performance of others*: the effect that the people and circumstances in my world have on me.

Self-Image

My self-image was in sad shape: I felt inadequate, clumsy, and unathletic. *Nobody likes me, I thought. I'm not any fun, and other people do not enjoy being with me because of my nervous laughter and because I'm generally too quiet (if it's one thing I am not, it's a conversationalist). I wish I were like Doris. She's so quick-witted and has such a great sense of humor.*

I have to work hard to be attractive. My nose is coarse-looking, my mouth is too big, and I have a space between my front teeth. My upper torso leaves a lot to be desired as far as curves are concerned; my legs are too short, and I have ugly hands.

I hate myself. Oh, how I wish I were different.

My Performance

My performance was bad and getting worse. “God Helps Those Who Help Themselves” was my motto. (Of course, I couldn’t find that anywhere in my Bible to underline and highlight, but I clung to my “self-imposed” theology nevertheless. It gave me a reason—a spiritual, “godly” reason—for my lifestyle.) I’ve got to do this by myself. I don’t want to ask for God’s help. He expects me to use the brains He has given me, and I don’t want people to think I can’t handle this alone...so I won’t ask anyone to help me.

Besides, the only way I can be sure things are done correctly is for me to do them. I’ll work hard, perform perfectly, and then people will accept me and say, “I like Anabel.” I will have earned their love.