

Sacred Creativity



UNCORRECTED
PROOF

Inspiration
to Reclaim
the Joy
of Your
God-Given
Gifts

Jena Holliday

Creator of Spoonful of Faith




Sacred Creativity

RECLAIM THE JOY OF YOUR
GOD-GIVEN GIFTS FOR HIS GLORY

Jena Holliday



WATERBROOK



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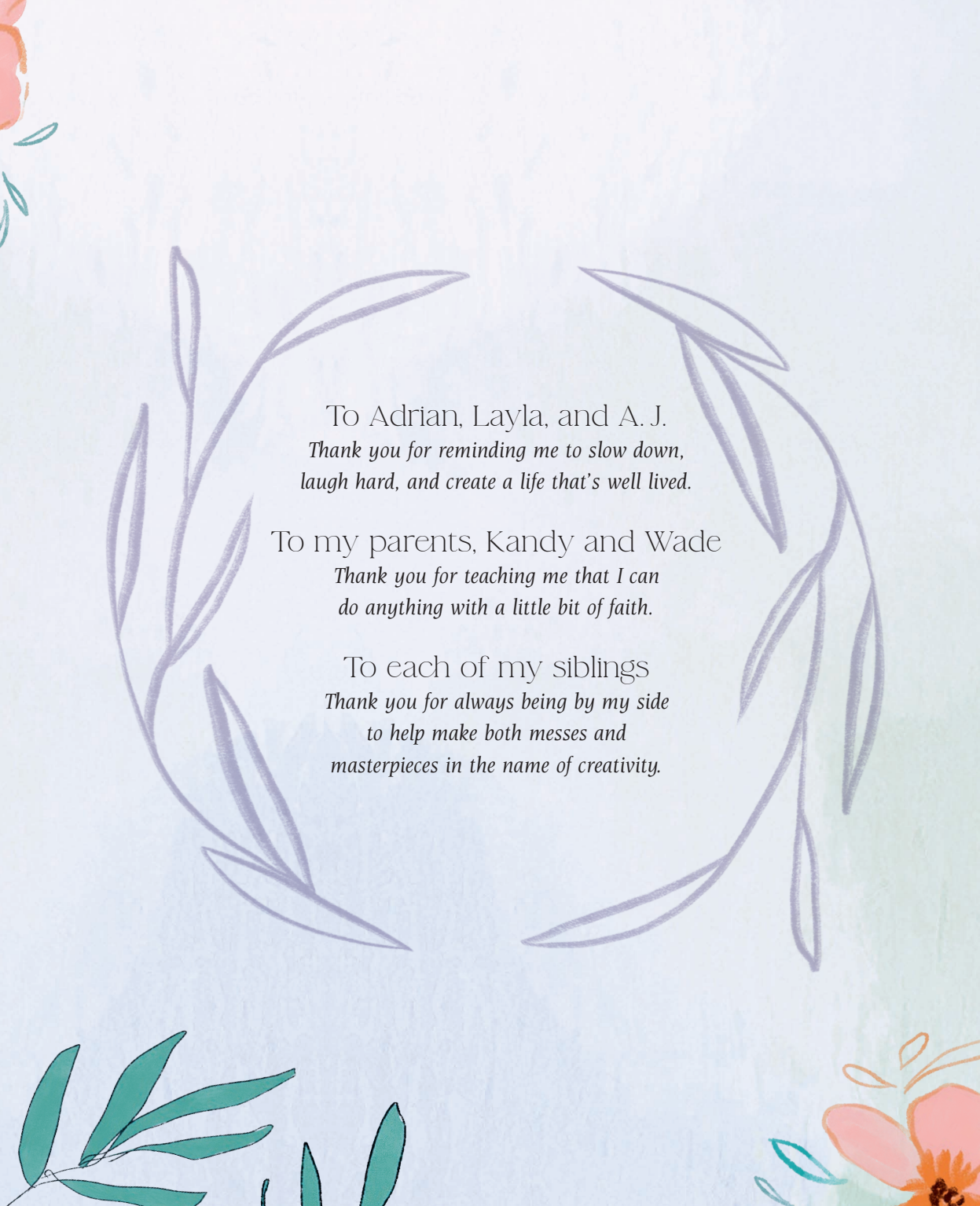
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To Adrian, Layla, and A. J.
*Thank you for reminding me to slow down,
laugh hard, and create a life that's well lived.*

To my parents, Kandy and Wade
*Thank you for teaching me that I can
do anything with a little bit of faith.*

To each of my siblings
*Thank you for always being by my side
to help make both messes and
masterpieces in the name of creativity.*

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The page features decorative illustrations in the top corners. The top-left corner has light pink and orange floral shapes. The top-right corner shows a thick, reddish-brown vine with several green leaves. The background is a soft, watercolor-style wash of light pink, purple, and blue.

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Made to Create




Ok God, I'm going to do it.

I sat staring at my phone. On it was an illustration I had just finished drawing days before. I was planning to share it on Instagram, which I had done many times with other pieces. But this time felt different. The drawing itself was of a dark-skinned Black woman, standing in a field of wildflowers. Her vibrantly colored headband held back her fluffy dark brown fro. She was dressed in a beautiful tan blouse and wore a pair of pink dangly earrings. The words "Do It As Worship" were written in the sky as she looked out ahead of her.

As I stared at the image, I could feel my stomach drop. It was as if butterflies were flying around in there. My throat suddenly felt extremely dry as I tried to swallow. I closed my eyes and hit Publish. With my eyes closed, I exhaled, "I'm doing this." The post went onto my Instagram page and along with it came a flood of emotions. I reread my caption a few times, checking that it was clear and free of any errors I could have missed. My words and this image were out there for everyone to see and read. I was really doing this.






It hadn't been an easy road though. The path that I had taken to get there had been difficult and lonely and untraditional, but I had found my own way and had figured out a lot of things on my own, and I wanted to share it with others. I felt the desire to help other women, especially women of color, lean into their creativity. I didn't see many women that looked like me pursuing creative careers in illustration. Of course, there were some, but not enough to make me feel that the art world would have room for more of us—room for me. Women of color weren't the ones getting all of the attention, big contracts, or promotions as mentors.

My experience, as an artist and small-business owner of Spoonful of Faith, taught me that running hard enough, working long enough, or fighting my way up the ranks wasn't the road for me. I knew that end of the route only held burnout. Somewhere in my journey, I had gained the confidence to find my artistic voice and share it with others. Not the voice the world had painted for me as a Black artist, but the voice and message that felt uniquely mine. I had figured out how to have courage in being exactly who God created me to be. Black, loving, free, soft, bold, and joyous. That voice was mine; it was unlike any other, and it was made in the image of the Creator.

But my heart had also seen so many other women like me who had struggled to find their footing. So many with potential and creative gifts that didn't know how to walk forward. Women who, like me, didn't feel seen or didn't know the way. Women who were bubbling with ideas and creativity but felt there was no room in this world for what they were given to share. Why did it have to be such a long and treacherous process for us?



For about two years I sat with the idea that I needed to do something to chart a healthy way forward for budding creators. Not in the hustle-and-grind kind of way but in a way that encourages them to create from a place that feels free and authentic and is led by faith, instead of driven by sales, productivity, or accolades. Deep in my heart, I felt the responsibility and desire to share what I'd learned with others, but I didn't think I had time to add this to my never-ending to-do list.

During this same time, I was fielding text messages from girlfriends and emails from strangers asking me how I showed up with confidence, doing something that



You are
Creative
by faith.



felt so authentic to me and that seemed like it was working for me. I had fellow entrepreneurs tell me they had been struggling to find their voice and show up more confidently in the sea of social media and algorithms. They felt like they couldn't keep their heads above water. Women I would meet at events would tell me they simply didn't feel like they were creative or that they even trusted in their creativity. I knew I had to extend a hand to other creatives who felt stuck, lonely, or unsure in their path, just like I had been.



My post with the official announcement starting a small online community and course called Do It as Worship was up. I read and reread my caption, waiting to see how my community would respond. I was relieved. I'd done it. I'd put it out there, trusting that God would reveal the next steps for nurturing the women He would bring into this community. My nerves turned to excitement for what was ahead.

Over the next few months, I walked side by side with women across the country. Brick by brick we built a creative community. We shared hopes and dreams and comforted one another through fears and setbacks. We wrestled with creative blocks and juggling priorities. I'd have moments of overwhelm, feeling like I had taken on way too much, then I'd witness times where someone would have breakthrough. I saw women who had for so long felt shut down and silenced find a safe place to be open and heard again. Women who had never shared their dreams shared them with me in this special place. The community was a place of encouragement where women pushed through fears, became unstuck, released the pressure to perform, and used the wonderfully unique gifts that were inside them. One by one, they began to recognize their uniqueness and figure out their way forward.

One woman shared her struggles as a creative: "I have found myself lost in my identity as the suggestions of others clouded my judgment as to what I should be creating and doing with my gifts." In comparing herself to others, she became confused about



what to do with her creative gifts. Through this group she discovered her work was never equal to her worth. She found power in the act of creating simply to create—as a way to honor the gift and the Giver. She experienced freedom that she hadn't felt before. The work God was doing in all of us through connection and community brought tears to my eyes.

I watched and witnessed image bearers open their mouths, speak life into the things they had been called to do, and create. Many of them gained confidence to walk forward, to show up exactly as God created them to be. No longer afraid, no longer comparing—but free to be.

And that is my prayer for you as you read the words in this book. I want you to find freedom, joy, and confidence to use your creative gifts, too.

I want to be a mentor for you. The mentor I wish I had early in my career, reminding me that in the same way that God made me one-of-a-kind, God had given me the ability to make something that is one-of-a-kind. God invited me to “create by faith,” as I like to say. By tapping into that well of creativity, I could have impact beyond my wildest dreams.

God can use your creativity, too.

Maybe you've started believing the lie that you aren't creative. Or maybe you feel that what you have to offer is not enough. Maybe you've always doubted that what God gave you was enough or that it could be used in a way that encourages your people or those around you. Maybe, like me, the spark used to be there, and life blew it out.

This book is your invitation to join me in discovering how you can take your God-given gifts and use them in confidence and joyful worship. As you create by faith—picking up your brushes, your pens, your hands—you'll discover that God wants to teach, love, and transform you and the lives around you.

As you read, my hope is that the words and stories release you and your heart from the burden of producing, the pressure to perform, to be perfect, or have it all figured out. Instead, I hope you grow in confidence, knowing that you can just show



good
things
grow
slow

up as your unique self, with what you've been given, and experience freedom and joy as you create.

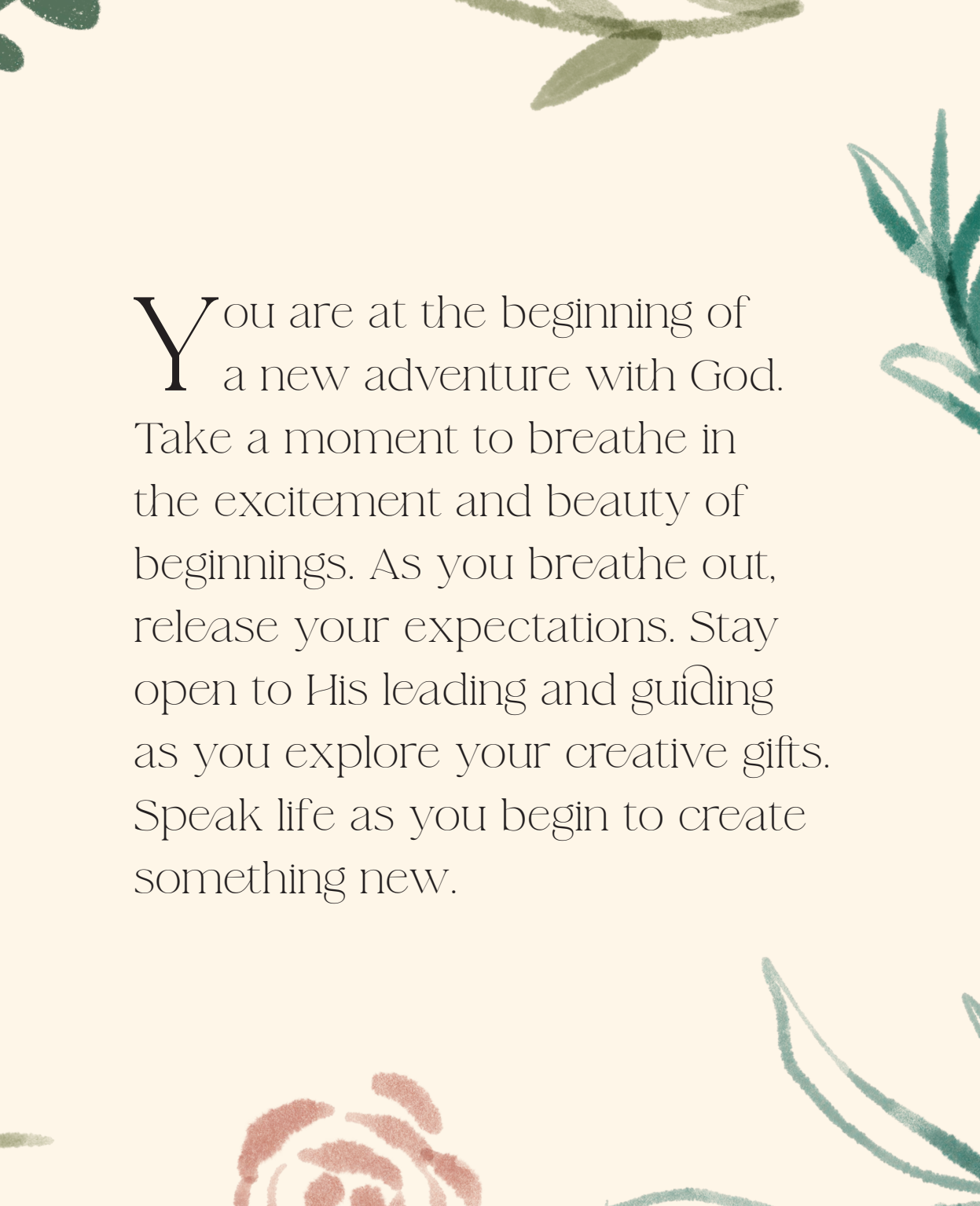
At the end of each section of this book, you'll find creative challenges, a playlist, reflection questions, and an affirmation. All of these I offer in the hope that they will propel you forward as your creativity blooms and flourishes. Take your time walking through the book, reflecting on your own journey as you learn from mine, making space for new thoughts and ideas to emerge, and finding encouragement and motivation to create.

When we make room for Him in the way we create, our gifts will make room for God's blessing to cover us in more ways than we can imagine.

Okay, friend, let's do this!



Begin

The page is decorated with watercolor-style illustrations of green leaves and a red rose. The leaves are scattered around the edges, and a red rose is positioned at the bottom center.

You are at the beginning of
a new adventure with God.
Take a moment to breathe in
the excitement and beauty of
beginnings. As you breathe out,
release your expectations. Stay
open to His leading and guiding
as you explore your creative gifts.
Speak life as you begin to create
something new.



**WILD
CHILD
OF GOD**



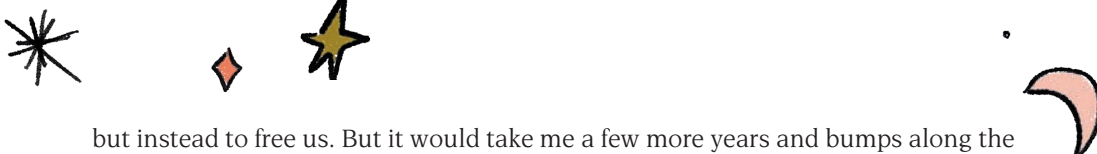
The One Who Created You




WHEN I WAS growing up, my family hardly ever missed church on Sunday. Because my father was one of the ministers, most of the time you would catch my mom, brothers, sisters, and me in church whenever the doors were open. Having a front row seat to church life meant I saw miracles. I saw life transformations, but I also saw when people were not authentic. I saw people who were one way in front of the church and another way outside of the church. I promised myself that I wasn't going to be "that person." I was going to strive to live the straight and narrow path I heard preached. I tried not to make mistakes or deviate from the rules and norms.

The combination of growing up in a legalistic church culture, having strict parents, and my own rule-following, people-pleasing personality meant I strived to do everything "right." I had exceptional grades, sang solos in church and school choir, was liked by my teachers, ran track, and was a competitive cheerleader. I was the "good girl" who did what she was supposed to do and didn't get in trouble.


If you're anything like I was, you've probably found yourself trying to do everything right, so you don't disappoint anyone. It can so easily create an unnecessary burden that stifles our lives, including our gifts and creativity. Faith isn't meant to do that,



but instead to free us. But it would take me a few more years and bumps along the way to learn that.




By junior year of high school, I felt stifled by my parents' rules and the religious standards. As an adult, I understand why my parents had rules and structure—after all, with seven children, they needed some way to keep the chaos to a minimum. But, sixteen-year-old me just wanted a later curfew. *I always do the right thing*, I thought. *Why won't my parents give me more freedom?*




Trying to keep up with the rules and expectations became a heavy burden to carry. Though I witnessed evidence of God being real, my experience with God had not felt personal. God always seemed to be moving in someone *else's* life. I was here, doing all the right things, I thought, but where was God? I didn't feel Him near like others did. And because I was determined to be authentic, I wasn't going to pretend or lie and say I felt something I didn't feel.

"If You're real, show me," I would pray. And I didn't see anything change. I was exhausted in my efforts to live up to my perfect standards, while having no personal relationship with God. If God was real, He was going to have to reciprocate the effort and make Himself known in my life. I wanted to really experience what others talked about. I wanted something real and something personal, and I would wait for it to come and not force it.


I started counting down the days to graduation and my eighteenth birthday. I wanted to be free to make my own decisions, and that day would come when I moved out of state to go to college.



I was excited to live my life, have the most fun possible, and not think about the big questions. I was looking forward to being on my own, away from my parents, living by my own rules, and making my own choices. And did I ever. I spent most of my nights partying way too late, pulling all-nighters in the computer lab, and suffering from hangovers in class the next morning.



After the first year, out-of-state tuition got expensive, so I moved back to Minnesota to finish college at a school I could commute to. I was working a good job, going to



You made
the stars
and know me
by name

open hearts
&
open hands



school full-time, and living my young care-free life. I started dating a man I really loved and would later marry. I still enjoyed planning fun nights out with friends but after I graduated, I was in the full-time corporate world, working a big-girl job in retail merchandising. On the outside, things looked good with my career, my relationships, and my financial situation. But, on the inside, I began questioning my purpose and my future. I had absorbed all the culture's messages about what a successful twenty-something life should look like. I'd done it, yet I couldn't shake the feeling that I wasn't fulfilled. With all I had, something felt missing.

Have you experienced that feeling? Where you reached a long-time goal and then felt . . . empty? I know now that there are places in our hearts that only God can fill, but back then I was still searching. Yet, God pursued me and had plans to reach me through the passion He had already placed inside of me: creativity.

It was during that time I thought that maybe I just needed a creative outlet. My job was data driven and I analyzed sales and worked with spreadsheets all day. So, I started a fashion and lifestyle blog where I would share my outfit of the day and a little about my life.

As I sat at home on my tan couch in the townhome, talking to my boyfriend, I wondered and asked out loud, "Is this all life has to give?" Admittedly, it was the dead of winter in Minnesota. It's not unusual to question your whole life when the days are short, there's very little sunlight, and the temperatures are less than 20 degrees for weeks. But this was different. The thoughts and questions about where my path was heading consumed me. I couldn't put my finger on exactly what I needed or why I urgently needed an answer. There was a weight on my heart.

It felt like life was all work and I had barely any time to live and enjoy my life. The thought that running the rat race, climbing the corporate ladder, and living for the weekend or a vacation was all I had to look forward to for the next twenty, thirty, forty years felt so sad. The fog of confusion and dissatisfaction followed me everywhere. I tried to relax my mind and often turned to unhealthy self-medicating in times of stress. After trying everything I knew to help me chill out, I finally went to lie down.

Hours later, around four in the morning, I woke up. The room was dark, but my mind was clearer than anything I had ever experienced. A voice in my heart and mind so clearly said, *Why are you asking everyone else where to go, who to be, and what do to, except the One who created you?*

The words washed over my heart and sunk into my spirit, like something I had never felt before. Peace filled me, and I knew without a doubt it was a moment with God. Immediately my eyes filled with tears, my worries fell to the ground, and the confusion that had plagued me left. The God I had been wondering about finally felt so real.

It was like nothing I had ever experienced in all my life. I am not gonna lie, I had a moment of doubt, asking, *Am I imagining this? Or maybe still dreaming?*

But I knew deep down this wasn't a dream. And something in me changed. I hadn't considered that God, my Creator, would have insight and answers for my troubled

heart. I had never heard anything so crystal clear, and I wanted to find out more about the One who created me.

Somewhere deep within my heart had been touched. The girl who had constantly been asking for direction, permission, and purpose but couldn't find it had finally heard from the very Source of all creation. I never expected to hear from God. I had not been attending church, studying my Bible, or praying. Yet God did what God does. He met me where I was and invited me to a lasting and life-changing relationship.

That night, with a refreshed perspective, I felt a closeness like never before to a God I had only read about. I wasn't fearful and I felt no pressure, only love and clarity. Although I didn't know what my next step would be, I finally knew Who to follow. That moment would also be the first step to showing up as my full self without holding back my gifts, ideas, or abilities and actively using them just as God made me to do.

That experience was a catalyst for me to step out in faith. I sat in the knowledge that God was my Creator and He loved me. He intricately made me and purposefully placed gifts within my hands to be used for His glory. Recognizing this, I began to see my self-confidence soar. I began to hope for the future. Knowing I had someone who had more answers than I did helped me take the pressure off my shoulders a little. It encouraged me to have faith, and soon I began believing bigger and seeing potential around me.

I didn't know it, but that moment was the first step of a new exploration of myself as a creation of God's.

How has faith helped you tap into your passions, gifts, and abilities? Or do you find that you sometimes still push them away? If you are like I was, it might be time to reconnect with the One who gave you these gifts. That was such a vital part of my journey.

Each day thereafter, I'd show up to my dining room table with my notebook, pen, Bible, and coffee and talk to God. I would clench my eyes shut and whisper, hopeful He was listening, "I just want this to be real, and I'm going to be honest with you." Tears would fall from my eyes. I wanted something true. I felt He knew that, too. This time with God felt like a big warm blanket wrapped itself around me, assuring and

affirming me that I was safe here. I felt as if God really wanted me just as I was, flaws and all. I'd never been more sure of it.

I never knew what these sessions would look like, but I'd be ready for where He'd take me. It's worth taking that time.

Some days I'd feel a push to read scriptures or listen to a teaching on my phone. Sometimes I'd get bored and feel an eagerness to write, draw, or rearrange my home. My mission was that I'd bring my full self and get to know God. My hope was that He'd show me the way. Every day as I showed up, I'd trust just a little bit more of who God was.

What happened next took me by complete surprise. As I would pray or journal, questions in my heart began to form around the creative gifts I had locked up years ago. In gentle whispers, God was asking me:

What are your dreams?

Why did you stop dreaming?

Why did you stop drawing?

Why don't you think your writing is good or impactful?

Why don't you share your heart more?

Why do you doubt what is in you?

As much as this was a journey to creativity, it was a journey through dealing with some of my roadblocks to putting my trust in God. I had to do some internal work in the process of exploring my creativity. *Why had I stopped dreaming, drawing, and creating?*

My art and the business that would emerge years later came from my heart and soul—a deep place that God was molding and shaping, holding me, pushing me, guiding me. It all started with Him.



Creative isn't something we have to become. It is a gift we get to tap into and use. Perhaps, like me, you've felt unfulfilled trying to be something you were never meant to be. Take a minute to hear from the One who created you. What creative avenue is God prompting you to explore? For me, it was visual art. For you, it could be cooking or baking, writing, decorating your home, doing photography, or doing hair. Make a note of what you think it is for you.

You already have it in you, friend.

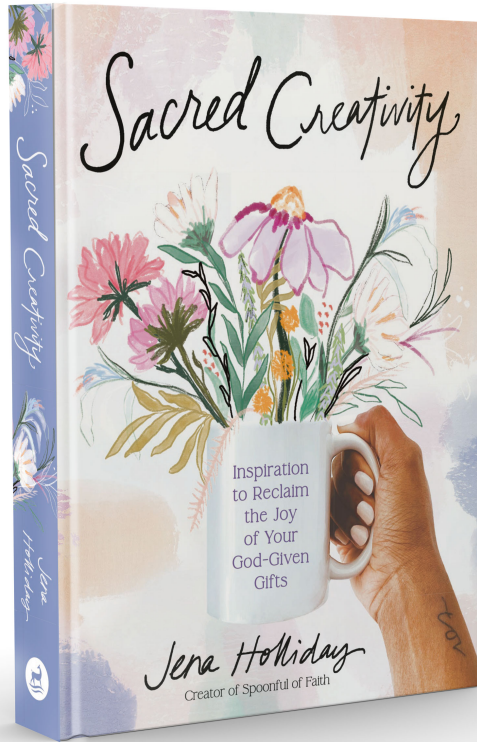
And as we'd do with any gift, we get to receive it, unwrap it, and make use of it whenever we desire. Creativity is the Creator's gift to each of us, and God loves when we connect to that part of ourselves.



"Creativity
is the
Creator's gift
to each of us."







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