

A Conversation with Chrystal Evans Hurst, Author of *She's Still There: Rescuing the Girl in You*

Q. Congratulations on She's Still There. It's such a moving but practical book—a rarity. But first thing's first: you are a mom of five, a wife, an in-demand blogger and speaker—how on earth did you find time to write this?

A. Oh, thank you! You know, only three of my kids are still home, so I am not taking care of five full-time anymore. One is married and moved away, one is in college, and then the boys are 14, 12, and 8. I don't do this all alone—someone comes to the house 25 to 30 hours a week to help me with everything from laundry to making sure the kids are doing their homework to ensuring we get dinner on the table, and I'm so grateful for that support.

That said, writing *She's Still There* definitely required a lot of 5 a.m. mornings and marathon weekends. The other day, someone asked me when I'm going to write my next book. I said, "That's akin to asking a woman who just gave birth and is still in stirrups when she's going to have another one! I cannot answer that right now!" (laughs)

Q. This book's premise is so beautiful and frankly, unique: you urge women not just to revisit the dreams of childhood, but to validate and pursue them. Where did this idea come from?

A. I tell this story in the book. My oldest daughter was contemplating marrying her now-husband, and she was asking me what I thought she should do. I told her, 'No, no, no, you're not going to blame me in 10 years if you're not married or if you are married and can't believe I let you do that. This has to be your decision.'" (laughs)

Then I said, "Look. Most women I know who are struggling with choices that they made in the past end up trying to go back and find the girl that they were before—before that choice to get married, before they took that job, before they had the kids. *Before.*"

I told her that I needed her to think of a time when she felt really hopeful and excited about her life, and had a level of certainty and peace about who she was and what she was going to do. I asked her: "What time do you remember being the most like that?"

She said, "When I was 18, right when I graduated from high school." I said, "Okay, here's the thing. I know this is going to sound a bit strange, but this is the best way I know how to say it: you need to find that girl and ask her what she wants you to do. Because if you don't find her and ask her now, you'll be trying to find her at 30 or 40 or 50."

Then, I told her, "She's still there. But you have to ask her what she wants for your life right now." That idea drove the entire book.

Q. I love that idea. Of course, it begs an important question: why do you think the dreams we had at 18 or even younger are especially valuable and worth rescuing?

A. I think who we were as girls—even though hopefully we get better and more mature as we age—matters because as children, we were raw and innocent. That purity makes it easier to discover those hopes and desires that are deeply rooted in the gifts God gave us. In other words, when we were girls, we hadn't tried to change ourselves too much to appease the world yet.

I also think it's important to point out that there are two possibilities here. One is that when you were a girl, you had dreams that you want to get back to now—or maybe today you realize they weren't quite right. But you had the dreams. The other possibility is that you didn't really have clearly formed dreams as a girl. That's okay—you still had gifts.

If you were a creative kid, you're probably creative now. If you were talkative, you probably still are. If you were passionate about nurturing other people, that's probably still a big part of you. And that's what we're concerned with ultimately, whether you had big dreams or not. We are searching for the gifts of the girl.

Q. The overall format of She's Still There is nice because it offers consistent practical applications for the points you make. Did you always plan on including the Reflections for the Rescue exercises at the end of each chapter?

A. Yes, I knew I wanted to include lists of questions to help guide the reader. I think I say in the beginning of the book that I want it to be practical. As the author, I felt obligated to help readers develop personal takeaways and to-do lists because that is what I crave as a reader.

Q. The book's opening is intense. You say that you were longing for a break, and that you literally prayed God would create a situation that would send you to the hospital for a while. This is going to be familiar to a lot of readers, although many of us would never admit it. It's brave of you to confess. Did you know it'd resonate?

A. No, in fact, I hesitated writing that part because I thought, "Oh, this is going to make me sound like a crazy person." As I was writing, I thought, "*Who thinks that?* Who thinks, 'God, please put me in the hospital.'? But apparently I'm not the only one! By being honest, we can really comfort and empower one another.

Q. You devote a lot of time in this book to discussing the drift. What is the drift?

A. The drift is what happens when where we intended to head in our journey is totally not where we find ourselves. We don't realize it's happening. We look up and see, man, we are miles off course.

We drift because we are not paying attention. It happens because we are in the rhythm and routine of doing things that don't seem to take us away from where we should be, but over time, inch by inch, they do. We get busy. We think, "Not today. I'll start on that tomorrow." And then tomorrow never comes. It happens because something that's more exciting, more pleasurable, and more interesting is available to us in the form of a person, a relationship, an activity, a goal—something we want to spend our money on.

So rather than keep focused on our true end goal, we take a little slip or a slight turn to the left or right. If you do that over and over again over time, you'll look up and find yourself lost.

Q. And in the book, you address how to get back on track. But really, you have to just realize you're drifting in the first place.

A. Exactly, and that is the point of pain where I started for this book. If a woman picks up a book entitled *She's Still There*, she's drifting. That's the assumptive principle of the book. I'm assuming in the first four chapters that you sense there is something in your life that isn't the way you want it to be.

Your life doesn't match your expectations or hopes for a few reasons: 1) you've drifted because you weren't paying attention; 2) you can tie a change in your life back to a choice you made; or 3) your derailment was caused by a collision. You got knocked from one lane to another because somebody else ran into you: you were abused, you got divorced, you lost your job, your house burned down. An event like that starts a series of other events that are out of your control.

No matter the cause, you're not where you want to be. And the fundamental answer to the problem of the drift is to acknowledge it.

That's why I spend so much time in the first part of the book saying that you picked it up because something is wrong. Then, I say let's be honest about what's wrong—about yourself, about how the drift happens. The first thing you have to do when you're lost is figure out where you are, and then, you have to get directions that usually make you retrace the wrong turns you took so that you can find your way back to the right road. In the beginning of the book, I am trying to get you—the reader—to admit where you are, and then, to explain the drift. Then we discuss what we need to do to get back on track.

Q. That's what makes exploring our past so valuable.

A. Right. You have to compare your history to your current life and figure out where you should be—that's why rescuing the girl in you matters. We are blessed with roadmaps here. The first basic roadmap is God's Word, the instructions He gave everybody. Then, the customized roadmap is deposited in you by God. It's in your gifts, in your abilities, in your interests, and in your nature. It's deposited in your opportunities and in your experiences, both those full of joy and those full of pain.

When you look at all of that, and add it to God's Word, you begin the process of finding the roadmap back to the girl you were. For this to work, you have to be honest about what went wrong.

Q. You model that kind of honesty for readers. In the first part of the book, you write candidly about how you became a single mom as a teenager. You're a woman of faith. Were you nervous at all about sharing this part of your story?

A. Nervous wouldn't be the word. I think more Christians need to share their stories so that other Christians don't feel like they have to carry a cloak of guilt and shame.

So no, I wasn't nervous. My pregnancy is what it is. I have a 25-year-old daughter and I'm 45. I don't get to hide that evidence of my drift! It's part of who I am, and it's an obvious part. My hesitation, if any, was just that I don't want to be the poster child for getting pregnant as a teenager and then coming back to the Lord. I didn't want to get into a lot of the details because I didn't want the book to be about me. I wanted to jump in first—to honestly tell my story and do what I'm asking readers to do—but I wanted the arc of the book to curve back to being about the reader.

I don't want people to hear my story and then just say, "Aw, well everything worked out!" I tried really hard as I wrote to leave clues that my story isn't that cut and dry. It took me a long time to heal.

Christians like to tie bows. I didn't want to put my story out there and have people box it up, decorate it with a bow, and say, "Oh, it got good after that!" So I tried to talk about other areas where I got lost, too.

Q. What are some other areas you delve into?

A. I talk about difficulty with finances, with health, with weight—there are so many ways to look at difficulty.

I did not want anyone to feel excluded, as in, "Oh, she had that moment, then she recovered. Life got perfect." No, it took me a long time, and there have been other moments. I didn't want anyone to walk away and think, "Well, that was neat. It worked out for her. It may not work out for me."

Q. So many women—especially women of faith—find it difficult not just to share our stories, but as you say, to "own" our stories. Why do you think it's so hard for us to own our stories?

A. Well, that's because we're humans, right? We tend to judge other people, and we judge them by their stories. But for every person who judges us based on our story, there is another person who receives a stepping stone to their own healing through our story.

We don't want to glorify our sins or mistakes or dwell on the horrible things that have happened to us. But the Bible talks about the fact that we can comfort others best when we have been comforted. Being honest with God, ourselves, and others is a gift to ourselves and other people.

Q. But as much as society encourages a sort of overexposure and oversharing, we are so frightened of being honest.

A. Yes—it is a weird time. We put up walls and are wary of being judged. I think ultimately, we have to be individually committed to seeking after God for ourselves. God is interested in us being naked before Him. The most important thing is to own our stories so that we are open and honest before Him. Then, what we do with those stories after that will vary from person to person, and should be rooted in obedience to Him—what he's calling us to do.

Q. I love this line from the book: “Just because it hurt you doesn’t mean it has to define you. Your scars are real, but your healing can be too.” Why do you think we tend to focus on the scars?

A. It’s our nature. Think about Israel. God delivered the people of Israel, they crossed the Red Sea, He gave them manna, provided for them. And what did they do? Complained constantly.

I think this is one of the reasons why the Bible encourages us to praise God and be grateful. Philippians 4:4: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

Our tendency is to look at what’s wrong. We have to make the intentional decision to say, “You know what? This did happen. It was awful. But this is what has gone right. This is how God brought me out.”

In the book, I talk about taking my husband to all of his doctor’s appointments. It was such a challenging time. But we realized, “We have a babysitter! We can go on a date. We can go to lunch!”

Find the silver lining. There is always something God is doing, even in the darkest times. He’s redemptive in nature. We just have to look for it and choose to focus on it.

Q. In that same vein, you write, “In reality, I tend toward pessimism.” You’re so honest. I love that you then emphasize how important celebration is. Can you talk about what you celebrate in your life and why celebrating is so powerful and important?

A. We do tend to look at what’s wrong. Celebration is a choice to not only look at what’s right, but to mark the moment. When we look back at our lives, we remember the things that we make special. We remember birthdays and anniversaries because we celebrate them. In the Old Testament, God told the Israelites to build an alter and have a feast. He knew that they would remember things they celebrated.

When I go on vacation, I take pictures of the most memorable moments. The best pictures get put in the album, and the even better pictures get put in the frame. When my kids remember the vacation, they rarely remember the part they didn’t like. They remember the part I framed for them.

Celebration builds a frame around the thing that you want to remember and puts it in a positive light. Even if you and your husband have an argument the week before your anniversary, you should still celebrate it. It’s still an accomplishment, even as you’re working through things.

Celebration gives us power. It allows us to frame our lives, which can then motivate us to continue doing the things that have propelled us to those high points that are worth applauding.

Q. You talk about the importance of what we say to ourselves and speaking the change we want to see. Why is what we tell ourselves about who we are so powerful?

A. We learn by what we hear. The Bible talks about how hearing is important for learning the Word of God. Think about children: they learn who they are and what is expected of them by what they hear. Call a kid dumb and stupid, and they start to think they’re dumb and stupid. Call

them smart and good, they start to believe that. So what do you think happens when we say those things to ourselves as adults?

We have the power to speak life and death to ourselves. If our head hears it enough, we will start to believe it.

What we think affects how we feel. We can choose to tell ourselves the truth. When our thoughts are running away—our emotions are running away—we can choose to redirect them, and one of our most powerful tools is our own tongue.

Q. There is a wonderful subtlety to this next point. You write about how God has expectations for us, and we need to figure out what those expectations are. But you're not just talking about loving our neighbor. You're driving home something more personal than that. Can you talk about that distinction a bit? How do we figure out what God's unique expectations for us are?

A. Yes. This idea that we are supposed to obey God and read His Word and love our neighbors as we want to be loved—that's all correct. But He gave each of us specific talents. He has expectations for you and me that are the same and rooted in His Word. Then, He also has expectations for you that are different and based on the gifts, opportunities, and experiences He gives you.

If you're a writer, you can help other people with their voices and share the message. That means He'll have different expectations for you than He has for the dancer. That doesn't mean she can't write, but if He gave her the body, love, and passion for dancing, that's His expectation for her.

God has a baseline standard for everybody. But we are called to push further. We should ask, "God, what are you expecting of me?"

Q. You say a lot in this book. There is a lot of practical advice and honest, soulful storytelling. But if readers have just one takeaway, what do you hope it is?

A. I hope the main takeaway is this: the girl in you—the best of the girl in you—is still there. It is your responsibility to do the work of rescuing her.

Believers tend to do a lot of stuff, then just sit around and say, "Well, I'm still struggling." We have to wake up and roll up our sleeves. He has given us everything we need, but we have to be willing to do the work.

About Chrystal Evans Hurst

Chrystal Evans Hurst is a dynamic speaker, worship leader, and writer with a clear message for women: God has big plans for the unique gifts he gave you. Through her blog, Chrystal's Chronicles, regular contributions to Proverbs 31 Ministries, thriving social media platforms, and conferences across the country, Chrystal reaches hundreds of thousands of women with honest stories and fierce encouragement. Co-author of the bestselling *Kingdom Woman* with her father, the beloved Dr. Tony Evans, she will publish her anticipated new book *She's Still There: Rescuing the Girl in You* in August 2017. A mom to five, Chrystal lives just outside of Dallas, Texas, with her husband Jessie. For more information, please visit www.ChrystalEvansHurst.com.