

PULL IT OFF

REMOVING YOUR FEARS AND
PUTTING ON CONFIDENCE

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WELCOME

AN INTRODUCTION

TO MY BRAIN

Anyone who follows me on social media knows I'm obsessed with my husband, Ben. Something about that baseball butt and kind heart just gets me every time. Sure, some days aren't so great and we bicker about the dumbest things, but most days (and the ones I choose to hold on to) feel easy and uncontrived. When it's just us, we aren't trying too hard and we're not overthinking the little things. When it's just us, we are not trying to make the other person someone they are not, and in turn, we are not putting pressure on our own selves to be something we aren't. When it's just us, it feels uncomplicated and sincere.

Ironically, the day when we decided to get hitched and make it "just us" forever felt like anything *but* that.

Those weeks leading up to the wedding should have been filled with days of excitement and anticipation. But, alas, they were filled with let's-get-this-over-with, can't-we-just-elope, don't-touch-me, you're-annoying days instead.

Planning an out-of-state wedding while taking twenty-one credits a semester for college was a little intense, so we occasionally dreamed of throwing the bird to the world and running away to Montana. To be honest, I'm not really sure why we selected that state—neither of us had been, and, in fact, we still haven't gone—but for some reason, it still seems ideal.

The big day for “just us” ended by being a day for everybody else and their dog-sitter's second cousin's mom.

The main characters in the actual wedding day were simply pawns—glorified party planners—given the task of throwing everyone in the universe a party that would be worth the plane flight and money it cost to buy the ugly bridesmaid dress. In fact, the bride and groom are virtually the last people a wedding day is for. Who cares if your favorite kind of cake is carrot? Someone *might* be allergic. Cancel the carrot. Who cares if you like pop jams blaring out on the dance floor? Someone *might* be offended by that kind of music. Cancel the DJ. Who cares if you just really, really love pink and want to wear a pink wedding dress? Someone *might* question the purity of your marriage. Go buy a white one, dummy.

Lest you think that I did not succumb to any of this nonsense, let me tell you something. I bought *two* wedding dresses. Two. I was so terrified by feeling sexy in dress number one that I took it back and bought dress number two.

It didn't stop there. I decided against the music I love to dance to because “Aunt Bertha” would complain it was

too loud and aggressive (when her disappointment was truly because she wouldn't be able to hear all the gossip at the other end of the table). I decided to not do a champagne toast even though I think of champagne as basically a more enjoyable sparkling water. Why refuse the bubbly, you ask? Because someone *might* be offended. To be fair, no one had raised a concern, but I was worried that *maybe* in the sea of 400 faces who attended our wedding, there *might* just *maybe* be someone who would get miffed.

Talk about walking on eggshells. It's a miracle anyone ends up getting married at the end of an engagement, because death by engagement is probably a thing. Thank the good Lord for my mother, who made the wedding day come together seamlessly. She could legitimately run the world with her brains and fortitude.

Here's the thing about living to make everyone else around you happy: It will never happen.

That Disney princess fantasy you have in your head that everyone must like you and you must never offend anyone or piss anyone off? It's a fairy tale. That's right. Tooth Fairy, Easter Bunny, Atlantis, Santa Claus, Pleasing All of Humanity = Not Real Life.

So why do we live our lives as if the ability to please every living male and female at any given moment is even a possibility? How can we be people who are gracious and kind, not because we live in a bunker, but because we are confident and secure and unapologetic?

Good question.

We are humans in desperate need of the One who not only exposes the reality of who we are but also opens our eyes and lovingly makes us His. He changes the beat to our song; instead of hiding or trying to become something we cannot, we sing of our humanness. After all, He made us this way. When we know that, we can let our transparency and vulnerability take their appropriate role as the common ground between each of us. This knowledge of acceptance by God amidst vulnerability will be the soil out of which grows a confident, aware, and free person. The you of yours.

In this book, we are going to journey together through the question I get asked most often: How do you pull it off? While this question is usually in regard to the seemingly life-sized Crayola box I must surely have gotten dressed in that morning, this book is most *definitely* not about clothes, because your self-expression is only an outward display of the confidence you feel inside. However, this book is about the question that seems to probe most of modernity today: How can we be completely transparent and vulnerable with ourselves and others, and yet be secure and confident enough to walk through life without fear?

Pull It Off is broken down into three parts that will address the issues of authority, identity, and security, in order to reveal the root issue of where our fears stem from. We can then maximize our true identities and lean into our unique gifts due to a grounded belief in our acceptance of others, our acceptance by God, and ultimately, the acceptance of ourselves.

1. AUTHORITY

When we make decisions based on fear, we have given the authority of our lives over to fear itself. When we make decisions based on being accepted by others, we hand the authority of our lives over to them. Until we can answer this age-old-yet-incredibly-relevant conundrum, we are unable to be truly confident in who we are as individuals. Because we all know decisions become very difficult when our authority is found in the flippant opinion of others.

So, who or what do we allow to be our authority when it comes to our own lives? I'm not talking about whether or not you need to be paying attention to traffic lights or police officers. I am talking about the outside voices we listen to—why did you or why didn't you decide to wear your pink wedding dress? Was it because you decided that you actually loved the traditional idea or was it because you saw one too many questioning eyes and confused looks and awkward responses? Only you can answer *why* you make the decisions you make. Why you parent the way you parent. Why you decided to go to law school instead of taking over the family business. Why you decided to be a stay-at-home mom instead of taking that next promotion. That is a question between you and God, and when God becomes the authority in your life, you will be freed to be confident in your decisions instead of being the indecisive eggshell walker you've always been—and that goes for

me too. I've been the indecisive eggshell walker. We're in this together.

2. IDENTITY

After you strip away the confusing opinions and preferences that every man, woman, and child on earth will have about the way you live your life, you will be left with a lot less noise and a lot more open space in your heart. When you push the mute button on who and what everyone else thinks you need to be, it can kind of feel like you're on top of a hill, all alone, just you and God. However, this also means pushing mute on that devilish little person inside you who is telling you who you are not measuring up to be. When you push mute on the outside and on the devilish inside voices, it will free up space and time and energy in your heart to sit and be still for a minute with God. Who am I? What do I identify with?

Spoiler alert: Your identity will not be found in your image. It will never be found in your ability to fulfill a certain role. Your identity will not be found in your success. Your identity will also never be found in your own ability to be good enough for God. Your identity is in God Himself. You are made in the image of God, with a purpose that He has designed for you—one of love, authority, freedom, security, and confidence in His approval of you, even when you don't have it from the world.

3. SECURITY

When you understand that you've got God in your corner—made by Him and for Him—you can be secure to be exactly who you are. You can be confident enough that when someone rolls their eyes at that pink wedding gown, you have the courage to respond to them with grace. You can give them a “Heck yes, I did,” instead of cowering and changing who you are in order to try and appease someone else. When you feel secure in who you are and in God's love for you and you have been created uniquely to display a part of who He is, then you care a whole lot less about what doesn't matter. And in turn, you can care a whole lot *more* about what actually *does* matter to you.

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Once we are able to name and believe who we are and where our authority is found, we begin to live lives of security and confidence. We begin to own our lives and stop apologizing for them. We cultivate environments of freedom and security for our families and relationships. We cultivate an environment of tenderness with ourselves and truly allow ourselves to begin to be creative and self-expressive.

This self-expression—stemming from having security and confidence—results in the belief that we are worthy of the time we put forth into self-discovery, the time

we put forth into our craft and work, and the belief in the love of God. Not because of our own morality and achievements, but because of His achievement on our behalf. When we are secure, we believe that we are worthwhile and can, indeed, pull it off.

And let's be honest, a happy day in Montana with a pink wedding dress, carrot cake, a dance party, and champagne sounds fun. Care to join?

PART

AUTHORITY

ONE

1

THE HEART AUTHORITY

STRINGS OF PEARLS

I remember those long drives down Highway 1.

There was a slight breeze from the cracked window on this midsummer Sunday afternoon. My hands gripped tight on the oversized steering wheel of my father's cherry-red 1969 Chevy truck. The black leather bucket seat sat up high and would bounce slightly as we drove over the small potholes in the road.

Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap.

The sound of my dad's fingers on his laptop as he manually programmed the engine of his truck. My dad is a genius and I always grew up knowing so. This '69 Chevy had the gas mileage of a modern-day hybrid because my dad programmed it that way—adjusting horsepower and torque to maximize fuel economy in the engine by

manually programming the laptop he had hooked to the truck's inner workings while I drove. Ya know, simple stuff.

These are some of my most-loved memories with my dad. Those drives were filled with mostly silence and the *tap, tap, tap* of the laptop, but every now and then, my dad would hand me a string of pearls—a figurative string of invaluable pearls of wisdom.

“Hey, sugar, don’t do anything to please other people, but do only what God wants of you. Protect your heart.”

“Okay, Dad,” I would reply as I waited for the rest of what he had to say.

“I will always be here, not to tell you what to do, but to support and help you.”

“Thanks,” I would say politely, my sixteen-year-old self wondering what all this implied.

“You can be whoever it is God wants you to be, because God loves you. God is not impotent; God is not out of control. He is present and all knowing. So, don’t ever let fear stop you. The work of our human nature is fear, but the work of God is courage. When you’re filled with joy and hope and peace, you can be courageous. If there’s no peace, you can’t be courageous. If there’s no hope, we won’t be courageous. But there is joy and hope and peace—because that is God.”

Pearls.

And I wore that string of pearls wherever I went. That’s not to say I was always courageous. And it’s *definitely* not to say that I never did things just to please other people. But I never believed fear was something to avoid. I grew

up believing that there would always be fear along the way and that fear was intended to be a motivator and could always be overcome with courage.

Years later, I was newly engaged to my fiancé and on tour with a rock artist when I received a call from my soon-to-be husband. He had just found out he had been drafted into the Minor Leagues by the Houston Astros. I'll never forget that call: *"If we're going to do this, Jules, this has to be a 'we' thing and not just a 'me' thing."*

I know that we didn't understand completely the implications of baseball life and how much it would change. But we did know that the travel would be intense and that this was going to be a huge difference from what we had visualized for our lives. We had always assumed Ben would become a youth pastor and I would continue being a writer and musician. For two pastors' kids raised in the rural Midwest, the baseball life was uncharted territory.

As weird as it may sound, signing that first professional baseball contract was an act of courage. We had visualized a simple life but signed up for exhilarating chaos instead. I never thought my life would include living between three homes, weekly plane rides, and teaching my children their numbers using hotel elevator buttons. We were fearful of the extremely high divorce rate within professional sports. We were fearful of being apart regularly. We were fearful of being away from family and friends and the very real possibility of isolation. We were fearful of never knowing where we would live, and we knew that a team could trade us and move us without warning.

What is it about fear that can keep us all from living full and courageous lives? Maybe we've lived in fear of putting ourselves out there. Maybe we've lived to just fit in, so that we won't ever have to stand out. Maybe we've allowed fear to keep us from trying new things because, well, if you never try, you'll never fail. Maybe we let fear keep us from being who we are, and we live a life of constant adaptation and pretty pretend.

Most important, what keeps us from fastening that string of pearls around our necks and stepping out in courage, confidence, and brilliance?

TOY BEARS AND CORN SNAKES

The Ancient Greeks and Romans believed courage to be the essential quality in a person. Aristotle wrote, "Courage is the first of human virtues because it makes all others possible."¹ The Roman philosopher Seneca considered all humans slaves to fear.² Yet given the right circumstances, ordinary people can set themselves free of this bondage and act courageously. How is this achieved? And what is it that happens to allow a person to willingly choose to engage in an activity that frightens them?

Well, turns out that neuroscientists recently determined how courage works in the brain. There is a little region in the brain called the subgenual anterior cingulate cortex (sgACC), the driving force behind courageous acts.

How did they arrive at this exciting discovery, you ask?

Teddy bears and corn snakes.

Volunteers were divided into those who had a fear of snakes and those who did not, before undergoing tests with either a stuffed teddy bear or a live corn snake, a nonvenomous species often kept as a pet.

Participants could choose whether to have the toy bear or snake moved closer or farther away from them while a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scan was done on their brain.

The scans showed different patterns of brain activity when volunteers succumbed to fear versus when they showed courage by deliberately overcoming it.

Activity in the sgACC increased along with the degree of fear felt by those who had the corn snake brought closer to them despite their fear of snakes. But this was *not* the case with the folks who succumbed to fear by increasing their distance from the snake.

In addition, activity in a series of temporal lobe brain structures was reduced when fear increased but was overcome.

Lead researcher Dr. Yadin Dudai, from the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, Israel, said: “Our findings delineate the importance of maintaining high sgACC activity in successful efforts to overcome ongoing fear and point to the possibility of manipulating sgACC activity in therapeutic intervention in disorders involving a failure to overcome fear.”³

And what does this scientific mumbo jumbo mean exactly?

That we have to exercise this part of the brain in order

to overcome our fears. It means that fear will always be present, but there is a definite importance in keeping that little part of the brain active in order to not be *bound to* our fears. That we have to push ourselves to overcome the things we are afraid of.

If you never even *try* to leap over the hurdle between you and living a beautiful, courageous, and brilliant life, you might not ever be able to jump over it at all. That high you get as you are in mid-leap, even if it's just barely grazing the hurdle, is scary—your fear of tripping and falling on your face is legitimate, but it is thrilling. On the other side of that hurdle is courage and confidence and a feeling of complete worthiness. It's a feeling of autonomy that no one but you can give yourself.

I think we can all agree that there is nothing more terrifying than being totally and unapologetically honest—be it when telling the truth or authentically living the life we were made to live. Both Ben and I (here comes the honest part) entered the traveling baseball player/traveling musician lifestyle with a degree of ignorance. We knew the figures, we thought we understood the risks, but we were unprepared. Kind of like running to jump a hurdle that you *know* is thirty-three inches instead of the normal thirty that you trained with, but you try to make the leap even though you don't know how you will do. Well, Ben and I jumped that thirty-three-inch hurdle and we fell flat on our figurative arses. The travel was a difficult adjustment and the harsh actuality of dealing with public scrutiny was more painful than

we wanted to admit. I was traveling every week back and forth between Phoenix and Nashville to try to finish my senior year of college and found myself in the ER with heart arrhythmia due to stress. We were making \$200 every two weeks in Minor League Baseball, which was financially strenuous, to say the least. We were in our first couple years of marriage, which is supposed to be so happy and romantic and sexy, right?! But our marriage was on the rocks, and we were both beat down by the difficulty of our uncharted venture. So, we did what so many do when faced with failure and struggle and the fear of others finding out our pain . . .

We hid.

We hid from honesty. We hid from vulnerability. We hid from any open and honest conversation with family and friends. We thought we were being courageous by staying in the baseball lifestyle—and that *was* the reality when Ben first signed on that dotted line—but when the struggle, isolation, and fear of not being strong enough to endure all the pressure set in, we realized that what was motivating us was no longer courage but fear. We had let fear become the authority of our hearts. Because we were afraid of failing. We were afraid of being looked at as quitters should we not be able to handle it all. We were afraid of what our families would think—that we would be seen as “weak” or “ungrateful for the opportunity” if we were honest about how it was actually really hard. We were afraid that even God Himself would look down on us in disappointment that we couldn’t handle the blessings

He'd given us. Our fear kept us bound to performance and bound to striving to keep up a perfect appearance. Our fear of others knowing that we weren't flying high but were actually sinking kept us obsessed with keeping up appearances.

This fear of others' disapproval of us and fear of God's disapproval of us had to come face-to-face with the one thing that would begin to set us free: courage. This time, the courage to be honest and vulnerable. It took the most courage to admit our weakness and come to grips with our humanity and limitations.

Slowly, we began to inch closer and closer to that corn snake of honesty, and when we began to be vulnerable, we began to heal. As our courage grew, it became easier and easier to be honest and vulnerable with ourselves, with God, and with others. We became less and less afraid of being known, and slowly became more and more confident.

Courage is recognizing our weaknesses and simultaneously recognizing that God approves of us amidst these weaknesses. Even though the circumstances didn't change—the travel schedule was still intense, public scrutiny was still a reality, and we weren't making any more money—we began to relish our true heart's authenticity and live more confident lives.

So how can you train your mind to act more courageously and live a life of authenticity in everyday life?

First, you've got to identify the armor you have *against* being courageous and honest with yourself. You've got to

ask yourself, *Why am I afraid, and how am I protecting myself from vulnerability?* Are you masking yourself with perfectionism? Pessimism? Have your feelings of being unworthy led you to always project a feeling of composure? Of having it all together? Or do you emit cynicism? Is sarcasm your chosen tone that best masks vulnerability? (Been there, done it all, folks.)

We must first acknowledge that, yes, fear is a part of life, and, yes, failure is going to reveal that we are not perfect and might even reveal that we feel we are not worthy. Then we've got to expose ourselves to what we are afraid of. We inch ever closer to the corn snake and exercise that little part of the brain so it can grow stronger and stronger, and we will eventually leap over those thirty-three-inch hurdles without a second thought.

I'm sure there are a lot of people who (God bless 'em) have thought I have it all together. The good news is that now you have this book, so you can kiss that perception goodbye! I want people to know that I, too, deal with debilitating insecurities that have taken years and years of exercising that darn subgenual anterior cingulate cortex in order to be a girl who is honest with both herself and with God and a woman who is not shocked by her limitations but embraces them. It took many snakes and hurdles to become a wife who is secure in her marriage and a person who feels her best in clothes that have been compared to the colorful garb of Rainbow Brite (rest assured, you'll hear *lots* about those growing pains in the coming chapters).

GRACE UNDER PRESSURE

Speaking of ensembles reminiscent to Rainbow Brite and the Color Kids, I hear one thing a lot (in both complimentary and not-so-complimentary tones): “I could *never* pull *that* off.” Sure, sometimes it’s backhanded and sometimes it’s genuine vibe appreciation. Either way, I always do my best to hold my head high, even if that head is on top of a crazy, wacky outfit. Much like our decision to take on the baseball/musician lifestyle, I wear kooky clothes simply because I want to. The fun I get from getting dressed outweighs the opinions of others and the desire to please other people (it took me a lot of time to realize that too). Because, truthfully, facing your fear is only half the battle. The other half is having to cope with the risk and uncertainty of the reactions before, during, and after you’ve faced your fear. Welcoming such critiques takes courage. As Ernest Hemingway so beautifully put it, “Courage is grace under pressure.”⁴ Can’t you imagine him saying this after just taking on an onslaught of bulls and bears and tigers, brushing the minor beads of sweat from his brow and taking a sip from his scotch on the rocks? What he means is that in high-pressure situations, a courageous person remains composed instead of reacting carelessly.

So, courage = practice + grace.

Got it. Pulling it off and courageousness can mean retaining a certain amount of grace, or elegance or poise, when things get a little rough. The figurative string of pearls suddenly seems less figurative.

But, since we don't all have the same *je ne sais quoi* as ol' Ernie, I also interpret this in another sense. The *other* kind of grace that comes before *that* kind of grace.

Courage, for me, means to be honest and be who I am and wear what I want and live the life I want. But it also means realizing my unmerited favor from God during hard times. When I decide to do something *really* important—something where the projected likelihood of failure is really, really high—the thing that allows me to make the leap is the reminder that *grace* is there even when it's under pressure.

Grace gives us the courage to keep on keeping on.

So yeah, courage = practice + GRACE + pressure.

You can overcome fear with an amazing amount of ease if you simply realize that before all else, you are incredibly worthwhile. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. And I get it—not everyone had a father like mine. But every single one of us living on this little blue planet has a Father who is *constantly* giving us strings of pearls to don and wear proudly every day.

Psalm 139:14 (NIV) declares, “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” Keep in mind that this definition of *fearfully* isn't the first definition you will find in the dictionary, meaning “full of fear.” In fact, in Hebrew, the intended meaning of this word is “with great reverence; standing in awe.”⁵ To be fearfully made was to be made with interest, with respect, with intimate care and forethought. It meant grace and the knowledge that

you were made by something grandiose and supreme. That you were fearfully created to live *without* fear.

And how awesome is the next part: “your works are wonderful, I know that full well”? You are God’s work. God has created you with meaning and purpose and intentionality.

What does that mean? It means you are not a mistake. God creating you with intentionality means you are not an afterthought. You are not just two cells joining together and accidentally becoming a human. You were dreamed about, foreknown, intentional, revered, intimately known and cared for from the beginning of time. God saw fit to create you, to allow you to come into this world...and His works are wonderful! Do you know that fully?

If God’s works are wonderful, and you and I are the most adored and cherished of His works, then do you believe *you* are wonderful?

How astonishing would it be to believe our worthwhileness and allow that belief to make us courageous! If God has given us implicit worth and value, then what do we have to be afraid of? If God is for us, if He is on our side, then why be afraid of those who are seemingly against us?

HEART AUTHORITY

Pearls are made when a small object, such as a grain of sand, is washed into an oyster. As a defense mechanism against this intruder inside its shell, the frustrated little

mollusk creates a pearl to seal off the irritation. A substance called nacre, or mother-of-pearl, is deposited on the surface of the object, forming the shiny, iridescent, smooth pearl.

The object itself (a grain of sand) is not necessarily a bad thing, but to the oyster, it is irritating and is treated as such.⁶

Amazingly, this moment of petulance, pressure, and grievance makes one of the most coveted and beautiful things known to man.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “The whole of nature is a metaphor,” and boy, does that feel most true when it comes to pearls. Emerson believed that the purpose of nature was to give us little pieces of imagery to offer insight into the laws of the universe, and therefore to bring us closer to God.⁷ I totally agree, and for me, pearls, and their process of being made, are inspiring representatives of courage being made, practiced, and found in our beloved hearts.

On the left side of your chest is a smooth, round, glowing, gleaming, luminous, elegant, rare, brilliant, soft, distinctive, precious beating thing, about the size of your fist.

It keeps your blood flowing and your eyes open and your brain thinking. Sometimes, unexpected intruders try to make their way into your heart, and those intruders can change the way you see the world and think about the world. When something grabs hold of your heart, that is called your *heart authority*.

So often, I find in my own life that fear has become my heart authority. If I'm afraid of something, I don't want to do it—and if I allow fear to determine whether or not I do something, I have handed my heart authority over to fear itself. Suddenly, every word said and action done can feel shameful and stupid.

Remember, not all oysters have pearls. If you let that intruder take over and don't practice the courage needed, that grain of sand won't become the pearl it was intended to be.

But, the good news is, like the nacre that covers the pearl, we all have been equipped with a heart filter that tells us that we are worthwhile. It can protect us from getting hurt by the silly things the world sometimes tells us. That filter is a strong, resilient, iridescent, and glorious protective layer that turns all the ick to a beautiful sheen. Ladies and gents, if you've got a strong enough heart filter, that pearl of yours can be jewelry grade.

Do you have the necessary filter over your heart that allows certain things to come in and keeps certain things out? Is that little pearl of yours being protected? Or is the wrong heart authority taking over? What on earth can motivate you to live a full, courageous, confident, and brilliant life?

Well, I don't believe you are going to find it on earth. What if our heart authority—the motivation behind our vulnerability and courage—is not found on earth but is actually divine?

What happens when our heart authority becomes something more like “You are fearfully and wonderfully

made”? What happens when our heart authority is “You have been made in awe, with intentionality, with worthiness”? When the filter over my heart is the truth that God has made me and His “works are wonderful, I know that full well”? When the authority of my heart is no longer fear but “God saw all that He had made and it was very good”?

That *I* am good. That *you* are good. That you and I are imperfect yet perfectly intentioned. That we are worthy, not because of what we’ve *done* or *proven* to others or even to God, but because God Himself, from the beginning, set His affection upon us and said, *You are worthy because I have decided that you are.* Grace.

Yes. These are the Father’s strings of pearls given to you.

When our heart authority becomes *that*, then and only then will we be courageous. Only then will you and I begin to step outside in bravery and confidence like a perfectly rare and harvested pearl. Only then will our lives look like this sort of gorgeous display of messy, imperfect, and blissfully worthy people in all of our reflective shades of white and gray and luminescent color. Only then will the Scriptures that talk about courage actually begin to make sense, because we are actually *feeling* the fear and are finding ourselves in the situations to have to *be courageous*.

Nothing great was ever accomplished without courage, because the easy things don’t need it.

As humans, we become more courageous by being in difficult situations—the same way a pearl is made by the

grinding of sand, or a diamond is made by intense pressure, or a tree is made strong by growing to withstand the elements. To pull it off will require courage, because, no, it's *not* easy and, no, it's *not* status quo, and anything that's not easy or status quo will elicit a response. So, we're gonna get tough skin, a solid heart filter, and the right amount of nacre.

We are called to live courageously and confidently. Unashamed and fearless and basking in the illuminating grace of our Creator. Only when we are fully convinced of who we were created to be will we ever begin to step out in courage, confidence, and brilliance.

So, I *dare* you.

Something beautiful might happen.

(And remember, corn snakes don't even bite.)