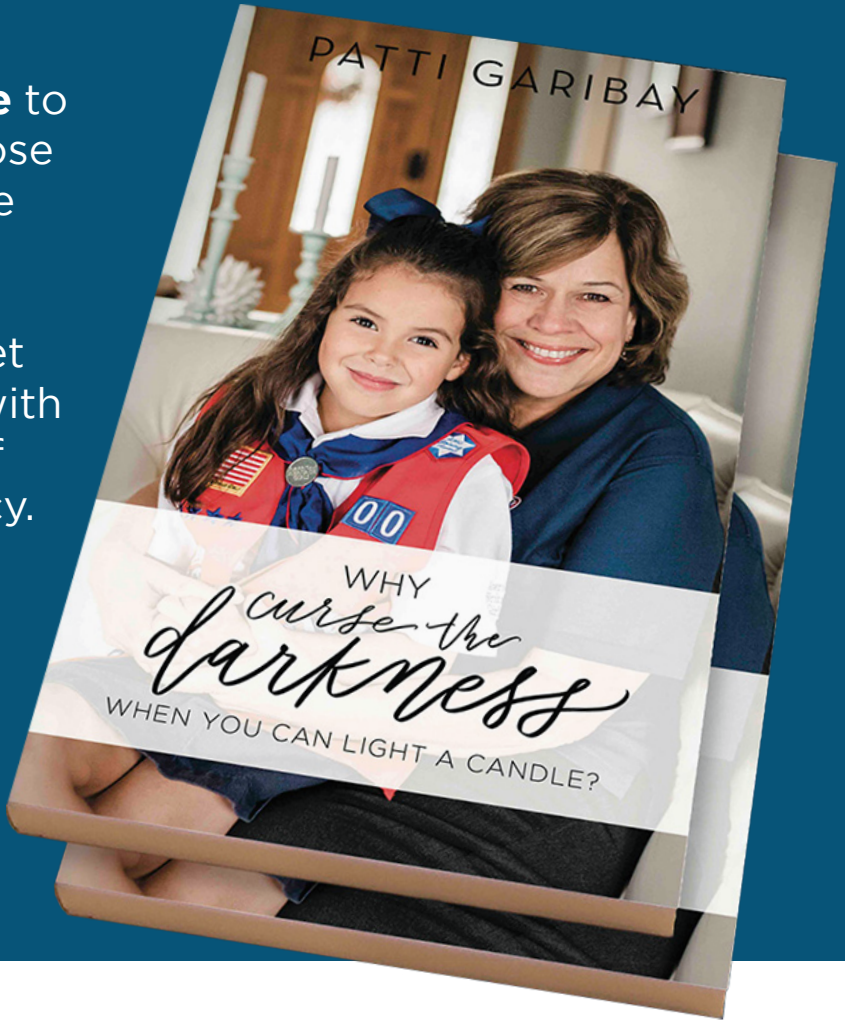


A story of **trust** and **obedience** to inspire those who desire to make a **Kingdom impact**, yet struggle with the fear of inadequacy.



SAMPLE  
CHAPTER

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## CHAPTER FOUR

# IDENTITY

1967

I felt guilty asking for it, because I knew the amount of stress my mom dealt with every day. I finally drummed up enough nerve to make my request.

Even at eight years old, I was wired for relationship. I made friends easily and wanted a birthday sleepover, but instead, Mom agreed to an afternoon celebration. That was somewhat disappointing, since I longed to have an overnight party, but I'd learned to be grateful for what I could get.

I hand-drew and meticulously colored the invitations and gave them to five friends. On the big day, I held my breath, until one by one, my friends arrived. I was thrilled. We ate cake and ice cream and played a few games. It didn't matter who won, just playing made us giggle so hard we struggled to catch our breath. I was happy to be with my friends and to feel like a normal kid, even if it was only for a single afternoon.

As I romped and laughed, I caught a glimpse of my mom, who appeared exhausted and overwhelmed. It was in this moment, I purposed in my heart that this party would be my first and last request.

How could I expect my mom to take care of a disabled husband, raise four kids, and attempt to cater to my childish desires? I was certain my inferior needs would soon cause more resentment and anger to well up in my mother, making my father suffer as a result. It was my duty to forget this dream of future birthday celebrations. I vowed when I grew up, things would be different. I was determined that my children would have parties they would always remember fondly, including sleepovers with fancy cakes, tons of friends, and big, bright balloons.

Once my short-lived, party era of life passed, we still celebrated birthdays, just on a smaller scale. One year, Mom made a ceramic Charlie Brown figurine for me, and I loved that gift. I treasured the thought of my mother patiently painting each line of Charlie's shirt just for me. I put it in a place of honor on my bedroom shelf. Sometimes, I'd lay in my bed at night and stare at Charlie Brown, imagining a day of tea-time with my mom and shopping excursions that lasted the whole afternoon.

I do believe my mother tried the best she could. Despite her full-time job and daily stress from caring for Dad, Mom continued to make room for activities meant to support the well-being of her children. She brought us to our Girl Scout meetings, paid for us to have art lessons, allowed us to play sports, and drove us to Mass every Sunday, all while making sure we learned good values, knowing right from wrong.

Although I longed for Mom's time and attention, Dad always seemed to have plenty of both. Whenever I was at home, I followed my dad around just to be near him. My sister, Karen, teased a few times that I was "Dad's darling," because I looked so much like our mom. Because of my darling status,

there were times my siblings had me ask Dad for special treats or favors.

I'll admit that I liked to please my older sisters, and I had an uncanny knack for getting my dad to do what we wanted. But ultimately, the extra time spent with him was what I was really after.

Dad seemed to enjoy time with me as well, no matter the place or season of year. Our family's garage was our "special" meeting place. In the winter months, we warmed the garage with a space heater while refinishing antiques or caning chairs. Dad's hobbies soon became my hobbies. However, in the summer of 1967, I had just finished third grade and I had an idea for a hobby of my own. As usual, Dad indulged.

I decided to have school in our special meeting place during summer break. Somehow, I convinced neighborhood kids to attend my pretend "institute" during those sweltering months in my non-air-conditioned garage. I became the teacher I always wanted to be, set up desks, and even served popsicles for snacks. I had everything I needed to run an efficient and effective classroom—date stampers, stickers, a chalk board (complete with a pointer), and even a bell. My schoolroom provided just the right amount of escape and purpose during the long summer break for the kids in the neighborhood, but even more for myself. Though some of my students knew about my dad, none of them knew of the difficulties "Miss Patti" faced after the bell rang at the end of our school day. I stayed in "professional character" while in the classroom.

My formative years were split, some time spent in a world of love and acceptance from my dad, and other times spent in a world of rejection and escape. My mom's rage was no longer aimed solely at my father. My siblings and I became recipients of her verbal lashings and criticism. It didn't take long for her

words to penetrate my heart, allowing insecurities to rush in, filling its many vulnerable spaces.

In retrospect, I realize this foundation started me on a years-long struggle with my self-worth and identity. We all need validation that our lives are meaningful. And because affirmations are so important, any criticism is hurtful, especially from our parents. This deep world of rejection would haunt me into my adulthood.

Because of the yelling I frequently heard from my mom, while my disabled father shrunk in guilt, I was a very fear-filled child. I cowered at night, scared of the verbal assaults, finding only one single comfort, sucking my thumb. Insecurities seeped in and I believed lies to

be true about myself: *You aren't worthy. You aren't smart. You cause additional strife*, and so on. Those mental messages took a lifetime to identify and intentional work to move beyond.

Relief didn't arrive until I learned about the true nature of God and comprehended what it meant to be His child. I had to understand more about Him to understand more about me. I needed to realize that "people approval" only lasts for a moment, but God's mercy and love are eternal. His embrace is so much more fulfilling than anything offered by a human heart. His acceptance is the only affirmation and validation that will wholly satisfy us—yet, we don't have to give up on

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being acceptable in the eyes of other people. God sometimes sends surprising gifts.

In my youth, I had yet to learn my value as a treasured child of God. And in third grade, little did I know that human validation was coming by way of a brunette boy from Pittsburgh. The Garibay family moved into the parish, and life once again changed.

#### HAVE YOU CONSIDERED . . .

- *Where do you seek affirmation and validation?*
- *Are you able to see the difference between self-care and selfishness?*
- *Where does your inner security come from?*