

Praise for *Will the Real Person Please Stand Up?*

“Most people struggle with the fear of rejection at some time in their lives. Gail Porter offers encouragement by sharing her own honest story and the inspiring stories of others. The division of sections in *Will the Real Person Please Stand Up?* provides a brilliant summary of her book: living in captivity, breaking strongholds, and tasting freedom. Gail nailed it when she explained that we wear masks because we think we’re not good enough, need to be perfect, or must measure up to a perceived standard. Many will relate to living in isolation rather than taking the risk of being their authentic selves. She reminds us that the One who matters most has loved us all along, faults included. I have no doubt Gail’s writings will inspire many to rise above the fear of rejection and live the life of freedom God intended. As a bonus, she has included study questions at the end of each chapter. They will make this book easy to use in a small-group setting.”

DENA YOHE

Co-founder of Hope for Hurting Parents

Award-winning author of *You Are Not Alone*

Coordinator of Prayer for Prodigals (a ministry of Cru)

“In four-plus decades of speaking and counseling, I’ve consistently heard one word. That word is ‘authentic.’ As you begin this book, you will see and feel authenticity—not just in its words, but in its author, Gail Porter. Gail is a friend and a fellow traveler in our journey to find meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in our day-to-day lives. This book is both honest and emotionally engaging because it comes from Gail’s heart, a heart that is open, caring, and yes—authentic.”

JIM KELLER

Founder, Charis Counseling Center

Orlando, Florida

“The world waits for the ‘real you’ to emerge and rise up to fulfill your God-given destiny and purpose. Gail has brilliantly given us the master plan. Read it, live it, see it change your life.”

SCOTT GEORGE

Senior Pastor, Pine Castle United Methodist Church and
Orlando Hope Executive Team

“Fear paralyzes. In the book *Will the Real Person Please Stand Up?*, author Gail Porter describes how fear of rejection layers our hearts and robs us of many blessings. Based on her own lifelong struggle with an irrational, fear-based identity, Gail shares ways to break the strongholds that take us captive. She also teaches her readers how to embrace the present without encumbrances of the past. Her practical, action-based steps give us new determination to climb mountains, so we can anticipate our futures with joy.”

JEANNE LEMAY

Award-winning author of

Dear God I'm Desperate: Women Have Issues, God Has Answers
www.jeannelemay.com

“Gail Porter’s use of personal stories invites you to feel your own pain. She then gives hope as she beautifully showcases, ‘up close and personal,’ God’s healing of the fear of rejection.”

LOTTIE K. HILLARD, LMHC

“In *Will the Real Person Please Stand Up?*, Gail succinctly unveils what imprisons and inhibits many of us: the inability to express our authentic selves. With honesty and openness, Gail reveals this effective ploy of the enemy. He deceives us into believing we need to please others to be loved, build walls to stay safe and pain free, and prevent others from knowing and rejecting the real us. No more! In this most enlightening, encouraging, and inspiring book, Gail provides Bible-based solutions for recognizing, confronting, and conquering our fear. Now we can live victoriously, be all we can be, and experience everything our Creator has in store for us. It is time to *Stand Up!* Thank you, Gail!”

MARVIN R. TERRY, DC

Whole Health Alternatives

**Will the
REAL
PERSON
Please
Stand Up?**

WILL THE REAL PERSON PLEASE STAND UP?

By Gail Porter

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Names and details of some stories have been changed to protect the identities of individuals.

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Will the
REAL
PERSON
Please
Stand Up?

GAIL PORTER

REDEMPTION 
P R E S S

I dedicate this book
to my longtime friend Shirley Mewhinney.

Thank you for traveling with me on this amazing journey of discovery.

Your prayers, encouragement, insights, advice, humor,
and willingness to speak the truth in love
have given me courage to step forward and taste freedom
to become the real me.

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To my writer friends in the Orlando Chapter of Word Weavers International. You gave me courage to become a serious writer and joined me in this journey of learning to communicate effectively with readers. Your friendships welcomed me into the Orlando writing community and paved the way for me to step into other opportunities as well.

To Enid, Connie, Margie, Janice, Kim, Sharon, Shirley, Brent, and Jo. Thank you for your willingness to share your deep and personal stories. You showed readers they are not alone and helped them embrace hope for rising above their fear of rejection.

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To other personal friends in different arenas of life. Thank you for your cherished friendship and your spiritual encouragement. They help me stay strong as a woman of God who desires to help others know God and live for Him.

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To my Father God, Shepherd Jesus, and my Holy Spirit Counselor and Companion, who stayed by my side throughout this project, giving me wisdom to write the words God wanted to say to those who desire to be set free.

Do not call to mind the former things,
Or ponder things of the past.
Behold, I will do something new,
Now it will spring forth;
Will you not be aware of it?
I will even make a roadway in the wilderness,
Rivers in the desert.

Isaiah 43:18–19

Will The Real Person Please Stand Up?

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Introduction

An Invitation to a Journey toward Freedom



I didn't want to delve below the surface. I was afraid of what I'd find.

Living a superficial life seemed easier. Driven by a need for love and acceptance, I stayed in hiding and presented myself as the person I thought everyone wanted me to be. In my mind, that way of life provided the best protection against my greatest fear: rejection.

The superficial life, however, robbed me of the joy of living in freedom. God wanted to set me free to become the person He created me to be.

Deep-sea diving is challenging, and many of us fear it because it takes us below the surface of safety. There, danger can arise when sharks, with the capability of killing us or maiming us for life, charge toward us. Likewise, living below the surface of our conscious thoughts can feel as dangerous as scuba diving because the enemy of our souls has the same capability of killing our joy of living.

Below the surface, though, we have the chance to observe the wonder of the sea creatures God created. In those same waters, away from the net of daily life, we can discover the beauty of God's creation of us.

Diving into those azure waters can help us uncover our fears. Realizing and acknowledging those fears can lead to the thrill of bursting from the depths into the freedom of the air above.

WILL THE REAL PERSON PLEASE STAND UP?

Are you aware of fears that keep you from experiencing freedom? Have you struggled with the same fear I have: rejection? Has that fear held you back from saying yes to wonderful opportunities and walking through open doors God has placed before you? You knew if you took the risk, your world could expand. Yet you said no.

God has plans and dreams for you. In His love, compassion, and grace, He will reveal the emotions and fears your experiences have formed. You can ask Him to release you from these emotions and fears. He is more powerful than all your hurts, wounds, disappointments, and fears. He can overcome everything that hinders you, so you can walk in freedom as the person He created you to be—the real you.



God helped me dive below the surface of my life. Once I uncovered my fear of rejection and released it to God, I could remove my facade and begin trusting His protection. I want to tell you about who I've become—the real me.

You will read about my experiences and the stories from others at various stages in their journeys toward freedom. The input from experts, also included, can help you better understand the fear of rejection and learn crucial ways to overcome its power.

Until you know you are under the influence of something or someone, you remain a victim. “Living in Captivity,” the first section of this book, will show you how childhood patterns and experiences may have led you to devise techniques and strategies for the Great Cover-Up (my term). This cover-up prevented you from revealing your real self, uniquely and lovingly designed by God.

Once you realize the reasons for your captivity, then what? The second section, “Breaking Strongholds,” presents action steps you

can take to break the vicious cycle of isolation. My life began to change when I no longer wanted to exist as the person everyone else wanted me to be.

As you allow God to lead you out of captivity and break strongholds, you can begin “Tasting Freedom.” In this third section, you will learn to embrace the present without being encumbered by the past. You’ll begin to climb mountains with new determination and less fear, enjoy the view along the way, anticipate the future with joy, and live in freedom.

Psychiatrist Gail Saltz says in her book *Becoming Real*:

Being real means experiencing life’s gifts to their fullest. It means being authentic, strong, rooted. It means that along with the pains of loss, we get to experience the joys of closeness, connection, and intimacy. When we’re real, we’re no longer like tumbleweeds blown around where the wind blows. We have the strength, the stamina, the courage, the power, and the freedom to go where we want to go. Being real means we can tolerate life’s discomforts and ambiguities because we are strong enough to embrace the good and the bad, the black, white, and grays of most situations. When we accept this truth, we will become like trees with deep roots—strong and capable and able to weather whatever comes our way. Being real means experiencing the full spectrum of human emotions.¹

Where are you on your journey of discovering and acknowledging your fears and living in freedom?

WILL THE REAL PERSON PLEASE STAND UP?

In God's strength, people who struggle with the fear of rejection can walk out of their self-made prisons and taste the freedom that will allow them to become who God made them to be.

Come on a journey of discovering how to live in freedom, and become the real person God intended you to be all along.

Part One
Living in Captivity

Chapter 1

Seeking Love and Acceptance

My mother and father didn't abuse me verbally, physically, or sexually. They didn't shout at me or use violence. They were good people who took care of my daily physical needs.

So why did I grow up feeling sad and lonely? Why did I feel disconnected and worthless? Why didn't I bond with anyone?

Because the nice people who raised me were empty.

Henri Nouwen, author and priest, describes how that feels:

There is nothing so harmful as a relationship where nothing is given, nothing is asked, nothing is expected. This is the barren landscape where children grow up in a family where drawbridges are perennially up. This is the place where love is not expressed. Where there is no engagement. No openness. No participation. No joining. No common celebration. No ability to weep together. It is the place where there are no questions and therefore no answers. This place lacks passion and therefore lacks humanity. There are no easy formulas for receiving healing from such neglect.²

These words perfectly represent life within my family. Or perhaps I should say lack of life. Our home was a place of nothingness.

Psychotherapist Lottie Hillard says this kind of family dynamics exemplifies "benign neglect" and "a nice version of rejection."

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My mother and father were kind and good people, but they disregarded the most important ingredients for our family: love and connection.

I never realized that truth before. I minimized my feelings and remained detached, never comprehending what was missing in our family.

As an adult, I tried to recall where my parents and my brother and I sat at our dining room table. I couldn't picture us together there. I didn't remember anything we talked about.

Someone asked me, "Why do you need to know? What does it matter?"

Not being able to picture the four of us during what would normally have been "family time" made me feel sad, lonely, unimportant, and unloved.

Now I grasp why I couldn't remember anything: nothing happened. I had no memories to latch on to because we weren't connected with love that would have fostered personal and meaningful conversations, smiles, and laughter.

There's no picture in my memory of my parents hugging and kissing me. They may have, but their hugs and kisses didn't leave an imprint on my heart.

I can't remember a gleam in their eyes when I bounced into the kitchen in the mornings or ran in from playing outside. I never heard, "That's wonderful" or "You're wonderful" when I told them something I'd said or done. Their lack of love and passion toward me made me feel I wasn't worth caring for. As a result, I stayed aloof and didn't bond with them.

Homesickness was never a problem for me, even during my elementary-school years, when I spent one week away at the annual Campfire Girls camp. During the four years I lived on my college campus, I seldom called, and I went home only on holidays and

vacations. Even while working overseas for many years, I didn't experience a sense of missing out. The fact is, I wasn't.

I remember two conversations with Mom that could have elicited a response of encouragement from her, but they didn't. As a teenager, I told her I planned to submit a personal story to the humor section of *Reader's Digest* magazine. She said, "They may not think your story's funny and won't accept it." Instead of trying anyway, I never submitted it.

Toward the end of my junior year in college, I was elected sorority president. When I relayed the news to my mother, instead of congratulating me, she responded, "That's a lot of responsibility." Behind her words I heard this message: "I'm not sure you're capable. What if you fail?"

My parents divorced when I was fourteen and going into high school. My brother was a year ahead of me.

Dad and I saw each other from time to time. Five years later, when he married Connie, they welcomed me into their home and lives. Their love and acceptance paved the way for Dad and me to build a close relationship we relished for the rest of his years.

Dad's absence relieved some of the underlying tension in the house caused by frustration in their marriage. Because Mom had to deal with every detail of our daily lives while working full time, she didn't have time or energy left for Greig and me. The disconnection between the three of us widened.

Now I understand that my fear of rejection grew out of my lack of love from and connection with my parents, especially my mother.



Life coach Adam Sicinski sheds light on possible origins of fear of rejection:

WILL THE REAL PERSON PLEASE STAND UP?

You were not born with the fear of rejection. It is not a natural part of the human psyche . . . The primary reason [for the fear of rejection] is often a lack of self-esteem . . . Often low self-esteem stems back to childhood experience. Certain events might have taken place that made you doubt your own personal sense of worth. It could even have been one significant traumatic experience of rejection that changed everything. As a result, you became insecure and lacked the necessary belief in yourself that would help you to create your own identity in this world.³

Dr. Saltz says:

Since we are almost never told the truth—that living life brings inevitable pain—we think that each time we experience pain it is proof something's wrong with us. . . . Being human, we look to avoid pain, but when we do, we lose the opportunity to follow the pain to the deepest part of our unconscious minds where our stories sit, spinning their magic about what does and doesn't make us lovable, adequate, or acceptable. But it's only when we make the decision to go into these deep places that we reap the reward of breaking free from the old, restricting narratives we have long outgrown.⁴

Dynamics in our extended family impacted me as well. My Aunt Elia, eleven years younger than Mom, breezed in and out of my life during my early years. I liked her makeup and wavy brown hair and admired her life as a sophisticated single professional woman.

Seeking Love and Acceptance

I enjoyed her visits, but even when we hadn't seen each other for a while, she didn't hug me or say, "I'm glad to see you." If she had, I would have tucked those hugs and words into my heart.

Through the years, she criticized more than praised. Determined that I would walk correctly, sit correctly, and use good grammar in my speech and writing, she often pointed out my errors. Sometimes that caused me to doubt her love.

One of her sons recently told me, "Mom loved you deeply. She talked about you all the time. You were the daughter she never had. The reason I wanted to stay connected with you after our mothers died is because I knew how Mom felt about you."

His tender words helped me realize I had misunderstood his mother. Aunt Elia did love me, but she didn't know how to show love. She corrected me out of a desire to help, yet I viewed her remarks as a sign that I was unlovable and unacceptable. In reality, my interpretation of her words stemmed from the message of rejection I'd already received from my parents.

The only person who never rejected me was my grandmother, affectionately called Grandmartie. She gave me continual hugs, endearing looks, encouraging words, and a sense of love that became my lifeline until her death, just short of age one hundred.

I remember Grandmartie pouring love and acceptance into my heart. One day she picked me up and laid me across her lap, wrapping her soft arms around my small body. I can still hear the melodious lullaby she sang over me as we swayed back and forth in the padded rocking chair in her den. Perhaps she cherished that tender moment as much as I do today.

Grandmartie's genuine love filled some empty spaces. Yet without receiving this kind of love and sense of belonging from my parents, I still floundered.

I didn't feel capable of establishing my own identity or my own voice within my family, and that lack of confidence stifled my

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emotions. If I felt hurt or disappointed by someone's comment or action, I didn't reveal that anything was wrong. Convinced it was less risky to pretend than to be honest, I stuffed my feelings inside and said nothing. My goal was simply to comply and hope they would accept me.

Dr. Saltz says, "When self-expression is blocked, we learn to pretend (to ourselves and to others) to be somebody else. Seeking approval, we migrate from who we really are to who we think our parents or teachers or grandparents want us to be. We adopt their expectations for who we should be."⁵

The lack of love and acceptance from my parents caused me to perform—as a child and even as an adult—to win people's acceptance.

Following my college graduation, I moved to California and began working and leading an independent life. While preparing for Mom's first visit, I noticed a shift in my view of our relationship.

I felt less guarded and more carefree as I made plans and pictured us talking about personal things and doing activities together. God gave me courage and desire to create space in my heart to love her in a new way. She would always be my mother, but I wanted to confide in her as I would a best friend.

When I saw her at the airport, I smiled and hugged her. "I feel as if I'm welcoming a friend!" I said.

She smiled, uncertain how to respond to my spontaneous comment.

We built wonderful memories during our visit. Mom seemed relaxed around me and more comfortable talking about personal things.

Later, during my years of living and working in the Philippines, she flew across the ocean three times to visit me, mostly at her initiation. On my first furlough to the US, she met me with a hug. Then she slipped her arm around my waist and kept it there

as we walked arm in arm from the arrival area (permitted in those days) to the front of the airport. Those gestures of love continued during the rest of my furloughs before Mom died.



Relationships in our families determine how we respond, either positively or negatively, to people and to life. Our relationships and interaction with people outside our families can alter our lives as well, depending on whether we receive admiration or rejection.

My friend Enid engages with people easily, speaks to groups with confidence, and attracts admiration from everyone who meets her. I never thought she would struggle with the fear of rejection.

Recently we set a date for girl talk at a favorite restaurant. After submitting our order and exchanging family pictures, Enid asked, “How’s your book project coming along?”

“Making a lot of progress. Since fear of rejection is so common, it’s been easy to collect stories.”

Enid looked down and ran her finger over the rim of her coffee cup. “Let me tell you my rejection story. I’ve begun to realize I fear that people will suddenly not want to be with me.”

“I’m so surprised, Enid.” I leaned closer and caught the shimmer in her eyes. “It’s hard to imagine anyone not wanting to be your friend.”

“Recently, a repressed memory came to me,” she said. “It happened in kindergarten. I had two special friends in my class. We always played together during recess and even before class began.

“One morning when I arrived at the classroom, the two of them were already playing together in the corner. When I ran over to them, one girl said, ‘We’re both sick, so you can’t play with us.’ I knew they couldn’t be sick or they wouldn’t be at school. I realized they were telling me they no longer wanted to be friends with me.

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“I started crying. My teacher came over to find out what was wrong. When I told her, she turned to other students in the room and said, ‘Who wants to play with Enid?’ I was afraid no one would. But Andrew said, ‘I want to.’ Andrew became my rescuer that day.”

“How sad, Enid. Do you think this is when your fear started?”

“I think so, but more happened later. At my elementary school, I was the only black child in my class. Soon a white classmate and I became best friends. We had several of the same classes and always ate lunch together in the cafeteria. Soon she asked her mother if she could invite me home. Her mother discovered I was a black girl.

“The next day, my friend said, ‘My mother won’t let me be friends with you anymore.’ Our friendship ended that day.”

I couldn’t imagine how Enid felt in that moment. All I could think to say was, “I’m so sorry that happened to you.”

“Something else took place in college. Tyrone and I met in biology class, and eventually he became my boyfriend. During Christmas break, we both went home. I thought he would call me, but he didn’t.” When she looked up at me, pain still lingered in her eyes, after all these years.

“When I returned to campus and saw him, he admitted he had gotten back together with his old girlfriend. Another rejection. I was heartbroken.”

I reached across the table and placed my hand on hers. “Such painful times. Do you still experience that fear?”

“I still have lingering questions. Will people welcome me? At times I feel the same emotion as I did during my school days.”

Experiences like Enid’s provide powerful examples of how the fear of rejection can stem from rejection by people outside our homes. Especially when those experiences happen at a young age, they can impact our thoughts, responses, and behavior into adulthood.

Seeking Love and Acceptance

If we do not receive love and acceptance from our family and friends, that deficiency can affect the way we live, causing us to change in an attempt to win love, acceptance, and approval.



God knows that not all of us will feel loved and accepted in our families or by our friends. When we seek love and acceptance and can't find it, we believe something is wrong with us. We can become consumed with fear that others will not like our performance. This kind of focus prevents God's love from infiltrating our lives.

God's love for us doesn't depend on our performance or our circumstances. We don't need to try to earn His acceptance. God's love is unconditional; He accepts us just as we are. This fact isn't true only for today; it will be true for tomorrow and throughout eternity.

You may have missed a lot in your family or been betrayed by friends, but becoming secure in God's love will fill the empty spaces in your life. Are you aware of how much He loves you? Have you seen proof of His love recently?

The Lord your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy. (Zephaniah 3:17)

God, thank You for filling the empty spaces in my life with Your unconditional love and acceptance. Nothing will ever change Your love for me. Please make me aware whenever I begin looking for love and acceptance from others, rather than receiving them from You.

Reflection Questions

Chapter 1: Seeking Love and Acceptance

1. Describe your relationship with your parents. What effect did they have on your life during your childhood and young adult years, both positive and negative? Did their investments in your life help you become a confident person? Did they convey rejection of you in a way that has affected your adult life? Explain.
2. What other family members influenced you in a positive way? How did they make you feel loved and accepted?
3. Did some family members have a negative influence on you? In what ways have they affected your view of yourself?
4. Life coach Adam Sicinski presents these symptoms of the fear of rejection:
 - a. Lack of assertiveness when it comes to your social interactions
 - b. Lack of courage to speak up and raise a different point of view
 - c. Dissatisfaction with life, but instead of vocalizing it openly, you internalize this sadness and anger
 - d. Consistently wearing different masks to please other people
 - e. Feel as though other people have some kind of superiority over you
 - f. Obsessed with acting and looking like other people
 - g. Extremely conscious of what other people think of you
 - h. Afraid to say no and express your opinion(For more information, see <http://blog.iqmatrix.com/fear-of-rejection>.)⁶

Do you identify with some of the symptoms listed above? Place a checkmark by those symptoms. Acknowledging and

accepting that you struggle with the fear of rejection will help create a willingness to take steps toward lessening that fear.

5. Do you believe an early-childhood fear of rejection has held you back from letting others know the true you? Do you seek love and acceptance by performing well? What is your response to yourself, or to others, if you don't think you were successful?
6. Review Enid's story at the end of this chapter. What was her original trigger for the fear of rejection? Describe the experience or person in your past that may be your original trigger. What emotional response did you have at that time? Think of a present experience that caused the same emotional response you had in the past.
7. To help preserve your personal discoveries as you take steps to rise above your fear of rejection, you may want to record notes and thoughts in the Journal Your Journey section (pages 160–162) or on your computer or mobile device after you finish each chapter. This will help you keep track of your experiences as you move through the three sections of this book: "Living in Captivity," "Breaking Strongholds," and "Tasting Freedom." Suggested thought questions for each section are included under question 3 of the Reflection Questions for chapter 15.