



Humble Confidence

A Q&A WITH OCIELIA GIBSON

Ocielia Gibson has an impressive résumé. Beauty pageant winner. Celebrity advocate. Ministry founder. Mentor. “Unsung Hero.” Speaker. But the name she is most passionate about isn’t her own. It’s teaching teen girls about the True Famous One: Jesus. As an overcomer of fatherlessness, self-hate and culture’s misperception of beauty – Former Miss Black USA Ocielia Gibson is passionate about sharing her honest message of perseverance, real beauty and affirming choices for girls and women in Christ.

Q: Tell us a little about your story. How did you get into girls ministry?

When I was in college, I started in girl ministry because I just really had a desire to pour into young women’s lives. I went down to the high school near my college campus and I asked them if they had any girls that needed any type of help. I just wanted to make myself available and I wanted to volunteer at the school. So I met with the

counselors and the community liaison and they were thrilled to have me come and be a part in any way that I could. They allowed me to come in and start a mentoring program. That’s where I started More Than a Pretty Face. I had a group of 10 high-risk girls. I did an afterschool program with them for one school year and that’s really where the ministry started. Then I developed the faith-based mentoring program that I did in the summers at community centers, and then I started the girls summits and workshops and speaking. But it really started as just a desire I had to work with young women, and love I had for teen girls and stepping out on it as a sophomore in college.

Q: You’ve had plenty of opportunities to find your confidence in beauty, accomplishments or awards. How exactly did you stay focused on God in the middle of all of that?

It becomes challenging when you have a

lot on your plate. It’s very easy to fall into the trap of focusing on the things you need to do instead of being still and quiet and seeking God. I have done it both ways: I have gotten very consumed with my tasks and things I needed to do, and then I have been the type of person that was very focused on God. When I was focused on everything I needed to accomplish, I was getting burned out. I was not being effective for God’s Kingdom. I have learned that I truly have to seek God first and that’s my first priority. As hard as I try in my own strength, I am simply not enough. I really have to depend on the strength of the Lord.

Q: Most people aren’t in a spotlight. What does confidence look like in everyday life of a typical teen?

Confidence in God is first and foremost understanding the love of Christ and understanding that I am here for a purpose. For me as a teen girl, that’s something that really spoke to me as

BY JENNA DEWITT



I developed my relationship with the Lord. I come from a single-parent home. Unfortunately, my father struggled with substance abuse and he died at 41. I also had low self-esteem. So I grew up with some challenges.

When I came to Christ as a teen girl, what really resonated was knowing that I had value because Christ died for me and really getting that revelation that God loved me and there was a reason for me being here. Regardless of the things that I faced, God had a purpose for my life. There is confidence in knowing that He has something unique that He wants you to do.

That's what I found to be the foundation of my confidence as a young lady. It wasn't built on temporary things. It was built on knowing there is a reason that I'm here and that God had a purpose for me. Confidence is to have faith and trust in something. Authentic confidence isn't faith and trust in what you

can do. It's faith and trust in God.

Q: Comparison is a huge challenge for teens (and adults too). What keeps you out of the comparison trap?

What is important when we are dealing with comparison is to focus on the path that God has set before us. Comparison usually stems from fear, fear of not being enough or just fearing there is not enough to go around.

Instead of thinking, "What if someone has more than me or is prettier than me or is smarter than me?" I focus on the love of God and how abundant His love is. When you focus on loving one another and supporting each other as young women, then you don't have the time to compare. You celebrate the achievements and the progress of everyone and you just don't have this limited mentality. One of the scriptures I stand on in terms of comparing is 1 John 4:18-19. It says, "perfect love casts out fear and the one

that fears has not been perfected in love." Instead of being fearful and intimidated by other young women, let me focus on loving them. If I'm dwelling on that, I can really operate the way that God wants me to.

Q: What impact has social media made on the tendency to compare?

Social media puts a magnifying glass on what is already there. If there is someone dealing with insecurity or dealing with jealousy, it's only going to highlight that. It's very easy now to see what's going on in the lives of others, or what you perceive is going on in the lives of others. Not all of it is reality. People can paint a picture of a life that may not actually be their real life on social media. Girls looking at that can get an unrealistic view of reality.

I do advise young women to be careful about what they are placing on social media, to be purposeful and thoughtful.



I also encourage them to really be selective in who they will follow and friend. I'm very selective as to who I follow and who I friend because when you are looking into your newsfeed or Twitter or Instagram feed, you are taking in messages and images. For me, keeping my walk of purity and just living before the Lord, I want to make sure the things that I'm putting before me are things that are going to bring me closer to the Lord and are going to be healthy for me, not things that are going to feed into unhealthy emotions and thought patterns.

Q: What are some practical things parents can do to reinforce healthy, but humble confidence in their girls?

One key thing is modeling it themselves. Kids watch so much of what the adults in their lives are doing. We do not recognize how much our actions influence those around us. Be watchful in the way you speak about others, the way you speak about yourself and the way you speak about your children and the young people in your life.

The other thing is really speaking into the lives of the young people around you. Direct them when you see them having comments or attitudes that aren't really of God. If a young lady speaks negatively about the way another young lady is dressed or the way she looks, really redirect that. Just being able to be there and guide them into having that confidence in Christ and humility.

There is a difference between confidence and arrogance. Arrogance is seeing good in yourself but looking low on others around you. Confidence is "I believe highly in myself, but I esteem others as well." Having that balance is really important.

Q: Identity plays a big role in this healthy confidence. How do you root

your identity in the right things?

It really goes back into our walk with the Lord. Proverbs 4:23 tells us to guard our hearts because out of it flows the issues of life. Really guarding my heart, checking my heart before the Lord, guarding my mind and my thought-life, seeing "What am I thinking about who I am? Am I really rooting my identity in Christ?" Then also cultivating my walk with the Lord.

I went through a period in college where I was listening to everything under the sun and the Lord started convicting me about it. I started weeding out music with negative influences and negative messages. To this day that is my lifestyle because I knew that was a struggle for me and for me to really cultivate the mind of Christ and have a greater sense of who I am in Him, I knew that I couldn't continuously feast on negative messages and distorted images from culture. That's something I had to begin implementing as a young woman in college so I could develop a healthy identity and that's something that is going to continue for the rest of my life. I would not say that I'm there completely but that's something that I continuously work on, becoming more and more rooted in my identity in Christ.

Q: What can adults do to help a teen caught up in the lies of self-hate?

You have to see really how severe the issue is. Some girls are struggling with really, really poor self-esteem and self-hate. They are replaying negative thoughts about themselves and speaking very poorly and hatefully about themselves. Then you have other young ladies who have not only replayed these thoughts and speech of hate about themselves, but they are taking it out on themselves in unhealthy ways – self-injury, eating disorders. If you need professional help, seek it for her in that situation. However,

if she's just beginning to speak negatively about herself and has a really poor self-image, be patient with her, love on her and speak into her life.

We are not very patient with young women. We want to give them a scripture and think everything is going to be OK. But when you have young ladies who are struggling with their self-image, it is a long process for them to overcome that because they are really feeding into the lies of the enemy. You have to help them renew their minds, as Romans 12:2 says. Get them in a supportive community of young women. A lot of times, they feel isolated. If they feel they have a community of friends, it helps them as well.

It definitely takes time and prayer and love and patience. Most importantly, it really takes them feasting on the Word of God and you being a guide and a support to them, helping them to know what God's Word says about them. That is really going to be the key: the Word and you taking that time to walk through it with them.

Ocielia Gibson is the founder and spokesperson of More Than a Pretty Face Inc., a ministry that has impacted thousands of underserved young women in the inner-city US and Africa. Ocielia's advocacy for girls and women has earned her national recognition, including being named an 'Unsung Hero' by EBONY Magazine and a celebrity advocate for The Heart Truth Campaign as Miss Black USA. She is currently pursuing a Masters in Divinity at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and is on staff as a Community Outreach Coordinator with Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, Texas.

You can receive more girls ministry equipping from Ocielia Gibson and other leading girls ministry influencers at the LifeWay Girls conference on Feb. 21-22 in Nashville, Tenn.

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