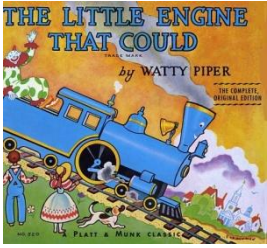


When Optimism is Not Enough

I don't recommend building your life on children's books.



As a kid, I loved the book *The Little Engine That Could*. Hey, it's a book about trains, so what's not to like? I'm sure you're familiar with the story of the little switch engine called upon to haul a long train over a high mountain. Switch engines aren't designed for this work, but this little engine psyched himself up to do the impossible by chanting "I think I can. I think I can." And he does ... because he thought he could.

Aww, the virtue of optimism. The power of positive thinking. There's a place for that, I suppose, if you're preparing for an athletic event, working up the nerve to ask a girl out, or walking into a job interview.

But if you're the little engine that has tried to go up the mountain multiple times and failed repeatedly, any dose of optimistic self-confidence quickly dissipates like smoke.

Moses was an 80-year-old failed has-been when God spoke to him. Earlier in his life, Moses reeked of bravado and self-confidence. After all, he was raised like a son of the pharaoh with all the advantages and privileges that came with that. But when Moses tried to do the right thing and prevent the abuse of another Jew, he went about it wrong. He failed—and he failed miserably.

Moses fled with his tail between his legs and spent the next forty years hanging out in the back country with a bunch of sheep. He no longer reeked of self-confidence; he smelled more like wet wool.

So when God issued His call for Moses to go back to Egypt and lead His people out, Moses offered plenty of excuses. Can you imagine the scenario had God simply challenged Moses with the same philosophy between *The Little Engine That Could*?

Moses: Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?

God: Moses, you need to believe in yourself. Just repeat after me: "I think I can. I think I can."

Moses: What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, "The Lord did not appear to you"?

God: Try it again, Moses: "I think I can. I think I can."

Moses: I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.

God: You'll speak well if you do it with confidence in yourself. "I think I can. I think I can."

Moses didn't need to psych himself up. He didn't need to look in the mirror and give himself a pep talk. He needed what only God could give him.



And if you're going to succeed in life—if you're going to overcome your past and move forward—you're going to need what only God can give you.

Every generation has its positive-thinking cheerleaders: the Napoleon Hills, Norman Vincent Peales, Zig Ziglars, Tony Robbins, and Joel Osteens. But you don't need pop psychology; you need a dose of the same truth God spoke to Moses thousands of years ago.

1. When you live in obedience to Him, God is with you ([Ex. 3:11-12](#)).
2. God created you just as you are ([4:10-12](#)).
3. God equips you with all you need ([vv. 13-17](#)).

You have failed. And you do have shortcomings. But Christ is greater than your past, and He overcomes every objection you can think of. The only barrier to moving forward with your life has nothing to do with pumping yourself up mentally or emotionally; it is whether or not you will surrender and be obedient to what Christ wants to do in you and through you. Since He's with you, He will empower you.

I think I'll trust. I'll think I trust.