



So Long, Insecurity Teen Edition Questionnaire

1. Why did you decide to create a teen edition of your adult book, *So Long, Insecurity*?

From the start I'd thought about the titanic need among teen girls to have open, healthy conversations about their struggles with insecurity. Teen girls were a major part of my research in the writing process, and I met for a number of weeks with a terrific group of them. Their input was crucial, and I thank God for them. There are elements in *So Long, Insecurity* I definitely wouldn't have thought to include without their help. I wrote the original book to the broader spectrum of ages in hopes of stirring up dialogue with as diverse a group as possible. My strong feeling is that our teen girls don't only need us to talk to them about insecurities. They need desperately for us to show them what secure women look like. My hope was to get to the 20-through 50-year-olds first and then see if we could begin to get the kind of grip on security that our younger girls could see as well as talk about.

From the earliest stages of publishing *So Long, Insecurity*, women began saying, "I wish we'd been talking about this when I was a teenager!" or "I'm going to try to get my daughter to read this!" It would seem easiest to just hand teen girls the original edition, but it doesn't work as effectively that way. They are not their mothers. They are not their big sisters. They want to dialogue on a platform designed for them and crack open a book that seems written for them. That is our huge hope with this teen edition.

2. Why is the struggle with insecurity such a problem for women, and particularly teens? When do you think teens become aware of insecurities in their lives?

I believe the struggle with insecurity is as old as Eve and that Adam had insecurities of his own. Nothing about the problem is new, but I believe a dramatic escalation can be traced back to the screen: first on televisions then

computer screens, laptops, cell phones, iPads, you name it. Fifty years ago, women had dramatically smaller communities of other women to compare themselves to. Suddenly we were hit with an ever-increasing barrage of images from every conceivable direction. Of course, screens aren't the only places we're inundated. Magazine covers, billboards, album covers, and storefronts make tremendous contributions. We can't escape all these sources, but we need to call out the impact these constant images and unreasonable ideals are having on us. If I go to a Disney princess movie, I know up front that what I'm about to see is fiction. We need to get in our heads that so much of what we're seeing out there is equally fictitious.

I think insecurity hits girls before the teen years. The challenge begins the moment each girl becomes truly aware of the mirror. That's when Mom needs to start paying heightened attention to how her daughter is processing what she sees. And I'm not sure the dad's role in his daughter's self-image can be overemphasized. We parents can't cure our daughters of their insecurities or block all of their sources, but we can proactively help them negotiate the minefields and cut back the most destructive suppliers. We can also aggravate and increase their insecurities without even realizing it. A mother trying to live her life through her daughter can be as destructive as her daughter trying to live her life through Facebook.

We parents can't go throwing towels over every mirror, but we can help our daughters see uniqueness, dignity, and God-given loveliness in that reflection. One wonderful young woman in my life is slightly over six feet tall. She once shared with me that her mother constantly told her in her girlhood that tall was beautiful and to hold her head up high. And she still does. It's not always that easy, but I'm telling you that the young woman I'm talking about is one of the most secure examples in her generation that I have ever witnessed.

3. What are some of the biggest areas of insecurity for teen girls?

Body image is huge but not new. It's just particularly challenging today because so many of the bodies we're subjected to seeing have either been physically enhanced or visually enhanced through photography and editing. There is simply no way to live up to the women put in front of us by the media. The images are deceptive not only to women. A lot of young men want the women in their everyday lives to look and perform like the images they see in the media. The real thing turns into a letdown. And God alone can measure the fallout of preadolescents and young adolescents, boys and girls alike, having so much access to pornography.

Social networking has thrown insecurities off the charts. It is wreaking total havoc, and since it's not going anywhere, the survivors and thrivers are going to have to get fortified and supported so they don't crash under the weight of

it. Ten years ago middle school and high school kids feared things leaking out at school just like their parents and grandparents had at that age. Now it's leaked on the Internet.

Teen girls are terrified of not being accepted by other girls, and most of them are equally terrified that guys won't find them desirable. Our culture is screaming this message to girls of all ages: "You are as desirable as you are sensual." That's false and terribly toxic. The world is not going to cease and desist its assault on insecurity any time soon. It's up to all of us girls to open our eyes to the lies and call them out.

4. What were some of the struggles you faced as a teenager?

Well, I was a wreck. But the more interesting part of it may be that I did not present myself as a wreck. In fact, I worked diligently to project a different image. That's one reason I tend to recognize it in a girl who is trying too hard to give the vibe that she's got this thing down. I was a fairly successful student academically and socially, but I was drowning in insecurities and personal problems. I was terrified of being rejected, undesired, or left unchosen. I was as fearful of being rejected by girls as I was by guys. I wanted friends. I wanted boyfriends. So much so that I'd have practically sold my soul to the devil if I could have.

I take full responsibility for my own foolishness and poor decision making. That falls to me and no one else. At the same time, I wonder if anything might have changed if some people I trusted had tried to talk to me and help me. I will never forget being told by one adult, "You'll be pregnant by the time you're 16." I wanted to scream, "Somebody help me!" I'd been abused at an early, very formative age, but to tell you the truth, I could have been as big a mess without it. It was all around me even if it had not been happening directly to me. I think our entire society is under sexual assault. I believe that is why so many girls have the behaviors and belief systems that were most prevalent in my teen years among those who'd been directly abused.

5. How do the media and social media affect teen girls and their sense of self-worth today?

There truly is no estimating how much insecurity social media has dumped on top of the already existing weight of it. I argue in *So Long, Insecurity* that the most dramatic surge of insecurities among women came with the introduction of the television screen in our dens. It was the game changer. It also introduced an entirely new platform for marketing and advertising that spread from the screen to billboards, storefronts, checkout stands, and every other possible avenue. This isn't our great-grandmother's Sears and Roebuck catalog we're talking about here. We're not just buying clothes. We're buying images. Personas. Insecurity is as old as humankind, but the burgeoning issue

we see now is, I believe, less than half a century old. What was once a censored screen in our dens is now an uncensored screen in our hands: 24/7 access that is as addictive as something we could smoke, swallow, or snort.

Recently a darling college girl I met on a plane told me that she'd grounded herself temporarily from Twitter because she was using it like a diary. Take one look at Twitter—which I love, by the way—and it becomes clear she was not alone. Our students do everyday life in a world of tweets, YouTube clips, and Facebook updates. One glance at a screen can strike instant terror: "Was he/she talking to me?!" Or worse yet, "*About me?!*" And here's the thing: the answer could be *yes*. The social paranoia of our teens is unfortunately not unfounded. If a girl has sex with someone, her first fear may not be pregnancy. It could be that she was recorded.

Insecurity can also contribute the kind of desperation and gullibility that makes a girl more vulnerable to online predators. So many of our girls want someone to want them and pursue them badly enough that they put themselves at stunning risk.

6. Why do a girl's clothing choices matter so much?

Our clothes are our own personal ad campaigns. They are meant to convey what we're trying to sell people about ourselves. But some of what we're selling people aren't buying. In the research process for *So Long, Insecurity*, I had the privilege of interviewing and surveying a number of guys online. They turned out to be solid gold in the writing process, bringing tremendous honesty and insight to the mix. I will never forget how many of them said that oftentimes the more skin a girl shows, the more they assume she's desperate. Don't get me wrong. I'm not letting the guys off the hook since many of them admitted they liked to look, but I found it tremendously enlightening that they made certain value judgments—whether right or wrong—based on how a girl is dressed. Over and over they said the same thing: too much skin says she's desperate. Trying too hard.

7. What are some of the biggest challenges teens face when it comes to finding their identity in Christ?

It's a true crisis of faith: coming to know and believe a God they cannot see over the scrutiny and pressure of what blares and glares right in front of them. It's the same thing for the rest of us, but ideally, with age comes experience and a more vivid history with God. The world is so in teens' faces that God seems far removed, and frankly, He's a lot more merciful and forgiving than their peers. Thank God the second half of that sentence is certainly true. In order to thrive in Christ, teens have to learn that He is relevant to their world—and *He is!*—and that He is *for* them and not against

them. That He's the Giver and not a big taker. That any "no" He issues is to direct them headlong into a tremendous "yes." That He can work all that has happened to them and all that they feel like they've done wrong to their good.

Teens are desperate to know that, in Him, they are accepted and loved with a loyalty and affection far exceeding anything they can experience in the natural realm. They need to know they have purpose. A sense of calling in Christ and the hope of fulfilling a truly divine destiny can matter immensely. It may not keep them from tumbling into the ditch at times, but it can give them the motivation to get out. They need to understand the power of the Holy Spirit inside each one of them who believes. They also need desperately to connect to other teens who know Christ so that they don't feel so alone. Going on mission trips, helping the poor, feeding the hungry, building houses, and developing a heart for the oppressed are a few hands-on ways they can unplug from social networks long enough to feel a hint of purpose. Meanwhile, they need some people up in front of them—young and old alike—demonstrating, teaching, and living out the Scriptures in authentic though imperfect ways with enough joy and passion for them to want to catch it. All of this is more easily said than done, but it must be done for their sakes as well as our own. They need us, yes, but we also deeply need them. There are several middle school girls at my church that hunt me down every single Sunday just to get a hug. I would not trade that interaction for anything. They bless me more than I could ever bless them.

8. How can teen girls rid their lives of insecurity?

Identify it! Give it a name! Help them to see how bad a companion it is to them. As fellow females, help them to see how insecurity seeks to make fools of us and how we can trade it in for God-given strength and dignity. Speak to them using words like *we* and *us* instead of *you*. They're sick of us pointing fingers at them. Despite how distant they seem at times, they'd ten times rather have a safe arm around them than a finger pointed at them.

And, for God's sake, we full-grown women have got to deal with our own insecurities so that our girls can see genuine security modeled. I hate that it took me so long to bring this titanic stronghold to God and ask Him to help me wrestle it into surrender. But I cannot even express what it means to me that both of my daughters can see the results of fighting this good fight. That part of my life has changed before their eyes.

9. How can parents and youth leaders use *So Long, Insecurity Teen Edition* to discuss these areas of insecurity with teen girls?

Read it for yourself. Pray it through. Add your own insights and experiences and teaching methods to it. Own the message, and take it passionately and personally to your girls. Have your teen girls read a chapter or two a week, and then discuss it with them in as casual a surrounding as possible. Try to make your gatherings more fun than a root canal. At Living Proof, we never have teens over without feeding them. We also try to give them free stuff. I write these words with a grin, but I'd be lying if I said we don't offer some incentives.

This whole journey brought a huge change to our community ministry in Houston. We exist to invite women into the thriving knowledge of Christ through the study of Scripture, but I began to see that much of what we offered the women would have to be tweaked if God was going to use us to reach girls in their teens. I hired a well-trained twentysomething to bridge that gap and facilitate methods and materials to younger girls. These days teens are in and out of our building on a regular basis. I cannot thank God enough for opening our eyes to that stream of ministry. The deep conviction that they need materials targeted specifically to them led to this teen edition of *So Long, Insecurity*. May God use it to do more than is explainable or reasonable. May He reap far more than we could know to sow. He alone can bring the kind of transformation we're hoping for.

10. What do you hope teen girls will get out of *So Long, Insecurity Teen Edition*?

Strength and dignity! Some real, live, bona fide, God-given security! The kind that translates from the page to the pavement. When they close the book, I want them to know one thing to the marrow of their bones:

“The LORD is your security. He will keep your foot from being caught in a trap.”
Proverbs 3:26, NLT