

I Thought I Could

First Person Essay

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“I think I can, I think I can, I think I can...”

These words from the bright blue train in *The Little Engine That Could* have come to inspire children and adults alike for over eighty years. In this famous children’s book, a little blue engine faces a task that seems to be nearly impossible for her: carrying cars of toys and food over a tall mountain to give to the children on the other side. Despite her small size, and with the help of the four little words “I think I can”, she makes it over the mountain and successfully delivers the toys and food.

As a child, this was one of my favorite books. The story of a small engine completing a task so great was something that truly captivated me. In fact, this book was such a great source of inspiration to me that “I think I can” became my childhood motto. In the span of a year, I began dance classes, gymnastics, and karate lessons. I took on every leadership role I was offered in school, from line leader to team captain for games. And as a four-year-old only child, I began to run my household. I thrived on leadership and independence. But as time went on, “I think I can” slowly transformed into “I know I can...and I know I can do it best.” My love of leadership had turned into a love of being in control. The more that I tried to gain control, the more I felt out of control. The moment that I surrendered that, the freedom of God arose in my life.

As I grew older, my controlling ways became worse. I completed entire group projects on my own to make sure they were done my way, even if it meant spending hours doing work that my group members could have done. Mornings were filled with screams, stress, and sometimes even tears if I was running even a minute late. By my freshman year of high school, I could tell you each and every detail of my future: where I was attending college, what I was majoring in, how many kids I was going to have, and all of their names. I was ashamed to admit the number

of hours I spent on Pinterest planning my wedding: a morning wedding in spring with all of my friends and family. This normal activity for most teenage girls fueled my love of control more and more.

However, that began to change this past summer. I was in Boston with my youth group serving at a football and cheerleading activity week. As we were driving to the field on the first day, I was filled with excitement for all this week would have in store...well, until I found out my job. While my friends were leading drills or coaching a team, I was put in charge of making sure all of the leaders had full water bottles and a fresh coat of sunscreen. Despite being on this trip to serve the children of Boston, the idea of serving the leaders with no position of evident authority was near appalling. My desire for control had completely distracted me from my purpose for being there. But on the third day of the trip, God gave me a vision that completely turned me around:

I was in a plain brown room; it was empty except for me and two others. While I did not clearly see them, I knew that one of them was a pastor and the other a foggy figure I assumed to be my husband. And that was it. There was no big dress, no decorations, no friends or family. It was just the three of us.

I suddenly snapped back into reality. As I continued walking across the field to give one of the leaders a fresh water bottle, I realized that this vision was not just about marriage, but was truly about my issues with control. Not one detail of the wedding I had seen was like the elaborate wedding I had spent hours planning, yet I was filled with abounding joy. In fact, the joy I had in that vision was a thousand times more than I ever had when I thought about the wedding of my dreams. I realized that things didn't have to go "my way" for me to be happy. I

didn't need hours of planning for something to go well. I learned that if I decided to put God in control, things will turn out better than any plan of my own. For the remainder of the trip, I gave God full control. I was still filling up water bottles and applying sunscreen, but I was doing it with a renewed joy and refreshed spirit.

When I returned home, I completely abandoned the controlling ways of my past. In the fall, instead of attending the college of my dreams, I will be attending the ministry school at my church. Instead of the desire for a specific career, I've been filled with a desire to follow God's will for my life, no matter what career He gives me, where He places me, and what family He blesses me with. God's freeing control broke the bondage of fear and anxiety on my life. When I begin to fall into my patterns of control, I remember God's promise to me in Jeremiah 29:11—
“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.’” God has a plan designed specifically for me. The plans God has for me will never cause me harm. His plans fill me with abundant hope!

Since then, when I think about my future and what God has in store for me, I hear the voice of Satan trying to attack me and say, “You can't do it.”

I have come to realize that he's right. On my own, I can't do it. Without God in my life and in full control, I can never live up to all He has in store for me.

Because of this, my motto is no longer “I think I can.” I am now living in the powerful truth of “I know He can.”