

To Those Thinking, “I Can’t Do This”

By **Onnastasia Cole**
Church Magazines

I never thought I was smart enough to go to college. Growing up watching my single mom struggle to support me and my sister, the fear of poverty sank deep in my heart. Our meals, clothes, and school supplies depended on the generosity of her clients. One tip made the difference between paying a bill or filling our stomachs. Meanwhile, life always seemed to get in the way of education. By seventh grade, I was failing my classes. By ninth, I had given up trying in school entirely. I believed I was too behind, too far gone to go anywhere worthwhile.

That all changed when my English teacher, Mrs. Temple, gave me a notebook. Written on

the first page were these words: “Onnastasia, when you are struggling—when you are hurting—who is there for you?” That small gift marked a turning point in my life that I never saw coming. I realized that I needed support to grow, and that I was worth supporting.

Shortly after this realization, my school counselor told me I wouldn’t graduate unless I transferred to an alternative high school. I put that notebook, now decorated with my hopes and fears, into my bag and prepared for my first day.

Can I Do This?

For the next two years, Heavenly Father blessed me with another teacher who saw my potential. When I’d



turn in an assignment halfway completed, he'd say, "You can do better, Onnastasia. I know you can." I'd return to his desk after another attempt and say, with a sigh, "I can't do this. It's too hard." But he wouldn't have it. He challenged my claims of inadequacy and reassured me that I was capable. By the time I walked across the stage to get my diploma, I'd grown more than I'd thought possible.

However, a fear of the future persisted. After months of thinking, "I can't do this. I'm too stupid," I finally took the entrance test at my community college and registered for a few courses. I still didn't quite know how

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

HEBREWS 10:35

to study, but I had developed a love for learning and a desire to prove myself that gave me the determination I needed to overcome my negative thoughts.



A year later I went to my first Pathway (now PathwayConnect) meeting.¹ And two years later I sat down in my first class at Brigham Young University–Idaho, determined to silence that voice in the back of my mind telling me I wasn't smart enough to be there.

Remember How Far You've Come

Like many young adults, I often find myself wondering, "Am I good enough? Will I make it? Does Heavenly Father really have a plan for me?" Sometimes those thoughts momentarily cause me to draw back, doubting my talents and progress. In these moments, it's easy for me to forget who I am, where I've been, and where I'm going.

As I prepare to finish my undergraduate degree, I can't say I've completely conquered my doubts. With tremendous emotional, academic, and spiritual growth under my belt, I still wonder, "Can I do this?" every now and then.

But now when those thoughts creep into my mind, I think of everyone who helped me along the way. Doing this reminds me who I am and how far I've come. Even in my darkest moments of self-doubt, I know the Savior is there. When I wonder, "Am I smart enough? Can I do this?" He gives me strength to try again. He reminds me to "cast not away therefore [my] confidence, which hath great recompence of reward" (Hebrews 10:35).

With hard work and His loving hands, we don't have to wonder anymore if we can accomplish what we are striving for.

I know we can. ■



Onnastasia Cole is a writer, editor, and enthusiastic succulent grower. She is passionate about helping others and enjoys learning, listening to podcasts, and spending time with her husband.

NOTE

1. For information about PathwayConnect, part of BYU-Pathway Worldwide, see Breanne Su'a, "BYU-Pathway Worldwide: 'A Monumental Moment in Church Education,'" *Ensign*, Aug. 2019, 52–55; see also byupathway.org.