

Retired NFL player, David Simmons, tells about his childhood home. His father, a military man, was extremely demanding, rarely saying a kind word, always pushing him with harsh criticism to do better. His Dad would never permit his son to feel any satisfaction from his accomplishments, reminding him that it was never good enough, that there were always new goals ahead.

When Dave was a little boy, his Dad gave him a bicycle, unassembled, with the command that he put it together. After Dave struggled to the point of tears with the difficult instructions and many parts, his Dad said, "I knew you couldn't do it." Then, he assembled it for him.

When Dave played football in high school, his father was unrelenting in his criticisms. In the backyard of his home, after every game, his Dad would go over every play and point out Dave's errors. "Most boys got butterflies in the stomach before the game; I got them afterwards. Facing my father was more stressful than facing any opposing team."

By the time he entered college, Dave hated his father and his harsh discipline. He chose to play football for Georgia Tech because it was further from home than any other college that offered him a scholarship.

After college, he was the 2nd round draft pick of the St. Louis Cardinals. "Excited, 'I telephoned my father to tell him the good news. He said, 'How does it feel to be second?'" **The Frightening Nightmare of Rejection.**

Rejection can be defined as "the spurning of a person's affections." The root word for rejection is the Latin word *rejection*, which means "a throwing back." That word-picture illustrates a forceful return of something advanced, like a basketball player slapping down an opponent's shot. In the same way, people reject others and their well-meaning ideas, words and efforts.

Fear of rejection puts a pit in our gut. Rejection leaves us feeling worthless. We feel trashed. It begins very early – on the playground at recess, at school growing up, asking a date to the prom, applying for a job. Rejection sometimes strikes hardest when it's from your spouse or your child.

God designed us as social creatures. Fear of rejection can cause you to be unable to chat with strangers or even friends of friends. The need to belong is a basic human condition. In high school, we tend to self-select as jocks, cheerleaders, nerds, preppies, or any number of small groups. As adults, we tend to organize by shared interests, relationship status and other commonalities. Fear of rejection can lead you to do things you're uncomfortable with just to remain part of the group. As Proverbs 29:25 says, *The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.*

The Bible is filled with accounts of individuals being rejected. One that perhaps has more sting to it than others is the tale of two sisters.

1. The fear of rejection is real. Let's pick it up in Genesis 29:21-28: "*Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.' So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. But in the evening [Laban] took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) And in the morning, behold, it was Leah!*

And Jacob said to Laban, 'What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?' Laban said, 'It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.' Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife."

This is an anti-Hallmark love story. Novelist, Margaret Atwood, (**pictures**) was so horrified by this story that it inspired her to write her dystopian book, *The Handmaid's Tale*, in which the most beautiful, intimate part of human existence becomes a hideous duty performed strictly in the interest of generating an heir, stripped of any semblance of love.

Here's the backstory. Jacob had to get out of Dodge. His brother, Esau, had taken out a contract out on his life. Jacob reaches Haran and at the local watering hole met his cousin, Rachel, drawing water for the sheep. It's love at first sight. Going to work for his Uncle Laban, Jacob agreed to serve him for seven years on the condition that at the end, Rachel would be his wife.

But Uncle Laban pulls a fast one on him. At the end of the specified period, Jacob is cruelly deceived. After a week of celebrating, it was the custom to conduct the bride to the Honeymoon tent in silence and darkness.

It was only with the morning light that Jacob discovers he's been deceived as he sees Leah in his bed, not Rachel. Don't miss the shock of, "*And in the morning, behold, it was Leah!*" Laban excused his deceit by saying that the younger daughter couldn't be given in marriage before the first-born.

What a grisly example of **The Frightening Nightmare of Rejection**. Leah knows morning is coming even while they're consummating the marriage. Imagine how she felt. While Jacob snored away, she lay there in fearful dread as the clock ticked away and the first rays of dawn flicker.

Leah is one of the few women in the Bible of whom it's specifically reported that she wasn't particularly beautiful. Her "tender-eyed" feature was slightly abnormal. While Scripture doesn't suggest she's ugly, she's not pretty either. Apparently, her eyes lacked the luster that attracts boys. For some girls, their eyes sparkle and boys are hypnotized. Leah has none of that.

Her name, Leah, means *weary*. Her appearance, disposition, personality brings years of insult heaped upon injury. Her trials stretched endlessly. She *wearily* went through life. While she loved Jacob, it's not reciprocated.

Too many marriages are like that. One spouse loves and is devoted to the other, but are continually met with disdain, even cruelty. For Jacob, she's just a breeder. She's unloved. Jacob only saw her as a baby factory.

There are people who don't love you, but they "love" what you can do for them. They use you. Like Leah, we're constantly inclined to ask ourselves, "Why am I not loved?" There's nothing wrong with wanting to be wanted.

Just a sidenote of encouragement. Leah is the one who apparently has a heart for God and is the wife buried in the family burial plot with Jacob later.

2. The fear of rejection imprisons us. Ed Welch (**picture**) warns, "*Regarding other people, our problem is that we need them (for ourselves) more than we love them (for the glory of God).*" Let me suggest two traps that we can be ensnared by when we live in the fear of rejection.

We can easily become overly starved for acceptance. Whitney Houston (**pictures**), in an interview with Diane Sawyer in 2002, discussed the pain and frustration she experienced in her failed comeback attempt. At one point in the interview she turned to Sawyer and asked, "*Have you ever heard the sound of 10,000 people disappointed in you?*" We become so needy for acceptance that we lose the very thing that we desire.

That was King Saul in the Old Testament. Here's a leader with the potential of becoming one of the greatest kings of all time. But his greatest weakness is that he's paralyzed with the fear of being rejected. He always wondered, "What are the people going to think? Will they like me?" At one point, because of fear of what people thought, Saul rejects God's command. When he finally comes clean with the prophet Samuel, he confesses that he disobeyed God because "*I was afraid of the people, so I gave in to them.*"

Often we do the same thing. We reject God because we're afraid of what people will think. Rather than doing the right thing, we do what we think they'd want us to do. Many of us took that first puff or that first drink because of peer pressure. We caved to the opinion of others. I know I did.

I love *Far Side* cartoons. I love Gary Larson's twisted sense of humor. Here's one about peer pressure (**picture**) Notice the group of scientists gathered around another scientist. The one in the middle is normal looking, the others grotesque. Huge eyes, hideous noses, monstrous lips, elongated faces. They're trying to get the normal looking scientist to take a drink out of a steaming jar. "*Laboratory peer pressure.*"

Many of us live in the fear of rejection. It's a trap. For example, many want to please God with sexual purity and wait until they're married to give themselves to their spouse. But instead, wanting the approval of someone, they'll give away their virginity. They'll give their body away, and then they too often jump from bed, to bed, to bed, to bed, seeking approval.

"Please love me," deceiving themselves that sex equals love. Sex outside of marriage is a far cry from committed, spiritual and physical intimacy.

"Please accept me." People spend hours on their body, their hair, and physical image. They're poofing up to be accepted.

"Please like me. If I buy this car, will you like me? If I say this, will you like me? If I compromise my integrity, and don't do what I believe is most important, but do what you like, will you like me? Will you approve of me?"

Many attempt to live out their parent's dream. "Gotta make Dad happy. Got to make Mom happy." Some have parents who died years ago yet are still trying to please a parent that's no longer here. Fear of rejection is a snare.

Some will do nearly anything to be accepted. They get close to someone and that person sucks the life out of them. They're human vacuum cleaners. "Will you like me?" You probably know someone like that.

If you're an approval addict, these thoughts are a challenge for you. Approval addicts, generally, have an inability to confront. They're driven by wanting to be liked. Until we learn to do biblical confrontation we'll never have the intimacy in relationships that make them real and God wants for us.

Approval addicts generally give in to others, but inwardly, are angry and resentful. The second rejection trap is the opposite extreme. Here's what the Bible says about that kind of person. Proverbs 28:14, "*Blessed is the one who fears the LORD always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity.*" Do you have a hard heart, hardened from the resentment of being used? It sets us up for calamity or trouble.

Women who've been burned will say something like, "You can't trust men as far as you can throw them. All a bunch of losers." Ladies, get off of it. Yes, a lot of them are, but there's a large group who love Jesus and are growing closer to Christ. We must be careful about broad generalizations.

And guys do the same thing. "Women, bunch of users. Get close to you, take advantage of you and mess you up." And we become paranoid and overly cautious. Again, we must be careful about broad generalizations.

Did you know that needing approval hurts the cause of Christ? This one is so sad to God. Many Christ followers have those they know and love, family members, maybe parents or children or siblings, maybe people you work with, those you've grow up with who don't have a relationship with Christ. But you're afraid to tell them about Jesus. *Why?* You're afraid they'll reject you. Their acceptance is more important to you than their eternal destiny.

That happened in Scripture to a group who believed in Jesus, but were afraid to confess their faith publicly. *Why?* Afraid of rejection. John 12:42, "*But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith.*" Fear of rejection is a snare. ***We become overly cautious or become overly starved.***

3. The fear of rejection is costly. Eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric issue. More die from eating disorders than bipolar disorder, substance abuse or even depression. Someone dies as the direct result of an eating disorder every 62 minutes. The pressure to be thin, cultural preferences for thinness, and exposure to media promoting false ideals is a leading cause. In fact, eating disorders are virtually nonexistent in cultures that haven't been exposed to our false ideals of thinness.

Mother Teresa was right. **(picture)** "*We have drugs for people with diseases like leprosy. But these drugs do not treat the main problem, the disease of being unwanted...The sick and poor suffer even more from rejection than material want. Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty.*" The fear of rejection carries a high price.

The fear of rejection causes us to conform our lifestyles and values. To avoid rejection we sometimes become chameleons with those around us. We settle in, whether it be through clothes or lifestyle or even values in what we believe because we don't want to be rejected. It's not just a teen problem. Look around and you'll see adults with this same fear.

The fear of rejection keeps us from speaking the truth. Many will lie or distort the truth in order to keep from being rejected by others.

The fear of rejection prevents us from giving and receiving love. Many shut down emotionally. They've been burned and don't want to be burned again. They fear rejection so they won't give or receive love. Many marriages are like that. There have been past problems. There is a fear of a future rejection, so they shut down and become emotionally distant.

The fear of rejection leads to isolation and loneliness. Because we fear the rejection of others, we build walls around us to protect ourselves rather than bridges to relate to each other. It's why some bail on church or won't get involved or join. They've been burned and don't want to be burned again.

The fear of rejection moves us toward unhappiness. There's a constant pressure to try to please others. That's a miserable way to live, wondering what others are think of us. Too often those who fear rejection become petty and critical. If they're hyper-critical they can reject others before others can get around to rejecting them.

4. The fear of rejection handicaps us spiritually. In his book, *Freedom from Fear*, Neil Anderson **(pictures)** says that fear is like the coils of a snake—squeezing tighter, the more that we give in to them. To win over the fear of rejection, you can't be passive. You must be proactive!

Too many of us spend far too much time turning our heads, wondering what others are saying about us rather than focusing our heart on God. Here are some action steps that we can take to break the chains of the fear of rejection.

Face the fact that people will let you down. We place far too much value on the opinions of others. We're shaped by their words, tyrannized by what they think of us. God knew this. It's why He reminds us in Isaiah 51, "*I am He who comforts you; who are you that you are afraid of man who dies, of the son of man who is made like grass, and have forgotten the Lord, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, and you fear continually all the day*" (vs. 12-13). People have a right to their opinion and will gladly share it. But why fear their opinion? They're all going to die and their opinion will die with them. While we'll be affected by the rejection of others, we don't have to allow it to control us, consume us, or conform us to their thoughts, opinions and feelings.

While relationships are vital for a healthy life, they're only human. They're not God. Because they're human, they'll let us down, so we must not put our faith in them. Too many Christians put their faith in a person or even in a pastor. Then, they're devastated because that person let them down. Even godly people will let us down. Our faith must be in God.

He's our sure confidence. And let me say this, as your pastor, if I haven't let you down yet or disappointed you – I WILL! I'm a sinner and need Jesus too, just like you.

People will never love you as much as you need to be loved. Human love is conditional and inconsistent. If you're living to please others, you're setting yourself up for hurt and rejection.

Ironically, we focus on the wrong fear. We fear people whose opinions are temporary rather than fearing God whose rejection is eternal. We spend so much time fearing what others may say, but their opinion is only temporary. But then, we don't fear God's rejection and His rejection is eternal.

Focus on how God sees you. This is so liberating! 1 Samuel 16:7, *“For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”* This was Jesus' constant theme in the Gospels. Our Lord doesn't care what people look like or even how religious they look. He looks at the heart. This is the huge difference between people and God. When people look at us, they see us externally. They look at our appearance, our homes, position, income, our car. God doesn't care if you drive a clunker and live in a shed. He cares about your heart.

You may have been rejected. Maybe because of something that others have no idea of what's going on in your heart and haven't taken the time or energy to find out. The encouraging news is that God knows your heart.

God is a bit like Prince Charming in *Cinderella* (**picture**). Prince Charming saw in Cinderella something that others didn't. God is a lot like that Prince, who comes and kneels before you. You may feel like a step child or someone who isn't loved. But God doesn't put a glass slipper on us, He puts a grace slipper on us. As He puts grace under us, He sees in us what others don't see. He sees value, potential, His unique creation and calls us away from being some unwanted stepchild to dance with Him and join His kingdom. God sees us far differently than this lost world.

Fall back on God's unconditional love. If you're sinking in the quicksand of rejection, remember God can pull you out and set you on the solid rock of His unconditional love. 1 John 4:10, *“This is what real love is: It is not our love for God; it is God's love for us in sending His Son to be the way to take away our sins.”*

Most of us have heard of God's unconditional love and may understand it theologically. Too few of us embrace it and are able to fall back on it and know that God loves us not for what we do, but for who we are. When you truly know His unconditional love, it liberates you. When you know God's unconditional love experientially, then your life will be radically different.

God longs for us to know His unconditional love. We can relax and be unconcerned about the rejection of others, focusing instead on His love. He won't reject us. He already knows everything about us and chose to love us!

Some have a really hard time with this. Even those who have been believers for a while feel like when they sin, God rips His love away from them. That's not what the Bible teaches. God's love is unconditional. Yes, He hates sin, but He doesn't pull out His love from under us.

Imagine Jesus in a boat and Peter wanting to walk on water. Peter says, "Jesus, I want to come to You." Jesus says, "Come!" Peter begins to walk on the water and then begins to sink. Jesus doesn't think of him as a loser. Yet, some of us think that's what God thinks...when we perform and behave He loves us but when we don't, He pulls His love from us until we walk on water again. But it's not true. God loves you unconditionally. Fall back on His love.

We must learn to live for an audience of One. So, who are you living for? Whose approval is most important? Who's your audience? When all is said and done there's only one vote that counts, God's. Ultimately, it's not the applause of the crowd that matters, it's the approval of God. British pastor, Peter Thomas, *“God is our audience of One, and we are all part of the band. We are not here to entertain or impress people, but to worship God.”*

Do you want to be free from the fear of rejection? Let God's love for you crowd out the opinions and the desire to please others. Focus on how God sees you which is so very different from the world. Fall back on His unconditional love and focus your heart on Him.

Conclusion: Jesus died to free us from **The Frightening Nightmare of Rejection**. Let me share **Three Take-Home Truths** and we're done.

Our Lord fully understands rejection. Isaiah 53:3 says of Him, *“He was despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.”* Jesus was perfect. There was no sin, no personality or character flaw in Him that caused Him to be rejected. Yet He suffered undeserved rejection all of His life. Why did Jesus endure such horrible rejection? He bore our sins on the cross and took our punishment so we could be forgiven.

When you trust Christ as your Savior, you're born into God's family. God accepts you as His beloved child. He loves you with a love that will never waver, falter, or end. And as you grow in your new life, your great High Priest Jesus intercedes for you with God.

His followers will be rejected, too. Jesus told us that we'd be hated and rejected (Mt. 10:22). When we're rejected, we share in the rejections of Christ and those of godly men and women since this world began. We may be rejected by this world, but we're accepted by God.

As His followers, we're to be the place of love and grace for the broken and rejected. If you ask most church people about their image in the community, they may reference “hospitals for the sick” or “lighthouses for lost.” Let’s be honest. That’s how we like to see ourselves. But are we? Are we a place where the broken can find forgiveness, God’s grace and healing?

One prostitute in Chicago had a completely different take on Christians and the Church. In his book, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*, Philip Yancey (**pictures**) opens his book with a story told to him by a friend who serves the impoverished and addicted in the Windy City. Yancey’s friend shared:

A prostitute came to me in wretched straits, homeless, sick, unable to buy food for her two-year-old daughter. Through sobs and tears, she told me she had been renting out her daughter – two years old! – to men interested in kinky sex. She made more renting out her daughter for an hour than she could earn on her own in a night. She had to do it, she said, to support her own drug habit.

He continued, *I could hardly bear hearing her sordid story. For one thing, it made me legally liable – I’m required to report cases of child abuse. I had no idea what to say to this woman. At last I asked if she had ever thought of going to church for help. I will never forget the look of pure, naïve shock that crossed her face. “Church!” she cried. “Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They’d just make me feel worse.”*

Yancey’s point in retelling the story was to show that in Jesus’ day, sinners, the very worst of the worst, flocked to Him, not away from Him. Are we like Jesus? While we can’t condone sin, we must accept and show His love to the sinner. Is that us? Are we doing that? Or are we just another place of rejection? Too often the broken won’t come to us because they fear more rejection. But Jesus took us in when we were a mess! And we must be Jesus in our community and world! Jesus didn’t reject sinners. And since Jesus didn’t make sinners feel worse, neither should we as His Church. We must be a place of grace! They must see God’s love in us!