

The Reality of Rejection

(Vickie Kraft, Bible.org)

** After reading this article, be certain to see this 4-minute message clip from Stephen Furtick on “Why Rejection Can Actually Be a Blessing.” www.youtube.com/watch?v=wY7yYCozRSI*

Kathy, an aspiring young writer, received a telephone call from a local pastor. "You did such a great job of editing my sermon transcripts into booklets, I suggested to Martha Frazier that you do the same for her. Do you know who she is?"

Kathy frowned, trying to place the name. The pastor continued, "Martha has a unique ministry, teaching Bible classes on the North Side. She's a bit eccentric," he chuckled briefly, "but she's got some great things to say. I recommended you highly, and she wants you to attend her Bible study tomorrow afternoon. She'll meet with you afterward. Oh, and she said she'd leave your name at the gate."

"What gate?"

"The study is probably in a gated community."

Delighted with the job referral, Kathy checked her map after hanging up. Martha's meeting was on the North Side, all right. It was in the most affluent section of the city, where the properties started at 1.5 million dollars and went up from there. Kathy's next stop was her closet. What on earth would she wear? She and Bill managed to pay the rent, to make the car payments, and to eat. There wasn't much left for clothes—especially the kind she needed for a job interview on Martha's side of town.

"Oh well," she told herself, "I'll wear a skirt and sweater. Nothing wrong with that . . ."

The next day, as Kathy dressed carefully, she was frustrated to find that she had a run in every pair of pantyhose she owned. She shrugged off the inconvenience, jumped in her not-so-clean Suzuki, and headed for the Bible study a few minutes early. After passing through two ornate steel gates and parking directly in front of an enormous mansion, she found her way to the front door.

The hostess eyed her coolly, then glanced at the street. "Is that your, uh, Jeep, dear?"

"Yes, it's mine. Didn't have time to wash it . . ." she laughed apologetically.

"Would you mind terribly moving it around the corner? We're expecting some special guests. Thank you so much, dear."

Glancing at the woman's huge diamond ring, bejeweled cross, and three diamond bracelets, Kathy was acutely aware of the run in her nylons. She realized her inexpensive clothes looked unmatched and tacky as she meekly reparked the car, and her hair kept sticking to the sweat on her forehead. Walking back toward the large house, she noticed two black Mercedes Benz sedans pulling up in front. The women who got out were impeccably dressed, perfectly manicured, and evidently knew each other very well—so well, in fact, that they failed to speak to Kathy.

Kathy found a seat in the back of the room, which was beautifully arranged with several rows of chairs and a table of hors d'oeuvres. She decided against taking anything to eat—by now her stomach was in knots, and she didn't want anyone to notice her. No one did.

After the Bible lesson, which was dramatically presented by Martha Frazier, Kathy waited at the front to speak to her. When she explained to Ms. Frazier her reason for attending, she noticed the older woman's eyes scanning her, head to toe. Was Martha Frazier naturally unfriendly, or did she simply dislike Kathy? How could she? They'd never met before. There was an uncomfortable feeling about their brief conversation, after which Kathy handed the teacher her business card and all but ran toward her car.

"We'll be in touch," Ms. Frazier had said as they parted.

Two days later, Kathy received a note from Martha Frazier, perfectly typed on her elegant letterhead. "Unfortunately, I don't feel you are the right person to edit my lessons into booklets. You clearly are not familiar with the type of woman to whom God has given me the privilege of ministering. Thank you, however, for attending the study. I trust you were blessed."

Kathy's eyes blurred with tears of shame and humiliation as she read the note. She knew very well why she had been rejected for the job—she didn't look like the other women there. They were rich. She wasn't. They were sophisticated. She was not. "She's right . . ." she said aloud as she ripped the note in half and angrily threw it in the trash. "Not only am I unfamiliar with that type of woman, I can't imagine how they can possibly call themselves Christians!"

Rejection—An All-Too-Familiar Experience

To reject someone means to refuse to grant that person recognition or acceptance, to discard that individual as being worthless. Have you ever felt rejected?

- Did you feel rejected because your father was distant and cold, too busy to give you time and attention?
- Did you feel rejected because your mother favored your older sister who was prettier or smarter?
- Did you feel rejected because you weren't gifted in athletics and when the class divided up into teams, you were the last one chosen?
- Did you feel rejected because your school clothes were not as nice as the other kids' and they made fun of you?
- Were you fat? Were you plain looking? Did you have acne? Did you have to wear thick glasses?
- Were you rejected during your high school years because you weren't popular; did you miss your prom because no one invited you?
- Were you rejected for membership in a sorority you wanted to join in college?
- Were you passed over for promotion at work because someone else was younger or prettier?
- Did you lose your job because you were getting older?
- Did you date a man for several years, expecting to marry him, only to have him back out?
- Do you feel rejected by your children, after giving your life to raise them and to provide for them the benefits you didn't have?
- Did your husband leave you in midlife for another woman—or worse yet, another man?
- Rejection is a painful experience no matter what the cause, and all too often, we don't assign enough blame to the rejecter. We simply agree with his or her evaluation of us and carry a feeling of inferiority or of being "damaged goods" all our lives.

REJECTION IS NOT A MEASURE OF TRUE WORTH

But does rejection really affect our basic worth? If individuals don't appreciate me as a total person because they don't like my looks or my performance, does that mean I really am what they think I am? Am I intrinsically less valuable? Should I permit them to label me for the rest of my life? What if they are wrong?

They usually are.

If you consider Jacob's two wives, Leah and Rachel, you will discover how envy and jealousy can destroy harmony and love in a family. As we study the emotional obstacle of rejection, let's take a closer look at Leah's spiritual journey, because Leah was a woman who lived with the pain of rejection every day of her life.

First of all, Leah was never respected by her father. In that day, it was the father's responsibility to arrange for his daughters to marry. During the seven years Jacob worked for Rachel, Laban could have tried to find a husband for Leah. If he had offered a big-enough dowry, he would have found someone to marry her. But apparently he thought she was hopeless as a marriage prospect and the only way to get rid of her was to palm her off on poor Jacob, who was besotted with love for Rachel. Laban passed Leah off to Jacob like a dishonest businessman getting rid of damaged goods at full price.

Leah: Unwanted, Unloved

Can you imagine how Leah must have cringed when Jacob looked at her in the morning light with shock, distaste, and anger? That terrible deception on Jacob's wedding night set in motion much of the grief that family experienced for decades to come. Sadly, Leah didn't deserve that rejection. Apparently, her rejection was based on her looks—her weak eyes. Nobody noticed her character, her inner self, or her mind. This isn't much different than the way things are today. You've never seen an ugly Miss America, have you?

"Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah." If we think at all about those six little words from [Genesis 29:30](#), we will be able to imagine the many ways Jacob demonstrated his feelings. But we also see how God expressed His feelings for Leah. As we learned in the last chapter, God stepped in to let Leah know

she was valuable to Him by allowing her to bear children. Still, Leah suffered her husband's rejection, so from her we can learn some important principles for handling rejection.

FACE THE FACTS REALISTICALLY

Leah knew she wasn't loved. She wasn't fooled, and she didn't fool herself. Sometimes we make excuses and cover up for the people who reject us, because if we acknowledge their cruelty, it hurts too much. Worse yet, we keep on trying to be accepted and as a result face rejection over and over.

Leah's longing for Jacob's love probably lasted all her life, but she learned to live with the situation. Her spiritual journey led her to reality and acceptance, and her awareness of God indicates a stable relationship with Him that sustained her and gave her the strength to endure her painful circumstances. Her spiritual growth is reflected in the names she gave her children:

"Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, 'It is because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now' ([Gen. 29:32](#)).

Reuben means, "See, a son" but when it is pronounced in Hebrew, it sounds like "He has seen my misery." What does that tell us about Leah's life? She was miserable! Listen to her heart's cry: "Surely my husband will love me now." We learn something important from her.

DON'T PRETEND; CONFESS YOUR FEELINGS

To accept the way things are and to admit you would like them to be different are two different matters. It isn't "spiritual" to pretend that everything's fine and you aren't really hurt when you are. Tell the Lord how you feel. He knows it anyway. And, if you can, share your feelings with a trustworthy friend who will pray for you. Both of these honest expressions are important to your emotional and spiritual health.

Despite the birth of Reuben, Leah remained unloved. As the account continues, "She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, 'Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too' So she named him Simeon" ([Gen. 29:33](#)).

Simeon means, "One who hears." Leah believed that because the Lord had heard that she was not loved, He had given her another son as a consolation prize. What exactly *did* God hear? Was Leah told in words that she was unloved? By whom? Did Rachel spitefully remind Leah that she was the booby prize as Rachel's jealousy increased because she was barren? Or did this mean that Leah told God in her prayers about her rejection? Sadly, both scenarios were probably true.

Before long, Leah had another son: 'Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, 'Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.' So he was named Levi" ([Gen. 29:34](#)).

Levi sounds like the word "attached" in Hebrew. This time Leah lowered her expectations. Now she would be satisfied with just some feeling of genuine connection from Jacob and some appreciation. She never mentions love again. It seems she had finally faced the fact that Jacob would probably never love her as he did Rachel.

GIVE UP UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Sometimes we make ourselves unhappy by envisioning changes that aren't going to take place. Your mother may never be a warm, loving person. Your father may never tell you verbally that he loves you. Your husband may never be able to let down the walls of protection he has built around himself and share the intimacy you long for.

If you spend your life focused on making some other person change, you're wasting your energy. The problem is not yours; the fault does not lie with you. You are not unworthy. Instead, the other person may be incapable of the normal responses of an emotionally healthy person.

We see this happen in Leah when a very important shift occurs in her focus after her fourth son is born: "She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, 'This time I will praise the LORD! So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children" ([Gen. 29:35](#)).

Judah means "praise." After years of pain, Leah's entire focus turned to God. This time she didn't mention Jacob at all; instead she got her sense of worth from God. She knew God valued her because He had proved it to her in a way that was understood in that culture. He gave her children. She was devalued

by her father. She was rejected by her husband. She was envied by her sister. But she was loved by God, and that fact gave her the strength to go on.

SHIFT YOUR FOCUS TO GOD'S ACCEPTANCE OF YOU

Take a moment, open your Bible, and read [Ephesians 1:3-14](#). Look how special we are to God! We are:

Blessed Chosen Loved Predestined Adopted Redeemed Forgiven
Lavished with grace Included in Christ Sealed with the Spirit Guaranteed an inheritance

When we trust Christ and establish a relationship with Him, He accepts us with arms wide open. His acceptance is what gives us value. It is from Him that we should derive our self-image.

Don't give the person or persons who reject you permission to put a price tag on you. God has put *His* price tag on you. You are worth so much to Him that He came Himself to die for you so you could be His son or daughter, born into His family by faith in Jesus Christ. Follow Leah's example!

PRAISE THE LORD!

Soon after that, Leah stopped bearing children, and she followed Rachel's lead in giving her maid to Jacob so she could have more sons. Even the names Leah gave those sons born to her maid indicated a thankful attitude: "Good fortune" and "Happy."

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD'S GIFTS

Focusing on God doesn't mean we won't ever feel resentment at unfair treatment. Leah wasn't perfect, either. When Rachel tried to prevent her from having more children by keeping Jacob from sleeping with her, she demeaned herself by "hiring" him for the night with her son's mandrakes. But she also must have prayed, because we read, "God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. Then Leah said, 'God has rewarded me for giving my maidservants to my husband' So she named him Issachar" ([Gen. 30:17-18](#)).

I don't think God gave Leah another son because she gave her maid to Jacob. I believe He answered her prayer simply because He loved her. Even today, we often have wrong concepts about God, although we possess the complete revelation of Scripture. And remember, Leah had no Bible. Everything Leah knew about God had been transmitted orally, mostly from Jacob, and Jacob clearly didn't understand the grace of God.

And even then God wasn't through showering Leah with His blessings: "Then Leah said, 'God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons' So she named him Zebulun" ([Gen. 30:20-21](#)).

Another son, and she welcomed him as a precious gift from God. Now she was willing to settle for even less—she just wanted her husband to give her the honor due her as the mother of his six sons. As a special blessing, we read that she also gave birth to a daughter, and she named her Dinah.

How easy it is to overlook God's blessings because there is something we *don't* have. Sometimes our "if only" blind us to the wonderful provisions we have received, and we refuse to be wholeheartedly grateful.

Life Can Be Unfair

We will all experience pain in this world if we live long enough. This is a fallen world, and we are a fallen race. There's no way to escape suffering. Instead, if we accept it and trust God to use it, He will work it out for our good. God has a way of compensating us for our hurts. And as we learn to deal with adversity, our personal character develops.

Leah was the mother of half of Jacob's sons, and half of the twelve tribes of Israel descended from her. Yet she lived with rejection all her life—her father's, her husband's, and her sister's. But God proved His acceptance of her in a language she could understand by giving her six sons and a daughter.

Jacob chose Rachel. God chose Leah.

Rachel had what Leah longed for, but it didn't make her a better person. We see no evidence of contentment or gratitude in Rachel's life. And there is no reason to believe that she had a relationship with

the Lord comparable to Leah's. Apparently, the pain of rejection caused Leah to turn to the Lord, and in doing so, she found her contentment in Him.

In the long term, God had the greatest blessing of all in store for Leah, even though she didn't live to see it. God chose Judah, Leah's son, to be the father of the royal dynasty through which His Messiah would be born: Christ, the Son of David, Lion of the tribe of Judah. And, like His grandmother generations before Him, Jesus was rejected too.

Our Savior Experienced Total Rejection

"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. . . . And we esteemed him not" ([Isa. 53:3](#)).

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 His life. Jesus was rejected by His peers, by His half-brothers, by His nation, by the Gentiles, by the world He had created. In the hour of His agony He was betrayed by one friend, denied by another, and abandoned by all of His disciples. He experienced loneliness, suffering, grief, and rejection. "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted" ([Isa. 53:4](#)).

Why did Jesus endure such agony? He bore our sins on the cross and took our punishment so that *we* might be forgiven. But in so doing He endured a rejection we will never know. He even felt rejected by God, His Father. Remember His cry from the cross, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" ([Matt. 27:46](#)).

When Jesus became man, He bore the full penalty for our sin, which is separation from God: "By his wounds we are healed" ([Isa. 53:5](#)).

In the New Testament, we learn more about Jesus' rejection: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" ([John 1:11-12](#)).

When you trust Christ as your Savior, you are 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. Here's the kind of priest He is:

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" ([Heb. 4:15-16](#)).

JESUS IS A COMPASSIONATE, SYMPATHETIC INTERCESSOR

Jesus knows how rejection makes us feel. He has been there. He will comfort us, give us value, and use our pain to help others. But to appropriate these gifts, we have to make the kinds of decisions Leah did. We have to give up our expectations and focus on God, praising and thanking Him for who He is and for the blessings He showers on us. If we do that, rejection will not be a hindrance to our spiritual growth. It will become a catalyst.

George Matheson was a brilliant young man who was engaged to a woman he loved very much. Like Leah, he was troubled by weak eyes and was told that he would soon be totally blind. Just before their wedding, his fiancée told him she wouldn't marry him because she couldn't face life with a blind man. Matheson never married. But the wounds of this rejection gave us a hymn that has comforted countless thousands of God's children. The words trace for us the journey we must all take:

O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.
O Light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me through pain
I cannot close my heart to thee.
I trace the rainbow through the rain
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.
O Cross that liftest up my head
I dare not ask to fly from thee;
I lay in dust, life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.