

CHAPTER 1: THE LIE OF REJECTION

DISCOVER
YOUR

True
SELF

*How to Silence the Lies of
Your Past and Actually Experience*

WHO GOD SAYS YOU ARE

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INTRODUCTION

THE POWER OF MIRRORS

I will never forget an experience I had my senior year in college. After my college basketball team lost a tournament game that ended our season, most of my teammates determined the best way to celebrate that would be to go out and party.

By this time, I was walking with the Lord and had no desire to hit all the bars in Charleston, West Virginia, to watch my buddies get drunk. A cheerleader named Mary was of the same mind. She was a friend I had met at a couple of the Bible studies on campus.

After the game, Mary and I found ourselves in a small all-night coffee shop. To be honest, I was more than a little intimidated. She was stunningly beautiful and athletic, with long blonde hair, piercing blue eyes, and a 3.7 grade point average. Though I had come to believe that no one “had it all together,” she seemed to be the exception. She had been blessed to be in that 1 percent of the gene pool.

After listening to her story for about two hours, I couldn't believe what I was hearing. The distance between how she viewed herself and objective reality was stunning.

I'm not exaggerating when I say she seemed to hate herself. She actually looked in the mirror and thought she was ugly. I tried to encourage her, reminding her of her great GPA.

"4.0 is a success in my family," she said. "I'm a failure."

I was sitting with someone who had so much going for her in every respect, yet she saw herself as a failure, ugly, and unacceptable.

Her perception was completely illogical to me.

Despite her beauty and her gifts, Mary had multiple mirrors throughout her childhood that told her she was ugly, that she didn't measure up, and that she was unlovable. Those mirrors shaped her thinking about herself and as a result how she interacted with others.

But after thirty-plus years of pastoring and counseling, I will tell you this: Mary is not an exception.

The Power of Mirrors

Let me ask you a question: what do *you* see when you look in the mirror?

We look at ourselves in the mirror multiple times a day. There's the mirror in the bathroom that says the makeup looks good, the hair is in place and that shirt matches the sweater. There are mirrors at the gym that tell you you're really making progress—or that you've got a long way to go.

But it's not just physical mirrors that are powerful.

There are mirrors that we all have: it's the mirror of a little boy looking up and catching his mom's first reaction of disappointment.

It's the mirror of going to your middle high school thinking, *I really look cool in this new outfit*, and then realizing three minutes later in the hallway that you not only don't look cool but people are laughing at you.

It's the mirror of disapproval from your spouse. It's the mirror of a boss who says, "You don't measure up." It's the mirror of a coach or teacher that said you were dumb or lazy.

It's the mirror of the media that says if you don't have a perfect body, you're not acceptable.

There are all kinds of mirrors that create a composite picture in our minds and tell us who we are.

Warped Mirrors

I am no longer surprised by how radically different a person's view of themselves and objective reality can be. The truth of the matter is, we all have warped mirrors.

We all experience distortions that affect our lives and our relationships because of mirrors past and present. It's a lot like when you were a little kid and you went to one of those fun houses where you would walk in front of one mirror and look eight feet wide and then run to the next mirror and look two feet tall and then the next mirror made you look skinny as a toothpick. As children, we laugh when we see ourselves in the distorted images in the fun house mirrors. But there's nothing funny about the distorted mirrors we believe.

When it comes to distorted mirrors, the most powerful influence in our lives is our parents and family of origin: our mom, dad, siblings, or lack thereof.

The second most powerful influence is authority figures and role models as well as peers. People that you look up to, whose opinion matters—sports heroes, artists, musicians, pop culture icons, and the friends you hang with—all constitute a myriad of mirrors constantly shaping your perception of who you are.

These influences can help us see our gifts, talents, and strengths and positively inspire us. None of our parents were perfect, but much of our best qualities and positive pictures of ourselves flow from them or a teacher, coach, or role model.

Unfortunately, the same influences can be the source of warped mirrors resulting in:

- Feelings of insecurity, inferiority, or superiority
- Performance orientation: my value is only in what I can do
- Withdrawal: avoid risk at all cost as it brings rejection
- Denial: refuse to look honestly within as it's too painful
- Compensation: overachieve and prove everyone wrong
- Addictive behavior: medicate the pain
- Unfulfilled longings for significance and acceptance

While there are multiple self-help resources and tools to address all kinds of dysfunctions, the root cause to many of our problems is an inaccurate view of ourselves.

What we need is a mirror that is trustworthy: a mirror that allow us to see ourselves as God does.

Where Can We Get an Accurate View of Ourselves?

I have good news for you: there is a mirror that never lies. It's objective, it's accurate, and it will tell you who you are, how much you matter, and why you're here on earth.

That's what I want for you.

I want to help you break free from deep-rooted misbeliefs, relational patterns that never seem to change, and internal struggles that seem to have no solutions. The mirror I'll show you is a divine one given to you by God to help you see yourself as He sees you.

Despite what you've heard, despite what's been planted in your conscious and subconscious mind about who you are, what you're worth, and what others think, God declares that in Christ you are wanted, valuable, secure, competent, beautiful, and called for a purpose only you can fulfill.

In the chapters that follow, I identify the lies that have held many of us as prisoners for years. We will look at the pain and

the struggles those things have caused us and learn specific and practical ways to replace those lies with the truth.

Someone has observed that what comes into our mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

Here's the second most important thing about us: what comes into our mind when we think about ourselves.

Will you join me on a journey to shatter the distorted images and lies we believe about ourselves?

THE LIE OF REJECTION

For years Billy watched couples come into the orphanage in search of children to adopt. For years he watched his friends get chosen. Billy was still there at the age of eight—past the stage of “cute,” past the typical age of adoption.

“Left out” and “rejected” became part of his identity.

Eventually, a husband and wife did come and adopt Billy. For the first time in his life, Billy had a bedroom of his own, enough food to eat, and a family who loved him. Yet his new parents found him sleeping on his floor.

“What are you doing?” they asked. “We have a nice bed for you.”

But Billy didn’t feel worthy to sleep in a bed.

On another occasion, Billy’s parents discovered food in his closet. He had snuck it out of the refrigerator and hoarded it in his closet because that’s what he had always done. In the orphanage, he was never sure if he was going to get enough to eat.

At the orphanage, Billy fended for himself: never feeling loved, never feeling worthy, never knowing what it meant to be accepted. In reality, he had been legally adopted by a father and mother who loved him, given him a new name, and provided him a caring home. But that wasn't enough to undo years of rejection.

For years after he was adopted, Billy kept his orphan identity. When he grew up, God called him first into the ministry. He was bright and a hard worker and became a successful church planter and pastor. However, Billy still felt that sense of rejection, so he went to school to get degree after degree, running after whatever he felt would make him acceptable.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of people like Billy who are loved and accepted but still live with an orphan identity.

The Second Most Important Thing

It took a long time for Billy to overcome his orphan identity, but by God's grace, he did. He was William D. Lawrence, the Dallas Theological Seminary professor who taught me to preach.

In fact, it was his mentoring and counseling that helped me see myself the way God does.

Let me ask you a couple of very important questions about your identity. First, what is your image of God?

There's a secret law of the soul that hardly anyone recognizes: *You will gravitate toward your image of God.* That's why A. W. Tozer was convinced that whatever comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. It's also why it is essential for us to get a high, holy, clear, accurate picture of who God really is because our perception of God has such a powerful effect on our lives. A distorted image of Him can take us pretty far off track.

To understand your identity it's vital to have an accurate picture of who God really is.

Now, if you agree that to understand your identity it's vital to have an accurate picture of who God really is, then another question is equally important: how do you see yourself?

Because closely related to that secret law of the soul is the second-most-important thing about you: *how you see yourself.*

If we are going to see God accurately, we need to know something about His perspectives, including His perspective of us—what He

thinks about when He looks at us Jesus followers. One of God's primary desires is for us to know who we really are in His eyes.

We need to learn what He had in mind when He created us, and what He wants and expects from us in our relationship with Him. God longs for us to see ourselves the way He sees us.

How Do You See Yourself?

In your mind's eye, how do you picture yourself? What do you believe about who you really are? Knowing everything you know about your appearance, your thoughts and feelings, your deepest needs and biggest dreams, your skills and talents and

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flaws, how would you describe yourself honestly?

Are you loving and caring? Warm and approachable? Gifted, smart, and innovative? Powerful and persuasive? Lonely, inadequate, and insecure?

Confused or fearful? Feeling lost or purposeless? Angry and resentful? Too tall, too short, too thin, too fat, too . . . anything?

For now, resist the temptation to describe yourself as the person you want to be. How do you *actually* see yourself?

This perception is what psychologists call your self-image. It's the mental image you have of your own identity and self-worth. In other words, it's a composite of all the mirrors you look into in order to see who you are.

Your New Identity

Many of our self-perceptions go much too deep to be wiped away with some corrective self-talk. But we can identify the lies we believe and renew our minds with God's truth. In doing so, we will significantly change the course of our lives.

No matter how painful your memories and emotions are when you think of your past, you can experience healing and restoration. That's what redemption is all about. Whether you perceive yourself positively or negatively, getting a vision of "your true self" through God's eyes is transforming.

It was for my wife, Theresa, and me. It changed the entire direction of our lives. It even saved our marriage. When I began to see myself as a wanted, valued, and deeply loved Son of my heavenly Father, I no longer demanded Theresa to "make my life work" and meet all my needs.

Scripture tells us to think about ourselves accurately—not too high,

not too low, not “too” anything. In Romans chapter 12, the Apostle Paul commands us to have an accurate perception of ourselves.

By the grace given me I say to every one of you:
Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought,
but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in
accordance with the faith God has distributed to each
of you. (Romans 12:3)

Notice that this instruction is given in the form of a command. It is not just friendly encouragement, a pat on the back, or a helpful suggestion. It is not presented as an option. We are told not to think of ourselves inaccurately but in accordance with sober judgment and with the faith God has given us—in other words, the way He sees us.

When we trusted Jesus as our Savior, we died with Him, our sins were forgiven, and we were justified in His sight, meaning we were declared legally righteous. All our sins—past, present, and future—are now forgiven. The moment we placed our faith in Christ, the righteousness of Jesus Himself was given to us, and God sees us now through the lens of His Son. We are reborn in the Son’s image; this is our new legal standing before our Heavenly Father, whether we are living up to that image or not.

Through the lens of the sacrifice of Jesus and His cleansing blood, God sees us as clean, righteous, forgiven—and His child.

The really big implication of this amazing truth is that God loves us as much as He loves Jesus.

Let me ask you a question: what does it mean to be *in Christ*?

If we are in Christ—in other words, if we have a real relationship with Him, not based on church membership or some standard of moral behavior but on genuine faith in Him—we are new.

We are “in Him,” He is “in us,” and God sees us as He sees Jesus. These are not just theological concepts or religious words. This is the new and eternal reality of everyone who has trusted in Christ and His work on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins and entrance into God’s family.

We tend to emphasize justification and the born-again experience—entering into salvation by grace through faith. And that’s huge, so it ought to be emphasized. But for many Jesus followers, it kind of stops there. Tragically, many Christians spend their lives focusing on what we are saved *from* without ever realizing what we are saved *for*. A real and profound journey begins with salvation,

and it involves living as a son or daughter of God who *no longer has anything to prove*.

When we enter into a relationship with our heavenly Father, we have a new standing. He gives it to us. We don't have to try to earn it

He has given us a completely new identity: we are sons and daughters of the Creator.

anymore. We don't have to try to become a son or daughter or demonstrate that we belong in the family. We already have His favor.

Our elder brother, Jesus, is at the right hand of the Father, and He wants us to live out of the love we have been given. Learning how to do that may be a journey, but becoming who we are is not. However, getting that reality from our heads to our hearts is no easy task.

He has already given us a completely new identity: we are sons and daughters of the Creator.

The Lie: Rejection

My wife, Theresa, never heard her father say, "I love you," and she can't remember ever getting any hugs from him. But she does remember the deep needs that were never met and the pain of feeling rejected.

Like many girls who don't get the love they need from their father, Theresa looked for it in unhealthy ways. To escape her home life, she was married young to someone who confirmed her sense of unworthiness. Human nature often draws us to whatever feels "normal" rather than what is right and good. After she put her husband through college, he began selling drugs and cheating on her. After she gave birth to twins, he left her for the other woman.

Theresa experienced the pain of rejection all over again. But thanks to the witness of her boss, she came to know Jesus. She accepted the truth that God loved her and wanted to have a personal relationship with her. I met Theresa when the boys were two and a half years old, and we became friends. Her life had been literally transformed. Her overwhelming sense of need had caused her to lean into God's love like few people I'd ever met.

About a year later we started dating and, eventually, we got married. But eighteen months into our marriage, I was beginning to wonder if it was going to work. I realized that even though my wife loved Jesus and accepted the truth of the gospel, she still had a deep sense of unworthiness. She was beautiful, smart, loving, talented, and passionate about God, but when she looked in the mirror, she saw someone who was a reject, someone unworthy of being accepted. She literally couldn't believe or receive my love.

Sitting in a counselor's office trying to sort out the roots of our problems was painful. By God's grace, our counselor realized that beneath all the psychological issues and my wife's warped view of herself was a bigger problem: she needed to see herself the way God saw her. She needed to stop believing the lies about her own self-worth.

Our counselor told Theresa to write down the misbeliefs she held on a card, followed by the corresponding truth. For example, **Misbelief:** "I need other people's approval to be happy." Then, at the bottom of the card, she would draw a stop sign followed by the **Truth:** "I want people's approval, but I don't need it. With God's approval, I am no longer compelled to earn love and acceptance. I am free to be me."

God provided scripture passage after passage that countered lies with truth, and Theresa would read them over and over again.

Misbelief:

I need other people's approval to be happy.

Truth:

I want people's approval, but I don't need it. With God's approval, I am no longer compelled to earn love and acceptance. I am free to be me.

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."
-1 Corinthians 15:10 (NASB)

For two years, we went over those cards together every morning before I went to work because our marriage depended on it. A lot of ugly, dysfunctional patterns develop when you have a warped view of yourself.

People who feel rejected may become people-pleasers at all costs, many become overly sensitive to criticism because it comes across as another form of rejection, and many withdraw to avoid any possibility of rejection, preempting the rejection they assume will be coming by removing themselves from relationships before it can happen. Avoiders are reluctant to take risks or to engage in certain activities where they might get hurt. People-pleasers can be enormously successful because they get up earlier and work harder in order to achieve more. Behind some of the world's greatest achievements is a deep insecurity and fear of rejection—scared people who believe their value is based solely on what they do and how they appear. All of these responses have a way of distorting, undermining, and potentially destroying our relationships.

Before we go on, let me ask you: which of those unhealthy responses do you most closely identify with? Go ahead, be honest. We all have them, and as you'll learn, being honest about how you really are is the first step to lasting change.

You Are Wanted

As I helped my wife review those cards and work through her deep issues, I realized I had all the same issues. I struggled with rejection just as much as she did, but I masked it better. In fact, I had actually learned to use it to my advantage. My fear of rejection was driving me to perform, to achieve, and to succeed. I was

actually being rewarded for my workaholic dysfunction.

But only to a point. I was so focused on overachieving and

being successful that I ended up being treated for exhaustion in the hospital—twice. A doctor told me my immune system was depleted and asked what I was doing to myself. I told him my schedule, and he basically told me I was “on an unhealthy and destructive path to burnout.”

My point is that all of us believe lies about ourselves. And we need to come to grips with those lies and replace them with truth. We need to see ourselves as God sees us. As long as we hold distorted views about ourselves, we will be driven by unhealthy motives, strive for unnecessary validation, and develop dysfunctional relationships. Worst of all, we will not be able to experience the fullness of the gospel of grace because

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we will always be searching desperately for something more.

Only when we realize that God views us as deeply loved children, will we really begin to live in freedom and experience fulfillment.

So, let me ask you again: How do you really see yourself? Let's face it, we all have distorted pictures of our identity and it undermines our relationships and robs us of the contentment we so long to experience. If you're like me, I'm guessing you can relate to the struggles with rejection.

Why? Because none of us has a perfect self-image or a complete understanding of who we are in Christ. We all wrestle with insecurity at some level, whether we are aware of it or not. We all have that experience of trying to be a "somebody" even though God has already made us to be incredibly valuable and loved. We still live like orphans in spite of having been adopted by the most loving Father there is.

This journey of discovering your true self begins with identifying what you think about yourself, measuring your perception against what God thinks of you, and learning how you can narrow the gap between your view and His.

God longs for you to see yourself as He sees you: wanted.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What are some factors that influence identity?
2. Fear of rejection is universal. Can you relate to Billy and Theresa? What about their stories resonate with you?
3. The trials and traumas of human relationships can distort the way people view themselves. What life experiences have affected your perception of yourself?
4. In Romans 12:3 we read that God has given each of us faith with which we can learn who we are in Christ. According to this picture of the truth, how should you think of yourself?
5. What distortions about your identity have you embraced to the point of seeing them as reality, even if your mind tells you they are not true? List them and identify them as lies. Pray and ask God for His help in seeing yourself the way He does.

WHAT DO YOU SEE WHEN YOU LOOK IN THE MIRROR?

Someone insignificant, insecure, REJECTED?

Most of us look at ourselves with warped mirrors, believing lies from our past that lead to insecurity, guilt, shame, and spiritual stagnation.

Pastor and author Chip Ingram wants to open your eyes to your true identity. God longs for you to see yourself as He sees you:

- Wanted
- Valuable
- Secure
- Competent
- Beautiful
- Called to a purpose only you can fulfill

Starting today, you can experience who God says you are and silence the lies of your past, including the feeling of rejection.

This excerpt is taken from *Discover Your True Self: How to Silence the Lies of Your Past and Actually Experience Who God Says You Are* (August 2020), based on the first three chapters of Ephesians.



Chip Ingram is the teaching pastor and CEO of Living on the Edge, an international teaching and discipleship ministry. A pastor for more than thirty years, Chip is the author of many books, including Culture Shock, The Real Heaven, The Real God, The Invisible War, and Love, Sex, and Lasting Relationships. Chip and his wife, Theresa, have four grown children and twelve grandchildren and live in California.