

Accepted in Jesus

A message of hope for those
who experience rejection

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Introduction

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

As we read this description of the “last days,” we might well wonder if Paul wasn’t gazing, by the aid of the Spirit, into twenty-first century America. If the description fits, the peril is upon us. We are in deep trouble.

Some Christians (and non-Christians) today rightly lament that psychologists have labeled nearly every quirk of human experience a disorder or a syndrome or a neurosis. This phenomenon of compulsive labeling may seem humorous, but it is truly sobering. It only masks a more serious problem. The prevailing winds of a society bent on indulging itself are wild and dangerous. When people love themselves, they resent authority, they renege on their commitments, they indulge their appetites, they hurt others and hate others, and ironically, they come to hate themselves too.

Self-focus, disregard for others, and the resultant broken relationships carry a huge price tag. People live with anxiety, loneliness, bitterness, depression, pain, and despair.

Perhaps psychologists overdo the labeling, but they also chronicle the unhappy conditions of a culture bent on loving itself to death.

Ours is a culture of rejection. It is the nature of self-lovers to reject others. And without God, those who are rejected have no source for healing.

But there is hope! The Bible abounds with examples of people who experienced rejection, including those who responded well and those who responded wrongly. Jesus Himself was rejected.

When we experience rejection, we are not doomed to living the rest of our days in misery, frustration, and bitterness. God's Word gives us direction. Jesus offers us His own example.

This study is intended to be both honest and practical. We travel through the valley of realism—God's Word never ignores the pain and suffering of human sorrow. We also come to stand on the high places of grace and spiritual maturity, for God's Word likewise assures us that there are answers for the difficulties we face. Our lives can be filled with great joy and we can develop strong character, not in spite of rejection, but precisely because of it. God is fully able . . . if we allow Him to be God.



Biblical Examples of Rejection

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

From these passages and others, we learn the benefits of studying the stories of men and women in the Bible. They were human beings with skin like us who faced trials, challenges, disappointments, and victories. They sinned. They hurt. They bled. They cried. They prayed. Some turned to God, and some turned away from God.

In the following pages, we will look at some of the men and women in the Bible who experienced rejection in their relationships. Their stories encompass a wide variety of circumstances and display both healthy and unhealthy responses. In observing their responses, I hope we will be able to see ourselves, profit from their experiences, and be better prepared to weather the hurricanes of our own rejection.

Example #1: Hagar was rejected by Sarah (Genesis 16).

When Hagar conceived a child by Abraham, the relationship between Hagar and Sarah changed. It was not simply that Sarah envied Hagar. We read that Hagar “despised,” or looked down in contempt, at Sarah. What had been a relationship of Sarah the mistress over Hagar the maid turned into a relationship of the maid looking down her nose at her mistress.

Hagar apparently believed her ability to conceive made her more valuable than Sarah. Though she was a servant, she was able to give Abraham the status of father—something Sarah had never been able to do. Hagar carried herself with an air of superiority and sniffed at the lady who could bear no children.

Sarah felt the change in Hagar and complained to Abraham. He, perhaps like a typical man not wanting to stir a hornet’s nest, said essentially, “Do whatever you need to do.”

So Sarah did. We know the story. She “dealt harshly” with Hagar, causing the servant girl to flee from home. Then God sent Hagar back to Abraham’s household, where she lived for another seventeen years.

But that is not the end of the story. Eventually Sarah did conceive, and Isaac was added to the family. Some years later, Sarah discovered Ishmael mocking Isaac. Her immediate reaction was to throw out the son along with his mother, which she did (Genesis 21:10-14). Here we may observe a few things related to our subject:

1. Ishmael demonstrated the same “down-the-nose” attitude his mother showed some years earlier.

2. Sarah's reaction to Ishmael likely carried the added freight of her hurt feelings from former years. Unresolved grievances ferment badly! And the longer grievances are held, the more trouble they bring.
3. Thus rejection breeds rejection in more ways than one. I reject you, and you reject me. Not only so, but when I reject you, all who are "with me" will tend to see you in the same negative light. Whole families reject other families. Whole nations and races look askance at one another. Rejection can be carried on for years, even from generation to generation.

Example #2: Joseph was rejected by his brothers (Genesis 37).

One of the ironies of Joseph's growing up years was that he was favored by his father and rejected by his brothers. The more his father favored him, the worse seemed to be the attitude of his brothers. Joseph didn't always help the situation. He reported to his father his brothers' bad behavior when they were out of the house. And telling them his dreams irritated them to no end.

None of this excuses the brothers for their ill will. They fervently hated Joseph, and when the opportunity presented itself, they gleefully sold him into slavery.

We can hardly imagine the scene—Joseph sobbing and pleading with them while they dickered with the merchants about his price. Malicious as they were, the memory burned its way even into their callous consciences, and years later they said, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us,