

## Chapter 1



# I'd Rather Ignore Honesty

In the quiet of an early morning, honesty finds me. It calls to me through a crack in my soul and invites the real me to *come out, come out, wherever you are*. Not the carefully edited edition of the me I am this year. No, honesty wants to speak to the least tidy version of the woman I've become. The one I can't make look more alive with a few swipes of mascara and a little color on my lips.

Honesty is a suitor with piercing vision who isn't swayed by pretending and positioning.

I can try and make things appear better than they seem, but honesty will have none of it. So, I throw my hair in a messy bun and let my face stay splotchy. I don't suck in my stomach or whiten my teeth or spritz on some perfume.

I simply emerge.

I come out from behind all the efforts to carefully construct

a more acceptable version of me, and I hesitantly extend my hand, uncertain how to greet honesty. I could be met with a slap or a hug, and I'm well aware it could go either way.

I would never opt for the slap, except with me that is probably the safer of the two options. I am an incredibly awkward hugger of the worst sort. I was once introduced to a well-known pastor I was extremely nervous to meet. He was a hefty older man with a delightful soul who was determined to make me feel welcome.

I should have felt honored.

But as I saw him approaching, all the options of how to greet him danced in my brain, and I became increasingly freaked-out with every step he took toward me. I stuck out my hand. He enveloped me in a bear hug, accidentally forcing my arm down in the worst possible location. Thankfully, he quickly backed away and instead placed his hands on my shoulders to say whatever he'd planned to say.

Of course I can't tell you what he said in the end, because 243 alarm bells were going off in my head about the awkward hug possibly resulting in my being banned from every church this side of the Mississippi. Or the world.

So, since hugs aren't usually my first choice, I didn't want to hug honesty.

Actually, I've never wanted to fully embrace honesty at all. I'm much better at it today than ever before, but I hesitate, knowing just how dangerous this can be. As long as I suspect that honesty's intention is to expose me and hurt me, it will always feel like a dangerous thing.

It's easier to construct a more palatable life story—where I can draw straight lines from each hurt of the past to the healing I later experienced—than to face the raw truth. I prefer

to neatly match each hard part of my testimony with the soft place I landed in the middle of God's grace, forgiveness, and restoration as proof I am walking in freedom.

Which I am. Most of the time. But honesty didn't want to talk to me about that. Honesty wanted me to bring the core of who I believe I am and hold it up to the light of what's really true.

And there's not a soul alive who will find perfect alignment there.

Not. One.

No matter how saved, sanctified, mature, and free we are, there are misalignments embedded in our souls. So this is what honesty wanted to address with me. The cause of this misalignment is something we all wish would have stayed in the middle school locker room: rejection.

One maliciously crafted rejection with my exact vulnerabilities in mind will pierce the deepest part of me. Being mature in my faith can help me better process it. It can help me have a better reaction to it. It can even help me remove the arrow and patch up the wound. But spiritual maturity doesn't shield me from rejection.

Today's rejections, big or subtle, are like stealth bombs that zing straight to my core, locating hurts from my past and making them agonizingly present all over again. They send messages that scramble up all my carefully established formulas for keeping life stable. The voices of doubt and insecurity whisper, "See, I've been telling you for years what an utter disappointment you are." Those voices don't have to scream; the pain does that in deafening tones.

So honesty stares at me, and I nod my head. I agree. There is still work to be done.

Finally, I see that honesty isn't trying to hurt me. It's trying to heal me.

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If you want to know what's really inside a person, listen carefully to the words she speaks. Recently the Lord made sure I had an acute awareness of what some of my own words reveal. Hints of the misalignment between what's true and what I believe about myself leaked out one day at the airport. There's nothing like a serious dose of stress mixed with an extreme time crunch that makes a person's mouth forget its filter. What you really think spills out in words a little too raw and forces you to take a look at where they came from.

There I stood, staring into an empty car trunk just outside the terminal, as a stabbing realization made my heart beat fast and my thoughts swirl. I had my itinerary. I had my driver's license. I had plans to get home. But I also had a rather inconvenient realization: I didn't have my luggage. Somehow it hadn't made it into the trunk of the car.

I thought another person had grabbed it. She thought I had. So there's that.

Quickly I called a friend who was still at the hotel. I breathlessly told her of my situation and asked if she could grab my luggage and stick it on the very next shuttle headed to the airport. And one other minor detail—I only had fifteen minutes to spare before the airline would no longer allow me to check my bag.

I'm not a nail biter, so instead I nervously picked at the little

threads of skin at my cuticles. I twisted my fingers until my knuckles cracked. Again, not a normal habit of mine. But this wasn't a normal moment.

Who shows up at the airport without their luggage?

I paced back and forth, willing the shuttle van to speed, but then quickly repented because my rule-following brain made me. Mentally, I was beating myself up and recounting why in heaven I hadn't made sure I had my luggage. I checked my watch. Things weren't looking good. The bus had more miles to go than I had time to wait. Ugh.

I walked over to an outside check-in counter with pleading eyes and a nervous voice, high-pitched and more than slightly annoying. "I know you don't work for the airline I'm flying, but your company is in the process of merging with it. So, is there any way I can check my luggage in here as soon as it pulls up to the curb and you can just work it all out on your computer? Please? Yes?"

"Sorry, but no," he replied. "Our computer systems aren't merged yet."

Bummer. Big huge stinking bummer.

And then I started to do what I often do when life refuses to cooperate with me. I started talking to myself. Frustration lilted and lifted from my nerves right out of my mouth. "I'm just such an idiot. I invite so much unnecessary drama and complication in my life, because my pace and my brain aren't in sync. I mean, seriously, what is wrong with my brain?!"

The luggage man made an abrupt about-face turn in my direction, extended his arm, and held up his hand, signaling me to stop. "Not in my presence," he said. "Not in my presence will you talk about yourself this way. Absolutely not."

His command startled me.

His words stopped me.

And suddenly I wondered if I was having a conversation with an angel.

“Spit happens, woman.” Only he didn’t say *spit*. He said, well, you know.

Great. Wouldn’t you know it? I have an “angel” that cusses.

So he wasn’t a divine presence, but some of his words certainly were.

They stuck to me. Like when a two-year-old spends an hour working a large lollipop into a gloopy, gummy mess and then runs her hands through your hair. That kind of sticking, it’s serious.

And so was this. These words—“Not in my presence will you talk about yourself in this way”—they don’t brush off easily. Nor should they. Sometimes a phrase lands in your soul with such weight it leaves the deepest impression. I collect these phrases like other people collect stamps and Beanie Babies. I fill the unlined pages of notebooks from Walmart with these phrases. These words that move me are treasures.

My fingers twitched, eager to add this to my collection, but my Walmart notebook was inside the luggage hopefully speeding, but not breaking-the-law speeding, my way. In the absence of the notebook, the only thing I could do was let the words take center stage in my mind. I heard them over and over and felt peace.

With car fumes and sharp airplane noises providing the unlikely backdrop for a church-type lesson, I realized why these words were so personally necessary for me. Negative self-talk was a rejection from my past that I had allowed to settle into the core of who I am. I talked about myself in ways

I would never let another person. Hints of self-rejection laced my thoughts and poisoned my words more than I cared to admit.

Self-rejection paves the landing strip for the rejection of others to arrive and pull on up to the gates of our hearts. Think about why it hurts so much when other people say or do things that make you feel rejected. Isn't it in part due to the fact they just voiced some vulnerability you've already berated yourself for? It hurts exponentially more when you're kicked in an already bruised shin.

Someone doesn't invite me to her event, and my thoughts recount all the faults and frailties I've voiced about myself recently. Suddenly, I assign my thoughts to that person. I hear her saying these same hurtful things. I feel labeled and judged and, yes, rejected.

Or my husband makes a comment about something I already feel sensitive about, and it incites an emotional response from me that is totally out of proportion. I find myself interpreting what he says and does way more emotionally than he ever intended. And it makes our relationship feel hard and exhausting. I feel so very rejected, and he's left scratching his head wondering why.

Or something I set my heart on unexpectedly falls through. I try to rally in my heart and remember that it's due to unforeseen circumstances. But there's some part of me that feels rejected. I don't want to take it personally, but I find myself slightly off for the rest of the day and can't quite shake the disappointment.

Or one of my adult kids makes a choice they know is the opposite of the advice I gave them. The more I push the more they pull back, and I feel like the mom I promised I'd never

be: overbearing and controlling. They become quiet and distant. And I ache in deep places.

Or someone flat-out rejects me, my idea, my invitation, my kids, my project, my whatever, and it messes with me more than it should.

Relationships feel increasingly unsafe. Opportunities feel increasingly risky. And life feels increasingly uncooperative. I carry on, because that's what we girls do. But this nagging sense of rejection, real or simply perceived, is doing more of a number on me than I care to admit. Rejection steals the best of who I am by reinforcing the worst of what's been said to me.

Rejection isn't just an emotion we feel. It's a message that's sent to the core of who we are, causing us to believe lies about ourselves, others, and God. We connect an event from today to something harsh someone once said. That person's line becomes a label. The label becomes a lie. And the lie becomes a liability in how we think about ourselves and interact in every future relationship.

**The line:** *I don't want you* becomes the label *you aren't accepted*.

**The label:** *You aren't accepted* becomes the lie *you aren't worthy*.

**The lie:** *You aren't worthy* becomes a script of self-rejection. And it unleashes suspicion, doubt, hesitancy, and many other liabilities that hinder present relationships. We project the lines of rejection we heard from our past on others and hold them accountable for words they never said. And worst of all, we catch ourselves wondering if God secretly agrees with those who hurt us.





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I would love to tell you I'm writing about this because I've overcome rejection in every way. I have made progress. I'm nowhere near as overly sensitive as I used to be. But there's a cussing "angel" who would caution me there's still work to be done.

No, I didn't choose this topic because I've mastered it. I chose this topic of rejection because I want us to dig in to the core of who we are and expose and finally heal rejection's deep infection. I'll warn you, the exposing of it all won't be tidy. But it will be honest.

And it will be good.

I can't say I'm quite ready to envelop honesty in a bear hug. I think you know the horribly awkward reason why. But I am willing to hold hands. And walk together from here.\*

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\* Oh, and P.S.—I did end up making my flight. Just in the nick of time that day. I think my angel at the luggage counter was quite eager to send me on my way.