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## chapter one



# humbly accepts acceptance<sup>2</sup>

**M**y heart was torn in two and ground with gravel from being stepped on, thrown around, and tossed aside. My carpet was wet with tears and I was sprawled facedown on my floor, wondering if the pain would ever go away.

Why was this battle crippling me so? I survived many months on bed rest followed by a devastating disease. I dealt with babies in the hospital, financial brokenness, and my husband's cancer. Those were tough times, but we could endure them because we felt embraced and understood, and we had people to love and support us along the way.

This was a different kind of pain.

I used to walk through life with an underlying sense of insecurity, and it wore like a small sharp rock imbedded in my sandal: impossible to see, but reinjuring me every single day. Even so, the chronic, shooting pain of insecurity had nothing on the agony of the betrayal, rejection, and character assassination I was now enduring.

With everything in me, I cried to the Lord, “*Oh God! This hurts so badly! Help me to see You in this! Show me how to walk through this pain to a better place. I am desperate for You, Lord!*” I felt alone and misunderstood, and the sobs coming from my mouth were deafening my own ears.

Yet all of a sudden, there it was, and my spiritual ears heard it.

*I am here for you, My child. You don't have to do this alone. I know rejection. I know the twisting, gripping pain that breaks your heart and makes your skin hurt. I understand it well. But it's time to get up now. I love you. I accept you. And you have things to do in this life. For starters, you are going to pray for your accusers.*

Instantly I sat up, wiped my eyes, and looked out the window. The sky was blue and magnificent and the birds seemed happy as ever. I couldn't relate. Using my couch as an altar, I knelt down, folded my hands, and began to pray. I had no love in my heart for my former friends; only anger. I didn't want them blessed; I wanted them squished under the mighty hand of God.

I'm just being honest here.

Even so, I obeyed and I prayed. The more I prayed, the more I realized that this pain—this valley—was lush with fertile soil, ready and waiting for me to plant seeds of faith, forgiveness, and obedience. I realized that before me was a mighty opportunity for growth, miracles, and a fresh revelation of this Man, Jesus.

The Bible says that He prepares a table for me *in the presence* of my enemies. Even if I had to crawl there, I wanted to eat at that table.



What if I could have reclined around *the* table with the disciples and with Jesus—God's Son, the King of the universe—would I have had mixed emotions? I imagine so. On one hand, I'm sure I would have felt tremendous awe and quiet reverence at

being so close to the Lord. And yet as I allowed my thoughts to take their natural course, would I also have felt a measure of pride and superiority because I was one of the few who were chosen to hang around and walk with Jesus? Oh, I hope not. But I do wonder.

As the dinner hour approached in the upper room, I imagine the disciples glancing around, looking for the slave who would clean their feet in preparation for the feast. Normally, if no slave was available to do the foot washing, it was customary for one of the guests to volunteer. Since there was no one who seemed ready to subject himself to the task, I wonder if they considered pulling a young servant from the street to do the duty. Perhaps they were murmuring among themselves, wondering out loud how long they would have to wait until dinner was served.

Imagine the jolt they experienced as Jesus got up, tied the servant's towel around His waist, and reached for the basin. Picture them swallowing hard as they awkwardly scooted back to give Him room. As Jesus' hands were dirtied from the filth on their feet, their hearts must have melted and any potential pride had to have been swallowed up and replaced by utter humility.

Even while Jesus was washing their feet, He knew in His heart that *every one of them* would abandon Him at some time that very night.

I have fears, I have insecurities; and had I been with the crowd, I am sure I would have abandoned Him too.

Judas abandoned *and* betrayed Jesus. (Judas wanted power and position, and it had become abundantly clear to him that the man he was following did not share his passion for human influence.) As Jesus rubbed the dirt off of his feet, His heart must have ached deeply, knowing He would be disowned for the price of a slave. Jesus *knew* that these were the feet of the man who would set in motion the most excruciating, agonizing hours of His life. *Still, He served.* Still, He washed, He rubbed, and He lovingly

held the feet of the guilty in His hands.

In the days that followed, how many times do you suppose that service was replayed in the disciples' minds? Without question, they had days when they were more cowardly than courageous. Their feet would get dirty again. Jesus knew all of this ahead of time, and He left them with a beautiful memory of His love for them, humbly washing their feet in a way in which they were honored and affirmed. He painted for them an enduring portrait of uncommon and true greatness.

Pondering this exchange between Jesus and the disciples compelled me to face my own dirty feet. The blackened water in the basin was *mine*. Never mind that women had hurt me with their words. It didn't matter that they couldn't stand me. Who had I hurt? Where had I been? And how was I to reconcile my low tendencies and dirty feet with the humility in Christ that took Him lower still?

I didn't have to look too far inside to be completely humbled by my own need for more of Jesus and less of me. But to pray for women who had stones in their hands and their gazes fixed on me seemed almost an impossible feat. To look up to Jesus and ask the question (as Joyce Meyer so eloquently puts it), "What *in me* needed this to happen?" took courage I didn't think I possessed.

From my perspective, their words were like planks while mine felt like slivers. From God's perspective, sin was sin and it's what separates us from Him—and keeps us from seeing clearly. Slivers come from planks and they're all the same, really. They are removed by love and forgiveness. This is ground God and I had covered before; He was just setting the plow a little deeper.

With all my heart I believe that it's not only possible to rise up out of the pain of betrayal and rejection, it's our call, our privilege, and our responsibility as ones who have been redeemed. In fact, I submit that those who tenaciously grab hold of God's promises during such times will rise up and be even more blessed and quali-

fied for His service once the storm subsides. They will have more tenderness in their souls, more compassion and conviction in their actions, and a greater capacity to love and forgive others.

Unfortunately, the *common way* through such times is the road of reciprocating pettiness and gossip, building cases, and forming allegiances. Those who take this path through betrayal and rejection give the devil a mighty foothold in their lives. They emerge from the crisis of betrayal miserable, not blessed. They struggle with suspicion instead of trust. They are more cynical and less hopeful.

To be an uncommon woman is to do what's *unnatural*. Like streams in the desert, the uncommon woman has the capacity to find refreshment and *be* a source of refreshment no matter where life finds her.

Here's how I walked through my valleys of rejection and betrayal and came out on the other side with the treasures God had promised me:

**Step One:** Regularly remind yourself who you are and whose you are in Christ, according to the Word of God (*loved, called, accepted, chosen, cherished, and forgiven*)! Dare to allow the Lord to point out anything in you that might offend Him (see Psalm 139:23–24).

**Step Two:** Pray for your accusers. Ask God to bless them. This will be tough because you won't want them blessed, but trust me; the more drawn they are to Jesus, the more like Him they'll become.

**Step Three:** Forgive your accusers. This will be a “hot potato exercise.” You will forgive them today—maybe twenty times—then you'll show up tomorrow to forgive them nineteen times. Eventually the potato will stay up in the air, and you will be free to leave the outcome to the Lord.

**Step Four:** Thank God for everything good in your life. During times of rejection you are at great risk of losing perspective and neglecting those who haven't abandoned or betrayed you.

**Step Five:** Pray for someone who has it tougher than you do. Write her a note or buy her a gift. Don't lose sight of the fact that even in tough times, God has called you to be a flow-through account of His blessings.

**Step Six:** Get some exercise. Working your muscles and forcing your blood to circulate will do great things for your body and your mind. Pray while you exercise. Ask the Lord to keep your heart pure.

**Step Seven:** Get proper rest and then wake up tomorrow morning and begin again with Step One.



Life gets messy. We make it that way. And yet amidst the dirt that's been thrown at us, the grime on our own feet, and the stones in our hands, we are supposed to believe that we are His treasure. Jesus beckons us off the low road of gossip and insecurity and to a higher place of holy confidence and humble dependence.

He lifts us up out of the ash heap, cleans us off, and teaches us how to sing (see Psalm 40:1–5). He reaches into our lives and, with a surgeon's precision, removes our cancerous character traits while preserving what's beautiful about us. When our spirits are bruised and our wicks are smoldering, He cups His hands around us and breathes life into us again (see Isaiah 42:3; Matthew 12:20). We are everything to Him . . . yet we are nothing without Him.

The uncommon woman understands her capacity for pettiness, selfishness, and a sinful bent that leads her away from the Almighty. But her thoughts don't dwell there. No, despite what

she knows about herself, she entrusts herself fully to the One who will shape her into a thing of magnificence.

Accepting acceptance means having the courage to face your foibles without it diminishing your value. Accepting acceptance means refusing to let others define you, because God already has. Accepting acceptance means cherishing the fact that you've been bought with a price, and thus embracing the call to become more and more like Christ every day.

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. (John 13:3–4)

To live freely and to embrace acceptance is to walk the way Jesus walked and to believe what He says. He understood *that He came from God and was returning to God*. So He got up from *His place* at the table.

Here lies the key to accepting acceptance. We understand who we are by knowing *whose* we are. First we must embrace this truth—once and for all—that we are a divine creation by a Masterful Artist, and we were made to bring Him glory, to bear much fruit, and to reflect His love.

Do *you* know where you came from and to where you are going? You came from Him! You were God's idea! He knows you best and loves you most because He made you! All of heaven is on your side, which is important because you are called to live a powerful life on earth. When your days are completed and your journey is through, you'll get to see Jesus face-to-face. You'll see firsthand the love in His eyes, and it will make your knees weak! For the briefest moment you'll wish you would have trusted Him more because you'll understand that *nothing* could have separated you from His love.

When we *regularly* identify ourselves as someone Jesus loves . . . everything changes. When we take that leap of faith to believe that all we could ever want, need, and hope for is found in Jesus, life takes on a whole new meaning.

*Eventually, we are going to believe all the love God has for us. At that moment, nothing on earth will be able to stop us from becoming the people God has called us to be. Through the leading of the Holy Spirit, our confidence and faith in the nature of God can enable us to believe fully in the enormity of His love for us.*<sup>3</sup>

☪ GRAHAM COOKE

The more we understand that our identity in Christ is *continually* secure and that no misstep, rejection, or judgment could ever change that, the more liberated we become from the opinions of others. As the gap increases between God's opinions and others' opinions, we are able to live more freely and are more consumed with the idea that heaven is our home and earth is the place to make Him known.

As we grow in the knowledge of our acceptance in Christ, the opinions of others will cease to have the power over us they once had. Not that we become inconsiderate or hardened toward others; quite the opposite. We *love* people, but we *hope* in God. We live, breathe, and walk in the *reality* that we are someone God enjoys, and we look for opportunities to demonstrate His love.

We've embraced acceptance when we are able to step away from our "place" at the table and get on our knees to serve when we are called to do so. We become uncommon when we, like Christ, forgive those who don't deserve it. Quite frankly, we don't deserve it either. And yet, to walk the high road is to accept the fact that though we may not *deserve* to be there, we *get* to be there, because of Him.

We are free when we are able to give without always expect-

ing a thank-you, and serve without always getting the credit. We won't always have to be right, first, or noticed because those things won't define us. *Jesus will.*

“Whatever past achievements might bring us honor, whatever past disgraces might make us blush, all have been crucified with Christ and exist no more except in the deep recesses of eternity.”<sup>4</sup>



Jesus deeply understood His identity with His Father. He knew that He wasn't made for this world; He came to fulfill His mission. He was merely passing through and He would be returning home again soon. Even though He would die before many would truly know who He was, He didn't waver in His knowledge that He was *royalty*.

Because He knew His royalty and intimate oneness with God were not up for grabs or changeable with popular opinion, He was free to live and give Himself for others. He was always a King. But when He got up from the table to reach for that basin, He was doing something that the lowliest slave would have done. He put himself in the most humble position and proceeded to rub the dirt off the feet of those who looked to Him for leadership.

Jesus washed the disciples' feet, and yet He did far more than fulfill a predinner ritual. When Jesus put His hands into that blackened basin, He showed us the secret to seeing others as He sees them. We are taught from this significant act how to really love the unlovely . . . even if that unlovely person is the one staring back at us in the mirror.

People are not what they *do* . . . they are someone God loves. *We* are not what we do . . . we are someone He enjoys. In big things and small things, amidst productive seasons and desolate ones, whether surrounded by loving friends or hostile enemies, we are His treasure, and that *never* changes.

When we understand that we were created for His beautiful purpose, our eyes become more focused on what matters. We become enveloped in His relentless love for us, and we get passionate about where He is taking us. We expect to encounter a few bumps along the way, but we finally believe that bumps, bruises, and deep valleys are not defining factors for us. Yes, they mark our journey and shape us into beautiful women, but they do not have the power to diminish our value.

We are nothing without Him, and everything to Him. We are a speck of dust in a vast and endless universe, and yet it pleases Him to stoop down to make us great (see Psalm 18:35).

It takes courage to accept acceptance. It takes grit to get up off the ground when we've been knocked down. It takes great humility to answer the high call when we've been the one throwing stones. And yet, this is the way of the saint; pressing onward and upward, not because of our perfection, because of His.

*Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace. It is so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times.<sup>5</sup>*

MARTIN LUTHER

To be uncommon is to silence the voice of our accuser that we may listen to the Lord's whisper. To be uncommon is to embrace the Lord's discipline that we may become more like Him. The uncommon woman refuses to let her mistakes or weaknesses define her because she is defined by His strengths alone.

*Precious Lord,  
You are all that I need. Somehow, I will learn to walk in this truth. Take everything about me and make me new again! Release me from the snare of others' opinions that I may serve You alone. Fill me up with a*

*greater sense of my identity in You! Give me the courage to take the leap of faith to believe that I am someone You love. You are a sincere and faithful God, and You deserve my highest affections. Be my highest aim and my deepest love. Be my anchor and my sail. Be my everything today and always, precious Lord Jesus. I love You so. Amen.*

*Declaration:*

I declare, in Jesus' Name, that I am fully loved and completely accepted! I have all that I need because Christ lives in me! I refuse to look down or to lose ground because of others' opinions or my past failings. God has redeemed my past and secured my future so I can be alive and fruitful today. I accept my high calling—and I, by faith, accept the fact that I am accepted . . . completely! Amen.

**what about you?**

1. Have you ever considered that insecurity is just another form of selfishness? When we doubt our identity, we make choices with “me” in mind. Most of what we do then becomes an effort to rescue our sense of self-worth. Read 1 Corinthians 7:23. Describe a time when you were tripped up by someone else's perception of you. What was the underlying lie that you believed?

2. Write down the initials (or a code word to protect your privacy) of those whose opinions matter to you to a fault. Ask forgiveness. Spend some time entrusting yourself once again to the Lord. Ask Him to give you a renewed perspective.
3. Most of us have “solid ground” areas where we walk with a measure of holy confidence, and yet we also have “sinking sand” areas that make it hard for us to remember who we are. What are the defining differences between your “solid ground” and your “sinking sand” areas? Write them down.
4. How can you carry the holy confidence (to which you were called) outside your familiar territory—to places unknown—without falling into the quicksand of insecurity? What are some precautions you might take? Write down a few of your ideas.
5. Read 1 John 4:16. The Greek word for “know” in this verse is *ginosko*, which, among other things, is a Jewish idiom for sexual intercourse between a man and a woman.<sup>6</sup> Think about that for a moment. To “know this love” is to be so acquainted with Jesus’ affections for you that more than anything else in all the earth you identify yourself as someone who is loved. Beyond titles, labels, mistakes, or accomplishments . . . you are absolutely treasured by the One who knows it all. Oh, that you may know this kind of love! What primarily defines you? Be honest.
6. The next word in this verse is “rely” or “believe.” You believe your car will start when you put the key

in the ignition. You rely on your chair to hold you when you sit down. And yet, how much do you rely, count on, and believe in His love? What are some tangible ways you can more freely rely on His love (e.g., less bragging, more trusting, less worrying, more faith, less spending, more giving)? Write down your thoughts.

7. Write a prayer that reflects the things you want to say to the One who loves you.