

The Faces of Rejection

Part 1 – Reframing Rejection

Introduction to the faces of rejection

Research has shown that rejection is the root cause of a lot of depression, anxiety and many other mental health challenges. Prolonged rejection and social isolation often results in low self-esteem which is a precursor to drug addiction, violence and other social ills. When we examine the prevalence and the consequences of rejection like this, it becomes very clear that the Church needs to give people tools to deal with it. Firstly, we must not be the perpetrators and secondly we need to know how to process it when it comes. Some people have become mature in how they deal with rejection whilst others have very low emotional intelligence in how they process it. It's important to note that we all have different levels of need for inclusion. Instruments like FIRO-B actually measure such levels and help us to be gracious towards those that have this need more deeply ingrained in their personality than we do. I am a big includer but have a very low need for inclusion. The result is that I tend to process rejection and exclusion positively whilst someone else can be stung by similar events. As we do this study we will examine various faces of rejection, such as betrayal, abandonment, neglect, disapproval, exclusion and disregard in everyday life. It's important for us to also examine the traits that develop in many people as a result of rejection experiences. Some develop a mental stronghold that causes them to reject themselves before they can be rejected. This person becomes socially isolated and detached. Others struggle with a persecutory super ego (intense feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame for trivial things), where they are self-critical and obsessed with the misbelief that the whole world is against them. If this persists, one can become oppressed by a lying spirit of rejection. We will discuss this in the course of this series. Some become vulnerable narcissists who are fixated and obsessed with the number of imaginary enemies they have. The point is that the way we process rejection affects our levels of Christlikeness and the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. This series seeks to help believers develop a robust theology of rejection, and life skills to process it when it occurs.

There are several Greek words that are translated as "rejected" or "rejection." Here are some that are relevant to our study. "Apodokimazo" (ἀποδοκιμάζω) – This word means to reject, disapprove, or declare unfit. It appears in several verses, including:

Matthew 21:42 – "Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes"?"

Mark 8:31 – "He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again."

1 Corinthians 9:27 – "No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

It's interesting to see here how Paul's fear was disqualification from the prize as opposed to rejection from men.

"Paraitheomai" (παραιτέομαι) – This word means to refuse, decline, or reject. It appears in several verses, including:

Matthew 7:23 – "Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

It is important to note that there is also rejection from God. It is sad that we are so concerned with rejection from mere mortals yet for many they can experience rejection from God on the Day of Judgement. This is far more severe than rejection after an interview.

"Αποβλέπω" (ἀποβλέπω) - This word means to reject or disregard. It appears in several verses, including:

Galatians 4:14 - "and even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself."

Are there people you are disregarding whom God has called you to welcome.

1 Peter 2:4 - "As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—"

Reframing Rejection

Many people go through life experiencing the wound of rejection. However, it is important to process rejection effectively so that you are not wounded by it in the first place. When I am not invited to a function I often feel relieved because it means I have more time to do what I need to do. However, for some people they process this quite differently. Their high need for inclusion results in them thinking, "why was I the last one to find out?" and the rejection stings them. Think of the times that you have coped well with rejection, what were the ingredients? Think of the times when rejection has wounded you, what were the ingredients? Often, we think it is just because people deal with things differently, that's why some get stung and others do not. However even as the same person you cope better in some scenarios than others. The question to ask is "WHY?". I will outline to you how you can do this, firstly based on research on something many of us can identify with, job interviews, and then I will illustrate this in scripture.

Positive self-talk: Research by Arimitsu and colleagues (2018) found that positive self-talk can help individuals cope with job interview rejections. Positive self-talk involves using affirming and encouraging language to boost one's confidence and self-esteem. I always like to say, "We are not destroyed by our experiences. We are destroyed by the story we tell ourselves of our experiences."

Reframing: Research by Fein and Spencer (1997) found that individuals who reframed their job interview rejections in a positive light were more likely to have higher self-esteem and a more positive outlook on their job search. Some of you need to reframe your past rejection. How many of you are grateful that you were rejected in past relationships when you see who God has now blessed you with? In many instances we were supposed to be rejected by the people or groups we pursued. They didn't have our DNA. Look at some of those people or groups today. Look at some of those companies today. What would have happened if you had processed it this way then. You would not have been stung by it.

Seeking social support: Research by Wanberg and colleagues (2000) found that individuals who received social support from friends and family were less likely to experience negative psychological effects of job interview rejections. In God's Kingdom we are called to be part of a family. Don't isolate yourself. Surround yourself with people who believe in you. This is how God wants to bless you.

Job search self-efficacy: Research by Chen and colleagues (2018) found that having high levels of job search self-efficacy (i.e., believing in one's ability to successfully search for and secure a job) can buffer the negative effects of job interview rejections.

When we examine scripture there are so many factors that enable us to cope better with rejection. In this sermon we will explore these.

1. **Rejection can work for you.** Many times we see rejection as something negative but often it works for us. It causes us to move from second best to God's best. Often God orchestrates rejection on our behalf. Often this may be to protect you from yourself or from sin. We can talk about leveraging rejection as opposed to just managing it. *Matthew 5:10-12 - "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

1 Peter 4:13-14 - "But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."

There is a blessing we receive when we are rejected because of Him.

2. **When you are rejected you are in good company.**

There are many examples of this in scripture. David is a case in point, not even being put forward for selection amongst his brothers. However, **the greatest man that ever set foot on earth was also the most rejected.** Look at the scriptures:

Look at some of the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus the Messiah:

Psalms 22:16-18 - "Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment."

Isaiah 53:3-6 - "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Jesus was rejected at birth. There was no room for him in the inn.

Luke 2:6-7 - "While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them."

Jesus was rejected because of where He came from.

John 6:41-42 - "At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' They said, 'Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"

John 7:41-42 - "Others said, 'He is the Messiah.' Still others asked, 'How can the Messiah come from Galilee? Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?'"

John 7:52 - "They replied, 'Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.'"

Mark 6:3 - "Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him."

They expected Him to be a certain kind of Messiah but He was not. These verses show how people had certain expectations of what the Messiah would be like, and when Jesus did not fit those expectations, they were confused, divided, and even hostile towards him.

John 6:14-15 - "After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself."

Matthew 16:21-23 - "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!' Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.'"

Luke 19:11 - "While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once."

Despite this, He was not touched by the rejection. We go through this in life don't we? People thought you were a bigger pastor than you are. This happens to me often when people think we have more branches than we have. It's easy to then get into performance mode. We see how Jesus didn't. Often the coping mechanism is, "Let me give them what they want." It reminds me of a sprinter who was asked why he had taken steroids and he answered saying, "the crowd wants to see sub 10s."

3. Man's rejection does not imply God's rejection of you.

In fact, it is often the opposite. *Psalm 118:22 "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone"* Jesus highlights that popularity with the world often means that heaven is not applauding. *Luke 6:26 "Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets."* Rejection from the world often occurs simultaneously with being highly esteemed by heaven. Daniel and Joseph are good examples of this. **Man can demote you in the natural whilst God is promoting you in the spirit.** When I reflect on how I was excluded from coaching in one of the banks, God subsequently opened more doors for me and has since reopened that old door. The key is seeing God as your source of promotion. He takes away the first to establish the second in Hebrews speaks of New Covenant being superior to the old, but is also a picture of how God deals with us. He takes you from glory to glory. The latter is greater than the former. Many a time, we experience the wound of rejection because we have made acceptance from that group or company become an idol in our heart. Sadly, that idolatry becomes a snare.

4. Jesus was straightened to the Father and not bent towards man.

A protective barrier from the sting of rejection comes upon us when we choose validation from Father God. *John 5:41-44 "I do not accept glory from human beings, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"*

Jesus spent time with His Father and received His Father's acceptance.

You will only be free from the sting of rejection to the degree to which you receive the Father's acceptance. **Every type of inner healing you seek to experience must never bypass the sanctification process that comes through the renewal of the mind.** When I was about 13 or 14 I remember crying because I felt God's favour so strongly. I felt sad for other people. I felt it was not fair. I felt so favoured by God. It is difficult to wound someone with this revelation.

5. **Christianity is counter-cultural.**

Accepting this fact will help you to see that when you are rejected you are in good company. For example, Jesus knew that His Kingdom was different. Jesus knew that His approach to leadership was different. He was not surprised or caught off guard when people wanted Him to do it another way. You will suffer rejection to the degree to which you don't embrace this. Do not be ashamed of Him and His teaching.

John 18:36 - "Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.'"

Matthew 20:25-28 - "Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'"

6. **Jesus identifies with our rejection experiences.**

Sometimes rejection comes in the form of feeling falsely accused or misunderstood e.g. when one of the guys in my form said to me, "Do you think you are Jesus or something!" This was painful for me as a young 12 year old boy who was trying to preach to his friends. But it is comforting to know that Jesus went through something similar. He was so humble and down to earth, yet He was accused of inflating who He was. The scholars of His day were the people who should have known better yet they were the ones who judged Him unfairly. In fact, they tried to kill him. This encourages me and comforts me. It is painful when you are trying to do good but it is seen as bad. I remember at school when the head-boy spoke to me on behalf of other seniors about spending too much time with the juniors. I remember when I had been working hard in the fields whilst the others were not and then whilst I was taking a break my grandmother shouted at me. One of the big faces of rejection is being misunderstood or judged unfairly. In fact, research has found that this is one of the top fears that women have.

Mark 3:1-6 - In this passage, Jesus healed a man with a shrivelled hand on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were watching and accused Him of breaking the Sabbath law. Jesus was grieved at their hardness of heart.

Luke 7:36-50 - A woman who was known to be a sinner anointed Jesus' feet with perfume at a dinner party, causing the Pharisees to question His prophethood. Jesus explained that the woman's act was a sign of her great love and faith.

7. **Jesus was rejected to the point of death.**

Think of all the rejection you have experienced. Has anyone tried to kill you? The most loving person that has very set foot on earth was the very same person they wanted to kill.

John 5:16-18 "So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defence Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and

I too am working.' For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

Elsewhere Jesus is reading from Isaiah in the synagogue and announces Himself as the fulfilment of the prophecy and look what happens. *Luke 4:28-30 "All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way."*

Leading up to this they were amazed by what He was saying, until familiarity crept in. In Luke 4:22 it states, *All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked.*

8. Jesus experienced intense betrayal.

This betrayal was not just from Judas. Jesus suffered at the hands of those He had created. This is major. Imagine creating someone and they turn around and try to kill you. I was reminded of the 1984 Marty Nystrom song that starts, "You laid aside your majesty, gave up everything for me, suffered at the hands of those you had created..." We can still talk about Judas. This was a close relationship. Imagine hanging out with someone pretty much every day for 3 years. This person is running your finances but then stabs you in the back. These guys were doing life deeply with each other. It wasn't a Zoom or MS Teams relationship.

9. Brokenness is a key antidote for rejection. If I feel insulted because of someone speaking to me like I am a baby Christian, it is because I am conceited. People can't put you down or belittle you because you are already down there. You only feel belittled when you have a superiority complex. Phil 2 is the attitude we are called to have.

Philippians 2:6-8 "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!"

Matthew 18:3 - "And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'"

In conclusion, I encourage you to make a list of the different faces of rejection in your life. Write down how you dealt with these and the person you have become as a result. Now take time to reflect on a new narrative by which you can process these experiences. Make a decision to reframe rejection going forward. Keep asking the question, "what else could be true?"

References:

Arimitsu, K., Takai, J., & Uchida, C. (2018). Coping with job interview rejection: The effects of self-talk on resilience, affect, and behavioral intentions. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 107*, 187-196.

Chen, H., Li, Y., Li, J., & Wu, J. (2018). Job search self-efficacy buffers the negative impact of job search stress on job search behavior. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 108*, 15-25.

Fein, S., & Spencer, S. J. (1997). Prejudice as self-image maintenance: Affirming the self through derogating others. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73*(1), 31-44.

Wanberg, C. R., Watt, J. D., & Rumsey, D. J. (2000). Individuals without job search experience: Are they less effective job seekers? *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 56*(1), 56-73.