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Silence Insecurity

Before I met my husband, I was a part of a small group of singles and couples that spent a lot of time together. We enjoyed all the usual activities, such as trying new restaurants and hunting for good bargains, but usually we just liked hanging out. One night we were sitting in camp chairs around a fire, roasting marshmallows. We took turns using old coat hangers we'd fashioned into roasting sticks, dipping the marshmallows into the flames and pulling them out once they were black on the outside and gooey on the inside.

We were finishing our sugary treats as the coals were cooling off and the area was now only dimly lit. Ava, an introverted, beloved member of our gang, had been unusually quiet. Although she was sitting right next to me, I could barely see her brown eyes as she whispered the question that had been plaguing her all night:

“Are you mad at me?”

“No, Ava, I'm not mad at you,” I softly replied.

“Are you sure you're not mad at me?” Ava asked a bit more boldly, wanting to be sure there was no conflict between us.

By this point, her boyfriend, who was sitting on her other side,

leaned in to the conversation. Before I could respond to her question, he piped in.

“Ava,” he said, “you’ve got to stop asking that all the time. If someone is upset with you, they’ll tell you.” He sighed and sat back in his chair, clearly frustrated—it wasn’t the first time they’d had this conversation. To be honest, it wasn’t the first time Ava and I had this conversation either.

A number of years after this marshmallow campout, I caught sight of a book on Ava’s coffee table. It was called *So Long, Insecurity: You’ve Been a Bad Friend to Us*.¹ It had just been released, and Ava, recognizing her struggle, had read it right away. I casually asked about it, mentioning that maybe I should read it too. After she gushed about how much it had helped her personally, I replied a bit defensively, “Oh, I don’t struggle with insecurity, but some of the clients that see me for therapy do. I’m sure there are some nuggets of wisdom I could share with them. Do you mind if I borrow it?”

I wasn’t intentionally being deceptive. I just didn’t realize at the time the role insecurity played in my life. I’ve always tried to put on a tough exterior, never wanting anyone to see my weaknesses or vulnerabilities. As a result, some of my relationships haven’t been as real or deep as they could be, and, really, as they should be.

HOW SECURE ARE YOU?

What about you? Do you struggle with insecurity? If you aren’t sure, let me ask you some questions. Have you ever picked up your cellphone over and over (and over and over) to see if someone has replied to your text or email, only to grow more and more anxious until you get the reply that everything’s okay? Have you ever felt the need (without cause or justification) to check your boyfriend’s or husband’s cellphone history? Have you ever found yourself over-communicating “just to clarify”? If you answered yes to any of these, you may be struggling with insecurity.

Perhaps you find yourself feeling like you're not worthy of *something* in your relationships—of love, of attention, of time together, of forgiveness. Don't feel good enough? Smart enough? Attractive enough? That's insecurity.

Perhaps there's a negative voice from your past that you keep hearing in your mind, like a song on repeat. (*You talk too much. You are just too sensitive! Are you sure you can handle that?*) Except the voice in your head is so much worse than the current pop song you heard in the waiting room at the doctor's office.

Maybe the negative voice you're hearing is your own. (*How could I have messed up again? What is wrong with me? I'm so stupid.*) There might even be someone presently in your life triggering self-defeating thoughts and feelings through his or her words or actions. It could be that this individual doesn't even know how he or she is impacting you. In fact, that person may be insecure too.

Perhaps you recognize a friend or family member in these descriptions. The above behaviors are not the actions of people who feel secure, and relationships that involve an insecure party cannot remain unscathed for long. Sooner or later (perhaps even now), you or your loved one's insecurity is going to catch up with you. Like it did with Ava's boyfriend, the constant neediness will get old and frustrating. Few people have the energy or time to constantly reassure someone that the relationship is on solid ground.

Sometimes we bottle up the insecurity, never verbally expressing it, yet it seeps out anyway through our behaviors. For example, a 2014 *Glamour* survey found that over half of women who participated felt insecure about their bodies.² Can you relate? Are you the wife, mama, or friend who refuses to wear a swimsuit—always sitting on the sideline while everyone else splashes and plays in the pool or ocean? Or maybe you do put one on, but you're constantly trying to cover yourself up or running to the ladies' room to see how you look, resulting in less time with your family or friends. Perhaps you're constantly asking for reassurance

from your husband or sister or kids that you look fine. Whether you express your insecurity through your words or through your behavior, you can be sure it's not helping you form strong bonds in your relationships.

The reality is this: *Everyone is insecure about something.* (As hard as this is to admit, “everyone” includes me.) Insecurity drives many of the issues we're going to explore in this book, such as envy and blame. Insecurity can also lead to fear of abandonment. This was the case for Ava.

For her, insecurity was like a self-fulfilling prophecy. Ava had so many doubts about herself that she believed that if she did anything wrong, a friend would stop talking to her or a boyfriend would break up with her. Her insecurity led to her constantly “checking in” to make sure there was no problem. Unfortunately, some of the folks she kept asking grew weary of her neediness, and as a result, her worst fear would come true. But it didn't have to be that way for Ava—and it doesn't have to be that way for you either.

The good news is this: *You can silence the insecurity.* It may not be possible 100 percent of the time, because so often we get in our own way. But we can definitely get a better handle on this issue that's been ailing us. It's time to evict the critics that have lived far too long in our own minds—those shaming, negative voices that weigh us down, leaving us distracted from what really matters. We—you—can break the chains of insecurity and be set free from this burden. The process of resetting relationships takes time and effort, but it's Oh. So. Worth. It.

As for me? Well, I went out and bought a copy of *So Long, Insecurity* for myself. Not only did I read it, I refer to it often. In fact, it's lying open right next to me as I write this first chapter. You see, we can't reset relationships without facing the insecurities that prevent us from thriving in our connections with other people.

In the following section we'll explore three things you can do

to develop a more secure self, thus lessening the negative impact that insecurity has on your relationships.

STEPS TO SILENCING INSECURITY

If you Google the terms *self-esteem* and *self-worth*, you'll find many definitions for each. Some people will claim these are synonyms, but I disagree. Merriam-Webster states that self-esteem is "a confidence and satisfaction in oneself." Self-esteem can be fleeting and change at the drop of a hat. My own decreases if I'm having a bad hair day or decide that I don't like my outfit once I leave the house. If someone compliments something I've done, said, or written, I feel good about myself. If I write an article or blog that I believe is on a critical and timely topic, and it doesn't get many views or comments, I start to doubt myself. My confidence drops. Levels of self-esteem can fluctuate, sometimes simply based on how well you've slept or whether you're feeling bloated. (Am I right, friends?)

On the other hand, self-worth is how you look at yourself as a person, how you see your value as a human being.³ Self-worth is about who you are at the *core*, and most importantly, *Whose* you are. In other words, it's all about knowing your place in Christ—and believing that you were created by God, in His image, and you are on this earth for a reason. As a mental health professional, but most importantly as a Christian, I believe having self-worth is far more important than having self-esteem.

Cultivate Self-Worth

Our self-worth is developed deep down inside of us, in our hearts and souls. It's how we identify ourselves at the core of who we are. Good self-esteem and low self-esteem come and go, while self-worth is long-term. Think of it this way: self-esteem is like the weather, which can fluctuate over a short period of time, while self-worth is like the climate, which follows a particular pattern over a

long period of time. While the weather changes frequently, it does not change the climate. Likewise, our self-esteem ebbs and flows based on whatever is going on that day (or that minute), while our self-worth is who we believe ourselves to be at the center of our very being, regardless of what's going on around us. The good news is that if you have low self-worth, it can be improved!

So, how do self-esteem and self-worth play into relationships? Think about how you are in your most important relationships. What determines your mood? Your thoughts? Your behavior? Do you rely on things that change quickly, like the weather in the South? (One January day we had sunshine and 80s and then the next day, several inches of snow. Talk about temperamental!) Is how you view yourself dependent upon another person's actions? Or, do you choose your attitude and actions based on things that don't change—on who you are deep down, on your self-worth?

Oftentimes, what is going on in our relationships impacts how we view ourselves, and how we view ourselves impacts our relationships. Here's a case in point. Joan's thoughts about herself are based on her relationship with her husband. When he is considerate and kind toward her, doing things like cleaning up the kitchen or bringing her flowers for no reason, her self-esteem improves. But when he slacks off in communicating with her in a way that demonstrates his love for her, she starts to think she must not be worth it. She sinks into a dark hole of believing her husband doesn't love her. In turn, she grows insecure in the relationship, snapping at him and questioning him.

However, instead of falling into this cycle like a hamster on a wheel, Joan could choose to remind herself that who she is does not change based on her husband's—or anyone's—behavior toward her. Her core being is still the same; she is not less desirable or less lovable simply because her husband hasn't been helping around the house as much. While *that* is a different issue to address, it doesn't have to trigger her to feel insecure about her worth, and,

as a result, insecure about the marriage either.

If you know your worth in Christ, even when you have good relationship days and bad relationship days, you can come back to our true identity. You can feel good about who we are if we are living to please the audience of the One who really matters. Your self-worth, thoughts, and actions . . . they all have to come back to God, or you may experience an emotional self-esteem roller coaster that puts the worst case of PMS you've ever seen to shame. Your identity in Christ can be an anchor in the midst of the ups and downs of your earthly relationships. Just because a friend doesn't get back to you doesn't mean you're a failure at friendship. Having a spat with your spouse doesn't make you a wretched wife. In other words, you don't have to feel insecure about relationships *just because they're not perfect*. And just because you're not perfect doesn't mean your self-worth has to suffer.

Another way of overcoming insecurity and cultivating self-worth is through biblical affirmations. We'll take a look at those next.

Remind Yourself of Whose You Are

Leigh was always on the move, and my motto with her was: "If you're driving, I'm riding." It was fun to get on the road with her and set out on an adventure. When we lived in the same small town, we took many fun drives toward whatever "big city" destination she had chosen for that day. On one occasion, she turned on a CD that contained self-affirmations. Before we actually got to those, we had to go through some put-you-to-sleep instructions about the affirmations. A couple of times we accidentally missed the beginning of the affirmations (because it's hard to hear over the sound of the GPS telling you to turn left in five million feet). After rewinding the CD a couple of times, Leigh asked me, "Do you want me to rewind it again?" Before I could stop myself, I shouted "No!" after which we fell into peals of laughter.

After we finally got through the Top 50 affirmations (yes—50!),

Leigh asked me what my favorite was. Hmm. Which one should I go with? Maybe “I love listening to my affirmation CD” (no self-indulgent plug there) or “I like to smile” (huh?). That conversation kept us laughing.

But, then, it was time to get serious. I told Leigh that while I believe in self-talk and use the technique frequently, I have found what I believe to be a better way. That better way is the truth found in God’s Word. As a believer, I feel much better about *who* I am when I remind myself *Whose* I am. I remind myself that God loves me and that being in relationship with Him means I have access to Him through prayer and His Word, the Bible, as my guide. Repeating scriptural truths that tell you who you are and Whose you are can do a world of good.

I’ll list some of my favorites to get you thinking in that direction:

- “If God is for [me], who can be against [me]?” (Rom. 8:31)
- “I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” (Ps. 139:14)
- “But by the grace of God I am what I am.” (1 Cor. 15:10)
- “We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” (Heb. 10:10)
- “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1)

I encourage you to create your own list of biblical affirmations. You can commit them to memory and even record them, reminding yourself over and over of your place as a princess, a daughter of the King. (I don’t even think I would mind rewinding these affirmations over and over!)

The next time you are feeling insecure in a relationship—or even before—and you’re starting to question everything (“She’s

mad at me,” “He doesn’t like me anymore,” “My boss doesn’t think I can do anything right”), try repeating these verses.

Yes, repeating biblical affirmations over and over to yourself is self-talk. But, it is not selfish talk. Satan will use any tactic he can to get to you—as the father of lies, he will surely lie. And he will use those lies to trigger insecurity in you. But when you repeat God’s Word over and over, you are affirming truths that calm your heart and soothe your soul, reminding you that God is for you and that you are fearfully and wonderfully made. You are who you are by His grace! You are holy; you are loved; you are a child of God. That is who you are. God’s is Whose you are!

It’s His praise you should be seeking, not the praise of those with whom you’re in relationship. After all, we’re all just human. Let’s take a look at one more step in overcoming insecurity.

Seek God’s Praise Alone

John 12:42–43 says this: “Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God.” The Scriptures could not be more clear: these people “loved human praise more than praise from God.” Sadly, because of their fear, they chose not to acknowledge their faith. They were so concerned about what other people would think about them, and what other people would do to them, that they chose to please people over God.

Keep in mind that these folks had seen Jesus face to face. Jesus had just ridden into Jerusalem through these crowds of people who were shouting “Hosanna!”, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”, and “Blessed is the King of Israel!” He had even predicted His death, and while many still did not believe in Him, many *did* believe (see John 12:42). They had seen the miracles He performed. They’d heard His words. They *believed*. Yet, they still

would not publicly acknowledge their faith in Him.

While the Pharisees generally deserve the bad rap they get, I can't help but think I am often no better than they. For example, before posting a message on social media, I often find myself wondering what people will think more than I consider what God will think—*Who will be offended by this?* rather than, *Is this true to the Bible and honoring to God?*

It's easy to fall into the trap of doing what others desire of us rather than what God demands. This is particularly true when we are insecure in our relationships. In Galatians 1:10, Paul writes, "Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people?" Notice how he emphasizes the question by asking it twice. *Who am I trying to please?* Maybe I want my boss to notice me so I get the promotion (or at least keep my job), so I agree to doing something I know is unethical. Perhaps I don't want to lose a friend, so I verbally agree with her on everything, even when I don't agree in my heart. To be concerned about careers, friendships, or *anything* more than God is to replace God with an idol. And it does nothing for relationships, because people-pleasing simply can't ease insecurity.

Why do we care more about what other people think than what God thinks? Why would we want their praise over the praise of the Creator of the universe? *Insecurity.*

I want to be in the business of pleasing God, and the only way to do that is to place my security in Him alone. By doing so, I can be in a right relationship with Him as I work on resetting relationships with others so that they become more like what He created them to be.

NO MORE INSECURITY

Insecurity damages relationships, while being secure strengthens them. If I know my self-worth, and my identity in Christ, and seek His approval, then I will feel freer to be myself, to be honest, to set

boundaries, to let go of envy and blame, and to use my relationships to glorify God rather than to satisfy myself.

Remember Ava? After many years of struggling, she sought help—both self-help and professional help—to wrangle this problem before it became worse. She had lost several friends and boyfriends and knew she had to do something different. While she didn't marry the guy at the s'more fest, she did eventually get married. He (and her friends) no longer hear, "Are you mad at me?" and "Is everything okay with us?" Ava is now secure enough in herself and in her relationships that she no longer feels compelled to obsessively wonder about and ask those questions. Instead, she knows her relationships are solid, and she is able to trust that if there is a problem, she will be the first to know. She is successfully doing the work to silence insecurity. You can too.

WORKING ON MYSELF

1. Has insecurity affected a relationship in your life? If so, how?

2. What have you done to silence your insecurity? Has this helped you? If so, how?

3. What does God's Word say about the security you can have in God?

4. What biblical affirmations can you repeat to yourself when you are feeling insecure?

Dear Lord,

Thank You for the promises I have in You. I know that in You, I can be totally secure. I can know my rightful place as a daughter of the King and rest in the assurance that I can live eternally with You because Jesus paid for my sins by dying on the cross. Please protect me from the lies of Satan.

I know that my insecurities and the insecurities of others can bring about conflict in relationships. I don't want that to happen. Help me be more secure and help my loved ones be more secure. Help me live my life as a model of someone firmly rooted in Your foundation. Lord, help me be a light for others.

For it's in the name of Jesus I pray.

Amen.