



**A Young Woman's Guide to Relying on God
for Validation, Identity, and Guidance**

Tracy Harper

"It's Nothing Personal, But..."

Feeling the sting of rejection? *You're not alone.*

We've all been there—left out, overlooked, or told, “It’s nothing personal, but...” In that moment, it sure *feels* personal. Rejection can shake your confidence and make you question your worth. But what if rejection isn’t the final word?

In this free resource, you’ll discover how to navigate those painful moments, recognize the lies rejection tells you, and embrace the truth of who God says you are.

Ready to stop letting rejection define you?

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An Invitation to Turn to Him, Not Them

**“Never be afraid to trust an unknown
future to a known God.”
~ Corrie ten Boom**

When I was finishing up high school, I knew I couldn't avoid the next big step—heading out into the world and trying new things. But I was feeling more anxious and unsure of myself than ever. Despite my academic and athletic accomplishments, a failed relationship shook my confidence and left me questioning my worth. My high school boyfriend had recently broken up with me, and suddenly, everything I thought I'd known about my future was unclear.

Even though I'd spent months crying, I tried to look as if I had it all together. My good grades and accomplishments masked what I was really feeling inside. In just a few months, I'd be starting college on an academic scholarship with my identical twin sister, Terri. Together, we were going to take on the world! But I was only fooling myself. Deep down, I was a mess, and I felt lost.

My fears weren't unfounded. I used to feel confident in how I handled my life and trusted my judgment. But by the end of my freshman year at Towson University, I was dealing with a serious eating disorder. I had turned to food and exercise to regain a sense of control, but it only added to the shame I was carrying. I was hiding my struggles from the people closest to me and keeping God

at a distance. I didn't recognize myself—in more ways than one.

This was concerning because I'd had a close relationship with Jesus since middle school. I read my Bible, attended my church's youth group—where I served on our fine arts team—and even helped start a Bible club at my high school. I went on a mission trip to Ghana when I was sixteen. But despite all of that, I still struggled to feel secure in my identity. Instead of finding my worth in God, I looked for it in the validation of others and in my own ability to achieve. By the time I started college, I wanted God to guide me, but *only* if it meant avoiding any surprises. I craved control over my future, not trust in God's plans.

Maybe you too grew up hearing that you should trust God with your future, but you struggle with that in practice. Life is full of changes and unexpected challenges, and they can make even the small steps you take feel scary. Maybe, like me, something happened in your life to knock you off-course—a breakup, a failure, or a disappointment that left you feeling like you had to prove yourself or piece your life back together. You crave confidence and security, but it always feels just out of reach, and anxiety and uncertainty are your familiar companions.

I wanted to live without worry, too, but I was living in a way that made deep inner peace impossible. I was looking in the wrong places, asking others to meet my needs for validation, worth, and guidance—needs that only God could truly satisfy. Those misplaced expectations journeyed with me into every stage of life—college, marriage, raising three daughters, working with a campus ministry, and even making a big move from the East Coast to Hawai'i. No matter how much I tried to control my circumstances or seek approval from others, it was never enough. The people or things I had been looking to for fulfillment might have met my needs for a moment, but they always fell short and left me wanting more. Through these struggles, I slowly learned that my core longings could only be met by God—from Him, not them—not by anyone or anything else.



Do you find it's hard to move forward to the next part of your life? Does it sometimes seem like life is tougher than it should be? Have you hit setbacks or felt like something's missing that could help you get through life successfully? If you answered "yes" to these questions, you're not alone. We *all* feel that way at some point.

After working with college students in campus ministry for twenty years, I've seen all of this up close. We all have times when we're questioning, exploring, feeling unsure or lost, or even feeling broken. While we may recognize *what* we're feeling, we don't always know *why* we feel that way. But have you considered that primarily turning to other people or things—instead of God—to shape your identity can greatly impact your ability to move confidently through life? This misplaced dependence cripples your ability to move forward—especially when your future feels uncertain.

Take Cassie, for example. She couldn't decide whether to change her major after investing a year in the program of study she'd chosen. Her fear of disappointing her family and friends paralyzed her decision-making process. When we seek validation from others, every decision feels high-stakes, as though the "right" or "wrong" choice isn't just about the decision itself—it's about how others will judge us or how we'll measure up in their eyes.

Then there's Amanda. Her soccer season ended abruptly with an ACL tear, and she found herself not only working through the physical pain of recovery and the hard work of therapy but also wrestling with her identity. Without "soccer star" as part of who she was, Amanda felt like she was nothing.

Or consider Raelynn, who spent her first year of college sleeping around in an effort to fill the void of loneliness and disconnection. Instead of feeling fulfilled, she found herself more

isolated than ever. Her need to have a guy validate her worth kept her stuck and unsure of how to move forward.

This crisis of not knowing who we are at our core and who or what to turn to often occurs at a time in life when we face some of life's biggest pressures. And the questions begin to pile up:

What should I do with my life? Should I keep dating this person or break up with them? Should I go to that party? Who are my real friends? What will my life be like after graduation?

And then, after college, the questions keep coming:

What's the right job for me? Who will hire me? Where should I live? How will I make lasting friends? Who should I marry? When's the best time to start a family?

On top of these personal struggles, the world itself presents challenges that often seem beyond our control. We live in a time when news travels fast, and we feel the weight of global issues—wars, pandemics, political upheavals—that leave us feeling disconnected, isolated, and uncertain about the future. One unexpected job loss, a big move, or a relationship change can remind us of how little we actually control.



We all have a limited view of the future. No matter how much we try to plan, the unknowns loom large. With all of this uncertainty, it's hard not to overthink our next steps. We keep questioning the direction of our lives, second-guessing every decision, and replaying every option in our minds. Sleepless nights follow and deep worries creep in, leaving us teetering on the edge, feeling like we're about to crash out.

And perhaps even deeper than the questions about our daily lives are the big spiritual questions we have:

Is God with me? Does He see me? Does He care? Why does He allow hard things to happen?

There's no doubt about it: Life *is* hard. For everyone.

Lexi feels stuck in the middle of her friend group, caught between two feuding friends. While Bella endures merciless teasing from her peers about her weight, Chantel struggles with a constant awareness of her race, always wondering which spaces will feel safe and accepting as she navigates different environments. Jessica's mom passed away during her sophomore year of college—a time when she needed her the most—and she feels lost navigating young adulthood without her. Emily not only struggles with the stigma of being labeled a “drug baby” but also endures a toxic home environment where family members and their friends frequently pass in and out of the house, intoxicated or high.

Resilience and *grit* are often touted as the answer to life's challenges, but have you noticed how often this advice leaves God out? We're told to rely on ourselves—to push through, rise above, and deal with life's problems on our own. But what if there's more to it than that?

Take Sharon, for example. When I met her, she was a smiling first-year biology major, full of optimism, who believed in transformation from within, something she could generate on her own. She told me, “I can reinvent myself. No one knows what I've done or who I was in the past.” It sounds empowering—Sharon's belief in self-sufficiency does seem like it could be the key to overcoming her struggles.

Maybe you've been there too. Perhaps you've tried to face life's challenges by relying on yourself to figure things out, telling yourself that if you work harder, try more, or start fresh, things will fall into place. But what happens when they don't? What happens when your strength runs out, or you can't escape the weight of your past?

The truth is, relying on ourselves alone is exhausting and lonely. Sharon's approach of self-sufficiency might sound empowering, but it will quickly become clear that handling life's

challenges in isolation only deepens the struggle. Life wasn't meant to be handled alone—especially not when we're facing deep, personal challenges or uncertainty about our future.

Here's the thing: Resilience can look different. Instead of relying on ourselves, what if we brought God into the equation—not as a last resort but as the foundation of our strength? What if, instead of focusing on our own grit, we learned to depend on God's faithfulness, trusting that He holds our future?

In today's world, it's hard to know what's true. We hear voices promising solutions, offering control over our lives and futures, but so much of it turns out to be empty or misleading. We're faced with a lot of noise—many ways to figure things out, but few true paths to peace and purpose.

Are you looking for true confidence and guidance you can trust? Do you want clarity instead of more confusion? If so, I invite you to leave behind the path of relying solely on your feelings, trying to fix everything on your own, or searching for help in all the wrong places.

There's a better way to navigate life's challenges—a way that doesn't erase tough times or answer every question, but reshapes how we think about and approach the unknown. It starts by inviting God into the equation—not just as an option, but as the essential guide for the journey.



Most core subjects in liberal arts colleges typically begin with an introductory course, often ending with the number *101*. Some students try to test out of these classes to jump straight into program-specific courses. But that's not always the best idea. Sometimes, by skipping the *101* level, you miss key information.

Think of the first part of this book as *Finding Your Worth*

101. While you might be tempted to skip ahead, I encourage you to take your time here—this section lays the foundation for discovering your true identity. You’ll see me pause throughout the book to ask you questions—don’t just skim past them. Take your time. Read slowly, maybe a few sections at a time. Grab a notebook or journal and write down your thoughts. I can’t stress this enough: *If you rush through, you’ll miss the real growth.*

As you read this initial section, think about where you’re seeking your value. Are you looking to others, your appearance, or your accomplishments to feel validated? Just like I did, you might find yourself chasing after things that never truly satisfy. But there’s a better way—one that starts with knowing that God sees you and values you deeply, just as you are.

As we journey together, we’ll also explore spiritually toxic ways we try to navigate life: relying on our feelings as guides, depending on ourselves to push through, letting anxiety pull us away from God, and seeking guidance from people and places God warns us against. These avenues are counterfeit guides—they seem attractive and helpful, but they ultimately hinder our walk with God.

A major influence behind these deceptions is a belief system that exalts the self as all-powerful. As Melissa Dougherty explains in *Happy Lies: How a Movement You (Probably) Never Heard of Shaped Our Self-Obsessed World*, this way of thinking—New Thought—has shaped modern culture, infiltrating Christian circles and promoting the idea that we can manifest our own reality apart from God. It *sounds* good: Truth is found within each of us, and we only need to listen to our own feelings and instincts to create the life we want. But relying on these spiritual teachings leads to devastating outcomes. As Melissa asks, “What better way to destroy God’s beloved image bearers than to turn them inward rather than upward?”¹

Without realizing it, I had absorbed some of these ideas, and they subtly influenced my own pursuit of counterfeit

guides—trusting my feelings, striving for control, and chasing self-improvement as the key to fulfillment. These struggles weren't just theoretical; they played out in real ways in my life. So, throughout this book, I'll share with you some of my toughest life experiences: facing rejection, developing an eating disorder, and struggling with anxiety. I'll also share stories from students I've worked with—some of whom have given me permission to use their real names, while in other cases, their names and circumstances have been changed to protect their privacy.

In the last part of the book, I'll introduce you to a person we often overlook—the one true Guide, the Holy Spirit. I wasn't as knowledgeable or familiar with the Spirit in my early years of spiritual growth, so don't stress if you're just getting to know Him. Throughout this book, you'll see me use both "Holy Spirit" and "Spirit" interchangeably but know that both refer to the same person. God is one being in three persons, and the Holy Spirit is one of them (Matthew 3:16-17). He's our Helper, sent to strengthen us and help us through life. I'll explain how you can activate His presence and power in your life, restore your connection with God when it's broken by sin, and strengthen yourself spiritually for the battles you'll face.

Before you go thinking I'm an expert in how we should look to God instead of others to meet our core needs, let me assure you that I'm not. The truths in this book are life lessons I continually revisit. Just recently, a friend whom I hadn't seen in a long time canceled plans to get together. I found myself feeling crushed and distressed, feelings that went beyond the normal disappointment in not being able to spend time together.

Upon reflection with God, I realized I had jumped to conclusions that weren't true: *My value is determined by how much she likes me. If I truly mattered to her, she wouldn't have ghosted me. Without this deep connection with her, I'm alone and unimportant.* Once again, I was elevating attention and approval from others as the basis for my sense of worth and belonging

instead of resting in God's unchanging love for me.

While I still struggle with turning to others for validation and guidance, I'm learning to lean more on God to provide these things. It's not easy, and it's not a one-time fix; it's a continual process of surrendering my need for control and trusting Him in the unknowns. I've seen how much peace comes when I stop searching for answers in the wrong places and start looking to God instead. His guidance isn't always as immediate or clear as I might want, but He's always faithful. And though I'm far from perfect at it, I know that trusting God to lead me through life's decisions, big and small, is the only path to true peace and purpose. I've learned that the more I seek Him, the more I see how He's been faithful to guide me—and I want to encourage you to trust that same faithfulness. Yes, it's a journey, but it's so worth it.

At the end of each chapter, I'll invite you to *kilo* ("kee-loh") with me. *Kilo* is a Hawaiian word that means to watch closely, observe, or examine. In early Hawaiian life, when fishermen went out to catch fish, someone stayed back on land as the watcher, or *kilo*. From land, this watcher could spot fish and signal their location to the fishermen in their canoes.²

Jesus was a watcher too. In John 21:1–14, after His resurrection, He appeared to His disciples for the third time. The disciples had been fishing all night but hadn't caught anything. When dawn came, Jesus called out to them from the shore, but they didn't know it was Him. The New Living Translation records "the disciples couldn't *see* who he was" (21:4, emphasis mine).

Jesus asked if they'd caught anything, and when they said no, He told them to put their net on the right side of the boat. When they did, they caught so many fish they couldn't haul in the net! It was then they realized it was Jesus and remembered when He first called them to follow Him (Matthew 4:18–22, Luke 5:4–6).

When we experience limited sight, we need the perspective of the One who sees everything. As we *kilo*, we'll listen and pay attention to what we see and hear. This mindfulness will help us

look beyond our surroundings and consider God’s viewpoint.

Nobody wants to go through life alone, and I’m here as your fellow traveler. While the future may be uncertain, our limited sight can actually be a gift. It allows us to trust God’s guidance through the twists and turns of life. We don’t have to worry about every detail ahead—what matters is staying close to the One who is always with us, leading us step by step. Our worth and direction come from Him, not from others. This journey is about trusting Him more than we trust ourselves. That’s the heart of *From Him, Not Them*.

Kilo

(to watch closely, observe, or examine)

1. What’s your usual gut reaction when things happen that are beyond your control?
2. When you plan for your future, who or what do you look to for guidance?
3. Do you let others know when you’re struggling or don’t have everything together? Why or why not? Where does the pressure to act like “I’ve got this!” come from?
4. Read Acts 9:1–31, where Saul (who later becomes Paul) goes from being a feared persecutor of Christians to a committed follower of Jesus. Pay close attention to how he loses his physical sight. What does Ananias say is the reason God sent him to Saul?

Extra Resource

Get your free printable color Companion Workbook with all the *Kilo* reflection questions from each chapter! Perfect if you

want extra space or prefer not to write in your book. Open your phone's camera app, point it at the following QR code, and tap the link that appears to access all the extra resources for this book in one place.

You can also visit the following website to access them.

<https://www.fromhimnotthem.com/resources>

