

Finding Peace in the Valley:  
“Valley of Rejection”  
Luke 4:14-30

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The book Crossing Over is the story of the rejection one woman faced when she fell in love with a person outside the Amish Community and ran away to marry him. Ruth Garrett had always been a little rebellious, but not even she could imagine the pain she was about to experience from being shunned by her family and community.

Rejection, even the word, has a foreboding sound. Yet, it is an experience with which most, if not all of us, are familiar. Everybody experiences rejection sometime. It may come from a boss, from a peer, from a lover, a church, even from strangers who communicate clearly you are not welcome in certain circles. So, I want to poke around in the valley of rejection and discover the things we can learn that lead to peace.

REJECTION IS A PART OF LIFE.

Our Biblical story today puts Jesus back in his hometown of Nazareth. He is teaching in the synagogue. People seem glad to have him home. *“All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. Isn’t this Joseph’s boy, they asked?”* He’s one of us. This is home; let the reunion begin. All was well until Jesus started preaching. His preaching got Him into a lot of trouble. *“Let me tell you the truth,”* says Jesus, *“no prophet is accepted in his home country”* (Luke 4:24). That old proverb drives a stake of resentment between Jesus and his relatives. They become furious. They drive him out of town. They are of the mind to throw him over a cliff to his certain death. How can love turn so quickly to hate? Ah, that is the question of rejection.

This is not the only time Jesus drives a wedge between himself and his family. His pronounced differences with relatives prompted someone to say, “If your family doesn’t appreciate you, take heart, Jesus faced the same thing in his family.” Jesus felt the rejection of the chief priests and rulers of his day. *“And with one voice they cried, away with this man, give us Barabbas,”* (hardly credentials to be named citizen of the year).

John summarized it well when he said, *“He came to His own, but His own received him not.”* He never owned a home, he never earned a degree, he never wrote a book, and he never held an office. Instead, he walked a lonesome valley all by himself. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and

acquainted with grief. Hardly the kind of Jesus personified in churches today that proclaim the prosperity gospel. He died alone for you and me.

Why are we surprised when we are rejected too? John Maxwell in his book Winning Attitude tells about two cows grazing in a pasture when they saw a milk truck pass. On the side of the truck were the words “Pasteurized, Homogenized, Standardized, Vitamin A added,” which prompted one cow to say to the other, “Makes you feel kind of inadequate doesn’t it?”

Arnold Palmer played his last Master’s Tournament in 2002. Palmer, who won the Master’s in 1958, 1960, 1962, and 1964, had seen his game slip away with age and his stardom fade with the rise of Tiger Woods and Phil Nicholson. A reporter asked Palmer, “Why did you do it? Why did you quit?” To which Palmer replied, “I didn’t want to get the letter that former champions Ford, Brewer, and Casper had already received asking them to step down.”

Whether it’s that girl in elementary school who looked at you in disdain when you offered her a Valentine card, or the boss that suggests you are not included in the company’s new plans, rejection hurts. It causes pain.

Yet, Jesus said it’s going to happen and we will be wise to live with it for “*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.*” There is some rejection that’s worth the cost.

#### HOW CAN WE HANDLE REJECTION?

We can handle rejection with respect. Respect for ourselves and respect for others. Our first reaction to rejection is anger. Anger at ourselves for assuming we deserve what we got and bitterness toward others who perpetuate the rejection. In the face of rejection we will be wise to follow the advice of St. Paul who said, “*Be angry and sin not. Let not the sun go down on your anger.*”

Avoid self-defeating assumptions. One rejection need not be an indictment on one’s life. Rejection is not synonymous with continuous failure. Brilliant British Theologian G.K. Chesterton could not read until he was eight years old. A teacher said if his head were opened they would probably find a lump of fat where there was supposed to be a brain. That teacher was wrong. Einstein’s parents were informed by a teacher that he would never amount to anything.

Don’t magnify the rejection. Rejection need not be a forecast of your future. Never make rejection a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rejection in the past need not be a predictor of rejection in the future.

Don’t allow rejection to derail your dreams. Keep coming back. In The Tale of Peter Rabbit, the author was rejected by seven publishers. Richard Bach got twenty rejection slips before Jonathan Livingston Seagull was published. Dr. Seuss, one of the most popular children’s authors of all time, got more than two dozen rejection slips before The Cat in the Hat made it to print.

Learn from your rejections. We are not perfect and we do not always get it right, but keep coming back until you do get it right. Every rejection can be a lesson if we stay open to new possibilities and new opportunities. What can I do different? How can I improve? What needs can I meet? These are the questions we need to ask if we are to never let a trouble go to waste.

Ruth Graham felt an uncontrollable urge to run out of the meeting the first time she heard Billy preach. She was not under conviction. She was put off by his preaching style. Billy had to improve his preaching before Ruth would become his wife.

We can handle rejection with focus. *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he had anointed me to preach good news.”* Jesus knew who He was and why He was here. Do you?

Martin Luther King, Jr. said a generation ago, “We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet you physical force with soul force. Throw us in jail and we will still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half-dead and we will still love you. But be assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process and our victory will be a double victory. For love is the most durable power in the world.”

He drew a circle that shut me out,  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But love and I had a wit to win;  
We drew a circle that took him in.

Amen.