



OUR
RESOLUTE
HOPE

Accepted



FRANK FRIEDMANN

A dear friend of mine named Bob shared his story with me about how he was a very legalistic man, very much a hard charger, and religious performer. Every time the church doors were open, he was there. When a volunteer was needed, he jumped at the opportunity. Even when it came to the most frightening of ministries, door-to-door evangelism, he was all over it. He pursued ministry with tenacity! And then, Father opened his eyes to the wonderful grace of God. He learned that the Christian life was not so much about what he did for God, but what God had done for him in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. **Through God's written Word, the Holy Spirit affirmed that God, in Christ, had made him righteous and that he had received this incredible gift—free of charge. God had done it all, and all he had to do was receive what God had done.** Put simply, the Holy Spirit showed him that he was not called to build the kingdom, but to experience a Person—the Person of Jesus—Who not only loved him but also accepted him completely.

At that point, life changed dramatically for Bob. He stayed an energetic, tenacious servant in the cause of Christ, but he was no longer driven to do so. His zeal was empowered by a different source—Love. For the first time in his life, he knew he was loved and he wanted everyone to know that they too were loved by God, especially his family.

One day, he took his son out and they sat down together for some lunch. Bob looked at his boy and said, “Son, do you know that I love you?” And the boy said, “Yeah, Dad, I know you love me.” To which Bob said, “No, you’re not hearing me. Son, do you know that I love you?” And the son said, “Yes Dad, I know you love me.” Growing more fervent, Bob intensified the conversation. “No!” he said emphatically. “You’re not hearing me. Son, do you know that I really, really love you?” And the son said, “Of course. You’re my dad. I know that you love me.” Growing exasperated, Bob declared to his son, “No, you’re just not tracking with me. Let me see.” **And then he changed the word, and he said, “Son, do you know that I accept you?” And the boy said, “No, Dad, I don’t know that.”** Bob was confused and sought clarification from his son. “What do you mean?” Bob asked. His son, at that point, made this stunning declaration, “Dad, you’re this really outgoing guy. You go door to door, and you’ve tried taking me with you to do that. And Dad, that’s just not me. I am not like you and I cannot do what you do, and inside I have felt like I just didn’t measure up in your eyes. I felt like you didn’t accept me.”

Instantly, Bob made the connection. His son was experiencing with his dad what Bob himself had experienced for years with God. **To know you are loved is one thing, but to know you are accepted is quite another.** There’s an incredible difference, my friends, between love and acceptance. To tell someone you love them is to communicate the reality of your heart for them. Acceptance is that reality put into action so that the person knows by experience the love you have for them. It is communicating love to them in such a way that they “feel” that love. I would put it this way:

LOVE IS THE DECLARATION; ACCEPTANCE IS THE AFFIRMATION OF THAT DECLARATION. ACCEPTANCE SUPPLIES THE EVIDENCE THAT OUR LOVE IS REAL.

And if you think about it, this makes acceptance one of the most powerful, transforming tools we have to communicate the Gospel.

I'm not a real formula guy. We should be very careful about reducing the glory of the Love and Grace of God into terse statements or clichés. There simply are not enough words in our vocabulary to fully define the awe and wonder of His redemptive work in Christ that made us acceptable. But while we can't fully define it, **I believe it is essential that we understand the power of acceptance in our lives and the lives of others.** So, I want to share with you this simple, yet powerful lesson to show why the ministry of acceptance is so powerful and necessary as we minister to others. And I hope we will become dangerously effective communicators of the love and grace of God to all who cross our path. HERE WE GO!

Where there is no honesty, there will be no intimacy.

NO HONESTY → NO INTIMACY

If we're not honest with each other, we will never experience true intimacy. You will never know who I really am nor will I really know who you are. We will be unable to share each other's struggles, fears, hopes, and dreams because we do not share our intimate life story and journey. I will remain an individual, and so will you.

When that fierce individualism remains, both of us will forfeit the experience of power that shared relationship can bring. Ecclesiastes 4:10-12 stresses that two are better than one. When one falls down, the other can pick them up. When one is overpowered, the other can come to the rescue. And when it's cold at night we can keep each other warm. **Being in relationship brings the resources of others into our lives. But when we live independently, we will walk through life with the limitations of our own resources. And we will remain weak.**

NO HONESTY → NO INTIMACY → NO POWER

Looking at the equation above, I trust you see that things are about to go from bad to worse. We live in a world that requires power. We are not up to the demands that this fallen world places on our lives. And without power, there will be no victory. We cannot win the day without power! This reality, which sadly is pandemic in our world, is below.

NO HONESTY → NO INTIMACY → NO POWER → NO VICTORY

So why are we not honest with each other? If we were honest, we could experience the intimacy that brings the power to live victoriously in relationship and community. But honesty remains a very rare commodity in the human arena. Why is that?

Because it is not safe to be honest. Think back to the Garden of Eden. In those early pages of Genesis, where man and woman walking in the Garden without a hint of fear, shame, or guilt. They were naked and they were not ashamed. That is... until they ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Do you remember the first thing they did after eating from that tree? They dove into the bushes and hid from God, right?

Wrong! That was the second thing they did. The first thing they did was put on fig leaves and hide from each other, and we have been hiding from each other ever since. In this COVID-19 pandemic, we all are forced to wear masks. But we need to understand that mask-wearing is nothing new. It has been common in mankind ever since Adam ate from the wrong tree.

We hide from each other. We live in façade with one another, never revealing who we really are or what we really think because of the fear that we might be rejected. Please understand that **I will never be honest with you if I do not know that you are going to accept me. And you will never be honest with me if you do not know that I am going to accept you.** The fear of rejection is the foundation on which this nasty equation we have been building is established.

NO HONESTY → NO INTIMACY → NO POWER → NO VICTORY

REJECTION

Is there any way to reverse this horribly devastating equation? Thankfully, there is. Acceptance is an incredibly powerful tool for reaching people and for building relationship on this planet. **If I know that you are going to accept me, and if you know I am going to accept you, then and only then can we be honest and vulnerable with each other.** Then and only then will we possess and experience the power of intimacy between us that will lead to relational victory. Compare the equation above, with the equation below.

HONESTY → INTIMACY → POWER → VICTORY

ACCEPTANCE

There's a passage in the New Testament that manifests this incredible power of acceptance. It's in John chapter four. There we have the story of the Samaritan woman. We're told that she's had five husbands, and the man she was currently living with was not her husband. In the village of Sychar where she lived, there were six natural springs. But this woman wasn't going to the springs to draw her water. She was going to Jacob's well, a mile outside of town.

In the ancient world, they gathered water twice a day using a heavy water pot. So instead of getting the fresh, spring water right outside her door, she carried a heavy water pot a mile each way for stagnant well water. Why would she do that? Isn't it obvious? Because the people of the village would be gathering their water at those springs. Those people would very likely offer stares and glares and share tantalizing whispers about her if she were to go to those springs. The light of man shines like a glaring, blinding, 100-watt light that is full of criticism and judgment. **For a lady leading a very unlovely life, those springs were not a safe place for her. It was much better for her to journey in solitary fashion to a well outside of town and avoid the light of man.**

When she went to that well that day, she met a man named Jesus. He caught her off guard by entering into conversation with her. This was something no righteous Jew would do. After all, she was not only a Samaritan... but a sinful Samaritan at that! Masterfully, Jesus drew out of her that she had no husband, and then He stunned her by revealing that He knew all about her and the previous five husbands she had.

At that point, she correctly decided that this man Jesus must be from God, so she tried to have a polite theological conversation with Him. Jesus affirmed to her that salvation was of the Jews because from the Jews would come the Messiah. And then He offered her living water that would satisfy her perpetually. **Jesus made it plain to her that He was the promised Savior and He extended to her an invitation to trust and find acceptance in Him.**

I assume you noticed that, in this passage, we don't see any condemnation, slander, criticism, or rejection from Jesus. We don't see the glaring, stinging, judgmental light of man. What we see is honesty along with an invitation to receive relationship. What is fascinating to me is that having had this encounter with Jesus, she dropped her water pot... which is why she came to the well in the first place! And then she ran to the very same people that she had been running from. How could she do that? I suggest to you that we see the power of acceptance lived out in the life of a sinful lady.

YOU SEE, MY FRIENDS, NO ONE WAS EVER AFRAID TO COME INTO THE PRESENCE OF JESUS; NEITHER THE WORST SINNER, NOR HIS GREATEST ENEMY.

Jesus lived out exactly what Father did back in Genesis chapter three. When Adam and Eve sinned, and they put on those silly fig leaves and hid in the bushes, what did God do? What

did God say? Did He hammer them with His holiness, condemn them over their carnality, or slander them with their sin? No, He simply called to them, “Where are you?” Own this reality. God seeks relationship with you. **You can run from God, but He’ll be right on your path, trying to woo you and win you back to Himself.** Do you remember how the dialogue went? The carnal couple told Him they were hiding because they were afraid. And what did God do? He called them to quit hiding and come out of the bushes so He could take off their fig leaves and provide them His own covering!

I shared with you earlier that the light of man is a 100-watt, glaring, critical, exposing, harsh, and stinging light that causes us to run and hide from others. Well, the light of God is a gazillion-watt bulb, but it’s a soft light. It’s a light that welcomes you into its presence and invites you to be 100% honest and vulnerable before Him, without fear of being rejected. **He wants you to come into the light of His love... no matter what you did or when you did it... so that He can clothe you with the acceptance that He offers in the sacrificial, finished work of Christ on your behalf.**

We see this illustrated in what’s probably my favorite New Testament passage, Luke chapter 15. There we have a father and two sons. It’s been mistakenly called the prodigal son passage. That’s not really a correct understanding of this passage. **Prodigal means reckless, lavish, wasteful, and that boy was certainly all those things.** But the subject of the parable is not the boy. The parable reads, “There was a certain man, who had two sons.” The parable is actually about the father. And as we read the parable, we can see that he was the one who was reckless, lavish, and wasteful. **In fact, the father was more reckless, lavish, and wasteful than the boy was. He was prodigal with his love and acceptance.**

In the story, the boy demanded his inheritance while his father was still alive. He callously expressed his love of money over love for his father. At that point, he ran off to the far country and spent the entire fortune on a very sinful lifestyle. He ended up bankrupt, not only morally but financially, and eventually sold himself into slavery to survive. As Jesus tells the story, this reckless, wasteful, lavish son ended up living with the pigs on his master’s farm. As a Jew, this would be a most detestable sin, for pigs were unclean animals. He had hit rock bottom.

At that point, the boy received some revelation. He came to his senses about himself and his circumstances. He no longer saw himself through rose-colored glasses but embraced the ugly state of his life. Then he received a second, and even more powerful, revelation that his father was a kind, benevolent man.

Please understand that he needed both of those revelations. If he knew his father was kind but did not embrace how bad his situation was, he would not have gone home. Likewise, if he had a revelation of his horrible circumstances, but he did not understand how good and kind his father was, he would not have gone home. He needed both revelations and, when he received them, he headed home with the goal to be one of his father’s servants. But he didn’t yet understand that he had an incomplete revelation of just how good his father was.

As he headed home, he composed a speech, “Oh, father, I’ve sinned greatly. And I’m not worthy to be your son. Make me your servant.” When the two met face to face, his father interrupted him and would not let him finish his speech, because the father had a speech of his own. “Never! Never, will you be a slave to me. You’re my son.” And then, what did the father do? He put his own robe on him. Why? Well, if you’ve been living with the pigs, everybody would know where you had been. The father was protecting him. Then he put shoes on the boy. The only people who didn’t wear shoes in that culture were slaves. The father was saying, “I know what you did, but no one else ever needs to know.” And then he did the most outlandish thing of all. He gave the boy the family signet ring, which is basically the ancient credit card. He had just squandered one-third of the family fortune, and now the father handed him the rest of it. What an incredible manifestation of acceptance. **Of course, the father that Jesus was describing to us in this story is none other than the Father God of the universe.**

In the mind and heart of God, as revealed in this story, the issue is not where you’ve been and what you’ve done. He is most concerned with where you are, and where you need to be is home in His presence. **We all need to come home from the far country into the arms of a God who will run and meet us on our way home before we ever make it home.** By the way, this is the only instance in all the Scripture where God ran, and the reason He did so was to minister love and acceptance. Please understand that God might not accept what you’ve done, but He will always accept you. He can do so because, in the finished work of Jesus Christ, He has taken care of what you’ve done, once and for all, with His shed blood. In doing so, He makes us right and acceptable so that, in our relationship with Him, we can be honest, intimate, and experience the power of His love so that we can live in victory.

THE GLORY OF BEING ACCEPTED IS HIS GIFT TO US, BUT IT COMES WITH A PURPOSE AND RESPONSIBILITY.

As we have received this glorious acceptance that transforms our lives, we in turn are to freely share that acceptance with others. Just like the Father, that does not mean we accept sinful behavior, but we are to strive with all our hearts to communicate that we accept the person committing the behavior. As we do so, we will become a safe harbor for them with the hope that, by experiencing acceptance, the transforming power of love will lead them to faith in Jesus and a radical altering of their lives.

I believe with all my heart that, if we would minister acceptance, we would transform the world. For too long, the church has shone its own light, that glaring 100-watt critical, negative, stinging exposing light. This glaring light causes us to fear rejection, which keeps us from being honest with each other. When that happens, we forfeit intimacy. We stay individual, solitary people who lack the relational power experienced in a community of faith. Without that relational power, we will not experience victory. **It’s time for you and me to give to others the acceptance that Jesus Himself extended to us.** Doing so will empower us to be

honest with each other, so that we can experience intimacy between us, live in the power of community, and find victory in our faith journey together.

Years ago, a young woman came into my office. She sat down and began to tell how she was having a very difficult time in life. She was vague and guarded as she shared some of the details of her life. Each time she shared, I would tell her, “I love you and accept you. Thank you for trusting me. And thank you for sharing that with me.” As we continued the conversation, and she experienced that she was safe with me, she grew more and more honest. The acceptance extended to her empowered her to share her life intimately with someone who could now walk with her through the deep valley she was experiencing.

Finally, she shared that she had lost her virginity at a very young age. Once again, I affirmed to her, “I love you. I accept you. Thank you for sharing that with me. Thank you for trusting me.” At that point, I restated what she had said in a gentle, comforting voice in the hopes of affirming her that she was still accepted and loved, “So you’ve had a boyfriend?” Upon hearing those words, she shook her head, her eyes lowered, and she began to cry. After a little while, she looked up and said to me, “Pastor Frank, I’ve had so many boyfriends, I don’t know how many boyfriends I’ve had.” Once again, I told her I loved her and accepted her. And then I asked, “Have you ever pondered why that happened? You see, young lady, all behavior has a motive. What was your goal in that behavior? Do you know?” She looked at me with tear-filled eyes and asked me, “Pastor Frank, would you believe me if I told you that I never wanted to do that with any of them? All I ever wanted was the hug, but I would do anything to get it.”

Her story is sad because she was trading so much of herself for something that was not genuine acceptance. There were those willing to offer such false acceptance in exchange for what they could get out of her. And she was performing for that false acceptance in the most sorrowful and hurtful way. My friends, this is the way the whole world operates. We do what we really don’t want to do and go where we really don’t want to go because someone will “accept” us if we do so. That kind of false acceptance comes with a price that most of us will regret paying later down the road.

Since the Garden of Eden, mankind has echoed a desperate cry. Is there anyone who will love me just for who I am? Is there anyone who will accept me, not for what I do but just because? My friends, Jesus has answered that question for any who would place their faith in Him. Because of His finished work on the cross to remove both our sin and our old sinful nature, He has made us completely acceptable to Him. Acceptance is ours. We possess it. **In 2 Corinthians 4:5, God affirms to us in no uncertain terms that in Christ we have been made acceptable.**

In the Gospels, Jesus called us to freely give as we ourselves have received. Now that we have acceptance, we need to provide that same acceptance to others. We need to become a safe harbor for others so they too can become honest and vulnerable, experience intimacy in relationship, enjoy the power of that intimacy, and walk in victory. My friends, this is what I did for that young woman, and this is what we all need to do for all those who cross our path. I

firmly believe that, if we begin to express the acceptance that we experience with God, we would transform the world—not with our doctrine, but with the experience of the Lord Jesus Christ, by the power of His Spirit and the truth of His Word flowing through our lives to others.

I hope that seeing just how accepted you are has encouraged you. And I hope that, through the power of Christ in you, you'll begin to minister acceptance to those around you who so desperately cry out for it. **The ministry of acceptance, found freely in Christ, can help release them from the horrible choices they make in their efforts to find acceptance in illegitimate ways.**

Be a vessel of acceptance to the prodigals you come across so that they can be led to a prodigal Father Who will recklessly and lavishly love and accept them. Encourage those people who are living like the Samaritan woman, who are satisfying their thirsts in such harmful ways, to find the living water that Jesus offers to them. Freely you have received. Now freely give. Let the people of the world know you are His disciple by the love and acceptance you bring them in Christ.

You are loved!
Pastor Jacob

Thank you for believing in the ministry of *Our Resolute Hope*, and for your faithful love and support. Please consider providing a financial gift so we can continue to spread the Good News of the finished work of Jesus, building up those who are His kids, and reaching out to bring others to Him by faith in Christ.

I'd like to help.