

Insecurity, Leave Us Alone!

Beth Moore has written many books, but she says So Long, Insecurity is the closest she'll ever come to writing an autobiography. Moore's life, like those of so many women, has been challenged by insecurities. But no more! She believes there is a cure for insecurity, which she says has become an epidemic. Women do not have to allow insecurities, or "lies," to cause them to miss life. Moore presents the truth as a  way to help women experience authentic security.

The Buzz features an excerpt from So Long, Insecurity: You've Been a Bad Friend to Us. (Click [here](#) to purchase this book.)

Insecure Enough to Matter

We all have insecurities. They piggyback on the vulnerability inherent in our humanity. The question is whether or not our insecurities are substantial enough to hurt, limit, or even distract us from profound effectiveness or fulfillment of purpose. Are they cheating us of the powerful and abundant life Jesus flagrantly promised? Do they nip at our heels all the way from the driveway to the workplace? Scripture claims that believers in Christ are enormously gifted people. Are our insecurities snuffing the Spirit until our gifts, for all practical purposes, are largely unproductive or, at the very least, tentative? Maybe you can answer each of those questions with an honest no. The only reason I'm bothering to write a book instead of leading a small group, however, is because I believe if you can, you'd be in the vast minority.

I'm convinced that many women—if not most—have enough insecurity to hinder them. I recently surveyed more than 900 women and found that 78 percent admitted to having feelings of insecurity at or above a level that bothers them. That qualifies as a major cry for healing. Of the total number of respondents, 43 percent described their issues with insecurity

as anywhere from “pretty big” to “huge.” If those 900 women are remotely reflective of the rest of us, we need to own up to a serious problem and seek serious solutions from a Creator who wonderfully crafted us.

Before we inch any further, let’s start shaping some working definitions of insecurity so we can figure out if ours warrants attention and healing. Later in our journey, we’ll also discuss various experiences that can feed those insecurities. Rest assured until then that there are often plausible explanations for why one person’s insecurities exceed another’s.

I am well enough acquainted with the issue to know that as we start defining and describing this malady, those of you with fairly chronic cases are going to begin to feel insecure even about your insecurities. (It takes one to know one.) Try not to go there. There was a time when I would have been tempted to put away a book that magnified my vulnerabilities, but these days I’d rather press through the discomfort of staring at my weaknesses than live in denial and bondage. The enemy of your soul has a tremendous amount to gain if you don’t deal with your insecurities. Don’t let him have that kind of victory. Let’s just stay honest and courageous, and trust that help is on the way.

OK, let’s start by looking at one specialist’s definition of insecurity:

Insecurity refers to a profound sense of self-doubt—a deep feeling of uncertainty about our basic worth and our place in the world. Insecurity is associated with chronic self-consciousness, along with a chronic lack of confidence in ourselves and anxiety about our relationships. The insecure man or woman lives in constant fear of rejection and a deep uncertainty about whether his or her own feelings and desires are legitimate. (Joseph Nowinski, *The Tender Heart: Conquering Your Insecurity*)

I hope that definition conveys to some extent the idea that insecurity is not the same thing as sensitivity. The latter can be a charming trait that is often evidenced in thriving individuals and relationships. Not everyone who is sensitive is insecure, but make no mistake: everyone who is insecure is usually sensitive to a fault. Confusingly, these are often people who can dish out all sorts of things they can't take. As you glance over this first definition, keep in mind that you don't have to possess every description or element to qualify as insecure and in need of healing.

For instance, I don't have anxiety about all my relationships, but I have enough to bother me in a few. Likewise, I don't live with a constant fear of rejection in all my associations, but a handful of experiences have left some sizable wounds. I also don't grapple with feeling like I have no place in this world. In fact, like so many other women who are in over their heads in responsibility—moms, teachers, caretakers, doctors and corporate executives, to name a few—some of my insecurity stems from being uncomfortable with the place that I do have. Whether we feel insignificant or overrated or drunk on some loony cocktail of the two, insecurity lands with both feet on two words: self-doubt. I step in it. Then I swim in it. Then I nearly drown in it.

This morning I went on a walk to listen to praise music on my iPod and hold the themes of this book out before God in hopes that He would speak to my heart. He spoke, all right. I realized that maybe I don't just doubt myself. Maybe I subconsciously doubt God for using me. Let me be frank: if I were God, I wouldn't have given me a second look. I constantly feel unqualified, inadequate and out of my league. I realized this morning that I not only lack security, I also lack faith. I don't just doubt myself, I also doubt God about myself. It was a revelation to me. Almost a horror. I wonder if you can relate.

If you know Jesus Christ personally, He has chosen you, too, and has appointed you to accomplish something good. Something that matters. Something prepared for you before time began (see Eph. 2:10). Something meant to have a serious impact within your sphere of influence.

Perhaps, like me, somewhere deep inside you entertain the lie that you know yourself better than God knows you and that you've somehow successfully hidden something from His omniscient eye. This could be the only explanation for why He bothers with you. For those of us who try to live in the light of Scripture, this thought process is far more subtle than outright. Roots always extend underground. Sometimes the only way we know one of these roots exists is when we see what's growing from it. If we have false assumptions like, "If God really knew me, He wouldn't like me" hidden somewhere in our core, it will feed our insecurities like a zookeeper shoveling hay to an elephant. We only know that assumption is there because something big, alive and destructive is growing from it.

Some of us never seek healing from God for our insecurities because we feel like we don't fit the profile. We think insecurity only looks one way—mousy, maybe even inept—and that's not exactly who we see in the mirror. At least not once the mascara's on. And it certainly is not the woman we present to the public. Insecurity's best cover is perfectionism. That's where it becomes an art form.

Keep an open mind to what an insecure woman looks like, and don't be too hasty to let yourself off the hook just because one dimension of the portrait doesn't look like you. The fact that she can be a complicated mix of confidence and self-consciousness is the very reason it took me so long to identify it in myself and admit it.

As I was preparing to write this book, I took an insecurity inventory and found that many of the statements did not apply

to me at all.

Do I cry easily? No.

Do I avoid the spotlight in social situations? Uh, no. There's a reason some of my best buddies call me "Beth La Ham."

Other suggestions on the inventory, however, were so descriptive that I felt my face flush like someone had caught me cheating.

Do I have a strong desire to make amends whenever I think I've done something wrong? Are you kidding me? I have a strong desire to make amends even when I *haven't* done something wrong! And not solely because I want to do the godly thing. I battle an inordinate desire to make peace that can't always be others- or God-centered. I dread the backlash of people far more than the backlash of God at times. He's infinitely more merciful. Depending on how insecure I feel at the moment, having someone upset at me is very unsettling even if I was on the right side of the conflict. I cannot count the times God has had to tell me to cease trying to fix something that insists on staying broken. Loss of favor and approval and harmony is excruciating to people with insecurity.

Here are a few other survey questions that hit the bull's-eye:

If someone gets angry at me, do I have a hard time not thinking about it? I try to limit myself to obsessing.

Do I sometimes feel anxious for no apparent reason? God knows I do.

Does it hurt my feelings when I learn that someone doesn't like me? Breaks my heart.

Do I fear that my husband might leave me for someone else? Not all the time. Not most of the time. But more often than I think is healthy.

Did you catch the part of the definition that describes insecurity as "a deep uncertainty about whether his or her own

feelings and desires are legitimate”? How often do you have to ask yourself if what you’re feeling is even real? Or if your desires should be quashed or pursued? If you’re discerning or just suspicious? If you were supposed to do “this” or not? If you’re like me, it’s more often than you want to admit.

You might protest with something like this: “But Beth, I feel all those same things and I don’t consider myself insecure.” My question in response would be: How intensely do you feel those things? If you feel as intensely as I do, that woman you see in the mirror probably has a bigger insecurity problem than you’re giving her credit for. Or, more important, seeking healing for.

Intensity is a key factor in insecurity. A fissure in a relationship might sting one person but devastate the other. Obviously, the latter party is most likely the least secure. Insecurity is not just about how many of the qualifications you possess. It’s about how much the ones you own really get to you.

The length of time you’ve been plagued by insecurity is another key factor to consider. Maybe you caught the repetition of the word *chronic* in the specialist’s definition of insecurity. This was originally a medical term coined by Hippocrates from the Greek word *chronos*, meaning “time.” It referred to maladies that persisted for many days. In modern medicine, the term is still used to describe conditions that have lasted three or more months. Humor me here for a moment. Have your insecurities bothered you for more than 90 days? Mine have. Then they’ve been chronic. Enough said. Let’s press forward.

Let’s lock in for a few moments on the element of self-consciousness from our earlier definition. At the mention of the term, our minds once again start sketching an image of what a self-conscious person looks or acts like, and we know

we don't want to be her. After all, we have too much pride to be her. But the truth is, she's not nearly as easily pegged as that seventh grader in the locker room who perfected the art of changing into her gym clothes without first taking off her dress. I hate to state the obvious, but all it takes to be chronically self-conscious is to be chronically conscious of self. Self-consciousness is acute self-awareness and a preoccupation with self, no matter how it's externalized in life. Suddenly the broader scope changes everything we picture about her.

The self-conscious person may protect herself with plainness and try to blend into the paint, but she also may dress herself to perfection and stand squarely in the spotlight. In either portrayal—or anything in between—she is ordinarily more aware of herself than she tends to be of any other person in the room. Whether she feels inferior or superior, she takes a frequent inventory of her place in the space. She may like it or hate it, but she's rarely oblivious to it. Never think for a moment that pride and self-centeredness have no role in insecurity. Since she keeps confusing her insecurity with humility, however, she never recognizes the self-centeredness so she can turn from it.

Now for the part of the specialist's description of insecurity that had me at hello:

The insecure person also harbors unrealistic expectations about love and relationships. These expectations, for themselves and for others, are often unconscious. The insecure person creates a situation in which being disappointed and hurt in relationships is almost inevitable. Ironically, although insecure people are easily and frequently hurt, they are usually unaware of how they are unwitting accomplices in creating their own misery. (Joseph Nowinski, *The Tender Heart: Conquering Your Insecurity*)

That's me! Or at least it *was* me. It's becoming less and less

descriptive, only because I decided to declare war on it and let God get to it if it killed me. Here's the confusing catch: I've rarely been called out on this issue. As the definition suggests, I was not consciously aware of putting undue pressure on the relationship, nor was I accused of it, but in retrospect it is embarrassingly obvious. Let's face it. Many of us appear far more together on matters of the heart than we are.

Like you, I've been confident and secure in many relationships while others were nearly the death of me. No matter how healthy some of my associations were, the ones where I harbored unreasonable expectations caused me considerable pain and innumerable disappointments.

Can you say the same thing? How honest would you be if it were just the two of us and God talking? Let's try to relate like that through these pages. What does your own relational track record look like? Do you tend to put a fair amount of pressure on some key relationships? Do you have a few unrealistic expectations?

I once heard a comedian on television say that he'd finally come to the conclusion that what a woman wants in a man is another woman. Isn't that the truth? Don't we frequently wish our men were more sensitive and nurturing? Don't we wish they liked to eat at Souper Salad, see a good chick flick, and talk afterward about how it made them feel? Don't we wish that just one stinking time they'd offer a massage instead of asking for one?

And then there are other times when we think if we have to hear another woman whine (no, not all women are whiners), we're going to put our heads in the washing machine and hold our breath. You know you're on the verge of unrealistic expectations when you want to tell your girlfriend to get some hair on her chest and take her situation like a man.

Understandably, we develop relationships in large part based on what we derive psychologically from them. Maybe you have a very sanguine friend who buoys you or brings an element of excitement to your life. But what if she doesn't happen to be in a terrific mood when you meet up after work that day? Is that OK with you, or do you tend to be disappointed even if you don't show it? Is there a part of you that feels like she let you down? You might have a mentor you look to for spiritual guidance, but she doesn't seem as focused on you as she used to be. How easily do you roll with that kind of transition?

We can be so blessed in certain relationships that our unrealistic expectations often seem met and, therefore, reasonable. We can get away with thinking we're secure people because, for a time, we have the important things just like we want them. But then change happens, and suddenly we are thrown for a severe emotional loop. We realize we weren't secure. We were spoiled. One way we can detect insecurity is by our knee-jerk reaction to any level of change in a relationship, particularly if we perceive that the focus has shifted away from us. The more easily threatened we are, the more insecure we are. You can take that one to the bank.

I know what it's like to inadvertently create an atmosphere where some measure of hurt is inevitable. In my vastly unhealthy days, I tended to handpick relationships in which I'd get mistreated in some ways. There have been other times when I've put so much stock in certain relationships that a crash was unavoidable. Thankfully, only a few of those collisions have been fatal. The rest of them, however, either stayed wrecked or took a good while to repair. If we let too much ride on a relationship, a blowout is inevitable. The very nature of pressure is to blow. The ramifications of this kind of insecurity reach all the way from a pattern of disappointment to unabated abuse.

Oddly, both the victim and the victimizer in toxic

associations suffer from a similar malady. They're both chronically insecure. Both have false belief systems shoveling hay into the mouth of that destructive elephant. The great news is that when we let God bring some wholeness to unhealthy propensities within us, we will not only make healthier relationships, we will also enjoy them immeasurably more. For crying out loud, we might even start liking some of those people we love but can hardly stand.

I'm going to take the risk of saying something pretty bold at this point so you'll have a heads-up. In your pursuit of God-vested security, the only relationships in your life that will suffer rather than improve are the significantly unhealthy ones. I'll go one step further. Those that are the unhealthiest might not even survive at all—and maybe they shouldn't. But more on that later.

Right now we're picking on ourselves, but later in our journey, we're going to pick on the people in our lives who prefer us to be insecure and have a sick need to keep us that way. They are what the same specialist I quoted earlier calls "emotional predators." No, you are not the only one to blame, but girlfriend, you are the only one you can change. God is willing. God is able. Let Him get to that terrified part of you that devalues the rest of you.

As we draw this chapter to a close, let's not allow our focus on personal relationships to fool us into thinking that this is the only area of our lives at risk over insecurity. It's just the most painful. The same self-doubt, self-consciousness and fear that dog us at home will dog us all the way to work and bark like a miniature schnauzer at our desks. Not only will insecurity cheat us of reaching and then *operating consistently* at maximum potential, it also will turn our co-workers into threats and trap us into becoming posers. It will also chase us to church, where we'll be so distracted by who we know or don't know, where we sit or don't sit, what brand we are or aren't wearing, that we probably won't hear three

words of the message.

This is the perfect spot to try my own hand at a succinct definition of insecurity: self-sabotage. Insecurity is miserable. That's the bottom line. We don't need it. We don't want it. And we really can live without it. So what would happen if we quit being accomplices in our own misery?

Taken

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