

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Tammy Tkach' Message of February 15, 2009
"Rocks of Rejection, Gems of Grace"**

[Far too many of us have been rejected from time to time by friends, family and even the church. And as a result we feel angry, depressed or worthless. The Good News is that Jesus Christ has redeemed us, loves us unconditionally and has given us his grace.]

[Topics: Rejection, Acceptance; Beloved, Grace, Adoption]

[Tammy Tkach, today's guest speaker, is the wife of the President of our denomination, The Worldwide Church of God.]

Excerpt: Have you ever been rejected? If you have a pulse, you have. It's not a very pleasant experience. Have you ever applied for a job or to a college and have been turned down? Have you ever tried to submit an article or story and have been turned down by the publisher? If you've made an unsuccessful marriage proposal or been through a divorce, or worked in sales, you've experienced rejection.

We all face rejection from time to time. Maybe you've experienced rejection just yesterday or even this morning. It's part of life and we have to learn how to handle it. Those who can't learn to deal with rejection can get angry or bitter. Some turn to crime or violence because they are so mad at being rejected. Others feel down-in-the-dumps about it and even depressed. As a result of rejection, you can go through life feeling insignificant and unwanted.

Since we don't like being rejected we try to do things to be accepted. Some are bizarre. I'm sure you've heard about how in order to be accepted into a particular gang you have to go out and kill someone. Girls will starve themselves to get skinny so they will be more accepted. Now more men and even teenagers are getting plastic surgery because they think they will be accepted by their peers or by society.

Most of us try to hide how much rejection really affects us. Those negative or mean comments, many which are unwarranted, stay with us the rest of our life. We teach our children this saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me." Now we know that's not true, don't we. Words do hurt. It's like someone has thrown a rock at you when they call you some hurtful name.

Rejection through the years piles up around you and makes you feel like you are carrying around a whole sack of rocks. Tammy calls them rocks of rejection. We are usually able to shake off the little rocks of rejection, as we get older. But if we accumulate too many rocks of rejection of various sizes – small, medium and large, we feel like we're inundated under a mountain of rocks.

The Bible is full of stories of rejection and acceptance. The first rejection, even though it was brought about by Satan through deception, was Eve who rejected God's warning and ate of the tree. She basically said, "I don't need God's rules. He doesn't know what he's talking

about.” So she rejected God. All throughout the Old Testament, we read additional stories of rejection. The biggest one is when Israel rejected God. In Exodus, when Moses was at Mt. Sinai for a long time, the Israelites put all their gold jewelry into a pot and as Aaron said out came this calf from the fire. They felt that God had taken too long, so they turned their back on him that quickly.

And in story about Job, he wasn't really rejected by God, but he sure felt that way. Job lost his children, his home destroyed, and his body was covered with boils. Job cursed the day he was born and even the day he was conceived. That's how rejected he felt.

And we all remember Joseph. His brothers hated him so much that they wanted to kill him. How do you think that made Joseph feel? While they didn't kill him, they did sell him as a slave. He still suffered rejection.

There are many stories of rejection in the New Testament. Remember the Samaritan woman at the well? She went to the well in the heat of the day because she didn't want to be around the other women. She knew what they would whisper, point at her and say, “Did you know what she did lately?” So she went to the well by herself to avoid all of this.

And then there was the woman who was bleeding for 12 years. She knew that she was unclean in everybody's eyes. She felt rejected big time. She couldn't go anywhere, do anything. The men would run away from her when they saw her because she was unclean.

And the woman caught in adultery. She faced stoning for her behavior. Talk about being rejected. And what about the Gentile woman begging crumbs from Jesus' table. At first Jesus said, “I've only come for the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” She was initially being rejected. And then what about the woman who went to Simon's house to anoint Jesus' feet with her tears. Remember her? All the people in the house didn't want her there. She had a bad reputation.

And if you look at all the women of that day, they were all pretty much treated as 2nd class citizens. They were stigmatized if they didn't have a husband. Or if they had a husband but had no children – that was bad. They didn't feel blessed by God. No woman could own property. Women couldn't testify in a court of law unless there were two of them.

Women still get treated like that today. Tammy just read in the paper this morning an article about teen prostitutes in the Inland Empire. Girls, who are 16 years old, are out there selling themselves at truck stops and other places. The one girl who was featured in the article felt that this was all she could do in life to make some money. What about the men who were taking advantage of teenager like that?

Women are still put down and rejected. There's the glass-ceiling syndrome where many women aren't paid equally as men for doing the same job. Too many husbands think the wife isn't as important as they are so they don't treat her as nicely as they would want to be treated.

And what about Jesus? He faced the ultimate rejection. He was falsely accused, unfairly tried, sentenced to death – and he was innocent. That's the biggest rejection in the whole Bible. The people he came to rejected him.

Now to most of us, rejection makes us feel worthless and insignificant. All rejection hurts. Little rocks, medium-size rocks, big rocks – it all hurts. Some suffer such deep and serious rejection that they feel they have nothing to live for; a few even commit suicide over it.

Rejection comes in many different forms to all of us – women, men, children, the poor, the disabled, the elderly, races, tribes, and even whole countries sometimes. Every country has their “less-than-desirable” people. And every country has incidents of abuses in their history.

And churches do the same thing. Legalism is a form of rejection. Have you ever thought about that? Legalism encourages judgment by others. So, if you feel that you didn’t quit do what you were supposed to do today, you believe that you will be rejected by the people at your church because you didn’t live up to the standards of the church.

Legalism tells you that you have to obey all the laws and obey them perfectly to be accepted. So there’s always the fear that you are not going to make it. You’re always in danger of failure, because failure is always inevitable under legalism. So not only do you fear rejection by God when you’re under a legalistic system, but you also fear rejection from the people you love.

Did you know that so many churches still practice legalism in some form? Sometimes in subtle ways and other times in big ways. Legalism encourages rejection; it encourages judgment. Under legalism, one is never sure that our salvation is secure, because the nagging feeling that we are quit good enough is always there. If you blow it, it was eternal rejection. You’re gone!

That’s how most people look at Christianity and especially God himself. Like he’s always ready to bring down the gavel and say “Guilty.” Like he’s always ready to zap people with a lightning bolt. Some people view God as judge, jury and executioner – all wrapped up in one package.

But that’s not true. We need to have an accurate picture of who God is. **Ephesians 1:4-6, "Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. 5) God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do and it gave him great pleasure. 6) So we praise God for his glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son."**

The Greek here is translated “Beloved”, which is what the New King James Version has. Jesus is the Beloved of God. Grace means acceptance. We are accepted in Jesus.

Now let’s go back to some of the women in the NT. The woman at the well didn’t understand what Jesus meant when he offered her “living water.” Tammy believes that she had an idea that Jesus was holding out his grace and acceptance to her. He wasn’t condemning her even though she was living with a man who wasn’t her husband.

Here she was getting acceptance from a Jewish man, who normally would never accept a cup of water from a Samaritan woman, who was unclean in eyes of Jewish men. She must have truly been overwhelmed by what Jesus had done. Finally someone had accepted her. She was so excited that she ran back to her village and told everyone about Jesus. That’s amazing what Jesus had done for her.

And then there's the poor bleeding woman, who had hidden herself away from everyone because of her uncleanness. She not only received healing that day, she received acceptance. A man let her touch him and he didn't get mad and didn't kick her away. She touched his garment and Jesus asked who touched him. He looked her straight in the eyes and said that her faith had healed her and that she should go in peace. No harsh words, no look of revulsion on his face; just love and acceptance.

The woman caught in adultery also felt the love and acceptance of Jesus when he stopped the stoning that was going to occur. That was a reprieve from the death sentence. She was so thankful and amazed that she had received acceptance from Jesus.

And then there was the Gentile woman begging for crumbs at Jesus' table. At first when Jesus told her he didn't have time for her, we feel that was kind of harsh of Jesus to say that. But when she asked him again for healing for her daughter, Jesus showed her mercy and told her that she had faith.

Then there's the woman who poured perfume on Jesus' feet after she washed them with her tears and then wiped them with her hair. The woman who had lived a sinful life was so thankful for Jesus' acceptance, she walked right into the house, where Jesus was eating dinner with the Pharisees and showed her appreciation to him. Jesus did not turn her away as the others hoped he would. We remember her act of love of kindness towards Jesus to this day.

Even though all these stories are about woman, Tammy isn't implying that grace is just for women. Grace is for everyone. But why do you think Jesus did this? In a society that didn't value women, Jesus treated them with respect. He made them feel valued and showed them mercy and grace when others would have cast them aside.

Jesus showed everyone watching him, including his disciples, that he accepted the weak and despised when others had rejected them. Jesus was showing that he cares for everyone not just those who thought they were important. Jesus cared for women to show others that just because women were viewed as less valuable or insignificant compared to men, they are of great value to him.

Because Jesus has experienced such complete and total rejection, he is able to understand any type of rejection we are going through. Jesus knows exactly how we feel. Knowing that we are individually accepted by Jesus should make a big difference in our spiritual life and our personal relationship with God and others.

The need for love and acceptance makes one become a very needy person. Speaking from a woman's perspective, women can get very needy. Sometimes people will do inappropriate things to get attention and to get the love and acceptance they really crave. We need to realize that since we have Jesus' acceptance, that's all we really need.

This is such a profound statement – to be accepted by Christ is the most important acceptance we need. We don't need other people to pat us on the back and tell us, "Good job!" even though we may want it. We really don't need it. To be accepted in Christ means that we don't have to be afraid that something will happen to your standing with him.

Living under legalism, we often worry that we would not live up to the standards of God and that we would fail at life and maybe not even make it into the next life. Being accepted in the grace of Christ means that we don't have to worry about that. Nothing can separate us from his love. Jesus won't ever push us away. He won't reject us in any way for any reason. People will but he won't.

When you know you are accepted other good things happen. You know you can't be threatened. What can anybody do to you when you have Jesus and he has you? His acceptance is like a soft warm blanket. His acceptance is made from the same material as Superman's cape. Remember the story -- when superman pulled it around himself, nothing could hurt him.

Now when the blanket of Jesus is wrapped around you, the rocks of rejection will bounce off you. Just because we are in Christ and he is in us, doesn't mean that we won't be rejected again by people. It will happen.

And we also need to realize that when people throw rocks of rejection at us, they may be doing it out of their own feelings of rejection. They may be feeling threatened and unloved. It's not always about you or me. Sometimes those rocks come at us because of their pain. But if you understand this, you can reach out to them with Jesus' love and acceptance and not take their rejection personally.

Acceptance by Jesus also reduces the number and severity of pity-parties. It's tempting to have a pity-party when you're feeling sorry for yourself. Tammy's mom taught her family this little song. The first line goes like this. "Nobody loves me, everybody hates me, I guess I'll eat some worms." You don't have to sing that song, when you're secure in the love of Jesus. We should sing songs of praise and thanksgiving instead, because Jesus accepts us.

Romans 8:38-39, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39) neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

That is so encouraging. Jesus' love is like a soft warm blanket. This should make us feel so secure and accepted.

The grace of God is great enough for everyone. His love is more than enough for all of us. It can never be taken away. God wants to give his grace to everyone. It's not just for a certain few people who are doing the "right" thing. It's for everybody. His mercy is never ending. Our acceptance by him means that we are included.

Have you ever felt like you were on the outside looking in? An example of that is when they are choosing players for a team in school and you are the last one picked. You feel like you're on the outside. It seems that nobody wants you. But that's not how it is with God.

God wants us. God picks everybody first. How does God do that, you might ask? It's because of his amazing love. God doesn't make anyone waiting at the end of the line think, "Oh no, nobody's going to pick me." Jesus has already picked you, because he loves you.

We are always going to be on the inside with God. We're always going to be included in the life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God wants us to participate in that life with him now and forever. It's very exciting and amazing that God wants to include us in his life.

Tammy has been studying about the Trinitarian life of God. One book that she is reading is "Invitation to Theology" by Michael Jinkins. It's helping her understand who God is. She feels that this should be a priority in all of lives – getting to know God better.

Jesus said in **John 17:3, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."** Getting to know God is eternal life. That was what Jesus told us. So it's important to know God better.

And as we get to know God better, we might find it easier to be reconciled to him and to each other. Because if you are walking around feeling rejected, or at least not very accepted, then being reconciled to God, through Jesus Christ, might give you some problems. If you don't feel that he really loves you and that you are totally accepted and under his grace, then you'll still hold God at a distance. And you won't be trusting him as much as you should be trusting him. You won't let him love you as much as he wants to. We need to understand what it means to be accepted by God. Living our life with God is a process. He changes us every day.

The better we get to know God, the more we realize he loves everybody, every single human being. And he wants to include every human being in his circle of life. He wants us to see the image of God in their face when we look at other people.

Remember when we read in Ephesians that God wanted to adopt us from the very beginning? Each and every human being is a potential member of his family. Now when God adopts us, he looks at us as his very own. And we won't think of ourselves as anything else but his full-fledged children. Being adopted by God means we belong to him in every way.

Grace is truly amazing. God has given us love and acceptance. God has given us what we don't deserve. He's given us a reprieve from our death sentence. We need to thank God every day for the grace he's given us. We also need to practice grace to other people. It all goes in a circle. God gives us grace and we try to pass it on to others.

Tammy then asked us to go home and write down the rocks of rejection that have been thrown at us that we can remember – the little ones, the big ones. And then image laying those rocks at the foot of the cross and just leaving them there. Give them to Jesus.

Now imagine that Jesus replaces them with beautiful sparking gems. The rocks are gone. The gems of grace are left – love, acceptance, forgiveness, mercy, compassion and patience. And you can pick up those gems, put them in your pocket and carry them around with you, because you will want to hang on to those.

They are a lot lighter than those rocks of rejection that you've been carrying around all your life. They're also fun to give away. And the good thing is, the more you give away, the more you have, because every time you reach in your pocket to get a gem of grace for someone, you'll discover that it's always full. Your pocket will never become empty of those gems of

grace. That's how amazing God's grace is. Because of his grace, we truly are accepted and beloved.

Key Scripture: Ephesians 1:4-6, "Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. 5) God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do and it gave him great pleasure. 6) So we praise God for his glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son."

General Group Question: Could you share one rejection in your life that had a big impact on you?

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. How does rejection affect you?
2. Could you share with us how you've learned to handle rejection?
3. How do legalistic religions play on a person's fear of rejection?
4. What were the circumstances when you realized that Jesus has accepted you and has totally redeemed you?
5. Which of the stories mentioned in the sermon about Jesus' acceptance touched you the most? Why?
6. Can the thoughts of rejection interfere with your relationship with God? Briefly explain why or why not.
7. How can we better share the gems of God's grace with others?