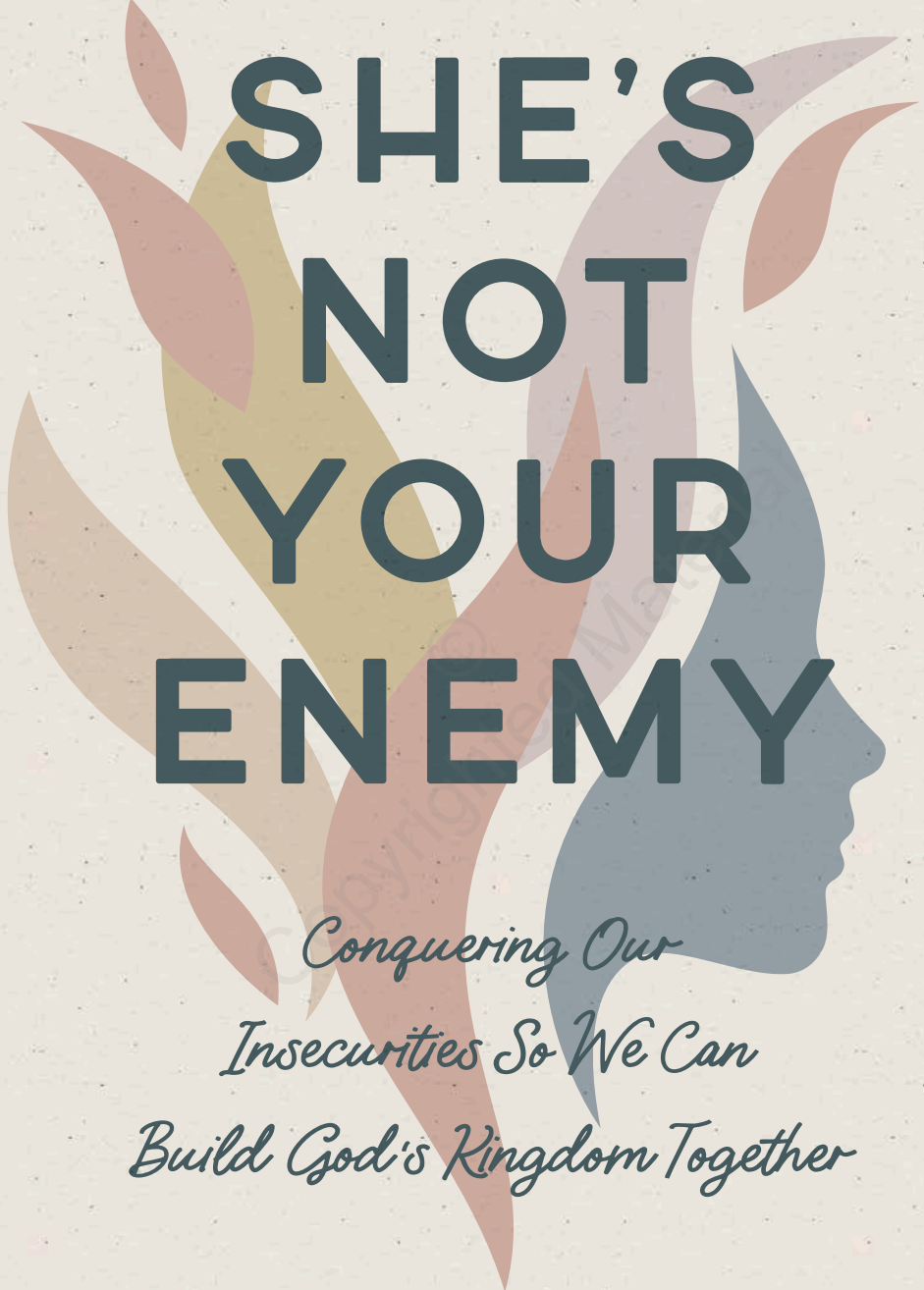
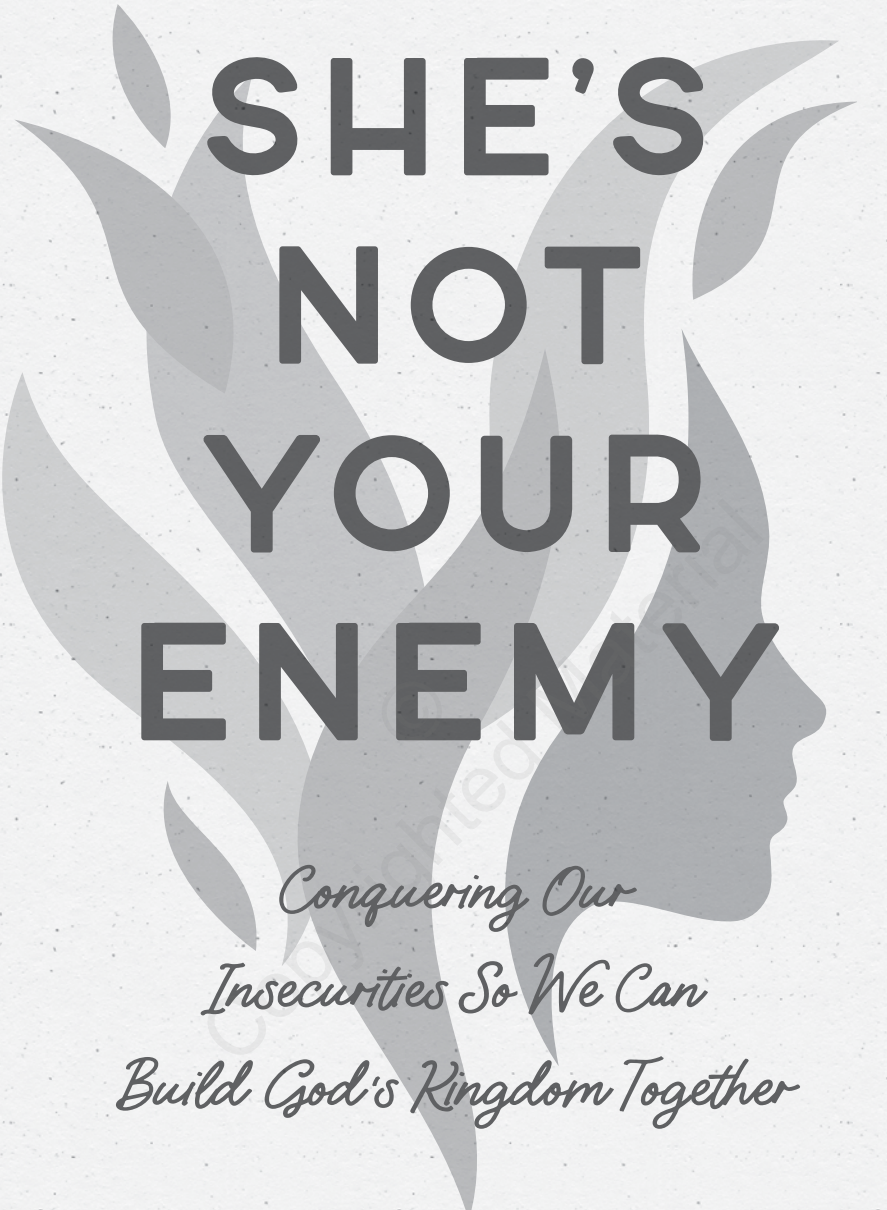

AN INTERACTIVE BOOK
WITH 10 SESSIONS OF
VIDEO INCLUDED



SHE'S NOT YOUR ENEMY

*Conquering Our
Insecurities So We Can
Build God's Kingdom Together*

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Books for Courageous Women
from David C Cook

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Contents

Introduction	
Know Your Enemy	13
Chapter 1: The Woman Who Doesn't Include You	29
Chapter 2: The Woman Who Has What You Want	49
Chapter 3: The Woman Who Disagrees with You	67
Chapter 4: The Woman Whose Suffering Scares You	89
Chapter 5: The Woman Who Doesn't Believe	109
Chapter 6: The Woman Who Has It All Together	131
Chapter 7: The Woman Who Has Guardrails Up	151
Chapter 8: The Woman Who Is Too Much	171
Chapter 9: The Woman in the Mirror	193
Conclusion: Embrace the Ongoing Process	213
Reflections	221
Acknowledgments	223
Notes	227



Chapter 1

The Woman Who Doesn't Include You

Rejected. Overlooked. Dismissed. Ignored. Uninvited. Excluded.
There's a certain heartbreak reserved for being left out.

Scrolling through Instagram, you spot photos from a girls' trip you weren't invited to.

You find yourself the awkward one out in a discussion as the rest of the circle shares experiences you cannot relate to.

"You're not the right fit for us," the email says, after multiple rounds of a job interview process.

Everyone in the room is already midconversation, and no one notices you or invites you to join.

Someone makes a joke at your expense, and you go from being inside the group to being the outlier.

Someone who was your friend yesterday wants nothing to do with you today.

You find out that you have been the topic of conversation around the workplace—and not in a good way.

Just a few of my personal experiences through the years. Maybe you can relate?

It's not a coincidence that it hurts. Rejection is a pain you can actually feel in your body, because social pain and physical pain activate the brain in the same places.¹ The neurons run through the same wiring and can overlap and affect one another. So that stinging, aching, or sharp sensation? It's valid. It hurts. And it's not about simply "getting over" those painful feelings of rejection.

Cliques and social ranking start young, in childhood and the teen years, and few of us escape it. Movies capture it well.

The lunch tables are unofficially assigned to each carefully categorized group. Who hasn't experienced that anxious feeling in their stomach while entering the school cafeteria, scanning the crowd for an empty seat near a familiar face?

Uncomfortable wallflowers sit on the sidelines at the dances. Or stay home completely. I was too bashful in school to attend most social events, out of fear of not knowing whom to hang with and being left alone. (I made it to senior prom and maybe one or two football games. That was basically it.)

The important titles and seats are reserved for the most popular. It feels crushing to be overlooked in class or at after-school activities simply because you're not on the inside track.

We leave behind many things from school—fortunately—but social ranking isn't one of them. It spreads into college. It seeps into our social circles. It affects who you talk to in the staff room or at the coffee station. You can spot it on the playground, among moms with diaper bags and strollers. Okay, let's be honest here. It can even cause deep divides in the one place that's supposed to be safe and inclusive: church.

Why does rejection hurt so much? And if it's so painful, why do we in turn reject or exclude others?

Because it's a two-way street, right? We are rejected, and we reject. We decide whom we want to be around and whom we don't. We intentionally and unintentionally leave people out.

We're all wounded, and we all inflict wounds.

The woman who excludes you is the one who didn't include you on the invitation list. She's the one who saw your text message and started to reply with those three punishing dots (because, apparently, we all need that much insight into when and how people are responding to us) and then disappeared. She's the one who is well into the group conversation but doesn't ask for your opinion, the one who started a morning walking group but didn't send you the details, the one who makes a snide comment about you to make everyone else laugh.

Sometimes she does it mindlessly, by accident. Sometimes it's intentional and overt. And then sometimes it's somewhere in the middle—not purposefully hurting any feelings but honestly not making an effort either.

Is this woman the enemy? Am I the enemy?

A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Invisibility became my superpower. But it wasn't always that way.

Up until first grade or so, I was loud and outgoing. Especially at church, surrounded by people who felt like family, it seemed like the safest place for me to

be completely myself. I could be loud and silly, make faces and sing and dance, participate wholeheartedly without holding back—because the people around me were *my* people.

One day I was doing my thing around a group of friends—probably running around and yelling or something, acting goofy. That was when someone declared before our whole group, “You are so *weird*.” Everyone giggled. I paused, and then giggled along too. You never want to be on the outside of the joke, even if you *are* the joke.

For a long time, the moment stuck with me, which still sounds absolutely ridiculous when I say it on paper or out loud. Why should it? Someone could have said or done a hundred things that were a lot more painful. Why did my mind keep hold of that one moment? After steady bouts of insecurity and social anxiety, it hit me years later: it wasn't the label that bothered me but rather the concept it had planted firmly within my mind—*You are the odd one out. You don't belong. And you didn't even realize it. How humiliating for you.*

Somewhere in the back of my mind, a running track started on a low volume. *You're not like everyone else. You don't fit in. There's something wrong with you.* And so, in an attempt to keep people from seeing me as the unusual one, I tried not to give them any ammunition. I grew quieter and quieter, the invisible girl in the back row. In school, I avoided the teacher's gaze, hoping not to have to answer questions. I hated group projects and presentations. With the small circle of people I trusted, I could be silly and less guarded; otherwise I ducked my head and stayed quiet.

I questioned myself constantly. *Is this what a normal person would do? What do these people think of me?*

And then it came back around full circle. It turns out that making yourself invisible leads to—surprise, surprise—people not noticing you. I'd go from one minute hoping no one would look at me to feeling hurt and left out the next. I

wanted to prove I could handle being on my own, while secretly hoping someone would talk to me.

One day in a new class in college, I sat by myself and didn't talk to anyone. Then for an icebreaker, our teacher had us introduce ourselves to one another and eventually take turns saying everyone's name. We went around in a circle, and most of my classmates had forgotten my name just as quickly as they'd learned it. I fulfilled my own prophecy. I'd made myself forgettable.

Are there moments when seeds were planted that made you question your belonging? Maybe it was an accusation someone made, a lack of invitation, a misunderstanding, an act of discrimination, an offhand remark, or a joke at your expense. It could have been a friend, family member, or someone on the street. Maybe they meant it to inflict harm, or maybe it was unwitting. Either way, those weedy seeds can have a whole field day in your mind. (Or weeks, months, or *years*.)

We want to be liked, accepted, and included. We want to belong. It hurts deeply to be alienated or rejected, even if unintentionally.

But the enemy isn't the person who overlooks you, or calls you out, or leaves you out.

The Enemy's Game

As we grow and start to form opinions about our place in the world, in creep ranking and division. Our sinful natures make us crave approval, validation, and even superiority.

We know the drill. It feels good to be accepted and bad to be rejected. It feels nice when your place is secure ... and sometimes even more so when someone else's place is not.

In her book, *The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World*, Melinda French Gates says, "Overcoming the need to create outsiders is our greatest challenge as human beings. It is the key to ending deep inequality."²

I think we can all relate to that. Where does this need to create outsiders come from?

A Desire for Power

Power is a sense of having the upper hand, a confidence that comes from feeling superior and being in control, yet an unstable feeling because it lasts only as long as you can maintain it. A desire for power becomes dangerous and debilitating toward the marginalized. We will do anything to have authority.

A Feeling of Unworthiness

Insecurity prompts us to bolster ourselves by feeling out how “well” we’re doing compared to someone else. Maybe if someone has less than us—less power and stuff, fewer accomplishments and connections—then our holes of uncertainty will fill up, making us feel more confident.

A Fear of Scarcity

Having authority, we think, means less of a chance of being excluded ourselves. Instead, we scrape and fight to achieve rank, and it feels so earned that we dismiss others, who may not have had equal opportunity.

If we’re being deeply honest, these traits are not exclusive to bullies and “mean girls” like we see in the movies. You and I struggle with the same sinful nature. We’re all at risk. Satan wants to use these feelings within us to divide and disengage.

On the other hand, those points above are the same conclusions we’re left with when we feel rejected: powerless, unworthy, lacking. These fears and insecurities grow as moments of exclusion happen, prompting us to reject others so that, maybe for a minute or two, we don’t have to feel that way ourselves. And the cycle goes on.

It is possible to break this terrible cycle. Although it's painful, being rejected doesn't have to hold the power to crush you every time. The hurt doesn't have to be a visitor that stays rent-free, indefinitely. Rejection also doesn't have to breed rejection. There's another way to approach our own insecurities and fears instead of taking down others to boost our moods for a while.

*The hurt doesn't have to be a visitor
that stays rent-free, indefinitely.*

The Bad News ...?

You're not going to like the first part. I don't either.

The Bible often calls us to do things we don't want to do, embrace truths that aren't comfortable or easy, and entrust ourselves to the wisdom of God—a wisdom that our human knowledge can't touch.

As with every heavy truth in the Scriptures, something for our good is waiting on the other side. Hope prevails. There's a silver lining in the cloud, because we have a Father who is the most powerful being in the universe and happens to work things for our good. But sometimes we have to start with the rain and work our way through.

Here's the hard truth: we were never meant to belong in this world. At least not as it is.

One day on a mountainside, early into a new ministry, a young carpenter from Nazareth spoke to a crowd and left them stunned. Who was this, to speak with so much authority, certainty, and confidence? He preached more powerfully than the teachers of the law—and yet didn't have the credentials and respect of those venerated men.

Let's zero in on one particular part of the Sermon on the Mount. The way Eugene Peterson's *The Message* phrases this passage feels particularly poignant to me:

You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don't like it, *I* do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble. (Matt. 5:10–12)

What Jesus modeled for us is this: our Savior, the Son of God and most trustworthy friend, refused to let people define him. In multiple occurrences, Jesus' lack of concern for the approval of people is contrasted with the way the world around him thought. John in particular talks about this multiple times. In John 12:42–43, people who believed in Jesus wouldn't publicly support him, due to fear of what the Pharisees thought, "for they loved human praise more than praise from God." But when it came to Jesus, John 2:24–25 says that he didn't entrust himself to people, because he knew what was in their hearts.

As he prepared to go to the cross, Jesus told his closest disciples and all who would follow in their footsteps that we're not to expect any kind of warm welcome from the world when we choose God above all. In the end, he set the example for us by being rejected by both his enemies and even some of his closest friends.

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you

do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: “A servant is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. (John 15:18–20)

If you have any experience with people-pleasing (like me), this passage might make you shiver a little bit. *Hated? You don't actually mean hated, do you, Jesus?*

James draws the line in an even more blunt way in James 4:4–5:

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?

That word *enmity*, to my mind, means hostility, or a state of active opposition. A battle stance, saying, “Come at me.” Not a posture I want to take before the almighty God. I don't want to be on the side of the Enemy, thank you very much.

Paul concludes a strong admonishment in Galatians 1 with the words, “Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (v. 10).

Clearly, there is no option to fence-sit on this one. The goal of getting everyone's approval puts you in a fierce stance against God. Conversely, the world will reject you when you choose God instead of it.

It is impossible to please everyone and also please God. We're not meant to fit in with this world.

It doesn't end there, though. We have a Savior who walked this road first and walks it with us still. I love the way Dane Ortlund puts it in his book *Gentle and Lowly*: "If God sent his own Son to walk through the valley of condemnation, rejection, and hell, you can trust him as you walk through your own valleys on your way to heaven."³

The Best News

There is a place where you belong. It's the kingdom of God. You belong with the one who designed you and called you into being. That's where you were always meant to be.

In the beginning, in the first few days of stars and land and plants and fish and birds, humankind was created in the image of God. Male and female. And they were called "good." God spent time with his creation. He walked with them. There was nothing to get in the way.

Yet somehow our Enemy, Satan, wormed his way in and warped the beauty and goodness, twisting God's abundance and generosity and wisdom, even the character of God himself, into what felt like the very first rejection. He spoke to the first woman, planting seeds with a question and some blatant lies, and that seed took root, sprouting into all the things he didn't say. He didn't have to. The woman filled in the blanks: *You're not good enough. God knows you're not smart enough to handle this knowledge. That's why he's withholding it from you. You're excluded from this club.*

That's how the snake convinced the first woman, who was *made in God's image*, to believe she was on the outside and missing out. This woman, whom God called good, felt unworthy. And so she took care of the problem herself, with the bite of a forbidden fruit.

Her flawed perspective was handed down to all of us. This is the question we have to face every day as we battle our sinful natures: Will we trust God at his

word about who he says we are, or will we take matters into our own hands to validate ourselves?

There is a place where you belong.

It's the kingdom of God.

Our relationship with God as it was meant to be is the one he had with the first man and woman in the garden, before a slithering snake came into the picture: partnering with each other and God. No competition or confusion. No grasping for power. Completely sustained by the One who shares with us everything we need and nothing we don't.

This is the kind of security and confidence I was desperately seeking as I sat invisibly in the back row. I knew about God and all the Scriptures that said he loves us. I could recite to you in a singsong voice various verses about Jesus, how his "yoke is easy" and his "burden is light," and what he did for all of us on the cross. But it took a long time to make the connection that I had nothing to do to prove myself or earn my place. His arms are wide open toward us. He invites us in. He accepts us.

Going back to our passage in John 15, just ahead of the warning that the world will hate his disciples, Jesus started with the best news: we are branches of his vine, part of him:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy

may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. (vv. 9–12)

We belong with Jesus. We belong with God. So your mission, should you choose to accept it? *To remain in him*. This brings the truest joy, and you can pass it on by loving others too. Our ultimate mission is to share this message of acceptance and belonging with those who are missing it.

The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid.

What can mere mortals do to me?

The LORD is with me; he is my helper.

I look in triumph on my enemies.

It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in humans.

It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in princes. (Ps. 118:6–9)

The LORD is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid? (Ps. 27:1)

Accepted, loved, and invited by God—so who is allowed to make you afraid? No one. We have nothing to fear with him. May we take God at his every reliable word.

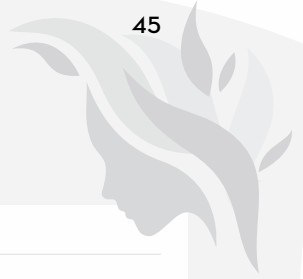
My heart breaks for the girl who felt she didn't belong. She ran on a hamster wheel of effort, hiding shame behind a mask of positivity, and often ended up

missing the whole point. She missed out on chances to serve people as Jesus did, to actually hear and understand people who were hurting. All because she was hurting too and didn't know what to do with it.

I wish I could gently take her hands and tell her there was nothing she had to prove or earn with God. Her place with him is secure. His love for her is certain. His design and purpose for her are as they should be.

Maybe I can do that for you today. Let me take your hands and look straight into your eyes. You are secure and safe in God's love. Your incredible worth is not a question to the One who made you. No matter who tells you otherwise, who leaves you out or sends you packing, you are valuable and seen and known and loved. You are invited and welcome. You belong.

Rest confidently in this. And then go and break the cycles of rejection by inviting others in. Especially the ones who try to remain invisible.



Three truths I know about God

✦

✦

✦

Three things I'm grateful for

✦

✦

✦

Three steps I can take moving forward

✦

✦

✦
