

Chapter 1 – She is Mindful

“And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, ‘This time I will praise the LORD.’ Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing.” (Genesis 29:35)

TO BE MINDFUL is to be aware. Isn't it much easier to look back and see the truth? In the moment, what our minds tell us isn't always true. In fact, fear is a bully and a liar. Your inner critic will make you believe that it's your fault or that God is mad at you. You may even feel shame. But, what if I told you that you are not stuck? You are not your illness. You are not your divorce. You are not your _____ (fill in the blank).

Sometimes our unmet desires make us believe that we messed up, missed the boat, or forever lost our purpose. *Wrong!* What if the book of Job was never mentioned in the Bible? We might still believe that our suffering was all our fault! If the Lord hadn't opened up the heavens for us to listen in on a conversation between Jesus and the accuser, Satan, we might have missed the message entirely.

In every mess, there is a message—regardless of who sinned. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Doesn't that thought just make you want to rejoice? Suddenly, my need

for perfection is off the hook. Can I get an amen?

In *Playing Big*, author Tara Mohr encourages readers to embrace their inner critic. Why? Because we're always going to struggle with doubt. Because our inner critic isn't going anywhere. Tara says to name your critic in order to recognize her when the thoughts in your mind don't make sense.

What if we went one step further to connect the voice of our inner critic to the enemy? The enemy accuses. Jesus pardons. The voice that says, "You're not good enough" and, "Nobody loves you," and "You're never going to make it"—they're all lies. Lies from the pit of hell. If we don't expose the voices and thoughts for what they are, then we may never understand that we are already free.

In every mess,
there is a message.

Freedom isn't some magical experience. It's a daily choice to surrender. To lay down the lies. To confess. To repent. To turn around and ask for help. Daily. Hourly. Minute by minute.

At first, this process seems to occupy all of your time. You may be suddenly mindful of *all* the lies, and it might take more than you can handle to write them all down. It's important to expose them so you can recognize the source because love comes from God. Fear comes from Satan.

You are loved. No matter where you came from or what you did. Jesus loves you and wants to have a relationship with you. If you're never accepted Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, I ask you to pray this simple prayer with me.

Dear Jesus, please forgive me of my sins. Come into my heart. Take over. Help me to go and sin no more. Show me your divine purpose and calling, and grant me the courage to follow through. Thank you for loving me to freedom. Amen.

The good news is that sin no longer has you bound. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Today, be mindful of what thoughts you are thinking. If they are lovely and pure you're on the right track. Any thoughts from the Spirit will be loving, joyful, peaceful, gentle, etc. If they are lies or half-truths whispered by your inner critic or by the enemy, they will be twisted, seductive and full of fear. They will make you believe things that are not true.

Love comes from God.
Fear comes from Satan.

The good news is that it's never too late to confess your sins and be covered by the blood of Jesus.

You can confess each lie every time it creeps up and overwhelms your mind.

Keep short accounts.

It's okay to not understand.

God knows.

When your circumstances, relationships, health, job, children are screaming for your attention—remember Leah. Leah thanked and praised God for the four blessings that she *could* see. The deepest desire of her heart was to be loved, cherished and told that she was beautiful by her husband. Unfortunately, that never happened for her.

What if Leah never looked up to heaven to thank God for the four sons that she did have? She might have missed the *biggest blessing* of them all. (See Chapter 2 for what happens next!)

A SEED PLANTED

When we were living in Houston, we started counting down at day 251 out of 356. To say that my husband and I were very unhappy was an understatement of the year. Our apartment was falling apart and so was Marc's job.

When I began counting my blessings, I stopped counting my sorrows as much. By the time we left, my heart was transformed. I could be joyful in the midst of troubling circumstances.

What about you?

Do you feel unloved because your deepest desires have gone overlooked or unmet by Jesus? A seed planted is not hidden. In Matthew 25, we learn about a man with one talent who was afraid of his Master. Instead of planting his talent in the ground to watch it die, which is harder than burying it—he hid it in the ground instead.

Wait.

Aren't these two the same thing? At first glance, *yes*. Digging a spot in the ground is the same thing as hiding something in the ground, but that's where it stops. The farmer knows that the seed must *die* in the ground to yield a harvest. He immediately relinquishes his right to the seeds he plants by cultivating the soil so that the conditions for dying are best.

Wow!

If I'm not careful, my need for approval will cause me to be afraid of Jesus when He asks me to let go of my deepest desires and talents so that He can bury them in the ground. But, instead of letting them die, I bury them myself. I hide the dream away in fear. When I withdraw in shame is when I know I must open my hands and let God dig me a hole.

Was Jesus afraid of doing the Father's will?

Yes, but He did it anyway. "Not my will, but Yours be done," He said (Luke 22:42). After Jesus was crucified, the stone was rolled shut so victory could come three days later!

A seed planted
is not hidden.

Psalm 126:5 says, “Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy.” I had no idea what that verse meant until now.

Maybe it’s because spring is so deceiving. Look at all the blossoms. Aren’t they beautiful? But you can’t eat flowers. It’s the produce in the harvest that we’re waiting for.

RECOGNIZING MY INNER CRITIC

We live and die by the fruit of our tongue (Proverbs 18:21). I am learning to recognize the voice of my inner critic. Whenever I feel unloved or fearful I am mindful that those feelings are not from God.

Dr. Catherine Hart Weber says,

“You feel happiest when you know who you truly are and are able to experience your true self. You can work to have it all: a nice home, a good job, even a loving partner. But true meaning and fulfillment in life isn’t found by searching outside yourself—it starts inside yourself.”

I wonder what thoughts come from your true self or from your inner critic? Do you know how to recognize the voice of God when you are still praying for the desires of your heart to be fulfilled?

Maybe your deepest desire is to publish your first book, have a baby, get healthy, or reconcile a rough relationship. Maybe it’s to move across the country, find a new job, or all of the above. Whatever your dreams are, I want you to learn how to be mindful.

I used to believe that the key to being loved was being married. My inner critic would make me believe things about myself when I was single. Now that I’m married, I thought my inner critic would stop talking.

Wrong.

Now, she makes me believe that I'll never find community because we don't have children yet. It's always something, right? Sometimes it's in the pursuit of "good" desires that we forget just how blessed we already are!

My circumstances, good or bad, don't dictate how *loved* I am! That's why I love the example of Leah in the Bible. Her example changed everything for me. Leah had every right to distrust her father Laban, who deceitfully gave her to Jacob as his bride when he was expecting to marry her sister Rachel.

Jacob, whose name actually means "deceiver," did not love Leah the way she longed to be cherished because he was in love with another woman. Leah could have sat down in the ashes of self-pity, complained her life was over, or just given up.

But she didn't.

Leah, the unattractive and *unloved* wife of Jacob, after bearing him four sons, declared,

"Now will I praise the Lord" (Genesis 29:35, KJV).

Now, in Hebrew, is *Pa'am*, which means: a stroke, beat, foot, step, anvil, occurrence.² *Praise*, in Hebrew, is *Yadah*, which means: to throw, shoot, cast.³

The Hebrew behind Leah's statement literally means the occurrence and repetition of a stroke or the beating of a foot. She forcefully decided to praise the Lord and believe God was *bigger* than her circumstances.

Why?

Because...

Praise changes everything.

God opened Leah's womb. Meanwhile, Rachel did not have any children. In that culture, bearing a son was the highest blessing or praise a woman could receive. It wasn't until Leah gave birth to four sons that she was able to recognize God's hand on her life. She was able to see through her heartache to count God's blessings.

I am like Leah.

I often am so dense to God's blessings because I am too quick to focus on counting my sorrows instead of my blessings. I focus on my immediate circumstances instead of remembering the bigger picture. Sometimes it's my health. Other times it's feeling like I don't belong. Before that it was focusing on my singleness like it was a cancer.

I confess that I get so easily caught up in focusing on everything else and everyone but God that I'm not able to see the friends God has already brought into my life. Why is it that I have a hard time looking through my own heartache to see God's many blessings?

What about you?

As you read through *Unloved*, it is my prayer that the Holy Spirit would reveal the lies you have believed about yourself.

Maybe like Jennie Allen, you believed that you are not enough.⁴ Maybe like LeeAnn Tankersley, you believed the Soul Bullies that you don't have what it takes.⁵ Maybe like Tara Mohr, you believed that your inner critic was right about you.⁶

Whether you have believed one lie your whole life or a million lies about yourself—*you can stop.*

Right.

Now.

You don't have to believe any lies about yourself any longer. You can choose today to agree with the things the Lord says about you.

You are chosen.

You are loved.

You are secure.

You are beautiful.

You are flourishing.

You are vibrant and strong and significant.

I hope you'll come along with me on the journey to recognizing and embracing your inner critic so, like me, you can find the love that you so desperately crave.

NAMING YOUR INNER CRITIC?

Today, if you find yourself struggling to rid yourself of all the lies, try creating a character that personifies your inner critic.⁷ I learned this from *Playing Big* by Tara Mohr. Tara writes,

*"The costs of women's self-doubt are enormous. Think of all the ideas unshared, businesses not started, important questions not raised, talents unused. Think of all the fulfillment and joy not experienced because self-doubt keeps us from going for the opportunities that would bring that joy and fulfillment."*⁸

This thought scares me, too.

As a writing coach, I often find the two biggest hindrances toward pursuing big dreams like self-publishing a book are:

1. Fear of Failure
2. Perfectionism

There will always be voices of doubt discouraging you from pursuing your dreams. Why not learn how to name your inner critic? This way when she (or he) appears, you can move forward in faith instead of fear.

Tara writes, “Create a character who personifies your inner critic. You can invent a character or pick a figure from film, literature, politics, or pop culture. Build out a portrait of his or her life: Where does your critic live? What does he or she wear? What does he or she eat for breakfast? Name your character and begin to call it by its name when it shows up.”

I named my inner critic Leah. I resonated with Leah’s story of choosing to praise God for her son Judah instead of believing the outcome of her circumstances that she was an unloved wife.

This violent act of praise became a game changer for Leah and her son. Her story helped me embrace the whole of me and walk in a newfound freedom. Talk about a game changer for me as well.

I named my inner critic Leah.

To give you an example of what it feels like to give a name and certain characteristics to your inner critic, here is what I feel when Leah, my inner critic shows up:

- Insecure
- Anxious
- Judgmental
- Needy
- Harsh
- Rejected
- Unloved
- Lonely
- Sees things in black & white
- Can only sight-read or play what’s on the sheet (afraid to play life by ear)
- Listens to pre-recorded messages over and over like “You’re not good enough,” “You’re not strong enough,” “You don’t have what it takes,” etc.
- Afraid of failure
- Quiet

- Afraid of being loud
- Can't speak up for what she really wants
- People pleaser
- Looking for self-pity
- Doesn't believe she is worthy

If you were to journal about your inner critic, what would you name her (or him), and why? Would what she (or he) be like?

I'm glad I learned about this exercise during an incredibly difficult year living in Houston. I was willing to try anything to come to terms with my strengths and weaknesses. It wasn't that I was just struggling with believing that I was loved.

I believed all the lies!!!

Suddenly, my inability to cope with stressful situations broke this giant dam of emotions telling me that I wasn't good enough, smart enough, strong enough, thin enough, or pretty enough to overcome.

Have you ever been there?

Today, don't allow your circumstances to define you. Don't allow your health, your job, your bank account, your relationship status or even what you believe about yourself to define who you are.

Now I recognize when Leah is trying to discourage me, lie to me, and get me on her side. I also recognize, like the Leah in the Bible, that I can choose to praise the Lord!

When I am faced with the ugly thoughts that no one loves me, I know it's because I am feeling insecure. I no longer feel the need to silence her. I know Leah is there, and I simply tell her, "Thanks, but no thanks."

I find that Leah shows up the most when I am uncomfortable

and in a season of transition. Now that I know that about myself, I am able to go one step further and rebuke each and every single lie I believe about myself. I'll admit, some days I don't have the strength to fight. It takes all my energy to get out of bed and make it through the day without a panic attack.

This exercise is just one tool.

Although it certainly doesn't make things any easier, I am able to recognize, name and expose the lies. It goes along with what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 10:5:

"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

Remember, the naming your critic exercise helps us to be mindful. It takes time to listen to the voice of the Lord and to distinguish whether He is talking to you or the enemy is trying to persuade you. I hope this exercise helps you name your fears, rebuke them and step outside your comfort zone.

You Are Loved Reflection Questions:

1. If you were to name your inner critic, what would you name her (or him) and why? What characteristics would you list? What kinds of things does she (or he) make you feel?
2. Has there ever been a time when you have been afraid of God? Why or why not?
3. Write down at least three positive things about your true self on a sticky note or 3x5 card. Keep them somewhere you can see them throughout the day!